



# RULES

## Strategic Partner

**Responsible department: Department for Sustainable Development**  
**Programme area: 03**

### **Rules for civil society organisations seeking approval as strategic partner of the grant manager.**

#### **1 Approval scheme for strategic partners**

The grant scheme's rules apply to civil society organisations seeking approval as a strategic partner of the grant manager.

Approval as a strategic partner confers rights and obligations across all grant schemes which the grant manager manages within the thematic areas for which the strategic partner has been assessed and approved.

Approval as a strategic partner does not in itself entitle the strategic partner to grants. Strategic partners must apply for grants when the grant manager issues calls for proposals.

Approval is valid for five years from the date of the decision and may be renewed.

#### **2 Definitions**

The following definitions apply in these rules:

- a. *Strategic partner*: a civil society organisation which exceeds the threshold value (cf. section 5.2(b)), and which meets the conditions stipulated in these rules (cf. section 5.2) and which has been granted strategic partner approval after having submitted an application. Approval as a strategic partner applies to the thematic areas that the organisation has been assessed and approved for.
- b. *Civil society organisation*: Non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation with its own board of directors and articles of association, including the national chapter of an international federation or membership organisation.
- c. *Applicant*: Civil society organisation that has applied for strategic partner approval.
- d. *Approval period*: The period for which approval as a strategic partner has been granted, (see section 1, fourth paragraph).
- e. *Cross-cutting issues*: four mandatory considerations in Norwegian development cooperation: human rights, women's rights and gender equality, climate and the environment and anti-corruption.
- f. *Grant management cycle*: In addition to the grant manager's agreement partner, this includes all organisations or other partners that receive grants from the grant manager through a project. These may be implementing partners or "sub-grantees" of the grant manager's agreement partner, however it may also include partners at a level even further removed.

- g. *Internationally recognised certification*: An internationally recognised certification is issued by a major development aid actor based on assessments of partners' systems and ability to achieve results.
- h. *Complex thematic areas*: When an application includes components within different thematic areas, for example, health, education and cash transfers.

### **3 Announcement**

The option of applying for approval as a strategic partner is announced publicly and open-ended (without a specific application deadline) on the grant manager's website.

The applicant is first asked to document that they exceed the threshold value for the strategic partner scheme (see below), and secondly that the applicant complies with the documentation requirements for the conditions in the section below.

The announcement must include the following provisions in these rules:

- Objective of the strategic partner scheme
- Criteria for achievement of objectives
- Assessment criteria

The application requirements, including the application deadline, formal requirements and documentation requirements, are specified in more detail in the announcement.

### **4 Objective of the strategic partner scheme**

The objective of the scheme is :

- The purpose of the approval scheme for strategic partnerships (strategic partner) is to introduce a partnership model for large, strategically important partners (strategic partners) with good systems and routines.
- Approval based on system assessments is intended to result in a more efficient application process and follow-up for approved partners, and thus free up time for more strategic dialogue, with an emphasis on results, innovation and learning.

### **5 Assessment criteria**

#### **5.1 Potential applicants under this scheme are:**

- *Civil society organisation*: Non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation with its own board of directors and articles of association, including the national chapter of an international federation or membership organisation.
- For international federations and membership organisations, only the Norwegian organisation may submit an application for strategic partner approval. If there is no Norwegian organisation, the international part of the federation may apply for strategic partner approval.

- When the applicant is a national branch of an international federation/membership organisation, only the applicant's own programme portfolio will be considered for approval.

## 5.2 Applicant criteria

The applicant must document that the following conditions have been met:

### a) Legal entity:

The applicant must be a legal entity. Accurate and comprehensive information must be provided about the legal structure of the organisation.

### b) Threshold value:

The applicant must be able to document a total annual programme portfolio in ODA-approved countries of at least 100 million Norwegian kroner (NOK million) (Norges Bank's exchange rate as of 1 January of the current year or a minimum of NOK 50 million in support from Norad/the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/the Ministry of Climate and Environment for programme activities in ODA-approved countries in at least one of the past three financial years (indexed from and including 2023).

### c) Professional expertise and capacity

Applicants must have excellent expertise and capacity in the thematic areas in which they are applying for approval. These areas must be within priority areas for Norwegian development policy as described in relevant white papers, draft resolutions and bills, Norad's letters of allocation and other relevant documents.

*Documentation requirements: Applicants must document expertise through previous experience and results within priority areas. Relevant documentation may include descriptions of results achieved, organisational charts, CVs of key personnel or other suitable documentation that highlights relevant expertise and capacity at organisational level or among the applicant's key personnel.*

### d) Programme approach:

The applicant must have an overarching strategic programme approach to its development cooperation work. This means that the applicant organises the project portfolio into overarching and logically structured programmes, where the individual initiatives are arranged in such a manner that they collectively contribute to realising overarching strategic objectives. The applicant must have clear objectives, a strategy for achieving the objectives, the ability to implement this, and practices/routines for highlighting the achievement of strategic objectives in its reporting.

