

Open Call for Consulting Services

Title:	Support programme for development of Digital Innovation Hubs in the Western Balkans
RCC Department:	Programme Department
Duration:	June – December 2023
Application Deadline:	31 May 2023 by 12:00CET
Reference Number	032-023
Eligible:	Consulting companies/consortia of individual consultants

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

I. BACKGROUND

The Common Regional Market (hereinafter: CRM) Action Plan 2021-2024, endorsed at Sofia Summit of the Berlin Process in November 2020, aims to enable an unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labour, making the region more attractive for investment and trade, while accelerating convergence of the Western Balkans (WB) with the European Union (EU).

The CRM's Regional Innovation Area component aims to support, inter alia, development of innovation infrastructure in the WB, including Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs). The RCC conducted a [mapping of the region's DIHs](#) to identify their needs and propose regional cooperation actions. The mapping revealed that the majority of self-declared DIHs in the region primarily provide basic, supplementary services. As a result, there is a mismatch between the roles of DIHs and their perceived functions. Implementing new technologies in SMEs also proves challenging due to limited knowledge and investment in WB. Stakeholders in the region do not fully understand DIHs, partly because they only offer access to a limited number of resources such as incubation, preparation and networking, instead of acting as one-stop-shops, serving companies within their region to digitalise their business.

The funding landscape for innovation in WB is still developing, with innovation funds currently operating in Serbia and North Macedonia, and a third one recently established in Montenegro. However, these funds offer limited support and focus on domestic projects, making them inadequate for bigger and more ambitious projects. The remaining three economies do not have similar funding instruments in place. SMEs and start-up lack access to

finance to scale operations through instruments such as crowdfunding, venture capital, and angel investors. In addition, there are no efforts to create a pipeline of projects at the regional level that would support the evolution of DIHs. Finally, DIHs would benefit from a better-defined and structured legal form to increase the odds of broader access to funding.

II. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Objectives of the assignment

The purpose of the assignment is to: (1) identify existing or upcoming funding opportunities and capacity-building schemes to support the growth of DIHs in the region and (2) build a pipeline of project concepts that would be suitable for such opportunities.

III. SCOPE OF WORK

Specific Tasks

More specific tasks are to:

- Compile a comprehensive list of existing EU and other funding and capacity-building opportunities, such as grants, investment and mentorship programmes suitable for DIHs in the region. This could include, but should not be limited to, Horizon Europe WIDERA Work Programme (e.x. Hop on Facility, Excellence Hubs, etc.) and similar programmes accessible to WB or those that will be accessible shortly;
- Build a pipeline of project concepts that fit within the parameters of the funding and/or capacity-building opportunities and match DIHs' strengths and areas of expertise. Project concepts should aim to ensure the regional scope with at least two DIHs from two WB economies included but preferably more;
- Assist selected DIHs to understand the benefits of cascade funding (Financial Support for Third Parties - FSTP) and other types of available opportunities (e.x. capacity building, networking, etc.) for the development of digital innovation;
- Find suitable partners from the EU that would be interested to join forces with WB DIHs on specific project proposals based on their strengths and areas of expertise;
- Submit a set of recommendations for new regional initiatives to encourage development of DIHs in WB by leveraging lessons learned from other parts of Europe.

Methodology

The consultants are expected to suggest the most suitable methodology for successful completion of the assignment. Note that a clear methodological overview featuring a broad list of potential partners from the EU and a broad list of EU and other funding and capacity-building opportunities should be an integral part of the concept note.

IV. LOGISTICS AND TIMING

Timeline

The engagement is expected to start in June 2023 and end in December 2023.

Lines of Communication

- The task will be implemented in close consultation with the RCC Secretariat.
- The contracted bidder will report to the Senior Expert on Human Capital Development and the Expert on Human Capital Development.
- As appropriate, meetings with RCC experts will be organised to agree on expectations and deliverables.

V. REQUIRED OUTPUTS/REPORTING

	Deliverables	Due date
1.	Work Plan agreed with the RCC	1 st half of June 2023
2.	A comprehensive list of EU and other funding and capacity-building opportunities prepared and suitable matching partners identified.	End of June 2023
3.	At least five project concept proposals prepared with selected DIHs aiming to exploit the identified opportunities.	11 th of December 2023
5.	A set of recommendations for new regional initiatives to encourage development of the region's DIHs submitted.	11 th of December 2023

VI. REQUIREMENTS

Expert Qualifications:

Education:	Degree in sciences, engineering, economics, business, or other fields directly related to the assignment. Master's or PhD degree is an advantage.
Experience:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Minimum of seven and five years of relevant experience in similar consultancies for a team leader and team members respectively;▪ Experience in working with WB stakeholders and/or EU institutions in the field of innovation and research is considered an advantage;▪ At least three similar (in scope and complexity) projects completed in the last five years, particularly in the WB;▪ Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualise and write concisely and clearly;▪ Demonstrable experience in writing and reporting on similar assignments (samples of work to be provided);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proven communication and presentation skills and ability to work in an environment requiring liaison and collaboration with multiple actors including government representatives, businesses, civil society institutions, donors and other stakeholders.
Language requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fluency in written and spoken English, as the official language of the RCC; ▪ Knowledge of other RCC languages is desirable.
Other:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N.A.

