

OPEN CALL FOR TENDERS

Reference No EACEA/2007/13

**“Provision of central support services for the implementation of the
eTwinning action of the Lifelong Learning Programme”**

TENDER SPECIFICATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General information

On 8 February 2007, the Commission adopted Decision 2007/114/EC amending Commission Decision 2005/56/EC setting up the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency for the management of Community action in the fields of education, audiovisual and culture (hereinafter referred to as 'the Agency'), and extending the Agency's lifespan till 2015. Its mission is to implement a number of strands of more than 15 Community funded programmes and actions in the fields of education and training, active citizenship, youth, audiovisual and culture. The Agency is in charge of most management aspects of the programmes, including drawing up calls for proposals, selecting projects and signing project agreements, financial management, monitoring of projects (intermediate reports, final reports); communication with beneficiaries; and on the spot controls.

The Agency has its own legal identity and is located in Brussels. The Agency wishes to conclude a service contract for the provision of central support services for the implementation of the eTwinning action of the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The services required are described in detail in section 3 of these tender specifications.

1.2 Management of the call

This call for tenders is managed by the Agency in cooperation with the European Commission. The Agency shall establish a Steering Committee comprising representatives of both the Agency and the Commission for the purposes of managing the contract, reviewing progress with the contractor, providing guidance and accepting the services and products. A member of the Steering Committee at the Agency will be nominated as the primary contact point for all official correspondence.

The ownership of the products and deliverables shall be vested in the Commission.

1.3 Duration of the contract

The contract to be awarded will be the subject of an agreement in accordance with the model enclosed in Annex 1. The contract will be awarded for a duration of twelve months with effect from the date on which it is signed by the last contracting party and may be renewed for a similar period up to five times, i.e. a maximum duration of six years (hereafter, "maximum total period")

The Agency reserves the right to make use of a negotiated procedure without prior publication of a contract notice for additional contracts involving services similar to those assigned to the party awarded an initial contract by the same contracting authority. This procedure may be used only during the three years following conclusion of the original contract.

2. GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLICABLE TO CALLS FOR TENDER

2.1. Tenders

Tenders must include all information and documentation required to enable the authorising department to appraise them in accordance with the criteria set out in section 4.

All documents submitted by tenderers will become the property of the Agency and are deemed confidential.

Expenses incurred in preparing and submitting tenders will not be reimbursed by the Agency.

The submission of a tender in response to a call for tenders issued by the Agency entails:

- a) acceptance of the terms and conditions set out in this invitation to tender, in the specification and in the draft contract (see model contract in Annex 1),
- b) waiver of the tenderer's own general or specific terms and conditions; the tender submitted is binding on the tenderer to whom the contract is awarded for the duration of the contract.

Tenders must be:

1. submitted in triplicate: one clearly identified "Original", two copies marked "Copy 1" and "Copy 2"; "Copy 2" should be unbound. In addition an electronic copy must be provided;
2. accompanied by the forms in Annex 2, filled in and signed by the tenderer;
3. accompanied by a covering letter signed by the tenderer or its duly authorised agent;
4. perfectly legible in order to rule out any doubt whatsoever concerning the words or figures;
5. submitted inside two sealed envelopes; the inner envelope addressed to the department indicated in the call for tenders should be marked:

**"Call for tenders
Reference No EACEA/2007/13
For the attention of Unit – R2
Not to be opened by the internal mail department"**

If self-adhesive envelopes are used, they shall be sealed with adhesive tape and the tenderer shall sign across this tape.

Tenderers may choose:

- 1) to submit tenders either by post or by courier service; in this case, tenders must be dispatched not later than the final date specified in the covering letter to this call for tenders; proof of dispatch is constituted by the postmark, the date of dispatch or the date of the deposit slip, to the following address:

Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)
Unit R2

Office: BOUR 4/43
Ref. EACEA-13-2007
Avenue du Bourget 1
B-1140 Brussels (Evere)
Belgium

2) to deliver tenders by hand to the following address:

European Commission
EACEA
For the attention of Unit R2
Ref. EACEA-13-2007
Office: BOUR 4/37
Avenue du Bourget, 1
B-1140 Brussels (Evere)

no later than 16.00 on the final date specified in the covering letter. In this case, a receipt must be obtained as proof of submission, signed and dated by the official in the central mail department who took delivery. This department is open from 08.00 to 17.00 from Monday to Thursday and from 08.00 to 16.00 on Friday; it is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Commission holidays.

IMPORTANT: Please note the following important distinction between these two options for the submission of tenders:

A tender sent by post or courier service (options 1 above) must be posted no later than the final date shown in the letter. This means that the tenderer must post the tender on or before that date and that it may reach the Agency after that date, depending on how long the postal service takes to process the delivery.

By contrast, a tender delivered by hand to the Agency (option 2 above) must be delivered no later than the final date shown in the letter. This means that the tender must reach the Agency on or before that date.

In either case, it is the tenderer's responsibility to ensure compliance with the rules applying to the option that the tenderer has chosen for the submission of the tender.

2.2. Payment

Payments will be made as follows:

Pre-financing:

After the signature of the contract by the last contracting party, within 30 days of the receipt by the Agency of a request for pre-financing, with a relevant invoice, and, if the case, a duly constituted financial guarantee a pre-financing payment of 50% of the total amount of the contract shall be made.

Payment of the balance:

Following completion of the tasks and approval by the Agency and, where appropriate, receipt of any document required under this service, within 30 days of receipt of the invoice by the Agency, payment of the balance corresponding to the relevant invoice shall be made.

2.3. Financial Guarantee

A financial guarantee is automatically required if the pre-financing amounts to at least EUR 150 000.

Where required, the contractor shall provide a financial guarantee in the form of a bank guarantee or equivalent supplied by a bank or an authorised financial institution (guarantor) equal to the pre-financing under the contract.

2.4. Penalties

If the contractor fails to perform its obligations under the contract within the time specified in Article I.2 of the contract, then, without prejudice to the contractor's actual or potential liability incurred in relation to the contract or to the Commission's right to terminate the contract, the Agency may decide to impose liquidated damages of 0.2% of the amount specified in Article I.3.1 of the model contract (Annex I) per calendar day of delay.

