1.
Pilot Projects
INFORMATION SOCIETY

Article 10 of the ERDF

Article 6 of the ESF

Information Pack

- Call for proposal n° 95/36

- Information note for the preparation of projects (Work programme)

- Bibliography

<u>Commission</u>

Call for proposals for pilot actions aiming at integrating the concept of the information society into regional development policies of less favoured regions pursuant to Article 10 of the ERDF Regulation[1] and Article 6 of the ESF Regulation[2].

(95/36)

Introduction.

One of the priority areas for pilot actions under Article 10 of the ERDF and Article 6 of the ESF for the 1995 - 1999 period is the translation of the 'Information Society' concept into real life in the regions through demonstration of innovative applications and services, a high stimulation of user's involvement and the diffusion of best practice, in particular for the less favoured regions (LFRs) of the European Union.

The final objective of this pilot scheme of approximately 20 Mecus is to help integrate the 'Information Society' concept into regional development policies of less favoured regions. There are two alternative fields of action within this call for proposals:

A) Developing partnership among key regional actors for the elaboration of a regional Information Society Strategy and Action Plan.

Objectives.

a) to *develop consensus* and partnership amongst key regional players around a regional information society Strategy describing how to face in a regional context the challenges, and to profit from the opportunities, offered by the 'Information Society' in the making,

b) and to *promote their commitment and cooperation* in view of the development of a regional action plan, including an assessment of the feasibility of key applications, characterised by a strong contribution to economic development .

The 'Regional Information Society Strategy and Action Plan' should provide a sound and consistent framework for optimising policy decisions regarding future investments in this field at the regional level.

Participants

Submissions can be made by the regional authority responsible for economic development in the region concerned, demonstrating commitment to participation by key regional actors, principally in NUTS II regions in which a large number of the population live in areas defined as Objective 1, 2, 5b and 6 under the ERDF Regulation.

Deliverables:

The main contract deliverable will be an 'Information Society Regional Strategy and Action Plan' endorsed by the key regional players. It will try to integrate indigenous capabilities in this field with socio-economic objectives, in view of a realistic assessment and an eventual exploitation of the opportunities offered by the 'Information Society' in a particular regional context.

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[1] Council Regulation (EEC) N° 4254/88, JO L 374 of 31.12.1988, modified by Council Regulation (EEC) N° 2083/93, JO L 193 of 31.7.1993.

[2] Council Regulation (EEC) N° 4255/88, JO L 374 of 31.12.1988, modified by Council Regulation (EEC) N° 2084/93, JO L 193 of 31.7.1993.

Funding :

The Community will finance up to 50% of the total costs of the elaboration of the 'Information Society Regional Strategy and Action Plan' with a maximum 250.000 ECUs per region.

Selection criteria:

A comprehensive list of selection criteria can be found in the information-Pack.

B) Preparing and launching pilot applications for demonstrating best practice in the regional deployment of Information Society

Objectives

The Objectives of this action are to identify and select a number of pluri-regional pilot applications having a clear innovative and demonstration effect in the LFRs. The Commission is seeking key user applications which, through the usage of information and communication technologies, can contribute to regional development and employment creation in less favoured regions. Proposals should clearly integrate the purpose of the pilot application within a regional development strategy element.

Information Society applications related to regional development objectives could be classified under the following fields:

1. Business needs and competitiveness.
2. Employment creation and human resources.
3. Environment and quality of life.
4. Reducing peripherality.
5. Improving the delivery of services to citizens and the development of personal services.

An indicative list of possible areas for pilot applications is given in the information Pack. Proposals submitted to this open call should justify their direct coherence with the above mentioned regional development objectives.

Participants

Submissions can be made by any local or regional authority demonstrating commitment to participation by key regional actors from several different regions. Proposals should be based on inter-regional cooperation aiming at applications being implemented/used in several regions, and they have to have at least 2 participating bodies from 2 regions from different countries. Priority will be given to pluri-regional proposals involving 3 to 6 regions from at least three countries. At least one third of the participating regions and of the requested financial contribution should be from Objective 1 and/or possibly Objective 6 areas.

Funding

The Commission's financial contribution will be between 1 and 3 Mecus per pilot project and will cover up to a maximum of 50% of eligible costs of the pilot applications, including the detailed project definition.

