

FROM THEORETICAL-ORIENTED TO PRACTICAL EDUCATION IN AGRARIAN STUDIES (TOPAS)

EC-Erasmus + project no. 585603-EPP-1-2017-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

Call for External Evaluator

1. Context and objective

TOPAS is a project under the funding umbrella of the ERASMUS+ Programme's Key Action 2 'Capacity Building for Higher Education (CBHE)'. It aims on the improvement of practical oriented education in agri-business in altogether 10 institutes for higher education (HEI) from 4 EU-countries and 3 non-EU-countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Most of the partner institutes already cooperated in several fields in the past and joined TOPAS due to the common interest in an internationally competitive education for students in applied agricultural sciences. The project started in October 15, 2017 and will end on October 14, 2020.

The external evaluation is part of the work package on quality control (WP3), which is a binding element of the funding contract with ERASMUS+, which acts under the leadership of the Sumy National Agricultural University (SNAU), Ukraine. The external evaluator acts independently, but in close communication with the leader of WP3. The TOPAS management unit (WP5) at the University of Applied Science Weihenstephan-Triesdorf (Hochschule Weihenstephan-Triesdorf, HSWT) acts as the contractual partner for the external evaluator and responsible for the final acceptance of evaluation results.

The central objective of the evaluation is to support the decision-making on further proceedings of TOPAS with regard to the successful realization of its anticipated goals. The evaluation results will serve simultaneously as evidence and attachment to the TOPAS mid-term report to the donor representative, which is due on March 15, 2019, and the TOPAS final report, due on October 15, 2020.

Expected analyses during the evaluation include the assessment of project proceedings and results, including a detailed bottleneck analysis. Results from these analyses shall provide the basis for suggestions about potential improvements in the remaining project period. The structure of analyses shall

- consider the defined criteria of OECD's Development Assistant Committee (OECD-DAC), i.e. Relevance, Effectiveness, Impact, Efficiency and Sustainability and
- follow a theory-based evaluation approach on the basis of the project's applied objective tree ('results model'), its defined theory of change and its assumed contribution story
- take into account the definitions in the project's log-frame matrix.

The present call invites the external evaluator(s) to submit a proposal for the project's assessment. The external evaluation will cover all project activities in order to complement the quality assessment scheme of the project and to provide the consortium with ideas for further improvement. He/she must not be an employee, i.e. have a contractual link with one of the TOPAS partner institutions.

2. The project

The main objective of the project is to facilitate the transition from a teacher centered, knowledge-based form of education to a student-centered, practice based education in agricultural studies. This transition will improve the chances of graduates of the participating HEI for employment in the national and regional job markets in the agricultural sector.

The improvements in education aim in particular on filling gaps of the soviet-inherited education approaches at the partner HEIs in the non-EU partner countries Ukraine, Armenia and Uzbekistan.

Partners from the EU countries Poland, Romania, United Kingdom and Germany benefit from the amplified cooperation and the exchange of enhanced teaching approaches and methodologies.

Activities for achieving the objective fall in the three categories (1) teaching approaches, (2) student placement syllabi and (3) collection of empirical data on local farming for purposes of teaching and research. Internal project monitoring and dissemination of results add two crosscutting issues to the project's agenda. Major linkages between the three categories comprise data collection through activities in category 2 and the exploitation of the gained information in activities of category 1.

The implementation of these activities relies on the pooling of activities in five work packages (WP) under the leadership of different partners:

- WP1: Preparation, which focuses on the revision of syllabi for student placements and learning outcomes from BA and MA agrarian management programs under the leadership of Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland
- WP2: Development, which focuses on the update of teaching methodologies, tools and infrastructure under the leadership of Writtle University College, United Kingdom
- WP 3: Quality plan, which handles quality control and monitoring of TOPAS under the leadership of Sumy National Agricultural University, Ukraine
- WP4: Dissemination & Exploitation, which takes care of awareness campaigns and the exploitation of TOPAS outputs under the leadership of the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iasi, Romania
- WP5: Management, which coordinates the activities of the WPs with regard to the joint objective and handles the liaison between TOPAS and the donor representative, i.e. the European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACAE) under the leadership of the University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf, Germany.

