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(Announcements)

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Call for proposals — Joint Harmonised European Union Programme of Business and Consumer Surveys

(2012/C 171/10)

1. CONTEXT

The European Commission is launching a call for proposals (ref. ECFIN/A4/2012/008) for carrying out surveys as part of the Joint Harmonised EU Programme of Business and Consumer Surveys (approved by the Commission on 12 July 2006, COM(2006) 379) in the following EU Member State: Ireland, as well as in the candidate countries: Iceland and Serbia. This cooperation shall take the form of a framework partnership agreement between the Commission and the specialised bodies over a period of two years, from 1 May 2013 to 30 April 2015.

The programme is designed to gather information on the state of the economies in the EU Member States and the candidate countries, so as to be able to compare their business cycles for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) management purposes. It has become an indispensable tool in the EMU economic surveillance process, as well as for general economic policy purposes.

2. PURPOSE AND SPECIFICATIONS OF THE ACTION**2.1. Objectives**

The Joint Harmonised EU Programme involves specialised bodies/institutes carrying out opinion surveys on a joint financing basis. The Commission is looking to conclude agreements with bodies and institutes suitably qualified to carry out one or more of the following surveys for the next two years:

- investment survey in Ireland, Iceland and Serbia,
- construction survey in Ireland, Iceland and Serbia,
- retail trade survey in Ireland, Iceland and Serbia,
- services survey in Ireland, Iceland and Serbia,
- industry survey in Ireland, Iceland and Serbia
- consumer survey in Iceland and Serbia,
- ad hoc surveys on topical economic issues. These ad hoc surveys are by definition more occasional and are carried out in addition to the monthly surveys, using the same established samples as the monthly surveys, to obtain information on specific economic policy issues.

The surveys target managers in the industry, investment, construction, retail trade and services sectors as well as consumers.

2.2. Technical specifications

2.2.1. Survey timing and reporting of results

The following table gives an overview of the surveys requested under this call for proposals:

Survey name	Number of activities/size classes	Number of aggregates	Number of questions asked monthly	Number of questions asked quarterly
Industry	68/—	8	7	9
Investment	6/6	2	2 questions in March/April 4 questions in October/November	
Construction	3/—	1	5	1
Retail trade	5/—	3	6	—
Services	37/—	1	6	2
Consumer	22 breakdowns	2	14	3

- The monthly surveys must be carried out in the first two weeks of each month and the results must be e-mailed to the Commission at least five working days before the end of the month in accordance with the calendar that will be included in the grant agreement; publication of results is generally on the second-last working day of the month. The deadline for the delivery of consumer survey results is seven working days before the end of the month in accordance with the calendar that will be included in the grant agreement.
- The quarterly surveys must be carried out in the first two weeks of the first month of each quarter (January, April, July and October) and the results must be e-mailed to the Commission at least five working days before the end of January, April, July and October, respectively, and in accordance with the calendar that will be included in the grant agreement.
- The six-monthly surveys of investment must be carried out in March/April and October/November and the results must be e-mailed to the Commission at least five working days before the end of April and November, respectively, and in accordance with the calendar that will be included in the grant agreement.
- In the case of ad hoc surveys, the beneficiary must undertake to adhere to the specific timetables laid down for them.

A detailed description of the action (Annex I to the specific grant agreement) can be downloaded from the following Internet address:

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/procurement_grants/grants/proposals/index_en.htm

2.2.2. Methodology and questionnaires

Details on the methodology, questionnaires and international guidelines on the conduct of business and consumer surveys can be found in the user's guide on the Joint Harmonised EU Programme of Business and Consumer Surveys at:

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/db_indicators/surveys/documents/userguide_en.pdf

3. ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS AND DURATION

3.1. Administrative provisions

The Commission wishes to establish a long-term cooperation with the successful applicants. For this purpose a framework partnership agreement will be concluded between the parties. Under this framework partnership agreement, which will specify the common objectives and the nature of the actions planned, specific annual grant agreements may be concluded between the parties. The action runs from 1 May until 30 April.

3.2. Duration

The body or institute is to be selected for a maximum period of two years. Two annual specific grant agreements may be concluded. The first of the specific grant agreements will concern the period from 1 May 2013 to 30 April 2014.

4. FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Sources of Union funding

The operations selected will be financed from budget heading 01.02.02 — Coordination and surveillance of economic and monetary union.

4.2. Estimated total Union budget for this call

- The total annual budget available for the period May 2013-April 2014 for these surveys is in the region of EUR 450 000 (four hundred and fifty thousand euro).
- Amounts for the following year could be increased, subject to budgetary resources available, by about 2 % per year.

4.3. Percentage of Union co-financing

The Commission's share in the joint financing may not exceed 50 % of the eligible costs incurred by the beneficiary on each survey. The Commission determines the percentage of the co-financing on an individual basis.

4.4. Funding of the action by the beneficiary and eligible costs incurred

The beneficiary will be requested to submit a detailed budget for year 1 containing an estimate of the costs and funding of the action, expressed in euros. A detailed budget, respectively for the following year under the framework partnership agreement, will be provided on the basis of an invitation by the Commission.

The budget grant amount requested from the Commission should be rounded to the nearest 10. If omitted, it will be rounded by the Commission. The budget will be incorporated as an annex to the specific grant agreement. The Commission may subsequently use these figures for auditing purposes.

Eligible costs can be incurred only after signature of the specific grant agreement by all the parties, save in exceptional cases and, under no circumstances, before submission of the application for a grant. Contributions in kind are not regarded as eligible costs.

4.5. Payment arrangements

Within 45 days of the date when the last of the two parties signs the specific agreement a pre-financing payment shall be made to the partner, representing 40 % of the maximum amount of the grant specified in Article 3 of the specific grant agreement.

A request for payment of the balance shall be submitted within two months after the closing date of the action (see full details in Articles 5 and 6 of the specific grant agreement).

Only costs which are traceable and identifiable in the beneficiary's cost accounting system will be considered as eligible costs.

4.6. Subcontracting

- Where, in a proposal, the amount of the services executed by a subcontractor is equal to or exceeds 50 % of the tasks, the subcontractor must provide all the necessary documents for assessing the applicant's proposal as a whole with regard to the exclusion, selection and award criteria (see points 5, 6 and 7 below). This implies that the subcontractor has to prove that he fulfils the exclusion criteria, and that the combined capacity of the subcontractor and the applicant will be considered with regard to the selection and award criteria.
- The applicant for the grant shall award contracts to tenderers offering the best price-quality ratio, while taking care to avoid any conflict of interest. In case subcontracting exceeds EUR 60 000, the applicant will have to document, once selected, that the subcontractor has been chosen on the best price-quality ratio basis.

4.7. Joint proposals

In all cases of joint proposals, the tasks and financial contribution of all members participating in the proposal must be clearly identified. All members must provide all the necessary documents for assessing the proposal as a whole with regard to the exclusion, selection and award criteria (see points 5, 6 and 7 below) related to their tasks.

One of the participating members will take the role of coordinator and shall:

- assume the overall responsibility for the partnership vis-à-vis the Commission,
- monitor the activities of the other participating member(s),
- ensure the overall coherence and timely submission of survey results,
- centralise the signature of the contract and deliver the contract duly signed by all participants to the Commission (proxy is possible),
- centralise the Commission's financial contribution and disburse payments to participants,
- collect supporting documents of expenditure incurred by each participant and present them in a single submission.

5. ELIGIBILITY AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

5.1. Legal status of applicants

The call for proposals is open to bodies and institutes (legal entities) with legal status in one of the EU Member States or the candidate countries. Applicants must show that they exist as a legal entity and provide the required documentation by means of the standard legal entity form.

5.2. Grounds for exclusion

Applications will not be considered for a grant if the applicants are in any of the following situations ⁽¹⁾:

- (a) they are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- (b) they have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of *res judicata*;
- (c) they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify;
- (d) they have not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
- (e) they have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of *res judicata* for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation or any other illegal activity detrimental to the Union's financial interests;
- (f) following another procurement procedure or grant award procedure covered by the Union budget, they have been declared to be in serious breach of their obligations;
- (g) they are subject to a conflict of interest;
- (h) they are guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required or fail to supply this information.

Applicants must certify that they are not in one of the situations listed under point 5.2 by means of the standard declaration of honour (with respect to the exclusion criteria).

