

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

ROMANIA

Romania Secondary Education Project

Loan Agreement No 8481-RO

Assignment Title: Technical Assistance to Facilitate the Preparation and Evaluation of High School Grants Proposals

Reference No.: C 1.1/2

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”) support selected public Romanian high schools to prepare grant proposals to be financed by the ROSE Project; and (ii) evaluate these grant proposals according to designated criteria within *70 days over a period of six months*. The Terms of Reference for Technical Assistance to Facilitate the Preparation and Evaluation of High School Grants Proposals 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. Graduate degree in any field, and training, allowing working in education,
- ii. At least 5 years of experience in education or education management.
- iii. Understanding of Romanian educational system, especially the upper secondary education will be an advantage.
- iv. Experience with project design and implementation, project planning and monitoring, human resources management, team building, and cultural sensitive communities (within at least 2 projects).
- v. Experience in projects or grants evaluation.
- vi. Strong communication and interpersonal skills.
- vii. Previous experience with grants under World Bank-financed projects will be an advantage.

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).

A maximum of 60 Consultants will be selected in accordance with the selection of individual consultants method set out in the Consultant Guidelines.

The number of high schools/grant proposals assigned and the period of the assignment will vary according to the number of high schools included in the final list of eligible high schools to be presented by the UMEFP.

Every Consultant must clearly state in his expression of interest which county/counties he/she would like to work in.

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 April, 25, 2016, at 4 P.M.

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 Technical Assistance to Facilitate the Preparation and Evaluation
of High School Grants Proposals**

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 combine 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. 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.

A *strategic planning exercise* to be carried out for the preparation of grant proposals will build on the existing regulation for the elaboration of Institutional Development Plans by Romanian schools. Facilitators will be recruited (based on this Terms of Reference - ToR) to support public high schools to develop grant proposals, taking into account the existing Institutional Development Plans. Facilitators will provide direct support to the high school-based teams for an accurate diagnosis of the situation in the respective institutions and the identification of problems and solutions that will be further implemented with the grant support. Facilitators will primarily train high school-based teams to develop grant proposals. Grant proposals will be prepared with the participation of the principal and a team of teachers, parents of students, students, the mayor, representatives of the local council, and local representatives of the Public Social Assistance Service. Proposals will present the situation of the high school in terms of performance on the Baccalaureate, dropouts, and graduation rates, and will identify solutions to address problems. The proposal will include a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that details costs and timelines for those activities to be financed with the grant. The high school grant proposal would be endorsed by a commission established at the county level, hosted by the county school inspectorate, before being submitted for evaluation.

Facilitators recruited under this proposed assignment will also evaluate proposals. Those who helped prepare grant proposals for public high schools in a given county will evaluate grant proposals submitted in a different county, following a well-defined evaluation procedure that avoids conflicts of interest. Compliant grants will be submitted to the Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects (UMEFP) within the MNESR for final approval. The facilitators will provide feedback to all public high schools that prepared grant proposals, and those high schools that submitted proposals that are not in compliance with the requirements stated in the Project Operational Manual (POM) will be further supported by their facilitators to improve and resubmit their grant proposals.

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 objectives of this assignment are to: (i) support selected public Romanian high schools to prepare grant proposals to be financed by the ROSE Project; and (ii) evaluate these grant proposals according to designated criteria.

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 (POM), and High School Grants Manual.
 - Familiarize with the World Bank's Guidelines for Procurement of Goods and Selection of Consultants' Services.
 - Review existing Romanian regulation(s) for the elaboration of Institutional Development Plans by Romanian schools.
 - Review existing procedures and controls (including those on budgeting and financial management) used by the MNESR/UMEFP for management of projects financed by international development organizations.

- *Meet the core ROSE Project Management Unit*, especially the Project Director, the Upper Secondary Specialist and Grant Officers who will work closely to achieve the objectives of this assignment.
- *Participate in orientation training organized by the MNESR* on the design and implementation of the high school grants scheme. The customized training program will include modules focused on the following:
 - The main features of the high school grant scheme and implementation background;
 - Specificities of upper secondary education (development priorities, challenges, etc.)
 - School Improvement Plans (SIP) and grant proposal development as per the preparation template and guidelines;
 - Use of active methodologies in guiding and training the high school preparation teams; and
 - Evaluation of grant proposals.
- *Prepare a work plan for supporting approximately 20 public high schools* (exact number of high schools to be confirmed by the UMEFP) to diagnose academic and non-academic challenges within schools and develop school grant proposals. This work plan 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 UMEFP will provide the Consultant with the list of high schools to be assisted under the proposed assignment.
- *Conduct strategic planning exercises with each assigned high school grant team within a period of approximately 3 months.*
 - These exercises shall involve the high school grant preparation team, comprised of the school directors, teachers, parents, students, the mayor, representatives of the local council, and local representatives of the Public Social Assistance Service.
 - The Consultant must visit each assigned high school at least two (2) times during the preparation process. Additional visits may be required if the proposal is rejected for further improvements (see below for more information).
 - Through these exercises, the Consultant will have the following responsibilities:
 - Explain to the potential grantee the basic concepts and eligibility criteria for grant proposal evaluation;
 - Evaluate the high schools' training needs;
 - Train the high school grant team that will develop the grant proposal. This training should be on strategic planning and grant proposal preparation; and
 - Guide the high school grant team to develop a feasible plan and adequate grant proposal. Guidance should be provided to each high school grant team for identification of needs of disadvantaged students at risk of dropping out of high schools or failing at the Baccalaureate, as well as for activities aimed at

addressing these needs. The respective requirements established in the POM and High Schools Grants Manual shall be observed by the selected Consultant.

