

Call for expression of interest inviting economic operators to put themselves forward as candidates for the provisioning of the different level of *Cluster Management Excellence Quality Label Assessments (Silver and Gold)* applying the criteria and procedures of the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis - ESCA and of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative - ECEI.

1. Introduction

The ACE – Achieving cluster Excellence project is co-financed by the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) under the General Directorate for Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission within the call 62/G/ENT/CIP/13/C/N04C031 - “Towards World-Class Clusters: Promoting Cluster Excellence” (2nd Wave).

Link to the call documents:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/fp7/calls/62-g-ent-cip-13-n04c031.html>

Finpiemonte SpA is the Lead partner of the ACE project consortium.

As foreseen by the above mentioned call text 62/G/ENT/CIP/13/C/N04C031 issued by the European Commission as well as by the description of the action of the ACE Project, Finpiemonte is expected to support cluster organisations in Piedmont to acquire the Bronze, Silver and Gold labels of excellence on cluster management, applying the methodology developed by the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis - ESCA in the framework of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative ECEI.

This call for expression of interest has a fact-finding purpose and it is aimed to verify which operators in Europe are able to provide the service as described in the call text 62/G/ENT/CIP/13/C/N04C031 issued by the European Commission.

2. Methodological framework

As part of the EU's efforts to create more world-class clusters across the EU by strengthening cluster excellence, the Commission launched in 2009, under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, the **European Cluster Excellence Initiative – ECEI** (<http://www.cluster-excellence.eu/>). Its main aim was, first, to design, test and validate a benchmarking methodological tool to be used by cluster organisations to identify and improve their internal management process and the way they offer services to cluster firms, and, second, to develop training materials with the ultimate goal to help cluster managers improve their own managerial capability.

To continue the successful work of this pan-European initiative which involved 13 partners from nine European countries, ESCA - The European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis was established by

one of the partners, VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH, to offer practical advice to cluster management organizations.

The **European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis – ESCA** (<http://www.cluster-analysis.org>) is responsible for further improving and updating the benchmarking tool, providing training on how to use this tool, and managing the labelling process. ESCA promotes cluster management excellence through benchmarking and quality labelling of clusters and cluster management organizations. ESCA has been mandated by the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI) to organise the assessment process.

Cluster management organizations that are benchmarked according to the ESCA-ECEI methodology demonstrate their interest in striving for excellence. The quality labelling system consists of three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold.

Many cluster organisations have already been awarded with the Bronze and Gold Labels of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI, www.cluster-excellence.eu/quality.html). As by March 2015, more than 700 cluster organisations in the EU have already successfully applied the benchmarking methodology and got the bronze label (commitment to excellence), and come 49 have so far received the gold label (cluster excellence).

Each Label audit is based on different steps according to ESCA procedures and methodologies.

The award of any of the labels is subject to the procedures of ESCA, including an independent assessment of the applicant's compliance with the label criteria.

Cluster organisations which are awarded with the ECEI quality labels (Bronze, Silver, Gold) are included in the official ESCA-ECEI database and are included in the list published on the website <http://www.cluster-analysis.org/>.

3. Contracting authorities

This Call for expression of interest is not intended to form any part of the Contract of Services.

The service will be contracted separately by Finpiemonte SpA, depending on the results of this Call for expression.

Any application received in this call will not and in any case bind Finpiemonte to conclude a contract.

Finpiemonte SpA will also consider the option of eventually sharing the cost for the services to be acquired with the cluster organisations that will be involved in the process, which in that case might act as contracting authorities for some parts of the services.

4. Aim of this call

4.1. Purpose

The purpose of this call is to compile a list of possible sub-contractors who would be able to provide the services as prescribed in the European Commission call 62/G/ENT/CIP/13/C/N04C031.

Link to the call documents:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/fp7/calls/62-g-ent-cip-13-n04c031.html>

Description of the Service is provided below, within the framework of the Grant Agreement SI2.668158 between the European Commission and Finpiemonte SpA on behalf of the ACE Consortium.