*Documentation requirements: The applicant must have clear objectives, a strategy for achieving the objectives, and the ability to translate this into implementation and reporting.*

### e) Results management and learning system

The applicant must have an established, well-functioning, results management, monitoring, evaluation and learning system (for example, documented in a monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) plan).

*Documentation requirements: The applicant must be able to document its results management system through policies, templates, guidelines and specific examples. The applicant must describe the responsibilities and systems for obtaining results information, including results information from sub-grantees and documentation of processes. The applicant must be able to document systems for monitoring, evaluation and learning (including for sub-grantees).*

**f) Compliance with the zero-tolerance policy**

The applicant must have good procedures on risk assessments and appropriate controls to prevent, detect and respond to financial irregularities and corruption at an organisational, programme and project level.

The applicant must have routines for appropriate handling and follow-up of whistleblowing cases, including a whistleblowing channel where it is possible for both internal and external parties to anonymously report suspected financial irregularities and corruption throughout the entire grant management cycle. Appropriate handling includes technical competence, an integrated arm's length approach when managing whistleblowing reports and the protection of whistleblowers.

When assessing whether the requirement is met, the grant manager will give significant weight to the applicant being able to cite specific situations in which a zero-tolerance policy was practised, and specific improvement measures were implemented and followed up in connection with the handling of corruption and financial irregularities.

*Documentation requirements: Documentation of risk management relating to financial irregularities and corruption that covers the entire grant management cycle.*

*The applicant shall document ethical guidelines which, as a minimum, must be in accordance with Norad's "Guide for the preparation of ethical guidelines for Norad's grant recipients".*

*The applicant must be able to document its whistleblowing channel and follow-up of whistleblowing reports and the practicing of a zero-tolerance policy for financial irregularities and corruption. If requested, the applicant must also provide the grant manager with documentation of the follow-up for spot checks to be carried out.*

*The applicant must be able to document competence and capacity for handling financial irregularities and whistleblowing throughout the entire grant management cycle. Relevant documentation may include descriptions/organisational charts, CVs, etc. demonstrating technical competence, an integrated arm's length approach when managing whistleblowing reports and systems for protecting whistleblowers.*

#### **g) Corporate governance**

The applicant must have holistic and documented corporate governance, including a well-functioning financial management system and risk management processes at an organisational, programme and project level that analyse, manage, and monitor risk.

When making the assessment, the grant manager will give particular weight to risk management related to the grant manager's cross-cutting issues, and partner follow-up. The establishment of an internal audit function will be viewed favourably.

Documentation requirements: *The applicant must provide documentation of governing documents such as articles of association, strategy and instructions for the managing director and board of directors.*

*The applicant must be able to document a risk management process(es) that cover(s) the entire grant management cycle. The applicant must have prepared a risk assessment(s) and an associated action plan(s) specifying responsible key individuals and deadlines for each of the measures. The applicant must be able to demonstrate a link between identified risks and established key controls in its activities. The applicant must document monitoring activities for its internal controls.*

*The applicant must document the division of labour in relation to critical functions, for example, approval of costs, changes to fixed data and bank payments. The applicant must document guidelines which ensure compliance with the grant manager's requirements for procurements, as well as agreement templates for partners which ensure that the grant manager's requirements in grant agreements are reflected throughout the entire grant management cycle. The applicant must have documented partner follow-up which should include a partner strategy and guidelines for differentiated partner follow-up.*

*The applicant must document guidelines and routines for budget processes, preparation of accounts and audits throughout the entire grant management cycle.*

*The applicant must have a whistleblowing channel where internal and external parties can anonymously report sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment (SEAH) throughout the entire grant management cycle. The applicant must document ethical guidelines, which must, at minimum, be in accordance with the grant manager's "Guide for the preparation of ethical guidelines for Norad grant recipients." If SEAH is not included in the applicant's ethical guidelines, the*

*organisation must have separate guidelines relating to this. These must be in line with the grant manager's minimum standard.*

*The applicant must document competence and capacity in risk and financial management throughout the entire grant management cycle. In addition, competence and capacity to handle cross-cutting issues must be documented. Relevant documentation may include descriptions/organisational charts, CVs, etc. demonstrating professional competence and capacity.*

## **h) Climate and environmental considerations**

The applicant should have integrated climate and environmental considerations throughout its operations.

The applicant should have a plan which makes it possible to document year-by-year progress in the work of reducing its most significant negative impact on climate and the environment and to increase its positive environmental impact.

