Call for proposals -
*Improving SMEs' access to public procurement*

*COS-APP-2016-2-05*

EASME-COSME-PUB-PROC-CALL-2016@ec.europa.eu

Questions and Answers

15/07/16

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 28 July 2016 17.00 hours (Brussels time). Please do not wait with the submission to the last day, last minute. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be admissible.

**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-PUB-PROC-CALL-2016@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

1. My company would like to submit a project for the current open call COS-APP-2016-2-05. We have a doubt which is if it is possible to focus it on Innovative Public Procurement instead of working in an overall public procurement.

A: The specialisation on certain type of procurement or sector is acceptable as long as the cross-border dimension is present.

2. In pg. 5 of the document (“Call for Proposals”), it is mentioned that:

[...]contribute to address the following indicators for the overall action:

[...]

Number of partner-matching actions (at least 10)

Can you please explain what the “partner-matching actions” are?

A: The partner-matching actions can be understood as matchmaking events or other actions meant to bring together SMEs in the view of forming consortia for participation in public tenders.

3. Is it possible to include activities about international public procurement procedures (ex. World bank procedures) or the call is restricted only to know better public procurement in Member States and COSME participant countries?

A: The proposal should focus on the Member States and COSME participating countries covered by the consortium. In addition, it could include activities as the ones mentioned in your question.
4. Regarding Section 2. Objectives – Themes – Activities – Outputs, two of the types of activities will be “Organizing matchmaking events” and “Organizing business-to-procurers events”. Can you please clarify to us, what kind of events are they exactly? Is “Organizing business-to-procurers events” related to indicator 4 “Number of partner-matching actions (at least 10)? We assume that partner-matching events (such as conferences) are about matching partners in order to create Consortiums which will apply to public procurements. If this is correct, then do we need to organize 10 such events or 10 Consortiums must be created from these events? In addition, what will the contribution of COSME partners be in the project? Should a COSME partner participate in every action (or maybe one/two) of the project or is there a specific restriction as to their participation (meaning that they have to implement certain activities)?

A: Matchmaking events are meetings where companies who are interested in similar fields and offer different skills, products and services come together to network and find a partner for their organisation in developing a new product or other type of cooperation, such as, in our case, joint bids to tenders. The concept is borrowed form speed dating.

These events can have several stages such as: enrolment/selection of companies, preparation of the company for the event, the event itself, and follow up with the businesses after the event to see if there is potential for closer cooperation.

The business-to-procurers events aim at bringing together contracting authorities and/or entities with companies. The purpose of the meeting is for the SMEs to learn about the procurement plans of the contracting authorities/entities, and for the latter to learn what goods and services the SMEs are able to offer and what is the state of art in the respective fields in terms of technology.

All these events should take place if the project is selected for funding and once the agreement is signed. None of the costs incurred to form the consortium or prepare the bid are eligible under this call and should be born entirely by the proponents.

The consortium should be formed before the start of the activities, in order to submit the proposal.

For each proposal, there should be one consortium. The minimum number of entities representing different Member States in a consortium is three. It is up to the consortium to arrange the roles of the partners.

5. We are preparing a proposal for the above mentioned call but we would like to kindly ask you a clarification concerning a doubt we have on target activities. We understand the general objectives and the activities that should be implemented to target the indicators. Each project individually must target all objective activities and indicators? Or, could we focus on some of them? In other words, should we tackle all objective activities?

A: Each proposal should explain how it contributes to reaching those indicators. These are overall indicators for the entire action and not for the individual proposal.
Regarding the activities, the list is not mandatory and it is not exhaustive either. Ideally, each proposal will include at least the activities falling in the categories: 1, 3, 4 and 5 of those mentioned in the call.

6. In section 2, when referred to how the project will contribute to address the following indicators, one of the indicators is: Number of SMEs reached by these actions (at least 500 SMEs from 5 Member States). My question is: does Member States refer to EU Member States?

   A: In this case "Member States" should be understood as the "EU Member States and COSME participating countries".

7. I would like to ask you to clarify following lines (page 5 of the call for proposal "Improving SMEs’ access to public procurement"). The proposal must explain how it will contribute to address the following indicators for the overall action:

   1. Number of SMEs reached by these actions (at least 500 SMEs from 5 Member States)
   2. Number of guides developed for the Member States specificities (at least 5)
   3. Number of meeting the procurers events (at least 5 meetings organised)
   4. Number of partner-matching actions (at least 10)

   In particular:
   1. are these indicators to be reached by each project proposal?
   2. are these indicators to be reached in total by all project proposals within this call?
   3. if a project proposal will reach, by others, e.g. 100 SMEs from 3 Member States is it eligible of not?

   A: The indicators are for the entire action and not per project and do not represent an evaluation criterion.

