



NATIONAL  
**STEM**  
COMMUNITY  
FUND

# GUIDELINES

NATIONAL

# **STEM**

COMMUNITY FUND

The National STEM Community Fund provides financial support to local organisations in order to enable them to run community-based STEM-related projects.



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA  
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT  
FOR YOUTH, RESEARCH  
AND INNOVATION

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**NATIONAL  
STEM  
ENGAGEMENT**  
WORKING GROUP



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**THE NATIONAL STEM COMMUNITY FUND PROVIDES FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS IN ORDER TO ENABLE THEM TO RUN COMMUNITY-BASED STEM-RELATED PROJECTS.**

**Introduction**

**The National STEM Community Fund** is an initiative of the National STEM Engagement Working Group chaired by Esplora Interactive Science Centre on behalf of the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST).

The fund focuses on the implementation of participatory projects that are based on the theoretical and practical aspects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and that primarily address the needs of the local community. The fund celebrates the relevance of science within the community, through support for research, education, communication, citizen engagement and citizen science, via the development of scientific projects, designed and led by actors within the community in collaboration with a researcher/STEM professional.

**For the purposes of this Fund:**

**Community-based STEM projects** are understood as projects that are developed as part of a collaboration between a researcher/STEM professional and a community-based organisation and that are based on the main principles of one or more of the following STEM fields.

**STEM** refers to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. While different definitions of STEM exist, this Fund focuses on the core of STEM fields: life sciences, physical sciences including earth sciences, health science and environmental science, IT and computer science, engineering and mathematics.

**Researcher/STEM professional** is a person who can bring along their knowledge, skills and expertise on the theoretical and practical aspects of STEM; that the project could make use of.

**Community-based organisation** refers to an existing Maltese or Malta-based organisation, made up of a group of people who share common interests and values and which group is active within the local community and engages with the local population. This could be a school, a Local Council, an NGO or a Foundation, for instance.

**Local community** refers to any established community in Malta or Gozo. This can but does not have to be tied to the community's geographical location.

**Benefit** is understood as of use to the local community and that leaves a favourable lasting impact on the community.

**The Applicant** refers to the organisation or individual (if the latter consider themselves representative of a community) applying for this Fund, who in collaboration with a researcher/STEM professional aims to address a specific community need by means of this very collaboration through the project that ensues.

*The project needs to be based on the main principles of one or more of the above-mentioned STEM fields. The main organisation may partner up with other community-based organisations.*

**Beneficiaries** refers to those being awarded the Fund money.

**Partner Cooperation Plan (PCP)** refers to the provision of a brief and comprehensive description indicating how the Applicant and researcher/STEM Professional propose to proceed together with the members of the community in terms of the collaboration - therefore the cooperative aspect throughout the project.

The Applicant must attach a PCP to the online application form. The PCP may be a document (max. 300-500 words), table, diagram etc.

The following questions might assist you in formulating your own PCP: *How will you as the applicant work together with the researcher/STEM professional and any other partners towards the project's aim, generic learning and social outcomes and deliverables and what will be your roles? What is expected of each role throughout the project's implementation, how involved will each role be? To what extent and at which project phase will each of the roles contribute towards the project's deliverables and outcomes? What will happen should any one of the partners choose to drop out during any of the different phases of the project?*

**Deliverables and generic learning and social outcomes** refer to what the Applicant, in collaboration with the researcher/STEM Professional, will be submitting as outputs/outcomes of their collaborative project.

Examples of **generic learning outcomes** include, but are not limited to: *fostering skills, improving attitudes or values, inspiring experimentation and innovation.*

Examples of **generic social outcomes** include, but are not limited to: *empowering communities, encouraging and supporting awareness and participation, improving health and wellbeing.*

Examples of **deliverables** include, but are not limited to: *workshop/s, seminar/s, journal/s, outreach.*

## Main Scope

This fund makes possible the coming together of community-based organisations and researchers/STEM professionals, to collaboratively carry out a project inspired by an identified common or related interest to either party which concurrently addresses the needs of a specific community.

