COMMISSION

MLIS PROGRAMME

Call for proposals for the development and demonstration of multilingual networked services and resources

(1999/C 156/06)

(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Council Decision of 21 November 1996 adopting a multiannual programme intended to promote the linguistic diversity of the Community in the information society (hereinafter referred to as 'the MLIS programme'), the European Commission hereby invites proposals for collaborative projects aimed at furthering the availability of multilingual services and resources over global networks. This call for proposals relates to Action Lines 1 and 2 of the MLIS programme as detailed in the first annex to the Council Decision and in the programme workplan.

2. ELIGIBILITY

2.1. Consortia

Proposals are to be submitted jointly by a group of partners, all of whom must normally be established within the European Economic Area (EEA — the EEA comprises the Member States of the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). The partners must include at least two independent (1) organisations, of which at least one is established in a Member State of the European Union and at least one other is established in a different State within the European Economic Area.

Participation by third countries and international organisations may be allowed where there is a significant contribution to programme objectives and achievements, subject to the agreement of the Commission, but without financial support by the Community.

Partnership participation of small enterprises is especially encouraged (2). Organisations established in less favoured regions are also encouraged to participate (3).

2.2. Participants

Participants in projects may take one of the following roles:

— the coordinator who is a principal participant in the project and is mandated to submit the proposal, to sign and fulfil the contract with the Commission on behalf of the consortium, and who undertakes overall project management responsibility. The coordinator must furnish a copy of his statutes, a memorandum of association or similar document, and a copy of the last audited accounts,

— partners are organisations who carry out the work and contribute towards the costs and have full and equal rights to the ownership and exploitation of the results of the project. Before the start of project work, the coordinator shall conclude formal agreements with the partners to cover their participation in the project and to define as far as possible the conditions governing the exploitation of the results arising from the project,

— subcontractors undertake specific tasks under contract to a partner at normal commercial rates. Approval by the relevant Commission service is required for the subcontracting of work which exceeds 20% of the costs of the partner placing the subcontract or where the subcontractor is established outside the EU.

2.3. General requirements

Proposals must be submitted by the coordinator on behalf of all the partners in the project.

Proposals must include full details of each of the participants and signed agreements by each of the named organisations, including the coordinator, to participate in the project as described in the proposal.

Proposals must be within the scope of the call as detailed in the Official Journal of the European Communities, and which specific issues are addressed.

(1) Independent means that less than 25% is owned by another enterprise or group from which it is said do be independent.

(2) A 'small enterprise' is defined as an enterprise which has less than 50 employees and an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 7 million (or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 5 million) and which is not owned for 25% or more of the capital or the voting rights by one enterprise, or jointly by several enterprises, falling outside the definitions of a small enterprise.

(3) Regions eligible under Objective 1 of the Structural Funds of the EU.
Proposals must clearly describe the work to be undertaken, the objectives, rationale and expected results of the project. Proposers should show how the results of the project will contribute to the objectives and achievements of the MLIS programme. In particular, they should specify performance indicators enabling both the consortium and the Commission to assess progress towards and cost-effective achievement of those objectives, and include appropriate actions for the dissemination of general interest results outside the consortium.

Proposals must specify all the tasks to be undertaken, including allocation of responsibilities among partners, detailed costings and expected deliverables. The tasks should be grouped together into work-packages, each covering one aspect of the work, for example project management, analysis and modelling of user needs, prototype development and alpha-testing, field demonstration, etc. The descriptions should make clear for each work-package what has already been done, the current state of the subject matter, the tasks to be performed and the expected outcome at the end of the project.

Proposals must provide evidence of the ability of each participant both to make a significant contribution to the proposed project and to provide the human, material and financial resources required for a successful outcome. Consortia should be of manageable size — experience has shown that international projects with many partners are often difficult and costly to manage.

Proposals must clearly describe the intended collaboration between the participants and demonstrate the suitability or transferability of the expected results in a broader European context thus justifying Community support.

The Community financial contribution under the present programme may not be cumulated with a payment from any other European Community programme or source for the same project work. The contribution may not include any payment relating to work already carried out.

3. SCOPe AND TARGET OF THE CALL

Project proposals are invited in the following areas:

— provision of multilingual language resources over global networks,

— development of multilingual networked services.

