



Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche

Support to SMEs under IST Programme

The Ideal-ist solution

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Technical Report

CNUCE B4-1999-011

Pisa, September 1999

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SUPPORT TO SMEs UNDER IST PROGRAMME

THE IDEAL-IST SOLUTION

Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate how through an initiative supported by the European Commission, set up in November 1996 a network of 18 EU member states help Small to Medium sized Enterprises overcome the barriers to participate to EU research & development projects. Furthermore, IDEAL-IST facilitates new relationships between potential participants.

The European funded project IDEAL-IST - *Information Dissemination and European Awareness Launch for the IST Programme* was set up to support and to spread the knowledge of the IST programme (*Information Society Technologies*) on a European level and to stimulate SMEs (Small to Medium sized Enterprises) to participate to the programme. This action is carried out through the information dissemination in order to guarantee both rapid and real access to the IST programme.

Principally, IDEAL-IST aims at bringing together potential proposers wishing to present a project and which will, in turn help proposers to obtain funding from the European Commission.

Chapter One - Project description

Over the years, despite significant efforts by the Commission and Member States, substantial barriers to participation in EC RTD Programmes have existed. Identifying the appropriate Programme, Task and Call, understanding Programme modalities, procedures and contracts, finding partners in other countries; formulating a collaborative workplan; and drafting a proposal involve activities outside the scope of the normal operations of most organisations.

The measures adopted by IDEAL-IST aims have an immediate impact on companies interested in EC RTD Programmes. Proposers are able to concentrate on technological aspects rather than on logistical ones, so saving cost, time and effort.

The work is carried out by the network of IST Programme National Contact Points (NCPs), or local organisations working in conjunction with them. The network is based on the existing NCPs for the ACTS, ESPRIT and Telematics Application Programmes. Its work complements that carried out by the NCPs at the national level in disseminating IST Programme information and improves their impact by adding a European-level dimension. The consortium includes an organisation from each EU Member State, plus Iceland, Israel, Norway and Switzerland.

So, through the network we have the following communications:

- transmission high speed of the information and documents in the electronic form between NCPs and between NCP and potential proposers
- greater collaboration between NCPs actions
- communication between NCPs and European Commission
- partner search

Chapter Two - Partner Search Description

IDEAL-IST has two main mechanisms to assist organisations in finding potential project partners: active partner search, and partner brokerage.

Partner search

Under IDEALFIT, an active and highly targeted partner search concept was developed and successfully tested and set up in February 1997. In IDEAL-IST, use of the system has been widened to match the scope of the IST Programme, while its use has increased as more proposers become aware of the service. The following steps, show in the Figure 1 give a short overview of the concept.