8. Objectives: Number of partner-matching actions (at least 10)

   Does this mean 10 consortia or clusters each containing 2 or more SMEs or can we also define it as less consortia or clusters but with a higher number of SME’s (e.g. > 5)?

   Budget available: budget is 800,000 € and this for funding max. 4 projects. Does it mean 200,000 € max. for each project?

   A: This means that should be at least 10 actions/events of such types. This is not directly linked to the number of consortia. These events can include a high number of SMEs participating.

   The maximum co-financing per project is Eur 250,000 with an overall maximum for all projects of Eur 800,000.
9. The call says in page 5: The proposal must explain how it will contribute to address the following indicators for the overall action:

1. Number of SMEs reached by these actions (at least 500 SMEs from 5 Member States)

2. Number of guides developed for the Member States specificities (at least 5)

3. Number of meeting the procurers events (at least 5 meetings organised)

4. Number of partner-matching actions (at least 10)

Doubt: are the indicators above for each of the proposals presented or for all the selected proposals as joint initiative?

The call says in page 4:

The action must cover several types of activities, such as:

- Exchange of information on procurement between Member States (tender alerts and guides on country specific elements on public procurement);

- Training and advisory services to SMEs (e.g. on the changes introduced by the new Directives, use of e-procurement systems, developing a proposal, etc.);

- Organising matchmaking events;

- Coaching/mentoring on bidding in other Member States;

- Organising business-to-procurers events;

- Coaching/mentoring on joint bids;

- Mentoring activities between large companies and SMEs, etc.

Doubt: could you please clarify what is the difference between the activities (2) “Training and advisory services to SMEs” and (4)(6) “Coaching/mentoring on bidding/joint bids”?

A: The indicators are for the entire action and not per project.

The coaching and mentoring activities need to be tailor-made to SMEs bidding in a different Member State or preparing joint bids, or on an individual basis. The training and advisory services can cover groups of SMEs and broader topics regarding participation in public procurement.

10. The answer for question 7 of section B stated, that the indicators of the call “do not represent an evaluation criterion”. Is our understanding that there will be no quantitative evaluation criteria correct? We are currently planning to address approx. 500 SMEs, however we are wondering if there is no upside to address as many.

A: Indeed, there is no quantitative criterion. However, the evaluation committee will evaluate this aspect accordingly in line with the award criteria.

11. Question 9 of section B states the importance of coaching and mentoring activities. We are currently focusing on cross border events (transnational networking events, etc.)
and are wondering if we understood the emphasis on the services correctly or if it is just a misunderstanding on our side.

A: The focus of the action is on cross-border procurement.

2. The call sets as specific target to develop guidelines about the peculiarities of procuring in other EU countries. It is very important to clarify the expectations of COSME regarding the type of contents, length and language of these guidelines, in order to have an objective estimation of the work needed. In our experience, the lack of clear delimitation of this type of work in advance could result in not satisfactory work. Could it be possible for COSME to clarify?

A: It is up to the consortium to propose the number and the characteristics of such guides, depending on the needs of their target group and specificities of the countries covered by the consortium. Possible examples, for illustration purposes only, could be: specificities linked to selection and award criteria; centralised purchasing bodies, the use of framework agreements, the use of e-procurement, etc. In terms of language, they should be available at least in the languages of the countries covered by the consortium.

C. Indicative Timetable

1. Which is the submission deadline?

A: The deadline for application is Thursday, 28/07/2016 – 17h00 Brussels time.

D. Budget available

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

A: EASME expects to fund 4 (four) projects, as stated in Section 4, on page 6 of the call text.

E. Admissibility Requirements

12. 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.

13. Is there any page limit for the project proposal?

A: There is no page limit. However, the proposal should be as concise as possible.

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 each case whether applicants comply with the eligibility requirements.
14. Based on the Call for Proposals, Eligible Consortia are composed of “minimum 3 legal entities from 3 Member States and countries participating in the COSME programme under Article 6 of the COSME Regulation”. Is a consortium composed of 3 legal entities from 3 Member States eligible, without any partners from countries participating to COSME programme?

A: Yes, it is.

15. Our Foundation is run by an EEN office; can it submit this application form?

A: yes, as long as there is no double funding for the activities proposed under the EEN agreement and this call.

16. May the partner in this consortium be a local government? Are local governments included in point 6.1?

A: Please note that the entities participating must have as core activity business support and/or the promotion of SME participation in public procurement. Any entity, including the local governments should fulfil this condition.

17. I am still uncertain whether, for example, an organization from Asia (South Korea) would be eligible to join a consortium that is preparing a project proposal for this call.