Deliverables:

The main deliverables will be a detailed project definition and a report with the description of the implementation process of the pilot application and the assessment of the obtained results and the socio-economic impact in the regions concerned. Deliverables should be oriented for information and dissemination of results to other regions.

Selection criteria:

A comprehensive list of selection criteria can be found in the information-Pack.

Information Pack

Detailed information about this call for proposals, including an application form, work programme, procedures and eligibility criteria for the submission of proposals and the principles governing the Community contribution can be obtained by contacting the following address :

European Commission
DG XVI - Regional Policy and Cohesion
Unit A2
Information Society Projects
Office CSM1 7/43
rue de la Loi 200
B - 1049 BRUSSELS
Telefax : 32 2 295 01 38 / 39 / 40
with the mention "DG XVI, Article 10, ERDF"

Submission of proposals

Proposals must arrive at the Commission before 12th January 1996 for the projects concerning Field of action A, and before 28 February 1996 for the projects concerning Field of action B (1 original and 3 copies).

Work programme for Article 10 of the ERDF and for Article 6 of the ESF Innovative Actions: Information Society

Pilot scheme aiming at integrating the concept of the information society into regional development policies of Less Favoured Regions (LFRs).

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Under Article 10 of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Regulation[1] and Article 6 of the European Social Fund (ESF)[1,] the ERDF and ESF may contribute to innovative actions in regional development through pilot schemes which encourage the pooling of experience and the development of cooperation between different Community regions, and innovative measures. Thus, Article 10 of the ERDF Regulation and Article 6 of the ESF Regulation provide a sound basis for innovative actions and experimenting with new policy approaches at regional and European level; for improving the workings of the labour market, developing human resources and for promoting regional economic development.

These pilot schemes should have an innovative character (provide an extra value added to existing previous actions in a particular region), a European 'networking' dimension (maximising the European dimension through the promotion of inter-regional collaboration and partnership), achieving employment intensive growth, reinforcing the training system and creating strong potential for demonstration effects for other regions (contribute to a more efficient use of Structural Funds for regional development in eligible regions by diffusing best practice).

One of the priority areas for pilot actions under Article 10 of the ERDF and Article 6 of the ESF for the 1995 - 1999 period is the translation of the 'Information Society' concept[1] into real life in the regions through demonstration of innovative applications and services[1,] a high stimulation of user's involvement and the diffusion of best practice, in particular for the less favoured regions of the European Union. The need for appropriate action in this direction has been recently stressed by the Regional Commission and the Commission on Social Affairs and Employment of the European Parliament and by the Committee of the Regions.

The final objective of this pilot scheme is to help the integration the 'Information Society' concept into regional development and employment policies of less favoured regions. The information society is going to revolutionise the ways in which we work and live together. This pilot scheme tries to help regions in benefiting from the opportunities now opening up to them and also to help them minimise the risks of being left behind in this revolution. For the regions of Europe, their future economic and social well being will depend to a large extent on how they are able to participate in the Information Society in the making.

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[3] Council Regulation (EEC) N° 4254/88, JO L 374 of 31.12.1988, modified by Council Regulation (EEC) N° 2083/93, JO L 193 of 31.7.1993.

[4] Council Regulation (EEC) N° 4255/88, JO L 374 of 31.12.1988, modified by Council Regulation (EEC) N° 2084/93, JO L 193 of 31.7.1993.

[5] 'Information Society' has been defined ("Developing a Finish Information Society", Council of State, Finland, Helsinki, 1995) as "a society which makes extensive use of information networks (meaning systems of IT hardware and services which provides users with delivery and retrieval services in a given area -e.g. electronic mail, directories and video services) and IT (information technology meaning the hardware, software and methods used for the automatic processing and transfer of data, and the skills needed to use them), produces large quantities of information and communication products and services, and has a diversified content industry".

[6] In this document applications and services are considered to be "innovative" when they are new in their economic, social or organizational use in a region.

The method proposed is twofold: to develop a regional partnership for the elaboration of a regional 'Information Society' strategy, and to launch pilot applications[1] The latter should be used for demonstrating best practice in the regional deployment of information society and thus for an effective use of public and private resources for benefiting from information society.

