Call for proposals - Clusters Excellence Programme: Promoting Cluster Management Excellence Across the EU

COS-CLUSTER-2015-3-02

EASME-COSME-CLUSTER-EXCELLENCE-CALL-2015@ec.europa.eu

Questions and Answers
16/03/16

INDEX

A. Background of the call
B. Objective(s) - Theme(s) – Priorities - Activities
C. Indicative Timetable
D. Budget available
E. Admissibility Requirements
F. Eligibility Criteria
G. Exclusion Criteria
H. Selection criteria
I. Award criteria
J. Legal commitments
K. Financial provisions
L. Publicity
M. Data protection
N. Submission of proposals

Important:
The deadline for the submission of applications is 31/03/2016 at 17h00 Brussels time.

New questions are marked in yellow.
A. Background of the call

1. The questions that are sent to EASME, are they published somewhere? Is there a time limit for asking questions?

A: All questions concerning the call can be addressed to the functional mailbox of the call:

EASME-COSME-CLUSTER-EXCELLENCE-CALL-2015@ec.europa.eu

All necessary information concerning the call will be provided on the web:


No conference/Info Day/webinar/web conference will be organised for this call. There is no possibility to organise bilateral meetings with the EASME team prior to the signature of grant agreements.

B. Objective(s) – Theme(s) – Priorities - Activities

C. Indicative Timetable

1. Which is the submission deadline?

A: The deadline for application is Thursday, 31/03/2016 – 17h00 Brussels time.

D. Budget available

1. How many projects will be financed under this call?

A: EASME expects to fund 7 (seven) projects, as stated in the table in Section 4, on page 14 of the call text.

E. Admissibility Requirements

1. The Call for Proposals states that the applications must be drafted in one of the EU official languages. In this sense, is the Spanish on of the EU official language?

A: According to section "Admissibility requirements", applications must be drafted in one of the official EU languages. Thus, you can submit in Spanish. However, the Guide for Applicants requires in such cases to submit a summary of the proposals in English. Please be aware that submission in English would greatly facilitate the assessment by the evaluators of your proposal.

F. Eligibility Criteria

Please note that in this Q&A’s section it is not possible to provide a decision on the eligibility of specific cases. It is for the Evaluation Committee to ultimately decide on the specifics of
Eligible applicants

1. One of our members (cluster) of the consortium has no legal personality as such but it is legally and officially represented by an Institute. Would such a case comply with the definition of cluster organisation of the call?

   A: Only legal entities can apply for this call for proposals. If the Institute is a legal entity in the meaning of the call and is representing legally the cluster, it could be an official partner. In the application you will need to explain this in details.

2. We currently have a bronze label for cluster excellence which expires on the 26th of February 2016. We have already applied for a silver label assessment but we haven’t received any reply yet. For this call for proposal, should we consider our organization as “not labelled” or we should consider a “bronze label”? The same question relates to organization which had a bronze label in the past which has expired at the time of the submission. How should we consider those organizations?

   A: Applicants will be declared by EASME as holding a Excellence label, or an expired one, based on their true statement they need to make at the time of the submission of the respective proposal. So the position at the time of submission will determine the verification of conditions on consortium eligibility as it reads in the call in the section 6.2: "It must include at least two applicants that have either no Cluster Excellence label or only Cluster Excellence bronze labels".

3. I would be grateful if you could clarify the definition of “business network organisations” when referring to eligible applicants (point 6.1 of the call for proposals). More specifically, could you please clarify whether a cluster network organization would be eligible as project leader or as project partner under this call?

   A: As it reads in the call at item 6.1 sub-item 1 cluster organisations and business networks are equivalent notions as far as eligibility is concerned therefore any of the two types of organisations is equally eligible to this call.

   Moreover the definition for any such organisation can be verified by the type of activity the organisations carry out in support of their members in the cluster or in the business network, and the call specifically refers to (organisations that are) "providing or channeling ... support services"... (to their members, often Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises)."in compliance with the definition of innovation clusters given in the "Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation" (source: call, item 6.1, except wording in in brackets).

The reference to the "Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation" is instrumental for potential call applicants to decide in the first place whether or not they are eligible by giving examples of the key support services that cluster or network organisations provide to members ...("to stimulate innovative activity by promoting sharing of facilities and exchange of knowledge and expertise and by contributing effectively to knowledge transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the undertakings and other organisations in the cluster" ...(or within the business network) –source : call, page ,footnote nr. 22, except wording in brackets.)
It is the competence of the evaluation committee to decide on the eligibility of the applicants on the specifics of each case as based on the general definitions.

