



Ambient Assisted Living Joint Programme

Information on procedures of the AAL Programme implementation

More information and contact details of representatives of the AAL Joint Programme are available from the website: <http://www.aal-europe.eu/>

Date of this version: 28 May 2008

Status: Public; adopted by the AAL General Assembly on 26 March 2008

Content

1. Introduction	3
2. AAL calls for proposals and submission.....	3
Calls	3
Announcement of calls	4
AAL proposals submission	4
3. Evaluation and proposal selection process	5
Evaluation process	5
Evaluators: nomination, assignment and payment.....	5
Evaluation list, list of proposals recommended for funding	6
Funding decision.....	6
National budgets – alignment procedure.....	7
4. Final negotiation phase.....	7
Cooperation among PMAs.....	8
Funding agreements.....	8
5. Administration of AAL projects.....	8
Funding workflow	8
Administration of funded projects	8
Reporting	9
Project reviews.....	9

1. Introduction

The information provided herein is made publicly available as a part of the AAL call documents. They may serve as information to potential proposers or other interested parties to learn more about internal procedures foreseen to be applied by the participating programme managing agencies.

The presented procedures are based upon legal documents of the AAL Association, including the co-decision text on AAL.

The AAL Joint Programme is new and therefore, certainly not all procedural matters can be assessed up front. The involved parties on the central and national levels described hereafter shall all seek a harmonized cooperation to solve the challenges of this new programme. In case that a problem is identified or a conflict appears due to inconsistencies or any other obstacle, the final body to be consulted and to take decisions shall be the Executive Board.

2. AAL calls for proposals and submission

The AAL Joint Programme (JP) managers envisage a 3-3-3 months model for call opening, evaluation and funding decision and the negotiation at the level AAL Partner States.

A single AAL project itself shall have a duration of 2 to 3 years.

Calls

The AAL Joint Programme (AAL JP) will be implemented through up to two annual calls for project proposals. The subject of each call is predefined (top-down approach) to meet a specific subsection of the defined focus and application area. Themes or topics are derived from the AAL topic groups (see figure 1):

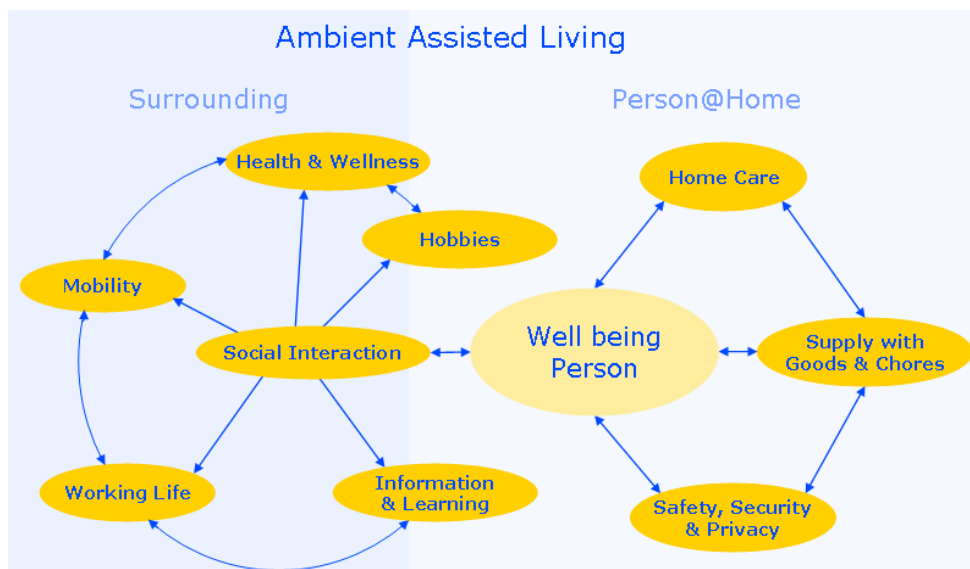


Figure 1 AAL Topic Groups

AAL calls for proposals are the most important annual activities under the AAL Joint Programme. The call preparation process during one year is handed over to the AAL internal Contents working group. The outcome of the work of the Contents working group is a call publication document. Essentially, this document consists of a description of the foreseen calls for proposals, the proposed timing for the calls and the financial pre-commitment of the Partner States to each of the calls.

