

III

(Notices)

COMMISSION

Call for Proposals — Services in support of business and innovation

(2006/C 306/07)

1. Context

The Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) is established to contribute to the competitiveness and innovative capacity of the Community with particular attention to the needs of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). It brings together several existing EU activities that support business and innovation.

As a major component of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (EIP), one of the three CIP sub-programmes, the European Commission implements a measure to provide SMEs with integrated services in support of business and innovation. These services will be delivered through a single network to be established through this call for proposals. *Article 21 (CIP)* and *Annex III (CIP)* detail the overall framework under which these services shall be delivered. ⁽¹⁾

The key elements of this call concern:

- The provision of an integrated and performing network of business support services building on the experience achieved with the currently operating networks of 270 Euro Info Centres (EIC) and 250 Innovation Relay Centres (IRC);
- The increase in synergies among all network partners, with the objective of ensuring the provision of integrated services;
- Improved access and proximity for SMEs to services ('No wrong door' concept);
- Lighter administrative procedures;
- Professionalism and quality of services provided.

In this context, will be rejected any proposal directly or indirectly contrary to EU policy or against public health, human rights, citizen's security and freedom of expression.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this call is to implement, on the basis of *Article 21 (CIP)*, a single network providing integrated services in support of business and innovation.

The individual objectives are to:

- Increase the synergies among network partners through the provision of integrated services;
- Maintain and continually improve the access, proximity, quality and professionalism of the integrated services provided by the network;

⁽¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/cip/index_en.htm.

- Raise awareness — in particular among SMEs — regarding Community policy issues and the services offered by the network, including the improvement of environmental awareness and eco-efficiency of SMEs and the Cohesion policy and Structural funds;
- Consult businesses and obtain their opinions on Community policy options;
- Ensure that the network offers complementarities with other relevant services providers;
- Reduce the administrative burden for all parties.

To implement these objectives, proposals will include the following services:

- Information, feedback, business co-operation and internationalisation services (*Art. 21.2 (CIP), Module a*)
- Services for innovation and for the transfer of both technology and knowledge (*Art. 21.2 (CIP), Module b*)
- Services encouraging the participation of SMEs in the Community framework programme for RTD (*Art. 21.2 (CIP), Module c*)

To ensure services of highest quality for SMEs and to implement a single network, the following general provisions apply for the whole network and for each network partner:

- Implementing the 'No wrong door' concept;
- Excellence, proximity and professionalism of network partners.

The Commission expects that proposals from single organisations or consortia will provide integrated services of all service modules. It is also expected that proposals show a balance of activities between services as described in Module a and b of Article 21.2 (CIP). Services related to Module c of Article 21.2 (CIP) must be covered in each proposal. The priority for integrated services will be reflected in the evaluation process and respective awarding decision.

Scheduled start date for the action: January 2008

3. Budget

The estimated budget available for the call is **EUR 320 million for the period 2008-2013**. The Commission will provide a co-financing of **up to 60 %** of eligible costs. The final percentage will be subject to the overall budget requested by successful applicants, the total budget available and the quality of proposals.

Moreover, it is expected that the budget allocation within proposals will reflect the range and complexity of services in each module with a fairly even distribution between services and costs for *Modules a and b of Article 21.2 (CIP)*. Services and costs for *Module c* will constitute a smaller portion of the budget than either *Module a or b*, but also need to be sufficiently considered.

While there is no pre-defined allocation of budget by Member State, the distribution will reflect to a certain extent the socio-economic criteria that correspond approximately to the total population in Member States.

4. Contractual Requirements

Successful applicants will sign a Framework Partnership Agreement (the 'FPA') and its annexes, which includes a Specific Grant Agreement. The FPA specifies the contractual terms and conditions to which applicants will be expected to agree if their proposal receives an award for funding.

The FPA is the formalised relationship between the Commission and its partners. It details the role of the Commission and the role of the partners. If concluded with a consortium, the FPA details the responsibility of the co-ordinator and the responsibility of co-partners.

Every partner shall supply evidence of the co-financing provided, either by way of own resources, or in the form of financial transfers from third parties.

Please note that one action may give rise to the award of only one grant from the budget to any partner.

The Commission reserves the right to award a grant of less than the amount requested by the applicant. Grants will not be awarded for more than the amount requested.

The publication does not guarantee the availability of funds for the above action. The implementation of the call is further subject to the formal opinion of the EIP management committee and the adoption of the 2007 budget.

A network brand will be adopted in due time: all network partners will be required to use it for all network activities and actively promote it.

