

Open Call for Consulting Services

Title:	Western Balkans Academia–Business Innovation Policy Lab
RCC Department:	Programme Department
Duration:	September 2026 – September 2027
Application Deadline:	23 September 2026
Reference Number	062-026
Eligible:	Consulting companies, consortia of individual consultants

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

I. BACKGROUND

The Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025–2028 (CRM 2.0) is a regionally owned framework based on EU rules and standards, designed to strengthen competitiveness, remove barriers and support the gradual integration of the Western Balkans Six (WB6) into the EU Single Market. Human Capital Development is one of its core pillars and places particular emphasis on improving the region’s innovation capacity, skills base and knowledge-based competitiveness.

The WB6 region has significant scientific potential, a growing private sector and a range of ongoing domestic, regional and donor-supported innovation initiatives¹. However, these assets often develop in parallel rather than as parts of a connected innovation pipeline. Many businesses struggle to identify relevant research capabilities, while researchers often lack access to market intelligence and commercial partners. On the other hand, public authorities may have limited mechanisms for cross-regional policy learning and development partners may receive overlapping requests that are not sufficiently prepared for investment.

¹ See for example: Mapping Deep-Tech and Green-Tech Manufacturing Potential in the Western Balkans Six <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/283/mapping-deep-tech-and-green-tech-manufacturing-potential-in-the-western-balkans-six>

The main constraint is therefore not only a shortage of finance. It is also a coordination and preparation gap: weak problem definition, fragmented information, limited trust, misaligned incentives and insufficient neutral facilitation to translate shared priorities into clearly owned, fundable action. Persistent barriers such as weak academia–business linkages, low commercialisation of academic research, modest business expenditure on R&D and fragmented governance frameworks continue to limit knowledge transfer and technology commercialisation.

To address this gap, the **Western Balkans Academia–Business Innovation Policy Lab** (Policy Lab) will be launched as a light, action-oriented coordination platform. The Policy Lab will bring together research institutions, businesses, public authorities, innovation intermediaries, investors and development partners to identify shared cross-regional challenges, form credible partnerships and connect promising initiatives with existing expertise, programmes and financing instruments. It will not create a new funding facility or finance capital-intensive regional projects. Its added value will lie in convening the right actors, structuring collaboration, reducing duplication and helping partners move from fragmented dialogue to jointly owned implementation pathways.

II. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Objectives of the assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to support the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in designing, launching and facilitating the first operational cycle of the Policy Lab. The consultants will translate the strategic concept into a practical regional process through which partners jointly identify priority challenges, assemble suitable consortia and develop concise action roadmaps or partnership concepts that can be matched, where appropriate, with existing local, regional, European, bilateral, private-sector or philanthropic support instruments.

More specifically, the consultants will assist the RCC in:

- **Designing the Policy Lab process and governance:** prepare the practical operating model, roles, steering arrangements, selection criteria, safeguards and work plan for a time-bound, demand-led regional Lab cycle.
- **Mapping stakeholders, initiatives and support instruments:** identify relevant research capabilities, business needs, innovation intermediaries, public authorities, existing programmes and potential sources of technical or financial support.
- **Facilitating challenge selection and working groups:** support a transparent process to select two to three priority cross-regional collaboration challenges linked to S3 priority domains.
- **Developing action roadmaps and partnership concepts:** help working groups define the problem, intended beneficiaries, partner roles, milestones, risks, resource needs and implementation pathway for each selected challenge.

- **Mobilising partners and documenting learning:** connect mature concepts with relevant implementing, technical and financing partners, track commitments and produce practical policy and institutional recommendations on barriers to knowledge transfer, talent mobility, commercialisation and cross-regional cooperation.