2.5. Period of validity of tenders

Tenders shall be valid for nine (9) months from the final date for the receipt of tenders.

2.6. Price

The Agency awards contracts and makes payments in euros. Tenders must accordingly be expressed in euros. Tenders expressed in currencies other than the euro will be eliminated.

For tenderers in countries which do not belong to the euro zone, the price quoted may not be revised in line with exchange rate movements. It is for the tenderer to select an exchange rate and assume the risks or the benefits deriving from any variation.

Prices must be clearly indicated and show all pricing elements and unit costs. They must be fixed and inclusive of all costs (project management, quality control, training of contractor's employees, back-up resources, etc.) and expenses (company management, secretariat, social security, salaries, travel and office expenses, etc.) directly or indirectly connected with the provision of the service. All prices must be quoted exclusive of all taxes and dues.

From the beginning of the second year of performance of the contract, prices may be revised upwards or downwards each year, where such revision is requested by one of the contracting parties addressed to the other party by registered letter received by the other no later than three months before the anniversary of the date on which the contract was signed. Price revision will be carried out in accordance with the method laid down in the contract (see Annex 1).

Under Articles 3 and 4 of the Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the European Communities, the Communities are exempt from all taxes and dues, including VAT, and accordingly these charges may not form part of the price of the tender (see point 2.2). The amount of VAT should be shown separately.

In signing and submitting a tender, the tenderer or, in the case of consortia consisting of two or more firms, each member of the consortium, certifies on behalf of their firm that:

- the prices indicated in the tender have been fixed independently, without any consultation or communication on any of the points relating to the price with another tenderer or competitor;
- unless the law stipulates otherwise, the prices indicated in the tender have not been and will not be voluntarily communicated by the tenderer to any other tenderer or competitor, directly or indirectly, before the tenders are opened;
- the tenderer has not attempted and will not attempt to induce other persons to submit a tender or to dissuade them from doing so with a view to restricting competition.

2.7. Conflict of interests

Tenderers should declare:

- that they do not have any conflict of interest in connection with the contract; a conflict of interest could arise in particular as a result of economic interests, political or national affinities, family or emotional ties, or any other relevant connection or shared interest;
- that they will inform the contracting authority, without delay, of any situation constituting a conflict of interest or which could give rise to a conflict of interest;
- that they have not made and will not make any offer of any type whatsoever from which an advantage can be derived under the contract;
- that they have not granted and will not grant, have not sought and will not seek, have not attempted and will not attempt to obtain, and have not accepted and will not accept, any advantage, financial or in kind, to or from any party whatsoever, constituting an illegal practice or involving corruption, either directly or indirectly, as an incentive or reward relating to the award of the contract.

The Agency reserves the right to check the above information.

2.8. Joint tenders

Joint tenders or tenders from consortia will be accepted. The nature and organisation of such tenders is at the discretion of the tenderers.

In any event, such tenders will be treated no differently from any other type of tender, each being assessed on its own merits in relation to the evaluation and award criteria contained in these specifications.

2.9. Subcontractors

Any intention to subcontract part of the contract must be clearly stated in the tender. In any case, the main contractor retains sole responsibility for the contract.

2.10. Contact point

The sole contact point that may be used during the submission period is the one indicated in the covering letter to this call for tenders. Tenderers are requested to put any questions in writing and to send them to the contact person by fax, e-mail or mail. **For legal reasons, queries by telephone cannot be taken into consideration.**

Queries concerning the administrative procedures will be treated individually. If the reply to a question is of general interest, it will be communicated simultaneously to all tenderers.

3. TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

3.1. Context of the contract - Introduction

In March 2002, the Barcelona European Council called on the Commission to “undertake a feasibility study to identify options for helping secondary schools to establish or enhance an Internet twinning link with a partner school elsewhere in Europe”.

The Commission submitted a report to the Seville European Council in June 2002 on using the Internet to develop twinning between European secondary schools.

“eTwinning of schools in Europe and promotion of teachers' training” (eTwinning) was subsequently integrated into the eLearning programme 2004-2006 as an action both for primary and secondary schools. The objective of the action was to strengthen and develop school networking via a European-wide school-twinning scheme which would make it possible for all European schools to build pedagogical partnerships with a school elsewhere in Europe, fostering language learning and intercultural dialogue.

eTwinning also address the updating of teachers' professional skills in the pedagogical and collaborative use of ICT through specific training and the exchange and dissemination of good practice in the pedagogical use of ICT.

eTwinning was officially launched in January 2005. Since then it has developed as a major school action in Europe with more than 26 000 schools registered for participation and more than 9 000 already taking part in an eTwinning project.

The most original feature of eTwinning, compared with other EU-funded education schemes, is that it does not finance individual projects, but rather supports services, advice, ideas, tools and recognition for facilitating school collaboration. This makes for a great deal of flexibility and a high potential of cost-effectiveness, since the number of projects does not depend directly on the available budget for the action. It also allows minimising the administrative workload of participating schools.

eTwinning has been integrated into Comenius under the Lifelong Learning Programme. Its legal basis is now Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning.

Support for schools is provided at national and at European level.

At national level, the National Support Services (NSS) have been assigned to organisations appointed by the ministries of education. They are responsible in particular for promoting eTwinning in their countries, helping teachers to set up and carry out their projects, rewarding schools for their successful participation in eTwinning projects, organising specific training sessions for teachers and ensuring that eTwinning evolves in a way which fits the particular needs of local schools.

At European level, the Central Support Service (CSS) is responsible in particular for the eTwinning portal, a fully multilingual website offering tools and services through which to register, find partners and work together. The CSS also plays an active part in the general strategy for the development of eTwinning, provides pedagogical and technical helpdesk services, organises specific training sessions for teachers on eTwinning and

coordinates, together with the Agency and the European Commission, the network of National Support Services.

3.2. Purpose of the contract - description of the main services and products

This call for tenders concerns the provision of the services required from the Central Support Service for eTwinning after the end of the current contract. The main function of the CSS consists of providing support to schools to set up and implement pedagogically relevant cooperation projects. In the provision of those services, the contractor will have to strive to keep eTwinning as simple and user friendly as possible and minimise the administrative workload and paperwork of participating teachers and school managers.