The general approach is to stimulate, experiment, evaluate and diffuse best practice in the creation of the necessary socio-economic conditions for the development and implementation of information society services and applications which contribute to regional development, in particular for less favoured regions (LFRs). In other words to enable and facilitate learning within a region and between regions, eligible and non eligible under the Structural Funds, and thus to contribute to cohesion.

This pilot scheme follows an approach based on the following specific aims:

1. to promote and assist partnerships among key regional actors[1] public and private, in shaping the information society in a way that it may contribute to employment, quality of life, sustainable regional development and socio-economic cohesion in the regions,

2. to assist key regional actors in overcoming barriers in building partnerships, establishing commitment and developing an integrated information society strategy for the less favoured regions, and

3. to provide a basis for better using existing regional, national and European resources, notably the support provided under the Structural Funds.

Regions eligible under the Structural Funds are the primary target of this pilot scheme.

The policy rationale behind this action is to help translate into regional practice the orientations given in the 'White paper' *on "Growth, Competitiveness and Employment: the challenges and ways forward into the 21st Century",* the 'Bangemann Report': *"Europe and the Global Information Society - Recommendations to the European Council"* and the associated European Commission's Action Plan[1] regarding information society, through new forms of policies and through demonstration actions in less favoured regions. The pilot scheme aims to contribute to the regional decision maker's and regional actors awareness and understanding of its economic and social implications, including the risks as well as the opportunities it may offer, and ensure that cohesion considerations are not overlooked in the race towards information society in Europe.

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[7] Information Society applications is a separate concept from basic services, which support and complement the specific applications, and digital bearer networks, which provide access, transport and conectivity. Applications respond to the demands of specific user groups.

[8] Key regional actors refer to all those major players involved in the regional economy who have got a direct involvement or may be directly affected by the development of information society. They include the regional and local government, the employer's asociations, trade unions, chambers of commerce, regional development agencies, information service providers, telecommunications operators and main information and comunications technology users, higher education institutions and training bodies among others.

[9] Communication of the European Commission COM (94) 347 final "Europe's way to the Information society: an Action Plan".

Regional partnerships participating in this pilot scheme are intended to feed into the planning and implementation process of the main strand of Structural Funds programmes in order to increase and fine-tune its regional developmental impact in line with the development objectives and strategies set by the regional and national authorities concerned on the basis of the subsidiarity principle.

Financial provisions

20 million Ecu will be devoted to this pilot scheme. 15 million Ecu will be allocated from the ERDF and 5 million Ecu from the ESF.

Field of action 1:
Establishment of an "Information Society Regional Programme", including a regional Information Society Strategy and Action Plan, through the development of partnership among key regional actors.

<u>OBJECTIVES</u>

The overall aim is to enable regional partnerships to make better use of existing resources for developing the information society. Therefore, the objectives of this action are twofold:

a) to *develop consensus* and partnership amongst key regional actors around a regional information society strategy describing how to face in a regional context the challenges, and to profit from the opportunities, offered by the 'Information Society' in the making,

b) and to *promote their commitment and cooperation* by developing a regional action plan, including an assessment of the feasibility of key applications, characterised by a strong contribution to economic development .

Regional consensus and public-private partnership among key regional actors will be facilitated by the establishment of an "Information Society Regional Programme" through the development of partnership among key regional actors for the elaboration of a "Regional Information Society Strategy and Action Plan". The latter provides an open and committed forum for the elaboration of a strategy in the short and medium term vis a vis the deployment of information society in the region and for the drafting of an action plan. This action plan includes a number of feasibility studies for specific pilot applications previously screened, with a detailed description of practical steps to be taken in the short to medium term for the development of new applications and services which can actively contribute to economic development in the region.

The strategy, which has to be based on a sound regional partnership, should contain some of the following elements.

1) **An analysis and assessment of the base-line situation, in particular :**

   - analysis of the main issues shaping the regional development process, in particular human resources development and employment creation;

   - regional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis vis a vis relevant aspects of the transition towards the information society. This Analysis may include comparisons with experiences from other regions;

   - an inventory and critical assessment of relevant applications and services, including service providers, in the region, already implemented or currently being established;

   - an inventory and critical assessment of information and service infrastructures needed for the establishment of the applications identified as most relevant for the regional development process;

- an audit of information society relevant training provision and infrastructure within the region, the identification of best practice and an analysis of barriers to upgrading training in order to meet the new pressures of the Information Society;

- an assessment of user's needs and degree of awareness of actual or potential users about the opportunities offered by Information Society. This analysis should also include an assessment of training needs directly related to users needs.

