D3.2: “Best Practice Guidelines”
Project: Promoting Co-operation of Central Europe in eBusiness

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1. Introduction

These guidelines show how potential participants in the IST Programme can be assisted. Participants would include companies both large and small, universities and research institutes, and administrative bodies such as libraries, hospitals, local authorities and government agencies. For the purpose of this guide, the IST Programme includes (for FP6) Integrated Projects, Networks of Excellence, Specific Targeted Research Projects, Coordination Actions and Specific Support Actions, but excludes cooperative (CRAFT) and collective research actions.

The guidelines are intended for intermediaries such as national and regional contact points for the IST Programme in the Associated Candidate countries. They are based on the experience of the CEEB consortium in promoting the IST Programme in the Czech Republic and Poland.

2. Needs of potential participants

The needs of potential participants vary from requests for specific information (eg the closing date of a Call) to very broad questions, for example whether a technical idea is likely to gain EU research funding. To describe these needs, we divide the process through which an organisation might progress in developing its knowledge of EU RTD Programmes into six stages. These are:

- Becoming interested
- Deciding whether a project idea has a chance of success
- Developing a proposal
- Proposal writing
- Negotiating a contract
- Running the project.

For each stage, some external assistance might be helpful. This is described in the following sections.

Stage 1: getting them interested

For those who are mostly or completely unaware of EU RTD Programmes, the requirement is to show them that participation brings benefits.

One approach is simply to state how much funding is potentially available. With a budget of thousands of millions of euro, EC RTD certainly looks attractive. However, simply to state that funding is available will lead quickly to questions concerning the terms and conditions under which the funding might be obtained. Because EC RTD funding is highly bureaucratic, the novice is soon lost in large numbers of acronyms, rules and documents (Workprogramme, Call text, Proposers Guides, Evaluation Manual, contracts etc). This will deter all but the most desperate.

An alternative approach is to use case studies showing how organisations have benefited from participation in EU RTD Programmes. For an audience of commercial companies, a case study might show how a company introduced new products or processes, gained market share or entered new markets as a result of participating in an EU project. For an audience from the medical sector, a case study might show a breakthrough in diagnosis or treatment.

Newcomers are often doubtful of the value of collaborative working, and the benefits of working with foreigners. So the case studies should also explain how collaborators brought, for example, new ideas or technologies, or clearer description of requirements. Where possible, they should also explain how working with foreigners helped. For example, foreign collaborators might ensure that a new product was well adapted to the requirements of different markets. In the medical field, an epidemiological study might only be possible if carried out on an international basis.

Below are a few extracts from a UK booklet which indicate the types of case studies which help persuade organisations to take an interest in EC RTD funding. (The booklet is aimed at small companies, and is not specific to the IST Programme).

- Teer Coatings of Kidderminster (who have 40 employees) obtained a £330,000 grant to help develop specialist coating technology equipment.

- A company employing 14 people received a grant of £319,000 to find a way to reduce chemical usage in raspberry production.

- Penn Refractories of Stourbridge secured a £210,000 grant to help develop a quality assurance monitor for refractories.

- "At the end of our project we had a new market with a German end user who has worked with us to validate the technology".

Preparing case studies is expensive. Fortunately, the IST Programme provides some well-written material in its "Technologies serving people" book, which can indicate where to look for suitable cases.

To reach the novices, the case studies would be used (a) in short presentations at conferences, which are not specifically aimed at EU proposers. (b) as articles placed in business and technical magazines (c) as printed documents promoting the IST Programme, either as case study reprints or within introductory booklets, to be used at exhibitions or mailed in response to initial inquiries.

Stage 2: deciding whether a project idea has chance of success

The effort required to develop a full proposal is substantial. A typical figure in FP5 is three person months for the coordinator, with smaller contributions from other participants. In FP6, the Integrated Projects will be larger than the research projects in FP5, and so the proposal preparation effort will also be larger.

Many proposals are rejected very quickly in the Commission's evaluation for simple reasons. For example, the proposal includes researchers from leading universities and research institutes, but no organisations who would eventually use or exploit the results. Or the proposed work duplicates research already under way in other countries. Another common fault is that the proposal does not really address the requirements of the Workprogramme. Or the cooperation between organisations in different countries is not clear, and so the European added value is not shown.

