

**SME ENVOY meeting with stakeholders
31 May, 2006
Agenda item 1: Joint call EICs/IRCs**

INFORMATION NOTE

Services in Support of Business and Innovation - Implementation of Article 20 of the CIP

Background

The guiding principles for the implementation of Article 20 of CIP are the continuation of the business support services currently provided by the Euro Info Centre (EIC) and the Innovation Relay Centre (IRC) networks, the increase in synergies among all network partners (with preferences for organisations which could provide joint services), the improved access by SMEs to services (no wrong door concept), and the lighter administrative procedures (multi-annual contracts). This will be achieved through an open call for proposals.

Mission

The mission for future business support network partners will focus on the need to support European business by providing:

- a) Information, Feedback and Business Cooperation services (EIC type services)
- b) Innovation, technology and Knowledge transfer services (IRC type services)
- c) Services encouraging the participation of SMEs in the Community RTD Framework Programme.

Call for proposals

To implement Article 20 of CIP, the Commission intends to launch a single, open call for proposals to deliver Business and Innovation support services. The publication of the call is foreseen within the year. It will remain open for three months.

Objective and scope of the call

In the call, potential network partners will be invited to propose at least one of the two types of services under module (a) and (b) of annex III of CIP. In addition, all network partners would also be obliged to include basic support and sign posting services in order to facilitate the access by SMEs to the different types of services and to ensure coordination and cooperation among all network partners at local level ("no wrong door concept"). All partners would also be asked to provide standard services of module (c) to facilitate access of SMEs to the Community RTD Framework Programme.

The substance of proposals should make clear the means of service provision, the work programme and work packages envisaged, and the coordination mechanisms by which consortium partners would work together.

Regional coverage / host organisations

The Commission seeks a full regional coverage, taking into account SME density and other socio-economic criteria while avoiding duplication of activities. The aim is to achieve a level of service comparable or better than that currently achieved. The NUTS 1 and 2 classification may serve as a general guideline when considering the scope of regional geographical coverage.

An important element of the new network architecture is the direct link that the Commission will maintain with all EIC and IRC network partners.

In order to reduce the administrative burden for all stakeholders and facilitate the contractual management, the Commission encourages the creation of consortia of service providers. Each consortium would be represented by a co-ordinator, whose role would be linked primarily to administrative tasks. The direct relationship between the Commission and the individual partners of a consortium would not be affected by the role of the co-ordinator.

Consortia could be single consortia for both EIC and IRC services (Commission preference) or separate consortia for IRC services only and for EIC services only.

Financial, administrative and management framework

At this stage of political discussions, the indicative budget for the EIC/IRC network including its administration is 350 million € for the period 2007-2013.

Multi-annual shared-cost contracts are envisaged (action grants), based on individual eligible costs for each consortium.

Information Day

An Info Day will be organised after the publication of the call to ensure understanding by existing and potential hosts

Transition year for the EICs

An extension of the Euro Info Centres on the existing MAP basis (EICs and the EIC Central Support Structure) for 2007, through the inclusion of a transition clause in the CIP, was proposed to the Council and Parliament in order to provide the basis for funding of the network without interrupting the provision of its services.