⁽¹⁾ In compliance with Article 93(1) and Article 94 of the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Union.

5.3. Illegal activities giving rise to exclusion

The cases referred to in point 5.2(e) shall be the following:

- (a) cases of fraud as referred to in Article 1 of the Convention on the Protection of the European Communities' Financial Interests, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 July 1995 ⁽¹⁾;
- (b) cases of corruption as referred to in Article 3 of the Convention on the Fight against Corruption involving Officials of the European Communities or Officials of Member States of the European Union, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 May 1997 ⁽²⁾;
- (c) cases of involvement in a criminal organisation, as defined in Article 2(1) of Joint Action 98/733/JHA of the Council ⁽³⁾;
- (d) cases of money laundering as defined in Article 1 of Council Directive 91/308/EEC ⁽⁴⁾.

5.4. Administrative and financial penalties

1. Without prejudice to the application of penalties laid down in the contract, candidates or tenderers and contractors who have made false declarations, have made substantial errors or committed irregularities or fraud, or have been found in serious breach of their contractual obligations may be excluded from all contracts and grants financed by the Union budget for a maximum of five years from the date on which the infringement is established as confirmed following an adversarial procedure with the contractor.

That period may be extended to 10 years in the event of a repeated offence within 5 years of the date referred to in the first subparagraph.

2. Tenderers or candidates who have made false declarations, have committed substantial errors, irregularities or fraud may also be subject to financial penalties representing 2 % to 10 % of the total estimated value of the contract being awarded.

Contractors who have been found in serious breach of their contractual obligations may be subject to financial penalties representing 2 % to 10 % of the total value of the contract in question.

That rate may be increased to 4 % to 20 % in the event of a repeat infringement within five years of the date referred to in the first subparagraph of paragraph 1.

5.5. Application of exclusion criteria and duration of exclusion

1. In the case referred to in point 5.2(c) the candidates or tenderers shall be excluded from all contracts and grants for a maximum of five years from the date on which the infringement is committed or, in the case of continuing or repeated infringements, the date on which the infringement ceases.

2. In the cases referred to in point 5.2(b) and (e), the candidates or tenderers shall be excluded from all contracts and grants for a maximum of five years from the date of the judgment having the force of *res judicata*.

Those periods of exclusion may be extended to 10 years in the event of a repeated offence within 5 years of the dates referred to in points 1 and 2 above.

6. SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the action is being carried out. They must have the professional competences and qualifications required to complete the proposed action or work programme.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 316, 27.11.1995, p. 48.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 195, 25.6.1997, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 351, 29.12.1998, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 166, 28.6.1991, p. 77.

6.1. Financial capacity of applicants

Applicants must have the financial capacity to complete the proposed action and must provide their balance sheets and profit and loss accounts, certified by auditors, for the last two financial years for which the accounts have been closed. This provision does not apply to public bodies and international organisations.

6.2. Operational capability of applicants

Applicants must have the operational capability to complete the proposed action and should provide the appropriate supporting documentation.

The following criteria will be used to assess the applicant's ability:

- the capacity of the applicant to comply with formalised business processes and international quality management standards, especially in conducting surveys,
- at least three years of proven experience in preparing and carrying out monthly or quarterly surveys. The applicant's track record as well as experience and qualifications of the experts and the managers will be considered,
- capacity of the applicant to complete the survey and to deliver the data each month (or if appropriate each quarter) in due time (e.g. on the basis of resources at its disposal and of evidence of relevant experience).

7. AWARD CRITERIA

The following four criteria will be used to evaluate the proposals and give marks (each criterion has the same weighting) in order to rank the proposals and determine successful candidates eligible for EU funding for the action:

- quality of the proposed survey methodology based on the technical specifications (sample design, survey mode, coverage rate, representativeness of results). The following further information will be considered:
 - sampling frame (source, size, characteristics, missing units),
 - sampling method (stratification, sample size, level of precision of estimates, etc.),
 - response rate (follow-up activities, including prioritisation of the follow-up activities),
 - missing data (unit non-response or item non-response),
 - weighting scheme (individual and aggregation),
 - quality assurance framework (quality of the sample, quality of the estimators, issues related to non-respondents' bias, controls, benchmarks series, etc.),
- the degree of experience and expertise in developing survey methodology, in constructing indicators based on survey results and in using survey results for cyclical and economic analysis and research, including analysis by sector,
- efficiency of the tenderer's logistics and work organisation in terms of infrastructure, facilities and qualified staff for the execution of the tasks as specified in point 2.2,
- the candidate's degree of compliance with formalised business processes and international quality management standards, especially in conducting surveys.

