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(Announcements)

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

CALL FOR PROPOSALS — EACEA/04/2017

under the Erasmus+ Programme

KA 2 — Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices

Sector Skills Alliances

(2017/C 26/06)

1. Objectives and description

Sector Skills Alliances aim at tackling skills gaps with regard to one or more occupational profiles in a specific sector. They do so by identifying existing or emerging sector specific labour market needs (demand side), and by enhancing the responsiveness of initial and continuing VET systems, at all levels, to the labour market needs (supply side). Drawing on evidence regarding skills needs, Sector Skills Alliances support the design and delivery of transnational vocational training content, as well as teaching and training methodologies for European professional core profiles.

Sector Skills Alliances for strategic sectoral cooperation on skills identify and develop concrete actions to match demand and supply of skills to support the overall sector specific growth strategy.

Projects can achieve these objectives by applying to one of the following 'Lots':

Lot 1 — Sector Skills Alliances for skills needs identification

Aimed at identifying and providing detailed evidence on skills needs, and gaps in a given specific economic sector. This would make it possible to address such gaps through training provision, whether it be VET-based or any other education and training sector.

The identification and definition of future skills needs should be supported by research on labour market needs in the sector. The skills needs should be identified for the relevant occupation profiles of the sector, drawing on, where available, the classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO). Where appropriate, they should make use on skills intelligence gathered by 'European Sector Skills Councils' and already existing sector skills studies, including results of previous Sector Skills Alliances. The EU Skills Panorama provides a wealth of skills intelligence, analyses and studies on professions (occupations) and sectors: http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en

Collaboration between public and private actors on the labour market (such as labour ministries, social partners, training and education providers, labour market intelligence entities, companies including SME's, chambers of commerce, public and private employment services and national statistics offices) should be organised to identify and anticipate persistent skills shortages and mismatches at sectoral level for a set of occupational profiles. It is important to maximise synergies with other sectoral initiatives.

Lot 2 — Sector Skills Alliances for design and delivery of VET

Aimed at responding to identified skills gaps and needs in a specific economic sector, by developing curricula, as well as teaching and training delivery methodologies. The curricula and training methodologies and should include a strong work-based learning component, and support trans-national learner mobility.

Partners will have to interpret existing research evidence on profession-specific skills needs when implementing vocational education and training or designing qualification standards based on occupational profiles, drawing, where available on ESCO. Where appropriate, they should base themselves on skills intelligence gathered by 'European Sector Skills Councils' and already existing sector skills studies, including results of previous Sector Skills Alliances. The EU Skills Panorama provides a wealth of skills intelligence, analyses and studies on professions (occupations) and sectors: http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en

The design and delivery of vocational curricula should follow the following key principles: i) quality assurance, including effective learner tracking systems and feedback loops, ii) curricula and qualifications that are learning outcome oriented, iii) provision which is modular in all its phases, iv) include significant work-based learning periods, v) embeds international experience (learner as well as teacher and trainer mobility).

The Alliance partners should demonstrate in the proposal what measures they will take in the countries and in the sector covered for the formal recognition of the new or adapted vocational curricula and qualifications and how they will pursue the project deliverables after EU funding has ended. Sector Skills Alliances are expected to carry out the proposed activities in a way that maximises the impact on one, or several related, occupations in a given sector.

Lot 3 — Sector Skills Alliances for implementing a new strategic approach ('Blueprint') to sectoral cooperation on skills

The Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills is one of the ten actions in the New Skills Agenda for Europe [1]. It aims to improve skills intelligence and to provide a clear strategy and instruments to address skills shortages in specific economic sectors. It will be piloted in six sectors: automotive, defence, maritime technology, space geo information, textile-clothing-leather-footwear and tourism.

The Alliances under Lot 3 will support its implementation by developing sectoral skills strategies. A sectoral strategy has to lead to systemic and structural impact on reducing skills shortages as well as ensuring appropriate quality and levels of skills to support growth, innovation and competitiveness in the sector. It must include a clear set of activities, milestones and well-defined outputs with the goal to match demand and supply of skills to support the overall sector specific growth strategy.

The sectoral skills strategy will contribute to increase the talent pool and support the adaptation of the workforce to the requirements of industrial and market developments in the sector, thus contributing to its long-term competitiveness. Particular attention will be paid to new technological developments (e.g. digital and key enabling technologies).

