

Call LOOK-EU-NET to select SMEs and support pilot European SME networks

The call for European SMEs is open from 12th July to 6th September 2019

Objective: *to select and support European SMEs interested in improving their internationalization readiness and export capacity collaborating together in network on the basis of common development goals on international markets expressed in a formalized cooperation agreement.*

The present call is developed within the project LOOK-EU-NET, supported by the European Commission (EC) Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship & SMEs. The objective of the present call is therefore the identification of the potential European SME candidates and the matching of SMEs having a common interest in internationalization development to form a transnational network.

European SMEs will be selected on the basis of key elements described below (e.g.: dimension, activity sector, export capacity, etc.) with the final aim of creating small international pilot networks of SMEs joined by potential synergies and common goals of development, innovation and competition on domestic and international markets with the support by the European co-financing.

In a first phase, the selected SMEs that decide to join an European business network will be informed and trained by international business experts about international business planning in order to increase their skills and capacity to exploit international markets and to define an action plan of business internationalization.

Then, international business experts will support SME pilot networks in the implementation of the concrete action plans of business internationalization (e.g.: participation in international B2B or commercial events, find new business opportunities, partners and clients, boost their commercial penetration in foreign markets, support strategic actions to increase sales and improve promotion marketing initiatives, etc.).

The implementation of the SME networks action plan will be financed. The European Commission will co-finance the action plan with grant of maximum € 25.000,00 (up to 90% of eligible costs of the action).

The Project Partners will co-finance the 10% of the pilot action.

The costs of the activity may be higher, but they have to be covered by the network of European SME. Financial management and payments will be carried out by Informest Consulting.

Documents

A. Call for expressions of interest.

B. Application Form.

A. Call for expressions of interest

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1. INTRODUCTION

The pilot project **LOOK-EU-NET**, co-financed by the COSME Programme of the European Commission, aims to support European SMEs to help them develop, further expand or improve their international business by creating small networks of 4-8 SMEs belonging to at least three Member States aimed at enhancing SME's capacity to exploit foreign markets for export purposes.

Operating in network, European SMEs will be able to increase their capacity to go international by easing cooperation among them and to improve their competitiveness.

This initiative is therefore meant to implement a pilot project that can identify elements, processes and obstacles in the path that SMEs of different EU Countries need to follow and overcome to start or improve their export capacities within their businesses through the setting up of transnational cooperation networks bringing together potential common interests and fostering potential synergies. Concrete experience in business collaboration and aggregation on the basis of shared internationalization projects have shown that participating SMEs improved their internationalization readiness and capacity to export to new markets.

Business networks can improve connections, enhance their capacity to identify new business and new partners for purposes other than strictly linked to selling and buying. For instance, supply chain links can indeed be improved by networking that provides enterprises with better possibilities to identify the right manufacturers, suppliers or retailers.

The activities of the **LOOK-EU-NET** project will be focused with priority on the economic sectors corresponding to the *Smart Specialisation Strategy* main trajectories (S3) drawn by the Regional Administration the Partners belong to:

- ✓ Mechatronics: Industrial Automation; Machineries and Equipments (different fields of application, e.g. with regard to agricultural mechanics); Industry 4.0 applications (among the others: virtualization, IoT, Robotics), machining and subcontracting;
- ✓ Sustainable Living: furniture; domotics; new efficient and sustainable materials;
- ✓ Agri-food industry: bio-products, gluten free products; food processing and packaging; horizontal services (labelling and circular economy);
- ✓ Cultural and digital tourism: tourism based on gastronomy (e.g. wine tourism), sustainability, cultural heritage (e.g. religion), through the exploitation of digital technologies;
- ✓ Smart Health: innovative solutions for well-being, healthy and autonomous life.

As target markets, the project **LOOK-EU-NET** will focus on:

- ✓ Partners respective Countries of origin: Italy, Germany, Spain, Poland and Bulgaria;
- ✓ Northern European Countries: Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Baltics;
- ✓ Extra-EU Target Markets: Kazakhstan, Russia and Azerbaijan.

These markets represent some of the most important current markets in the Single Market and the most promising extra-EU markets in the future, in terms of market size and market growth.

Project WEBSITE: <http://www.projects-informest.eu/look-eu-net>

2. OBJECT OF THE CALL

The present call is aimed at European SMEs interested in bringing together common goals in international development and fostering potential synergies in small transnational SME pilot networks of 4-8 SMEs belonging to at least three Member States.

The target SMEs should have the potential to start or further expand abroad, exploiting cooperation with other companies. SMEs with international experience or participating in clusters or international partnerships can be also relevant as they tend to be already cooperative, innovative and keen to jointly develop activities in these SME networks. Including SMEs with solid experience in internationalization together with those who are less experienced can bring added value and lead to more successful overall networking activities.