The contract will include, in particular, the following services:

eTwinning portal: hosting, managing and maintaining the multilingual website enables schools to know about eTwinning and its benefits, register for participation, find suitable partners and cooperate with them in a secure virtual environment using appropriate tools.

Coordination and moderation of the National Support Services network (together with the Agency and the European Commission).

Helpdesk services: providing pedagogical and technical assistance to National Support Services and teachers participating in eTwinning.

Teacher training: organising and designing specific teacher training activities about school cooperation and the use of ICT for collaborative school work.

Communication and promotion: developing communication and promotion activities at European level and supporting those undertaken at national level by the NSSs. This includes the organisation of events (annual eTwinning Conference and prize award ceremony; "eTwinning camp" for the winners of the European eTwinning prizes), publications, and specific eTwinning campaigns and activities.

General monitoring of eTwinning: selecting and disseminating good practice emerging from eTwinning projects; developing project ideas, analysing and fostering the pedagogical impact of eTwinning through a team of experts in school development and school collaboration projects ("pedagogical team").

Minimum requirements and ways of providing these services are given below, but tenderers should feel free to propose their own vision and methods, and any additional services they consider necessary for the performance of the tasks of the Central Support Service. To make it easier to compare bids, such additional services, if any, should be clearly separated in the budget form.

Tenderers should refer to the current eTwinning portal (www.etwinning.net) to gain a better understanding of the nature of the services required by this call for tenders.

Upon request, they will also be given access to a mock-up version of the parts of the portal reserved for registered users.

3.3. Tasks

3.3.1. eTwinning portal

The European eTwinning portal (www.etwinning.net) is the central feature of eTwinning. It allows teachers to get to know about this initiative and its benefits, search out project ideas,

register for participation, find suitable partners, communicate and plan a project with them, and implement the project in a secure collaborative virtual space. It is also the place where teachers can share resources and find recognition for their successful projects, which are showcased as a source of inspiration for others. In addition, it contains a set of management tools and applications which allow the Central and the National Support Services to view, edit, approve and delete data on schools and partnerships registered in the system.

The portal is structured in four different layers:

A **public part** designed to inform all interested audiences about eTwinning and its pedagogical benefits and to showcase good practice.

An **area for registered schools** where teachers can look for the most suitable project partners using a partner-finding tool able to deal with a large amount of data on registered schools. This area should also allow teachers to communicate with one another in order to negotiate and plan their joint projects.

A **collaboration platform for registered partnerships**, i.e. a private and secured area allowing partners to communicate and share resources and offering them groupware and other tools for enhancing cooperation.

A **specific desktop for National Support Services**, allowing them to manage data on the schools in their countries, to monitor the progress of projects, to handle quality labels and prize submissions and to report on a day to day basis on the eTwinning activities in their countries (national and regional eTwinning events, teachers workshops - including number of participants -, publications, media coverage of the action, etc.)

The portal has to be user-friendly, multilingual and European in scope, adding European value to the services provided by the national support services. As such, it should be linked to the support services on offer at national level.

The tender should refer to the main functionalities of the current portal and suggest further developments. The functions can be supported through several methods and combinations of resources. The portal should also be associated with other media and services to varying degrees, such as print publishing, communication actions, real events, etc.

The tender should contain a detailed description of the main features, the various tools and a proposal for the general architecture and functions of the planned web portal.

Takeover and handover of content and data of the portal

The successful tenderer will have to ensure the smooth takeover of the content and data of the current portal without disruption to the functioning of the action. This may require a limited period of time, not longer than three months after the signature of the new contract, to prepare the launch of the new portal with all its main functionalities and the extension of the current contract.

Tenderers will have to keep in mind that, after the entry into force of the initial contract, a decision might be made to integrate the portal into Europa, the official portal of the European Union's institutions, or into the website of the Agency and to host it in the European Commission's data centre. Should this be the case, and in any event at the end of the contract, the contractor will have to ensure the smooth handover of all the data contained in the portal, together with any necessary technical tools and other material connected with establishing and operating it, to the Agency or to its nominee.

General design and architecture of the portal

The design of the portal should be both functional and visually appealing for the target users.

The contractor must ensure that the content is readily accessible and well organised to facilitate user navigation. Provision should be made for users to interact with the portal, for example through participation in moderated forums, blogs or wikies, and to stimulate such interaction. The contractor will also have to promote the creation of thematic communities of eTwinning practitioners and to facilitate and moderate such communities.

The look of the site should be professional and cutting edge, and convey a consistent visual identity which can be readily associated with the European Commission, and the Comenius sub-programme of the Lifelong Learning Programme. Every page of the portal must clearly display the Comenius logo, which can be found at following Internet address: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/graphics/identity_en.html

The portal must be available in a text-only version and in a 'printer-friendly' version. It must conform to the Level A WAI accessibility guidelines.

An example of the eTwinning portal's proposed design must be provided with the tender, together with the web addresses of any relevant sites currently managed by the tenderer, which could act as reference examples. The proposed design will not necessarily correspond entirely to the final design approved by the Agency and the European Commission.

Usability and user feedback

The portal and its tools should be easy to use and to learn. Usability should be a major concern in the design and development of the portal. The contractor will have to perform periodic usability tests and surveys among registered teachers and/or students in order to adapt the various features of the portal to the needs and wishes of the users. Special attention should be given to the fact that the audience of the portal is formed by people with very different degrees of familiarity with ICT tools.

Multilingualism

Since the objective of eTwinning is to mainstream school collaboration through the use of ICT, and thus to reach the maximum number of schools, full multilingualism should remain an important feature of the portal. The general and most stable information must be made available in the following official languages of the European Union: Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Norwegian,¹ Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, and Swedish.

Specific and less stable information, such as national news and detailed information on individual projects may be published in a smaller number of languages. The languages to be used should be those most widely understood by the specific target audience of the information involved. The practice of reducing the number of languages in which an item of information is posted on the portal should be the exception to the general rule of complete multilingualism.

The total number of standard original pages (1 500 characters without spaces) to be translated into those languages every year by the CSS for the portal and for paper publications is estimated at 380.

¹ The Norwegian National Support Service will cover all costs of translation into Norwegian.

As far as possible, languages should not be mixed on one and the same page.

