

BESTbelt



Call for proposals 2022

BESTbelt – more power for the European Green Belt

Operational Manual

Deadline for submission of concept notes:

11 April 2022 at 23:59

(Brussels date and time, in order to convert to local time click [here](#))

Applicants are strongly recommended to read this guidance document in full before completing and submitting a proposal for BESTbelt.



BESTbelt



With financial
support of the
European Union

Notice

This is a two-step call for proposals: first, only concept notes must be submitted for evaluation. Thereafter, applicants who have been pre-selected will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Background

The BESTbelt Project (hereafter BESTbelt) is based on the experience of the [EU BEST Initiative](#). BESTbelt was launched as an EU pilot project on the initiative of MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) Jutta Paulus and Nicolae Ștefănuță. BESTbelt is a great opportunity to further strengthen and promote local action on the European Green Belt (EGB).

BESTbelt provides grant funding for small-scale field actions for biodiversity conservation and restoration as well as sustainable development to provide inter alia training and capacity building along the EGB, which involves countries of the European Union, candidate countries and third countries (see **Figure 1**, detailed online version at [BESTbelt website](#)).

EuroNatur as Chair of the [European Green Belt Association \(EGBA\)](#) acts as the lead partner of BESTbelt, and operates as the contractual partner for the beneficiaries. For the implementation and realization of BESTbelt, EuroNatur and the BESTbelt Project Team work in close collaboration. Besides EuroNatur, the BESTbelt Project Team consists of the regional BESTbelt focal points (Finland/Norway: EuroNatur, Russia: Karelian Research Centre, Baltic: Friends of the Earth Germany Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Central Europe: Friends of the Earth Germany Bavaria, Balkan: EuroNatur).

Objectives of BESTbelt

The overall objective of BESTbelt is to **provide support for biodiversity action along the European Green Belt**.

The specific objectives of BESTbelt are:

1. To **facilitate access** to EU-funds for actors in the four regions along the European Green Belt through small grants aiming to unlock local initiatives and potential in the fields of biodiversity conservation, restoration and the sustainable use of ecosystem services. In this regard, local actors may consider nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches to tackle climate change adaptation, mitigation and the cultural-historical dimensions of the EGB.
2. To **increase the capacity** of these actors to access and effectively manage EU-funds.
3. To strengthen local capacities through appropriate training focussing on young volunteers and on people in precarious socio-economic situations, including job seekers.
4. To **increase the visibility** of the European Green Belt Regions as key contributors to the achievement of EU and global biodiversity targets.



Figure 1: Indicative spatial reference area of the European Green Belt, defined by the European Green Belt Association (EGBA). The northern part of the reference area (Fennoscandia) is under preparation. For the BESTbelt project, the area is defined as 100 kilometres (km) of the border for Norway and Finland, 150 km of the border for Russia and 5 km on the coastal water.

Financial allocation

The BESTbelt is developing a grant scheme designed to provide **effective support for actions on the ground at the local as well as the regional level**. The amount available for the call for proposals 2022 is 400.000 EUR (further calls are planned to be scheduled in the year 2023).

SMALL GRANT

The **Small Grant budget can be up to 40 000 EUR**. The budget must be realistic. It is not necessary to request the maximum (or close to the maximum) grant amount available. **The amount requested should be consistent with the proposed project activities and workplan.**

Small Grants requested **must be 100% funded by BESTbelt**: Co-funding cannot be included. The total budgeted costs of the project must be equal to the grant amount requested from BESTbelt.

Project duration

The project duration lies **between 12 to 24 months**. The **project duration must align with the proposed activities and workplan**.

Type of Grant	BESTbelt Funding	Max. Duration
Small Grants	≤ 40 000 EUR	24 months

Start Date: Projects must have a start date in **October 2022 or after**.

End Date: The latest possible end date is 01 November 2024.

Eligibility criteria

The eligibility is based on three criteria: the eligibility of applicants, activities, and costs.