The **AAL Annual Work Programme** (AAL WP) will specify in detail all activities foreseen under the AAL Joint Programme. It is drafted under authority of the Executive Board and subject of approval by the General Assembly of the AAL Association (GA) and the European Commission (EC).

AAL Joint Programme: Implementation Procedures

Preferably, the AAL WP is brought to the approval of the General Assembly in early autumn. After the approval, it will be forwarded to the EC, asking for their approval – which is essentially the confirmation of the European co-funding to the AAL calls for proposals.

The AAL WP may be compiled with the support of external experts and the AAL Advisory Group.

An AAL call will call for proposals for collaborative projects and, if agreed upon, accompanying measures. The budget for the latter projects shall not exceed 5 % of the total budget for a call. The procedures for both types of projects should be the same as far as possible. The requirements for both types of projects will be described in detail with the call publication documentation.

AAL Programme Managing Agencies (PMA) of the Partner States are not allowed to participate as partners in a consortium.

Announcement of calls

The Executive Board announces the call and initiates its publication on the website of the AAL Association (www.aal-europe.eu) and within the Official Journal of the European Communities. It is under the responsibility of the national Programme Owners to publish the call corresponding to the national rules. Each call will specify the following:

- Topical description of the call
- Call deadline (sharp, e.g. 17.00 hrs; central electronic submission)
- Call budgets: Total budget, budget per Partner State and the EC-contribution
- Rules for participation and eligibility criteria:
This information will be predominantly provided by the national Partner States. The range of information incl. eligible types of organisations, national funding quotas, a description of eligible costs items and the financial pre-commitment of the Partner States to each of the calls.
- Central AAL JP evaluation criteria
- Additional information, e.g. regarding the requested participation in AAL JP activities

Calls are intended to be open for 3 months.

The AAL Joint Programme is unique and new. At its beginning, efforts have to be made to announce its objectives and rules of participation. It is important to communicate the topic and aims of a call, to organise partnering events, to offer consultations etc. on the European level as well as in the Partner States.

AAL proposals submission

AAL proposals are submitted on the basis of a proposal template. The size of a proposal is limited to a degree which allows a thorough evaluation but shall not impose a heavy burden on the proposers in terms of work load. The size of a proposal shall be approx. 20 pages. Proposals must be drafted in English (other languages are “ineligible”) and consist of two parts (similar to the Electronic Proposal Submission System of the EC)

- part A requests formal and financial data (for each of the partners),
- part B is the description of the content (PDF-file).

Each partner has to provide information in part A. Approval with electronic storage and data procession is also given by the proposers at this time.

The proposed content and work plan described in part B is provided on the whole consortium level. A sufficient detailed description of work contributions from each individual project partner shall be asked for.

Proposals will be electronically uploaded by the consortia to a central web-portal that is set-up and maintained by the AAL Central Management Unit (CMU) under authority of the AAL Executive Board. The timely receipt will be acknowledged automatically by the portal. Proposals will receive a unique AAL number “xx-yyyy” (with xx referring to the number of the call and yyyy to the number of the proposal) for identification. Proposals missing the deadline will not be considered for the evaluation.

The deadline given in the call is ultimate.

The requirements concerning the composition of a consortium are described in the call documentation that is published with each AAL call for proposals.

Consortia may involve partners who do not request a funding budget or partners from outside the AAL Partner States who are not eligible for funding. This is acceptable if it is justified or necessary or advantageous for the project. At this moment, this type of participation shall be restricted to European Union member countries currently not members of the AAL Association. Further details are explained in the actual call documentation.

3. Evaluation and proposal selection process

Evaluation process

The full process from the call deadline to the funding decision shall last up to 3 months.

The evaluation starts with a strictly formal check of the eligibility of the proposals, as published with the call announcement, performed at the central level by the CMU with support of the national coordinators.

If any sharp eligibility criterion is breached for one partner of a project, the whole proposal will be rejected. The Central Management Unit informs a consortium about the formal decision. The final judgement of breaching the criterion is made by the respective AAL Programme Owner – in writing and within 7 calendar days after the breach has been noticed.

