SMEs Go International

SMEs Go International Technical Assistance Facility: call for submission of concept notes

Frequently asked questions
Ver. 23.09.2020

About the technical assistance

1. How many projects will benefit from this call?

A total of 25 projects will benefit from the technical/business advisory support of this Facility. There may be opportunities for a wider group to benefit from general support services.

2. Can I get financial assistance from this call?

No. This call is about technical/business assistance services. This includes general business advice (e.g. business planning, resilient business models, marketing, internalisation, etc) and technical services (e.g. legal and financial advice, feasibility studies, innovation, technology, environment, etc).

3. What is the equivalent -in financial terms- of advisory support that all SMEs will receive?

The extent of the support depends on the specific needs of the project. Project support will range from 40 to 66 expert days.

4. Is any financial contribution expected from the SME?

Delivering the activities in the project may require financial contribution also from the SME, which 'SMEs Go International' cannot provide. Therefore, in kind (time, resources, people) and financial contributions from the SME are expected. SMEs must explain in their applications how they plan to finance their projects

5. What is the duration of the support for each selected project?

The duration of the support, i.e. the amount of expert days allocated to each selected project, will depend on the type of support needed. The advisory activities are envisaged to last for a maximum of six- eight months.

6. Who will be the advisors?

Depending on the specific needs of each selected project, the assigned advisors will be experts in general business advice (e.g. business planning, market assessment, marketing, auditing) or technical services (e.g. resilient business modelling, digitalisation, internationalisation, legal and financial advice). When assessing applications, projects will be matched with the most suitable advisor or combination of advisors.

7. Will the SMEs be able to propose or choose the advisors?

Most suitable experts will be selected by the Technical Assistance Facility Team and proposed to the SME.

8. Will it be possible to change an advisor if the working relationship is not satisfactory for the SME?

A robust feedback and monitoring mechanism will provide the SMEs with the possibility to inform about such issues. Those are unlikely situations given that the advisors will be hand-picked from a pool of vetted associates and advisors. However, if serious situations arise, a replacement advisor will be put in place.

9. How will the success of the support be monitored?
Key indicators will be in place to monitor progress of projects based on the specific needs and milestones indicated in the concept notes. The key indicators will be developed and finalised on a case-by-case basis.

10. How could the COVID-19 pandemic affect the delivery of the technical assistance?
COVID-19 has shown that, despite the lockdowns, globalisation does not stop as businesses keep searching for international opportunities. 'SMEs Go International' might now be even more relevant than before, as it can also help companies in recovering from the initial impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has potentially shifted priorities of supported SMEs and might cause adjustments in the delivery format (digital) of the services. In their essence, the support is however not expected to be impacted.

About the application process

11. What is the deadline for the submission of concept notes?
The deadline for the submission of concept notes is 16 October 2020 at 18:00h CEST.

12. Are companies that provide services instead of products eligible?
Yes, they are.

13. Can a small group of SMEs apply jointly or only one SME?
The minimum requirement for being eligible is to be an SME who intends to cooperate with another company or organisation from a third country (non-EU, non-COSME). Consortia of SMEs are also eligible. In that case, a consortium leader working alongside the advisors needs to be clearly defined.

14. Is a consortium led by an SME that includes a big company eligible?
The consortium leader must be an SME. However, a larger organisation can participate in a call as a partner of a consortium.

15. Are start-ups eligible for this call?
Yes, provided that the start-up is an SME, participated in ESCP4i activities and can prove cooperation with an organisation in a third country.

16. Can a leader of a COSME project (Strand 2) apply for this technical assistance?
The leader of a COSME project (i.e. a cluster organisation) cannot lead a consortium applying for this technical assistance, but can participate as a supporting organisation in a consortium led by a SME.

17. Can clusters also be part of a consortium?

Clusters may support their SMEs in preparing the application. The partner participating in the project from outside the EU can be any type of organisation. The main applicant must be an SME from the EU or COSME participating countries. If a cluster acts as a supporting organisation, this is acceptable.

18. Can one joint service (cluster partnership) under one legal entity/sole entrepreneur providing consultancy services apply for the Facility?

Yes, if the lead applicant is a sole entrepreneur (i.e. an SME) since the Facility aims to support SMEs.

19. Should the partner in the third country be an SME?

No, it can be an organisation of any kind (e.g. SME, large enterprise, agency, chamber of commerce).

20. Is there any part in the application form to present the partner in a third country?

Yes. It is in *Part 2- General project information*. The details of your ESCP4i and business partner in a third country need to be provided in questions 21-28.

21. How can SMEs prove contact with partners in third countries?

SMEs can prove contact with a business partner in a third country with an exchange of emails, a letter of intent or a summary record of exploratory discussions with that partner.

22. I do not have a partner in a third country yet. Can I still apply?

Yes, if you can provide a proof of contact with that partner before submitting your application. As you fill in the application form, please conduct some research on the type of partners you are looking into, reach out to them, and provide us with a preliminary arrangement (e.g. proof of email communication) on the partnership.

23. Can a SME submit two applications if it has two projects with different partners in third countries?

The assessment of applications will be based on the projects. Therefore, a SME can present two applications if there is a different project in each of them. It is however expected that projects differ in substance and not just geographical location.

24. Should the application be filled in by SMEs or by clusters?

The application form should be filled in by the lead applicant, which must be an SME. Clusters are invited to support their SMEs. However, as the support is provided to SMEs, it is important that SMEs take full ownership of their application.

25. Do you intend to maintain this Technical Assistance Facility each year?

Currently, one call for concept notes and implementation is planned. Given that business advisory service support spans across 3-9 months generally, this will continue till 2021.

26. What if I have questions on how to fill in the application form?

If you are unsure about how to fill in the application form, please check the guidance document and join a dedicated webinar on 1 October. If you still have questions, contact smes-go-international@ecorys.com

27. How can I learn more about this Facility?

For regular updates on the SMEs Go International Technical Assistance Facility, you can sign up to the ECCP quarterly newsletter and follow @Clusters_EU on Twitter. For specific up-to-date information about this Technical Assistance Facility, please check the official webpage and request to be added to the direct mailing list by sending an e-mail to smes-go-international@ecorys.com