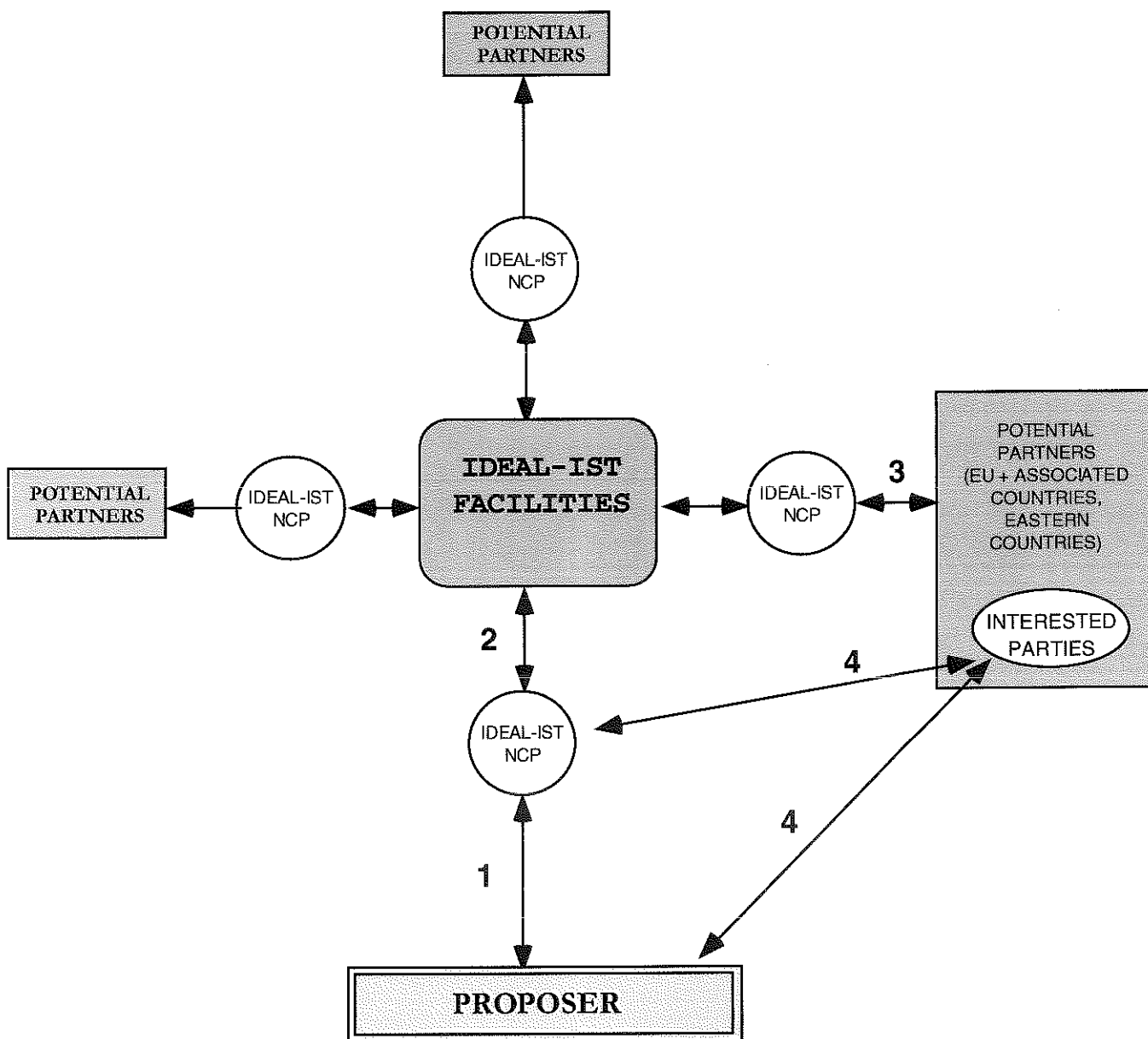


Figure 1 – Active Partner Search

Steps to find a European project partner:

1. The proposer gets in touch with the NCP of his country with the aim of looking for foreign partners interested in joining an IST Programme proposal.

2. The NCP

- asks the proposer to fill in a standard partner search form and assists on EU Programme related questions.
- prepares an HTML-formatted partner search page on the basis of the information provided by the proposer, and this is published on the international IDEAL-IST web server.
- in parallel, the web server generates automatically a brief summary of the inquiry including its web address which is sent to all IDEAL-IST partners.

3. Each NCP downloads the information and forwards it to appropriate organisations within its country. All NCP members manage a mailing list of a minimum of 1,500 national organisations.

4. After receiving the information interested parties will contact searching organisation, either directly or through the NCP.

NCPs will periodically check the status of each the partner search inquiry in their country.

When an inquiry is finished, the responsible NCP immediately informs the IDEAL-IST network of its final outcome which, in turn, is registered on the IDEAL-IST server and informs interested parties that the search has terminated. (IDEAL-IST considers every interested party who is informed even if not included in the consortium). Furthermore, the number of contacts and their origin are registered so that statistics on success can be generated.

Brokerage events

IDEAL-IST invites potential proposers, especially SMEs, from across the EU and Associated States to participate in a brokerage event.

The IDEAL-IST consortium provides SMEs wishing to participate with financial assistance to wholly or partially cover expenses for travel, subsistence, and conference fees; and allows for personal introductions to other IST participants, and Commission officials.