5. Content of Proposals

Proposals to be submitted will mainly be constituted by the following two parts:

- A proposed Implementing Strategy, notably on the integration, access and proximity of services, having a 6 year time horizon (2008-2013) that will define, for a given geographical area and for each of the services defined in *Article 21.2, Modules a to c (CIP)*, the objectives, the justification and the methodology for implementation. This document will constitute the annex I of the FPA if the proposal is awarded.
- A Preliminary Work Programme that will translate the implementing strategy into detailed actions during the first 36 months with the corresponding estimated budget. This document will constitute the annex I of the first Specific grant agreement if the proposal is awarded.

The European Commission will conduct a mid-term evaluation of the performance of the network. The results of the evaluation will have an impact for the Work Programmes to be sent to the Commission by the end of 2010 to prepare the next Specific grant agreements, including a possible modification of the financing arrangements.

6. Applicants

Proposals may be made by single organisations able to provide the services as described above or by consortia comprising a group of host organisations. However, given the likely size of the proposals, it is expected that most proposals will be made up of consortia.

A consortium shall be understood as a flexible structure based on national good practices and must fit with the domestic setup of services in support of business and innovation.

Each consortium will be represented by a co-ordinating host organisation for contractual and administrative purposes. For other matters, the Commission will maintain direct relations with each host organisation within a consortium and exchange views about policy issues and strategic views of the single network development.

In addition, each host organisation will have direct access to products and services provided by a technical and administrative support structure (the Commission is currently exploring the possibility of using an Executive Agency to run these activities) for the implementation of the single network. A constant dialogue between this structure and all host organisations will be promoted. This will not be affected by the contractual relationship between this structure and the consortium coordinator.

There is no theoretical limit to the number of host organisations within a consortium. However, the co-ordination arrangements generally become more critical as consortia grow. Arrangements for internal co-ordination of consortia shall be explicit and be an important aspect in selecting consortia.

Co-operation with international organisations with intergovernmental agreements is welcomed.

7. Geographical coverage

The Commission seeks a complete geographical coverage of services in support of business and innovation, without duplication of activities in any geographic area.

Applicants should provide in their proposal a detailed description of coherent, accessible and integrated services to be offered within a clearly delimited geographical area. The geographical area covered by the proposal should therefore be sufficiently large to demonstrate that quality services will be provided to a significant target population.

For most countries, it is expected that the typical size of geographical area will more or less correspond to the NUTS1 nomenclature⁽¹⁾. Applying consortia may assign the responsibility for serving smaller areas within these geographical areas to particular host organisations within a consortium (NUTS2).

Where the NUTS1 level does not correspond to domestic structures, alternative geographical area of comparable size may be considered.⁽²⁾

Consortia offering the described services in a cross-border area are eligible if all host organisations in the consortia are eligible. A cross-border consortium shall demonstrate that services under all modules are accessible for clients from the geographical area covered, either through a sufficient number of host organisations in the consortium or through a non-discriminatory access to services in the countries involved.

Although formally eligible, trans-national consortia not operating in neighbouring geographical areas are not encouraged. Experience has shown that the added value from a closer co-operation of two separate geographical areas within the same consortium does not balance the extra cost for co-ordination. Specific co-operation activities between two or more geographical areas might be included as special services or activities in the respective modules.

Proposals of host organisations wishing to provide services in geographical areas larger than the NUTS1 level will be eligible.

8. Eligibility

Applicants and applications must comply with the following conditions in order to be eligible:

- Applicants must be legal entities established in EU 25, Bulgaria, Romania, Candidate countries, EEA member countries, the Western Balkan countries and other Third countries as defined in Article 4 of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme and explained in V.1 of the Submission set;
- Corporate bodies must be properly constituted and registered under the law;

⁽¹⁾ NUTS = Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 of 24 June 1988; Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003); for further information see <http://ec.europa.eu/comm/eurostat/ramon/nuts>

⁽²⁾ Please note that the use of NUTS1 serves purely as an indication for this specific call for proposals. It does not prejudice any other current or future initiatives related to the NUTS classification.

- Applications must be signed, dated and complete, using the submission requirements indicated in section 11 of the present document;
- Applications must be received before the closing date;
- Only applications for projects that are strictly non-profit-making and/or whose immediate objective is non-commercial shall be eligible;

Moreover, according to article 93 of the Financial Regulation (Council regulation No 1605/2002) mentioned below, candidates shall be excluded from participation in a grant procedure if:

- (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 judgement 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 judgement which has the force of *res judicata* for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation or any other illegal activity detrimental to the Communities' financial interests;
- (f) following another procurement procedure or grant award procedure financed by the Community budget, they have been declared to be in serious breach of contract for failure to comply with their contractual obligations.