A: An organisation from Asia is not eligible to receive funding under COSME. Should you decide to include, in addition to the activities promoting SME participation in public procurement across border among the countries of the consortium, activities for the same objective between the EU and South Korea, please note that the costs incurred by the partner organisation in that country will not be considered eligible under this call.

18. My company intends to submit a proposal for the call, and I have a query regarding the profiles of potential partners. In particular, I'd like to know whether Central Purchasing Bodies and SME Associations could form part of the consortium.

A: Without prejudice to the screening of the eligibility criteria which will be carried out during the evaluation phase, these types of organisations are, in principle, eligible.

19. First of all, I have the following situation (hypothetically): I have SMEs in 5 EU Member State, - all of them are legal entities with relevant core activity - may I form a consortium with them? or they have to be separated by owners too? More specifically, I am owner with x% ownership in all the 5 companies I am talking about, may I form a consortium with just them? Do I need to have other companies too in my consortium or these are enough? Is it an advantage or not, if I have in the consortium public entities supporting/organizing public procurement? Second, should I organize minimum 1 event in each country? May I organize more than 1 in each country, or 1 in each and more in one country?

A: Without prejudice to the screening of the eligibility criteria which will be carried out during the evaluation phase, SMEs could be eligible. The number and location of events will be evaluated by an evaluation committee, once the evaluation committee has determined that the eligibility and selection criteria are fulfilled.
20. We would like to make a formal enquiry regarding the future participation of United Kingdom in European projects. Our organization is involved in European projects, and we need to clarify what will be the eligible status of English organizations in next call for proposals. More specifically, we are building a consortium with an English partner for the Call 'Improving SME’s access to public procurement' and we are wondering if there will be changes in the country criteria due to the latest developments. We would be very grateful if you could give us an answer as soon as possible in order to reorganize our project consortium with enough time to submit the proposal.

A: At the time of the deadline for submission of proposals, the UK is a member of the European Union and as such entities from this country are eligible to participate in the call. At this stage, it is impossible to predict how – and when - the eligibility status of entities based in the United Kingdom will be affected by negotiations about the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom.

21. X is drafting a proposal, together with several Associations of Chambers of Commerce and other business counselling agencies. We would like to include in our partnership a public university for the implementation of 2 specific activities of our project. Is it possible? Because the universities are not listed in the eligible applicants (pag. 6 of the Call).

A: Without prejudice to the screening of the eligibility criteria which will be carried out during the evaluation phase, these types of organisations can be eligible.

22. We are drafting a project proposal and have a question regarding the subcontracting.

23. One of the partners is expected to be a chamber but who would like to subcontract separate legal entity specialised in education for implementing some of the activities. This legal entity is however established and owned by the same chamber but they operate as separate entities. Is this acceptable?

A: No, a subcontracting solution is not acceptable in this context.

24. My company is highly interested in joining a consortium for this call. So, I would like to know if there is any portal for finding consortiums specifically for this call.

A: There is no specific portal for this purpose. However, for partner search for EU project applications you can always contact your local Enterprise Europe Network branch: http://een.ec.europa.eu/

25. What does the "maximum reimbursmement rate of 75%" mean? Which are the conditions/criteria for reaching that maximum percentage?
A: The co-financing rate for this call for proposal has been set for a maximum of 75%. However, the proposal doesn't necessarily need to reach this co-financing rate.

26. What do you mean by “third party”? One of the consortium member or another partner out of the consortium? (pg. 12 call proposal A.2.)

A: This term refers to an organisation not part of the proposed consortium.

27. This funding is considered as a "de minimis" cost or not? If it is, from the eligible costs listed in the call for Proposal, which one is de minimis and which one is not? Does my, or the other legal entities’ -who are part of the consortium- turnover considered as a maximum limit of the sum of the financing aid we are allowed to ask for? Or we can ask for the maximum amount 750.000 Euro if we provide the relevant proof of financial capacity?

A: The rules of European financial regulations for grants apply to this action. Please read carefully the guide for applicants and call text for all related requirements. Moreover, it is estimated that proposals requesting a contribution from the EU of EUR 250.000 would allow the objectives of this call for proposals to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts. EASME expects to fund 4 proposals (see pg 6 in the call for proposals).

28. Please confirm that our project idea is eligible or not.

A: EASME cannot comment on project ideas and proposals in the framework of FAQs for calls for proposals.

29. Should every member of the consortium have their own budget for organizing the event held in their country or the leader of the consortium should support all the costs?

A: Each member of the consortium should prepare their budget based on their planned contribution to the project implementation.

G. Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion from participation:
No questions.

Exclusion from award:
No questions.

Supporting documents
30. 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

31. Are we supposed to submit the CVs and the Activity Report with the proposal?

A: Yes you are supposed to submit the CVs and the list of previous projects but not the activity reports at this stage.