3. Description of the external evaluation task

The external evaluation will focus on two specific phases of the project's implementation:

- The first phase covers the preparation period of the project's mid-term report to the donor and extends from the start of 2019 until March 1, 2019. Elements of this part of the external evaluation are
 1. the already installed project mechanisms and tools,
 2. attained intermediary results and their correspondence with the initial project planning,
 3. the analysis of bottlenecks in implementation and proposals for overcoming them in the project's second phase, including statements on the relevance and efficiency of project activities for achieving the stated goals of the project's log-frame planning matrix.
- The second phase covers the preparation period of the project's final report to the donor and extends from the mid 2019 until October 1, 2019. Elements of this part of the external evaluation are
 1. the analysis of obtained results with regard to their observed and/or expectable impact on the level of the target group,
 2. the assessment of the activities' effectiveness in achieving the stated goals of the project's log-frame planning,
 3. an assessment of the sustainability of project achievements.

The external evaluation mission will require at least one visit in each of the participating countries, which should allow the evaluator to visit all TOPAS partner HEIs in the respective country (2 in the non-EU countries Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Armenia, 1 in the EU-countries Poland, Romania, United Kingdom and Germany) and gather information for the analyses. The missions may be combined with the participation at consortium meetings.

The evaluation will follow the OECD-DAC quality standards for development evaluation, i.e. Relevance, Effectiveness, Impact, Efficiency and Sustainability. It will also comply with the following standards:

- a. **Usefulness**, i.e. to ensure that the information requirements of its users are taken into account and the desired information is provided to them:
 - Credibility and competence of the evaluator: persons carrying out evaluations should be personally credible and possess the required methodological and technical expertise so that the evaluation findings offer maximum credibility and acceptance.
 - Selection and scope of information: the selection and scope of the information collected should enable treatment of the questions to be investigated for the object of the evaluation and at the same time take into account the information requirements of the commissioning party and other recipients.
 - Transparency of values: the perspectives and assumptions of the participating and affected parties on which the evaluation and interpretation of findings are based should be described in such a way that the basis for the assessment is clearly comprehensible.
 - Completeness and clarity of reporting: evaluation reports should provide all material information, and be easy to understand and verifiable.
 - Timeliness of evaluation: evaluation projects should be started and completed in time for the evaluation findings to be incorporated into impending decision-making processes and improvement processes.
 - Use and benefits of evaluation: planning, execution and reporting of an evaluation should encourage the participating and affected parties to review the evaluation attentively and use its findings.
- b. **Feasibility and fairness (process quality)**: The design of the evaluation process must correspond to the use of its results. To make the evaluation **as** useful as possible for decision-making processes, the following standards should be met:
 - Appropriate procedure: evaluation procedures, including the procedure for obtaining necessary information, should be chosen so that there is a reasonable relationship between the burden on the object of evaluation or participating and affected parties and the expected benefits of the evaluation.
 - Diplomatic approach: evaluations should be planned and carried out such as to achieve the greatest possible acceptance of the evaluation approach and findings among the various participating and affected parties.
 - Efficiency of the evaluation: there should be a reasonable relationship between the effort involved in conducting the evaluation and its benefits.
 - Formal agreements: the obligations of the parties to the contract for the evaluation (what should be done, how, who by and when) should be set down in writing so that the parties are obliged to meet all the conditions of the agreement or renegotiate it.
 - Protection of individual rights: evaluations should be planned and carried out so that the security, dignity and rights of the persons included in an evaluation are protected.
 - Complete and fair review: evaluations should investigate and present the strengths and weaknesses of the object of the evaluation as fully and fairly as possible, so that the strengths can be further developed and the weaknesses addressed.

- Impartial execution and reporting: the evaluation should make clear the different views of participating and affected parties with regard to the object and findings of the evaluation. Reports and the overall evaluation process should demonstrate the impartiality of the evaluation team. Assessments should be made fairly and be as free as possible from personal feelings.
 - Publication of findings: the findings of the evaluation should be made accessible to all participating and affected parties as far as possible.
- c. Accuracy:** The methodological quality relies on the application and documentation of a comprehensible concept of methods as well as of the underlying information and its sources, which includes:
- Description of the object of the evaluation: the object of the evaluation should be clearly and accurately described and documented, so that it can be unambiguously identified.
 - Context analysis: the context of the object of the evaluation should be investigated and analysed in sufficient detail.
 - Description of purposes and approach: the object, purposes, questions and approach of the evaluation, including methods used, should be accurately documented and described so that they can be identified and assessed.
 - Citation of sources of information: the sources of information used in an evaluation should be documented with sufficient accuracy to assess whether the information is reliable and appropriate.
 - Justified conclusions: the conclusions drawn in an evaluation should be derived from findings in a way the recipients can follow.

