

**Project acronym**

**CORE Organic Plus**

**Project title**

**Coordination of European Transnational Research  
in Organic Food and Farming Systems**

**Deliverable 3.3b:**

**Evaluation of the call procedure**

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This publication represents the deliverable 3.3b about task 3.6 in Work Package 3 "Evaluation of the call procedure". Deliverable 3.3a is a working document for internal use.

## Introduction

According to Work package 3 of the ERA-NET CORE Organic Plus, dealing with "the launching of a Plus call", MIPAAF (Italy) as task leader, had the mission to carry out the Task 3.6 "Evaluation of call and call procedure". ICROFS (Denmark) contributed to the activity.

The main objectives of this task are:

- the analysis of the call launched in 2013.
- identifying optimisation requirements.
- modifying call procedure if necessary.

The task was performed by means of a survey addressed to target persons, which results have been then analyzed.

## Background and aims

All along the story of the ERA-NET CORE Organic (its first version started in 2004, we are now at its third session) a great attention has been dedicated to a correct and transparent implementation of the calls for the funding of research in organic food and farming. The analysis of the calls procedure perception, the level of appreciation or individuation of critical points, expressed by the funding institutions and CORE Organic bodies or by the call applicants, has always been considered important for the improvement of the activity. Therefore, every call put in place has been followed by a survey (see table 1), addressed to all the people involved in the process and its outputs have been taken into consideration for the building of the following call. Consequently, Core Organic members have been able to adapt specific call procedures (for ex. the adoption of a two-step procedure, the publication of the call pre-announcement, etc.) when unanimously requested by the survey's respondents, and when feasible.

Nevertheless, CORE Organic consortium is fully aware that some critical aspects still need to be improved and will not be overcome in a short while, especially those regarding the harmonization of the national regulations, different for each funding institution and country, due to national legal constraints which prevent reaching a complete share of funding rules.

Table 1 - Evaluation of the calls implemented by CORE Organic

	<b>Duration of the Action</b>	<b>Call published on</b>	<b>Total budget dedicated to the winning projects</b>	<b>Evaluation of the call: survey with questionnaires addressed to</b>	<b>Report on the survey</b>
CORE Organic	10/2004 - 09/2007	September 2006	8.3 Mio €	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Applicants</li> <li>- Evaluation expert panel</li> <li>- CORE Organic National Call Contact Persons</li> <li>- CORE Organic Governing Board</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.coreorganic.org/library/pub/D7_3_final_22NOV2007.pdf">http://www.coreorganic.org/library/pub/D7_3_final_22NOV2007.pdf</a>
CORE Organic II	09/2010 - 08/2013	September 2010 and October 2011	9.1 Mio € (in 2010), 4.5 Mio € (in 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governing Board</li> <li>- Call Board</li> <li>- Expert Panel (evaluators)</li> <li>- National Contact Points</li> <li>- Project Coordinators</li> <li>- Project Partners (co-applicants)</li> </ul>	The 2 surveys' results are reported at: <a href="http://coreorganic2.org/Upload/CoreOrganic2/Document/D3_5_evaluation_call_procedure_final.pdf">http://coreorganic2.org/Upload/CoreOrganic2/Document/D3_5_evaluation_call_procedure_final.pdf</a>
		June 2012 (restricted to 6 CORE Organic members)	0.86 Mio €	The call was a real common pot call with only one application received. A standard evaluation of the call was not needed	Feedback from funding bodies and applicants has been collected by direct communication
CORE Organic Plus	12/2013 – 11/2018	December 2013	11.3 Mio € incl. EU funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Call and Monitoring Board members</li> <li>- Applicants</li> </ul>	This report

The present survey aims at collecting new opinions on aspects which are controversial, and on the different mechanism adopted for the implementation of this last joint call, which had to include the "Plus" rules, i.e. some specific call rules imposed by the EU Commission who contributes

financially to the selected projects (further details about the ERANET PLUS actions can be found at [http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/coordination/docs/z-era-net-plus-provisions-november2011\\_en.pdf](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/coordination/docs/z-era-net-plus-provisions-november2011_en.pdf)).

With this report CORE Organic brings further evidence to all those involved in such processes, the results obtained from the evaluation of 4 CORE Organic calls could be of use for other ERA-NET consortia, through PLATFORM (project which brings together the European Research Area Networks) or ERALEARN (support platform for the Public-Public-Partnerships community).

