COMMISSION

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
PREPARATORY AND INNOVATIVE ACTIONS
eLEARNING ACTION PLAN

DG EAC/25/01
(2001/C 166/17)

1. CONTEXT

The eLearning action plan, adopted by the European Commission on 28 March 2001, aims at presenting ways and means of implementing the eLearning initiative. Its intention is to involve all those in education and training, both in the private and public sectors, in the realisation of the potential of e-learning methods and resources for lifelong and life-wide learning.

The eLearning action plan operates by mobilising of existing resources. For the European Commission, these are found within the existing programmes and instruments which are suited to the development of e-learning projects. However, the fast evolution and changing nature of e-learning makes it often difficult to place these projects into a specific programme or budget line. For example, an e-learning project could involve different disciplines, pedagogical theories, technological developments, new logistics and concern a wide range of actors.

In view of this, a special budget line has been set to explore in depth specific e-learning issues. This will be achieved by undertaking a small number of pilot projects addressing the key strategic areas of the eLearning action plan. Their aim is to provide the basis for a wide debate at European level, and to encourage increased coordination of related actions at Member State and community levels. They should also provide important information on which future community actions can be based.

This call for proposals will be organised in two phases this year as explained below in point 7.

2. OBJECTIVES

The present call for proposals aims at developing better understanding of the problems and opportunities which are associated with e-learning methods, contents and resources; their relationship with the traditional ones; their impact in education and training in terms of organisation and management; the pedagogical and technological trends emerging in this new sector and the possibilities for European added value.

Its objective is to provide support and initial funding for sustainable and scalable projects, which establish at the European level new quality networks, contents or services in the field of e-learning.

These projects should demonstrate how e-learning can be of benefit in the priority areas identified in the eLearning action plan. They should provide an added value and contribute to a fast moving and well-grounded development of e-learning in Europe. They should be wide-ranging, addressing issues such as the general use of ICT, but also looking at possible future developments, and exploring the transition from research and experimentation to general use. Their results should be suitable for drawing operational conclusions on e-learning at the European level.

3. BUDGETARY RESOURCES

The total available budget for this call for proposals is EUR 7.5 million for 2001 and 2002. Under this budget, the Directorate-General for Education and Culture could provide financial support for between four and eight projects for each of the two phases of this call for proposals, addressing the subjects listed below.

4. SUBJECTS

The themes for proposals are those identified as priority ones in the eLearning action plan. The aim of the call is to support innovative ideas and approaches. Development and tailoring to specific objectives and user groups of the following guidelines is therefore expected and required, but projects proposed must address precisely one, or a combination, of the listed subjects.

All proposals must address the European level, contribute to the creation and/or strengthening of European networks and cooperation platforms, provide for a wide dissemination of results and facilitate the exchange of experience and good practice. Therefore, good documentation of all project data (description of application contexts, profile of participants, positive and negative results of different tools and pedagogical approaches, etc.) is essential.
4.1. e-learning European information services

In view of the current scarcity of decision-making information, relevant proposals should address the definition, organisation and financing of observatory-type services for monitoring and evaluating ICT use for education and training in Europe, building up on existing national, European and international practices.

The idea is not to propose new statistical data collection, but to analyse existing sources, both in the public and private sectors, at national and European levels, for the construction of meaningful quantitative and qualitative indicators and for the improvement of the agreed benchmarking exercises. These projects should also aim at identifying needs for further research and field work, and producing appropriate recommendations.

Projects under this heading should address all the issues concerning the permanent provision of such services, and should provide all necessary data for their direct implementation.

4.2. European laboratory for innovation in e-learning

This proposal of the eLearning action plan aims at a virtual European centre of excellence built on existing national centres of excellence. The idea is to develop a virtual research network, linking pedagogical, technical, organisational and socio-economic research on e-learning, and providing communication channels between researchers and practitioners in the field.

The laboratory should be a source of reference and guidance to European research, an active promoter and disseminator of innovative research projects, a platform for facilitating cooperation with other international centres of excellence, and a beacon of European excellence in the global networks.

Projects proposals should identify and enlist possible participant centres and organisations; define their roles and responsibilities, and their modus operandi for joint activities and services, produce budgetary and other logistics analysis and provisions, and establish an operational network ready for definitive implementation.

4.3. New learning environments

This action targets applied research, development, implementation and testing of new learning environments, combining innovative educational methods, digital resources and communication technology. The focus should be on a critical-reflexive use of new pedagogical methods and approaches, assessing the added value and benefits of e-learning environments for the learners and communities involved.

