

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (CONSULTING SERVICES – INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANTS)

ROMANIA

Romania Secondary Education Project

Loan Agreement No 8481-RO

Assignment Title: Preparation of Universities grants' manual

Reference No.: C 2 / 1.2

The Government of Romania (GoR) has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the *Romania Secondary Education Project*, and intends to apply part of the proceeds for consulting services.

The consulting services ("the Services") include *Preparation of Universities grants' manual* within a period of 100 days. The Terms of Reference for Preparation of Universities grants' manual are annexed to this Request for Expressions of Interest.

The Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research / the Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects now invites eligible consultants ("Consultants") to indicate their interest in providing the Services. Interested Consultants should provide information demonstrating that they have the required qualifications and relevant experience to perform the Services.

Qualification

The minimum competencies required from the Consultant are the following:

- i. Master degree or other postgraduate studies;
- ii. Postgraduate studies in project management field are considered an advantage;
- iii. At least 10 years of professional experience in education or education management field;
- iv. Experience and knowledge related to project design, evaluation and implementation;
- v. Previous experience in developing similar guidelines is considered an advantage;
- vi. Training or experience within other educational reform programs at the national level are considered an advantage;
- vii. Very good understanding of Romanian education system, especially the tertiary education;
- viii. Strong communication and interpersonal skills. Demonstrate good written and oral communication skills in Romanian.

The attention of interested Consultants is drawn to paragraph 1.9 of the World Bank's "Guidelines: Selection and Employment of Consultants under IBRD Loans and IDA Credits and

Grants by World Bank Borrowers" dated January 2011 (revised July 2014). ("Consultant Guidelines"), setting forth the World Bank's policy on conflict of interest. In addition, please refer to the following specific information on conflict of interest related to this assignment:

Bank policy requires that consultants provide professional, objective, and impartial advice and at all times hold the client's interests paramount, without any consideration for future work, and that in providing advice they avoid conflicts with other assignments and their own corporate interests. Consultants shall not be hired for any assignment that would be in conflict with their prior or current obligations to other clients, or that may place them in a position of being unable to carry out the assignment in the best interest of the Borrower. Without limitation on the generality of the foregoing, consultants shall not be hired under the circumstances set forth below:

(a) Conflict between consulting activities and procurement of goods, works, or non-consulting services (i.e., services other than consulting services covered by these Guidelines): A firm that has been engaged by the Borrower to provide goods, works, or non-consulting services for a project, or any affiliate that directly or indirectly controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with that firm, shall be disqualified from providing consulting services resulting from or directly related to those goods, works, or non-consulting services. Conversely, a firm hired to provide consulting services for the preparation (before Loan effectiveness) or implementation of a project, or any affiliate that directly or indirectly controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with that firm, shall be disqualified from subsequently providing goods, works, or services (other than consulting services covered by these Guidelines) resulting from or directly related to the consulting services for such preparation or implementation. This provision does not apply to the various firms (consultants, contractors, or suppliers) which together are performing the Contractor's obligations under a turnkey or design and build contract.

(b) Conflict among consulting assignments: Neither consultants (including their personnel and sub-consultants), nor any affiliate that directly or indirectly controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with that firm, shall be hired for any assignment that, by its nature, may be in conflict with another assignment of the consultants. As an example, consultants assisting a client in the privatization of public assets shall neither purchase, nor advise purchasers of, such assets. Similarly, consultants hired to prepare Terms of Reference (TOR) for an assignment shall not be hired for the assignment in question.

(c) Relationship with Borrower's staff: Consultants (including their experts and other personnel, and sub-consultants) that have a close business or family relationship with a professional staff of the Borrower (or of the project implementing agency, or of a recipient of a part of the loan) who are directly or indirectly involved in any part of: (i) the preparation of the TOR for the assignment, (ii) the selection process for the contract, or (iii) the supervision of such contract may not be awarded a contract, unless the conflict stemming from this relationship has been resolved in a manner acceptable to the Bank throughout the selection process and the execution of the contract.

(d) A consultant shall submit only one proposal, either individually or as a joint venture partner in another proposal. If a consultant, including a joint venture partner, submits or participates in more than one proposal, all such proposals shall be disqualified. This does not, however, preclude a consulting firm to participate as a sub-consultant, or an individual to participate as a team member, in more than one proposal when circumstances justify and if permitted by the RFP (Request for Proposal).

