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**SUPPLIER EVENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS DOCUMENT**

**FOR**

**SO17327**

**EVALUATION OF ENGLAND 2014-2020 EUROPEAN REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF)**

**FOR**

**DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
(‘DCLG’)**

**Event:** Supplier Event for Request for Information Regarding SO17327 Evaluation of England 2014-2020 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016 3pm

**Location:** 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF

**Attendees:**

- DCLG (Hosts)
- CCS (Hosts)
- Amion Consulting
- Arup
- Coffey
- Ecorys
- Frontier Economics Limited
- Grant Thornton
- ICF International IFF Research
- Independent Research intelligent Solutions (IRIS)
- Ipsos Mori
- KPMG
- London Economics
- Mott MacDonald
- NatCen
- Regeneris
- Sheffield Hallam University
- SQW
- Technopolis
- TNS BMRB
- Warwick Economics & Development

## **Slides – Points to Note**

### ***Slide 7: National Evaluation Aims***

The aims are as set out in the plan, required by EU Regulations, which is yet to be finalised. DCLG will be in a position to share this later with the ITT.

## **Q & A Discussion**

### ***1. Proposals for 2 competitive tenders***

**Question:** Can the same organisation tender for both contracts? (The contract for the scoping study and summative assessments, as well as the contract for the national evaluation).

**Response:** This will be dependent on the route to market chosen for both requirements; at this moment in time it is thought that organisations will be equally able to tender for both.

DCLG recognises existing feedback that Lots 3 or 4 would be appropriate for the scoping study whereas it is felt that Lot 3 would be more appropriate for the national evaluation.

DCLG recognises that these decisions will have implications for prospective tenderers and they will be considered in more depth.

**Question:** How would the successful bidder for the scoping study be affected (negatively or positively) by their insider level of knowledge if they chose to bid for the later national evaluation tender? For example, the organisation or consortium to which the scoping study is awarded to may be able to gain a more detailed view of realistic costing for the national evaluation from their work.

**Response:** CCS will ensure that the procurement process will be as fair as possible and that information will be accessible to all interested Potential Providers. It will be down to CCS and DCLG to ensure that the evaluation criteria used to evaluate the tenders are not favouring the Successful Provider for the Scoping Study and Summative Assessment.

**Question:** How does DCLG intend to bring everyone up to speed with the evaluation plan? And, how do we make DCLG's thinking transparent?

**Response:** The evaluation plan is still in a very general format, and some of this makes up the content of the slides presented at this event as well as the RFI – such as the thinking around methods, databases and challenges.

The plan is still in the process of being finalised as it needs to be submitted to the European Commission. It is likely to be more of a 'think piece' with key milestones and ambitions but this will be shared with the market. Ultimately, though, bidders will not be tied to it and we want to make sure the scoping study makes advances on that plan with innovation and ambition.

**Question:** Why is there a need for a separate scoping study to the national evaluation?

**Response:** This is due to a combination of issues. The element of risk to the Government is particularly important. DCLG needs to have more of an idea of time and budget before commissioning a national evaluation.

**Feedback:** It was raised by some organisation representatives that past experience has shown that a scoping study does give insight into evaluation best practice, and that when given in Lots the process is more manageable and allows for expertise to be brought in for the different aspects desired to be covered.

**Question:** Would the scoping study, with its current requirements, be too constraining for the national evaluation?

**Response:** A cautionary note was raised by one organisation that in previous evaluations, scoping studies have not gone far enough; with successful contractors for national evaluations needing to check and even redo some of this work. It was recommended that some sort of scrutiny as to the robustness of this work should take place. Ideally this would be addressed early on, either internally by DCLG and/or by a steering group

**Feedback:** It was, however, also fed back that the national evaluation needed to be flexible, and not necessarily defined by the scoping study as elements such as the data available for the evaluation may change.

**Question:** Is there a risk that prescribed baselines for the Summative Assessment resulting from the scoping study would not be aligned with the needs of the National Evaluation?

**Response:** DCLG responded that there is a need to make progress. The summative assessment offers a unique opportunity to start collecting data over a six year period. Ideally DCLG would like to get this right in the first instance. Whilst there would be scope to alter the summative assessments going forward, DCLG wouldn't want to do this retrospectively as it would impact on the richness of the data produced and its comparability with national datasets.

## ***2. Remits of the respective tenders***

**Question:** Is the scope of the national evaluation about evaluating which projects received funding and their experience/relative success, or is it wider than that?

**Response:** Broadly, the national evaluation is about what the programme has achieved and what more could have been done. This is not limited to the success of the projects, though this does form one dimension, (and an aspect which the summative assessment aims to bring a ground-level set of data about).

**Question:** Would individual projects go on to commission their own evaluations to inform the summative assessments? What part of the evaluation activity is being done through this national exercise?

**Response:** What the summative assessment is trying to do is to get individual projects to start collecting data that would a) aid a better evaluation of their own project, as well as b) help the national evaluation. The scoping study is about identifying what those additional outputs are.

The support for the summative assessment is about providing appropriate guidance throughout this process, which a lot of the projects have to do as part of their application (e.g. logic models). We currently do not envision this aspect to be very onerous, in fact in the pilot that is currently running so far nobody has come forward with this kind of complaint.

It was also emphasised that one of the jobs of the scoping study is to assess what is feasible or proportional for the projects.

The ERDF operational programme has an incredible level of project diversity; the scoping study should identify what is a realistic expectation for capturing different baselines for the different projects.

**Question:** Can we know more about how projects that are successful in applying for ERDF project funding are selected?

**Response:** For the ERDF programme concluding in 2015, the decision-making process happened in conjunction with local partners. Quite a lot of the process had sat around this involvement which is why DCLG is keen to carry out the process evaluation side reasonably early on.

In order to qualify to receive funding, successful projects need go through a rigorous appraisal process, so they have to be of a good quality. DCLG will try to share information on this process where possible. It was also noted, however, that successful projects understand the process better and are likely to be successful in subsequent programmes; there is a question to be explored here regarding how to draw new people into these funds.

**Question:** There needs to be greater clarity regarding the provision of support to GDTs, for example is this support to be provided at the project level?

**Response:** DCLG recognises that there needs to be more clarity on these responsibilities. There is still some uncertainty remaining over the role of the GDTs as they are expected to be impartial yet they may also be asked by applicants to provide advice as to the process (they are primarily there to ensure the required tasks get done by the projects in the limit of guidance available). This could in part be covered in the scoping exercise but the Authority will need to consider timetabling.

Overall, DCLG emphasised that they are mindful of these points; they will be taken on board and elaborated on more clearly in the ITT.

**Feedback:** It was collectively felt that this aspect would affect interests in bidding for this work as organisations would need to question whether they have the capacity to provide the level of support required.

### **3. *Tendering process***

**Question:** Why has the UKSBS Research and Evaluation framework been selected as the preferred route to market when it is not related to either DCLG or ERDF?

**Response:** CCS confirmed that this pre-engagement stage was to test the level of interest by advertising through Contracts Finder to reach all suppliers. The UKSBS Research and Evaluation framework is a research framework, and these DCLG requirements are research requirements, therefore the UKSBS framework is an appropriate route to market as the work fits within the framework's scope of services. We have consulted with the framework owners and they have confirmed that these requirements are in scope of this framework. Although a firm decision has not been made on the final route to market a preference would be to use the UKSBS Research and Evaluation framework Lots 3 & 4 rather than the expense of a full OJEU competition. The framework was put in place as a result of a fair and open competition.

CCS confirmed that the framework owners had included the opportunity for either sub-contracting or consortia arrangements to be put in place by suppliers on the framework who will act as the lead supplier.

### **4. *Duration and milestones***

**Question:** What is driving the timeline for the national evaluation?

**Response:** This requirement is primarily being driven by the need to start and finish the process evaluation so that there is sufficient time for any recommended changes to be made to the Operational Programme and to test their impact, though DCLG recognise that these time constraints may be somewhat limiting.

**Feedback:** In response, some market representatives suggested that some of the process elements could be built into the scoping study as they suggested that it would be difficult to do the scoping study without process-related knowledge. As a result the two main components (summative assessment and national evaluation) could overlap slightly.

**Response:** It was agreed that the handover of summative assessment support between the Scoping Study and National Evaluation would need consideration, with DCLG emphasising that whilst it was difficult to predict the on-going level of summative assessment support likely to be required, there shouldn't be a significant gap between the two.

**Feedback:** Adding elements of the process evaluation to the scoping study could complicate this phase of work.

**Response:** DCLG will consider what needs to be made clearer regarding what is expected from a process evaluation, and the potential impacts on the evaluation of changes made to processes.

**Feedback:** Others suggested that this element was for the tenderers to set out what they could deliver, but that this would be easier to do with more time at the proposal stage. More time at this stage would facilitate the organisation of consortia which can be time intensive; a larger budget for the research would also be beneficial as it would allow for expertise to be brought in.

**Feedback:** Another related issue raised was that there needed to be more consideration given to the difference between the process and the impact/economic evaluation in terms of timelines for reporting. They raised the point that in previous ERDF evaluations it was often too soon for some projects to be able to robustly demonstrate impacts. There needs to be greater clarity on the questions of ‘when do you need these things by?’ and ‘what are you using the findings to scope?’

**Response:** DCLG responded that Impact Assessments of the Operational Programme will be due in 2020; therefore the key questions to keep in mind would be ‘what information do you need in 2020 to do the evaluation properly’, and ‘what can we do now?’