2) **Development of visions and scenarios related to the integration of new services and applications into long-term regional development goals and strategies, including:**

- an assessment of the main regional implications of current and expected forthcoming regulatory and legal changes in the fields of telecommunication services, infrastructures, and multimedia;

- an analysis of the potential growth of employment intensive and employment generating sectors (especially where SMEs could play a leading role and in high job growth fields such as person orientated services and quality of life services);

- a focused approach, supporting new services and applications which can directly feed into regional development by i) identifying the sectors and/or clusters of inter-related economic activities that are critical to a region's development, and ii) extending support to the development and, in particular, effective use of applications and services in those areas;

- an assessment of the regional impact of likely technological trends and new developments in this field, in particular regarding new job opportunities in less favoured regions related to information society;

- an outline of the main strategies of key public and private regional actors and their potential to contribute and benefit from the deployment of the information society.

The Action Plan should include, in particular, the following elements and characteristics:

it should be consistent with the main objectives, priorities and orientations identified in the Strategy;

it shall aim to offer the regional economic actors (SMEs in particular) the opportunity, through the use of new applications that allow for a higher degree of networking and collaboration, to create and retain more of the value added within their value chain for their own development in the region;

it should build on the existing labour market situation and map out pathways to development that are realistic;

it should give particular attention to identifying initiatives which could help individuals who are not appropriately qualified for the information society to adjust through raising awareness, counselling, training programmes and skill upgrading;

it should be complementary to other actions and policies of an industrial and technological character developed within the region in order to achieve possible synergies;

it should be based on a needs led and market driven approach which tries to maximise the involvement of private promoters and the final users in the definition of concrete applications for the deployment of Information Society;

it should relate the proposed applications to the existing and developing needs of individuals in the regional labour market, within which, due consideration should be given to overcoming exclusion on the grounds of gender, disadvantage and disability;

it should give careful consideration to the manner of implementation to ensure high levels of user participation;

it should include the launching of feasibility studies to validate new possible applications and services;

it should give consideration to the role that regional actors could or should play within the regulatory structure and process for telecommunications networks and services;

it should describe in detail the managerial and organisational arrangements necessary to its implementation including calendar and budget;

A built-in evaluation system has to be established at the beginning of this Programme by the regional authorities concerned.

The 'Regional Information Society Strategy and Action Plan' should provide a consistent framework for making sound and coherent policy decisions regarding future investments in this field at the regional level. It should be integrated with and complementary to relevant existing regional national and Community policies and actions in this filed. It should also be coherent with socio-economic objectives agreed under the last generation of Community Support Frameworks and Community Initiatives for the areas concerned. Therefore the Regional Information Society Programme will be reported to the relevant Community Support Framework (CSF) Monitoring Committee in the regions concerned by this pilot scheme.

PARTICIPANTS

Submissions can be made by the regional authority responsible for economic development in the region concerned, demonstrating commitment to participation by key regional actors, principally in NUTS II[1] regions in which a large number of the population live in areas defined as Objective 1, 2, 5b and 6 under the ERDF Regulation[1].

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[10] Regions NUTS I in which more than half of the population live in areas defined as Objective 1, 2, 5b and 6 under the ERDF Regulation might also be taken into consideration. Regions NUTS III will also be considered when the country is level I and II.

[11] Co-financing with the private sector will be subject to the financial rules established in Article 17.3 of Council Regulation 2082/93, JO L 193 of 31.7.93, and Article 13 of Council Regulation 2081/93, JO L 193 of 31.7.1993.

The proposer will establish a Steering Committee in which key actors in the regions, i.e. the public authorities, service providers, the private sector, in particular SMEs, key user groups, trade unions and other Information Society actors in the regional business community will be represented. It will also set-up the proper secretariat for the Steering Committee. This Steering Committee will present a detailed work programme within three months after approval by the European Commission of their application for assistance. Thereafter the Steering Committee will submit an intermediate report every 6 months after the start of the contract. The final report on the Information Society Regional Programme will be submitted to the Commission no later than 18 months after signature of the contract. The interim report and the final report will also be presented to the Community Support Framework Monitoring Committee responsible for Structural Funds interventions in the region concerned, whose comments, if any, may be included in the work programme.