As indicative of the Fund title, the project must be oriented in a STEM field and/or operating through the means of STEM communication, education, public awareness, and citizen science.

Furthermore, the intention of this fund is that local communities become ever more active in STEM. Citizen science takes place when scientists and citizens work together to meet needs or solve problems. The awareness of Citizen science can come closer to the fore and through its promotion become less of an abstract notion and more of an accessible and applicable option. Such a shift can lead to an overall contribution that lessens the gap between scientists and local citizens. The National STEM community Fund thus serves to bridge a connection to the perception that science is more accessible and at hand than one might think. This ties well with Esplora's vision which aims to

increase public awareness of the fact that we ‘already use scientific reasoning and skills’ within our ‘daily activities including making science-based choices continuously.’

## 1. Eligibility Criteria

The Applicant must be a Maltese or Malta-based individual or organisation that is active within a community and engages in some form with the local population. Eligible organisations include:

- Schools and resource centres
- Local Councils
- NGOs and Foundations

Government bodies, private companies and tertiary education providers **cannot** be the Applicant. This does not exclude them from taking part in the project.

- The Applicant must provide a Letter of Commitment from the researcher/STEM professional with whom they will carry out the project as well as any other collaborators mentioned in the PCP.
- The Applicant must fill in **the online form** and provide the necessary documentation, including the budget breakdown (by filling in the first tab in the Budget Template titled ‘NSCF Budget Plan’).
- Non-Governmental Organisations **must be** in possession of a valid Voluntary Organisation (VO) number.

## 2. Budget

### 2.1 Eligible Costs

Eligible costs are those costs which are strictly related to the project. These can be direct or indirect as long as they conform to the Fund’s guidelines.

#### Direct & Indirect Costs:

Direct costs are easily linked to the project, showing a clear direct connection to the project’s purpose, and typically refer to personnel and research costs.

Indirect costs form part of the Applicant’s general rather than specific/direct costs, but which are nevertheless connected to the project. Such expenses relate to administration, equipment, consumables, travel\*, advertising, dissemination of information concerning the project and similar promotional event expenses.

\*Travel expenses are only eligible if they are indispensable to the implementation of the project.

#### Displaying the costs involved:

- A budget plan needs to be filled in at application stage (refer to ‘8. Application Process’ below). **Deviations from the initial NSCF Budget Plan submitted will need to be justified.**
- A quotation must be provided for every purchase and/or service that is contracted for the project (e.g. remuneration of the researcher/STEM professional, purchase of equipment,

graphic design, etc.). These quotations are to be included within the filled-in 'Final Budget Sheet' (second tab in the Budget Template excel document) which you will need to submit along with the filled-in Final Report.

Invoices/acknowledgments of payment for such purchases and/or contracted services are **necessary** for the last payment (the remaining 30%) to be fulfilled.

## 2.2 Non-Eligible Costs

- Infrastructural costs (such as construction costs and any related land or property acquisition costs).
- Consultancy fees (the named researcher/STEM Professional is not considered to be a consultant).
- Expenses that are not clearly identifiable and verifiable, and accordingly substantiated by presentation of original documentation in accordance with the terms and conditions of fiscal legislation.
- Expenses that are not incurred during the timeframe allocated to the project as stipulated in the guidelines.
- Expenses that are already covered by another funding organisation/scheme, be it public (including international and EU funds) or private (double funding).

## 3. Funds available and Funding Procedure

- For the year of 2024, the total budget for this Fund shall be of 24,000 euro.
- Funding per chosen project is a maximum of 8,000 euro, allocated at the discretion of the Evaluation Board.
- Payment will be carried out in two instalments: 70% upon announcement of the awardees and the remaining 30% allocated after the submitted Final Report has been evaluated and checked for compliance.