These could be new forms of learning partnerships, for example, learning cities, learning regions; new forms of learning services, for example web resources or helplines; new forms of learning spaces, such as virtual communities or learning collaborations. These should address the need for new organisational models for schools, universities, training institutions or adult learning services, and consider different user needs, for example those of the unemployed, of SMEs, or the growing demand for mid-career re-skilling.

This action should result in the identification of problematic issues such as the obsolescence of technological systems and maintenance of access to stored resources, or the ICT literacy skills and knowledge for navigating in digital information. It should also aspire to develop new visions of what can be achieved, from a learning perspective, by the imaginative use of emerging technologies.

4.4. Virtual models of education and training

Projects addressing this subject should explore and propose new models and ideas for:

— virtual European universities, based on partnerships and cooperation with other universities and with other socio-economic actors. New possibilities for European e-universities, either as new entities or as ad-hoc cooperation of existing universities; for European degrees combining courses and materials from different universities; or for any other structured form of combination of virtual and current learning with European scope. Due attention will be paid to the issues of academic recognition, in the context of the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations,

— virtual European campus structures, facilitating students and teachers access to virtual learning resources and to European cooperation networks at all levels. This could mean, for example, European-wide access to university libraries, research laboratories, seminars as well as to professional and academic associations debates and information resources,

— virtual mobility schemes, preparing and/or complementing physical mobility, and providing enhanced possibilities for European experiences for those unable to choose physical mobility. These proposals should develop a virtual Erasmus scheme, building on the acknowledged value of the Erasmus programme.

4.5. Teachers and trainers training on use of ICT for learning

Projects under this line should link a representative sample of teachers or trainers training institutes of Member States, with the aims of facilitating the exchange of information and experiences; supporting collaborative learning practices; developing an evaluation culture based on peer production and test of materials; linking initial and in-service training; and supporting teachers learning communities and ICT information services.
4.6. e-learning demonstrators for key areas

Projects under this line can address subject areas or special needs.

The subject areas identified by the eLearning action plan as crucial for the European model of knowledge society are science, technology, art, culture, languages and citizenship.

These projects should demonstrate in practical terms how e-learning can improve and enrich the quality of the learning process in these key areas. They should also foster the production and exchange of multilingual and/or language-independent learning materials, and contribute to increased accessibility to public resources in these fields.

The networking of specialised libraries, museums and educational institutions for the development of new learning materials based on their contents and on their academic and research resources is a good example of this type of projects.

Projects in the area of special needs should demonstrate the potential of e-learning solutions for specific user groups, such as the visually impaired; children in mobile professions families; immigrants; or isolated communities. Gender-specific projects are also possible under this heading.

5. REQUESTED PROPOSALS CHARACTERISTICS

Proposals should address specifically one, or a combination, of the listed themes; have a European dimension concerning their scope, their objectives, and their partners; be large enough to produce significant results and clearly demonstrate the potential of e-learning methods and resources to improve existing educational and training provision.

Proposals should contain an explicit commitment to sustainable results. This can be a letter of intention of partners (for example universities), of public administration departments (for example ministries of education, local education authorities), or of public-private partnerships (for example, local or regional authorities together with enterprises) responsible for later financing of the project.

6. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS?

Organisations from the public and private sectors which have interest, expertise, and European experience in e-learning matters concerning any of the subjects listed above. Proposals coming from European networks having wide implantation and representativeness would be especially welcome.

All promoters must conform to the general eligibility rules of the European Commission, and more specifically of the Education, Training and Youth programmes:

— either in the form of a European partnership composed of a minimum of three countries, including at least two actors per country. These partnerships should involve some actors with a certain experience of European collaboration; however, these partnerships are equally addressed to bodies that have not previously had the opportunity to participate in Community programmes but that wish to launch new European projects satisfying the e-learning objectives,

— or in the form of a European network, composed of at least five countries, and involving various actors in each country. These networks can be existing ones, or be proposed by bodies that have already participated in one or several Community programmes and that wish to develop synergies and/or connections so as to extend their field of action and the impact of their work within the terms of the e-learning objectives.

7. PROJECT DURATION

The duration of each project will be between 12 to 18 months starting from the signature of the contract.

On this basis, the two phases of this call for proposals will be organised as follows:

— the first phase will involve projects which have a starting date of 1 November 2001,

— the second phase will involve projects which have a starting date of 1 February 2002.

8. SELECTION CRITERIA

Only proposals that are properly completed and received within the deadline stipulated (see point 11) will be taken into consideration.

