

# **Prior information notice – call for competition (Notice to be published in the Official Journal, S series)**

## **1. Contracting authority**

European Commission  
Directorate-General for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion  
Unit F1 - ESF and FEAD: Policy and Legislation  
Rue de Spa 3  
B-1049 Brussels/Belgium  
Email: [EMPL-VT-2019-004@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EMPL-VT-2019-004@ec.europa.eu)

## **2. Application procedure**

The objective of this prior information notice – call for competition of interest is to set up a list of pre-selected candidates for the services described below.

Expressions of interest shall be submitted in one of the official languages of the European Union by electronic means only at the following address: [EMPL-VT-2019-004@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EMPL-VT-2019-004@ec.europa.eu).

Inclusion on the list entails no obligation on the part of the contracting authority concerning the conclusion of contracts.

## **3. Information and documents to be provided**

Interested parties shall provide their full contact details and list the specific fields indicated at point 7 that interest them in their expression of interest in carrying out the services described below.

Candidates shall provide a declaration on honour (in Annex) stating that they are not in one of the situations of exclusion and that they fulfil the selection criteria listed at point 11. It is to be duly signed and dated by an authorised representative and to be sent via postal / courier services to the physical address indicated on the top of this page. In case of doubt, they may be requested to provide supporting evidence of non-exclusion. **At any time before concluding a contract, candidates may be asked to provide supporting evidence related to the exclusion and selection criteria or an updated version of their declaration on honour.**

## **4. General description of the procedure**

Interested parties are invited to submit an expression of interest in accordance with the rules set out in this notice.

The contracting authority will draw up a list of pre-selected candidates who meet the criteria set out at point 11.

Where a specific contract relating to the field described at point 7 is to be concluded, the contracting authority will invite all the candidates on the final list to submit a tender. The contracting authority will send these candidates the tender specifications relating to the contract in question.

Where a particular task relating to the field described at point 7 is to be performed by an external expert, the contracting authority will assign experts to the task on the basis of the skills, experience and knowledge necessary and in accordance with the principles of non-discrimination, equal treatment and absence of conflict of interests.

## **5. Protection of personal data**

If processing a tender involves the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, address and CV), this data will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 2018/1725 on the protection of

natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC. Unless indicated otherwise, any personal data will be processed solely for evaluation purposes under the call for tender by the Head of Unit of Unit F4 - Programme Management & Implementation, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Details concerning the processing of personal data are available in the privacy statement at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/data-protection-public-procurement-procedures\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/data-protection-public-procurement-procedures_en).

The tenderer's personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) if the tenderer is in one of the situations mentioned in Article 136 of the Financial Regulation<sup>1</sup>. For more information, see the privacy statement:

[http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm).

## 6. Use of the list resulting from this notice

The list resulting from this notice will be used exclusively for a restricted procurement procedure to carry out the tasks listed under Point 7.

## 7. Full description of the fields covered by the call for expressions of interest

This prior call for competition (hereafter the call) has been drafted in order to pre-select potential candidates for the upcoming contract related to the prolonging of services under the EU-level ESF transnational cooperation platform. More specifically, the selected candidate will be requested to manage the existing ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform (see specifications below) for the remainder of the 2014-2020 programming period.

The future contractor will manage the daily activities and online presence of the Platform, update and modernise it, as appropriate and in collaboration with the contracting authority and the ESF Committee. Activities consist in setting up and/or pursuing existing transnational partnerships, including thematic networks, setting up activities to facilitate the exchange of experiences, capacity building and networking, and working on the capitalisation and dissemination of outcomes of the platform's work between 2014-2020. In addition, the contractor is expected to carry out activities (including capacity building) with a view to prepare the post 2020 framework on transnational cooperation in the context of ESF+.

This contract is the continuation of previous contracts (VC-2015-0531, renewed three times by VC-2016-0439, VC-2017-0366 and VC-2018-0401, ending 15 July 2019) to "Support to the establishment of an 'EU-level platform to facilitate the setting up of transnational partnerships, the exchange of experiences, capacity building and networking, and the capitalisation and dissemination of relevant outcomes'".

The contract will cover a period of **24 months** from the signature date. Its main objectives are:

- To cover transnational cooperation, as per Article 10 of the ESF Regulation<sup>2</sup> until the end of the 2014-2020 programming period.
- To carry out preparatory activities in the field of transnational cooperation for the post 2020 period, in line with the new ESF+ Regulation<sup>3</sup>.

The main purpose of transnational cooperation between Member States under the ESF is to contribute to the quality and effectiveness of employment policies and reforms delivery. This entails the exchange and sharing of information and good practice, and working together towards common

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 (OJ L 193 of 30.07.2018, p.1).