The evaluation process will be organised as a two stage process. Stage 1 is designed as a remote process, providing evaluators access to proposals and an electronic evaluation interface by means of a web based tool. Stage 2 is designed as a physical gathering of – eventually a subgroup of – expert evaluators. This process shall ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Stage 2 consists of a presentation of the ranked proposals to the Executive Board and other representatives of the AAL Association and includes a discussion on equally ranked proposals.

In stage 1 of the evaluation, each proposal will be evaluated by a team of 3 experts, or more as appropriate if the Executive Board deems the proposals as particularly complex. The majority of the experts should normally originate in countries not participating in the proposal.

The evaluation is based on common AAL evaluation criteria as indicated in the call publication documents. The general applicable AAL-criteria can be combined with call-specific ones. A threshold score is defined for each criterion as well as for the proposal as a whole. The criteria groups may be weighted.

Evaluators of a proposal always evaluate the proposal as a whole. One evaluator for each proposal is nominated as the rapporteur. The rapporteur must conclude the evaluation of a single proposal by harmonising a common evaluation result from all involved evaluators. The result of this is an individual evaluation summary report for each proposal. In cases where this is not successful, the rapporteur informs the CMU which consults the Executive Board who takes further action. Each evaluator is only able to see his own evaluation sheet until all the evaluations of the project are done.

The members of the association, the Executive Board and the EC have the right to monitor the process with full access to all documents and procedures at any time. All external participants in the process have to sign a non-disclosure agreement.

Evaluators: nomination, assignment and payment

The evaluation of the AAL proposals is performed by expert evaluators. Nominations of (at least one) suitable expert evaluator(s) are done by AAL Members for a specific AAL call. Nominations may be renewed by Partner States for a succeeding call. Continuity for the AAL evaluation process (this calls for renewal of the nomination) and the expertise (this calls for new experts) shall be considered in this respect.

The CMU sets up an expert evaluator database from which the Executive Board nominates single experts. Assignments of evaluators will be made proportionate to the number of proposals received. The expert evaluators finally nominated will be paid by the AAL Association; this process is administered by the CMU. The EC reimbursement scheme as applied in FP7 shall be followed. Not all evaluators are necessarily invited to a physical meeting – some may only work from their home basis.

AAL Joint Programme: Implementation Procedures

A system for the proper payment needs to be developed, also in accordance to the first experience with the number of incoming proposals. A first assumption is that an expert evaluator may evaluate 4-5 proposals per day in the first stage.

Evaluators will sign a declaration of confidentiality and confirm that they are in no conflict of interest as defined by the AAL Association. The general rule for each expert is that he is not, to the best of his knowledge, in any situation that could influence his ability to evaluate the proposal impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an external third party.

Evaluators will remain anonymous to the proposers. Applicants have the right to name up to three companies or experts that should not be assigned to the evaluation of their proposal.

Evaluation list, list of proposals recommended for funding

The result of the evaluation procedure is the **evaluation list**. This list is compiled for collaborative projects as well as for accompanying measures by putting the proposals in order corresponding to their score.

On the basis of the evaluation list, the CMU compiles a matrix showing the requested funding amount for each proposal partner and the respective AAL partner state. This list will identify

- proposals ranked high and with a sufficient financial budget from all AAL Partner States: This batch will remain high on the **list of proposals recommended for funding**.
- Proposals ranked high but for which the budget from single Partner States is exhausted. A replacement procedure (see section National budget - Alignment procedure) will be applied in these cases.
- Proposals ranked low. These proposals will be rejected and not considered anymore.

The **list of proposals recommended for funding** is the matrix listing the proposals recommended for entering into the final, national negotiation process. This list is compiled by mandate of the Executive Board and subject of approval by the General Assembly.

At a certain stage, when the National Programme Managing Agencies foresee a future problem in the negotiation stage, they may give an opinion on the appropriateness of the budget requested for by the partners.

Funding decision

The General Assembly decides about the list of proposals recommended for funding as a whole until the available budget for the call is assigned to the budget request of the proposers. A reserve list (or waiting list) with a small number of projects shall be maintained in case a project from the funding list fails or parts of the project budget is cut in the following national negotiation process.