**Feedback:** Another representative stated that they wouldn’t advise taking any longer for the scoping study, 4-5 months was probably about right otherwise it would get confusing.

## **5. Timetable**

**Feedback:** Timescales in the RFI were broadly agreed to be okay, though it was thought that more consideration should be given to the length of time it will take to test the feasibility of matching study data to national datasets such as the IDBR and so on.

**Feedback:** It was suggested that it would be useful to get ONS involved early on in the process, as well as other Government, and even some European, agencies (e.g. VOA, Higher Education Society); otherwise DCLG would be paying the contractors to chase them.

**Response:** DCLG noted that the evaluation plan is still very general and that they do want to make this more specific, with more hands-on work devoted to the role/expectations concerning datasets. At the minute DCLG doesn’t have a fixed idea of how long the various permissions may take to obtain. There is also a question as to whether the successful bidder for the scoping section would need this early access, or at least some knowledge regarding what the agencies can provide in order to build relationships to gain access.

**Feedback:** It was generally thought that early access would be helpful. One representative, however, stated that accessing the datasets would only be useful if there is capacity to carry out data linkage. They also queried whether there would be any records at this stage in order to make data linkage worthwhile as this would limit the number of investigations of risk registers required.

**Response:** DCLG responded that part of the scoping exercise will also involve looking at the Department’s own data (ECLAIMS) and trying to expand that dataset as much as possible

as the outcome of the scoping exercise will be to establish whether changes need to be made.

**Feedback:** It was requested by one representative that DCLG set out within their ITT the milestones that they consider important (as a minimum), as well as updating this as and when they change.

They also requested that DCLG provide details about which elements of both the summative assessment/scoping study and national evaluation is causing DCLG concern, or where DCLG thinks that the research process might encounter difficulties.

**Response:** DCLG responded that there will be other information for the evaluations going forward (though it is yet to be published). There is an internal Government Review currently being conducted which does focus on process evaluation elements. This is yet to report but it is thought that this will provide a wealth of information for consultants to draw on to inform their work. DCLG is also undergoing the Lean, Six Sigma business processes which aim to look at where the biggest risks are.

## **6. Budget**

**Question:** Will DCLG and CCS be setting a budget in the ITT? If not, can DCLG be as specific as possible about what they want?

**Response:** It is not usual for CCS to disclose the budget, unless this is a particular request of the customer. DCLG has not made this request at this stage.

**Question:** Does the European Commission have a fixed idea of the amount that they expect DCLG to spend on this evaluation? Is there expected to be any parity between member states?

**Response:** DCLG acknowledged that there was a minimum amount expected to be spent on the evaluation but that this is not regulatory (it will also not be disclosed). DCLG stated that there was no requirement for parity between states.

**Feedback:** It was noted by one representative that investing more in the measurements could help create a greater effect on the original intention (the Hawthorne Effect). DCLG need to bear this in mind, particularly when encouraging projects to be honest in their reporting of the performance of supported businesses etc.

**Question:** Does DCLG have a sense of expectation regarding the grant holders/Projects in relation to the Summative Assessments?

**Response:** The design of the summative assessments is a requirement of the Scoping Study. The expectation is for the grant holders to spend the money on a quality product, and DCLG wants to know what the money is achieving. The evidence to be collected should not duplicate existing information provided by projects. The process must be feasible for the

smallest projects with the smallest budgets. Related questions include: 'what data do we need to work with?' and 'what can give the best return on investment?'

### **7. Methodology/design: Scoping study & Summative Assessment design**

**Question:** How do you plan to evaluate the different axes of the programme?

**Response:** There is a requirement to evaluate each priority axis. DCLG are mindful of the balance or proportionality required and would point those interested towards the guidance on the budget breakdown by priority axis in Annex 1 of the RFI and the Aims and SMART objectives in Annex 2.

**Question:** The summative assessment will tell DCLG a lot about the projects that the ERDF programme has supported, but what of the counterfactual? How far can DCLG obtain information about those who applied for the programme but were unsuccessful?

**Response:** All project applications will be available on ECLAIMS, however DCLG is mindful of the potential need to get information from non-beneficiary businesses that unsuccessfully applied for business support; the Evaluation Plan will say more about unsuccessful projects and final beneficiaries/non-beneficiaries. The feasibility of collecting such information will be a consideration for the Scoping Study.

**Question:** Is there an interest in the spatial dimension of this operational programme? Or is the interest purely restricted to the level of individual intervention?

**Response:** There is only a regulatory requirement for the evaluation to take place. Local growth will be an angle of interest to the department but only if the budget facilitates this. See Annex 2 of the RFI.

### **8. Business registers and data linkage: Scoping study**

**Feedback:** Regarding data linkage and sharing, it would be good if DCLG could share what consent is available and therefore what the contractors might be able to do.