In general, translations made available on the portal will be provided by the contractor and validated, if required, by the network of National Support Services. This network will also contribute to the translation and localisation of other texts for the portal, such as information on selected projects.

Tenderers should set out what arrangements they intend to make for efficient and timely management of translations and to ensure multilingualism and linguistic quality on the portal. The bid should include a sufficient budget for translations.

Provision must be made for an increase in the number of language versions on the portal should new countries join eTwinning. In order to compare bids, the price of adding a new language should be indicated separately in the budget form.

Public portal area

This public part of the portal must feature, in particular:

- general information about eTwinning (why and how to participate, general advice for success, contacts for support at national level, etc.);
- information on teacher training activities;
- relevant news and interviews;
- a gallery of successful and inspiring eTwinning projects;
- a library of all projects that have received the eTwinning quality label;
- links to other relevant sources of information;
- project ideas;
- ready-made project kits based on successfully proven projects;
- advice for teachers on the factors for successful school collaboration projects;
- guidelines for the use of the portal and eTwinning tools;
- descriptions of successful projects;
- access to a dynamic and easily searchable database of registered schools and projects;
- access to electronic versions of paper publications on eTwinning;
- general information on school systems in Europe (as gathered and managed by the CSS itself and/or through linkage to relevant national or European sources);
- restricted access to a general database of registered schools and projects;
- access to a repository of shared educational resources and teaching materials for fleshing out projects. Among other resources, the repository should contain and make highly

visible the good quality resources produced by eTwinning, other relevant Comenius and school related projects;

- access to private collaboration spaces of eTwinning projects whose partners have decided to make them public; and
- any other information items that make for a better understanding of eTwinning and promote the participation of the maximum number of schools.

The public area should also give access to the registration form for teachers interested in taking part in eTwinning (see "Databases, registration, user profiles and data protection" below).

The portal should become a genuine and active virtual meeting point for anyone interested in eTwinning. Therefore, it should attract visitors and be run in a proactive and dynamic way.

Tenderers should bear in mind two important aspects of the service:

- the dynamic nature of the information, as eTwinning will evolve and progress from its present stage to increasingly more advanced applications and uses; information and news must therefore be searchable and updated constantly and dynamically;
- the need to comply with take multilingualism.

The contractor will have to take intellectual property rights issues into account. When linking to educational material and software, the portal should provide clear information on authors and their rights, on the status of resources and on the rights and responsibilities of users.

It should also provide help and assistance to twinned schools on this issue and give them clear information on the relevant national and European regulations.

It should establish legally and technically defined links with information and resource sites.

Databases, registration, user profiles and data protection

The portal should include dynamic and multilingual databases of registered schools and projects, and of all eTwinning activities carried out by the National Support Services.

The database on registered schools should allow the partner-finding tool to operate effectively. It should contain all the relevant information for this purpose and for general reporting on the development of eTwinning. It should include in particular data on the school, profile of the person registered, their preferences for an eTwinning project and regional data. Data fields will have to be agreed with the Agency and the European Commission in order to ensure consistency with the data required in other actions of the Lifelong Learning Programme and the availability of all data needed for monitoring and reporting purposes.

The database of registered projects should allow information to be readily retrieved, such as the status, duration and themes of projects, number of participating students, communication languages used, etc. Data should be input by teachers at the most appropriate stage (school or project registration, running project, closing projects). Partners should be encouraged and offered the possibility of updating their data.

The tender should specify the provisions to be made for the online registration of users, for the definition of differentiated user profiles and for a suitable level of protection of user data to

prevent abuse or inappropriate use. Registration should be made as simple as possible for the user, requiring only relevant information.

All data concerning registered teachers should be carefully protected and may only be used for the purposes of eTwinning. No personal data can be transferred to third parties without the consent of the data subject and the written agreement of the Contracting Authority.

Registration pages should clearly display a privacy statement to inform those registering of the processing of their personal data and of their rights relating to this processing. In particular, the privacy statement must identify what personal information is collected, for what purpose and through what technical means, who has access to the collected information and to whom it is disclosed, how data are protected and safeguard, how information that concerns them can be verified, modified or deleted and for how long data are kept.

Portal area for registered users

The main purpose of the portal area for registered users is to help those users to find suitable partners, to communicate with them and ultimately to register an eTwinning project. This area should also contain the items of information which are only relevant for registered users.

The search for suitable partners should be facilitated by means of a tool currently called *Twinfinder*. This tool should be user-friendly and allow combined searches based on the data provided by teachers when they registered for eTwinning.

Communication tools should also be made available in this area to enable teachers to communicate with each other and plan their projects.

The portal area for registered users should give access to the registration forms for partnerships (see section above).

Collaboration platform for registered partnerships

A safe private platform for project partners to communicate and collaborate is a central element of the eTwinning portal. The platform should be password protected; access should be restricted to the members of the corresponding partnership.

Given the high variety of platforms used by schools and the voluntary nature of participation in eTwinning, the contractor should strive to offer an entirely free, multilingual, attractive, user-friendly and competitive platform and to give teachers every reason to use it, so as not to lose track of projects set up through the eTwinning portal but using alternative tools for collaboration.

The platform should have at least the following standard components: messaging (email, calendaring and contacts), team collaboration and real-time collaboration tools (e.g. instant messaging and web conferencing), file sharing, podcasting and web publishing tools, including blogs and wikis. The platform should be kept state of the art and up to date with the developments in ICT both in terms of software releases and new functionalities which become standard. The tenderer should consider the integration of commonly used free or proprietary software into the platform.

The collaboration platform should offer sufficient capacity to upload texts, images and videos, while ensuring normal performance.

Desktop for National Support Services

The specific desktop for National Support Services should support three types of functionalities:

1. Managing eTwinning at country level: easily retrieving data concerning registered schools and partnerships from the country; accepting, commenting on and rejecting partnership registrations; monitoring project progress; assessing quality labels and prize applications and any other useful functions for the everyday work of National Support Service staff members.
2. Communicating and sharing among National Support Services and with the Central Support Service, the Agency and the Commission: this should include the standard functionalities of a community workspace such as forums, chat, calendar, bulletin board, file archives and search engine.
3. NSSs reporting on their work and the evolution of eTwinning in their countries. NSSs should be provided with tools for up to date reporting on training sessions and workshops run at national level, promotional activities, publications, activities of "eTwinning ambassadors", contacts with national and regional authorities, etc.