The subsidy to the SME participating will be paid from each partner's IDEAL-IST budget. The precise subsidy will be determined by each IDEAL-IST partner as appropriate for his/her country, depending on actual costs and available budget. SMEs adhere to the Partner Search service completely free of charge.

The companies selected will have a strong interest participating in the IST Programme and a specific project idea in mind. During the brokerage event representatives of all the companies have the chance to present their project ideas and give a company profile. The objectives of the event facilitates communication between the participants, helping them to take the first steps towards future co-operation.

Brokerage events are held in conjunction with either International Workshops or Conferences. Attending a brokerage event can involve significant expenditure for potential proposers. By combining the brokerage event with the workshop or conference, the potential proposer can obtain additional benefit at no extra cost.

Chapter Three - Statistics

From the Partner Searches (PS) created since the beginning of the database, set up in February 1996, a number of statistics have been deduced.

The partner searches refer to the last two calls under the Fourth Framework programme (the 10th and 11th call the dates range from February 1997 through to March 1998) the Partner Search requests for the IST programme began from January 1999. From figure 2, a number of different statistics have been achieved.

The table is divided into PS inquiries, PS consortia established and the PS where the proposer has decided to not go ahead with the search.

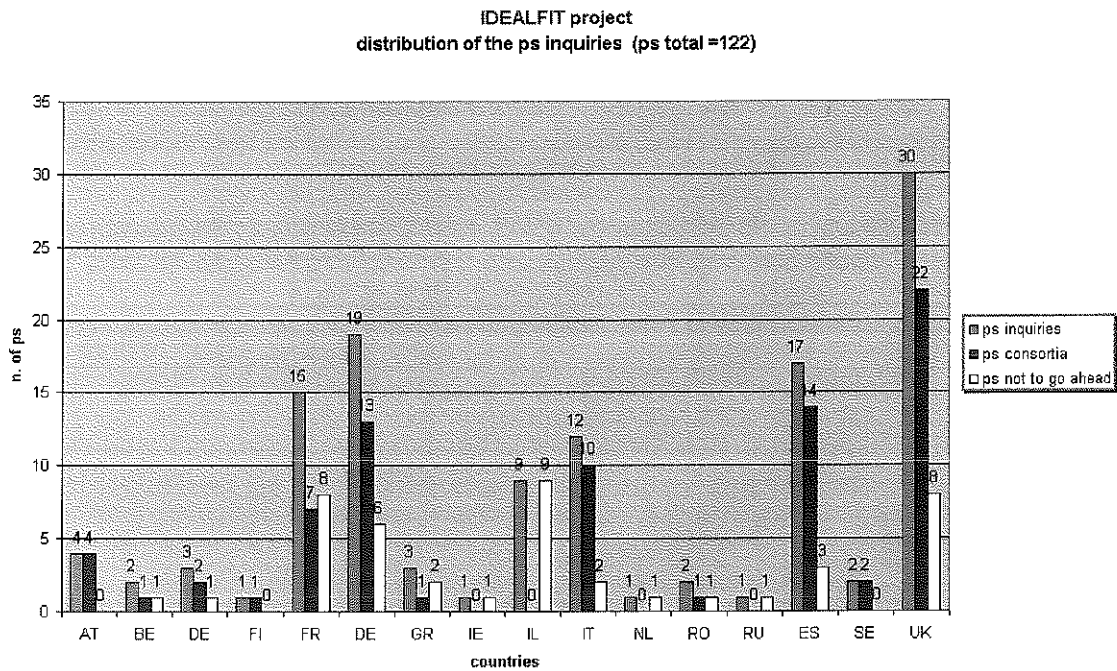


Figure 2 - IDEALFIT distribution per country

In short, under the IVth Framework programme, 122 partner searches were submitted leading to 78 partner searches reaching consortia levels.

Figure 3 shows the number of PS who requested partner searches and the level of interest from the number of the countries involved in IDEAL-IST, from the table it is evident that as more & more proposers learn about IDEAL-IST more partner searches are carried out and consortia is successfully established.