## **The CORE Organic Plus call**

CORE Organic Plus consists of 24 partners from 21 countries/regions. The call process started in December 2013, the projects were selected in October 2014. For further details see the information published by the CORE Organic consortium at <http://www.coreorganic.org/>

## **The survey**

After the end of the 2013 joint call Mipaaf and ICROFS prepared two questionnaires, one addressed to the applicants, the other to the Call and Monitoring Board (CMB) members, i.e. the representatives of the funding institutions members of the CORE Organic consortium.

CMB members and no other CORE Organic bodies were involved being them almost represented by the same people.

ICROFS created the survey online using the programme MonkeySurvey.

Questionnaires were sent on 8th of June 2015, 3 weeks' time was given to answer, a reminder was sent on the 30th of June with a new deadline, the 12th of July.

The target people were:

- 401 applicants (coordinators and co-applicants), including the ones who were not selected for the submission of a full proposal, we had a feedback from 107 (26.7%) of them.
- 28 CMB members, we had a feedback from 15 (53,6%) representing 70% of the CORE Organic countries.

## **Results of the survey**

Answers given by the 2013 joint call applicants are summarized in table 2 (see Annex 1 for the complete survey and some comments). Opinions and observations from the representatives of the funding institutions (CMB members) are shown in table 3, especially when dealing with the same aspects asked to the applicants, or with details which could be of public interest, while technical questions (specific to the internal procedures) addressed to CMB members are not displayed in these premises.

Tables are organized in such a way that positive and critical points are distinct, these will contribute to the CORE Organic funding bodies discussion while preparing future CORE Organic calls.

Table 2 – Summary of the survey addressed to the 2013 CORE Organic call applicants

	Strengths	What has been reached	Weaknesses	Can CORE Organic do something for the improvement of the call procedure?
<b>APPLICANTS</b>				
<b>General information</b>				
<b>1. Participation in a transnational call (Q. 4) / new partners, not known from previous projects' cooperation (Q. 13) -</b>	23.6% of the respondents never participated before in a transnational call / 22% had new partners in their project proposal	More researchers are involved in transnational activities / CORE Organic contributes to the improvement of the capacity building at EU level		
<b>Communication</b>				
<b>2. National websites reporting the news on the initiative (Q. 7)</b>			Not always effective	To be improved by the national CORE Organic representatives (with the support of the CORE WP for dissemination?)
<b>3. Pre-announcement of the call (Q. 6)</b>	Most researchers appreciate it	We have the confirmation that a pre-announcement of the call is appreciated by researchers. The procedure is in any case consolidated, the CORE Organic consortium set it up also during the previous ERA-NET experience (CORE Organic II)		If possible, to apply for all the CORE calls
<b>4. Core Organic website (Q. 7), the online submission tool (Q. 8)</b>	Nearly 90% of the respondents consider the CORE Organic website good - very good, most of them were happy about the functionality of the submission tool	The CORE Organic web tools are on a general basis well planned and user-friendly	A few respondents say it could be improved	More attention will be dedicated to this aspect to get the full efficiency of the communication
<b>5. Call announcement and Guideline (Q. 7)</b>	83% of the applicants consider it good – very good	The information about the call (announcement, guidelines) is clear and exhaustive	A few respondents say they could be improved	More attention will be dedicated to this aspect to clarify the information for the users

<b>6. FAQ document (Q. 7)</b>	58% of the applicants say they were good – very good /		31% did not use it (why?)	Could it be improved?
<b>7. Partnering tool and sheets (Q. 7)</b>	51% of the applicants appreciated the partnering sheets		Not used by 39 – 48% of the applicants (why?)	Improve them?
<b>8. The process of finding partners and setting up a consortium (Q. 15)</b>	Easy for 51%		Not easy for 26% of the respondents	How can CORE help researchers find transnational partners?
<b>9. Brokerage event (Q. 9)</b>	Appreciated by 70.1% of the respondents			Experience to repeat if possible?
<b>10. National rules (Q. 10, 11)</b>	45% of the respondents find them easy – very easy to manage		More than 40% of the respondents find them difficult	CORE Organic members are aware of this critical point of the procedure. How can funders clarify their rules? Is it possible to simplify them?
<b>11. Clearness and transparency of CORE Organic Plus call procedure (Q. 12)</b>	75% are satisfied	There is a positive perception of the way the call procedure has been managed, it can be considered satisfactory	23% are not satisfied, some feel the evaluation was not transparent	More information about evaluation? Is more information needed about the pre-proposal evaluation? Do the evaluators need to write a clearer and more motivated full proposal evaluation report?
<b>12. Assistance from the Call Secretariat and National Contact points (Q. 16)</b>	58% give a positive answer		ca. 21% could not answer, was it because the procedure was clear enough?	
<b>13. Scientific feedback on the full proposal in the statement from the expert panel (Q. 17)</b>	66.7% say it was clear		33.3% say it was too generic	We probably can not accept too generic evaluation reports
<b>14. Feedback on the Pre-proposal from the Call Secretariat (Q. 18)?</b>	Nearly 52% find it acceptable		13% find it not acceptable	Improve this point also through a revision of the criteria for eligibility/evaluation of pre-proposal: do we need a scientific evaluation of the Pre-proposals?
<b>Other Comment or Suggestion regarding the CORE Organic Plus Call (Reflections for CORE Organic Consortium)</b>				
1) Too much effort for too low funding (at least at the stage of pre-proposal)				
2) National translations provided by CORE Organic?				

