

Lessons Learned from the Market Dialogue Phase

Therapeutic Virtual Reality (VR) for GBV Survivors in Iraq

Based on consultation with other projects funded by Innovation Norway, NCA chose to use the following approach to conduct the Market Dialogue:

- **Ecosystem Mapping:** NCA compiled a list of over 120 VR/technology companies, academics, research institutions, humanitarian actors, MHPSS & GBV specialists, and more, from around the world who were relevant to this project. NCA used this mapping to create a mailing list to invite stakeholders to the Information Sessions.
- **Virtual Information Sessions:** This was an opportunity for vendors and interested parties to learn more about the project, the innovative procurement process and NCA's problem statements, as well as ask questions and learn what a solution needs to deliver on. NCA organized two 1.5-hour sessions on 1 & 2 November 2022, covering different time zones to ensure vendors from across the world had a chance to engage with us. The sessions were recorded, posted on NCA's YouTube channel, then shared via the mailing list, and posted on NCA's website.
- **Questionnaires:** Any potential supplier or sector expert who had a viable solution strategy or ideas was encouraged to submit a questionnaire after the info sessions to collect basic information about them and what they wanted to discuss in a bilateral meeting.
- **Bilateral Meetings:** NCA held 20 bilateral meetings with potential suppliers, subject matter experts, and other stakeholders throughout November and December 2022. These meetings were an opportunity for potential suppliers to ask questions, as well as for NCA to clarify our problem statement, see what solutions already exist on the market, and get ideas for RFP specifications. The Questions & Answers from these meetings and the Info Sessions were compiled and shared as part of the RFP.

The following are lessons learned from this process:

1. **Innovation Norway's procurement process is, generally, new to vendors and requires education.** NCA spent significant and necessary time in the market dialogue and bilateral meetings to explain Innovation Norway's procurement process. Generally, vendors may be accustomed to a more prescriptive RFP process where the entity putting the bid forward defines the outcome solution or product. Also, some vendors initially perceived the meetings before the RFP as an opportunity to pitch their companies, rather than to have a dialogue about possible solutions or specifications. Given that the innovative procurement process may likely be unique for vendors (and NCA), taking time to explain and outline the process is beneficial to all parties.
2. **Ecosystem mapping is time-consuming and multi-faceted.** NCA used Google to search key terms to find relative VR companies, leveraged existing networks and contacts (especially Norwegian networks), and tracked down contact information for researchers from published articles on relevant topics. NCA also used the Digital Public Goods Alliance registry and UNDP's Digital X Solutions catalogue, which were fruitful. Asking related companies or experts to refer us to other people/companies in their networks was also

successful (e.g., health VR companies). Reaching out to global networks, such as VRARA, were less fruitful.