Provision should be made to ensure that the National Support Services can grant restricted access to the desktop to regional school authorities and other multipliers involved in the promotion and/or the management of eTwinning partnerships at national, regional or local level.

Hosting

The contractor will ensure that the portal is hosted in a secure environment.

The eTwinning portal should be accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and should be properly supervised. The level of supervision should be specified in a draft Service Level Agreement to be submitted by the tenderer.

In their bids, tenderers should state clearly what level of availability they can offer and the guaranteed recovery time following a system failure, and also how they intend to measure and monitor such availability.

The portal and the underlying databases, directories, middleware and tools to link to national sites and other organisations must be protected using state of the art technology against malicious access, virus and worm propagation and other Internet threats.

The tender should describe what security measures will be taken to protect the site from attacks and damage. This should also be specified in the draft Service Level Agreement.

The tender should specify through what means the quantity of traffic will be measured (hits, visitors, demographics, time spent by visit, etc.). The Agency reserves the right to require that this information be made highly visible to users.

Prototyping and testing

The Steering Committee (section 1.2) will establish acceptance criteria that will have to be tested. The development of the portal and its different functions should be undertaken in a staged approach, using prototypes to be discussed at the meetings between the contractor and the Steering Committee before final acceptance.

The tender must clearly specify the routines and scenarios that will be run to test usability, accessibility (including level A WAI), security, technical performance (including volume, capacity and response time for 2 500 simultaneous users) and compatibility with the content management requirements of Europa (see below “Various technical provisions”).

Various technical provisions

In view of the very large and steadily increasing number of users of the portal, its architecture and components should be highly scalable. The system must support up to 2 500 simultaneous users at any given time.

The eTwinning portal must be a model as far as technical requirements are concerned. The technologies used to create, administer, operate and maintain it must be state-of-the-art, based on international technical standards, able to deal with an increasingly large amount of traffic, allow possible extensions, evolutions, further integration of new technologies, and be adjustable to new requirements that may emerge from new technological developments or from users’ feedback. In particular, it will use the most advanced operational tools to support group work.

Nevertheless, the technologies used must be compatible with the large majority of systems used by the visitors. The tender must propose ways of making the best possible use of all the available tools, while taking into account the different levels of equipment and connectivity of schools in Europe.

The portal will provide a technical Help Desk service for users. Standard requests from schools and National Support Services will have to be answered within 48 hours. More complex questions will be answered within one week.

Every effort must be made to ensure the permanency of the site and the security, safety and continuity of the information it contains and the services it offers. This includes the requirement to make regular back-ups of the site, and to ensure speedy recovery after system failure, with minimum loss of data.

In order to facilitate the possible transfer of the portal’s content to Europa, the official portal to the European Union's institutions, tenderers will have to refer to the Information Providers Guide, which gives an overview of the editorial, technical and graphic requirements of the Europa site. The Guide can be consulted at the following address: http://europa.eu.int/comm/ipg/index_en.htm

The contractor will also have to provide the Agency, upon request, with all the required technical documentation and instructions. Data will have to be transferred in a format conforming to widely held market standards.

Quality assurance and control

The offer must specify the quality standards to which the tenderer will have to adhere and the proposed measures and resources to monitor and improve the quality of the portal. In particular, the provisions taken to guarantee usability, accessibility, function of the search engine and integrity of links, and to monitor traffic and user satisfaction should be clearly stated.

Provision must also be made to proactively seek and implement user feedback, in order to correct technical faults and to streamline the site to users’ expectations.

3.3.2. Coordination and moderation of the National Support Services network

The Central Support Service must coordinate the network of National Support Services in close cooperation with and on behalf of the Agency and the European Commission.

This coordination involves the following tasks:

- keeping contact and exchanging information with National Support Service staff on a day to day basis;
- planning, organising, hosting and moderating the periodic joint CSS/NSS meetings (at least two a year); this includes drawing up the agenda and chairing the meetings;
- planning, organising, hosting and moderating the meetings of the joint CSS/NSS working groups (as a reference, currently three working groups on European and national portals, on Communication and networking and on pedagogical issues; each working group meets at least twice a year);
- making available and moderating a community platform accessible through the NSS desktop for exchanging information, discussing common interest issues and collaborating in general.
- gathering and disseminating good practice by the NSSs.

3.3.3. Helpdesk services

The National Support Services will have the main responsibility for providing teachers with assistance on practical problems relating to the search for suitable partners, the planning and setting-up of projects, the use of eTwinning tools, the integration of projects in the curriculum and other technical or pedagogical issues. However, the CSS will have to provide a helpdesk service on those issues for National Support Service staff and teachers who contact the CSS directly. Standard requests have to be answered within 48 hours. More complex questions have to be answered within a week.

The provision of these services will require the active involvement of the pedagogical team (see point 3.3.8. below).

3.3.4 Teacher training

Working in close cooperation with the National Support Services, the Central Support Service will strive to ensure that teachers and other educational personnel receive the necessary training to participate in eTwinning and to exploit the potential of ICT for innovation and collaborative work in school education. To this end, it will encourage the National Support Services to cooperate with the national and regional authorities responsible for teacher training and organise specific European online or/and offline training courses and seminars for teachers.

Teacher training for eTwinning should cover the following fields:

- pedagogical use of ICT,
- use of tools provided by the eTwinning portal,
- any other issues relevant for the implementation of successful eTwinning projects (e.g. intercultural communication, project planning, collaborative aspects of learning, computer supported collaborative learning, teacher's role in project-based learning and so on).

Participation in eTwinning projects has an important peer learning effect for the teachers involved. To encourage the sharing of knowledge, experience and know-how, the CSS should also promote, moderate and encourage teachers to participate in communities of eTwinning practitioners and discussion forums. To this end, it will open and manage participation areas in the relevant parts of the eTwinning portal.

The Central Support Service should:

- provide guidance on relevant teacher training to the National Support Services;
- locate, collect, adapt and share with the National Support Services information, educational materials and ideas from the relevant teacher training activities carried out at national level;
- create specific materials to be used and adapted by the National Support Services;
- organise and run specific professional development workshops for teachers.