- 3) Role of the sector expert for the final decision: must be clear and its influence must be limited – or extended to full member of scientific expert panel
- 4) Specific topics on organic products?
- 5) Reduction of national bureaucracy at the stage of pre-proposal, this stage needs to be more focused on scientific aspects
- 6) Institutions already funded in previous calls with similar topics not to be accepted?
- 7) Clearness of communication to users (how economic resources are distributed by the funders, how prioritization of the proposals is carried out, information about evaluation, more feedback at the stage of pre-proposal, scientific quality of proposals sacrificed on the altar of ensuring maximum use of national budgets?)
- 8) An applicant has never received the evaluation result, another asked for more details about the evaluation but did not receive them
- 9) The two-stage application process is appreciated

Summary of the survey addressed to the 2013 CORE Organic Call and Monitoring Board members

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Can CORE Organic do something for the improvement of the call procedure?
<b>CMB MEMBERS</b>			
<b>Call: preparatory phase, application phase, selection of the projects</b>			
<b>1. Quality of the CORE Organic Plus call procedures</b>	All the members are satisfied about the call procedure, especially for the following aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- quality in general</li> <li>- compared to the national calls (including added value of the transnationality)</li> <li>- Call Secretariat</li> <li>- timing between the different steps of the call</li> <li>- procedure for the selection of experts</li> <li>- evaluation criteria adopted at the stage of pre-proposals</li> <li>- experts evaluation reports</li> <li>- website dedicated to the call-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- scientific evaluation during a holiday period</li> <li>- sector experts not able to give a score</li> <li>- online submission tool</li> </ul>	The role of the sector experts in the evaluation needs to be rediscussed, this is the first time CORE Organic used sector experts who had the duty to evaluate the potential for the research results to reach the end-user
<b>2. Part(s) of the call procedure to improve</b>		Evaluation (final selection of the projects, selection of the sector experts, evaluators, top-up funding contribution from the EU)	The various evaluation aspects will be again analysed by the CORE Organic consortium
<b>3. Do the adopted thematic research</b>	Yes		



	Strengths	Weaknesses	Can CORE Organic do something for the improvement of the call procedure?
areas and topics address national priorities?			
<b>4. Level of information requested from the applicants in the pre- and full proposals</b>	All the members are satisfied		Lighter pre-proposals? A few applicants complain about the big effort needed for the preparation of the pre-proposal. To be discussed
<b>5. Complaints from national applicants during the application phase</b>		33% received complaints, mainly about the submission tool	CORE Organic will try to make the submission tool more friendly
<b>Funds</b>			
<b>6. The way the Commission contribution dedicated to the call has been distributed among the selected projects (pre-allocation of 1/3 of the EC contribution to the funding institutions according to their original fund commitment and published with the call + allocation of 1/3 of the EC contributed during the expert panel and Call and Monitoring Board meeting to close funding gaps)</b>	More than 80 % are satisfied		
<b>7. For a future Cofund Consortium Agreement: each funder, during the selection of projects, will pay its own applicants as far as possible, and receive only EC funds if the requests from the applicants exceed own funds</b>	84% agree		
<b>8. Pre-proposals to accept for the full proposal submission: requesting a total of 4 times the budget available for each partner</b>	66.7% agree, the others have no opinion		This proposal probably still needs some internal debate
<b>9. Restriction in terms of number of thematic research areas the funders can join in case of lower availability of funds</b>	64% agree, the others ask for the Involvement of the Call and Monitoring Board Partners in decision		Funding institutions adopted less thematic areas in case of limited funds ..does the CORE consortium need to discuss again about this when the call is under construction?
<b>10. CORE Organic is one of the few</b>	80% of the CMB members want to go on		It seems that some applicants have not