<sup>2</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1304/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006

<sup>3</sup>At the time of the publication of the present Call, the ESF+ proposal (COM(2018) 382 final) is being negotiated.

solutions by bringing together administrations, social partners, NGOs and other organisations active in the field of employment, social inclusion and training. The transnational dimension has an important multiplier effect: it can strengthen the capacities to innovate, modernise and adapt to new social and economic challenges, while improving the quality of governance.

During the 2000-2006 programming period, the EQUAL Community Initiative was the main driver for the delivery of transnational and interregional cooperation under the ESF.

In 2007-2013, the ESF regulation covering the programming period established only the purpose and broader objectives of transnational cooperation (which was mandatory) and each Member State and region could choose the most suitable implementing arrangements. The Commission organised complementary support for promoting exchanges of experience, thematic networking and mutual

For the 2014-2020 period, the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform was set up in 2015 in line with the relevant provisions of the ESF Regulation. Consequently, a Common Framework<sup>4</sup> was created which encompasses the following elements:

- The establishment and running of Thematic Networks for each of the nine common themes proposed by the Commission and endorsed by the ESF Committee. These networks must theoretically include all relevant Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, national/regional networks involved in transnational cooperation, social partners and NGOs. However, participation has been variable.
- The launch of Coordinated Calls (two cycles for the whole programming period) to create synergies and effective partnerships among Member States around the selected common themes. Coordinated calls were launched in 2016 and 2018. Only six out of 28 Member States have taken part. Information on coordinated calls is available in the various progress reports drafted under previous contracts and will be made available to the successful tenderer.
- The development of an EU-level partner-search database, meant as the basis for developing partnerships.

Experience has also shown that transnational cooperation is most effective when:

- A clear work plan is established for each theme or thematic network, with a limited number of deliverables and core projects;
- Themes are chosen in agreement between Member States, bearing in mind each member's interest and planned reforms at national level;
- Stakeholders (incl. social partners, civil society organisations, service users) are involved early in the process;
- Member States and ESF Managing authorities play an active steering role in defining and running the networks.

The successful candidate will be expected to:

- Take stock of lessons learnt from the previous contracts;
- Make an inventory of all outputs produced during the first years of the Transnational Cooperation Platform;
- Propose a comprehensive strategy, with a focus on quality communications, to valorise said outputs; examine the database and manage its content so it is proofread, understandable and accessible to all potential partners;
- Ensure the follow up of transnational activities, including the thematic networks;
- Ensure the timely closure of transnational activities until the end of 2020;
- Prepare the post 2020 period.

The contractor will be expected to demonstrate a solid knowledge of ESF planning and implementation, and to undertake active outreach activities (e.g. targeted mailing lists, web or physical meetings with key ESF stakeholders especially managing authorities at national and regional level, surveys, etc.).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/content/about-esf-transnational-cooperation>

The awarded tenderer will receive the following documents from the contracting authority:

- All necessary background documents and access codes to the ESF transnationality website, library and fora.
- Inception, interim and final reports submitted under contracts VC-2015-0531, VC-2016-0439, VC-2017-0366 and VC-2018-0401
- Contact details of ESF Managing authorities, thematic experts and other stakeholders (subject to their prior authorisation and GDPR permitting)
- Other documents as relevant

***- Intermediate outputs and deliverable***

Intermediate outputs and deliverables will include inception and interim reports. These reports shall be drafted in a clear and understandable language, include links to all activities carried out under the contract, and contain both a qualitative and quantitative assessment of said activities. Other outputs may include thematic papers and videos. The precise list of intermediate outputs and deliverables will be specified in the tender specifications. Additional details concerning the intermediate outputs and deliverables will be provided within the Technical Specifications.

***- Final output and deliverable***

The awarded tenderer shall deliver a final report to the contracting authority detailing activities and publications carried out under the contract. Given that this contract will pave the way for transnational cooperation post 2020, the tenderer shall include, in the final reports, some recommendations in this regard. The precise list of final output and deliverables will be specified in the Tender Specifications.

***- Details on deliverables***

Deliverables shall be drafted in English. Priority will be given to electronic formats (Word and or PDF). The need for printed publications shall be carefully considered on a case by case basis. Additional details concerning the required deliverables will be provided within the Technical Specifications.

***- Language requirements for the future outputs:*** any paper, outline, newsletter, article, report, shall be proofread carefully by the contractor before being submitted to the contracting authority. A solid quality management process shall be implemented. The contracting authority shall be entitled to refuse a product that does not meet its quality standards. If no agreement is reached, the contracting authority reserves the right to suspend payments accordingly and proportionally.

Additional requirement concerning the graphic, content and structure requirements of the deliverables will be provided within the Technical Specifications.