The General Assembly decision is final and includes the irrevocable commitment of the Partner States to allocate their national budgets to the successful project partners for the full duration of the project.

The CMU – on behalf of the Executive Board – informs co-ordinators from proposals ranked below the reserve list on the negative decision.

To ensure that the final negotiation process is performed by all AAL Members without unjustified delay, the central AAL level upholds the funding commitment for the European co-funding for a maximum period three months with the possibility of an extension of up to six month in exceptional cases after the decision of the General Assembly. If there is no funding decision from an AAL member within this time frame, the full project is put on hold. The Executive Board will clarify the situation with the respective national Partner State.

All efforts aim to ensure a common project start date for all partners. A rejection of an application at this stage constitutes a real exception and will be – in most cases – subject of failure of the respective project partner to fulfil certain national requirements.

This procedure will take place for each call, up to twice a year.

National budgets – alignment procedure

National budgets are a limiting factor. A full AAL proposal cannot be recommended for funding if an AAL Partner States' funding commitment is exhausted.

The Central Management Unit, together with the Executive Board, analyses the list of proposals recommended for funding project by project by its ranking. At a certain position in the list, an AAL Partner States' funding commitment will not be sufficient to fund a national partner.

The most convenient solution for all parties at this stage – where the proposals are considered of good quality – is an increase of the national funding budget. In order to stimulate such an increase, also the EC co-funding shall be raised according to the final proportion of EC and national funding shares. So, the first action is a request to the Partner State to increase its funding commitment. However, to avoid that a Partner State profit to a much higher extent from the EC co-funding than any other, a limit is set at a maximum increase of 20% to the initial annual funding commitment. Beyond this threshold, the increase of any national funding will solely be from national budgets.

The National Coordinator of the Partner States is asked to confirm the position of the Partner State within 7 calendar days. If no answer is given by this short time, the original funding commitment is assumed as valid.

If the Partner State with the exhausted budget is not able to increase the funding, the CMU will ask the other Partner States involved if they would be able to fund the project. If not, it will be checked whether the not funded partner can participate at his own cost. Finally, the Executive Board will ask the coordinators of these projects

- whether the project can be successfully implemented with the remaining consortium partners (condition: still minimum 3 AAL Partner States involved) or, if this is impossible,
- to replace the partners from that Partner State within a period of 14 calendar dates

If they succeed in doing so, the proposal has to be resubmitted to the central level and will be evaluated once again. If they fail, the proposal will be dropped from the further process. A longer uphold of the selection procedure shall be avoided under any circumstances.

To ease the partner search in the above mentioned scenario, the CMU informs the co-ordinator on the financial situation in the AAL Partner States. Additional support measures from the AAL programme to the project consortia in identifying partners are under discussion.

4. Final negotiation phase

The CMU/Executive Board will inform co-ordinators on the successful decision. The co-ordinator is responsible to inform the other consortia partners. All partners will then start the final negotiation with their respective Programme Managing Agencies (PMAs) which receive a copy of the information.

At this level national administrative data, a financial viability check and other requirements (as e. g. a work plan for the single partner in the corresponding national language) are asked from the project partners. Also, a budget cut decision can only be made officially at this stage.

CMU and National Project Officers will analyse the description of work of each project and decide commonly on eventual further requests for information which would be addressed to the co-ordinator.

Every consortium has to sign a consortium agreement (in English) which esp. includes the regulations for handling IPR. The signed consortium agreement must be forwarded to the CMU which forwards an electronic copy to the PMAs. If PMA must keep originally signed consortia agreements, the above stated rule shall be adapted accordingly. No funding will be implemented before the signature of the consortium agreement.

If a consortium faces changes during this period, it is subject of decision by the Executive Board on how to proceed with such a proposal. The co-coordinator's entry point shall be via the CMU in such a case. Changes that affect only the national level shall be ruled out on this level – between the National Project Officers and the AAL project partner.

At the end of this phase, PMAs send a copy (or rather an English declaration) of the national funding agreement for all national project partners to the CMU.

Cooperation among PMAs

For each project recommended for funding, each PMA appoints Project Officer(s) (PO). The PO keeps close contact to the national project partners and the Project Officers of the other PMAs.