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Can CORE Organic do something for the improvement of the call procedure?
<b>ERA-NETs which try to balance the funds by inviting some of the projects to add one or more partners between stage 1 and 2.</b>	with this possibility		understood the meaning of our procedure which has the purpose to involve as much as possible researchers from all the countries participating in the call..
<b>11. Projects' proposals cannot exceed a certain amount of budget, decided by the funding institutions</b>	92% agree		
<b>12. The coordination cost could be covered with EC funds</b>	Nearly 93% agree		Is it possible to handle these coordination budgets at national level? This aspect needs to be considered.
<b>General strategic issues</b>			
<b>13. Interest in implementing transnational calls with institutional funds, not only cash, i.e. for example networking actions</b>	Nearly 92% are interested		Consider activities promoting researchers' networking
<b>14. Involvement in the call of Enterprise, Young Researchers, Post Doc, Phd Students, grants for mobility of researchers</b>	Most of the members agree		Consider these indications in future calls
<b>15. Other tools important for organic farming apart from generation of scientific knowledge by research-driven projects, which could be priority for the CORE Organic consortium</b>	End-user involvement in the research process is seen as an most important tool		Consider these indications in future calls
<b>16. Good experiences from other ERA-NETs</b>	Joint activities with other Co-fund ERA-NETs / Meta Knowledge Base developed in ICT-AGRI		
<b>17. Dissemination</b>	Most of the funding institutions are interested in contributing to dissemination of the projects results		The involvement of all the partners will be sought
<b>18. How can we collaborate with operational groups (implemented by EIP-AGRI) funded by EU Rural Development Programme</b>		67% have no idea	Open to discussion...

## Conclusions

The following indications highlight the main findings resulting from this survey and show what has been improved compared to the past and what are still critical call procedure questions. Funding institutions and applicants points of view are considered.

### What CORE Organic has reached:

- more “organic” researchers working internationally!
- in general a good quality of the call process
- funding institutions are satisfied about the procedures adopted, some of these procedures can be considered as fixed for CORE future joint calls
- funding institutions are satisfied in general on how the funds (national, European) have been distributed among the projects
- a better communication about the call

### Points still critical or which still need some discussion:

- the setting up of a project consortium
- the submission tool
- the national regulations
- the evaluation aspects (including perhaps insufficient Feedback on the Pre-proposals, sector experts role, etc.)
- the final selection of the projects
- an insufficient information at national level about the call
- Funds (total budgets requests threshold at the stage of pre-proposals to accept for the full proposal submission, number of thematic research areas the funders can join in case of lower availability of funds)