The contracting authority reserves the right to activate the clause on price reduction, should quality standards not be met.

Progress meetings in the premises of the Contracting Authority in Brussels and phone calls shall take place as often as needed.

**8. Place of delivery**

Brussels, Belgium

**9. Expiry date of the list resulting from this call for competition**

The list resulting from this notice is valid for one year from dispatch date of this notice.

**10. Exclusion criteria**

The objective of the exclusion criteria is to assess whether the tenderer is in any of the exclusion situations listed in Article 136(1) of the Financial Regulation. As evidence of non-exclusion each

tenderer needs to submit with its tender a Declaration on Honour in the model available in Annex. The declaration must be signed by an authorised representative of the entity providing the declaration.

The initial verification of non-exclusion of tenderers will be done on the basis of the submitted declarations and consultation of the [European Union's Early Detection and Exclusion System](#). The documents mentioned as supporting evidence in the Declaration on Honour need to be provided whenever requested and where this is necessary to ensure the proper conduct of the procedure within a deadline given by the Contracting authority<sup>5</sup>.

Please note that a request for evidence in no way implies that the tenderer has been successful.

## 11. Selection criteria

### a) Legal and regulatory capacity

Tenderers must prove that they have legal capacity to perform the contract and the regulatory capacity to pursue the professional activity necessary to carry out the work subject to this call for tenders.

The legal and regulatory capacity shall be proven by the evidence listed below:

- Proof of enrolment in a relevant trade or professional register
- Proof of authorisation that the tenderer is authorised to perform the contract in its country of establishment
- Proof that the tenderer is a member of a specific professional organisation

### b) Criteria relating to financial and economic capacity

- Criterion: Annual turnover of the last two financial years above € 2 500 000 threshold
- Evidence: The following evidence(s) shall be provided upon the request of the contracting authority by the selected candidates:
  - Copy of the profit & loss account and balance sheet for the last two years for which accounts have been closed
  - Appropriate statements from banks
  - If applicable, evidence of professional risk indemnity insurance

If, for some exceptional reason which the Contracting Authority considers justified, a tenderer is unable to provide one or other of the above documents, he or she may prove his or her economic and financial capacity by any other document which the Contracting Authority considers appropriate. In any case, the Contracting Authority must at least be notified of the exceptional

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<sup>5</sup> The obligation to provide the supporting evidence will be waived in the following situations:

- if the same documents have already been provided in a previous award procedure of the European Commission, have been issued no more than one year before the date of their request by the *Contracting authority* and are still valid at that date;
- if such evidence can be accessed by the *Contracting Authority* on a national database free of charge, in which case the economic operator shall provide *the Contracting authority* with the internet address of the database and, if needed, the necessary identification data to retrieve the document;
- if there is a material impossibility to provide such evidence.

reason and its justification in the tender. The Commission reserves the right to request any other document enabling it to verify the tenderer's economic and financial capacity.

**c) Criteria relating to technical and professional capacity**

• **Criteria relating to tenderers**

Tenderers (in case of a joint tender the combined capacity of all tenderers and identified subcontractors) must comply with the following criteria:

- The tenderer must prove experience in and knowledge of Structural and Investment Funds, preferably the European Social Fund, in at least 4 projects delivered in this field in the last three years with a minimum value for each project of € 450 000. Previous experience in implementing other European funds, such as Erasmus+, Horizon2020, Interreg and the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programmes, is an asset.
- The tenderer must prove experience of working in English and French with at least five projects delivered in the last three years showing the necessary language coverage.
- The tenderer must prove their capacity to draft reports in English.
- The tenderer must prove experience of working in at least five EU countries with at least two projects delivered in the last three years, the combination of which must show the necessary coverage.
- The tenderer must prove experience in survey techniques, data collection, statistical analyses, drafting reports and recommendations, and organising events.

• **Criteria relating to the team delivering the service**

The team delivering the service shall include, as a minimum, the following profiles:

**Team leader**

The Tenderer will designate in its offer a senior manager (team leader), who will devote at least 60% of his/her time to this contract and deal directly with the Commission. In addition to the operational contacts with Commission services, the team leader will coordinate the execution of services, which are the subject of the contract, and will have to make sure that these are delivered within the specified deadlines and high level quality standards. The team leader will also have to ensure that all work of administrative nature is completed in accordance with contractual provisions. The team leader will make sure that reports, supporting documents to invoices and any other administrative/operational documents are drafted and presented in a way that enables easy assessment by Commission services.

