**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)**

*Conformity Assessment Bodies Programme*

Gaia-X European Association for Data and Cloud AISBL

Avenue des Arts 6-9

1210 Brussels

Belgium

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1. **SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND**

Gaia-X AISBL ( www.gaia-x.eu) is an European association which goal is to establish an ecosystem, whereby data is shared and made available in a trustworthy environment. The intention is to give the control back to the users by retaining sovereignty over their data. The outcome is a federated system linking many cloud service providers and users together in a transparent environment that will drive the European data economy of tomorrow.

The association has more than 350 members coming from different European countries, big companies as well as SME, users of cloud services, providers of cloud services and academics.

Within the association the Policy Rules Committee (PRC) is in charge of describing the compliance rules for the different parties, named as the "compliance framework". The compliance framework is composed of two documents:

- the Gaia-X Trust Framework, prepared by the Working Group Compliance

- the Gaia-X Policy Rules and Labelling Document (PRLD) prepared by the Policy Rules and Labels & Qualification Working Groups.

The architecture (including the points related to compliance) has been designed by the Technical Committee and is described in the architecture document.

The Policy Rules and Labelling Document is the result of a work of two years by more than 50 Europeans companies, users, cloud providers and academics. The first version has been approved in April 2021 by the Gaia-X Board of Directors following a global comprehensive survey within the 350 members of the association, with more 700 comments processed. A new version with more details and some minor changes has been approved in November 2022.

The Working Group has also started a work to operationalize the concept of labels; the document has not been finalized yet.

During the Gaia- X summit in November 2022, a first demo of the compliance framework and the labels has been achieved.

The aim of Gaia- X in 2023 is now to operationalize all the concept so that the first "lighthouses" of Gaia-X start to work in real life with the compliance framework including the labels.

The Gaia-X labels are divided in 3 levels. The Label holder will request the issuance of a label to the CAB (Label Issuer) which will evaluate the label level by validating that the individual criteria have the necessary documented compliance for levels 1-3 by checking the VC (Verifiable Credential) for the individual criteria (provided by self-description or one or many CABs) and ultimately issuing a VC which states the Gaia-X label level.

Therefore, the Gaia- X AISBL has decided to work on a "conformity assessment program".

## 2. PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

This Request for Proposal contains the requirements for an open and competitive process. Proposals will be accepted until the 18th of February 2023, 8.00 pm CET. Any proposals received after this date and time will be returned to the sender. All proposals must be signed by an official agent or representative of the company submitting the proposal.

If the organization submitting a proposal must outsource or contract any work to meet the requirements contained herein, this must be clearly stated in the proposal. Additionally, all costs included in proposals must be all-inclusive to include any outsourced or contracted work. Any proposal that calls for outsourcing or contracting work must include a name and description of the organizations being contracted.

All costs must be itemized to include an explanation of all fees and costs.

Contract terms and conditions will be negotiated upon selection of the winning bidder for this RFP. Gaia–X will determine all the contractual terms and conditions and is ready to discuss them with the applicants. Scope, budget, schedule and other necessary items pertaining to the project are necessary elements of the proposal.

## 3. PROJECT PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this project is as follows:

Gaia-X AISBL is seeking a provider to give advice and to write documents for the association, and especially to give advice and to provide these documents to the Labelling Working Group. The association is not willing to select, at this stage, a CAB or a list of CABS, but is willing to have advice on the selection of CABS and on the assessment program.

The advice must be divided in different parts. These different parts must be separated in the answer.

**Part 1 – Detailed description and assessment program for some criteria**

Some of the criteria described are either too generic or without details or without standards to describe them.

The advisor should propose some standards or some more details or some assessment program for these criteria.

The advisor should also provide a mapping document. For each criterion, the mapping of the standards that correspond to these criteria needs to be proposed.

**Part 2- Approval of CABS by Gaia-X**

Part a) To become a CAB approved by Gaia-X to issue the overarching Gaia-X labels, CABs will have meet pre-determined criteria, related to aspects such as quality of service, independence and impartiality, availability, transparency, reliability.

The advisor will propose a set of common criteria considering the specific needs of Gaia-X, and – where needed – adapt or extend such common criteria accordingly.

Part b) Gaia-X will have to approve such CABs based on the criteria following a pre-determined, fair and transparent process. Gaia-X does not intent to arterially limit the accessibility for CABs but strives to remain the market as open and accessible as possible.

The advisor will provide a document proposing a process and suitable means of operations, to approve CABs according to the pre-determined criteria, assuring that such process and means of operation reflect common good practices considering the specific needs of Gaia-X, and – where needed – adapt or extend such process and suitable means of operation accordingly.

**Part 3 – Operational procedures**

The conformity assessment of the Gaia-X labelling will require operationalization.

Part a) Assessment shall follow pre-determined and transparent procedures, e.g., what type of assessment, type of evidence, etc. shall be required to meet the criteria, especially, if the criteria cannot be met with conformity of an already existing standard.

The same applies to elements, if and to what extent conformity must be met at first submission or whether remediation throughout the assessment process shall be considered possible.

These types of – common – procedures and details, shall be developed and relate to the current existing drafts by Gaia-X.

Part b) Once the pre-determined assessment will be completed, procedures and frameworks shall exist to operationalize the results of such assessment.

In case of a negative decision, how to address disagreement by the assessed party.

In case of a positive decision, what are the rules to receive, use and uphold the respective label.

What happens if the CAB becomes aware of any information that indicates non-conformity, i.e., the rules and procedures to revoke or suspend a label, including necessary communication thereof.