III. SCOPE OF WORK

Specific Tasks

The consultants will work closely with the RCC, businesses, academic stakeholders, public authorities, innovation intermediaries and development partners to deliver a phased, output-oriented process:

Specific tasks and deliverables

- **Phase 1: Scoping, mapping and operating model (Months 1–3)**
 - Prepare an inception work plan agreed with the RCC, including methodology, timetable, consultation plan, quality assurance arrangements and risk management approach.
 - Map relevant actors, initiatives, research and business capabilities, support instruments and potential complementarities across the WB6.
 - Propose the Policy Lab's operating model, including governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities, challenge-selection criteria, participation principles, documentation standards and safeguards against duplication or unfunded proposal development.
- **Phase 2: Challenge selection and structured dialogue (Months 3–6)**
 - Design and facilitate consultations with academia, businesses, public institutions, innovation intermediaries and development partners to identify a longlist of possible collaboration challenges.
 - Apply transparent criteria to help the RCC and steering participants select two to three priority challenges where regional cooperation offers clear added value and committed partners are available (for example, common priorities identified under S3 documents in the WB6).
 - Establish and facilitate time-bound working groups for each selected challenge, ensuring that each group includes relevant research and business actors and has designated leads.
 - Facilitate 3–5 pilot academia-business collaborative projects (integrating existing ongoing initiatives where applicable) through scoping, action-planning, and early-stage implementation to ensure tangible collaborative outputs.
- **Phase 3: Action design and partner mobilisation (Months 6–10)**
 - Support RCC to prepare concise, evidence-based action roadmaps or partnership concepts setting out the problem, beneficiaries, partners, responsibilities, milestones, risks, resources required and potential support instruments.

- Facilitate structured matchmaking and partner-mobilisation discussions with relevant local, regional, European, bilateral, private-sector or philanthropic programmes.
- Prepare a policy and institutional recommendations note identifying recurring barriers and feasible actions related to knowledge transfer, talent mobility, commercialisation and cross-regional cooperation.
- Facilitate RCC to design a regional Academia-Business Innovation event to bring together key triple-helix stakeholders from the WB6 (conceptualise the agenda, develop thematic session briefs, identify and invite high-profile speakers, ensure interactive, output-oriented dialogue rather than passive panel discussions, and produce a post-event action report capturing key policy takeaways and an action matrix to feed into the Policy Lab's ongoing policy interventions).
- **Phase 4: Learning, visibility and follow-through (Months 10–12)**
 - Track commitments made by working groups and partners, document progress and identify follow-up actions after the assignment.
 - Prepare a sustainability and follow-through roadmap for the next Policy Lab cycle, including options for partner ownership and continued coordination.
 - Produce final reporting that captures results, lessons learned, partner contributions and the Policy Lab's additional value.

Methodology

The consultants are expected to suggest a work plan that should include at a minimum: a clear methodological overview covering all specific tasks mentioned above and a clear timeline.

IV. LOGISTICS AND TIMING

Timeline

The engagement is expected to start in October 2026 and end in October 2027.

Lines of Communication

- The task will be implemented in close consultation with the RCC Secretariat.
- The contracted bidder will report to and closely liaise with the RCC's Senior Expert on Human Capital Development.

V. REQUIRED OUTPUTS/REPORTING

No.	Deliverables	Due date
1.	Inception report and detailed work plan , including methodology, consultation plan, timetable, quality assurance arrangements and risk management approach, agreed with the RCC.	First week of October 2026
2.	Stakeholder, initiatives and support-instruments mapping report , covering relevant research and business capabilities, innovation intermediaries, public authorities, existing programmes, financing opportunities and potential complementarities across the WB6.	End of November 2026
3.	Policy Lab operating model and governance package , including proposed steering arrangements, roles and responsibilities, participation principles, challenge-selection criteria, documentation standards and safeguards against duplication or unfunded proposal development.	End of December 2026
4.	Challenge-selection report and working-group set-up note , documenting the consultation process, longlist and shortlist of possible challenges, application of selection criteria, selected two to three priority challenges, designated leads and agreed working-group composition.	End of February 2027
5.	Facilitation and progress report on Policy Lab working groups , summarising structured dialogue sessions, participation, decisions, emerging partnership concepts, partner contributions, risks and next steps for each selected challenge track.	End of April 2027
6.	Action roadmaps or partnership concepts for selected challenges , including problem definition, intended beneficiaries, partner roles, implementation milestones, risks, resource needs and potential local, regional, European, bilateral, private-sector or philanthropic support instruments.	End of June 2027
7.	Partner-mobilisation and policy recommendations note , documenting matchmaking discussions, potential follow-up support opportunities, commitments made, and practical policy and institutional recommendations on knowledge	End of July 2027

	transfer, talent mobility, commercialisation and cross-regional cooperation.	
8.	Final report and sustainability/follow-through roadmap , capturing results, lessons learned, partner contributions, actions completed, remaining gaps, proposed next Policy Lab cycle and options for continued partner ownership and coordination.	End of September 2027