Professional development workshops will take place in turn in different European locations and will bring together 25 teachers from the hosting country and 50 teachers from other countries. They must be organised in collaboration with the relevant National Support Service, which will be responsible for hosting them. The selection of teachers attending these workshops will be made by their National Support Services, which will also cover their travel and subsistence costs. The tasks of the Central Support Service will consist of designing the workshops, tailoring them to the relevant target audiences (for instance, head teachers, science, maths, geography or language teachers, etc.) and providing trainers.

The number of workshops scheduled to take place during the first year is seven; this number will be adjusted to the development of eTwinning at the beginning of each of the following years (up to twelve each year). Merging two or more workshops into a longer event, for instance during the holidays (eTwinning summer academy), could also be considered.

The tenderer is required to specify the unit costs of the workshops in the budget.

As an optional service the Steering Committee could request, the tender must include multilingual online training modules for teachers on subjects relevant for eTwinning. Tutors for online courses could be provided by the National Support Services but trained by the Central Support Service. The unit costs of developing and running online modules should be indicated in the budget.

The Central Support Service is required to monitor and assess any teacher training activities and to suggest how this area should develop, with the input of its pedagogical team and the collaboration of the NSS.

3.3.5 Communication and promotion

Since the main objective of eTwinning is to contribute to the mainstreaming of cooperation between schools in Europe through ICT, the involvement of the maximum number of schools is of paramount importance for its success, as is a balanced distribution of partnerships in terms of geographical coverage, types of schools, age ranges, subject areas and communication languages used in projects. The Central Support Service is expected to develop a dynamic and well targeted communication strategy designed to publicise eTwinning at European level and to coordinate the activities of the National Support Services in this field.

The contractor will have to engage in diverse activities to promote eTwinning. Tenderers are required to submit a detailed communication action plan describing activities, target groups and information relays. The communication action plan of the successful tenderer will have to be

approved by the Steering Committee and be in line with the communication strategy of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.

Promotional activities should clearly identify eTwinning as a Comenius action within the Lifelong Learning Programme. Any eTwinning web page or publication must clearly display the Lifelong Learning Programme logo, which can be found at the following Internet address: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/graphics/identity_en.html

Promotion-related issues will be dealt with by a joint NSS/CSS working group on communication and promotion. The Central Support Service should lead this group and coordinate its promotional activities with the National Support Services.

Apart from the online communication activities through the eTwinning portal and the linkage with other relevant websites, the communication strategy will include the following services:

- Communication campaigns
- Paper publications
- Promotional videos
- Prizes
- Events
- Networking and media relations

Communication campaigns

Each year the Central Support Service will have to design, coordinate and run an awareness-raising campaign in the first term of the school year ("back to school campaign") and a specific campaign related to a priority area in school education decided by the European Commission.

The main objective of the awareness-raising campaign at the beginning of the school year is to draw the attention of teachers, students and other stakeholders in school education to eTwinning and its pedagogical benefits and to re-launch the registration of schools and partnerships. The tasks of the Central Support Service include the organisation and moderation of the campaign activities at European level, the coordination of national activities and the creation of dedicated campaign web pages. Ideally, the campaign should include short and easy to do school collaboration activities, allowing teachers and pupils to meet and to try out eTwinning tools, and a contest.

The specific annual campaign will associate eTwinning with a current issue relevant to school education. The subject of the campaign will be decided at the beginning of the school year and will typically be related to the theme of the European Year (for reference: 2008 is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue) or with a priority policy area to which eTwinning could contribute, such as science education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, sustainable development, etc. The tasks of the Central Support Service include the organisation and moderation of the campaign activities at European level, the coordination of the national activities and the creation of dedicated campaign web pages. Ideally, the campaign should include short school collaboration activities, allowing teachers and pupils to meet and to try out eTwinning, and a contest.

Paper publications

In order to maximise the number of participants to eTwinning, to showcase good practice emerging from it and to increase the overall visibility of the action among all those involved in school education (national and regional education authorities, inspectorates, headmasters, teachers

and pupils), the Central Support Service will have to produce a number of publications to complement the information made available on line.

As a minimum, the following publications will have to be issued over the maximum total period of the contract:

- each year, a booklet targeted at teachers, featuring a selection of outstanding eTwinning projects from the previous school year and any other items of information that could inspire teachers for their projects and make them aware of the benefits and possibilities of eTwinning. Depending on what decisions are taken at the beginning of each school year, the booklet could focus on thematic issues or on various aspects of eTwinning, while retaining its main function of giving visibility to good eTwinning practice. The role of the Central Support Service will consist of drafting, translating into all languages, printing and distributing an adequate number of copies across Europe. Projects have to be selected and copies distributed in collaboration with the National Support Services;

- each year, at least one publication on the educational impacts of eTwinning targeting policy-makers, school authorities, head teachers and other stakeholders in education. These publications must be printed in the most widespread European languages, so as to reach the maximum number of interested people while keeping the cost at a reasonable level (for instance, in German, English, French, Italian, Spanish and Polish);

- at least three times during the maximum contract period, promotional leaflets and posters in all languages.

The tenderer may plan other publications and the possibility of reprinting publications which run out of stock during the contract period.

Promotional videos

During the maximum contract period the CSS will have to produce a minimum of three professional promotional videos featuring eTwinning examples that clearly convey the pedagogical benefits of eTwinning. These videos should be subtitled in all languages. The contractor should actively seek ways to give the maximum visibility to the videos through relevant media and websites.

As a reference, each video could be between 10 and 15 minutes.

Prizes

The contractor will have to organise and run a European annual competition designed to reward the best eTwinning projects and give them maximum visibility. Different categories based, for instance, on age of pupils, type of schools, subject matters, etc. could be considered. The prizes must include offering the winners (teachers and pupils) the opportunity to meet in person in an attractive location and to learn more with their partners about the possibilities of eTwinning for further, deeper and richer collaboration (see "eTwinning camp" below). Under the current contract, runners-up are given the possibility of taking part in centrally organised teacher training activities, but the tenderer can consider similar or alternative prizes. All expenses related to the annual competition and award will be covered by the contractor.