ACTIVITIES TO BE SUPPORTED FOR THE PREPARATION OF AN INFORMATION SOCIETY REGIONAL PROGRAMME, INCLUDING A REGIONAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Commission will be prepared to support the activities necessary to establish a Regional Information Society Programme, guided and managed by the Steering Committee of the key regional actors. The Steering Committee's main task will be to elaborate a high-quality 'Information Society Regional Strategy and Action Plan'. This includes the organisation and stimulation of consensus building and regional partnership around the 'Information Society Regional Strategy and Action Plan' with a view to promote commitment by and close collaboration among the regional actors concerned. The Steering Committee can use the Commission financial aid for the following activities:

1. **The establishment and operation of a regional coordination secretariat, which will carry out the following tasks:**

    -   provide a Secretariat for the regional Steering Committee, as well as acting as a focal point for intra-regional co-ordination and liaison with other regions.

    -   awareness creation through information activities such as seminars, workshops and demonstration activities directed at all those actors involved in the deployment of 'Information Society' in the region, notably potential final users and service providers.

    -   provide the Steering Committee with all the elements it needs to exercise its animation and orientation roles for the elaboration of the 'Information Society Regional Strategy and Action Plan'.

    -   launching of feasibility studies and stimulation of innovative services and applications.

    -   provision of information and dissemination of results to other regions in Europe.

2. **Recourse to external expertise,** including local/national and international consultants which may provide an input to the strategic building exercise and Plan of Action, such as regarding specific technical questions directly related to new applications and services, preparation of feasibility studies, evaluation or audits of the existing regional information

infrastructures, applications and services, development and assessment of scenarios for integrating new demand-led applications and services into the regional development process, assessment of existing experiences and policy action in the field, provision of methodological support, consensus building, organisation of sectoral seminars, animation of working groups, preparation of international seminars, etc. among other activities.

3. **Seminars and study visits** outside the region concerned in order to draw lessons from experiences in other regions in the development of consensus, strategy building exercises and launching of new applications and services.

DELIVERABLES:

The main contract deliverable will be an 'Information Society Regional Strategy and Action Plan' endorsed by the key regional actors. It will try to integrate indigenous capabilities in this field and regional socio-economic objectives, in view of a realistic assessment and an eventual exploitation of the opportunities offered by the 'Information Society' in a particular regional context. This document should also include

i) the definition of strategic goals,

ii) the determination of an action plan, including the field of human resources and training,

iii) technical, economic and financial feasibility studies of key applications necessary to ensure that strategic goals can be met,

iv) a global estimation of costs and the design of management and monitoring systems required for the implementation of the Action Plan.

It is expected that the final report on the experiences, results and lessons learnt from Information Society Regional Programme will be submitted to the Commission no later than 18 months after signature of the contract.

The deliverables will be reviewed by a team of independent experts selected by the Commission.

FUNDING

The Community will finance up to 50% of the total costs of the elaboration of the 'Information Society Regional Strategy and Action Plan' with a maximum 250.000 ECUs per region.

The European Commission may also provide assistance in the setting-up of an inter-regional collaboration network for the exchange of experience and best practice between the regions participating in this exercise.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The main selection criteria for regional proposals will be:

1. the importance given in the proposal to its contribution to regional development objectives.

2. the relevance given in the proposal to the human resources development, employment intensive growth in the regions, including equal opportunities, long term unemployed and disabled and disadvantaged.

3. level of involvement of regional and, eventually, national authorities, in particular those responsible for the use of Commission's financial aid under the Community Support Frameworks.

4. the degree of commitment and support expressed by the key regional actors concerned, public and private, through the institutional agreements necessary to develop partnership at the regional level[1].

5. the quality and feasibility of the work method and organisational arrangements foreseen to elaborate the Strategy and Action Plan based on a sound regional partnership.

6. the quality and feasibility of the proposed work programme and its integration with the economic development strategies and objectives of the region, including its complementarity with other actions, notably from the Structural Funds, in the region.

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[12] A detailed list of proposed members for the Steering Committee should be provided. The applicants are also expected to be willing to include an international external expert, agreed by the EC Commission and the region, in this Committee.

