

FP7 Quick info for National Contact Points November 2012

No more signed paper financial statements (forms C)

Paperless FP7 grant management comes closer; the electronic-only submission of financial statements (forms C) will start on 1 January 2013.

New process

- Organisations have to identify online the persons authorised to sign forms C. For this, a **new role**, the **Financial Statement Authorised Signatory (FSIGN)** is introduced in the identity and access management (IAM) of the Participant Portal [hyperlink]. **FSIGNs** are nominated by the Legal Entity Appointed Representative (**LEAR**), online directly in the portal (see revised model grant agreement [hyperlink] and new LEAR mandate [hyperlink]). The **nomination of a LEAR** for each participating organisation becomes thus **mandatory**. LEARs can register an unlimited number of FSIGNs for their organisation, can add comments to each name and can revoke or replace them at any time. Account Administrators (nominated by LEARs and having delegated powers from the LEAR) can do the same. Nominations are made in the role management screen under "My organisations".
- One of the participant contacts (PaCo) – or coordinator contacts in case of the coordinating entity - for a particular project chooses one or more FSIGNs for the project from the list nominated by the LEAR. This is done in the role management screen of the project.
- When a periodic report is due, after the financial data are introduced in the financial reporting module, PaCos identify a form C as "ready for signature" (instead of submitting directly to the coordinator as currently). This triggers a notification to the FSIGN who then signs electronically and submits to the coordinator. If no FSIGN was yet assigned to the project (see above) the system alerts the PaCo and provides instructions on the necessary steps to take.
- Certificates on financial statements (CFS), if applicable, have to be scanned and the electronic copy uploaded alongside the form C before the form is identified as "ready for signature". The original of the CFS (signed by the certifying auditor) must be kept in the files of the beneficiary (no longer sent in paper to the Commission).
- The coordinators collect all of the participants' forms C and CFS in one package. The submission of this package by the coordinator triggers the issuing of a digitally signed electronic receipt for each form C submitted and for the whole package. LEAR, FSIGNs and PaCos from each beneficiary will be notified electronically and be able to download this electronic receipt for their organisation.

Applicability and retroactiveness

This new regime applies to FP7 grants signed after 1.1.2013 (revised model grant agreement entering into force). For grants signed before this date, the traditional parallel electronic submission and paper signature is still available as an option. However, the Commission **strongly encourages all beneficiaries in all FP7 grants to use the new electronic-only submission.**

For doing this, co-ordinators of on-going grants have to initiate a simple amendment, with the agreement of all beneficiaries of the project. The templates and instructions for this amendment are here [hyperlink]. The amendment becomes applicable to all beneficiaries under a given grant, i.e. there will be no "mixed" reporting in a consortium (either all electronic-only or all with paper signature).

Important links:

Participant Portal: <http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal>

European Commission Authentication Service (ECAS): <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/aida/selfreg>

Introduction to ECAS: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/cas/ec/help.jsp>

Participant Portal Frequently Asked Questions:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/appmanager/participants/portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=faq

Technical helpdesk of Participant Portal: DIGIT-USER-ACCESS@ec.europa.eu

Information on LEARs: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/pp-lear_en.html

Frequently asked questions

1. Even if no signed paper versions of forms C have to be sent to the Commission, do we have to keep signed versions in our files within our organisation?

From the Commission side, there is no obligation to even create paper versions of forms C. The electronic-only submission is the valid act. The need for paper versions might arise from internal rules and processes in your organisation.

2. Our organisation has no LEAR. How can we register the persons authorised to sign forms C (FSIGNs)?

Your organisation must first nominate a LEAR. Only the LEAR can register the FSIGNs. The details for nominating LEARs can be found here [hyperlink].

3. My organisation is small and we participate only in one FP7 project. The appointment of so many persons in different roles (LEAR, PaCo, FSIGN) seems quite an overburden.

You can nominate one and the same person in different roles (e.g. the same person can be LEAR of your organisation, PaCo and FSIGN for your project). Once a LEAR is nominated, the nomination into all other roles is very simple and quick (and can be changed at any moment online in the Participant Portal).