European SMEs that internationalize successfully are in most cases the ones of greater dimensions; SMEs are those who most need and would most benefit from the support that this pilot project can provide and should therefore be considered as well. The SME networks typically consist of 4-8 SMEs belonging to at least three Member States. The objective of the present call is to identify the potential candidate SMEs and to match SMEs with a common interest and strategy to form a network.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PRESENT CALL LAUNCHED AND MANAGED BY UNIONE REGIONALE DELLE CAMERE DI COMMERCIO DELL'EMILIA-ROMAGNA (INDICATED IN THE FOLLOWING ALSO AS PROMOTER PROJECT PARTNER) IS THEREFORE THE IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF 4-8 EUROPEAN SMES WITH THE CHARACTERISTICS AND POTENTIAL TO BE MATCHED ON THE BASIS OF BUSINESS SYNERGIES AND A COMMON INTEREST TO FORM ONE NETWORK AIMING TO EXPAND THE SMES' BUSINESSES AND PARTNERSHIPS ON INTERNATIONAL MARKETS.

The selected SMEs that will decide to participate and will be matched to form a European SME network, will be supported by experts in defining of a target action plan for internationalization of their business and in implementing concretely the planned actions, with the EU co-financing within the **LOOK-EU-NET** project.

In the first part of the project, the SMEs will be informed and optionally trained on international business planning and marketing tools and will work on the development of the action plan of the network, supported by the expert of the **LOOK-EU-NET** project. The action plan of the network will identify the promotional and business activities and implementation methodology (more effective at network level) to expand SMEs business and partnership on international markets.

Then, in the second part of the project, the activities will be carried out, as previously planned and defined by each SME network in the single action plan of the network, with the support of the experts of the **LOOK-EU-NET** project.

The implementation of the SME networks action plan will be financed. The European Commission will co-finance the action plan with grant of maximum € 25.000,00 (up to 90% of eligible costs of the action). The Project Partners will co-finance the 10% of the pilot action. The grant will be awarded to the SMES network and based on the reimbursement of actual costs incurred and defined in the action plan. The costs of the activity can be higher but they have to be covered by the network of European SMEs.

The eligible costs may include professional and /or consultancy services for:

- selection of target markets; identification and selection of the customer profiles;
- scouting of new potential distribution channels and clients;
- participation in international fairs and related B2B meetings;
- common brand, common catalogues, e-commerce.

3. REQUIREMENTS TO PARTICIPATE

The present call addresses to all European SMEs meeting the requirements described below and interested in bringing together common strategy and goals in international development and fostering potential synergies in small transnational SME pilot networks of 4-8 SMEs belonging to at least three Member States.

The main requested eligibility criteria are the following (detailed administrative requirements are also listed in the application form):

- ✓ To be a SME according to the definition of Recommendation CE 2003/361;
- ✓ To be located in a European Country;
- ✓ To belong to the following RIS3 *Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization* priorities:
 - 1) Mechatronics;
 - 2) Sustainable Living;
 - 3) Agri-food industry;
 - 4) Cultural and digital tourism
 - 5) Health Care.

Will constitute evaluation criteria in the selection of SMEs the following:

- ✓ Level of export orientation;
- ✓ Level of complementarity of products / processes within a sector/industry/network in order to establish the European SME network;
- ✓ Level of preparation and availability of SME staff to dedicate to the European SME network;
- ✓ Existence of a realistic business plan of internationalization program, level of integration of this plan in a European business network;
- ✓ Capacity of the SME to continue the network project after the end of the present project.

Administrative requirements:

- ✓ To be a Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) according to the definition of the EU recommendation 2003/361;
- ✓ To be established in a EU Member State;
- ✓ To be active in one of the target sectors of the Call;
- ✓ To be active, not in liquidation or bankruptcy and not have been subject of bankruptcy proceedings or in the pre-settlement procedure;
- ✓ not be in receipt of an outstanding recovery order following a European Commission decision declaring the aid received illegal and incompatible with the common market;
- ✓ fulfill obligations related to payment of tax liabilities and liabilities for pension and health insurance in accordance with the legal provisions in the applicant's Country;
- ✓ comply with the rules concerning accidents at work and occupational diseases, safety in the workplaces, the collective labor agreements and regulations relating to environmental protection, in accordance with the legal provisions in the applicant's Country;

The general criteria described above will be applied in the evaluation procedure on the basis of direct interviews with those SMEs satisfying the eligibility criteria.

4. SELECTION PROCEDURE

All the European SMEs that have expressed interest in the participation and that meet the eligibility criteria will be interviewed to collect information about SME position towards internationalization, with a view to establish European SME pilot networks of 4-8 SMEs belonging to at least 3 Member States.

The final objective of the evaluation step is the identification and selection of all those European SMEs that have the characteristics and tools to be potentially matched and join a European network.

European SMEs will be informed of the result of the evaluation and their **eligibility with the possibility to participate actively in an SME transnational network** and activities or not.

After a subsequent in-depth comparison of European SMEs with a view to setting up the SME networks (profiles, parameters, economic sectors, goals, product complementarity, development programs, Countries, etc.), **experts will propose to each SME to join one or more networks, and the SMEs can finally decide whether to participate or not.**

The pilot SMEs network will be considered as **formalized once the relative agreement has been defined and signed by the participating European SMEs**. Then SMEs will start the operative activities of the network within the LOOK-EU-NET project.