VI. REQUIREMENTS

Expert Qualifications:

Education:	Degree in sciences, engineering, economics, business, or other fields directly related to the assignment. Master's or PhD degree is an advantage.
Experience:	▪ Minimum 10 years (team leader) and 7 years (team members) of professional experience in innovation policy design, regional development, and technology transfer, with specific familiarity with the WB6 innovation ecosystem; ▪ Demonstrated expertise in Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), triple-helix collaboration frameworks, and EU accession/funding mechanisms (e.g. Horizon Europe, IPA funds); ▪ Proven track record in facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues between academia, the private sector, and public institutions; ▪ Proven communication and presentation skills and ability to work in an environment requiring liaison and collaboration with multiple actors including government representatives, businesses, civil society institutions, donors and other stakeholders; ▪ Strong analytical, facilitation, and policy-drafting skills.
Language requirements:	▪ Fluency in written and spoken English, as the official language of the RCC; ▪ Knowledge of other RCC languages is a distinct advantage.
Other:	▪ N.A.

Core Values

- Demonstrates integrity and fairness by modelling RCC values and ethical standards;
- Independent and free from conflicts of interest in the responsibilities defined by the Terms of Reference;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability.

Core Competencies

- Demonstrates professional competence to meet responsibilities and post requirements and is conscientious and efficient in meeting commitments, observing deadlines and achieving results;
- Result-oriented; plans and produces quality results to meet the set goals, generates innovative and practical solutions to challenging situations;
- Communication: Excellent communication skills, including the ability to convey complex concepts and recommendations clearly;
- Team work: Ability to interact, establish and maintain effective working relations in a culturally diverse team;
- Ability to establish and maintain productive partnerships with regional and national partners and stakeholders.

Quality Control:

The consultants should ensure internal quality control during the implementing and reporting phase of the assignment. The quality control should ensure that the draft reports and deliverables comply with the above requirements and meet adequate quality standards before sending them to stakeholders for comments. The quality control should ensure consistency and coherence between findings, conclusions and recommendations. It should also ensure that the findings reported are duly substantiated and that conclusions are supported by relevant judgement criteria.

The views expressed in the report will be those of the contractor and will not necessarily reflect those of the Regional Cooperation Council. Therefore, a standard disclaimer reflecting this will be included in the reports. In this regard, the consultant may or may not accept comments and/or proposals for changes received during the above consultation process. However, when comments/proposals for changes are not agreed upon by the consultant, they should clearly explain the reasons for their final decision in a comments table.

RCC employees and partners participating in any programme or activity conducted or funded by RCC are prohibited from discriminating based on race, religion, political beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, marital status and national origin.

VII. APPLICATION RULES

Technical Offer:

The technical offer needs to contain the following:

- Company profile including a brief description (up to 2 pages) of the company;
- Copy of Company's Registration Certificate;
- Financial records - company's balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement for the past 2 years (only in case of bidding of consulting companies);
- In case of bidding consortia of individual consultants participating in this Call, they must indicate the members and show how the work is divided between them. Specifically, all members must name the team leader and authorise this member to represent the consortium. A corresponding power of attorney must be attached to the bid;
- CVs of consultants, outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in the Terms of References, along with contact details of referees;
- An outline work plan of a maximum of 5 pages;
- List of references for activities implemented over the past years;
- Signed Statements of Availability (Annex I).

Financial offer:

The financial offer should reflect the following:

- All figures should be expressed in EUR;
- VAT amount, if applicable, should be presented.

