

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

ROMANIA

Romania Secondary Education Project

Loan Agreement No 8481-RO

Assignment Title: Preparation of High Schools Grants' Manual

Reference No.: C 1.1/1.1

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 high schools grants' manual* within a period of *100 days*. The Terms of Reference for Preparation of high schools grants' manual are annexed to this Request for Expressions of Interest.

The *Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research / 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. Graduate degree (master degree, other postgraduate studies) in education, business administration, economics or a related field;
- ii. At least 7 years of professional experience related to preparation and/or implementation of education development projects (experience in implementing World Bank financed project is an advantage);
- iii. Proven experience in designing/revision of various procedures and methodologies related to preparation, evaluation and implementation of projects;
- iv. Knowledge of procurement procedures under the World Bank rules will be an advantage;
- v. Extensive knowledge of Romanian education system and national policies;
- vi. Ability to deliver under tight deadlines and produce high quality outputs;
- vii. Demonstrate strong interpersonal skills and 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 22.04.2016, 2 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 (ROSE Project)
Loan Agreement N° 8481-RO

Terms of Reference for Development of the High Schools 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 Bacalaureate, or scoring a low mark on the Bacalaureate.

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 combine the following rates: Bacalaureate 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 Bacalaureate. Eligible activities will include the following:

- Academic and support interventions (e.g. remedial classes, tutoring, counseling, coaching, mediation with Roma communities, etc.) – at least 50% of the grant amount;
- Extracurricular interventions (e.g. outreach programs, documentary trips/visits, internships, competitions, school networking, etc.) – up to 30% of the grant amount;
- Minor civil works for renovation of internal spaces/rooms (e.g. laboratories) with minimal or no adverse environmental impacts, and purchase of goods – up to 20% of the grant amount.

Up to 10 percent of each grant can also be used to cover grant management and incremental operating costs associated with grant management tasks, including salaries of grant implementation team members.

The high school grant scheme is due to start in the 3rd quarter of 2016 and will be phased in over *two batches* so as to allow for the MNESR to build in an effective learning curve and have sufficient time to make adjustments to the grants scheme, if required. Accordingly, during 2016, the first batch of approximately 25 percent of the 1,260 eligible high schools (around 300) will be provided with a grant, with the remaining second batch of 860 eligible high schools participating in this scheme starting in 2017. Each batch of approved proposals will be implemented over a period of 4 years (2016-2020 for the first batch and 2017-2021 for the second batch).

The **High School Grants Manual**, to be developed based on this Terms of Reference, will inform participating high schools about the preparation and evaluation of grant proposals. Furthermore, it will inform high schools of the implementation process for approved proposals, procurement procedures, financial management, and procedures for monitoring and collecting information on both the physical and financial implementation progress.

This sub-component will also finance the technical assistance required for establishing a quality assurance mechanism for the High School Grants Scheme throughout all steps in the cycle, including: (i) preparation of guidelines on eligible activities to be financed by the grant; (ii) facilitation for the preparation of high school proposals; (iii) evaluation of grant proposals; (iv) in-depth technical assistance for implementation of pedagogical activities; and (v) on-site monitoring of implementation of the high school improvement plan.

The high schools eligible to apply will be assisted in preparing the grant proposals by a team of *facilitators* who will primarily operate at the county level. Each facilitator will be in charge with providing assistance in the form of strategic planning exercises to about 20 eligible high schools. These exercises will support high school teams to prepare grant proposals while building on the existing regulation for the elaboration of Institutional Development Plans by Romanian schools. These facilitators will also evaluate grant proposals, each of them evaluating proposals submitted by other high schools from different counties than the schools facilitated by them.

Once the grant agreements with selected high schools are signed, a team of *monitors* will provide on-site monitoring of the grants under implementation, to ensure: (i) that all activities are being implemented according to the approved high school improvement plan, (ii) that the reporting is carried out accordingly, and (iii) that there is evidence of social participation and citizen engagement in connection with grant implementation.

In-depth technical assistance for pedagogical activities under grants will also be provided through *mentors*, in matters concerning the design and implementation of all pedagogical-related interventions addressing the pedagogical issues for which the grant was requested.