What are the obligations of label holders to maintain conformity – e.g., conformity with determined existing other standards. Likewise, elements must be determined and developed relating the Contractual framework between the CAB and the assessed parties.

The overarching procedures and means of operation shall also sufficiently address and limit the liabilities of all parties involved, be it the CAB, Gaia-X or participants (the to be assessed parties). This shall also include relevant agreements governing non-material rights, such as licensing of the Labels.

In regards of Part a and Part b): The advisor shall consider to the extent possible the existing drafts, such as the "Operational Requirements" document.

**Part 4 – Technical procedures**

Labels are expected to be issued on the level of "Gaia-X Service Offerings" (SO) which are defined in the "Gaia-X Architecture Document" (AD) in chapter 4.4.2. Service Offerings are electronically represented by the means of "Gaia-X Self Descriptions" (SD, ref chapter 5 of the AD) following a defined Scheme. The high-level process is described in chapter 5.5 and is a specific implementation of the W3C recommendation on Verifiable Credentials.

A provider may claim conformance to one or many specific criteria and ask one or many CABs for specific claims (e.g. I am ISO 27k certified) to issue a VC for validation of the specific claim; these electronic validations may provide digital input to the assessment list of criteria.

It is foreseen that after validation of the Label criteria the Label issuer will provide an additional VC to validate the Gaia-X Label level.

Technical and digital way to automatize the assessment against and validation of Labels can be implemented.

The advisor shall – against this background – develop the framework to ensure that the expected implementation as described above will stand good practice of conformity assessments and remains the liabilities of the parties involved as limited as possible.

4. **SUBMITTER PROFILE**

The following characteristics constitute the best credentials for a successful submitter:

- Competencies related to the scope of assessment bodies
- Previous experience in advice on such topic
- International experience
- Project management competencies
- Command of the English language

5. **PROJECT SCOPE**

The submitter proposal must clearly cover the following points:

- Deliverables: divided as described in part 3)
- Timeline: on which Deliverables will be produced
- Methodology: adopted to produce Deliverables and to interact with the requestor

6. **PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Gaia-X AISBL, notably the Labelling Working Group as requestor of this RFP, will evaluate received proposals considering, but not limited to, the following criteria:

- Completeness: all the aspects of the project, as described in sect. 3, must be covered

- Structure: the proposed method, plan and work breakdown structure must be well structured to enable a thorough verification of execution and results
- Specificity: the proposal must be relevant and specific in the scope of the Gaia-X aim to define and automate digital credentials verification as described in this and referenced documents
- Suitability: proposal must satisfy the needs herein described, providing a clear solution to the problems they address
- Relevance: submitters will be evaluated against their proven experience as it pertains to the scope of this project
- Experience: submitter experience in the field of projects and examples of work pertaining to Conformity Assessment Bodies will be required
- Solution Value: the cost Vs benefit of the solutions described in the received proposals will be compared for evaluation
- Proposal Price: bidders' proposals economical value will be considered
- Methodology: clarity and evidence of previous adoption of the proposed work methodology will be evaluated
- Implementation: the evidence of the next steps to transform the deliverables of the proposal into concrete implementation in the Gaia-X trust framework, in particular providing reference and direct contacts to CAB to be involved, will be considered a valuable plus
- Expertise: technical competence and experience, relevant to the scope, of submitters will be provided in documented and verifiable form
- Readability: quality of the produced proposals and deliverables must be in English language and with clear and readable format

Each bidder must send their proposal to the address below by February 18th, 2023 at 8.00 pm CET.

Gaia-X reserves the right to cancel and relaunch the procedure if none of the proposals received is technically suitable.

tenders@gaia-x.eu

7. **REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL AND PROJECT TIMELINE**

Request for Proposal Timeline:

All proposals in response to this RFP are due no later than the 18th of February 2023 8.00 pm CET at the e-mail address: tenders@gaia-x.eu

Requests for additional information from bidders should be received by the 3rd of February 2023, 8.00 pm CET at the latest and answered in 5 working days.

Evaluation of proposals will be conducted from the 19th of February 2023 until the 5th of March 2023.

The selection decision, including request for clarification to selected bidders, will be made from the 6th of March and end no later than the 15th of March 2023.

Upon notification, the contract negotiation with the winning bidder will begin immediately.

Contract negotiations will be completed by the 24th of March 2023.

Notifications to bidders who were not selected will be completed by the 27th of March 2023.

**Timeline for Deliverables (Term of Contract)**

First deliverables shall be in May (acknowledging those may not be final)

Subsequent deliverables must be produced monthly, reflecting the timeline agreed between the bidder and Gaia-X.

8. **PRICING**

All proposals must include a cost breakdown to complete the tasks described in the project scope. Costs should be stated as one-time or non-recurring costs (NRC) or monthly recurring costs (MRC).

NOTE: All costs and fees must be clearly described in each proposal.

**A. Appendix**

i) Gaia-X Architecture Document: Gaia-X Architecture Document - 22.10 Release

ii) Gaia-X Trust Framework: Gaia-X Trust Framework - 22.10 Release

iii) Gaia-X Policy rules and labelling document: https://docs.gaia-x.eu/policy-rules-committee/policy-rules-labelling/latest/policy_rules_labeling_document/

iv) W3C: Verifiable Credentials: Verifiable Credentials Data Model v1.1 (w3.org)

v) Operational conditions clarification (not final /Gitlab repository version): https://gitlab.com/gaia-x/policy-rules-committee/label-document/-/blob/master/docs/operational_conditions_clarifications.md