4. Could you please clarify whether a cluster network organization would be eligible as project leader or as project partner under this call?

As set-out in Answer nr. 3 above, cluster organisations and business network organisations are equivalent notions provide they comply with the definitions set out in the call which is ultimately for the evaluation committee to verify on the specifics of each case. Moreover the call doesn’t provide any specific eligibility requirement with regard to the determination of the coordination role among members in each applicant consortium.

5. I'd be grateful if you could help me identify possible partners.

A: We do not foresee any support in the sense of the creation a specific partner search tool.

We advise however to consult the cluster collaboration platform. The platform offers an overview per sector and per country, including the labelling of clusters. It is advised you to visit the platform: http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/.

The Enterprise Europe Network could be a source of potential information: http://een.ec.europa.eu/.

6. We are a working group representing a University in Greece. We have an inquiry regarding the eligibility criteria of the call, and specifically we kindly request that you inform us whether an under establishment cluster may be an eligible applicant.

A: The call requires eligible applicants to "be legal entities established in a EU Member State or in a COSME Participating Country under Article 6 of the COSME Regulation" (page 14 of the call) and that eligible applicants are " innovation cluster organisations or business network organisations, all of them providing or channelling cluster and network support services, in compliance with the definition of innovation clusters given in the Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation". Applicants should also (describe) their organisation and confirming that they correspond to the definition of a innovation cluster organisation or business network organisation" (page 15 of the call).

The call further elaborates on these definitions by setting out that innovation clusters for which organisations or business network organisations provide support ...(are)..."structures or organised groups of independent parties (such as innovative start-ups, small, medium and large enterprises, as well as research and knowledge dissemination organisations, non-for-profit organisations and other related economic actors) ... (and that the support activity provided by organisations or business network organisations to their cluster members including SMES are) ...designed to stimulate innovative activity by promoting sharing of facilities and exchange of knowledge and expertise and by contributing effectively to knowledge transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the undertakings and other organisations in the cluster" (page 15 of the call).

Additionally the call sets out that cluster organisations are legal entities that support the "enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning" in innovation clusters and act as innovation support providers by providing or channelling specialised and customised
business support services, especially to SME. In comparison, clusters are referred to both as a concept and a real economic phenomenon such as the Silicon Valley of which its revealed effects such as employment concentrations can be measured – as done by the European Cluster Observatory. Cluster policies, on the other hand, relate more to an expression of political commitment and set of specific government policy interventions aiming at strengthening existing clusters or facilitating the emergence of new ones, while cluster initiatives are organised efforts to achieve the competitiveness of a cluster. For more information see the EU Cluster Portal at http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cluster/ and the Commission Staff Working Document SEC (2008) 2637 on "The concept of clusters and cluster policies and their role for competitiveness and innovation: Main statistical results and lessons learned", including its glossary (page 4 of the call).

7. I am representing a think-tank based in an EU country. Few of our researcher are interested in Cluster excellence programme but the question is whether we could participate as a partner in projects, as a think tank organization, or is the call reserved exclusively for cluster organizations? In other words could think tanks and NGOs participate in the project consortium alongside cluster organizations, (for example taking part in improving management skills of cluster organizations)?

A: The call is addressing cluster organisations or business networks only in the sense of innovation clusters and in providing support to cluster members "designed to stimulate innovative activity by promoting sharing of facilities and exchange of knowledge and expertise and by contributing effectively to knowledge transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the undertakings and other organisations in the cluster". Please further read answer provided above under nr F.6.

G. Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion from participation:
No questions.

Exclusion from award:
No questions.

Supporting documents

1. Where can I find the right template for the declaration on honour of financial capacity?

A: All necessary documents will be made available on the web site of the EASME or in the Participants Portal.

H. Selection criteria

No questions.
I. **Award criteria**

No questions.

J. **Legal commitments**

No questions.

K. **Financial provisions**

**General Principles:**

1. We found that for organizations requesting more than 60,000 € will need to provide for either the profit and loss account, the balance sheet or a table provided in the application form in order to assess the financial capacity. Could you give us some explanations?

   A: Balance sheets will be asked only from the successful applicants. At the moment there is no document to be submitted.

2. In which part of the application should the profit and loss accounts, balance sheet information be provided? Would it be within the registration of each organisation or somewhere else?

   A: As mentioned in the answer K.1 at the moment of submission no balance sheets are requested.

2. **Publicity**

No questions.

M. **Data protection**

No questions.

N. **Submission of proposals**

**Electronic submission of proposals:**

1. How shall proposals be submitted?

Submission of the proposal will have to be done through an online submission system of the Participant Portal: