

Call for Service: Technical Expert(s)

FSM- 2024-07-19

INTERNET ACCESS FLAGSHIP: Rural Empowerment through Digital Inclusion (REDI) is an EU funded project that Solidarity Fund PL in Georgia (SFPL in GEO) began implementing on December 1st, 2023, together with our partner - the e-Governance Academy from Estonia (eGA).

By virtue of its innovative approach, this action will reduce the existing digital division and include those traditionally left behind by improving access to affordable digital infrastructure and developing digital literacy skills in rural areas of the target regions of Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti and possibly Kakheti.

When it comes to the development of the connectivity infrastructure, first of the two main directions of the project, it will be implemented as a follow-up of the Open-Net Programme's project "Log-in Georgia" and will focus on providing access to the Internet and technology to inhabitants of rural areas from ≈200 selected villages from target regions with a minimum effort required (via public spaces of the greatest social impact (i.e., schools, kindergartens, ambulatories, libraries, village administration, outdoor pavilions - panchaturi, local shops, etc.)) and at the minimum cost, so that it is affordable and at the villagers' fingertips.

The second direction of the action centers around promoting digital literacy in the inhabitants of the rural areas of the selected target regions. This will be done in coordination with and by increasing the impact of the already existing educational programmes implemented by the "Login Georgia" project and the Communications Commission (ComCom). Approx. 25 Digital Rural Hubs (DRH) will be created to be used for the purpose of enhancing digital skills of the rural population. Some of them will be set up by expanding the existing ones, while others will be in completely new locations, closer to the villagers, which will make them more accessible. Furthermore, mobile training buses with IT trainers, equipped with laptops and with Internet, will be visiting the areas with no IT-equipped training classes.

The REDI team is looking for service/consultancy contract with seasoned professionals with extensive experience in digital infrastructure deployment. Ideal candidates will possess a profound understanding of networking technologies, wireless communication systems, hardware and software installation, as well as troubleshooting techniques. This technical proficiency is paramount for effectively designing, implementing, and maintaining robust and reliable internet connectivity solutions, particularly in rural areas.

Service requested: Technical Expert for the project Rural Empowerment through Digital Inclusion (REDI).

Responsibilities:

Task 1: Develop optimal business model(s) with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and/or other partners to implement sustainable connectivity infrastructure deployment and maintenance in 4 target regions of Georgia (Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi, Kvemo Svaneti and possibly Kakheti).

Specifically:

- Review Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MoESD)/World Bank (WB) pilot research and feasibility study on ISPs in Racha-Lechkhumi and Considering findings of feasibility study, prepare/suggest to REDI possible business models of work with regional/local small and medium-size ISPs;
- Consult Project Manager (PM) on the optimal business models for connecting different regions and villages to affordable optical network.
- Assist PM in the meetings with key stakeholders such as MoESD, WB, European Investment Bank (EIB), and others, in order to establish technical standing of the project as well as define chosen business models of work with ISPs and other partners;
- Based on project budget and aims, develop a minimum of 4 different business models for different target regions and/or different categories of village profiles, including financing mechanisms, its commerciality and sustainability of project deliverables.

Task 2: Lead the work of the tech team of the REDI project.

Specifically:

- Provide supervision and tailored technical advice on relevant technical study/(ies) and field trips in relation to connectivity infrastructure.
- Validate, with the support of the local expert, a list of 250 profiled villages proposed by the research company.
- Validate, with the support of the local expert and regional ISPs technical solutions offered to provide connectivity infrastructure to affordable Wi-Fi zones; including technology, equipment, bandwidth quality, other relevant technical solutions.
- Facilitate the tech aspect of Steering Committee and/or other roundtables within the project in terms of business models of deployment and maintenance of connectivity infrastructure and ISPs' (and other relevant actor(s)) role in it.
- Support the local tech expert and the team in selecting, procuring, deploying and installation of digital infrastructure, equipment and software in public spaces, relevant tower, Digital Rural Hubs (DRH), etc.
- Advise the project team regarding the launch and operation of Internet access points, Digital Rural Hubs, Wi-Fi equipment, rally connections, fiber optics, pay boxes, etc.
- Advise the local team, partners and technical expert on modes of connection, equipment and technology that are optimal and suitable for project aims and criteria.
- Formulate guidelines for the replication and scaling of effective digital inclusion strategies, emphasizing sustainability and long-term impact across different regions.

Task 3: Develop TOR for connectivity infrastructure and Digital Rural Hubs (DRH).

Specifically:

- Provide guidance to a local technical expert and possibly partners in tailored formats for deploying connectivity infrastructure, such as Wi-Fi arrays and transmission equipment, based on the most commercially viable international practices that fit the local context.

- Set up minimum technical parameters (in terms of building envelope, construction type and condition and interior) for the Digital Rural Hubs (DRH).
- Ensure premises selected for the Digital Rural Hubs (DRH) meet both the minimum parameters and community needs in terms of accessibility and functionality.

Task 4: Advise and consult on best strategies to reduce digital gaps in Georgia.

Specifically:

- Identify strategies to overcome specific challenges and requirements for digital inclusion identified via the research study commissioned by SFPL.
- Advise on optimal types of access points to be installed and considered in specific villages or groups of villages given affordability and accessibility of the technology.
- Supervise network planning.
- Closely coordinate and consult the team to develop an optimal business model of connectivity infrastructure to be deployed beyond the target regions (with the involvement of policy and decision makers).
- Collaborate with local stakeholders to select and refurbish suitable premises for Digital Rural Hubs (DRH), ensuring accessibility and functionality in line with community needs.

1. Duration of the assignment:

Upon request, during the year of 2024, approximately 65 working days (number of days can be negotiable), with possible term of extension, subject to terms and conditions of the agreement to be signed between parties.

2. Place(s) of Assignment

Online but the selected Technical Expert will be required to conduct at least 1 (one) field trip to the selected regions in Georgia.

3. Minimum requirements

- 3.1 Technical Proficiency: The applicant should have participated in at least 5 (five) international projects in the field of reducing the digital divide. The value of each project should be at least 1 (one) mln EUR.
- 3.2 Familiarity with international best practices in digital inclusion and connectivity initiatives confirmed by a minimum of 1 (one) publication. The applicant must be an author or co-author and should provide a link to the said publication(s) or add the document(s) as an attachment to the application form.
- 3.3 Fluency in the English language.
- 3.4 Providing a CV.
- 3.5 Providing a completed practical task (check Annex 1_Task).
- 3.6 Providing two reference contacts (work emails) of former supervisors and/or colleagues from ICT, wireless technology and/or related field who can confirm the candidate's knowledge and competencies in the field of reducing the digital divide (referees must work in the referred field/job when providing the references).

Offers from service providers that do not meet the minimum criteria will be rejected for formal reasons.

4. Criteria for selection of the Applicant (max. 100 points)

Only shortlisted candidates will be invited for an interview.

4.1 Knowledge and experience - max. 20 points

4.1.1 Experience in advising on IT network infrastructure development and/or deployment, including an understanding of IT networking and radio frequency engineering:

- over 5 years of experience – 10 points
- 1 to 5 years of experience – 5 points
- below 1 year of experience – rejection of the offer for formal reason

4.1.2 Experience in using best international practices in digital inclusion and connectivity in developing countries:

- over 1 year of experience – 10 points
- 6 months to 1 year of experience – 5 points
- below 6 months of experience - rejection of the offer for formal reason

4.2 Practical task (Please see Annex 1_Task) – max. 50 points

4.3 Cost of a single consultation (a single consultation equals 8 hours) – max. 30 points

Assessment under the criterion „cost” will be based on the following formula:

$$P = P_{min} / P_{of} \times 30 \text{ points}$$

where:

P_{min} - the lowest proposed price

P_{of} – price presented in the examined offer

P – the number of points awarded to the examined offer under the price criterion, rounded to the full number.

The cost of a single consultation must be submitted in EUR, in GROSS and excluding VAT.

5. Information about remuneration:

Settlements between the Contracting Authority and the Contractor will be conducted in EUR depending on the Contractor's place of tax residence and in relation to the current Euro exchange rate of the National Bank of Georgia.

6. The application must contain **Fiscal Statement** and **Application FORM** (templates attached), signed and scanned in PDF format.

7. SUBMISSION

Application must be submitted no later than September 15, 2024 24:00 Tbilisi time to the email address: redi@solidarityfund.pl

Questions regarding the call for proposals, can be directed to redi@solidarityfund.pl before the expiration of the deadline.

8. Information on the outcome of the procedure will be sent to the e-mail address indicated by the applicant and will be published on Solidarity Fund PL_GEO Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/solidarityfund.ge> and <https://participatoryhub.ge/>

9. Please be advised that by submitting an application you agree to share the content of the application with other applicants who could submit an appropriate request to the SFPL (except for personal data, which will be anonymized).

10. Solidarity Fund PL, provides equal opportunity and fair and equitable treatment in employment to all people without regard to race, colour, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, political affiliation, marital status, protected genetic information, or sexual orientation.

11. Please be advised that the administrator of personal data contained in the submitted applications is the Solidarity Fund PL with headquarters in Warsaw, ul. Mysłowicka 4, 01-612 Warsaw. The data will be processed on the basis of art. 6 clause 1 point. c of the Polish law on personal data protection for the purpose related to public procurement procedure. You have the right to access the personal data provided, the right to rectify personal data and the right to request the administrator to limit the processing of personal data, subject to the cases referred to in art. 18 clause 2 of the law. You have the right to lodge a complaint with the President of the Office for Personal Data Protection "The data controller is Solidarity Fund PL in Georgia, 20 Chavchavadze Avenue, Apartment #3, floor 2, 0179 Tbilisi, Georgia. To exercise your rights, please contact the SFPL in Georgia directly at georgiarep@solidarityfund.pl – we are committed to protecting your rights to the best of our ability