4. Deliverables of the external evaluation

Deliverables of the external evaluation will include:

- a. 2 presentations of findings and suggestions on the occasion of consortium meetings in Powerpoint-format, dates of the presentations will be agreed upon between the evaluator and the TOPAS management unit
- b. Mid-term report on findings and suggestions for the second phase of the project until March 1, 2019 in modifiable WORD-format
- c. Final report on the findings and overall assessment until October 1, 2020
- d. Comments and explanations on request by the TOPAS management unit or TOPAS partners on the TOPAS Moodle platform,
- e. Mission reports of the visits to the partner HEIs latest 2 weeks after the respective mission.

The external evaluator will actively participate in the consortium discussions on the TOPAS Moodle-platform during both phases of the evaluation. He/she will present -insight on the findings and suggestions by attending two consortium meetings, one before the submission of the mid-term report and a second before the submission of the final report of the project to the donor agency. All milestones concerning the evaluator's action must be included in work package 3, which is responsible for the project's quality plan.

5. Expected profile of the external evaluator

The external evaluator has a proven record of expertise in the field of academic recognition. Specific criteria are:

- Substantive professional experience in the higher education sector in the European Union

- and East European and/or Central Asian countries,
- Solid background in academic recognition,
 - Strong quality assurance and management experience in the context of internationally funded projects. Past experience conducting external evaluations or as reviewer is an asset,
 - Good experience in management/coordination and development of international projects or academic networks, ideally including EU and East European and Central Asian Higher Education Institutions,
 - Prior involvement into the implementation of EU-funded projects,
 - Excellent knowledge of English required, knowledge of Russian is an asset,
 - Excellent communication competence and experience in working in intercultural and international environments,
 - University degree, a PhD either in social sciences and humanities or science and technology is an asset.

The external evaluator should demonstrate in his/her application as a sound knowledge and understanding of the project topic.

The selection will follow the principle of equal opportunities based on the stated selection criteria.

6. Support by the TOPAS consortium

The TOPAS management unit will

- provide the evaluator with an access to the TOPAS Moodle platform with the signature of the contract
- facilitate the communication between the consortium partners and the evaluator,
- provide the required documents for the analyses at the University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf and support the evaluator in the access to the relevant documents and information at the partner HEIs.

The leadership of the work package 3 "Quality Plan" will provide the evaluator with all documents and data of the TOPAS internal monitoring system on request

7. Budget and financial offer

The project budget allows for a maximum sub-contract of 12.000 € including all related costs and taxes for the external evaluation. The TOPAS management unit is not entitled to reclaim input tax, i.e. this amount

- a) includes the VAT (Ust) for bids from German applicants,
- b) sets the upper limit for bids of applicants from other EU countries to 10.084 € due to the obligation of the TOPAS management unit to settle VAT (19%) directly with the German financial authority.

The financial bid should include also air travel costs to the partner countries of the consortium as well as travel costs within these countries (reimbursement against evidence). Overnight costs and per diem allowances must also be costed.

8. Documents to present:

Bids must include:

- A technical proposal: The description of the proposed evaluation approach should outline the methodological approach as well as the intended approach to cooperation and communication with TOPAS partners. (maximum 2 pages)
- A financial proposal according to the stipulations in section 7
- A CV, which provides detailed information on related previous activities that contribute to the expertise on the topic of the evaluation.

The documents shall be send in English language and PDF format to the administrative manager of TOPAS:

Dr. Nicolas Alt
e-mail: nicolas.alt@hswt.de

9. Deadline to submit proposals

Proposals must be sent until December 7, 2018, 23:59 CET.

9. Timeline

Analysis of submitted proposals: December 10-12, 2018

Steering Committee decision: December 15,. 2018

Communication of results: December 18, 2018