## 4. Project Timeline

Dates	Activity
16 <sup>th</sup> April 2024	Online Application opens.
31 <sup>st</sup> May 2024	Deadline for submission of online application.
3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2024 – 8 <sup>th</sup> August 2024	Compliance and evaluation of submitted projects.
16 <sup>th</sup> September 2024 – 12 <sup>th</sup> September 2025	Announcement of awardees, disbursement of first tranche (70%). Development and implementation of the projects.
12 <sup>th</sup> September 2025	Deadline for submission of project Final Report.
15 <sup>th</sup> September 2025 – 10 <sup>th</sup> October 2025	Final Report evaluation and compliance check. Disbursement of second tranche (30%) will follow.



## 5. Project Structure

Below is a simple framework which can be helpful when putting together the initial application (closing date 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024) and final project report (due 12<sup>th</sup> September 2025 for funded projects).

### Project overview

- Predicted Generic Learning Outcomes and Social Learning Outcomes
- Project deliverables (e.g. workshops, events, developed resources, apps)

### Project details

- Budget Plan outlining planned expenses
  - Refer to section “Budget” above for more information
  - Download a copy of this year’s Budget template from the NSCF 2024 web page
- Partner Cooperation Plan, listing the role and responsibilities of each project partner
- Project Implementation Plan with timeline
- Data collection opportunities - how will you carry out any data collection? Can you make your collected data available for others to benefit too after your project concludes?

### Project conclusion

- Some of the project application marks will be based on the quality of how you propose to disseminate (share) your project results, analyse & evaluate the project, and the legacy you intend to leave behind. You will then need to provide information / results in the final project report. We encourage open and transparent sharing about challenges, struggles and failures, because this is how we all learn and improve for next time.
- Analysis and evaluation of the project - how will you evaluate what went well and what did not?
- How will you assess the impact that your project actually had on the community?
- How will you disseminate your project results / content so that other people can learn from or be inspired by your project?
- What legacy content will you make available after the end of your project so that others can continue to benefit from the project even after it concludes next year?

## 6. Evaluation and Selection Criteria

All participating projects will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

### A. Project Excellence (45 marks)

- Scientific soundness of the project and its methodology. The project must be substantiated with evidence-based research.
- Excellence of project structure (refer to 5. above).
- Presented budget needs to be realistic, all expenses accounted for, subsequently the project is able to start taking shape following the first disbursement of the funds (70%).

## B. Relevance of Project to the Community (35 marks)

- How aptly it proposes to meet the topics raised, as a result of this collaboration of applicant and researcher/STEM Professional in relation to addressed community's needs. Therefore, the project's defined objectives and outcomes show that they are concurrently relevant to the target audience and notably addressed via the project.
- How well the project can convey the potential of STEM within the community to its citizens and other partners.
- Choice of delivery method(s) opted for by Applicant and researcher/STEM Professional, how effectively intended target audience is reached through this method.

## C. Impact and Legacy of project (20 marks)

- Clarity of the project's aim for impact with due consideration of both the scientific and social aspects of the project.
- Quality of impact assessment plan.
- Engagement of participants in evaluation process.
- Strength and applicability of proposed action plan for the delivery of the project and thereafter. Such a plan should provide a clear description of how the organisation will address the main area of concern purported to be addressed within the time frame as stated in the application form, and also beyond.
- Link to any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## 7. Evaluation and Adjudication Process

Each application will go through an evaluation and adjudication process by the chosen Evaluation Panel. The panel will be composed of a chairperson and two attendant members.

- All evaluators are to sign a Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration.
- When a conflict of interest arises, Explora will take due steps to resolve it, usually by appointing a replacement evaluator for particular applications.
- Evaluation will take place following the deadline for submission of applications, according to the "Project Timeline" dates above.
- Winning projects will receive the allocated funds as set out in the Project timeline table of dates. Project applicants may request up to €8000, but may be allocated a lesser amount than requested.
- A list of awarded projects and applicants will be published on Explora's official website.

### 7.1 Equally Ranked Projects

In the case of a tie, projects will be evaluated further in terms of the project's environmental sustainability, gender equality and inclusivity, and the number of community entities involved.