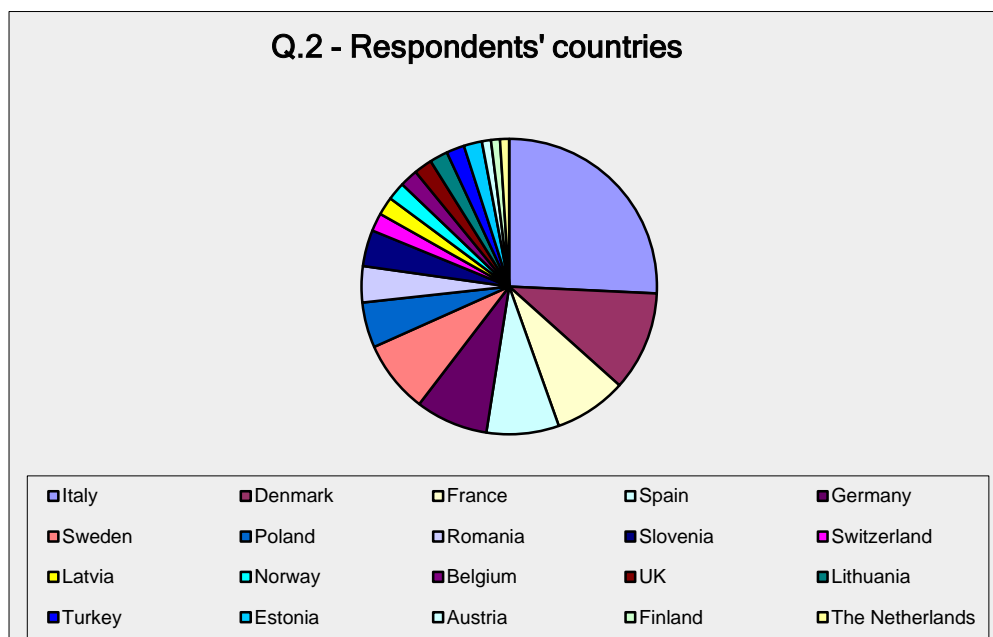
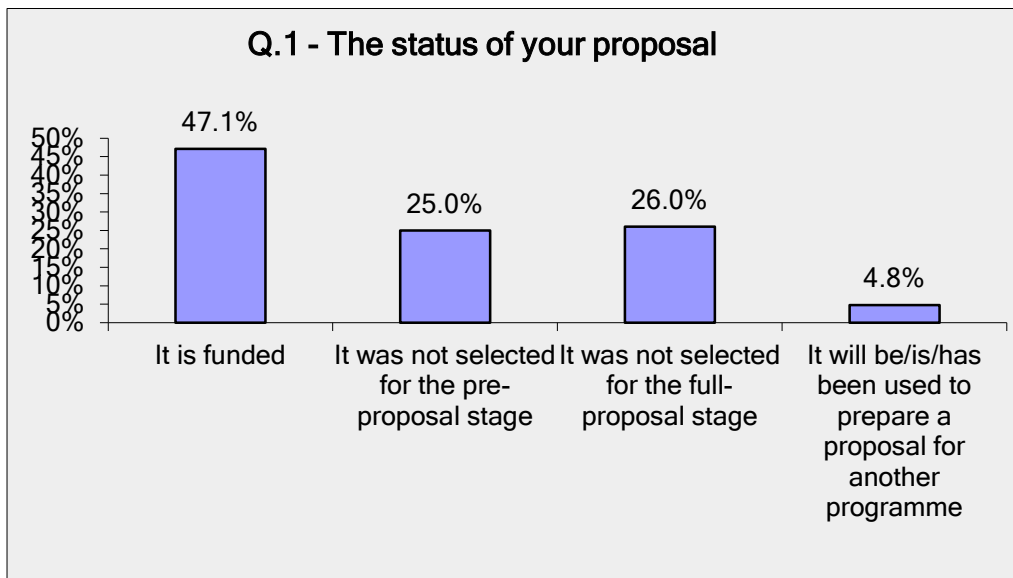
### To consider for future calls:

- the involvement of end-users in the projects proposals
- the involvement in the call of Enterprises, Young Researchers, Post Doc, Phd Students, adoption of grants for mobility of researchers
- networking activities
- more involvement of the national CORE organic partners for dissemination activities
- projects coordination costs to be covered by EC funds (agreed on in this survey by the funding institutions)

## Annex 1 – Applicants’ answers

Some comments are given in text boxes, highly ranked options are highlighted.