The objectives of Lot 1 (forecasting skills demand) and Lot 2 (responding to identified skills needs through design and delivery of VET) have to be included in the sectoral skills strategy.

The partners are required to set up an EU level Alliance for a sector for cooperation on skills and the implementation of concrete demand-driven actions. The Alliance will be industry-led and include other relevant stakeholders, such as education and training providers, social partners, clusters and networks, research institutes, statistical bodies, employment services, and qualification authorities (whenever possible).

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[1] http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=8848

2. **Eligibility criteria**

Lot 1:

The Sector Skills Alliance must cover at least 12 Programme Countries and include at least 2 organisations, out of which at least 1 represents the industry and at least 1 represents education and training providers.

Eligible participating organisations are:

— European and/or national social partners;

— labour ministries or associated bodies (agencies or councils);

— public or private employment services;

— labour market research institutes, national statistics offices;

— public or private, small, medium or large enterprises (including social enterprises);

— economic development agencies;

— chambers of commerce, of industry or of labour;

— sectoral or professional associations of employers or employees; chambers of skilled crafts;

— European or national sectoral umbrella organisations;

— training or education providers at local, regional or national level;

— sector-based research institutes;

— bodies providing career guidance, professional counselling and information services;

— public authorities responsible for education and training at regional or national level.

Lot 2:

The Sector Skills Alliance must cover at least 4 Programme Countries and include at least 8 organisations, out of which at least 3 are enterprises, industry or sector representatives (e.g. chambers or trade associations), and at least 3 are education and training providers.

Eligible participating organisations are:

— public or private enterprises (including social enterprises) in particular those with an own training department, those providing apprenticeships, and those providing shared training (collaborative training);

— EU or national organisations representing industry, small and medium-sized enterprises, relevant sectoral organisations;

— public or private VET providers, including inter-company training centres and higher education institutions providing VET;

— networks of VET providers and European or national organisations representing them;

— Education and Training authorities at regional or national level, and Ministries;

— organisations or networks – at EU or national level – representing social partners, industry, sectoral organisations, professions and education and training stakeholders, including youth organisations;

— chambers of commerce, of industry, of skilled crafts or of labour, and other intermediary bodies;

— sector skills councils;

— economic development agencies, statistical bodies and research institutes;

— cultural and/or creative bodies;

— bodies providing career guidance, professional counselling, information services and employment services;

— accreditation, certification, recognition or qualification bodies (bodies with 'regulatory function').

Lot 3:

The Sector Skills Alliance must cover at least 6 Programme Countries and include at least 12 organisations, out of which at least 5 are enterprises, industry or sector representatives (e.g. chambers or trade associations), and at least 5 are education and training providers.

Eligible participating organisations are:

— public or private enterprises active in the selected pilot sectors especially those with an own training department, those providing apprenticeships, and those providing shared training (collaborative training);

— EU or national organisations representing industry, small and medium-sized enterprises, relevant sectoral organisations;

— public or private education or training providers, including training centres and higher education institutions (and military academies of the defence sector);

— networks of education or training providers and European or national organisations representing them;

— authorities responsible for education and training or employment, at regional or national level, and related Ministries;

— organisations or networks – at EU or national level – representing social partners, industry, sectoral organisations, professions and education and training stakeholders, including youth organisations;

— chambers of commerce, of industry, of labour and other relevant sectoral intermediary bodies;

— sector skills councils;

— economic development agencies, statistical bodies and research institutes;

— bodies providing career guidance, professional counselling, information services and employment services;

— accreditation, certification, recognition or qualification bodies (bodies with 'regulatory function');

— bodies representing relevant authorities at regional and national level.

Eligible countries are:

The Erasmus+ Programme Countries:

— the 28 Member States of the European Union,

— Non EU Programme countries: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Turkey.

3. Eligible activities

The proposal shall cover a coherent and comprehensive set of activities and outputs as set out below for each Lot and as relevant for the sector concerned.

For all three Lots, a particular focus must be given to digital skills as they are increasingly important in all job profiles across the entire labour market. This should be done in synergy with the new Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition and efforts to promote skills for key enabling technologies (KETs). In addition, the transition to a circular economy needs to be supported by changes to qualifications and national curricula to meet emerging professional needs for 'green skills'.