Winning projects will be selected by the pedagogical team of the Central Support Service and/or by an external jury in collaboration with the National Support Services and the Steering Committee.

The tenderer may consider other prizes to reward outstanding projects.

Events

The Central Support Service will have to organise the following events each year as a minimum:

- eTwinning annual conference and prize award ceremony: this will bring together 300 teachers selected by the National Support Services, representatives of those services, the finalists of the annual eTwinning prizes and other school stakeholders. The conference should open up opportunities for the National Support Services and for the prize finalists to showcase the results achieved through eTwinning and for teachers to take part in workshops on the pedagogical dimension of eTwinning and to network and form new partnerships. The services to be provided include overall organisation and coordination, the design of the agenda, the hire of the premises, the remuneration of speakers along with the travel and subsistence costs for finalists and for around 25 guests (for instance, representatives of teachers' unions or associations, journalists and other multipliers). The National Support Services will cover the travel and subsistence costs of participating teachers.
- Organisation of an “eTwinning camp” to reward the winning partnerships of the eTwinning Prizes (as a reference, 120 pupils and teachers under the current contract). The camp will consist of pedagogical workshops and other networking activities for teachers and pupils. The Central Support Service will be responsible for the organisation of the event and will cover all venue, activity, travel and accommodation costs for teachers, pupils, speakers and animators.

The tenderer should also suggest ways of ensuring that eTwinning is well represented at relevant events, in particular exhibitions and conferences related to school education.

Networking and media relations

The Central Support Service should actively seek and promote appropriate networking between eTwinning and other relevant initiatives and programmes, including other centralised and decentralised Comenius projects, so as to take on board good practice developed elsewhere. It should also aim to maintain good working relationships with school authorities and opinion makers in schools in Europe and with the relevant media and other multipliers.

The tender could include the costs of several meetings to network eTwinning during the maximum contract period.

The Central Support Service should also strive to establish good relations with the relevant media. In particular, it should issue press releases on eTwinning events and news that might be of media interest.

3.3.6. General monitoring of eTwinning and pedagogical team

The Central Support Service should work in close collaboration with the National Support Services to analyse and filter all information related to eTwinning projects in order to identify and promote good practice, teachers' professional development and pedagogical improvements. It should also help the Agency and the European Commission to monitor and assess the success of eTwinning by producing qualitative and quantitative data.

The tender should suggest ways of following up on the direct impact of eTwinning and the trends emerging in its implementation, along with a limited set of parameters for monitoring and evaluation purposes. It should also produce indicators on the use of the support services offered by the CSS and the NSS, respectively. It should define a methodology for collecting data with a minimum workload for schools.

The CSS will produce annotated statistics at least every three months and, at the request of the Steering Committee, will provide all the necessary information for reporting to the Lifelong Learning Programme Committee.

The monitoring, assessment and conception tasks of the Central Support Service will be performed with the active involvement of a multinational team of experts in school development and school collaboration projects. This team will be composed of permanent staff of the contractor and, if appropriate, external consultants. Their main tasks will consist of:

- analysing teacher practice in eTwinning projects
- identifying teacher training needs
- monitoring teacher training activities by the National Support Services and identifying best practices in this field
- advising, where appropriate, the National Support Services on teacher training
- designing and running the professional development workshops for teachers
- participating in the design and running of workshops for the annual conference and the eTwinning camp
- designing online training modules
- drafting pedagogical guidelines for teachers
- promoting the creation of communities of eTwinning practitioners and moderating them
- selecting projects to be showcased on the eTwinning portal
- setting the award criteria for the European eTwinning prizes
- on the basis of a shortlist established by the National Support Services, selecting projects for the award of eTwinning prizes
- setting criteria for the award of quality labels
- designing pedagogical activities for the promotion campaigns
- assisting National Support Services and teachers on pedagogy-related issues (helpdesk function)
- taking part in the production of publications
- analysing external good practice relevant for eTwinning and liaising with the promoters of other projects that could be linked to eTwinning (in particular, projects funded by other Comenius actions).

3.4. Methodological remarks

The provision of the Central Support Service for eTwinning requires close client involvement, coordination and supervision. The contractor will have to keep continuous informal contacts and regular meetings with the Steering Committee members. The Steering Committee shall support the contractor in taking key decisions regarding the development of the services.

The decision on the final acceptance of the deliverables will be made by the Steering Committee, in accordance with the terms specified in the contract.

3.5. Budget

The maximum acceptable budget for this contract is 1 000 000 € per year, for a maximum total period of 6 years. This includes all expenses.

4. EVALUATION AND AWARD OF THE CONTRACT

The evaluation will be based on the information provided by the tenderer in reply to this call for tenders.

In addition, the Agency reserves the right to use any other information from public or specialist sources. All the information will be assessed in the light of the criteria set out in these specifications.

The evaluation will proceed in stages, as described below. Only the tenders meeting the requirements of each stage will pass on to the next stage of the evaluation. The final stage involves the award of the contract.

The stages of the evaluation procedure will be as follows:

- exclusion of tenderers;
- selection of tenderers;
- evaluation of tenders on the basis of the award criteria:
 - technical evaluation,
 - financial evaluation;
- award of the contract.

4.1 Exclusion of tendering parties

Tenderers must certify that they are not in one of the situations referred to in Articles 93 and 94 of the Financial Regulation. To this end, tenderers shall provide a declaration on their honour, duly signed and dated, stating that they are not in one of the situations listed below:

- (a) they are bankrupt or being wound up, having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- (b) they have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of res judicata;
- (c) they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify;
- (d) they have not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
- (e) they are guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the authorising department;
- (f) they have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation or any other illegal activity detrimental to the Communities' financial interests;
- (g) following another procurement procedure or grant award procedure financed by the Community budget, they have been declared to be in serious breach of contract for failure to comply with their contractual obligations.

For joint tenders (consortia), each member of the consortium must submit the required documents. The exclusion criteria will be applied to each of the members of the group individually, and to the group as a whole.

The tenderer to whom the contract is to be awarded must provide, within the time limit stipulated by the contracting authority and preceding the signature of the contract, the evidence confirming the declaration referred to in the first paragraph.

