**SUMMARY REPORT**

**PHASE II INFORMATIVE SESSIONS**

**for the shortlisted applicants**

**Public Call for Proposals for Procurement of Equipment and Provision of Services for Entrepreneurs, Micro and Small Enterprises**

**Niš, Vrnjačka Banja**

**Sessions held 19 to 26 September, 2018**

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**Background**

The European Union (EU) allocated 4.5 million Euros for Public Call for support to entrepreneurs and micro and small enterprises aimed at increasing competitiveness of local economy in the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia and the Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia. The Call was announced on 22 May and was open until 6 July 2018. The entrepreneurs, micro and small enterprises registered in 99 cities and municipalities involved in the EU PRO Development Programme, engaged primarily in production or provision of IT services and founded between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2017 are eligible to apply.

Within the call there are two groups of enterprises to be supported – the first group includes newly-founded enterprises registered between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2017, and the value of the individual projects to be funded may range from 10,000 to 20,000 Euros. The second group includes enterprises operating more than three and up to five years, i.e. those registered between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2015, while the value of individual projects ranges from 10,000 Euros to 30,000 Euros, or 50,000 Euros for fast-growing and export-oriented enterprises.

The projects will be evaluated within two-stage process, first by assessing and ranking the submitted project concepts and, in the second stage, the shortlisted applicants need to submit the full project proposals.

**Objectives**

In response to the Public Call for submission of Concept Notes, the Programme received a total of 468 applications. A total of 47 applications are assessed as non-eligible according to criteria of the Call. The remaining 383 applications underwent technical evaluation, out of which 215 received a sufficient number of points and are recommended for Phase II evaluation process. The 468 enterprises applying to the Call are registered in 79 Programme LSG’s and the proposed 215 are from 63 LSGs. The distribution between the two regions is even, with 229 received and 115 recommended from Šumadija and Western Serbia and 219 received and 100 recommended from Southern and Eastern Serbia.

The main objectives of the informative sessions for Phase II evaluation process. were as follows:

* to present the results of the first application phase
* to present detailed information about the Application documents
* to present information about the application process and selection criteria;
* to provide an opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions;

In order to better inform applicants recommended for Phase II evaluation process on the application procedure and the application form, the EU PRO Development Programme held 5 info sessions in the period from 19 to 26 September 2018. Info sessions were organised based on assessment of locations of the MSE’s proposed for the Second phase. Three info sessions were organised in Vrnjacka Banja and two sessions in Nis. These will be in the format of our initial info sessions, with

**Project Team Members in Attendance**

The following project team members were in attendance at the Informative Sessions to support events, present information, facilitate discussions and to answer questions:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Informative Sessions for the shortlisted applicants Public Call for Proposals for Procurement of Equipment and Provision of Services for Entrepreneurs, Micro and Small Enterprises** | |
| **Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Business Support Organisations (SMO and BSO) Sector team** | **Role** |
| Olivera Kostić | *SME and BSO Sector Manager* |
| Enis Ujkanović | *Programme Associate for SME and BSO* |
| Milica Korać | *Programme Associate for SME and BSO* |
| Jelena Despotović | *Programme Assistant for SME and BSO* |
| Evgjenije Isljami | *Programme Assistant for SME and BSO* |
| Goran Zlatković | *Programme Assistant for SME and BSO* |

**Overview of Info sessions statistics**

A total of 282 persons attended 5 info sessions, including businesses and regional development agencies representatives. Details about the session’s attendances are outlined in table below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Location** | **Number of  Participant** | **Business  Represent.** | **RDA  Represent.** | **Female** | **Male** |
| **NIŠ,** Wednesday,  19 September 2018 | 59 | **56** | 3 | 17 | 42 |
| **NIŠ,** Thursday,  20 September 2018 | 55 | **55** | 0 | 17 | 38 |
| **VRNJAČKA BANJA,** Monday,  24 September 2018 | 53 | **50** | 3 | 15 | 38 |
| **VRNJAČKA BANJA,** Tuesday,  25 September 2018 | 64 | **61** | 3 | 24 | 40 |
| **VRNJAČKA BANJA,** Wednesday,  26 September 2018 | 51 | **50** | 1 | 16 | 35 |
| **TOTAL** | 282 | 272 | 10 | 89 | 193 |
| **TOTAL %** |  | **96.5%** | **3.5%** | **32%** | **68%** |

Out of the total number of info sessions participants, 272 are representatives of 186 companies whose concept notes of the project proposals passed to the second phase of the evaluation, while 10 participants represented Regional Development Agencies that will provide support in preparing the complete project proposal.