In its assessment, the grant manager will place particular emphasis on actual compliance with the plan.

*Documentation requirements: Documentation of how climate and environmental considerations are integrated into the applicant's activities. If there are no specific objectives or action plans in place (which make it possible to document annual progress), the applicant should be able to document goals and a schedule for its work relating to integrating climate and environment considerations into its activities.*

*The applicant should also be able to document adequate competence and capacity in climate and the environment to further develop, implement and report on overarching strategies and specific objectives and action plans. Relevant documentation may include descriptions/organisational charts, etc. demonstrating how the applicant organises its climate and environmental work and what resources are allocated for this, as well as documentation of the competence of key personnel.*

## **i) Experience from consortia**

The applicant's participation in and leadership of civil society consortia, as well as experience cooperating with other development aid actors (including public agencies, research institutions, the UN, and the private sector) will be viewed favourably.

*Documentation requirements: Documentation of experience from consortia may include descriptions/overviews which demonstrate the civil society consortia the applicant has participated in and led. The applicant must enclose the contact details of any references from collaborative partners.*

## **6 Application**

Applications for strategic partner approval must be submitted to the grant manager via the relevant channel announced on norad.no. Applications must be in Norwegian or English. The relevant documentation specified on norad.no and these rules will need to be enclosed with the application. The grant manager may request additional documentation if required.

If the applicant shares systems and guidelines with the global part of the federation/membership organisation, these will be part of the assessment.

If the applicant has valid, internationally recognised certifications and/or has achieved good results in partner assessments conducted by other major international donors, these may be included as part of the documentation of the conditions for approval as a strategic partner in these rules. These can be documented by a statement of certification and/or results of a partner assessment, as well as through relevant supporting documentation.

## **7. Decision to grant or reject strategic partner approval**

A decision to grant or reject an application for strategic partner approval is considered an individual decision pursuant to the Norwegian Public Administration Act.

### Decision on strategic partner approval

The grant manager may grant strategic partner approval if the requirements in section 5.2(a)-(g) are met. Even if the applicant meets these requirements, the applicant is not automatically entitled to strategic partner approval. When assessing whether to approve applications, the grant manager will assign importance to the degree of fulfilment that exceeds the required minimum level, fulfilment of the requirements in section 5.2(h) and (i), and the grant manager's need for strategic partners within various priority areas for Norwegian development policy.

Approval as a strategic partner may be granted for one or more thematic areas (cf. section 5.2(c)).

The decision will stipulate the rights and obligations for the strategic partner and the length of time the approval is valid for.

The decision will establish follow-up points based on the assessment that forms the basis for approval.

### Rejection

If the application is rejected, the applicant will be notified in a decision stating the grounds for rejection. The applicant will be informed of the right of appeal.

Rejection of an application for strategic partner approval, as well as a decision to revoke strategic partner approval pursuant to section 8, may be appealed.

If a decision to reject an application or revoke approval is upheld following an appeals process, an organisation may reapply for strategic partner approval 12 months after the date of the final decision.

## **8. Revocation of strategic partner approval**

Upon being granted strategic partner approval, the applicant/organisation is deemed to have accepted the conditions and requirements that are set for status as a strategic partner in sections 9-10.

If the conditions for strategic partner approval cease to be met during the approval period, the grant manager may decide to revoke the approval.

The grant manager may also decide to revoke the approval if the organisation/applicant has breached the duty of disclosure in section 10(a). Breaches of the duty of disclosure may, for example, relate to information that the strategic partner's operations are in breach of the law or other relevant regulations, and this has been documented by another public authority. Furthermore, a decision to revoke approval may be made when the strategic partner has otherwise been in material breach of the provisions in these rules or conditions stipulated by the grant manager pursuant to these rules, for example, in guidelines.

The strategic partner must be notified and has the right to respond before the grant manager decides to revoke approval.

## **9. Rights**

### **a) Scalable agreements**

The strategic partner may, where a call for proposals so permits and following a simplified application in accordance with section 9(b), be allocated increased funding through costed extensions to scale up initiatives within the grant schemes in which they already have contractual initiatives in accordance with an existing grant agreement.

### **b) Simplified application**

The strategic partner must apply for grants under the individual grant schemes. The requirements for the application set out in the grant scheme rules and the call for proposals also apply to strategic partners, with the exceptions specified in this section.

Strategic partners have the right to submit simplified applications for all calls for proposals for grants issued by the grant manager, within the thematic areas their strategic partner approval applies.

A full application must be submitted when concerning applications for calls for proposals within a thematic area that the strategic partner has not been approved for.



When submitting applications in calls for proposals within complex thematic areas consisting of both thematic areas that the strategic partner has been approved for and thematic areas that the strategic partner has not been approved for, the strategic partner must document compliance with the conditions relating to professional expertise and capacity in section 5.2(c) for the part of the thematic area that the strategic partner has not been approved for.