The selection process consists, in two Phases detailed in the following and will be supervised by an Evaluation Committee that will be appointed by the Project Partner.

Phase 1. Formal and Administrative Evaluation

- Applicants have completed and submitted the application form, including the self- declaration, in full conformity, and have undersigned it.
- Applicant is an SME established under its National Law and based in an EU Member State
- Applicants operate in a sector belonging to the RIS3 *Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization* priorities.

Phase 2. Qualitative evaluation will be carried out in two parts related between them: the first focused on **the individual SME**, the second focused on the **SME with the view of the forming/being set up EU Network**).

The evaluation will be based on the macro-criteria described in the following; for each macro-criteria is indicated maximum of assignable points (max. total 100 points):

Individual SME:

- Internal capacity of the SME as potential partner in the EU Network (i.e. in terms of products, documentation, knowledge of foreign markets, level of orientation to export, self-motivation), as individual (max. 50)
- Organizational capacity of the SME, as individual structure. (max. 25)

SME in the forming /being set up Network

- Level of integration of the SME in the forming/being setup EU network (in terms of integration of technical profile and horizontal or vertical role in the network, product complementarity, objectives and goals, development programs, Countries, etc.) max.25.

Each company can be awarded in max. n. 1 EU network. The EU Network awarded within the present Call as result of selection will be published on the project website. The excessive eligible applications will be included in a reserve list and considered in case of renouncement of the beneficiaries of the approved list.

5. OBLIGATIONS

After the completion of selection and set-up of EU networks, the beneficiary SMES must sign a Network Agreement within 20 days after the communication of the results, with Promoter Project Partner which has in charge the management of the pilot action and Informest Consulting.

Beneficiaries undertake to:

- sign Network Agreement including Network's Plan of Action and its Budget,
- submitting a financial reporting including proofs of expenditures and submitting an operative reporting about work in progress and status of the ongoing project's activities.

6. HOW TO APPLY

European SMEs can forward the expression of interest to the email address: simpler@rer.camcom.it according to the deadline.

7. DEADLINE AND TIMING

The call for European SMEs is open **from 12th July to 6th September 2019.**

8. RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROCEDURE - CONTACT PERSON FOR INFORMATION

Contact persons: Laura Bertella, Stefano Lenzi (051 6377045/037; simpler@rer.camcom.it);

9. AUDIT

The selected SMEs and awarded SMEs are required to provide to Promoter Project Partner, all the information and documents required.

The selected SMEs are required to notify any cessation of activities and any other event occurred after the application delivery relating to the stated requirements, which could lead to the loss of any of the requirements for admission to the planned activities of the Call for Applicants.

10. LIABILITY

Each Applicant is responsible for the completeness, clarity and accuracy of the data and information contained in the documents and materials prepared as part of the participation to this Call for Applicants.

The Promoter Project Partner and Project Partners of the LOOK-EU-NET Consortium are not responsible for such content, or for any inaccuracies, omissions or violations of the rights of other people.

11. WITHDRAWALS, REVOCATION AND SANCTIONS

Each winning SME can renounce without any charge to the participation in the program, giving a written notice by 3 days from the date of publication of the results to the email address simpler@rer.camcom.it. In case of loss of any eligibility requirement, the beneficiary is excluded from the project (revocation) and sanctions are imposed. Sanctions are also imposed in case of breach of the listed obligations and withdrawal after 3 days from the date of publication of results. In both conditions, the leader of the LOOK-EU-NET project shall impose the reimbursement of any expense occurred, or any expense the LOOK-EU-NET Consortium is already committed to undertake. In both conditions, the leader of the Consortium may impose the request of repayment of damages, considering the seriousness of consequences that would arise from loss of eligibility requirements and non-fulfilment of the obligations and how they affect the execution of the project.

12. PRIVACY, DATA PROTECTION

The personal data will be processed according to EU REGULATION 2016/679 by the UNIONE REGIONALE DELLE CAMERE DI COMMERCIO DELL'EMILIA-ROMAGNA, located in viale Aldo Moro 62, 40127 Bologna – Italy, in order to manage the European LOOK-EU-NET project. The processing of the data is legitimized in the consent granted to us to carry out the objectives of the project, and will be conserved during the legally established time or until you revoke your consent or freely oppose the UNIONE REGIONALE DELLE CAMERE DI COMMERCIO DELL'EMILIA-ROMAGNA your data with the indicated purposes. For these purposes, Personal Data may also be communicated to third parties entitled. The processing of Personal Data, therefore, carried out through electronic and/or automated or equivalent, will be based on principles of fairness, legality, transparency and will take place with appropriate procedures to ensure the security and confidentiality. A

The interested Party can exercise the rights of access, rectification, cancellation, opposition, portability and limitation of the processing of its data by writing to THE UNIONE REGIONALE DELLE CAMERE DI COMMERCIO DELL'EMILIA-ROMAGNA, at the address viale Aldo Moro 62, 40127 Bologna – Italy, or via email to staff@rer.camcom.it email, attaching a copy of DNI duly accrediting the identity and specifying the right the interested Party want to exercise. In any situation, the interested Party has the right to file a claim with the Italian Data Protection Authority.