Out of the total number of companies whose concept notes applications entered the second phase of evaluation process, info sessions were attended by representatives from 186 companies (87%). Representatives of all 215 businesses that have qualified for the second phase have confirmed that they have received all the necessary documentation for the second phase application process.

Gender statistics shows that females made up 32% of the participants while male accounted for 68%, which is slightly better than in the first phase sessions, as shown in the table below.

**Overall Assessment**

Assessment of the topics discussed during the info sessions and their relevance to preparation of the project proposal have shown that 96 % of participants think that they are useful and very useful. A vast majority of participants (97%) stated that they received concrete answers to all questions asked.

Organisation of the info sessions, clarity of information, interactive approach and presentation of the call, the selection criteria and application submission were underlined as good. The format of the Info sessions allowed for productive dialogue between the attendees and the project team. Attendees asked questions related to the topics presented and record of the questions asked is noted and will be available on the EU PRO web site, together with the answers.

Of the total number of applicants who completed the evaluation form, more than half took part in information sessions during the first phase of the Public Call (54%), as shown in the table below:

**Summary of Evaluation Questionnaire results**

Out of the 282 attendees on Info sessions, 183 provided feedback. Attendees were encouraged to provide written comments in the provided evaluation form, which consisted of 11 questions. Not all of them filled in the feedback form, but a majority of 65 % did (68% in Phase I evaluation). Responses to questions were given mainly by rounding off the answers, while a very small number responded to questions where it was necessary to write an opinion.

With their own approval, all attendees who registered and signed in at the Info sessions with their contact information have been added to the project-specific contact database. This database will be used during the program implementation to contact/inform them on important issues and events.

**Question I** asked “ How did you get information about the Public Call?”

Five specific options were offered and one open where it was possible to give an individual answer. The largest number of participants received information on the Public Call from Regional Development Agencies (37%). The participants listed the following RDA’s as a source of information:

1. Regionalna Razvojna Agencija Sandžaka “SEDA” Novi Pazar – 15 participants
2. Centar za razvoj Jablanickog I Pcinjskog okruga, Leskovac – 10 participants
3. Regionalna Agencija za ekonomski razvoj Šumadije i Pomoravlja, Kragujevac – 9 participants
4. Regionalna razvojna agencija "JUG" – 8 participants
5. Regionalna agencija za prostorni i ekonomski razvoj Raškog i Moravičkog okruga, Kraljevo - 6
6. Regionalna agencija za razvoj istočne Srbije “RARIS”, Zaječar - 6 participants

Other sources are listed on the second place as the source of information (27%). Other sources are listed as follows: Internet, Chamber of Commerce, friends and colleagues, printed media, other business supporting institutions. The conclusion is that the biggest impact on informing participants had business supporting organizations.

**Question II** asked “ Did you attend the EU PRO info sessions during the promotion of the first phase of the Public Call?“

Most applicants who successfully passed into the second phase of the process, took part in the first info sessions (54%).

**Question III** asked“If the answer to the previous questions is No, please specify the reason?“ Applicants who did not participate in info sessions of the first phase as reasons for non-participation stated the following:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. They were not held in my place of residence | 2. Time of event did not fit | 3. There was no need, the Public Call was clear | 4. I was not timely informed about the event | 5. The other reason |
| 9% | 26% | 24% | 35% | 6% |

Majority of applicants who did not attend it were not timely informed (35%) or time of event did not fitted. Nearly a quarter of those applicants considers that there was no need for attendance since the Public Call was clear to them.

**Question IV** asked “What were your biggest challenges in the first stage application process, if you encountered the same?“

As the biggest challenges in the development of the concept note of the project proposal applicants most often stated the following::

* To precisely, clearly, specifically and briefly write business ideas and plans
* The ability to improve business
* To present the idea in the simplest and best way possible
* Defining the impact on corporate social responsibility
* Sending the application in two formats
* To improve productivity
* Enhancing production process and employment of new labor
* The challenge was to create an ideal combination of machinery to improve production for a certain sum of money
* The challenge was to reconcile the business idea with reality
* The ability to provide cost share

**Question V** asked “ What could we improve in the entire process (promotion of a public call, organization of content of information sessions, application process etc)? Please be precise“