8.1. Eligibility of applicants

— Applicants may be institutions and/or organisations that have legal status and are from one of the 15 Member States of the European Union or from Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway.

— The proposals presented must ensure the partners' European participation, namely three countries for European partnerships and five countries for European networks.

8.2. Applicants' technical and financial capacities

The Commission will also make its selection on the basis of both the applicants' financial and technical capacities to successfully complete the proposed action. These capacities will be judged principally on the basis of the following documents:

— the 2000 activity report,

— the accounts for the financial year 2000.
The curricula vitae of those submitting the proposal, ad-hoc information on past and current projects in the area of e-learning, as well as the declared partners’ letters of participation will also be taken into consideration.

9. AWARD CRITERIA

9.1. Overall quality of the proposal

**European added value:** the proposals presented must offer added value for the European Union as well as national and/or regional value. They should achieve this principally by allowing the transfer of experiences and knowledge, or by identifying the conditions for generalising the results and/or activities or products, through, for example, their integration into national systems or at European level.

**e-learning added value:** the proposals results must provide new meaningful information concerning e-learning methods, products and services, either as practical conclusions for their generalisation or as conceptual elements valid for decision-making or for orientation of further tests and research.

**Pedagogical quality:** harnessing the potential of ICT tools and resources for improving their pedagogical use is a key objective of e-learning; hence the decisive weight of pedagogical quality for the final choice of proposals.

**Technical quality:** the proposals presented must be ‘state of the art’ concerning their use of ICT; efficient and innovative use of existing technologies or educationally oriented test of emerging ones is required.

**Demonstration potential:** the proposals presented must have a clear potential as general demonstrators of specific aspects of ICT use, either for their direct use for teaching and learning, or for their integration in curricula, or in the organisation and management of educational services. This entails the production of good information and presentation material.

**Transferability of results:** the proposals presented must pay special attention to transferability aspects, such as project information and documentation; standardisation; or consideration of translation and localisation issues.

**Scalability potential:** the projects must be suitable for extension to a larger number of users, to other user groups, or to other similar subjects or issues. Downsscalability, i.e. their capacity to be tailored to narrower needs or user groups is also an asset.

**Sustainability guarantee:** the main objective of this call is to support initiatives with a potential to evolve into stable structures, networks, products or services. Proposals presented must consider this request and provide adequate proof to this end.

9.2. Organisational and budgetary aspects, and other administrative conditions

The actions projected in the proposals submitted must not promote either directly or indirectly messages contrary to European Union policies, or be able to be associated with an image contrary to that of the Institutions.

The proposals should contain precise information on the following points:

— work plan (clarity and correlation between the stated objectives and the means proposed),

— time schedule for the project,

— methodology followed,

— balanced distribution of work among the partners (including the partners’ financial participations),

— cost of evaluating the proposed activity,

— the Community subsidy should primarily cover expenditure related to the projects’ European dimension (travel, stays, cost of products, information, documentation and dissemination costs, etc.).

10. FINANCIAL CONDITIONS

Community subsidies are intended to encourage projects that could not go ahead without Community financial support. The principle of co-financing applies. In other words, the Commission will only part-finance the project, the Community subsidy being complementary and subsidiary to the applicant body’s own contributions and/or national, regional or local grants. Generally speaking, Community funding for the projects selected may not exceed a maximum of 60 % of the eligible costs.

With the exception of proposals of such scope and quality as to demonstrate an excellent cost-efficiency ratio (see point 9.1, specifying the quality criteria for allocating subsidies), the Commission envisages that the proposals that it will select will require a Community funding of the order of EUR 500 000.

The request for subsidy must include a detailed draft budget (the model for which is included as an annex), specifying in particular the eligible costs, towards which the Commission’s funding must contribute.

The budgets must not include any expenses that pre-date or post-date the indicated project duration period stipulated in the contract.
10.1. **Eligible costs**

For the first phase of this call for proposals, the eligible costs mentioned below will be taken into consideration only if supported subsequently to 1 November 2001. Only the following direct costs are eligible but they must be necessary to carry out the project and must be in line with normal conditions on the market. They must be entered in accounts, identifiable and controllable:

(a) staffing costs for those staff working directly on the action, corresponding to their actual salaries plus social charges;

(b) staff travel and subsistence costs;

(c) direct costs associated with the action:
   - the cost of holding conferences and seminars (organisation, travel and subsistence costs for participants and speakers, interpretation costs, fees),
   - information dissemination costs (publications, books, CD-ROMs, videos, Internet, etc.), translation, dissemination and distribution costs,
   - other direct costs associated with the action.