ELIGIBILITY OF THE APPLICANTS (I.E. APPLICANT AND CO-APPLICANT(S))

In line with **BESTbelt objectives**, target beneficiaries are organisations that are able to achieve a sustainable, local impact in the EGB area and meet the criteria of **eligible activities**. To unlock local potential, it is an asset if applicants are based in the indicative spatial reference area of the EGB or cooperate with such a local partner.

For being eligible for BESTbelt, lead applicant and co-applicants **must be**:

- I. **Registered as a private or public legal entity in one of the countries along the EGB¹**. Individuals, sole traders are not eligible to receive a grant from BESTbelt.

¹ Norway, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Greece, Turkey

- II. **Directly responsible** for the preparation and implementation of the grant project. Applications submitted by a body acting as an intermediary for a third party are not eligible.
- III. **Have a bank account in the name of the organisation;** grants cannot be paid into an account in the name of an individual. Please note that the grant is paid in EUR.

Examples of applicants are:

- non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- civil society organisations (CSOs)
- non-profit organisations
- micro and small enterprises as defined by the European Commission²
- sub-governmental bodies i.e. municipalities, cities of a territory, communal services
- research organisations

The lead applicant may act **individually or with co-applicant(s)**. Co-applicants must sign the mandate included as Form 3 to these guidelines. The lead applicant is the main contact person of the BESTbelt Project Team. The lead applicant represents and acts on behalf of any other co-beneficiary (if any) and coordinates the design and implementation of the action. The lead applicant will bear full responsibility for the technical and financial implementation of the project.

An organisation can submit a **maximum of two concept notes/proposals per call** as lead applicant and/or co-applicant. Nonetheless, **an organisation can only be awarded one grant as lead applicant**. If two proposals where an organisation is lead applicant successfully pass the assessment steps, only the proposal with the highest score will be retained for the award of a grant.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND INELIGIBILITY

If organisations or their representatives who are a member of the BESTbelt Steering Committee are involved in a BESTbelt grant application, they will be excluded from the decision-making process on the respective application. All members of the BESTbelt Steering Committee sign a Declaration of Impartiality and Confidentiality. Concerning the organisations that are part of the BESTbelt Project Team, those organizational units that are involved in project assessment and management are not at all eligible to apply for grants.

Potential applicants may not participate in calls for proposals or be awarded grants if they are in any of the situations listed in Form 6 (exclusion criteria). In the Applicant Declaration (see Form 2) the lead applicant must declare that the lead applicant himself and the co-applicant(s) are not in any of these situations.

² https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Eligible activities **must**:

- contribute to the **BESTbelt objectives with tangible activities on the ground**;
- **be located in one or more areas of the [indicative spatial reference area of the European Green Belt](#)** (see **Figure 1** on page 2) (if not, the applicant has to provide a written statement how the activities contribute to the achievement of the BESTbelt objectives). The northern part of the reference area (Fennoscandia) is under preparation. For the BESTbelt project, the area is defined as 100 kilometres (km) of the border for Norway and Finland, 150 km of the border for Russia and 5 km on the coastal water;
- comply with the **European Green Belt Vision**³;

Vision of the European Green Belt Initiative

The European Green Belt (EGB), our shared natural heritage along the line of the former Iron Curtain, is to be conserved and restored to function as an ecological network connecting high-value natural and cultural landscapes, whilst respecting the economic, social and cultural needs of local communities.

- contribute to **tangible and measurable impacts** in terms of biodiversity conservation and/or ecosystem restoration, sustainable development and/or sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services, including nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation or mitigation;
- encourage a **partnership-based approach with local stakeholders**;
- guarantee **open access to data, results and all information generated by the project**;
- **not be fundamental research projects**. Proposals that include research activities must include **tangible follow-up actions using the research during the lifetime of the project**, i.e. proposal of a practical management plan or new policy, or new protected area design, new natural resources management plan, in vivo pilot site activities implementing the results of the research with new management or conservation actions.

In line with the vision of the EGB it is an asset if projects integrate transboundary cooperation.