Core Values

- Demonstrates integrity and fairness by modelling RCC values and ethical standards;
- He/she is independent and free from conflicts of interest in the responsibilities defined by the Terms of Reference;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability.

Core Competencies

- Demonstrates professional competence to meet responsibilities and post requirements and is conscientious and efficient in meeting commitments, observing deadlines and achieving results;
- Result-oriented; plans and produces quality results to meet the set goals, generates innovative and practical solutions to challenging situations;
- Communication: Excellent communication skills, including the ability to convey complex concepts and recommendations clearly;
- Team work: Ability to interact, establish and maintain effective working relations in a culturally diverse team;
- Ability to establish and maintain productive partnerships with regional and national partners and stakeholders.

Quality Control:

The experts should ensure an internal quality control during the implementing and reporting phase of the assignment. The quality control should ensure that the draft reports and deliverables comply with the above requirements and meet adequate quality standards before sending them to stakeholders for comments. The quality control should ensure consistency and coherence between findings, conclusions and recommendations. It should also ensure that findings reported are duly substantiated and that conclusions are supported by relevant judgment criteria.

The views expressed in the report will be those of the contractor and will not necessarily reflect those of the Regional Cooperation Council. Therefore, a standard disclaimer reflecting this will be included in the reports. In this regard, the expert may or may not accept comments and/or proposals for changes received during the above consultation process. However, when comments/proposals for changes are not agreed by the expert, he/she should clearly explain the reasons for his/her final decision in a comments table.

RCC employees and partners participating in any programme or activity conducted or funded by RCC are prohibited from discriminating based on race, religion, political beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, marital status and national origin.

VII. APPLICATION RULES

Technical Offer:

The technical offer needs to contain the following:

For the companies and consortia of experts

- Company profile including a brief description (up to 2 pages) of the company. In case of a bidding consortium, the team leader should submit the profile of the consortium;
- Copy of Company's Registration Certificate (in case of consulting companies);
- In case of bidding consortia of individual consultants participating in this Call, they must indicate the members and show how the work is divided between them. Specifically, all members must name the team leader and authorise this member to represent the consortium and receive payments on behalf of the other members. A corresponding written authorised power of attorney must be attached to the bid;
- Financial records - company's balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement for the past 2 years (only in case of bidding of consulting companies);
- CVs of experts, outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in the Terms of References, along with contact details of referees;
- An outline work programme of a maximum of 5 pages;
- List of references for relevant activities implemented over the past years demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- Application Submission Form (Annex I);
- Signed Statements of Availability (Annex III).

Financial offer (Annex II)

The financial offer should reflect the following:

- All figures should be expressed in EUR;
- VAT amount, if applicable, should be presented.

When preparing the financial offer, the applicant should take into account the following:

- Maximum budget should not exceed EUR 15,000. The offers above the threshold will not be considered.

- Use a free format for the budget providing the global price for the work to be provided.

- Fee rates should be broadly consistent with the regional framework rates for these types of professional services.

Note: For companies from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

According to the Indirect Taxation Authority Instruction and its status of an international organisation, the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat is entitled to VAT refund and is exempted from customs duties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Applications need to be submitted via e-mail to ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int by 31 May 2023.

Please make sure that the application is submitted in two separate folders one containing Technical Offer and the other Financial Offer. The documents should be submitted in a form of copies of the originals. (Maximum size of the email should not exceed 15MB. WeTransfer alternative is recommended. Please avoid RAR files.)

VIII. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

The assignments will be awarded to the highest qualified applicant based on the skills, expertise, and the quality of the concept note(s) and the cost-effectiveness of the financial offer.

Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the profile and competencies of the candidate and the responsiveness to the Terms of Reference for consulting services.

The best value for money is established by weighing technical quality against price on an 80/20 basis.