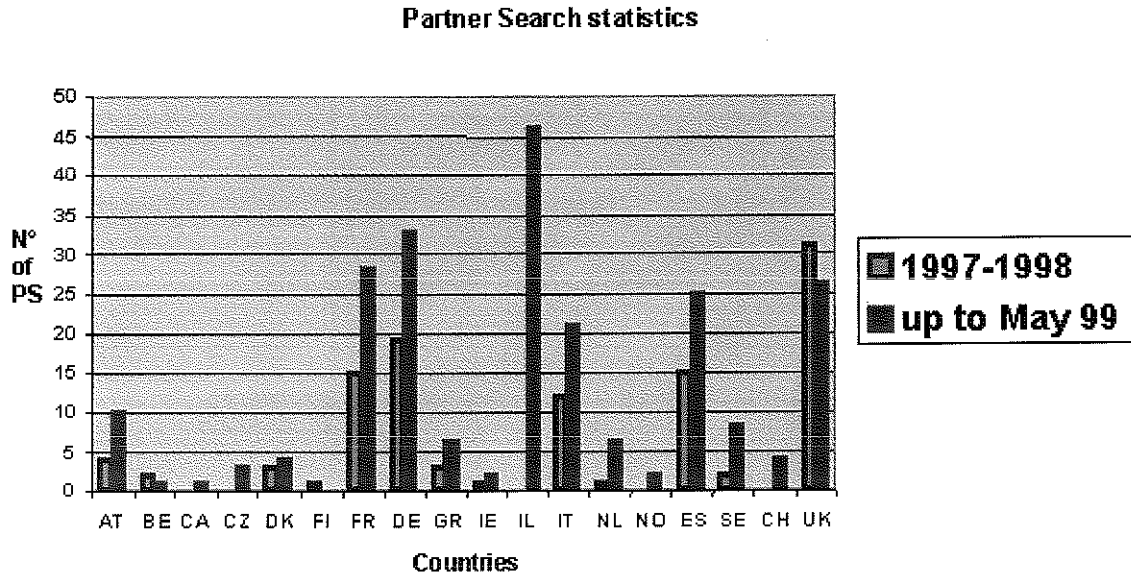


Figure 3 - Partner Search requests from different countries

The tremendous number of PSs under simply the first call of the Vth Framework programme has already reached 265 partner search inquiries and 51 successful consortia established thanks to the IDEAL-IST partner search mechanism. This last factor gives us some solid indication of the success rate of the IDEAL-IST partner search mechanism where partner searches have tripled in a third of the time since its set up back in 1997.

IDEALFIT has established a concrete viability of the partner search concept. From statistics carried out, the IDEALFIT consortium received more than 1000 responses searches in the three month period leading to one call deadline in December 1997, providing partners for approximately 100 proposals. The IDEALFIT and now IDEAL-IST experience demonstrates that not only SMEs are interested in this help but larger companies too.

Chapter Four - Web Server Description

The IDEAL-IST web page, which was set up shortly after the start of IDEALFIT, in February 1997 has proved to be a source of regular guidance for proposers.

The pages are divided to offer various information to proposers and are very user-friendly. The links which have been regularly updated since the offset have created an ergonomic and useful web site to SMEs. The most interesting features of the web site include the Partner Search page which has a search engine to help search for keywords, there are PS forms & guidelines for Proposers and a Partner Search procedure.

A link on the IST programme details the entire IST 1999 workprogramme, the complete calls planned in 1999 including the Guide to Proposers.

A recent item has been inserted *Non-EU countries* where the links of our sister project *IDEAL-IST East* has been included with its home page. Coupled with this, is the link with *Co-operation with Canada*.

A search engine on the partner search pages has been inserted to search for particular partner searches under IDEAL-IST. By searching keywords or the key identification codes for each partner search, potential proposers can look up certain proposals by simply keying in specific information.

For further information visit the web site at <http://www.IDEAL-IST.net> .

IDEAL-IST, in the 5th Framework Programme, works on the existing resources made available in IDEALFIT while continuously developing easier approaches to proposers and will continue to help SMEs in dealing with the procedures required of them to manage European RTD consortia throughout the Fifth Framework programme.