When preparing the financial offer, the applicant should take into account the following:

- Maximum budget should not exceed EUR 30,000. The offers above the threshold will not be considered.
- Use a free format for the budget offering the global price for the work to be provided.
- Fee rates should be broadly consistent with the regional framework rates for these types of professional services.

Note: According to the Indirect Taxation Authority Instruction and its status of an international organisation, the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat is entitled to VAT refund and is exempted from customs duties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Applications need to be submitted by 23 September 2026 through the website link [Apply now](#).

Please make sure that the application is submitted in two separate folders one containing Technical Offer and the other Financial Offer. The documents should be submitted in a form of copies of the originals.

The assignments will be awarded to the highest qualified applicant based on the skills, expertise, and the quality of the concept note(s) and the cost-effectiveness of the financial offer.

Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the profile and competencies of the candidate and the responsiveness to the Terms of Reference for consulting services.

The best value for money is established by weighing technical quality against price on an 80/20 basis.

The applications are evaluated following these criteria:

EVALUATION GRID	Maximum Score	Actual scoring
A. Technical Offer (A.1+A.2+A.3)	100	
A.1. Competencies: relevant institutional and technical experience, references and demonstrated expertise: - Proven experience in innovation policy design, technology transfer, commercialisation of research, academia–business collaboration and regional development, with demonstrated familiarity with the WB6 innovation ecosystem; - Demonstrated capacity to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder processes	15 10	

involving academia, businesses, public authorities, innovation intermediaries, donors and other partners; • Relevant experience in mapping research and business capabilities, support instruments, financing opportunities and partnership potential across local and regional innovation systems; • Strong analytical, facilitation, communication and policy-drafting skills, supported by references for comparable assignments and outputs.	5 5	
A.2. CV quality and professional capacity of the proposed consultants: • Relevant academic qualifications in science, engineering, economics, business, innovation policy, public policy or another field directly related to the assignment; a Master's or PhD degree is an advantage; • Proposed team demonstrates the required professional capacity, including minimum experience levels for the team leader and team members, appropriate division of roles, availability for the full assignment period, and complementary expertise in Lab design, stakeholder engagement, working-group facilitation, action-roadmap development, partner mobilisation, reporting and quality assurance.	15 20	
A.3. Quality of the methodology and work plan • Quality, feasibility and coherence of the proposed work plan, including a clear methodology for all phases of the assignment, realistic sequencing of tasks and deliverables, stakeholder-consultation approach, governance and facilitation arrangements, risk management, quality assurance, reporting, and allocation of	30	

responsibilities and person-days across the team.		
B. Financial Proposal/ lowest price has a maximum score	100	

Score for offer X =

A: [Total quality score (out of 100) of offer X / 100] * 80

B: [Lowest price / price of offer X] * 20

In addition to the results of the technical and financial evaluation, a competency-based interview will be held with the selected bidder.

Information on selection of the most favourable bidder

The RCC Secretariat shall inform candidates and bidders of decisions reached concerning the award of the contract as soon as possible, including the grounds for any decision not to award a contract for which there has been competitive tendering or to recommence the procedure.

Standard letter of thanks for participation to unsuccessful bidders shall be sent within 15 days after the contract is signed with the awarded bidder.

The candidates and bidders wishing to receive feedback may send a request within 15 days after receipt of the standard letter of thanks.

The request may be sent to the e-mail address ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat
Attention to: Administration Department
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V
71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Appeals procedure

Bidders believing that they have been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may petition the RCC Secretariat directly. The RCC Secretariat must reply within 15 days of receipt of the appeal.

The appeal request may be sent to the e-mail address ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat
Attention to: Administration Department
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V
71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

ANNEX I: STATEMENT OF AVAILABILITY

REF: 062-026

Western Balkans Academia–Business Innovation Policy Lab

By representing the Entity _____ we agree to participate in the above-mentioned tender procedure. We further declare that we are able and willing to work for the period(s) foreseen for the position for which our CVs have been included in the event that this tender is successful, namely:

Full Name	Available from (Date)	Available until (Date)	Acceptance by signature	Number of person-days associated with each task from the ToR