One Consultant will be selected in accordance with the selection of individual consultants method set out in the Consultant Guidelines.

Further information can be obtained at the address below during office hours 8:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Expressions of interest and CVs must be delivered in a written form to the address below (in person, or by mail, or by fax, or by e-mail) by 18.05.2016, 4 P.M. local time.

Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research – Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects

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Romania
Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research
Romania Secondary Education Project
Loan Agreement N° 8481-RO

Terms of Reference for Development of the Universities Grants Manual

1. Background

On April 17, 2015, the Government of Romania (GoR) and the World Bank (WB) signed the Loan Agreement N° 8481-RO on the implementation of the **Romania Secondary Education Project** (hereinafter referred to as **the ROSE Project**). The ROSE Project was declared effective on October 14, 2015, and will be implemented by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research of Romania (MNESR) until November 2022. The ROSE Project Development Objectives (PDO) are to improve the transition from upper secondary into tertiary education and increase the retention in the first year of tertiary education in project-supported education institutions. It is structured in three components, as described below.

Component 1 – School-based and Systemic Interventions. This component finances supply-side interventions at the school and system levels to address the academic and personal factors hindering Romanian students from transitioning from upper secondary to tertiary education, including dropping out, declining to take the Baccalaureate, or scoring a low mark on the Baccalaureate.

Sub-component 1.1 – School-based Interventions. This sub-component supports the transition of students from upper secondary into tertiary education using a decentralized approach based on non-competitive grants to low-performing public high schools. The criteria for selection of eligible high schools combines the following rates: Baccalaureate passing rate, dropout rate and upper secondary graduation rate. Grants will be awarded to public high schools for a 4-year period to allow sufficient time for implementing activities aimed at supporting students from Grade 9 through Grade 12. At the end of the Project, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of Romanian public high schools (1,160) would benefit from this sub-component. High school grants are intended to support activities that reduce high school dropout rates, increase graduation rates, and improve performance on the Baccalaureate.

Sub-component 1.2 – Systemic Interventions. This sub-component finances: (i) revision of the upper secondary education curriculum, with specific consideration for the needs of disadvantaged students including Roma; (ii) training of teachers and public school directors on implementing the revised curriculum, on adapting the curriculum to the needs and abilities of different students (inclusive education), student-centered teaching approaches, intercultural competence and on formative assessment; (iii) improving teaching conditions within Teachers Houses; (iv) revising and updating Grade 8 and Baccalaureate exam banks of items, and providing training and improvement of existing information and technologies platform; (v) development and implementation of a Grade 10 learning assessment, to be administered at the end of the compulsory education cycle; (vi) development of digital teaching and learning

materials; (vii) development and implementation of campaigns to raise student and teacher awareness, which could be tailored for Roma students; and (viii) strengthening of MESR's capacity to use educational information to monitor upper secondary education and the transition of students into tertiary education.

Component 2 – University-Level Interventions and Bridge Programs. This component supports activities designed to address the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of faculties in the first year of study in tertiary education. It finances two grant schemes – one non-competitive and one competitive – for public universities that serve these at-risk students. In addition to the grants, this component finances technical assistance for evaluation of proposals and grants implementation monitoring. Approximately 85 percent of Romanian public faculties would benefit from this component.

This Component will also finance all the technical assistance required for establishing a quality assurance mechanism for the Higher Education Grant Scheme along all the steps in the cycle, including: (i) evaluation of grant proposals; and (ii) monitoring of fiduciary and other pedagogical aspects during the implementation of the approved grants.

Non-competitive grants aim at encouraging eligible public faculties to implement remedial programs, tutoring, counseling, guidance and support services, coaching services, workshops in specific areas, and awareness raising campaigns targeted to at-risk student to achieve the specific Project Development Objectives. The implementation period of these grants would be for 3 years.

Competitive grants aim at supporting tertiary-level campus-based summer courses (*summer bridge programs*) for public high school at-risk students to be offered on campus. The summer bridge courses would be offered during summer breaks and last between two to three-weeks. These courses would be offered to up to 50 public upper secondary education students per course and will fund student allowances and related course-delivery expenses. These courses would provide students an early and low-consequence university experience (“university knowledge”), developing familiarity of the context and initiating early skills development relevant to success in tertiary education. Faculties could present more than one summer bridge proposal.