The applications are evaluated following these criteria:

EVALUATION GRID	Maximum Score
A. Technical Offer (A.1+A.2+A.3)	100
A.1. Work experience, references list:	35

Relevant work experience; evidence of other contracts of the nature comparable to that of the Call; experience with clients comparable to the Contracting Authority.	
A.2. Quality and professional capacity of the consultants: CV satisfies the criteria set forth in the ToR, education and experience demonstrate professional capacity and experience required.	35
A.3 Quality of the Work Plan Work plan outlining proposed action by the consultant, sources of information to be used, timeline and tools to be employed by the consultant.	30
B. Financial Proposal/ lowest price has maximum score	100

Score for offer X =

A: [Total quality score (out of 100) of offer X / 100] * 80

B: [Lowest price / price of offer X] * 20

In addition to the results of the technical and financial evaluation, a competency-based interview will be held with the selected bidder.

Information on selection of the most favourable bidder

The RCC Secretariat shall inform candidates and bidders of decisions reached concerning the award of the contract as soon as possible, including the grounds for any decision not to award a contract for which there has been competitive tendering or to recommence the procedure.

Standard letter of thanks for participation to unsuccessful bidders shall be sent within 15 days after the contract is signed with the awarded bidder.

The candidates and bidders wishing to receive feedback may send a request within 15 days after receipt of the standard letter of thanks.

The request may be sent to the e-mail address ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat
Attention to: Administration Department
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V
71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Appeals procedure

Bidders believing that they have been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may petition the RCC Secretariat directly. The RCC Secretariat must reply within 15 days of receipt of the appeal.

The appeal request may be sent to the e-mail address ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat
Attention to: Administration Department
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V
71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

ANNEX I:

APPLICATION SUBMISSION FORM

Open Call for Consultancy Services:

Support programme for development of Digital Innovation Hubs in the WB

REF: 032-023

One signed copy of this Call for Consultancy Submission Form must be supplied.

1 SUBMITTED by:

Name of the Entity	
Address	
Telephone	
Fax	
e-mail	

2. STATEMENT

[Name of the Authorised person representing the Entity] _____ hereby declares that we have examined and accepted without reserve or restriction the entire contents of the Open Call for Experts, Grounds for Exclusions and Conflict of Interest as such:

Grounds for exclusion

Candidates or bidders will be excluded from participation in a procurement procedure if it is known that:

- (a) They are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- (b) They have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of res judicata;

- (c) They have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the Contracting Officer can justify;
- (d) They have not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the Contracting Officer or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
- (e) They have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation or any other illegal activity.

Contracts may not be awarded to candidates or bidders who, during the procurement procedure, are:

- (a) Subject to a conflict of interest;
- (b) Guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the Contracting Officer as a condition of participation in the contract procedure or fail to supply this information.

Conflict of Interest

- a) The Contractor shall take all necessary measures to prevent or end any situation that could compromise the impartial and objective performance of the contract. Such conflict of interests could arise in particular as a result of economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties, or any other relevant connection or shared interest. Any conflict of interests which could arise during performance of the contract must be notified in writing to the Contracting Authority without delay.
- b) The Contracting Authority reserves the right to verify that such measures are adequate and may require additional measures to be taken if necessary. The Consultant shall ensure that their staff, including its management, are not placed in a situation which could give rise to conflict of interests. The Consultant shall replace, immediately and without compensation from the Contracting Authority, any member of its staff exposed to such a situation.
- c) The Contractor shall refrain from any contact which would compromise its independence or that of its personnel. If the Contractor fails to maintain such independence, the Contracting Authority may, without prejudice to compensation for any damage which it may have suffered on this account, terminate the contract forthwith.
- d) The Contractor shall, after the conclusion or termination of the contract, limit its role in connection with the project to the provision of the services. Except with the written permission of the Contracting Authority, the Contractor and any other contractor or

supplier with whom the Contractor is associated or affiliated shall be disqualified from the execution of works, supplies or other services for the project in any capacity, including tendering for any part of the project.

- e) Civil servants and other agents of the public administration of the RCC Participants, regardless of their administrative situation, shall not be recruited as experts in contracts financed by the RCC Secretariat.
- f) The Contractor and anyone working under its authority or control in the performance of the contract or on any other activity shall be excluded from access to RCC Secretariat financing available under the same project unless they can prove to the Contracting Authority that the involvement in previous stages of the project does not constitute unfair competition.

We offer to provide the services requested in the Terms of Reference on the basis of supplied documentation subject to this Open Call for Consultancy Services, which comprise our technical offer, and our financial offer.

This Open Call for Consultancy Services is subject to acceptance within the validity period stipulated in the Terms of Reference.

Name	
Signature	
Date	