The Commission requires the following minimum qualifications for the team leader (Level I expert):

**Qualifications and skills**

- University degree in political sciences, social sciences, European affairs, European law, public affairs, economics or equivalent.
- Ten years' experience in managing EU programmes and/or grants. The team leader will need to provide evidence that she/he managed a team at least in the framework of two projects in the last 4 years, providing services to the EU under a contract, or managed a team of a beneficiary that received an EU grant.

- Fluency in English and two other EU languages. Other languages are an asset.

#### Specific professional experience

- Experience in implementing EU-funded projects including projects with a transnational, interregional, and/or cross-border component;
- Experience managing multicultural/international teams
- Experience working with EU Structural and Investment Funds, in particular the European Social Fund. Experience in an ESF managing authority is an asset.
- Experience in planning and running events;
- Proven experience in drafting report and studies.

#### Permanent staff

Tenderers shall also propose permanent staff members that will constitute the **core team** performing daily activities of the Support team and coordinating the activities of non-permanent experts. The core team will therefore work on a permanent basis in the project office provided by the contractor.

The core team will have both the technical expertise required for the day-to-day delivery of services (website, databases, etc.) and the overall thematic expertise in the field of social and employment policies, as well as European funding and the European Social Fund. They will be able to set up, animate and gather content for meetings. They will actively contribute to the dynamism of the platform, for instance by carrying out outreach actions. Staff members are expected to provide input for meetings (agenda, preparatory and concept notes, guiding questions, workshop content, speakers' suggestions, etc.), and draft minutes and reports. Logistical support shall also be provided in due time.

Good knowledge of issues related to EU cohesion policy and more specifically experience in ESF-funded actions and more broadly in the policy areas of activity of the ESF, transnational cooperation, local development issues and experience in relevant programmes and initiatives such as EQUAL, will be essential.

An up-to-date knowledge of information technologies is required.

Previous experience working in a multicultural environment for the majority (between 70 to 80%) of team members is also required.

#### Core team members working with policy issues (Level II or III experts):

##### Qualifications and skills

The future contractor shall ensure that the overall expertise of the core team members working with policy issues covers the **ESF-related Investment Priorities** as per REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 known as the Common Provisions Regulation. The overall expertise of the core team shall also cover the list of Common Themes endorsed by the ESF Committee and both mainstreamed themes (gender and social innovation).

The contractor is free to decide how many experts to foresee, provided the above knowledge is covered by the team as a whole.

- University degree in political sciences, European affairs, European law, public affairs, economics or equivalent.
- All team members shall be fluent in English.
- Fluency in the other two working languages of the EU (DE and FR) within the team as a whole
- Fluency in four other EU official languages.

### Specific professional experience

- At least ten or five years' experience (depending on category being II or III) working with EU projects, in particular within the framework of the Structural and Investment Funds, and notably the ESF. Prior work experience in a managing authority, implementing body or beneficiary is an asset.
- Either four or two years relevant experience (depending on category being II or III) with networking projects, within the framework of the Structural and Investment Funds, notably the ESF.
- Experience in working for organisations, at regional, national or European level, dealing with employment and social inclusion policies.
- Strong organisational skills, attention to detail, written and presentation skills.

### **Technical skills of the core team as a whole**

The core team as a whole must be able to offer professional skills allowing it to deal with the following aspects of the products and services to be provided (non-exhaustive list): website creation and management, including knowledge of the main tools and software used in this field, media relations, organisation of events, analysis and summary, experience in the production and manufacturing of printed information material, including experience in graphic design and layout. The Tenderer will also ensure that the necessary editing and journalistic skills are available.

The tenderer may decide to propose category IV experts to deal with some of the more technical skills.

### **Non-permanent staff**

In addition to the core team described above, the tenderer can hire non-permanent staff and thematic experts to help with specific projects. Experts will be selected on the basis of their knowledge and academic background on a given topic. External experts, unless specifically contracted to do so, shall not undertake tasks of a logistical nature.

- **Evidence**

The following evidences shall be provided to fulfil the above criteria:

- List of relevant services provided in the past three years, with sums, dates and recipients, public or private. The most important services shall be accompanied by certificates of satisfactory execution, specifying that they have been carried out in a professional manner and have been fully completed;
- The educational and professional qualifications of the persons who will provide the service for this tender (CVs) including the management staff. Each CV provided shall indicate the intended function in the delivery of the service.

## **12. Conditions of remuneration and reimbursement of experts**

Experts shall be remunerated at a fixed price for the day(s) they worked. The travel and subsistence expenses will be reimbursed under the conditions and ceilings set out in the contract; the contract template will be provided to the future contractor by the contracting authority. The fixed price (remuneration) for the work of the experts and the ceilings for the travel and subsistence expenses will be disclosed in the Technical Specifications.

## **13. Date of dispatch of notice**



06/05/2019

**14. Date of receipt by the Publications Office**