4.2. Description of Service

Finpiemonte intends to candidate at least one cluster manager to the ESCA-ECEI Gold Label and at least two cluster managers to the ECEI/ESCA Silver Label.

To conduct the assessments and award the quality labels, the contractor will ensure that:

- only ECEI/ESCA certified benchmarking experts will run the assessments, and will be selected based on an updated list of all existing certified benchmarking experts;
- the benchmarking reports will be produced according to ECEI/ESCA methodologies;
- the labels will be awarded according to ECEI/ESCA procedures and at the end of the process, if successful, the assessed clusters will be included in the ECEI/ESCA official database as well as in the online official lists of ECEI/ESCA labelled clusters.

The following services should be provided:

- **Preparation to the assessment**
In the preparation phase of the assessments, provide to cluster managers detailed information about the methodology and indicators, also giving access to any self-assessment tool that may be made available in relation to the different quality labelling levels (Silver and Gold).
- **Assessment**
Use the benchmarking tools, methodologies and procedures set by ECEI/ESCA in order to assess the performance of a number of cluster managers in Piedmont. When required by ESCA methodologies, an on-site assessment will have to be conducted by the entitled ECEI/ESCA experts, ensuring that documentation in Italian will be duly understood and taken into account for the purpose of the assessment.
- **Analysis of the data assessed**
Produce the required reports as foreseen by the different quality labelling levels/processes, according to ESCA-ECEI procedures.
- **Award the Labels**
In case of positive results of the assessments, award of the ESCA label certifications to the involved cluster organisations, according to ECEI/ESCA procedures in relation to the different quality labelling levels/processes.

All the above listed activities will have to be completed and invoiced by the end of November 2015 at the latest. Decisions on timing, planning and location will be subject to approval of Finpiemonte SpA.

Further information on the service required are provided in the call text 62/G/ENT/CIP/13/C/N04C031 issued by the European Commission at "Part C" section.

4.3. Estimated Budget

The maximum estimated expenditure for the Service provision is set at 15.800 €.

With the above mentioned budget Finpiemonte intends to cover the costs for at least one cluster manager assessment for the Gold Label and at least two cluster managers assessment for the Silver Label.

The real expenditure will depend on the number of services that will concretely be activated, in relation of the number of cluster assessments that will concretely take place.

5. Evaluation procedure

5.1. Criteria

Evaluation of applications will be based on the quality of the service offered, with respect to the requirements expressed at points 4.1 and 4.2.

Multi-annual experience of the provider organisation in providing the services according to the ECEI/ESCA methodology will be required.

Benchmarking experts shall be selected solely on the basis of their affiliation to the ECEI/ESCA and on their professional and technical ability to perform cluster assessments and award cluster quality labels using the tools and methodology developed by the ECEI/ESCA.

Excellent knowledge of English language is required. Furthermore, experts will have to ensure that any documentation in Italian provided by cluster managers will be duly understood and taken into account for the purpose of the assessments and quality label certifications.

Finpiemonte shall award the contract to the tender offering the best value for money or, as appropriate, to the tender offering the lowest price.

5.2. Application Submission

Applicants are invited to express their interest to provide the requested training service and duly validate their position at it regards the selection criteria referred to in Article 5.1, of the present call document.

Applicants are required to submit their technical proposal and best offer for the required services.

Starting from the publication date of this Call for Expression of interest (20/03/2015), applications may be accepted until 31/03/2015 at 18h00 (CET).

Successful submission of application is that which is sent via email to: susanna.longo@finpiemonte.it, although applications sent by post (or private post service) to the Finpiemonte SpA office or hand delivered by the deadline above indicated will also be accepted.

For any questions or comments, candidates are advised to send an email using the above email address, stating their inquiry. Answers will be provided at a maximum of 3 calendar days.

11. Responsible of this procedure

11.1. The responsible person identified by Finpiemonte for this procedure is Susanna Longo.

Torino, 20th March 2015

Il Responsabile del Procedimento
Dott.sa Susanna Longo