Learning centers, also funded under the competitive grant scheme, aim at increasing the academic and social support mechanisms available to at-risk students. Each learning center would be designed based on the main factors contributing to student under-achievement and dropout from the earliest years of university, including under-preparation in upper secondary education, underdeveloped study skills, limited exposure to new academic subjects, and lack of familiarity with pedagogical norms (class size, duration, homework levels, and the like) at the university level. These centers would be fully-realized learning spaces, for directed support and self-learning, with furniture (including desks, tables for collaborative work, chairs and bookshelves) and technical equipment, such as computers, interactive white boards, and teaching/learning software (e.g. for language instruction, mathematics, writing, and other core skills, as well as for remedial support and assessment). The learning centers would require full-time administrative staff, paid or volunteer tutors and support staff, and would benefit from the

contributions of professors or experts who would be compensated for supplementary work through the Project.

Public faculties would have autonomy to choose eligible activities, including but not limited to remedial programs, tutoring, counseling, guidance and support services, coaching services, workshops in specific areas, and awareness raising campaigns. Accordingly, eligible categories of expenditures could include: consulting services, non-consulting services, and incremental operating costs (including the management of the grant, excluding utilities, not to exceed 10 percent of the amount of the grant).

The categories of eligible and ineligible grant activities (positive and negative lists) will be detailed in the *Universities Grants Manual* to be developed under the proposed assignment and provided to each participating faculty and university.

The grant cycle for both the competitive and non-competitive schemes includes the same 8 key steps:

- Dissemination and awareness activities;
- Preparation and submission of grant proposals;
- Evaluation of grant proposals;
- Signing of grant agreements;
- Advancing of the first tranche of grant proceeds;
- Fiduciary and pedagogical on-site monitoring of grant activities followed by disbursement of the first tranche;
- Allocation of future tranches of grant proceeds; and
- Grant closing.

Participating public tertiary education institutions in both grant schemes – competitive and non-competitive - will receive a proposal preparation template, guidelines for the preparation, presentation, and evaluation of proposals, as well as the implementation, fiduciary, and monitoring aspects of approved grants. These guidelines together comprise the *Universities Grants Manual*.

The Universities Grants Manual will inform the participating tertiary education institutions about the steps to prepare and present proposal for both kinds of grants schemes, as well as the evaluation criteria and processes envisioned to approve or reject proposals. Furthermore, it will also describe the implementation process for approved proposals, procurement procedures and disbursement of funds and collection of supporting physical and financial implementation progress information. The Universities Grants Manual will be available in a printed format, as well as on-line.

Component 3 – Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation. This component finances day-to-day project management activities, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities, project audits, as well as incremental operational and staffing costs of the MNESR's UMEFP. This component also finances the carrying out of: (i) surveys concerning high school students attending bridge programs; (ii) an impact evaluation of the high school grants program to assess improvements in student outcomes and school management processes; (iii) a revision of the

existing student loan scheme developed for tertiary education students; (iv) an analysis of existing demand-side programs addressing the needs of disadvantaged upper secondary students that are currently under implementation; and (v) other M&E studies, as needed.

2. Objective

The objective of this assignment is the *development of the Universities Grants Manual*.

3. Scope of Services

To achieve the objective of this assignment, the Consultant is expected to undertake the following activities:

- *Learning tasks:*
 - Review the ROSE Project documents including the Project Appraisal Document, Loan Agreement No 8481-RO, Project Operations Manual, Project Implementation Plan, Project Procurement Plan, and the Subsidiary Agreement signed between MENSUR and the Ministry of Public Finance (MoPF).
 - Review the World Bank's Guidelines for Procurement of Goods and Selection of Consultants' Services and the Romanian legislation on procurement in force.
 - Review existing procedures and controls (including those on budgeting and financial management) used by the MENSUR/UMEPF for management of projects financed by international development organizations.
- *Meet the core ROSE Project Management Unit*, especially the Project Director, the Technical Coordinator, the Higher Education Specialist, the Grant Officers, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist.
- *Prepare an outline of the Universities Grants Manual*, taking into consideration all requirements presented in the Project Loan Agreement and POM and an efficient implementation of the universities grants schemes. This outline should be presented to the ROSE Project Director in a draft version, and all comments provided to the Consultant should be incorporated in the final version of this document. The outline as well as subsequent versions of the Universities Grants Manual should include three chapters:
 - 1) Application Guidelines. This chapter should provide detailed information at least on the following aspects of the universities grants schemes: eligibility criteria, formula for calculation of the grant, identification of universities' needs, principles of strategic planning, eligible activities, preparation of Implementation Plan, preparation of grant proposals, submission of proposals (online and on paper), evaluation of proposals, and preparation of Grant Agreement.
 - 2) Evaluation Guidelines. This chapter should provide detailed information at least on the following aspects of the universities grants schemes: registration of