## 8. Application Process

- Apply via the online form which can also be accessed [from our website](#).
- Fill in the online application step by step. The compulsory parts are identified with an asterisk.

- The Applicant must provide a **Letter of Commitment** from the researcher/STEM professional with whom they will carry out the project, after having stated, discussed and agreed on the terms related to each of their roles, the distribution of related tasks and responsibilities and the extent of their contribution towards the project's successful implementation and completion. This should also be stated in the Letter of Commitment. A similar Letter of Commitment is required from any other parties who are also mentioned in the PCP.
- A **Partner Cooperation Plan (PCP)** is also a requirement as it will serve to outline the applicant's and partners' roles and how they will come together in this project.
- Esplora requires written confirmation from any other parties mentioned in the PCP (aside from the Applicant and the researcher/STEM professional), stating that the person or entity is aware of their role and responsibilities as outlined in the PCP, and is committed to carrying them out.
- **Remember the Budget Plan Form!**  
Download the Budget Template, from our website. Fill in the second tab in the Budget form titled 'NSCF Budget Plan' **only**, save it as a pdf and upload it within the online application form where indicated. The 'NSCF Final Budget Report' (third tab) should be filled in and submitted with the filled in Final Report Template at the end of the project.
- *Kindly note that the **Letter of Commitment, Partner Cooperation Plan and Budget Plan** are required to be submitted at the application stage, along with written confirmation from any other parties mentioned in the PCP.*
- Submit the online application form.
- You should receive an acknowledgement by email within two-three working days. If you do not receive such a notification, kindly contact us on: [stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt](mailto:stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt)
- Incompletely filled forms or forms which do not abide by the regulations or do not match the eligibility criteria established in these guidelines will not be considered eligible for further processing towards eventual evaluation.
- Late applications will not be accepted.

## 9. Complaint Procedure

Complaints should be directed to Esplora Interactive Science Centre, specifically to this address: [stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt](mailto:stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt)

### 9.1 Arguments for and against lodging a complaint

- **Arguments for settling a complaint:**  
Instances where one identifies a procedural anomaly or irregularity in the submission or evaluation process, in terms of the procedure laid down in these guidelines.
- **Arguments against settling a complaint:**  
Complaints that breach the policies and regulatory procedures of Esplora Interactive Science Centre or the Government of Malta.
- Complaints related to the remits of the application in terms of the evaluation criteria stipulated in these guidelines.
- Complaints that do not concern the complainant's project.

## 9.2 Settling a Complaint

A complaint must be lodged within five (5) days of receiving notification of result. The complaint can be emailed to: [stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt](mailto:stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt)

Alternately it can be sent by local mail to:

STEM Engagement Team  
Esplora Science Centre  
Villa Bighi, Dawret Fra Giovanni Bichi  
Kalkara KKR 1320  
Malta

### In the complaint, you are expected to provide the following information:

- Full name and contact information.  
(If not filed directly by the complainant, submission of proof that the representatives of the affected people have the necessary authority to do so).
- The specific area of concern.
- A brief explanation on how and why you feel that the decision made regarding your project was influenced by irregularities that took place in relation to or despite the procedures laid down in these guidelines, or in the standard rules and regulations on good governance relating to the public sector.
- Any relevant supporting documentation and evidence.
- Any actions taken so far to resolve the problem, including contact with the STEM Engagement Team at Esplora.
- Proposed solutions.
- Whether confidentiality is requested (stating reasons).

## 9.3 On Acknowledgment and Further Processing

The STEM Engagement Team within Esplora will take care to send you a reply within ten (10) business days from the receipt of your complaint.

This will be done after assessing the eligibility of complaint in question informing you whether it is eligible for further processing in accordance with the above criteria.

If the issue has not been/cannot be resolved, the complainant has the right to refer the concern to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's role is to provide an independent and impartial service between the Government and its institutions and the public. The Ombudsman has the power to decide whether a complaint is justified or not. If it should be the former, recommendations will be made for a satisfactory remedy, and on how to mitigate a similar situation in the future. It is highly recommended that complainants acquaint themselves with the main guidelines of the Ombudsman's process/procedure before reporting their complaint.