³ <https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/>

Non-exhaustive list of eligible activities:

- Improving the status of threatened species and their habitats;
- Vegetation/habitat mapping for supporting tangible activities on the ground of protection and/or restoration of threatened habitat type;
- Strengthening Protected Area management and/or governance effectiveness (training, new/updated PA management plan, participatory activities);
- Support local stakeholders' initiatives (e.g., local communities and authorities) to help protect/manage biodiversity, ecosystems (e.g. ecosystem management, participatory monitoring);
- Analyses to better understand/quantify the threats on biodiversity for supporting during the lifetime of the project tangible activities on the ground;
- Socioeconomic studies for supporting the development of new sustainable economic valorisation of biodiversity, ecosystems and ecosystems services (e.g. ecotourism);
- Mitigation of specific threats such as climate change impacts, invasive alien species, or poaching/poisoning;
- Traditional solutions promotion and deployment in terms of sustainable management, biodiversity conservation, resilience;
- Local and participatory circular economy solutions for preserving ecosystems and reducing pressures on biodiversity;
- Introduction and conversion to sustainable agricultural and fisheries good practices promoting species and habitat conservation; agro-ecological and agro-forestry activities;
- Public awareness, education campaigns, socio-cultural activities, training and capacity building;
- Support to local stakeholders' enhanced participation to biodiversity and sustainable development (e.g. participatory monitoring, eco-sentinels);
- Regional cooperation activities for example:
 - Supporting sub-regional approaches based on geographic, institutional and other commonalities, where appropriate;
 - Improving coherence and creating synergies between European initiatives along the EGB;
 - Developing partnerships, joint initiatives between stakeholders in countries along the EGB to foster regional cooperation on the ground on shared issues;
 - Capacity building aimed at networking, sharing knowledge and experience, strengthening capacity on the ground of stakeholders in countries along the EGB.

INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

- The purchase of land, involuntary resettlement of people, or activities that negatively affect physical cultural resources, including those important to local communities;
- Activities adversely affecting individuals and local communities or where these communities are not supporting the project activities;
- The removal or altering of any physical cultural property (including sites having archaeological, paleontological, historical, religious, or unique natural values);
- Activities that duplicate work previously funded by other projects;
- Financial support to third parties through sub-grants.

ELIGIBILITY OF COSTS

Only eligible costs will be reimbursed. Eligible costs must be:

- necessary for the implementation of the project activities;
- reasonable and justified and consistent with the principles of sound financial management, in particular in terms of value for money and cost-effectiveness;
- generated during the lifetime of the project (costs incurred before the official starting date of the project or after the official end date of the project are not eligible); expenditure eligible for financing may not have been incurred before the signature of the grant agreement;
- actually incurred by the beneficiary and be recorded in his accounts in accordance with the applicable accounting principles,
- identifiable and verifiable;
- compliant with the requirements of the applicable tax and social legislation.

Categories of eligible costs:

- ✓ Personnel: the costs of personnel working under an employment contract with the beneficiary or an equivalent appointing act and assigned to the action, provided these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual policy on remuneration. Those costs include actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration.
- ✓ Travel: costs of travel and related subsistence allowances, provided these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual practices on travel.
- ✓ Equipment and supplies for the project, provided the purchases are made in accordance with BESTbelt Procurement Policy (Form 7) and are in line with the national and public procurement regulations, if applicable.
- ✓ Local office costs.
- ✓ Other costs and services: costs derived from subcontracts, provided the purchases are made in accordance with BESTbelt Procurement Policy and are in line with the national and public procurement regulations, if applicable.

REIMBURSEMENT OPTIONS

Reimbursement of costs for **Small Grants** are based on the **actual costs** incurred by the beneficiary(ies) and a unit rate for local transportation (use of vehicles owned by beneficiary or private). Beneficiaries have to submit a financial report with supporting documents or invoices for expenditure incurred as electronic documents (text, image, etc.) / files in a readable format. All relevant supporting financial forms and explanations are available on the [BESTbelt website](#).

The unit rate for local transportation with own vehicles is based on statistical/historical data and is set at 0.20 EUR per kilometre for all applicants and cannot be changed during project implementation.