Lot 1 — Sector skills alliances for skills needs identification

Defining skills and training provision needs in a given specific economic sector:

— gathering and interpreting evidence of skills needs on the labour market in a given economic sector, including by drawing on the Skills Panorama (e.g. Cedefop skills forecasts, various survey data, analytical highlights) and, where relevant, on the work of European Sector Skills Councils or previous Sector Skills Alliances;

— analysing the trends and challenges that shape the sector and its labour market with focus on drivers of change that may influence skills demand and supply in the sector (e.g. automation, demography);

— based on the above activities, providing a detailed assessment of the current and anticipated skills shortages, gaps and mismatches in the sector (both job specific and soft skills), as well as the need for the review of occupational profiles, indicating the priority in which they should be addressed, on the basis inter alia of their impact on growth and competiveness potential in the sector and on employment (e.g. likely job loss, hard-to-fill vacancies);

— analysing the potential impact of such skills needs on growth and employment in the sector;

— analysing major trends affecting closely interrelated sectors, to capture potential spill-over effects;

— identifying needs in terms of training provision, drawing on, where available, the occupational profiles of the classification of ESCO;

— delivering all relevant EU and/or country level qualitative evidence and quantitative data on skills, employment and economic performance of the sector in an electronic form, in linked open data format, so that it can feed into the Skills Panorama (http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en).

Lot 2 — Sector skills alliances for design and delivery of VET

Designing trans-national sector-wide vocational curricula:

— on the basis of identified skills needs for specific occupation profiles in a given economic sector, identify and design VET curricula or qualification standards (in line with EQF and informed by ESCO), to respond to those needs;

— translating skill needs into innovative, learning outcome-oriented modular VET programmes and/or qualifications (applying ECVET for designing qualifications composed of units of learning outcomes), to allow for transparency and comparability, taking also into account needs of validation of prior learning (e.g. non-formal or informal);

— applying quality management to the new training content either by applying the quality assurance principles of EQAVET or by using already existing quality assurance systems which, however, should be in line with EQAVET;

— integrating periods of work-based learning into the new training content, including opportunities to apply knowledge in practical 'real life' workplace situations, and embedding trans-national learning experience whenever possible;

— designing VET provision focusing both on job specific skills as well as on key competences, soft skills, and STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), while providing effective opportunities to acquire or develop those competences, particularly in work-related training contexts;

— promoting relevant VET sectoral qualifications (including trans-national joint programmes awarded by more than one VET provider), and support agreement for their recognition by implementing ECVET principles, and referencing qualifications to NQFs and the EQF as well as other relevant European tools and instruments in the sector concerned;

— increasing recognition of qualifications at European and national level within a sector, by promoting and agreeing on sectoral qualifications, facilitating cross-border certification, and building mutual trust, contributing to increased learner and professional mobility in the sector;

— identifying, documenting and promoting successful skills or qualifications related projects and good practices, as well as those fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, including from other sectors or from outside Europe and make detailed proposals to replicate or scale them up, where relevant;

— where relevant, ensure that results of the project are available in open data format so that they could feed into the Skills Panorama and ESCO.

Delivering vocational curricula:

— identifying the most appropriate delivery methodologies for the curricula, using innovative approaches to teaching and learning, as well as a strategic and integrated use of ICTs (e.g. blended learning, simulators, etc.), and open educational resources (e.g. MOOC's, and VOOC's);

— identifying ways to implement innovative VET teaching and learning methods to respond to the needs of specific target groups of learners; and through the provision of work-based learning;

— developing actions to facilitate inter-generational transfer of knowledge within VET;

— describing the ways on how assessment methodologies and procedures can embed all forms of learning, including work-based learning and facilitate the validation of skills and competences acquired prior to training;

— identifying adequate measures to track learners after completing their training in order to provide 'feedback loops'. These tracking and feedback systems can build on information from companies, learners/employees, as well as public information resources and labour market stakeholders;

— proposing the appropriate measures for the formal recognition of the new or adapted vocational curricula and qualifications in participating countries and in the sector(s) covered;

— planning the progressive roll-out of project deliverables leading to systemic impact.

Lot 3 — Sector Skills Alliances for implementing a new strategic approach ('Blueprint') to sectoral cooperation on skills

Sector Skills Alliances under this Lot shall set up sustainable cooperation on skills development between key industry stakeholders in a given sector, education and training providers, and public authorities.