### General information

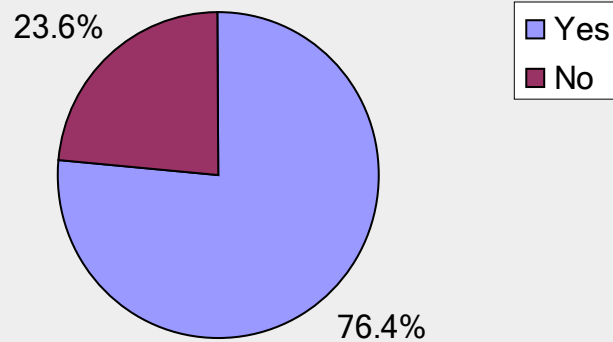


### Q. 3 - Are you a Coordinator or a Project partner?

Coordinator	23.6%
Project Partner	76.4%

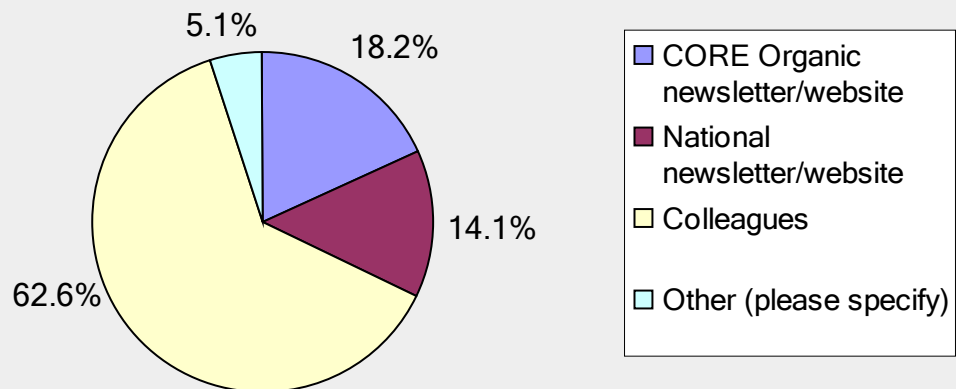
23.6% of the respondents never participated in a transnational call, this aspect shows the added value of CORE Organic in the ERA (European Research Area) perspective

**Q.4 - Have you ever applied for other transnational funding schemes?**



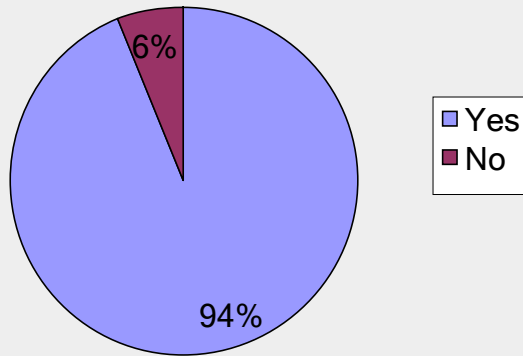
**Communication**

**Q.5 - How did you hear about the call?**



Researchers were informed about the call mainly by word of mouth, but nearly 20% surfed in the CORE Organic website or received the CORE Organic newsletter. To a lower extent the information was also spread at national level.

**Q. 6 - Do you think the pre-announcement of the call was useful?**



CORE Organic members already pre-announced a call during CORE Organic II, other than in CORE Organic Plus. The answers given by researchers confirm the idea of the procedure's usefulness.

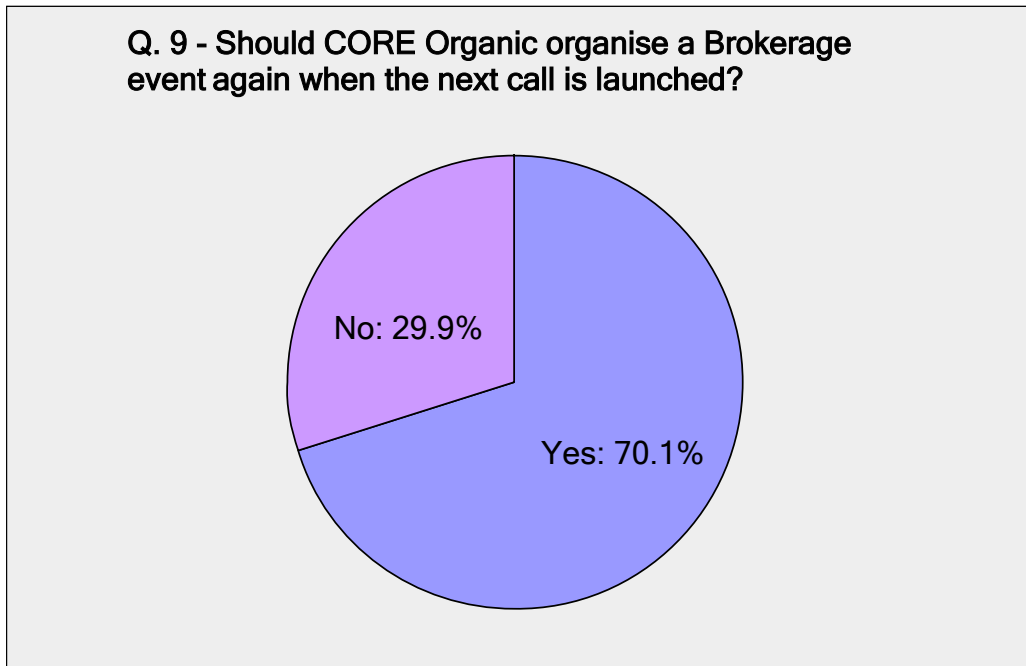
**Q. 7 - How would you rate the following information sources regarding the CORE Organic Plus Call?**