8. PRACTICAL PROCEDURES

8.1. Drawing-up and submission of proposals

Proposals must contain the completed and signed standard grant application form and all supporting documents referred to in the form. Applicants can submit proposals for several surveys and several countries. However, a separate proposal should be submitted for each country.

The proposals must be presented in three sections:

- administrative proposal,
- technical proposal,
- financial proposal.

The following standard forms can be obtained from the Commission:

- grant application form,
- legal entity form,
- financial identification form,
- declaration of honour (with respect to the exclusion criteria),
- declaration indicating willingness to sign the framework partnership agreement and the specific grant agreement,
- declaration concerning the publication, release and use of data,
- form for the description of the survey methodology,
- form regarding subcontracting,
- budget statement for providing estimates of the survey costs and financing plan,

as well as documentation regarding the financial aspects of the grant:

- aide-memoire for drawing-up financial estimates and financial statements,
- model of the framework partnership agreement,
- model of the specific annual grant agreement,

(a) by downloading them from the following Internet address:

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/procurement_grants/grants/proposals/index_en.htm

(b) in case the previous option is not possible, by sending an e-mail to the Commission at:

e-mail: ecfin-bcs-mail@ec.europa.eu

Please mention 'Call for proposals — ECFIN/A4/2012/008'.

The Commission reserves the right to amend these standard documents in line with the needs of the joint harmonised EU programme and/or budget management constraints.

8.2. Content of proposals

Proposals must be submitted in one of the official languages of the European Union, however preferably in one of the working languages of the European Union, i.e. in English, French or German.

8.2.1. Administrative proposal

The administrative proposal must include:

- a duly signed standard grant application form,
- a duly completed and signed standard legal entity form and the requested supporting documentation proving the legal status of the body or institute,
- a duly completed and signed standard financial identification form,
- a duly signed standard declaration of honour (with respect to the exclusion criteria),

- a duly signed standard declaration indicating willingness to sign the framework partnership agreement and the specific grant agreement, if selected,
- a duly completed and signed standard declaration concerning the publication, release and use of data in relation to the European Commission's business and consumer surveys,
- the organisation chart of the body or institute, showing the names and positions of the management and of the operational service responsible for conducting the survey(s),
- proof of sound financial situation: balance sheets and profit and loss accounts, certified by auditors, from the last two financial years for which the accounts have been closed. This provision does not apply to public bodies and international organisations,
- a declaration identifying the member acting as coordinator, signed by each participating member, in case of a joint proposal.

8.2.2. *Technical proposal*

The technical proposal must include:

- a description of the activities of the body or institute, enabling the assessment of its qualifications and the scope and duration of its experience in the requested areas under point 6.2. This should mean any relevant studies, service contracts, consultancy work, surveys, publications or other work previously carried out, indicating the name of the client and stating which, if any, were done for the European Commission. The most relevant studies and/or results should be attached,
- a detailed description of the operational organisation for carrying out the surveys. Relevant documentation should be attached regarding the infrastructure, facilities, resources and qualified staff (concise CV's of the staff the most involved in carrying out the survey(s)) at the applicant's disposal,
- a sample questionnaire in English as well as in the language in which the survey will be conducted,
- duly completed standard form(s) providing a detailed description of the survey methodology,
- a duly completed standard form regarding subcontractors involved in the action, including a detailed description of the tasks to be subcontracted.

8.2.3. *Financial proposal*

The financial proposal must include:

- a duly completed and detailed standard budget statement (in euros and exclusive of VAT), covering a period of 12 months, for each survey, containing a financing plan for the action and a detailed breakdown of the estimated total and unit eligible costs for conducting survey(s), including subcontracting costs. For non-public bodies, this budget may exceptionally include VAT, provided that a certificate issued by the appropriate tax authorities certifies that the beneficiary is unable to recover VAT. For public bodies, VAT is never eligible,
- a signed document certifying the financial contribution(s) from external organisation(s)/sponsor(s) (co-financing), if applicable.