ELIGIBLE INDIRECT COSTS

Indirect eligible costs are costs, which cannot be identified as specific costs directly linked to the implementation of the project and which are not directly chargeable to the project by the eligibility conditions. Indirect eligible costs shall be eligible for flat-rate financing **but the total must not exceed 7 % of the total estimated eligible direct costs**. They may not include ineligible costs or costs already declared under another costs item or heading of the budget.

The lead applicant may be asked to justify the percentage requested before the grant contract is signed. However, once the flat rate has been fixed in the Special Conditions of the grant contract, no further supporting documents need to be provided.

CONTRIBUTIONS IN KIND AND INELIGIBLE COSTS

Contribution in kind means the provision of goods or services to a beneficiary free of charge by a third party. As contributions in kind do not involve any expenditure for beneficiaries, they are **not eligible costs**.

The following costs are **not eligible**:

- debts and debt service charges (interest);
- provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union (including through EDF) grant;
- purchases of land or buildings;
- currency exchange losses;
- credit to third parties;
- contracts that are not awarded in accordance with EU procurement law or local procurement regulations.

How to apply and the procedure to follow

There is a two-stage application process for BESTbelt Small Grants:

- **Stage 1:** Open call for project **concept notes** (a short application form)
- **Stage 2:** By invitation only call for **full project proposals** (a more comprehensive application form).

Applicants are expected to submit applications **in English**. All Forms and guidelines are available in English on the [BESTbelt website](#). **Hand-written applications will not be accepted.**

ONLINE APPLICATION

Applications **must be submitted online to the BESTbelt Office via email (bestbelt@europeangreenbelt.org)**

The submission containing the complete application documents must be received before the deadline for submissions. Please note that once submitted, applications cannot be modified anymore. On request, additional or revised documents can be submitted.

Before submitting applicants should ensure that all the requested information have been entered and all the required documents have been filled in successfully (see checklist in the application form).

CONCEPT NOTE CONTENT

The applicants have to complete the different sections of the concept note application form (Form 1). Activities must be clearly articulated and capacity demonstrated to manage and implement successful projects.

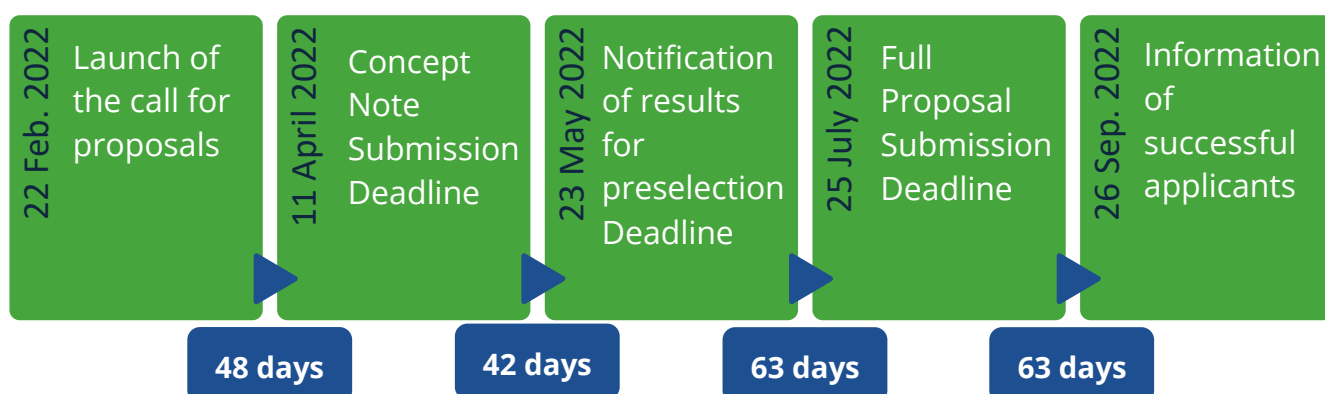
From a financial point of view, lead applicants must only provide **an estimate of the requested BESTbelt contribution**. The elements outlined in the concept note may not be modified in the full application. The BESTbelt contribution **may not vary** from the initial estimate **by more than 20%**. A detailed budget is to be submitted by the lead applicants only if invited to submit a full application in the second phase.