To enable Europe's linguistic diversity in the information age, there is a need to ensure a balance between major languages and the languages used by smaller national or regional communities. Consortia are therefore encouraged to include regional and less-used languages in their proposals.

3.1. Provision of multilingual language resources over global networks

Language-based tasks, products and services depend heavily on high-quality repositories of language knowledge. Widespread availability of computer-tractable resources such as multilingual lexica, ontologies, translation memories and terminology collections is especially relevant for companies and professionals in the translation industry, for content and software localisation, language learning and business training, and for the information and communication technology (ICT) industries at large.

Proposals falling under this heading should aim at developing, demonstrating and assessing novel models, methods and processes for all-digital, across-the-network compilation, publishing, re-purposing, trading and on-demand delivery of sizeable resources of recognised user value, encompassing the broadest possible range of EU and EEA-EFTA languages, including regional and less-used languages.

In addition to the eligibility criteria detailed under point 2 the following criteria apply for project line 3.1: successful consortia will consist of multinational networks of independent centres; participating organisations are expected (a) to set up and maintain electronic directories of available resources, (b) to apply relevant standards for content coding, access and inter-change, (c) to implement appropriate distribution and licensing schemes and provide user referral services, and (d) to establish collaboration agreements with other major holders of language databases of general interest. Preference will be given to proposals originating from consortia involving industrial players and user organisations from the private and public sector.

3.2. Development of multilingual networked services

The rapid deployment of Internet and Web technologies is changing the way companies do business, providing new opportunities but also giving rise to new challenges, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. The ability to deliver, access and retrieve digital information across languages in a timely and effective way is becoming a decisive competitive factor in international trade and electronic commerce. To operate successfully in the single market and achieve global presence, companies must be able to conduct their business in the language of their customers.

Proposals falling under this heading should aim at developing, demonstrating and assessing innovative approaches and solutions for the cost-effective provision of multilingual digital content, interfaces and services. Proposals are expected
to focus on network-based business-customer relationships, and to address one or several of the following areas:

(a) concurrent multi-language design, development and maintenance of innovative large-scale Web sites,
(b) integrated multilingual service provision for self-help tele-services, customer support centres and other Internet-based product and customer related information services,
(c) cross-lingual search and retrieval front-ends for information and transaction services, and
(d) networked translation services.

Preference will be given to proposals involving companies possessing a proven experience with multilingual business practices. Successful consortia will comprise both users, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, and providers of language products and services.

4. CONDITIONS

The criteria and procedure used for the evaluation and selection of the proposals submitted in response to this call are detailed in the information package which can be obtained, along with the programme workplan and other relevant information, from the European Commission according to the instructions detailed in point 5.

5. FUNDING

The proposals retained for funding under this call will be implemented as shared-cost projects, in conformity with the rules for implementation set out in Annex III of the aforementioned Council Decision. The Community contribution may vary according to the scope and size of the project but will normally not exceed 50 % of the total cost of each project. The indicative budget available for this call in terms of Community contribution amounts to EUR 3 million.

6. MODALITIES OF SUBMISSION

(a) An information package relating to the submission of proposals may be obtained from:

European Commission
DG XIII-E.4
Jean Monnet Building, office EUFO 0-177
Rue Alcide de Gasperi
L-2920 Luxembourg
Tel. (352) 43 01 328 86
Fax (352) 43 01 349 99
E-Mail: mlis@lux.dg13.cec.be

The information package is also available on the Web server I*M EUROPE, URL:
http://www2.echo.lu/mlis

(b) Proposals must be signed by an authorised representative of the consortium, and must be sent to the European Commission by registered mail (as confirmed by the postmark) or delivered by courier or by hand (as confirmed by the acknowledgement of receipt) before 6 September 1999, 4 p.m. local time (Luxembourg).

Delivery by post to:

European Commission
DG XIII-E.4
Jean Monnet Building, office EUFO 0-177
Rue Alcide de Gasperi
L-2920 Luxembourg.

Delivery by hand or courier to:

European Commission
DG XIII-E.4
Euroforum Building, office 0-177
10, rue Robert Stumper
L-2537 Luxembourg.

Fax or mail submission will not be accepted. All proposals received by the European Commission will be treated in strict confidence.