The High School Grants Manual to be developed under this proposed assignment will be used by the MNESR, the applicant high school team, the World Bank, the technical assistance mentioned above (facilitators, monitors and mentors), and other relevant stakeholders.

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.

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 to develop a Manual for the Operations of the High School Grants Scheme financed by the ROSE Project.

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 MENSER 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.
- *Meet the core ROSE Project Management Unit*, especially the Project Director, the Technical Coordinator, the Financial Management Specialist, the Procurement Specialist, the Grant Officers and the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist.
- *Prepare an outline of the Manual for the Operations of the High School Grants Scheme* financed by the ROSE Project (hereinafter referred to as the High School Grants Manual), in Romanian, with the following chapters:
 - 1) *High School Grant Application Guidelines*, aiming to orient the potential beneficiary high schools in the application process under the High School Grant Scheme. This chapter should provide detailed information on the following aspects of the high school grants scheme: eligibility criteria, formula for calculation of the grant, identification of high school needs, principles of strategic planning, eligible activities, preparation of High School Improvement Plan, facilitation process, community involvement, preparation of grant proposals, submission of proposals (online and on paper), evaluation of proposals, and preparation of Grant Agreement.
 - 2) *High School Grant Evaluation Guidelines* intended on establishing the evaluation procedure to be applied by the UMEFP and selected facilitators. This chapter should provide detailed information on the following aspects of the high school grants scheme: registration of proposals, organization of cross-county evaluation, criteria for evaluation, instructions regarding the evaluation process, phases of evaluation, facilitators' conduct, templates for evaluation, and cycle of evaluation (including subsequent rounds of revision of proposals by high school teams and evaluation of revised proposals).
 - 3) *High School Grant Implementation Guidelines*, aiming to orient the beneficiary high schools, during the grant implementation process. This chapter should provide detailed information on the following aspects of the high school grants scheme: 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 high school grant team. This chapter should also explain the multi-tranche mechanisms and timely transfers of funds to the high school benefiting from the grant. Grant funds will flow from the MNESR to the high school benefiting from the ROSE Project 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.

The outline of the High School Grant Manual will be presented in a draft version to the Project Director, who will review this manual with the core team mentioned above. All comments provided to the Consultant should be incorporated in the final version of this document.

- *Prepare a draft version of the High School Grant Manual* in which all fiduciary information (on procurement, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation) are fully aligned and coherent with the overall ROSE Project fiduciary principles and requirements stated in the POM. Submit the draft version of the High School Grant Manual for review of the Project Director. All comments provided to the Consultant should be incorporated in the final version of the High School Grant Manual.
- *Prepare the final version of the High School Grant Manual.*
- *Communicate proactively and regularly with the Project Director and the core team of the UMEFP for the high school grants scheme.*

4. Deliverables

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

Deliverable	Due Date (in weeks following contract signing)
Draft Outline of the High School Grants Manual (HSGM)	1 week
Final Outline of the HSGM (incorporating feedback)	2 weeks
Draft Version of HSGM Chapter 1 – High School Grant Application Guidelines	3 weeks
Draft Version of HSGM Chapter 2 – High School Grant Evaluation Guidelines	5 weeks
Draft Version of HSGM Chapter 3 – High School Grant Implementation Guidelines	9 weeks
Final Version of HSGM Chapter 1 – High School Grant Application Guidelines	12 weeks
Final Version of HSGM Chapter 2 – High School Grant Evaluation Guidelines	13 weeks
Final Version of HSGM Chapter 3 – High School Grant Implementation Guidelines	15 weeks

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:

- i. Graduate degree (master degree, other postgraduate studies) in education, business administration, economics or a related field;
- ii. At least 7 years of professional experience related to preparation and/or implementation of education development projects (experience in implementing World Bank financed project is an advantage);
- iii. Proven experience in designing/revision of various procedures and methodologies related to preparation, evaluation and implementation of projects;
- iv. Knowledge of procurement procedures under the World Bank rules will be an advantage;
- v. Extensive knowledge of Romanian education system and national policies;
- vi. Ability to deliver under tight deadlines and produce high quality outputs;
- vii. Demonstrate strong interpersonal skills and 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 April-July 2016, with the possibility to be extended, if needed, based on a positive assessment of the performance of the Consultant.

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.