Many of these faults can be detected in proposal ideas at an early stage, before the proposer has made a lot of effort to complete the consortium and define the workplan. The proposer can then be advised either to stop work, so saving several months effort, or to reorientate the project in a direction more in line with the requirements of EU RTD funding.

To detect faults in project ideas at this stage, seven tests can be applied:

a. How well does the project idea match the IST Workprogramme? Is it a good fit, just a partial fit, or fits only limited aspects?

b. Is the project idea innovative? What similar work is going on elsewhere?

c. How well does the project idea match the organisation's strategy? If the proposal is funded, will the proposer have the support of the organisation not only to carry out the project but also to exploit the results?

d. Will the project results have a large impact in European society or economy? Can the potential market size be estimated? Can potential benefits to users be quantified?

e. How will the research results be transferred to the market? Is a member of the consortium already supplying this market?

f. Where is the added value from European cooperation? How interdependent are the efforts of the different consortium members?

g. How urgent is the need for the work? Is this compatible with the speed of EU funded research projects?

If the proposer can provide convincing answers to these questions, then they should proceed with proposal development. Where unconvincing answers (or even no answers) are given, this indicates areas for improvement. For example, if the proposer cannot show that the proposal is innovative, maybe a survey of the state of the art should be undertaken.

At this stage, the proposer will also need basic information about EU RTD project funding. This would include the funding models, the evaluation process, rules concerning intellectual property, and participation rules (in FP5, the content of Guide for Proposers Part 1). This will help them decide whether to develop the proposal and recruit partners for the consortium.

This assistance – the seven tests plus basic administrative information – can be provided in several ways.

- The administrative information can be supplied as an EC document, or as telephone or email advice, or as part of a training workshop.

- The seven tests can be introduced as part of a workshop. Their full application, however, requires one-to-one advice, based on written documents supplied by the proposer. The advice can be given face-to-face, by phone or via email. It is likely at this stage that the proposer would have incomplete information, so it might require several iterations before all seven tests have been checked.

- An alternative approach is for an external advisor to carry out all the work on behalf of the potential proposer. This is normally done by a strategic analysis of the operation, through which the advisor identifies opportunities for EU RTD funding. To do this for SMEs, a methodology called Euromanagement was developed and applied with EC support. This approach is, however, expensive, since it takes several days effort of an experienced consultant to carry out the analysis.

Stage 3: developing a proposal

Once the project idea has passed the seven tests, proposal development starts. This has two main components: completing the consortium and developing the workplan.

Potential proposers often request assistance in finding partners. There are several ways this can be done in the case of the IST Programme: Idealist, Cordis and the SJIC service.

- Idealist is a service dedicated to the IST Programme. Searches for partners are distributed expressing interest in a specific area of the IST Programme. It usually produces first responses within a few days (sometimes a few hours) of starting a search, and can produce 20-30 replies within six weeks.

- The SJIC service supports all areas of the Framework Programme, but its primary focus is on SMEs and the CRAFT scheme. Usually it produces several responses within a few weeks of the start of the search.

- Cordis partners is a public database where proposers can submit a description of either a proposed project or their capabilities and wait for others to contact them. Data on success rates in finding partners is not published.

Because Idealist provides the best service, this is the one recommended for use.

Experienced proposers can usually fill out the Idealist partner search form with little or no assistance. For less experienced organisations, help is often required on one of two areas.

- **Identifying the appropriate part of the IST Workprogramme** (Action Line in FP5) addressed by the project idea. This is important for three reasons. Firstly, to ensure that the proposer is addressing an Action Line which is open in the current Call for Proposals. Secondly, to ensure that the search is distributed by Idealist to the right audience (many of the Idealist partners have different mailing lists for different domains of the IST Programme). Thirdly, so that the proposal is judged in the evaluation by experts in the appropriate technical domain.

- **Deciding which types of partners should be sought.** Often, newcomers to EU RTD Programmes seek partners with similar skills to themselves, on the grounds that these are the only people who can add to the research of the proposer and so accelerate scientific progress. This might be appropriate for the FP6 Networks of Excellence and some Coordination Actions. For research projects, however, a wider range of skills is usually needed, including researchers with complementary technical know how, potential users of the results of the work, and potential exploiters of the results.

Developing and agreeing the workplan is a major activity of consortia. Unless external advisors have specific knowledge of the technical field concerned, this discussion is best left to the researchers involved. However, these discussions can lead to changes in technical scope and partnership. So as these discussions near completion, it might be a good idea to run the seven tests described in the previous section. This can be done by an external advisor either in a meeting with the proposer or remotely, by email.