	Very Good (%)	Good (%)	Rather poor (%)	Very poor (%)	Not applicable/ I did not use it (%)
The CORE Organic Website	14.6	75	5.2	0	5.2
National website (if any) reporting news on the initiative	6.6	29.7	15.4	7.7	40.6
Call announcement and Guideline for Applicants (including clearness of the call text)	12.7	70.5	10.5	2.1	4.2
FAQ document	12.8	45.7	8.5	1.1	31.9
The information sheets - for partnering search, published here <a href="http://www.coreorganic.org/Pages/partner_search.html">http://www.coreorganic.org/Pages/partner_search.html</a>	12.8	38.3	4.3	5.3	39.3
Partnering tool provided by the call submission website	8.6	32.3	8.6	2.1	48.4

Most of the applicants have appreciated the CORE website and the call guidelines, but some complain about the insufficient national information and others say that more could be done for the improvement of the partnering instruments provided. Moreover, the FAQ page has been useful for 43 respondents out of 96 but it is not clear why some did not use it, however, it is likely they did not notice it.

**Q. 8 - How would you rate the functionality (i.e. accessibility and ease to use) of the CORE Organic Plus call submission website**

	Very Good	Good	Rather Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
%	11.4	68.8	9.4	2.1	8.3



**Q. 10 - How difficult was it for you to handle the different national rules in terms of financial aspects when it comes to building a consortium and a proposal?**

	Very Easy	Easy	Rather difficult	Very difficult	Don't know
%	4.2	40.6	35.4	13.6	6.2

**Q. 11 - How difficult was it for you to handle the different national rules in terms of management aspects when it comes to building a consortium and a proposal?**

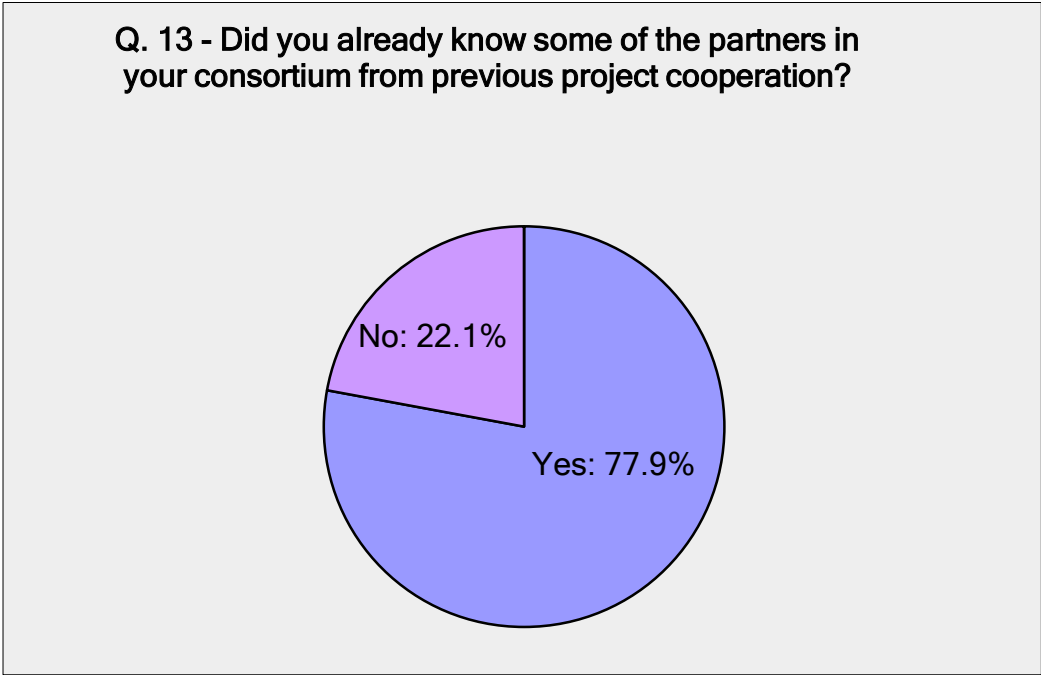
	Very Easy	Easy	Rather difficult	Very difficult	Don't know
%	4.2	40.6	32.3	7.3	15.6

National rules are, like in the previous CORE calls considered a difficult aspect to manage

**Q. 12 - How would you rate the CORE Organic Plus call procedure regarding clearness and transparency?**

	Very Good	Good	Rather Poor	Very Poor	Don't know
%	9.6	66	17	6.4	1

A few applicants have the feeling that the evaluation process is the most critical and is seen as not transparent