proposals, criteria for evaluation, instructions regarding the evaluation process, phases of evaluation, evaluators' conduct, templates for evaluation, and cycle of evaluation (including subsequent rounds of revision of proposals by university teams and evaluation of revised proposals).

3) Implementation Guidelines. This chapter should provide detailed information at least on the following aspects of the universities grants schemes: procurement, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, operation of the ROSE Management Information System, and reporting.

- On Procurement, this chapter should provide information on procurement planning under the grant, types of procedures and procurement methods, standard bidding documents, and instructions for use of bidding documents.
- On Financial Management, this chapter should provide information on the maintenance of adequate accounting records and supporting documentation for all transactions incurred from grants funds, which is one of the key responsibilities of the university grant team. This chapter should also explain the multi-tranche mechanisms and timely transfers of funds to the university benefiting from the grant. Grant funds will flow in accordance with the procedures described in the internal controls and flow of funds sections of the ROSE Project Operations Manual (POM). Grant beneficiaries would regularly report on the use of funds, per the frequency and due dates agreed, and subject to review and approval of such reports by MNESR, and meeting the technical and financial requirements stipulated in the POM and Grant Agreement.
- On Monitoring and Evaluation, this chapter should clarify the procedures and processes of monitoring of grants implementation, including reporting on the use of funds and technical progress and maintaining appropriate supporting documentation. Grant beneficiaries will report to the MNESR on the performance and financial status of the grants at least on a quarterly basis.

- *Prepare the first draft of the Universities Grants Manual, including the three chapters mentioned above.* This should be presented to the ROSE Project Director for review. All comments provided to the Consultant should be incorporated in the final version of this document.
- *Prepare the final version of the Universities Grants Manual,* that should be presented to the ROSE Project Director, and all comments provided to the Consultant should be incorporated in the final version of the document.
- *Communicate proactively and regularly with UMEFP staff.*

4. Deliverables

As a result of the services described above, the Consultant shall deliver the following products:

- Outline of the Universities Grants Manual: due 2 weeks following the signing of contract;

- First draft of the Universities Grants Manual: due 1 month following the completion of the outline;
- Final version of the Universities Grants Manual: due 2 weeks following the completion of all rounds of review by the MNESR and World Bank.

All deliverables will be elaborated in Romanian. Translation in English will be subject to a separate contract to be established by the UMEFP.

5. Qualification

The minimum competencies required from the Consultant are the following:

- Master degree or other postgraduate studies;
- Postgraduate studies in project management field are considered an advantage;
- At least 10 years of professional experience in education or education management field;
- Experience and knowledge related to project design, evaluation and implementation;
- Previous experience in developing similar guidelines is considered an advantage;
- Training or experience within other educational reform programs at the national level are considered an advantage;
- Very good understanding of Romanian education system, especially the tertiary education;
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills. Demonstrate good written and oral communication skills in Romanian.

6. Other Relevant Terms

Period of the Assignment. The assignment is planned for up to 100 days between June and August 2016, with the possibility to be extended based on a positive assessment of the performance of the Consultant, if needed.

Location of Assignment. The Consultant will be located in his/her office. He/She will also participate in regular meetings with the UMEFP staff, at the UMEFP office.

Reporting. The Consultant should report to the Project Director.

Confidentiality. The Consultant shall not at any time communicate to any person or entity any confidential information acquired in the course of the proposed assignment.

Proprietary Rights. All documentation compiled or prepared by the Consultant for the MNESR in the course of the proposed assignment shall be confidential and become and remain the absolute property of the MNESR. The Consultant shall, not later than upon termination or expiration of the Contract to be prepared for the proposed assignment, deliver all such documentation to the MNESR.