Stage 4: proposal writing

Assuming that stages 2 and 3 have been completed successfully, then proposal writing becomes chiefly an exercise in communication, with the aim of expressing the consortium’s project idea clearly on paper and providing all the information necessary to evaluate it.

Some of the most common failings in proposals are listed below:

- The project objectives – what will be achieved by the end of the project, not through subsequent development and application – are often unclear. The consortium has become so familiar with the objectives that they assume everyone knows them.

- Project objectives are not presented in a measurable way, so progress towards achieving them cannot be assessed.

- The proposers explain the features of the proposed work, but not the state of the art, so making it difficult to judge whether the work is in fact innovative.

- Benefits to users of the research results have not been identified or quantified, making difficult the judgement of potential social or economic impact.

- The population of potential users has not been quantified, again making difficult the judgement of potential social or economic impact.

- Proposed management structure is based on highly centralised control, which does not take account of the need to coordinate the efforts of largely independent organisations, many of whom are contributing to the funding of the project.

- Workplan lacks on overview to link between the high level project objectives and the detailed work to be carried out.

Help to address these deficiencies in proposals can be provided in three ways:

- By providing the relevant EC documentation (in FP5, Guide for Proposers Part 2)

- Through a proposal writing workshop.

- Reviewing the draft proposal and providing feedback. This can be done via email.

Stage 5: negotiating and administering EU RTD contracts.

In FP6, the Commission proposes to eliminate some of its bureaucratic procedures such as detailed checking of cost statements and approval of changes of contractors. Partly to ensure the proper use of public money, partly for self-protection of participants, corresponding procedures (such as audit certificates and consortium agreements) will be needed to fulfil some of the functions of the eliminated EC procedures. Newcomers will therefore continue to need advice on subjects such as:

- EC contracts, form filling, and how to negotiate a Commission proposal for a budget reduction

- Intellectual Property

- Consortium agreement, including procedures for changing the budgets of partners, for changing partners and for modifying the workplan.

- Audit certificates, allowable costs, time recording, exchange rates and cash flow

- Progress reports, deliverables, EC review

Most if not all the information needed is available on the Commission's web site. Understanding all the information is frequently a challenge. External assistance can be provided, either individually (by phone and email), or – more efficiently – through a training workshop, followed by phone and email advice.

Stage 6: managing

EC RTD projects are different from many of those normally encountered in economic and research activities. They are multi-cultural, mixing organisations large and small, public and private, commercial and non-profit distributing. They are genuinely collaborative: each partner has its own objectives and priorities, which must be reconciled. And they are carried out on a distributed basis. Conventional project management assumes a high degree of contact between those working on the project. In EC RTD projects, the contact is much less extensive.

Newcomers to EC RTD projects need to understand the different environment in which these projects are managed and the different techniques, which need to be employed. This can be achieved in two ways:

- Firstly, through training courses. These can explain how EC RTD projects are different from traditional projects, show how to focus on outputs rather than activities, explain the management structures and processes needed, how to exploit the relationship with the Commission to advantage, and explore the sources of conflict in the projects and how they might be handled.

- Secondly, the project manager (and perhaps workpackage leaders) can be coached in how to carry out their roles. This might be done on a face to face basis, but can mostly be done through email and web-based tools plus telephone support.

2. Support agencies/intermediaries supplying help efficiently

Intermediaries provide a range of services to promote the IST Programme. They include ccirculation of documentation on EU RTD programmes and organization of promotional activities such as Information Days, seminars, conferences, newsletters, web sites, fairs, etc. They also provide some advice to individual proposers by phone and email.

Limitations of existing support services in the Associated candidate countries include:

- Lack of focus. Not every potential proposer needs all the information. As described above, newcomers to EU Programmes need to be persuaded of the benefits of international research collaboration, and to understand how international projects work. Experienced proposers do not usually need this information, but they do need detailed information on current research priorities of the Commission and its administrative procedures. A single Information Day which tries to meet the needs of both experienced proposers and newcomers will either confuse the newcomers with jargon and detail, or bore the experienced proposer.

- Lack of resource. Intermediaries cannot provide unlimited consultancy to proposers. In some cases, the national or regional authorities who provide their funding put a time limit (which can be as little as ten or fifteen minutes) on the effort to be used per inquiry. This is adequate when the proposer is experienced and requires specific information (eg where to find the Commission's official exchange rates) but provides little opportunity to guide a newcomer through the intricacies of proposal development, or even to the point where they can decide whether they should get involved with EC RTD Programmes.