**Response:** Noted. DCLG will attempt to progress data access and look at consents in place for the work required/requested.

**Question:** There was a discussion around data linking and the potential desirability of testing the feasibility of this as part of the scoping work. It was asked whether DCLG would be able to indicate whether they would expect to have any firm-level data (e.g. company names, addresses, Companies House Registration Numbers) from projects by the time the scoping study might kick-off in September.

**Response:** During the Scoping Study timescale there will be data available on the projects already funded by the 2014-20 ERDF, the 'beneficiaries' (See Annex 3 of the RFI for numbers).

With regard to 'final beneficiaries' i.e. those businesses on the ground that are being supported by the projects, the role of the Scoping Study is to specify what data should be gathered to enable economic impact evaluation.

The Scoping Study will need to understand what data will be available and how it can best be used (including through data linking) to ensure effective evaluation at a later stage.

In the ITT we will update you on any DCLG-led investigations into the provision of access to the IDBR within the project timescales, and its timing.

The project level data that may facilitate data matching to business or charity registers would be based on the applicant details section of the application form. This covers:

- Organisation name
- Organisation type
- Is the organisation a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME)?
- Company or charity registration number
- VAT number (if applicable)
- Website
- Address
- Town / City
- County
- Postcode

### **9. Summative assessment support**

**Question:** What sort of arrangements might facilitate working with GDTs?

**Response:** One organisation provided the example of different consultants supporting different local entities, with conversations occurring between technical advisers/national consultants and those in tune with things at the local level.

DCLG explained that the GDTs will operate as the 'local arm' of the Authority. The contractor is expected to have an ongoing relationship with the GDTs, and it is anticipated that this will be positive for the contractors as, due to their close contact with local projects, they constitute a large resource base.

The GDT resource level is fixed; they are funded through DCLG's technical assistance budgets and are meant to act in an impartial manner. It is not expected that this support work will be a huge burden to GDT Relationship Managers.

### **10. Database for Summative assessment support**

**Question:** A clearer steer will be needed in the ITT regarding the interim measure requirements. The scoping study, however, will be expected to provide more information as to the following questions: what information does the database need to store? How flexible does it need to be? How do we need to manipulate ECLAIMS?

**Response:** The ideal scenario would be that the summative assessment process is built into ECLAIMS and will be part of how individual projects complete the wider process.

DCLG are currently exploring some interim measures using Logusnet though there are some problems with this and DCLG would welcome information about other provisions that could help inform the ITT going forward.

DCLG would also like to emphasise that as the interim measure will only be needed for a short period, proposals should be proportional to this requirement.

### ***11. What further information could be helpful?***

**Question:** Are BIS and the GLA (and any other bodies) going to commission separate evaluative programmes?

**Response:** This is not expected. Also all of these bodies use ECLAIMS. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are, however, conducting their own work.

### ***12. Any remaining questions?***

**Question:** Will there be any other/future opportunity for clarifications (and 1-2-1 telephone or face to face discussions) with the team?

**Response:** As part of the pre-market engagement, the supplier event will be the main forum for any questions, there will then be an opportunity to provide written feedback until 16th May.

If these requirements go out to tender, then there will be a clarification period built into the timescales.

Additionally, there may be further pre-market engagement activity for the National Evaluation element which is not due to be tendered until early next year.

**Question:** Can you confirm that you do not need to know at this stage details of our partnering arrangements?

**Response:** No, we do not need to know at this stage the details of your partnering arrangements. This will only need to be disclosed at the tendering stage as part of your bid.

**Question:** It was noted that in addition to the national evaluation work, individual projects will undertake their own evaluations, which may include commissioning independent researchers or consultants. Would involvement in the national evaluation prevent us being able to undertake 'local' evaluation work?

**Response:** No. The Successful Provider would not be precluded from providing services to ERDF-funded projects, but it would need to demonstrate that it would not impact your capacity or independence in fulfilling the contract requirements. The Invitation to Tender(s)

documentation will make clear if there are any specific restrictions with regards to undertaking local evaluation and/or how potential suppliers will be required to address this in their responses and approach.

**Question:** If a supplier perceives there to be a conflict of interest with their organisation delivering either of the requirements, how will they need to approach addressing this?

**Response:** The Invitation to Tender(s) documentation will make clear how potential suppliers should address any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest in their responses as well as how such responses will be assessed as part of the evaluation criteria.

**Question:** Could we have details to understand whether ConsultancyOne is considered viable as an option for a framework through which to procure the services.

**Response:** This is a research requirement(s) so it is not appropriate to use a non-research specific framework such as ConsultancyOne. The Authority is keen to seek expert knowledge from within the research field to input into this work which is readily available on the UKSBS Research and Evaluation Framework. As covered above, the framework does allow for subcontracting arrangements and consortia bids.

#### **Discussion from 1-1s**

*<No discussions held>*