4.2 Selection of tendering parties

4.2.1 Professional capacities

In order to assess the professional capacity of the tenderer, the following information must be supplied:

- name of the organisation;
- date of foundation of the organisation;
- copy of articles of association;
- VAT number;
- organisation's activities;
- composition of the Board of Directors;
- certificate dated less than 90 days previously, issued by the competent authority of the tenderer's country showing that its situation regarding tax and social security obligations is in order.

In the case of a consortium, all partners must provide the information required.

4.2.2 Commercial and financial standing

In order to assess the financial capacity of the tenderer, the following information must be supplied:

- balance sheets for the previous two years;
- a bank declaration concerning the financial situation.

In the case of a consortium, all partners must provide the information required.

4.2.3 Technical capacity

The tenderer must comply with the following requirements:

1. the necessary skills, experience and capacity for carrying out the tasks specified in the Terms of Reference for the Central Support Service, including expertise in the fields of school education;
2. proven experience (minimum of three years) in the hosting of web services and in the development, running and maintenance of portals and databases in the field of school education. Tenderers must provide evidence of having successfully completed projects involving diverse data source integration, hosting of web services (or control of hosting service provider) and large-scale public web applications;
3. proven experience in the provision of communication and promotion services in the field of school education;

4. proven experience in projects requiring high quality editorial work;
5. proven experience in managing and coordinating European networks;
6. ability to provide the necessary technical infrastructure;
7. an effective quality assurance system.

The Contracting Authority shall accept the following as evidence of compliance with the above criteria:

- an organisation chart of the tenderer's organisation along with the curriculum vitae of the key persons (criterion 1.);
- a list of similar or relevant services provided in the past three years, with the subjects, dates and recipients, public or private, along with a statement of the average annual manpower and the number of managerial staff of the tenderer in the last three years (criteria 2., 3., 4. and 5.). Please specify to which criterion/criteria each example relates;
- specification of the technical infrastructure available to the tenderer, including technicians or technical bodies, whether or not belonging directly to the tenderer's organisation (6.);
- a description of the quality assurance system of the tenderer to ensure the quality of services (7.).

4.3 Evaluation of tenders

Tenders will be evaluated in relation to the following criteria (Article 53 of Directive 2004/18/EC):

4.3.1 Qualitative criteria

The qualitative evaluation shall be based on the following criteria (100 points)

1. The general quality and creativity of the tender and its relevance to the objectives and results set out in the Terms of Reference (50 points).

This criterion shall be assessed on the basis of the following elements to be included in the tender:

- a short issues paper, setting out the tenderer's approach to the opportunities and challenges of eTwinning and to the role of the Central Support Service;
- a methodology, which will set out how the tenderer intends to achieve the objectives and results set out in the Terms of Reference, including at least the following points: detailed time schedule, organisation of work, preliminary assessment of likely difficulties and likely results, understanding of the purpose and nature of the tasks to be undertaken and provisions for ensuring the pedagogical relevance of the services to be provided;
- a detailed explanation of the main features of the proposed eTwinning portal and of its planned architecture;

- an example of the proposed design of the portal;
 - an explanation of the ways of measuring and increasing the number of visitors to the eTwinning portal and their return rate, as well as the ways of making the portal attractive to target audiences;
 - a communication and promotion plan including a summary of activities designed to promote eTwinning and a time schedule for its implementation;
 - the proposed methodology for content creation and management and for gathering relevant, accurate and timely information to be posted on the portal;
 - the proposed resources and procedures for ensuring true multilingualism and a high standard of editorial and linguistic quality of the portal.
 - a description of the quality and creative contents of the tender based on previous relevant services and contracts. A list of web addresses of any relevant sites managed by the Tenderer shall be provided.
2. The quality and adequacy of the proposed technical and organisational arrangements, including the appropriateness of the staff to the tasks which are proposed for them (50 points).

This criterion shall be assessed on the basis of the following elements to be included in the tender:

- a description on the technical infrastructure the Tenderer intends to allocate to the project;
- a list of the software the Tenderer proposes to use for the portal;
- a draft Service Level Agreement in which the Tenderer will specify the level of security and availability they intend to ensure for the portal;
- the profiles of the staff proposed by the Tenderer, including the pedagogical team, together with specifications of the role to be performed by each member of staff;
- a management plan which includes: the time schedule, allocation of staff to different tasks, milestones, risk management plan and quality assurance plan for the various services;
- the coherence of the price and estimated budget breakdown, with the methodology and the Terms of Reference.
- a description of the quality and adequacy of the technical and organisational arrangements of the tender based on previous relevant services and contracts. A list of references shall be provided.

Further to the above, the Tenderer may provide any other information or documents deemed relevant for the assessment of the Tender.

Tenderers who score a total of fewer than 70 points for the qualitative criteria will be rejected. In addition, any Tenderer who scores below 50% of the maximum number of points available for any one criterion will be rejected.

4.3.2. Financial evaluation

Points will be awarded to the tenders eligible to participate in the financial evaluation on the basis of the following formula:

- 100 points will be awarded to the lowest-priced tender;
- the following formula will be applied to the other tenders:
(lowest-price tender/price of the tender in question) x 100.

4.4 Award of the contract

The contract will be awarded to the tender offering the best price/performance ratio:

This will be achieved by multiplying:

- the result of the technical evaluation (number of points) by 0.5;
- the result of the financial evaluation (number of points) by 0.5.

The two results will be added together and the contract will be awarded to the tender obtaining the highest score at the end of this process.

5. GENERAL CONDITIONS FOR THE AWARD OF CONTRACTS

5.1. Contract

The contract shall take the form of a service contract based on the model contract annexed to these specifications, amended and completed on the basis of the selected tender to which the general terms and conditions set out in the enclosed model contract shall apply. The contract shall be signed by the authorised representatives of the Agency and the tenderer.

In the case of a consortium, the contract shall be signed by the leader of the consortium on behalf of all the consortium's members. Each member of the consortium must sign a mandate acknowledging the signature of the contract by the consortium leader.

5.2. No obligation to award the contract

Initiation of a tendering procedure imposes no obligation on the Agency to award a contract. The Agency is not liable for any compensation with respect to tendering parties whose tenders have not been accepted. Nor shall it be so liable if it decides not to award the contract.