- Lack of skills. Even in EU Member States with long experience of EU RTD Programmes, recruiting staff with experience is difficult. They are rare! In Associated candidate countries, they are even more rare, because these countries have been involved in EC RTD Programmes for only a few years.

3.1 Focus

To develop a more focussed approach to promoting the IST Programme, it is helpful to identify the level of experience of the potential proposer. So initially we identify four types of organisation:

- Novices – their only knowledge of EC RTD has been some publicity concerning EC RTD funding, maybe case studies

- Basic – have read the basic information, maybe attended an Information Day

- Experienced – have participated in a proposal
- Professional – have participated in a project.

The help required will vary by the type of organisation. For example, those at the basic level might need advice about partnering what types to include in their consortium, and the roles they should play. For the professional, what they might require is an efficient partnering service (eg through Idealist or through brokerage events).

All organisations (or are we talking people?) will start as novices. As they acquire knowledge of EC RTD Programmes, they progress through the stages of Basic and Experienced, and finally arrive at the level of Professional. As they progress, their need for external assistance changes.

This classification can be used by the support agency to decide what type of assistance to offer.

3.2 Resources

In Poland, the Czech Republic as well as in other Central Europe Countries consultancies concerning aspects of FP5 activities were provided mainly by the National Contact Point (NCP) network (including regional, branch/thematic, and local contact points). The network was established as a new organisation responsible for the FP5 implementation, with some connections rather to the research institutions, universities, etc. than to the enterpreneurship environment or the local governmental bodies. Therefore, it is clear that universities and research institutions were the first which took an advantage of being close to the intermediaries responsible for the FP5 implementation in the country.

The main objective of the activities released was to define potential project participants among organisations of the respective sector and make them interested in participating in international undertakings provided under the 5PF (bearing in mind that all the sources of information regarding EC funding, especially the FP5, present in most Central Europe countries were rare and mostly provided by institutions situated in major cities).

Fortunately, in the case of the IST Programme most of the organisations of the sector have been quite opened to such ideas and at that early stage efforts of the work of intermediaries seems to be fruitful and quickly visible.

Of course, there is no doubt that developing the network of contact point and/or creating networks of organisations with similar expertise, especially at every level of governmental institutions would improve noticeably not only the response of potential participants but also the participation rate, and the success rate as well.

Urgent need for commercial consultancies is also an important aspects, which has to be underlined. NCP, due to limited personnel funds as well as extended range of duties, is able to provide mostly general support. It is not able to concentrate on each project, and takes care of each stage proposal development including: project idea verification, partner search in order to form a consortium, project budget estimation, filling the administrative forms, contract negotiations, management of the project, etc.

There is a hope that in conditions of normal market economy all needs are going to be satisfied in the near future, helping newcomers from the candidate countries (sooner or later: from the new members of European Community) to achieve desired success in the field of receiving the Community funding. In any case one should NOT expect that the Commission's approach to the participants of Community co-financed projects would differ depending on the country of proposal submitters.

3.3 Skills

In Candidate Countries there is a serious lack of consultants experienced in EC RTD programmes requirements and procedures. The members of existing NCP network have continuously been gathering the needed skills, taking advantage of various possibilities of doing this. They attend, wherever it is possible, trainings and courses organised by the experiences European consultancy firms. Information o how to solve particular problems (at any stage of the project) is being passed through the network, including exchange of experience on international level (after few years of contacts with EC: programme committees, NCP meetings, fairs, brokerage events, etc.) people throughout Europe made professional contacts opened future cooperation under following 6. Framework Programme.

Sometimes the Commission has given such opportunities itself – as for example intensive trainings for coordinators of the projects. Such actions increase considerably the number of specialists having relatively detailed knowledge of EC funding principles.

Running projects and completed projects could also be considered as permanent source of experienced people, but normally such specialists have been employees of an organisation or research institution and they use their experience for themselves and their co-workers rather than for someone else.

Therefore it is so important to create friendly environment for permanent and new staff, especially that at the lower level of the local government, being closest to the local enterprises and other potential participants, enabling quick and detailed involving into EU funding problems, among these into Framework Programmes' rules of participation. The more competent intermediaries, the more successful beneficiaries of EU project in a given country.