8.3. **Contacts between the Commission and the applicants before the final date for submission of proposals**

- The Commission may inform interested parties of any error, inaccuracy, omission or any other clerical error in the text of the call for proposals as well as any additional information by means of posting the information on its web address:

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/procurement_grants/grants/proposals/index_en.htm

Applicants are invited to regularly check the website.

- At the request of the applicants, the Commission may provide additional information solely for the purpose of clarifying aspects of the call for proposals. Any requests for additional information must be made, in writing only, to ecfin-bcs-mail@ec.europa.eu, mentioning clearly in the subject line of the e-mail the following reference: 'Call for proposals — ECFIN/A4/2012/008'. Requests for additional information received less than five working days before the final date for submission of proposals may not be processed.

8.4. Address and final date for submission of proposals

Applicants interested in these grants are invited to submit their applications to the European Commission.

One signed original proposal and three copies, not stapled nor bound, must be supplied by the applicant. This would facilitate the administrative work when preparing all the necessary copies/documents for the selection committee(s).

Proposals must be sent in a sealed cover contained in another sealed envelope.

The outside envelope should bear the address given at point 8.4 below.

The sealed inner envelope containing the proposal must be marked '**Call for proposals — ECFIN/A4/2012/008, not to be opened by the internal mail department**'.

The Commission will notify candidates that their proposal has been received by returning the acknowledgement of receipt slip submitted with the proposal.

Applications may be submitted:

either by post or delivery service dated **no later than 17 September 2012**. The evidence of the date of dispatch shall be constituted by the postmark or the date of the deposit slip of the delivery service at the following address:

by post:

European Commission
Mr Johan VERHAEVEN — DG ECFIN/R2
Office BU 1
Call for proposals — Ref. ECFIN/A4/2012/008
Avenue du Bourget/Bourgetlaan 1-3
1049 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

by courier service (e.g. DHL) or by hand:

European Commission
Mr Johan VERHAEVEN — DG ECFIN/R2
Office BU 1
Call for proposals — Ref. ECFIN/A4/2012/008
Avenue du Bourget/Bourgetlaan 1-3
1140 Bruxelles/Brussel (Evere)
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

no later than 17 September 2012, 16.00 (Brussels time). In this case, proof of submission will be by means of a dated and signed receipt issued by the receiving official in the abovementioned department. The department is open from 8.00 to 17.00 Monday to Thursday, and from 8.00 to 16.00 on Fridays. It is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Commission holidays.

9. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

All applications will be checked to assess whether they meet the formal criteria of eligibility.

Proposals considered eligible will be evaluated and given marks according to the award criteria specified above in order to identify those which may receive EU funding for the action, taking into account their cost effectiveness and the total budget available for this call.

The process of evaluating and selecting the proposals will take place during the months September-November 2012. A selection committee is to be set up for this purpose under the authority of the Director-General for Economic and Financial Affairs.

It is expected to notify successful and unsuccessful candidates at the beginning of 2013.

Afterwards framework partnership agreements will be signed with successful candidates, followed by signing specific grant agreements for the first year.

10. IMPORTANT

This call for proposals does not constitute any sort of contractual obligation on the part of the Commission towards any body/institute submitting a proposal on the basis of it. All communication regarding this call for proposals must be in writing.

Applicants should take note of the contractual provisions which will be obligatory in the event of award.

For the purposes of safeguarding the financial interest of the Communities, your personal data may be transferred to internal audit services, to the European Court of Auditors, to the Financial Irregularities Panel and/or to the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

Data of economic operators which are in one of the situations referred to in Article 93, Article 94, Article 96(1)(b) and (2)(a) of the Financial Regulation may be included in a central database and communicated to the designated persons of the Commission, other institutions, agencies, authorities and bodies mentioned in Article 95(1) and (2) of the Financial Regulation. This refers as well to the persons with powers of representation, decision-making or control over the said economic operators. Any party entered into the database has the right to be informed of the data concerning it, up on request to the accounting officer of the Commission.