Field of action 2

Preparing and launching pluri-regional pilot applications for demonstrating best practice in the regional deployment of Information Society

OBJECTIVES

The design and implementation of pilot applications should be based on co-operation and pooling of experience between different regions. Various alternative types of pluri-regional projects could be envisaged. Four main categories could be identified in this respect:

i)   Collaborative development of similar applications through regional networking and exchange of experiences,

ii)   Inter-regional cooperation for the effective transfer and customisation of existing regional applications,

iii) The collaborative development of different applications in order to meet common user needs in a particular sector, in different regions,

iv)   Inter-regional 'information society' applications networks.

These projects should be based on the identification, selection and launching of a number of pluri-regional pilot applications having a clear innovative and demonstration effect in the Less Favoured Regions (LFRs).

Rather than identifying specific basic services and generic applications, this call for proposals tries to prepare the groundwork for, build up and launch applications based in innovative uses for regional development of validated information and communication technologies and/or their adaptation and adoption in LFRs.

The proposed pilot applications should target the driving economic sectors of the regions involved (sectors having a clear potential for regional development in the regions concerned or those which would make a major contribution to the social development of the region through the generation of new jobs).

Applications should also seek to increase know how (both in terms of human resources and technological capacity) through public - private partnership.

In addition, the applications should be able to generate sound expectations for social and economic benefits in order to attract further investment from public or private sources. *Special attention will be devoted to those applications involving peripheral regions of the Community with poor accessibility to markets and business networks.*

The selected applications should focus on the adaptation and use of existing validated technologies rather than developing new ones, since the general approach of this pilot scheme is to concentrate on applications responding to actual regional user's needs rather than on advanced communications technologies per se.

The starting point for the evaluation of proposals will be the assessment of its innovative and demonstrative nature, the social and economic impact of the proposed application, as well as its public interest and/or potential for commercial exploitation in the future. The regional and inter-regional networking capability of the application will be specially taken into consideration.

Proposals should clearly integrate the economic objective of the pilot application within a regional development strategy element. Targeted rather than generic approaches will be preferred. User and demand driven applications are sought by the European Commission in this area.

Information Society applications related to regional development objectives could be classified under the following fields:

1. Business needs, competitiveness and (employment intensive) growth

2. Human resource development and continuous learning

3. Environment and quality of life

4. Reducing peripherality

5. Improving the delivery of services to citizens and the development of personal services

Proposals submitted to this open call should justify their direct coherence with the above mentioned regional development objectives.

The following is a non-exclusive list of possible areas for pilot applications (not in order of priority) related to the above fields:

- Information and communication services for companies (Business networks)[1]
- Applications related to sustainable development, including the environment and energy savings.
- Electronic tendering and trading.
- Telematic Transport management.
- Telematics services for industry and particularly SMEs[1]
- Healthcare applications and other care related services
- Open and distance learning and continuous training.

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[13]   For example, electronic data interchange, tender information systems, access to finance services, access to administration services, tourism and transport applications, reservation systems, etc.

[14]   For example, access to information services & business transactions distributed access to design tools and databases, etc.

-   Teleworking and mobile working.
-   Applications for social groups with specific needs, and applications in sparsely populated   areas.
-   Citizen's Information systems and city information highways.
-   Applications linking research facilities and universities amongst regions.
-   Applications to increase the efficiency of employment services and job demand and supply signalling.
-   Applications and initiatives which promote the adoption of telematics by small firms.

ACTIVITIES TO BE SUPPORTED

Depending on the state of advancement in the proposal's definition process[1] two complementary elements are envisaged for a pilot application:

1) A first element aiming at the ***detailed project definition.*** Such detailed project definition will cover the preparatory stage, with the objective to assist regions in assessing the technical feasibility, commercial viability or public interest as well as the social acceptance of planned services or applications; in identifying and designing adequate funding structures, and in defining sound monitoring and evaluation procedures for the identified application.

    The detailed project definition should make a sound problem statement as well as a clear specification of the approach and methodology proposed for the pilot application. It should be completed within six months of the signature of the contract. The detailed project definition should address, inter alia, the following issues

    a) the technical and financial feasibility for the building and launching the pilot applications.

    b) the social acceptance and commercial viability of the application. This entails analysis of i) the impact of the application across the different sectors involved; ii) the benefits that the different user communities could reap from the application; iii) the methodology and instruments used to monitor and assess the application.