10.2. **Ineligible costs**

The following are not eligible:

(a) ongoing operational, depreciation and equipment costs;

(b) overheads;

(c) the cost of consumables and supplies;

(d) capital investment costs;

(e) general provisions (for losses, possible future liabilities, etc.);

(f) contingency reserves;

(g) debts owed;

(h) interest on debts owed;

(i) charges for financial services;

(j) bad debts receivable;

(k) exchange losses, unless specifically provided for in exceptional cases;

(l) contributions in kind;

(m) expenditure on luxuries.

Contributions in kind are not eligible costs (land, immovable property whether in its entirety or in part, durable capital goods, raw material, unpaid charity work by a private individual or corporate body), but are taken into account in calculating the rate of funding granted by the Commission grant for the project.

11. **PROCEDURE FOR SUBMITTING APPLICATIONS**

11.1. **Forms**

Applications for subsidies should be made on the official application form, in one of the 11 official languages of the European Union. Only typed forms will be accepted. Forms can be obtained on the Internet in the 11 official languages of the European Union, at the following address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/elearning.index.html

or by writing to:

European Commission
Directorate-General Education and Culture
‘eLearning call for proposals’
For the attention of Mrs Maruja Gutierrez-Diaz
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
(B-100 03/7)
B-1049 Brussels
Tel. (32-2) 295 63 46
Fax (32-2) 296 69 92.

Only one form will be sent for each request. The Commission will stop sending out forms 10 working days before the closing date for submission of proposals of the two phases of this call for proposals as mentioned in point 11.2.

11.2. **Submission of the application**

The application must be sent in triplicate and drafted precisely and succinctly, and must provide comprehensive and verifiable information with regard to the criteria listed in points 8 and 9. If necessary, further information can be supplied on separate sheets.

Furthermore, the applicant body must attach a copy of its statutes or articles of association, unless it is a public or semi-public body. This document must be provided in one of the 11 official languages of the European Union.

The application must be duly completed, dated and signed, and be accompanied by an official, explicit letter from the applicant.

To facilitate the processing of the applications, applicants can attach a summary description of the project (outlining the content, aims, proposed activities and work plan) in either English or French (maximum one page in length).
For the first phase of this call for proposals, applications must be sent to the above address by ordinary or registered mail by 17 August 2001 at the latest. The date on the postmark will be considered the official date of dispatch. For the second phase of this call for proposals, applications must be sent to the above address by ordinary or registered mail by 16 November 2001 at the latest. The date on the postmark will be considered the official date of dispatch.

Applications submitted via the Internet, fax or electronic mail will not be accepted. The applicant must mark on the envelope:

‘eLearning call for proposals’
European Commission
Directorate-General Education and Culture
For the attention of Mrs Maruja Gutierrez-Diaz
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
(B-100 03/27)
B-1049 Brussels.

12. PROCESSING OF THE APPLICATIONS

Applicants will be informed of the receipt of their application within 10 working days.

Only applications that satisfy the selection criteria will be considered for funding.

All unsuccessful applicants will be informed in writing.

The projects selected will be subjected to a detailed approval procedure, during which the Commission may request further information from the project leaders.

Once the project has received the Commission’s definite approval, a funding agreement, drawn up in euro, specifying the amount and the terms of funding, will be concluded between the Community and the beneficiary. The beneficiary will sign the original copy of this agreement and return it to the Commission immediately.

13. SUBMISSION OF THE FINAL REPORT AND THE FINAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Under the terms of the funding agreement, the beneficiary must submit a final report. This must provide a succinct but comprehensive description of the results of the project and be accompanied by copies of any material produced (brochures, teaching material, videocassettes, multimedia supports, press cuttings, etc.), including addresses and descriptive documentation of Internet sites or resources.

In any publication concerning the project, or on the occasion of any activities for which the subsidy is used, beneficiaries must clearly mention the support provided by the European Union, with the following two phrases:

— ‘With the support of the European Commission — Directorate-General for Education, Training and Youth — eLearning initiative.’

— ‘The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinion of the European Commission.’

The final financial statement, to be attached to the report, must show actual expenditure and revenue. The beneficiary must keep accounts of the co-financed project and must keep all original supporting documents for five years after completion of the project for audit purposes.

If the actual cost of the project turns out to be less than the total estimated cost, the Commission will reduce its contribution proportionally. It is therefore in the applicant's interest to present a reasonable budget estimate.