4. The Guidelines

Summarising the above considerations, the problem of passing the expertise to potential participants consists of two areas:

- identifying the proposers' likely needs
- providing the service according to needs

What concerns the needs: of course the necessity of the first general information will remain during many years, at least for the reason of new organisations emerging on the market. Such general information should focus on basic information on EC funding possibilities. The well-prepared success examples always help to encourage new potential clients. Info-days should be supported by good and complete written information materials.

For the group of people already involved in the general principles of participation and considering their hypothetical participation in the project the information should include details of present calls for proposals, demand for additional partners for consortia for well-defined projects (very important, because it can be the quickest and most effective way of entering into a project!). Appropriate documentation for such more sophisticated info-days is a must, as for any type of intermediaries' activity.

The more advanced in gaining the EC funding have been those who have been preparing their own project proposal or their own share in the project proposal. In this case the most suitable way of teaching them is to prepare an interactive training seminar or a workshop. Depends of number of participants, the meeting similar to brokerage event can be consider, and – if only possible – with some participants from abroad. During such workshop some important issues on proposal writing techniques should be underline (formal requirements, fulfilling the evaluation criteria, following the guidelines, importance of the budget preparation in the right way, etc.), problems with completion the appropriate consortium and how to overcome them, potential support from the local organisations, both governmental and non-governmental. The possibility of individual consultations in the cases of some particular problems is not excluded.

The most advanced participants are those who have already been in the project – either at the stage of completing the project proposal or in the course of project performance. Some training seminars on issues connecting to the contract negotiations, project management, cost statements, reporting to the Commission, overcoming particular problems, items connecting to the post-project period, etc. The main role of intermediaries is to serve as a source of most detailed information and advice, in most cases – in face–to-face discussions.

The degree of the involvement of potential participants into European RTD programmes can be evaluated using, for example, specially prepared questionnaires distributed among the organisations of given sector or branch. But lesson learnt from such kind of activity in the case of other projects, at least in Poland, is not very optimistic: not necessarily due to the lack of interest but maybe due to the lack of time and/or a person who could do this, such questionnaires have been returned to the NCP offices rather seldom. Better results one can achieve asking for filling in such forms by all the participants of any info-day, training, fair, etc., because in such an occasion majority of participants feels obliged to look into such documents and fill them in. Of course, the opportunity of individual contacts or consultations with the firm representative(s) can be also used for collecting the questionnaires' data base as quite sure source of desired information.

Appendix 1

Running events

Eg when to mail.

Must include preselection (entry questionnaire).

Before joining workshop 1, should already be motivated by case studies, now want to know how.

Targeting

Keep in touch after/follow up to give more help, including next workshop in series, and partner search and consultancy.

Get them on partner search, at least database, in workshop 1.

Helpline for those who received initial training eg relate to the 7 tests.

Proposal review only for those who attended the Proposal Writing workshop

Traditional NCP = give info/answer questions. CEEB = find out what they need.

Must deal with brokerage (needs much preparation)

	STAGE	HELP NEEDED	SUPPLIED AS				
			Documents (including web)	Presentation	Workshops	Help line advice (phone/ email/ faq) – 5-15 minutes	Advice (hours)
1	Becoming interested	Benefits of EU collaboration	Case studies	Case studies – how I benefited	na	na	na
2	Deciding whether a project idea has a chance of success	• Basic administrative rules	Workprogramme Guide for Proposers, Part 1	Case studies – how I applied	Introductory workshop	Yes	na
		• Seven tests	na	na	Introductory workshop	na	Yes
3	Developing a proposal	• Partner search	Idealist	Idealist standard presentation	Introductory workshop	Yes	na
		• Develop workplan	na	na	na	na	Yes
4	Proposal writing	• Meet formal requirements	Guide part 2	Evaluator's view	Proposal writing workshop	Yes	na
		• Clarity and address evaluation criteria	Evaluation manual	na	Proposal writing workshop	na	Yes
5	Negotiating a contract	Guide to EC bureaucracy	Electra EC guide to negotiating Contracts etc	na	Workshop: negotiating and administering EC RTD contracts	Yes	na
6	Running the project	How to motivate, monitor and control virtual teams	na (except for a few academic texts)	na	Workshop: managing virtual teams in R&D projects	na	Yes (coaching)

Na = not applicable

Blue text: documents supplied by EC, made available by intermediaries

Red text: provided by intermediaries