2) A second element aiming at ***building up and launching pilot applications.*** The Commission will provide financial assistance for building up pilot applications. The emphasis is on supporting the development of applications, and not on investments in infrastructures which will be eventually considered only when they are directly linked to the promotion of the applications targeted by this action. Proposals for pilot applications should include a detailed project definition covering the above specified aspects. In addition, it should make a clear picture of:

    a) the regional development objectives of the pilot application.

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[15] In the case of applications which already include a comprehensive and detailed project definition, applicants might concentrate their request for financial support on the building up and launching of the pilot application, subject to the European Commission's approval and validation of the detailed project definition.

b) the partnership scheme together with the management and operation principles through the different phases of the application.

c) the technical and human resources involved in the making and operation of the application both during the initial phase and when fully operational.

d) the development and implementation methodology: steps to be followed together with a detailed schedule and planning.

The proposals should pay a special attention to the portability -customisation and transfer- and interoperability aspects both at technical and operational level.

The development, implementation and testing of the pilot should be done in a reasonable lapse of time not exceeding 24 months from the signature of the contract.

Applicants are asked to provide a calendar and a detailed budgetary plan with forecasts of the costs involved in the different phases of the project, including clearly defined benchmarks.

DELIVERABLES

The main deliverables will be the feasibility study and the pilot application working as indicated by the proposal.

In the case of pilot applications, the following deliverables will also be requested:

Progress report every three months from the signature of the contract.

Final report evaluating the achievements as compared to the stated aims of the pilot applications. The results of the pilot applications should be explained in the light of the proposed selection criteria: integration of the pilot in the regional development strategy, nature and composition of the organisations in charge of implementing the applications, social and economic impact, demonstration capacity, commercialisation perspectives, etc.

Deliverables will be examined by a team of independent experts nominated and convened by the Commission.

PARTICIPANTS

Submissions can be made by any local or regional authority demonstrating commitment to participation by key regional actors from several different regions· Proposals should be based on inter-regional cooperation aiming at applications being implemented/used in several regions, and they have to have at least 2 participating bodies from 2 regions from different countries. Priority will be given to pluri-regional proposals involving 3 to 6 regions from at least three countries. At least one third of the participating regions and of the requested financial contribution should be from Objective 1 areas and/or possibly Objective 6 areas.

FUNDING

The Commission's financial contribution will be between 1 and 3 Mecus per pilot project and will cover up to a maximum of 50% of eligible costs of the pilot applications, including the detailed project definition.

COMMON SELECTION CRITERIA APPLICABLE TO FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND PILOT APPLICATIONS

The overriding principle is that the applications' proposals should have a clearly demonstrated relevance to regional economic development and employment intensive growth in the regions concerned.

GENERAL KEY CRITERIA

1. Internal coherence between stated objectives, applications and regional strategies.
2. Commitment and quality of the partnership agreement amongst project promoters.
3. Degree of clarity in the definition of expected results, including explicit milestones.
4. Extent to which targets set can be used for an on-going evaluation of project advancement.
5. Quality and level of description of project management mechanisms.

CRITERIA RELATED TO SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Cohesion and Societal Impact

    a. Applications which can contribute to economic and social cohesion by helping people in the regional labour force to realise their full potential.

    b. Contribution to employment, skills and working conditions in quantitative and qualitative terms, in particular regarding long term unemployed and equal opportunities and creating pathways to permananent employment for underqualified people

    c. Impact on the social and economic cohesion of the Community, in particular from the viewpoint of increased competitiveness by the users and economic sector(s) involved.

2. Partnership and integration

    a. Level of involvement of regional and, eventually, national authorities, in particular those responsible for the use of Commission's financial aid under the Community Support Frameworks.

    b. Level of commitment and financial involvement from users and the private sector.

    c. Potential of the proposed application for creating a sustainable structure and platform for the collaboration of different actors within the region (universities, technology transfer centres, research centres, industry and especially SMEs, public authorities, users, social partners etc.)

d. the quality and feasibility of the proposed pilot application and its integration with the economic development strategies and objectives of the region, including its complementarity with other Structural Funds actions and instruments in the region.