By using the 'Exclusion Form' (attached to the 'Submission Set'), applicants shall declare on their honour that they are not in one of the situations listed above. The authorising officer responsible may however request the evidence described in the 'Exclusion Form' above mentioned. In such case, applicants shall be bound to supply such proof, unless there is a material impossibility recognised by the authorising officer responsible.

In addition, and according to article 94 of the Financial Regulation mentioned below, grants may not be awarded to candidates who, during the award procedure:

- (g) are subject to a conflict of interest;
- (h) are guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the contracting authority as a condition of participation in the contract procedure or fail to supply this information.

Please note that, according to article 96 of the Council Regulation — EC, Euratom No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 — on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities and according to article 133 of the Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom No 2342/2002 of 23 December 2002 — as last modified by Regulation 1248/2006 of 7 August 2006, laying down detailed rules for the implementation of the Financial Regulation, administrative and financial penalties may be imposed by the Commission on applicants who are excluded in relation to points a) to h) above mentioned.

Applicants may act individually or in consortium with partner organisations; partners of applicants must satisfy the same eligibility criteria as those for applicants

9. Selection

The selection will be based on the applicants' financial and technical capacity to complete the proposed project.

Financial capacity

For the financial capacity, applicants must show that they have stable and sufficient sources of finance to ensure the continuity of their host organisation throughout the project and to play a part in financing it.

To that end, they must include in the proposal their annual accounts for the last two financial years (i.e. profit and loss accounts; balance sheet). In conformity with article 176 of the Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom No 2342/2002 of 23 December 2002 — as last modified by Regulation 1248/2006 of 7 August 2006, laying down detailed rules for the implementation of the Financial Regulation), the verification of financial capacity will not be applied to public bodies.

Where the proposed amount requested from the Commission exceeds EUR 500 000 per host organisation, an audit report on those accounts must be provided before conclusion of the FPA. For applying consortia, the threshold concerning the audit report is applicable at the level of individual host organisations and not at the level of the consortium.

Technical capacity

To assess the technical capacity of applicants, they must show that they have the operational (technical and management) capacity to complete the operation and demonstrate their capacity to manage a large-scale activity corresponding with the size of the project described in the proposal. In particular, the team responsible for the project must have adequate professional qualifications and experience.

The list of criteria that will be used to assess the technical capacity is available in the 'Submission set'.

Applicants must be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project, not acting as an intermediary. They must provide information about the capacity to provide the service and demonstrate their experiences in working with other parties, in trans-national projects and in providing the services expected.

10. Award

An evaluation of the quality of proposals, including the proposed budget, will be carried out in accordance with the following award criteria:

1. Relevance	/30
2. Quality	/30
3. Impact	/15
4. Visibility	/10
5. Budget and Cost-effectiveness	/15
Maximum total score	/100

If a total score lower than 70 points or a score lower than 50 % for any of the above five criteria is obtained, the proposal will not be evaluated further.

The complete selection and evaluation procedure is described in part VIII of the Submission set.

Indicative scheduled month for closing the award procedure: August 2007.

Please note that, in case of award, the partners authorise the Commission, according to article II.5.2 of the Draft grant agreement, to publish the following information in any form and medium, including via the Internet:

- the partner's and co-partner's name and the address,
- the subject and purpose of the grant,
- the amount granted and the proportion of the action's total cost covered by the funding.

11. **Submission of Proposal**

The proposal must be drafted using the specific submission set available for this call.

The submission set can be downloaded from the CIP call website <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/cip/index.htm>

Proposals must be submitted electronically. A user guide is available in the standard submission set.

The Electronic Proposal Submission Tool (EPSS) can be accessed via the abovementioned website.

Reminder: Late delivery will lead to the applicant being excluded from the award procedure.

- Main documents to attach to the submission set: Full proposal and description of the project/action. Legal documents: Official registration certificate, Articles of association/Statutes, List of directors/executive board members (names and forenames, titles or positions in the applicant organisation), organisation chart, rules of procedure. Evidence of technical capacity: Curriculum vitae of persons to be performing work in connection with the operation. Financial capacity: Annual accounts (audited, where applicable) for the last two financial years (or annual budget in the case of a public body). Idem for partners.

12. **Equal opportunity**

The European Community has the task to promote equality between women and men and shall aim in all its activities to eliminate gender inequalities (articles 2 and 3 of the EC Treaty). In this context, women are particularly encouraged to be involved in proposal submission.