Any error or major discrepancy related to the concept note instructions may lead to the rejection of the concept note. Clarifications will only be requested when the information provided is not sufficient to conduct an objective assessment.

Lead applicants must verify that their concept note is complete using the checklist for concept note. Incomplete concept notes may be rejected.

In addition to consulting the Frequently Asked Questions on the [BESTbelt website](#), clarification questions on the call for proposals can be sent by email to the BESTbelt Office **no later than 10 working days before the deadline for the submission of proposals**, indicating clearly the reference of the BESTbelt call for Proposals.

DEADLINE AND TIMELINE



All dates/time are in the time zone of Belgium.

BESTbelt call for proposals	DATE	TIME*
Launch of the call for proposal	22 February 2022	
Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the BESTbelt Project Team.	01 April 2022	23:59
Deadline for submission of concept notes	11 April 2022	23:59
Notification of invitation to prepare a full proposal	23 Mai 2022*	-
Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the BESTbelt Project Team.	15 July 2022	23:59
Deadline for submission of full proposals	25 July 2022*	23:59
Evaluation results submitted to the Board⁴ for selection decision	12 Sep. 2022*	-
Information of successful applicants	26 Sep. 2022*	-

*Indicative dates, depending on the number of submitted proposals

⁴ The BESTbelt Board consists of the European Commission and EuroNatur

FULL PROPOSALS

After the evaluation and pre-selection of the submitted concept note, applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal. **Only invited applicants** are allowed to submit a full proposal using the BESTbelt Full Proposal Application Form, which can be found on the [BESTbelt website](#).

A detailed budget is to be submitted by the lead applicants using the BESTbelt Budget Form and **may not vary** from the initial estimate by **more than 20%**.

Any error related to the points listed in the checklist in the proposal application form or any major inconsistency in the full proposal (e.g. if the amounts in the budget worksheets are inconsistent) may lead to the rejection of the proposal.

Lead applicants must verify that their proposal is complete using the checklist for proposals. Incomplete full proposal may be rejected. Clarifications will only be requested when information provided is unclear and thus prevents the evaluators and BESTbelt Office from conducting an objective assessment.

WHERE AND HOW TO SEND THE FULL PROPOSALS

The full proposal must be **submitted online to the BESTbelt Office via email (bestbelt@europeangreenbelt.org)** and is subject to the same procedure as the concept note.

DEADLINE

The deadline for the submission of full proposals will be indicated in the letter sent to the lead applicants whose concept notes have been pre-selected. In case of proven technical difficulties, applicants can submit via email to the BESTbelt Office. The email containing the complete application documents must be received before the deadline for submission.

In case of difficulties that cannot be solved by the Frequently Asked Questions, available on the [BESTbelt website](#), questions may be sent by email to the BESTbelt Office **no later than 10 working days before the deadline for the submission of full proposals**, indicating clearly the reference of the call for proposals.

Please note that questions that may be relevant to other applicants, together with answers are published on the [BESTbelt website](#) along with other important notices.

Evaluation and selection

Concept notes and full proposals will be examined and evaluated by two independent evaluators according to the criteria set out in this document. The evaluators are members of the BESTbelt Project Team (see page 2) and external experts. All concept notes and full proposals will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria:

STEP 1: ADMINISTRATIVE CHECKS

During the administrative check the following will be assessed:

- If the deadline has been met. Otherwise, the concept note will be automatically rejected.
- If the concept note satisfies all the criteria specified in this document. This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the action. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the concept note may be rejected on that **sole** basis and the concept note will not be evaluated further.

The eligibility check will be performed on the basis of the supporting documents submitted with the Due Diligence and Financial Capacity Form.

- The declaration by the lead applicant will be cross-checked with the supporting documents provided by the lead applicant. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration by the lead applicant and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.
- The eligibility of applicants will be verified according to the criteria set out in this document (see section - Eligibility of the applicants (i.e. applicant and co-applicant(s))).

The concept notes that pass this check will be evaluated on the relevance and design of the proposed action.