3. **Economic Potential**

Contribution to the strengthening of the market forces, e.g. extent to which the application can help current driving sector(s) to evolve and diversify and/or to the modernisation of traditional sectors; contribution for the creation of new economic activities, products and services.

4. **Demonstration effects**

a. Innovative and demonstrative nature of the application. Applications with an exemplary nature should have tangible and clearly understandable social, economic or cultural benefits which can be demonstrated to the public.

b   Portability and inter-operability of the application. Open access as an integral part of the application design.

5. **Inter-regional collaboration effects**

a. Potential for inter-regional transfer of best practice in terms of technical solutions, organisational and financial arrangements and partnership

b. Developments on inter-regional networking capabilities that enable or facilitate cooperation (i.e.: joint production, commercialisation, research, etc.) amongst regions.

6. **Quality and Feasibility**

a. The quality and feasibility of the working methodology, the work programme and the organisation and financial arrangements foreseen to launch, steer and manage the applications (and, if needed the feasibility study).

b.   Technical, economic and financial feasibility of the application.

The Commission may select projects with the assistance of a panel of international experts.

Regional networking for exchange of know-how
Development and dissemination in relation to fields of action I and II

Regions or groups of regions selected to participate in fields of action I and/or II undertake to use their work relating to the information society to contribute to a series of measures involving information and the exchange of experience and know-how.

These measures, carried out by the regions working together with assistance from a body and experts made available to them by the Commission, should enable them:

- to keep each other informed about developments in ideas, techniques and applications related to the information society;

- to place their reflections in an international context;

- to compare their working methods;

- to develop a body of good practice for those regions which, from 1997, wish to undertake measures of the same type;

- to have available methodological resources and know-how to help other regions which so wish to take part from 1997 in measures of the type in which they are involved;

- to investigate whether work on the information society carried out through networking will be relevant after the period during which measures part-financed by the Community are carried out.

For that purpose, the regions, in partnership with the Commission, will define the methods and organization required to carry out the measures listed above. For their participation in these measures, they will earmark an appropriate part of the budget allocated to the pilot project for expenditure on the participation of the region or groups of regions in the network, including documents in electronic form, participation in seminars and participation in an electronic communications network.

For measures carried out through the network and to assist regions or groups of regions in their relations with the Commission, with particular regard to the administrative and financial management of the pilot projects, the Commission will provide them with an office whose responsibilities will include the secretariat of the network, the preparation and organization of seminars, information for regions or among groups of regions, the monitoring of pilot projects and the selection of the experts regarded as necessary.

This office will also enable the Commission to carry out all the work of information, development and dissemination needed to facilitate the participation of other regions.

Useful publications and contacts to help in preparing submissions

Applicants' attention is drawn to the following publications which may be of assistance to them in drawing up their applications.

* General background on the implementation of ERDF innovative measures:

"Guide to innovative measures for regional development (Article 10 of the ERDF Regulation) 1995-99". Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1995. ISBN: 92-827-4871-5. This publication is available from the Official Publications Office or its agents in each Member State.

* Particularly relevant to the subject of the call for proposals, includes examples of good practice:

1. *"Growth, competitiveness, employment: the challenges and ways forward into the 21st century", White Paper - Chapter 5: the changing society, the new technologies-, European Commission, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1994. ISBN 92-826-7423-1 (Parts A+B).*

2. *"Europe and the global information society: recommendations to the European Council - Bangemann report", Brussels, 26 May 1994.*

3. *"Europe's Way to the Information Society. An Action Plan". Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions. COM (94) 347 final of 19/7/1994, Brussels.*

4. *"Employment and Human resources in the regional information society". European Commission-Document de la DG V, Brussels, 24 August 1995.*

5. *European Parliament: Resolution on the recommendations to the European Council: 'Europe and the global information society' and the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament and to the Economic and Social Committee of the Regions: 'Europe's way to the information society: and action plan'. Official Journal of the European Communities, N° C 363/33 of 19/12/1994.*

6. *Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament and to the Economic and Social Committee of the Regions: 'Europe's way to the information society: and action plan', CES 193/95, Brussels, 23 February 1995.*

7. *Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament and to the Economic and Social Committee of the Regions: 'Europe's way to the information society: and action plan', CdR 21/95, Brussels, 1 February 1995.*

These documents/publications are available from the Information Society Project Office (ISPO), which can provide general information on topics relating to the information society.

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