- The Consultant will not draft proposals himself/herself, but will support high school preparation teams to address all necessary sections of a well-designed and evidence-based proposal.
- Strategic planning exercises must be presented for all assigned high schools in the Consultant's work plan mentioned above.
- Strategic planning exercises must take into account the existing regulation for the elaboration of Institutional Development Plans, and the POM and High School Grants Manual, as mentioned above.
- The Consultant will also support the high school preparation team in engaging with the community and the local Social Assistance Services during the preparation process at two key points: (i) prior to the preparation phase to incorporate the stakeholders' concerns and make sure that the proposal is in alignment with local Social Assistance programs; and (ii) prior to the submission of the proposal for review and approval, in order to share the proposal design with the community and solicit feedback.
- At the conclusion of the strategic planning exercise, each high school should prepare a grant proposal according to the criteria designated in the High School Grants Manual and the POM. The proposal shall present the situation of the high school in terms of performance on the Baccalaureate, dropouts, and graduation rates, and will identify solutions to address those problems. The proposal should include a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that details costs and timelines for those activities to be financed with the grant over the 4-year implementation period.
- *Evaluate grant proposals prepared by high schools.*
 - The Consultant will evaluate grant proposals (approximately 20) prepared in counties other than the counties where the high schools he/she assisted were located, following a well-defined evaluation procedure that avoids conflict of interest (to be defined in the High School Grants Manual and POM).
 - The Consultant will evaluate assigned proposals according to specific criteria as designated in the High School Grants Manual and the POM. Analysis and scoring for each criterion should be detailed in evaluation reports with respective recommendations for approval or further improvements.
 - The Consultant will submit evaluation reports along with compliant grant proposals to the UMEFP for final approval.

- The Consultant must provide feedback to all public high schools that prepared grant proposals with his/her assistance. Those high schools that submitted non-compliant proposals will be further supported by their assigned Consultant to improve and resubmit their grant proposals.
- *Provide follow-up support to assigned high schools in the event that a proposal is rejected. If the proposal produced with the Consultant's initial support is deemed to be non-compliant upon evaluation, the Consultant will be expected to provide follow-up support to the high school to revise and re-submit the grant proposal.*
- *Communicate proactively and regularly with the ROSE Project Director and his/her core team.*
- *Prepare monthly progress reports on the status of grant proposals of assigned high schools and any challenges and solutions that may affect facilitation of proposals preparation or evaluation. Additionally, the Consultant would prepare a Final Report by the end of the proposed assignment (see more information below).*

4. Deliverables

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

- Work Plan for supporting approximately 20 public high schools: due 1 week following the completion of orientation training.
- Monthly Progress Reports: due at the end of each month following the start of the contract.
- Evaluation Reports for each grant proposal evaluated: due within 5 business days of receipt of a proposal.
- Final Report: due by the end of the contract, summarizing all activities carried out and drawing recommendations for similar future initiatives. The format of this report should be discussed with and approved by the UMEFP.

5. Qualification

The minimum competencies required from the Consultant are the following:

- Graduate degree in any field, and training, allowing working in education,
- At least 5 years of experience in education or education management.
- Understanding of Romanian educational system, especially the upper secondary education will be an advantage.
- Experience with project design and implementation, project planning and monitoring, human resources management, team building, and cultural sensitive communities (within at least 2 projects).
- Experience in projects or grants evaluation.
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills.
- Previous experience with grants under World Bank-financed projects will be an advantage.

6. Other Relevant Terms

Period of the Assignment. The assignment is planned for 70 days over a period of six months, with the possibility of extension, if needed, based on a positive assessment of the Consultant's performance.

Location of Assignment. The consultant will primarily operate locally at the county level, though travel to Bucharest may be required. It is expected that up to 60 individual consultants will be selected based on this Terms of Reference, each one of them providing assistance to different sets of high schools. The exactly county or counties where the Consultant will work in will be determined by the UMEFP before the signing of the contract. While assigning the Consultant to a certain county/certain counties, the UMEFP will ensure that no overlaps will be observed in terms of high schools assigned to each Consultant.

Reporting. The Consultant should report to the Project Director. The Consultant should work closely with the Grant Officer and the Upper Secondary Specialist.

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.