STEP 2: CONCEPT NOTE EVALUATION

Concept notes will be assessed using the evaluation criteria in the evaluation grid below.

Concept Note	
Total score: (max 100 points)	0/100
A. CONSISTENCY WITH BASIC OBJECTIVES (max 20 points)	0
Is the project in line with the BESTbelt objectives?	
Is the project well focused on the European Green Belt and complies to its Vision?	
B. RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS (max 20 points)	0
Is the addressed subject relevant and the work plan adequate to tackle it?	
Are the project measures effective and is there a clear approach for the sustainability and replicability of the project?	

C. PROJECT STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY (max 20 points)	0
How transparent, consistent and logical is the project setup?	
D. COST-EFFICIENCY AND BUDGET QUALITY (max 20 points)	0
Is the budget logical and complete?	
E. FEASIBILITY AND RESILIENCE (max 20 points)	0
Are timelines and workforce realistic?	
Can the applicant provide the necessary capacities and powers?	

The concept notes are ranked according to the final score awarded. **The threshold is 60.** Concept notes with a total score below this threshold will not be selected for developing a full proposal.

All applicants will be informed in writing by the BESTbelt Project Team about the results of the evaluation of their concept note (see the following section on Notification of applicants). Only pre-selected lead applicants will subsequently be invited to submit full proposals.

STEP 3: FULL PROPOSAL EVALUATION

The following will be assessed:

- If the submission deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will automatically be rejected.

The full proposals submitted by the deadline will be further evaluated on their quality, including the proposed budget and capacity of the applicants. The evaluation criteria are set out in the evaluation grid below.

Full proposal	
Total score:	0/100
A. CONSISTENCY WITH BASIC OBJECTIVES (max 20 points)	0
Is the project in line with the BESTbelt objectives?	
Is the project well focused on the European Green Belt and complies to its Vision?	

B. RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS (max 20 points)	0
Is the addressed subject relevant and the work plan adequate to tackle it?	
Are the project measures effective and is there a clear approach for the sustainability and replicability of the project?	
C. PROJECT STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY (max 20 points)	0
How transparent, consistent and logical is the project setup?	
Does the project involve and secure the necessary partnership?	
D. COST-EFFICIENCY AND BUDGET QUALITY (max 20 points)	0
Is the budget volume justified?	
Is the budget logical and complete?	
E. FEASIBILITY AND RESILIENCE (max 20 points)	0
Are timelines and workforce realistic?	
Can the applicant provide the necessary capacities and powers?	
F. SUMMARIZING REMARKS	
Main strong points of the project:	
Main weak points of the project:	
Potential risks that may occur during implementation:	

The proposals are ranked according to the final score awarded. **The threshold is 60. Full proposals with a total score below this threshold will not be selected for funding by BESTbelt.**

After the evaluation, a table will be drawn listing the proposals ranked according to their total score **in each region**. The **highest scoring** proposals **per region will be selected for funding** until the funding amount of the call is exhausted.

The European Commission will retain the decision-making power regarding the proposals to be selected for the award of a grant in close consultation with the BESTbelt Project Team and the BESTbelt Steering Committee.

Notification of applicants

Applicants will be informed in writing by the BESTbelt Project Team about the results of the evaluation of their proposal. Applicants can contact the BESTbelt Office (bestbelt@europeangreenbelt.org) for detailed explanation or if they have additional questions about the decision.

The award decision

Following the BESTbelt Board award decision, the beneficiary(ies) will be notified and offered a contract based on the standard grant agreement. By signing the application form the applicants agree, if awarded a grant, to accept the contractual conditions of the standard grant contract.

Recommendations to award a grant are always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, unrealistic costs and ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead the BESTbelt Project Team to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant amount as a result of these corrections nor to increase salary costs at this stage.

Useful links:

Application Forms

All of the application forms can be found on the [BESTbelt website](#).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) can be found too on the [BESTbelt website](#).

Contact details:

The BESTbelt Office is located at the EuroNatur office in Radolfzell, Germany.

Website: <https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/best-belt/>

Email: bestbelt@europeangreenbelt.org