The applicants proposed the following ideas for improving the process of promoting the public call, the organization and content of information sessions and the application process:

* To duplicate the number of info sessions
* Promotion in smaller places (advertising on local radio stations and local TV)
* Promotion in terms of sending e-mails to target groups covered by a public call
* Simpler email addresses for sending questions and applying
* Evaluation is fairly long, it would be realistic that is shorter
* Consultations should not be limited until the date before the closing of the competition
* Localizing info sessions, presentation programs in smaller communities
* To reduce promotions and increase total grant funds
* To better specify the CSR activities

**Question VI** asked “What is in your opinion, the best way to promote such public calls?“

As best information channels applicants consider business supporting organizations. The largest number of participants think that this is on the first place the Regional Development Agency (33%), followed by the Local Economic Development offices (18%). Afterwards, media (TV – 19%) and social networks follow.

**Question VII** asked “To what extent has this info session helped in better understanding of conditions proposed with the Public Call?“

All of the evaluation participants who answered this question (100%) confirmed that it helped them to better understand the second phase application process.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1. not at all | 2. very little | 3. I do not know | 4. enough | 5. completely | Total |
| Total | - | - | - | 95 | 79 | 174 |
| **Total (%)** | **0%** | **0%** | **0%** | **55%** | **45%** | **100%** |

**Question VIII** asked “How would you evaluate topics covered during the info session and their relevance to your work on the preparation of the Complete Project Proposal?“

The large majority of evaluation participants (99%) assessed topics discussed as very useful (61%) and useful (38%).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1. irrelevant | 2. generally irrelevant | 3. partially useful | 4. useful | 5. very useful | Total |
| Total | 0 | 1 | 2 | 64 | 103 | 169 |
| **Total (%)** | **0%** | **0%** | **1%** | **38%** | **61%** |  |

**Question XI** asked “Have you received concrete answers on the questions asked?

The vast majority of info session participants (97%) answered that they were given answers to all the questions asked. Only 6 of the participants (3%) said they did not receive full answers. Their questions were recorded and will be further communicated in order to get satisfactory answers.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | a. Yes | b. No | Total |
| Total | 168 | 6 | 174 |
| **Total (%)** | **97%** | **3%** | **100%** |

**Question X** asked “What was good?“

Responses are quoted as given by the participants:

* *Concreteness of the session and concrete answers to the questions*
* *The complete information session was at a high and professional level.*
* *Everything - a good intention in presenting everything that is necessary to do the project successfully*
* *Info session was meaningful. All areas of the application form have been processed. All the uncertainties have been clarified.*
* *Very competent and clear answers to questions asked, qualified and well-trained people from EU PRO team*
* *Quality presentations, attitude and approach of the presenter who brings trust and presents the Public Call as useful and fair, transparent and good-natured action.*
* *The presenters were very interested to explain everything to us*
* *The explanation for the application for the second round was well presented and there was a two-way communication.*
* *The session itself was good because there was nothing left unanswered*
* *The program is greatly presented. All questions were answered*

**Question XI** asked “ What was bad and how can we improve these events in the future?“

Responses are quoted as given by the participants:

* *To group info sessions based on the type of application so that companies with similar activities get the most concrete answers*
* *More frequent communication with entrepreneurs, with a focus on young people aged 22-35 years*
* *Maybe to divide trainers into groups and to work in groups*
* *Time for listening is a lost time*
* *To include additional short break for smokers*
* *To organize these events in small and underdeveloped communities*
* *Maybe to give as many concrete examples as possible*
* *A large number of participants, participants writes on their knees*
* *Info sessions are organized in working hours*
* *To offer more frequent trainings and support to businesses in achieving goals*
* *To organize more often Public Calls and sessions*
* *More info sessions in more municipalities*

**Key Takeaway Points**

1. The Public Call is relevant as proven by the number of participants and received comments.
2. Engaging RDA’s is proven to be effective as they do have built relationships with the business community.
3. E-mail for questions regarding the Call for Proposals should be simplified, i.e. [pitanja@unops.org](mailto:pitanja@unops.org), to enable easier access to the interested entrepreneurs to raise questions
4. Smart sheet is a good tool for organization of info sessions and for visibility
5. Evaluation lists to be included in the promotional materials and to be pointed out at the beginning of info sessions, to avoid distraction of participants during presentation.
6. To reduce number of questions in the evaluation sheet, in order to get more focused questions.

**Appendices**

Appendix A. Power Point Presentation