**If No, which instrument did you use to find them?**

- 1) My college worked together with this project coordinator.
- 2) Not all of them, I found them through the published papers
- 3) I was in contact with the coordinator for other projects that identify me based on my scientific skills
- 4) personal contacts
- 4) Colleague recommendations

It seems that CORE Organic contributes to capacity building at European level



#### Q. 14 - Any other Comment or Suggestion regarding the CORE Organic Plus Call?

- 1) To be able to make a good Call and good Projects, it is important that the countries participating in the Call agree upon the topics and have the same angle on the work that should be done.
- 2) The Core organic call is not really attractive - the Funding is too low and as coordinator the Work load is simply too high to make it worth the effort - We had a very productive project but we all had to use parallel Funding to get through it - Thus, never again...
- 3) We need national language translation of the abstract and title for communication when the project starts. Could this could be provided by the Core coordinator ?
- 4) The scientific evaluation it is quite clear, it is not clear the selection on the basis of the organic Sector people. This makes weak all the process because the organic Sector expert can affect the the final decision. Our evaluation report was written "The sector experts did not score the proposals but made a comment to each proposal on its relevance for the European organic sector, the potential impact, and the potential for the results to reach the end-users, and the comment was included in the discussion of the proposal and the comparison among proposals".
- 5) We have not many comments because we realize such project for the first time.
- 6) The Call could be more clearly addressed to specific topics on organic products
- 7) Please reduce the bureaucracy in particular in a preproposal, it is not possible that there are national regulation so complicated for a preproposal. It should be better to consider the scientific aspects and not the bureaucratic aspects
- 8) If you want to expand the number of people / institutions which work in organic research, the people / institutions which were financed in previous calls / similar themes, should not be accepted again.
- 9) Very poor feedback from the first round. Impossible to understand the country priorities leading to some proposals being rejected.
- 10) Preparing a proposal is exhaustive and time consuming. Applicants need to know clearly what are the rules of the game in terms of evaluation criteria. Specifically, it is important to know how decisions are taken collectively by the different funding bodies when it comes to prioritize proposals for funding, considering that national budgets and priorities are uneven. I suspect that, in some cases, the scientific quality of proposals have been sacrificed on the altar of ensuring maximum use of national budgets
- 11) I have still not get the evaluation !
- 12) To proceed in future
- 13) I would expect from a two-step application involving a "pre-proposal" to be time saving. This was not the case: The pre-proposal was already quite exhaustive. So I thought that the main proposal would be short, but it was in fact again very long and time consuming. Often the same questions were asked, asked in another way than in the pre-proposal.
- 14) The evaluation was really murky, and in spite of several promises, we never got any further feedback. This is unacceptable.
- 15) I liked the two-stage call very much. It allowed us to agree on ideas in the pre-proposal. When we did the full proposal, we knew there was a very good chance for funding and so I think the experiments we proposed were much more specific and realistic than what groups I have been involved with before have done.

**Q. 15 - How would you rate the process of finding partners and setting up a consortium (if applicable)**

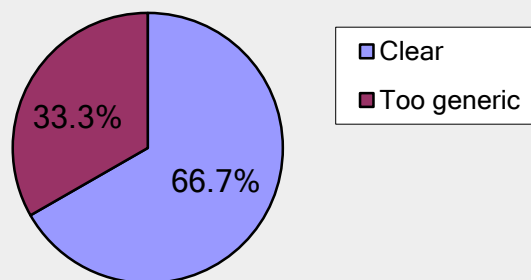
	Very easy	Easy	Rather difficult	Very difficult	I asked the National Contact Point for help	N/A
%	9.1	42	26.1	0	2.3	20.5

Something more could be done by CORE Organic? Compared to the past this aspect has been improved (brokerage event, partnering tool, etc.), being aware of the difficulty of finding partners, but still needs to be taken into consideration

**Q. 16 - How would you rate the assistance from the Call Secretariat and National Contact points to the applicants**

	Very Good	Good	Rather Poor	Very Poor	Don't know
%	17.6	40.6	17.6	3.3	20.9

**Q. 17 - How would you rate the quality of the scientific feedback on your full proposal in the statement from the expert panel? (only for those who have been invited to submit a full proposal)**



**Q. 18 - How would you rate the feedback on your Pre-proposal from the Call Secretariat?**

	Acceptable	Not Acceptable	No opinion
%	51.6	12.9	35.5