One of the Project Officers (or the CMU) will take over responsibility for central aspects of the projects. This person acts as the single entry point for the consortium coordinator regarding all project matters and will report to the CMU. He synchronises the work of the POs, he will check the consistency of the work programme of the project and the consortium agreement.

The proposers are supported by the respective national PMA to ensure that the project can start as soon as possible. Cases of a delay shall be identified and according sanctions designed, if necessary.

A national rejection of a proposal partner at the final negotiation phase may happen if the national partner fails to meet the financial or legal requirements (as e. g. high financial risk of a partner) or a clear case of double funding can be proven.

Funding agreements

Funding agreements are closed between project partners and the Partner States and not between a project partner and the AAL Association.

The CMU informs the co-ordinator on the responsibilities of the funded partners in relation to the AAL Association, e.g. concerning central level reporting, attendance at central AAL events, etc. These central level aspects shall be integral part of the funding agreement of each partner.

5. Administration of AAL projects

Funding workflow

The total funding amount (grant) consists of a national amount topped up by an EC contribution. The final allocation of the national and European funding will follow the ranking of the AAL. This is very likely distinct from the national commitments to a call. For the best possible expenditure of the available funding budgets, the AAL Association shall have the widest flexibility concerning the usage of the co-funding from the EC.

The Members of the AAL Association will give a financial guarantee declaration to the European Commission and with this, take over the financial liability for the European co-funding. Consequently, the CMU forwards the European co-funding to the authorised national bodies that are endorsed by the Members of the Association for the funding workflow with the national project partners.

The list of proposals recommended for funding, when approved by the GA and the EC, indicates the national and proportionate EC funding for all AAL Partner States. The AAL Association requests the stated amount from the EC – based on a specific call and not on an annual basis.

The EC shall transfer an amount that is orientated on the sum of yearly pre-financings and a 12-month funding period, consolidated for all project partners from AAL Partner States. It is intended to work with just one single transfer of funds between the AAL Association and each Partner State. The EC contribution will include a down payment for the administrative work of the AAL Association.

Each national PMA is responsible to allocate and transfer funds to the national project partners. Consequently, PMA are also responsible regarding the proper usage of the funding amounts. The project partners will send cost reimbursement claims to their respective PMA which, after approval by the PMA, are collectively reported to the CMU.

Interests generated from overpayments to PMA need to be transferred back to the AAL Association.

Administration of funded projects

The co-operation between central and national and among national partners persists over the full duration until the administrative end of the funded projects. Each funded project partner is administratively managed by the Project Officer appointed from the respective national PMA. These POs are responsible to administer all requirements as specified in the national funding rules and set by the CMU. The tasks comprise

AAL Joint Programme: Implementation Procedures

- collecting administrative data,
- forwarding payments (national and European parts),
- collecting and compiling reports,
- checking all spent costs after a pre-defined period after project end (e. g. two or three years).

For the sake of a single AAL project a harmonisation of these activities between all PMA shall be envisaged.

Reporting

Consortia partners have to meet reporting requirements from both, the central and the national programme administration levels. Whereas the central programme administration focuses on the overall progress of a project, the national administration assesses the performance of the national project partner. An interfaced procedure between the two levels shall lead to a harmonisation of the reporting requirements for the projects.

Project progress reports and the associated payment requests (the financial reporting) shall be separated from each other. The period for project progress reports should be one half year, until June 30 resp. December 31. The report should point out the state of the project as a whole as well as for each partner in relation to the agreed work plan. The CMU shall elaborate a binding report template.

Project reviews

Regular project reviews will assess the project progress concerning the deliverables and milestones. If the review assesses critical underperformances, any further payment will be put on hold until the project delivers positive results. If any from the PMA identifies such a case, immediate information of the other PMA and the CMU shall result. The CMU informs the Executive Board instantly.

The CMU will organize an overall technical project review at the end of the project. For projects lasting more than 24 months, an intermediate technical review will be conducted after 24 months.

The AAL Joint Programme seeks a demonstration of its activities to the public. Therefore, funded projects shall be obliged to provide information of the results or to organise public project status seminars. In some Partner States this is legally required.