4. I have a third party reporting costs in my project (special clause 10). How does it work in this case?

A separate form C for the third party has to be completed in the financial reporting module and submitted by the PaCo of the main beneficiary to the coordinator (without electronic signature). After the coordinator submitted the whole package to the Commission, the form C of the third party must be printed and hand-signed by an authorised representative of the third party. This document must be kept in the files of the main beneficiary (no sending to the Commission).

5. I am coordinating a multi-beneficiary collaborative project signed before 1.1.2013. Will I have to monitor two different parallel streams of forms C (paper signed and only electronic) depending on the beneficiaries?

No. The transition to electronic-only submission of forms C can only be made for the consortium as a whole. Either your grant maintains the provisions under which it was signed (and then all beneficiaries will keep the traditional process with electronic submission and paper signature), or your grant is amended in order to move under the provisions of the new model grant agreement allowing for the paperless submission of forms C. In this case, all beneficiaries will report under the new regime. For practical help on how to amend your grant agreement you can follow this link: [hyperlink].

6. I am the LEAR of a complex research organisation and would need to identify different financial signatories (FSIGNs) for different departments or institutes. How will the Participant Contact (PaCo) of a given grant know which is the correct FSIGN for his/her project?

When designating the FSIGNs for your organisation, the Identity and Access Management of the Participant Portal will allow you to encode comments that will help the PaCo to identify and select the right FSIGN for the project.

7. Will this new process affect negatively the time I have to wait to be paid as beneficiary or coordinator?

On the contrary, apart from the advantages in terms of simplified administrative processes, the only-electronic submission of forms C will help to compile a full report faster and therefore will allow the Commission to start its analysis earlier, hereby accelerating the whole payment procedure.

8. In my organisation, forms C are always signed by two persons. How should we handle this in the new approach?

Only one act of electronic signature per form C will be possible in the system. If prior to this authoritative signature your organisation requires an approval involving more than one person, the necessary processes must be organised internally in your institution.

9. What happens if the financial signatory (FSIGN) chosen for the project is absent (leave, sickness etc.)?

The Participant Contact (PaCo) can assign more than one FSIGN to the project, so that business continuity is covered in case of absences. All FSIGNs assigned to the project will receive the notifications "form C ready for signature". However, even if several FSIGNs are assigned to the project there is only one act of electronic signature, by the first FSIGN signing the respective form C.

10. Can the consortium go back to paper submission after having signed the amendment to go for electronic-only?

No. Once the amendment on the paperless process has been accepted and signed by the parties, the consortium has to apply the electronic-only submission.

11. Can the coordinator see the drafted versions?

Yes, the coordinator is able to see drafts and can comment before the form is submitted and signed officially by the FSIGN of a beneficiary.

12. Can the coordinator of a consortium reject an electronically signed form C of a participant?

Yes, coordinators can reject forms C for corrections. In this case, the cycle starts again at the beneficiary (drafting - ready to sign – signing and submitting) Beneficiaries can avoid rejections after electronic signature by checking the form C in draft status with their coordinators (coordinators can view draft forms C of other participants).

13. How can the LEAR indicate which FSIGN should be assigned to a given project?

In the Participant Portal the LEAR will be able to nominate FSIGNs for the organisation and add comments (optional) about the scope of responsibilities or duration (ie. "Mr. Smith can sign for projects of Department X from 1st October 2011").

14. Can the LEAR limit the duration of the FSIGN nomination?

The LEAR (or one of his account administrators) can revoke the nomination of an FSIGN at any time, and as a consequence, the person will not be able to sign forms C any longer.

15. Who can submit the signed forms to the Commission or Services - the coordinator contact or the FSIGN of the coordinator?

Once the forms are signed by the respective FSIGNs including the coordinator's FSIGN, the coordinator contact will be able to submit the whole package to the Commission or its services.

16. Can two FSIGNs sign the form?

Once an FSIGN signs and submits the form, it cannot be signed by another person of the same entity electronically.

17. Can the electronic forms be printed?

Yes, the printing functionality remains as it is now. In addition, users will be able to download the forms with the e-receipt.

18. Who should be chosen as FSIGN signing electronically the forms C?

The nominated persons must have the authority within the organisation to sign the financial statements.

19. Does the LEAR have to send a proof who can be assigned an FSIGN role within the entity?

No. The revised LEAR mandate gives the responsibility for identifying FSIGNs to the LEAR. The LEAR is nominated by the legal representative of the organisation, so that the chain of responsibility and trust is established.