A simplified application means that strategic partners can submit a general description of the initiative (what, where and with whom) and the target group for the initiative by using the grant manager's application form. This must include a problem analysis, brief description of the present situation, overarching, knowledge-based theory of change and goals at different levels (it will be sufficient with categories or examples of deliverables/outputs). Submission of a logframe (logical framework) is not compulsory. A simplified application must include an overall risk analysis for the entire programme (not at country level), which includes the risk of negative effects on cross-cutting considerations.

Information on sustainability and local ownership and exit strategy, systems for following up results, risk management, cross-cutting issues, partner strategies and capacity to follow-up partners must not be submitted in a simplified application.

The budget must be submitted at an overarching level (i.e., sector/thematic area, country, head office/local level).

For grant applications that entail particular risk and/or complexity, the grant manager may, if necessary, request more information after the application has been submitted.

### **c) Flexible financing**

The strategic partner shall enter into grant agreements as stipulated in the individual grant schemes, with the exceptions stated in section 9(c), (e) and section 10(d).

The strategic partner has the right to agree to a budget at an overarching level (i.e., sector/thematic area, country, head office/local level) within the thematic areas their strategic partner approval applies.

The strategic partner has the right to include a budget line (up to 20% of the total grant) to be used to achieve objectives across the agreed target areas.

The strategic partner has the right to be able to reallocate 20% between budget lines for thematic area/sector and 30% between budget lines for country without first seeking approval from the grant manager.

### **d) Overarching results management**

The strategic partner has the right to establish an agreement for expected results that a specific grant will fund at the same overarching level as the budget, cf. Section 9(c), within the thematic areas to which the strategic partner approval applies.

The agreed problem analysis, theory of change, and goals must focus on the overarching and combined effects that the initiative seeks to achieve.

When awarding grants, the grant manager may establish special follow-up measures that go beyond what generally applies to strategic partners if the risk, materiality, or complexity of the project makes this necessary in the interests of prudent grant management. The strategic partner's right to overarching results management will also not prevent the grant manager from requiring more detailed reporting if circumstances arise in a project which would indicate that this is necessary to ensure that the funds are used in accordance with the intention and to ensure prudent grant management.

#### **e) Overall follow-up**

The strategic partner is entitled to overall follow-up within the thematic areas that the strategic partner approval applies to. The focus of the follow-up shall be on strategic dialogue and any major deviations from the plan. Annual plans do not require approval, and revised budgets are submitted when the limit for deviations is approaching.

Evaluations and reviews should be used actively and strategically in the follow-up in the areas where the grant manager and the partner consider this most important, however the timing and thematic area of these evaluations and reviews must not be agreed upon/defined in advance.

The right to strategic dialogue does not entitle the strategic partner to the views that are expressed in the dialogue being implemented when preparing broader priorities, grant scheme rules or calls for proposals. Strategic dialogue shall not include the formulation of specific calls for proposals.

When awarding a specific grant, the grant manager may make exceptions from the starting point concerning overall follow-up and strategic dialogue when the risk, materiality or complexity of the project makes this necessary out of consideration to prudent grant management. The strategic partner's right to overall follow-up will also not prevent the grant manager from requiring more detailed reporting if circumstances arise in a project which would indicate that this is necessary to ensure that the funds are used in accordance with the intention and to ensure prudent grant management.

### **10 Obligations**

#### **a) Duty of disclosure**

The strategic partner has a duty to inform the grant manager of all matters that may be relevant to the approval, including matters that may negatively impact the grant manager's reputation or its relationship with third parties.

An approved strategic partner is obligated to inform the grant manager of changes that are of material importance to approval as a strategic partner. Changes of material importance will, among other things, include the information specified in section 5.2(a) -

(i) of these rules. A reduction in annual turnover/grants will always constitute a change of material importance.

**b) Statistical reporting**

The strategic partner is obligated to assist with the grant manager's need for statistical reporting. This includes the obligation to report on the statistical codes required by the grant manager.

**c) Facilitate control measures**

An approved strategic partner is obligated to facilitate control measures conducted by the grant manager of matters that are of significance to the strategic partner approval. The control measures are normally carried out as spot checks, as part of the application process for approval and during the approval period.

The spot checks will focus on compliance with the criteria and can target all levels of the grant management cycle.

**d) Results information**

Strategic partners are obligated to provide information about programme activities in the strategic dialogue.

It must be reported to the grant manager on the budget line with available programme funds for it to be possible to assess whether it has the desired effect.

**11 Evaluation of the scheme**

Reviews of experiences with the strategic partner scheme may be conducted to obtain information about whether the scheme is effective in terms of resource use, organisation and stipulated objectives.