The alliances shall develop a *sectoral skills strategy* to support the objectives of the established growth strategy for the sector. This strategy should be the first key deliverable of the project, identifying concrete actions and indicating clear set of activities, milestones and well-defined outputs, to suggest how to match demand and supply of skills.

The strategy should detail how major trends, such as global, societal, and technological developments in the sector, are likely to affect jobs and skills needs. It should describe the expected timeline and give particular attention to the impact of digital and key enabling technologies.

Alliances in this Lot cover activities of Lot 1 (as appropriate for the sector) and Lot 2. In particular, they have to cover the following activities:

— providing a detailed assessment of the current and anticipated skills shortages, gaps and mismatches in the sector, as well as the need for the review of occupational profiles, indicating the priority in which they should be addressed, on the basis inter alia of their impact on growth and competiveness potential in the sector and on employment (e.g. likely job loss, hard-to-fill vacancies);

— developing a common methodology for assessing the current situation and anticipating future needs as well as monitoring (on a yearly basis) progress and the evolution of the demand and supply of skills based on credible foresight scenarios;

— identifying occupational profiles that need to be revised or created and their corresponding skill needs as well as the required proficiency level, drawing on, where available, the occupational profiles in ESCO and existing competence frameworks; where relevant, the development of sectoral competence frameworks may be considered;

— identifying, describing and indicating priorities for the review or the establishment of new qualifications on the basis of the relevant occupational profiles;

— fostering the development of concrete solutions in VET provision (including higher VET) as well as business-education-research partnerships;

— developing concrete solutions to promote mobility of vocational students, jobseekers and trainees across Europe in the sector, capitalising on the use of existing EU tools (e.g. Erasmus+, EURES, Drop'Pin, European Alliance for Apprenticeships);

— developing actions to promote the attractiveness of the sector as a career choice, in particular among the young, while also aiming for a gender balance in the sector;

— designing an industry-led long term *action plan* for the progressive roll-out of project deliverables after the project has finished. This plan shall be based on sustained partnerships between education and training providers and key industry stakeholders at the appropriate level. It should include the identification of appropriate governance structures, as well as plans for scalability and financial sustainability. It should also ensure the appropriate visibility and wide dissemination of the work of the Alliance, including at EU and national political level and include details on how the roll-out will be implemented at national and/or regional levels with relevant governmental and sectoral authorities;

The *action plan* shall also indicate how EU funding opportunities (e.g. European Structural Funds, European Fund for Strategic Investment, Erasmus+, COSME, sectoral programmes), as well as national and regional funding can support skills strategies., This should take into account national and regional smart specialisation strategies. Models could be developed based on good examples to promote focussed use of such funding, including up-skilling employees;

— delivering all relevant EU and/or country level qualitative evidence and quantitative data according to linked open data format.

4. **Award criteria**

Eligible applications will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Relevance of the project (maximum 25 points - threshold minimum 13 points)

2. Quality of the project design and implementation (maximum 30 points - threshold minimum 16 points)

3. Quality of the project team and the cooperation arrangements (maximum 25 points - threshold minimum 13 points)

4. Impact and dissemination (maximum 20 points - threshold minimum 11 points)

The threshold for proposals to be put forward to the evaluation committee shall be minimum 70 points (out of 100 points in total).

5. **Budget**

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects is estimated at 28 million euros (1 million euros for Lot 1, 3 million euros for Lot 2 and 24 million euros for Lot 3).

For Lot 1 each grant will amount to between 330 000 euros and 500 000 euros. The Agency expects to fund around 3 proposals.

For Lot 2 each grant will amount to between 700 000 euros and 1 000 000 euros. The Agency expects to fund around 4 proposals.

For Lot 3 each grant will amount to maximum 4 000 000 euros. The Agency expects to fund around 6 proposals. Only 1 proposal per pilot sector can be selected.

The Agency reserves the right not to distribute all the funds available.

6. Deadline for submission of applications

Applications must be submitted no later than the **2 May 2017 12:00 noon (Brussels time).**

7. Full details

The guidelines together with the application eform can be found at the following Internet address:

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/sector-skills-alliances-2017_en

Applications must comply with all the terms of the guidelines.

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