32. What does “activity reports” are exactly and where should we attach them? As an appendix in the Description of Action document?

A: By "Activity reports" we mean recent reports about the activity of the organisation. They can be added as appendix to the Part B template.

33. In the paragraph "8.2 Operational capacity" the list of previous projects in the past three years, is mentioned twice (Bullet point 1 and bullet point 4), or are they referring to two different things and it was me that I interpreted it wrong?

Applicants must have the professional competencies as well as appropriate qualifications necessary to complete the proposed action. In this respect, applicants have to submit the following supporting documents:

Curriculum vitae (CV), preferably in European CV format http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu or description of the profile of the main persons primarily responsible for managing and implementing the different activities of the action. The CV should be accompanied by a list of relevant projects managed in the last three years;

- a summary table indicating the persons that will make up the core team responsible for the project with their qualifications and competences. A template is included in the application forms;

- the organisation’s’ activity report for the previous year or any other similar document;

- a list of previous projects and activities performed carried out in the last three years and connected to the policy field of the call or to the actions to be carried out;

A: In the first bullet point we refer to the relevant project managed by each person while in the fourth bullet point we refer to the relevant projects managed by the organisation.

34. Where should we upload the CVs, the declaration of honour and the organisation activity report? Should we include these documents as annexes to the Part B template? We are asking because there is no space to upload anything inside the participants’ portal.

A: Yes, you can upload them as appendix to the Part B template.
35. We are preparing a proposal for the call COS-APP-2016-2-05 (deadline: 28/07/2016) and on the template of the technical annex (partb_technical_annex_1_doa_app_2), specifically on table A.1.1 List of Participants, there is a column titled "Link to activity reports". The question is what this refer to? What do you expect to be added here?

A: You can add links to Activity report published online.

36. Are we supposed to submit the CVs and the Activity Report with the proposal?

A: Yes you are supposed to submit the CVs and the list of previous projects but not the activity reports at this stage.

37. Could you please clarify if full europass are mandatory to be sumbitted as appendix of part B? Or in contrast is enough to fill the field “Summary of relevant skills and experience” within section B.2.2 Operational/Technical Capacity: Skills, expertise and role of key staff involved in the project :

A: Yes, it is mandatory to submit the europass CVs as appendix of part B.

38. In the "PartB_Technical_Annex_1_DOA_APP" under the Point "B.2.1 Management structure and procedures" the following task is described: "Provide prove that the consortium coordinating organisation has at least 5 years of experience in the areas described in the section 2.3 of the call text". However, we were not able to find any document which included the chapter stated above. We assume that we have to describe our experience and track record with the tasks described in the section 2.3. Is this assumption correct?

A: The operational capacity for the tasks described in the call need to presented by all applicants. Hence, the respective sections in the technical proposal template have to be completed accordingly, i.e. "B.2.1 Management structure and procedures" (skills and expertise of key staff) and "Annex" (Description of previous projects and activities).

I. Award criteria

No questions.

J. Legal commitments

1. Can you please tell me where is it possible to find the Model grant agreement mentioned in the Call and in the templates for further details on Programme rules?

A: The model grant agreement is available under "topic condition and documents" for the call on the participants portal.

K. Financial provisions

General Principles:

L. Publicity

No questions.
M. Data protection

No questions.

N. Submission of proposals

Electronic submission of proposals:

1. How shall proposals be submitted?

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

   https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/cosme/calls/cos-app-2016-2-05.html#c,topics=callIdentifier/t/COS-APP-2016-2-05/1/1/1/default-group&callStatus/t/Forthcoming/1/1/0/default-group&callStatus/t/Open/1/1/0/default-group&callStatus/t/Closed/1/1/0/default-group&+identifier/desc

2. Under section B.3 Work Plan there are two quite similar subsections/tables. The way we see it, Table 1.3 already includes Table 1.6 (Participant No, Role and Effort are the same) (except the Start month – End month) part. Should we fill in both tables (with the same information)?

   A: Yes, the template should be filled in as indicated in the form.

3. There is a problem in the new version of the Excel budget PartB_Technical_Annex_2_detailed_budget_-APP_v2.xls, which I downloaded today 13/7/2016 in the Participation Portal. In the spreadsheet “Budget Co-ordinator (CO)” the Total Direct Personnel Costs (cell K22) is calculated correctly. However in the spreadsheets of the rest of the partners (Budget-Partner2, Budget-Partner3, Budget-Partner4 ... etc), the Total Direct Personnel Costs, does not take into account the “Employee or equivalent” costs. It calculates only the “Natural persons under direct contract” section, thus leaving out the first section of the Personnel costs.

   A: The Excel budget template has been replaced with a corrected version. It is uploaded on the public page for the call: https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cos-app-2016-2-05-improving-smes-access-public-procurement