**Disclaimer:** The Ombudsman cannot reverse funding decisions or make changes on behalf of Esplora Interactive Science Centre's legal responsibilities and policies on awarding funds.

## 10. Project Monitoring

Applicants of the Awarded projects will be asked to sign a grant agreement.

In accepting the grant, participants are giving their consent to MCST/Esplora for the publication of the name of the organisation, project title, and a brief overview of the project, as well as the summative amount of funds awarded to the project.

The first 70% of the allocated funds will be processed once the contract has been signed, whilst the remaining 30% will be awarded following submission and approval of the Final Report by the awarding body/bodies.

Beneficiaries of this fund are expected to acknowledge the funding assistance received from MCST/Esplora on all digital and physical materials and resources (including purchased resources) pertaining to the project. Branding guidelines will be provided as needed.

In line with the submitted proposal and the subsequent contract the grant received can only be used towards the project, and therefore for the purpose which led to its awarding.

Should the Applicant identify a need to implement certain changes, which in turn affects the nature of the project, and/or occurs past the signing of the contract, MCST/Esplora needs to be notified right away. **Changes cannot be implemented unless and until approval is granted.**

MCST/Esplora may alter or withdraw a grant if the change in the project is not considered in line with the initial proposal as approved by the Evaluation Board, or MCST/Esplora deems it has not been informed of the changes in due time.

Any remaining savings/funds over the approved budget may, upon approval by MCST/Esplora be re-allocated towards other areas of the project as long as this stays within the project's original aims and objectives.

The Beneficiary is responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation, including legislation regulating voluntary organisations and VAT registration.

MCST/Esplora reserves the right to send representatives for monitoring purposes during any stage of the project implementation.

MCST/Esplora reserves the right to consult with the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS) according to the necessary circumstances.

## 11. Documentation and Submission of Final Report

- Throughout the entire implementation of the project, and for the sake of the final report, it is of great importance that the Applicant documents the project's process.

This can be done by means of:

- photos (kindly include at least 5 photos in the final report)
- video material
- social media updates (preferably on an account dedicated to the project)
- press articles
- blogs
- testimonials
- promotional material.

We encourage Beneficiaries to maintain a social media presence to share ongoing updates with the public regarding their project. This material can also be included in the final submission.

Fiscal receipts and documents related to the project must be kept for eventual presentation and assessment. Any hard copies should be digitised through photos or scanning.

Along the way the beneficiary may be asked to provide updates as to the status of the project and in due time communicate its existence via public calls, press releases, and adverts.

## 11.1 Final Report

The project can be finalised before the one-year time period suggested in these Guidelines. At the end of the project, the beneficiary will be required to submit a report – including all respective documentation – highlighting developments, work accomplished, and the added value relating to the support provided by the Fund.

### **The report template can be found on our website or here.**

The report will be evaluated and will help to have your project assessed as part of the decision to release the final 30% of the funding. It will also provide legacy material for others to appreciate and learn from your project.

The NSCF Final Budget Report (third tab in the Budget Template Excel document) will need to be filled in and submitted together with scanned receipts/invoices of materials/services purchased. As already mentioned, any changes made to the original NSCF Budget Plan submitted will need to be shown and justified.

The report must be submitted in the provided template by the end of the implementation of the project time frame according to the timeline given above via email to:  
stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt

MCST/Esplora retains the right to recover funds if it is perceived that these have not been used according to the approved budget in relation to established guidelines. MCST/Esplora retains the right to use any material included in the Final Report for dissemination purposes.

## 12. Contact Details

**For more information, kindly contact us on [stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt](mailto:stemengagement.esplora@gov.mt)**

<https://esplora.org.mt/the-national-stem-community-fund-2024-introduction-and-applications-call-now-open/>

## Concluding Remarks

Esplora Interactive Science Centre on behalf of the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST) together with the National STEM Engagement Working Group, wish you all the best of luck with your projects!