3. **Use Innovation Norway's [Planning template for market dialogue](#).** The smaller team working on the market dialogue used this tool to organize ourselves, assign roles, clarify our objectives, identify target groups and dissemination methods, and strategize. The inputs in this tool were then later adapted to craft messaging for the market dialogue invitation, RFP and other documents.
4. **Send personal invitations to key individual companies or stakeholders to attend the market dialogue sessions.** For both information sessions combined, a total of 78 people registered but only 10 participants attended, which was far fewer than expected and desired. Consider reducing the time from 1.5 hours to 1 hour to encourage attendance. Additionally, active participation in the two meetings was minimal. Stakeholders were invited to the info sessions via mass email (i.e., BCC). For the bilateral meetings, NCA did personalized outreach to VR companies (e.g., individual emails and their websites' contact forms), which led to higher response rates and higher participation in bilateral meetings. It is likely that similar individualized invites may have resulted in higher, more relevant participation in the info sessions. Also, invitees may have referred other companies or colleagues to attend the market dialogue. That said, the process of creating the info session presentation was very useful for NCA internally, including distilling our needs assessment findings down more concretely and refining the problem statements. NCA also shared the recording with those seeking bilateral meetings and encouraged them to watch beforehand, which allowed for more focused bilateral meetings.
5. **Leverage social media and internal Communications and Marketing teams to promote the market dialogue on multiple social media channels well in advance of the meetings.** NCA's Communications team was involved in promoting the market dialogue by posting to social media (LinkedIn & Twitter) and uploading the info session to YouTube. In the future, bring in the Comms and Marketing teams earlier in the planning process and have clear expectations, turnaround times, and guidance for them. For example, request the Marketing and Comms teams to draft the text for LinkedIn and Twitter posts, including hashtags and graphics. It would have been helpful to have the Marketing team help with messaging on the website and market dialogue invitation. Also, providing the teams with key points about the procurement process and target market dialogue audience may also be beneficial.
6. **Have a dedicated website that is easy to update.** NCA used the "For Contractors" part of its website to create an Innovation specific page to host information about the market dialogue, including the initial invitation with background information (e.g., needs assessment report and problem statements) and a link to register for the info sessions, and later posted the recording of the info session and instructions to sign up for bilateral meetings. However, making changes to the website was too slow given the at times quick pace of the process. In the future, have clear understanding between those involved in updating the website of when changes will be needed and how changes can be made.
7. **Leverage connections to technology companies and their networks to gain more relevant attendees.** VR companies and experts attended the info sessions; however,

increased VR expertise in the market dialogues would have added more color to the specifications discussion. The info sessions were promoted via NCA's social network, as well as some VR specific networks (e.g., VRARA). However, asking technology companies to repost the market dialogue information to their social channel may have led to more VR expertise in attendance.

- 8. Use the bilateral meetings as an opportunity to make additional relevant connections.** In a few instances, bilateral meetings organically led to additional contacts, introductions, or leads. At least 2-3 companies made introductions to additional relevant parties who were helpful or put forward a bid. Systematically asking all potential vendors if they know of other companies to speak to may be helpful in generating new partnerships or leads, especially in academia as participation from this group was very low.
- 9. Clarify the purpose of bilateral meetings with an agenda and overview.** Having an agenda helps companies prepare for the bilateral meetings. Several companies viewed the bilateral meetings as an opportunity to pitch their companies and/or products. As the bilateral is not designed to be a sales pitch opportunity, we used some of the time to redirect the potential vendors to ask questions. Additionally, it was evident that some companies had not watched the market dialogue recording, despite encouraging them to do so. As such, NCA's team provided an overview of the project and Innovation Norway, repeating some of the content from the information session. Providing the vendors with this information in writing in advance may save some time in the bilateral meetings.
- 10. Extend time for bilateral meetings from 30 to 45 minutes.** Thirty minutes was often too short given the richness of discussions.
- 11. Ask potential suppliers approximate timelines for design, development and delivery early on in the market dialogue process.** This will help later when creating the RFP. Understand suppliers' iterative user testing and co-design processes.
- 12. Consider hosting smaller round-table discussions with targeted groups.** NCA presented the project to the MHPSS Task Team (under the Global GBV Area of Responsibility) and had a brief discussion with members about the problem statements, fielded questions, and received suggestions and considerations. Because time was limited, NCA has follow-up meetings with a few of the Task Team members to explore their ideas further. These technical specialists contributed advice on guidelines for trauma-sensitive mindfulness, cautioned the project to mitigate technology-facilitated GBV, and contributed ideas for making a VR intervention more feminist-informed, empowerment-based and survivor-centered. They also discussed and debated different MHPSS theoretical approaches that could be used. Similar small group discussions with specialists could be very beneficial for creating specifications for the RFP, including open sources/closed source considerations.
- 13. The market dialogue takes time. Plan accordingly.** The ecosystem mapping exercise began very early on in the process and continued throughout the market dialogue process. However, other aspects of the market dialogue took longer than initially anticipated, especially the bilateral meetings as more and more stakeholders expressed interest.