



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Towards EU Regional Economic Convergence (TREC)

Pilot Projects to reinforce collaboration among clusters and technology centres

179/G/GRO/PPA/15/8641

The present call for proposals is composed of a set of Grant Submission Documents,
which form an integral part of this call:

The call for proposals,
The Guide for Applicants
The Submission Set

The terms set out in the call for proposals document shall take precedence over those in
the other parts of the Grant Submission Documents.

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INTERESTED PARTIES ARE INVITED TO READ CAREFULLY THE BELOW INSTRUCTIONS, AND TO USE THE QUESTIONNAIRE PROVIDED IN CHAPTER II OF THE GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT APPLICATIONS ARE COMPLETE WHEN SUBMITTED.

1. CONTEXT

Europe is addressing the challenge of growth and jobs to restore prosperity and advance regional economic convergence. This challenge has also been addressed by the European Commission's new political guidelines, where the focus for its action is placed prominently on a new boost for jobs, growth and investment, and a deeper and fairer Internal Market with a strengthened industrial base.¹

To achieve this, smarter and more strategic investments, and the building of bridges between different policies and efforts at various levels, are required. A push for cross-fertilisation across regional and sectoral silos is needed to bring together bottom-up commitment and regional efforts in European Strategic Partnerships.

An important lever in this drive for jobs, growth and investment are clusters² and their innovation actors. Specifically, the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) is supporting the internationalisation of clusters through European Strategic Cluster Partnerships, cluster mapping and cluster management excellence³. In addition to COSME, this approach in support of SME competitiveness and emerging industries is also present in the EU's research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020, in the mandatory national/regional research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation⁴ intended to guide investments under the European Structural and Investment Funds and in other EU programmes related to eco-industries and climate change.

Economic convergence of European regions is an overarching priority of the EU that requires overcoming industrial competitiveness gaps. Industrial excellence tends to be concentrated regionally and clusters and business networks provide an opportunity for SMEs to better access innovation sources and overcome these disparities. Clusters provide SMEs in lesser developed regions with the chance to increase their relative industrial competence, productivity and value added whilst taking their sector and cluster to a higher competitiveness standing. Simultaneously, SMEs in more competitive regions can improve their competitive positioning by taking advantage of the collaboration and synergy with SMEs in more lagging regions and the increase of innovation sources and demand that greater collaboration brings about.

Technology centres support SME innovation and start-up activities by providing high quality space, shared facilities and advisory support services.⁵ They provide added value services to SMEs with the ability to tailor technology services to the needs of customer SMEs. A specific industrial thematic focus and comprehensive cluster development is sometimes, but not necessarily, linked to the tasks of technology centres. In this respect clusters tend to provide a more comprehensive approach to innovation and tackle the competitiveness gaps in the EU industry.

¹ A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change Political Guidelines for the next European Commission, available http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf

² Clusters can be defined as groups of firms, related economic actors, and institutions that are located near each other and have reached a sufficient scale to develop specialised expertise, services, resources, suppliers and skills. See also the European Commission's 2008 Staff Working Document on *The concept of clusters and cluster policies and their role for competitiveness and innovation: Main statistical results and lessons learned*, available at <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/the-concept-of-clusters-and-cluster-policies-and-their-role-for-competitiveness-and-innovation-pbNBNA23591/>

³ For more information, see the EU Cluster Portal at <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cluster/>

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/smart_specialisation_en.pdf

⁵ Numerous terms are used in practices for "technology centres", including innovation centres, science parks, technology parks, co-working centres and so on. See also European Commission (2014) *Setting up, managing and evaluation EU Science and Technology Parks: An advice and guidance report on good practice*, http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/10157/47822/stp_report_en.pdf

A closer cooperation between so-called cluster organisations⁶ – that manage joint activities, facilitate networking and provide or channel specialised and customised business support services to specific groups of SMEs –, on the one side, and technology centres, on the other side, appears a sound approach to improve the business environment for SMEs and maximise synergies. Regions tend to grow better when provided with an innovation infrastructure which is instrumental for industrial innovation and competitiveness. To engage in inter-regional collaboration among regional clusters and technology centres with specific smart specialisation and different levels of competitiveness can also provide a cross-fertilisation process that benefits all. Efforts in this direction should be scaled up especially in regions lagging behind. This approach could represent a key driver towards economic convergence in the EU.

Cluster organisations, technology centres and other organisations providing technology services play a central role in supporting SMEs to have better access to innovation support and funding. This applies to regions where SMEs are generally less innovative, but also to more competitive regions. SMEs need to have better access to clusters' and technology centres' services to exploit growth opportunities from new technologies, service innovation and resource-efficient solutions that Horizon 2020, European Structural and Investment Funds and other programmes can support.

Under Horizon 2020, a specific cluster initiative has been launched, for example, to facilitate the emergence of new industrial value chains.⁷ It aims at promoting cross-regional and cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation activities of SMEs through clusters and leveraging European Structural and Investment Funds.

Regional smart specialisation strategies (RIS3)⁸ offer great scope to build such linkages as they have been developed to guide research and innovation related investments under the European Structural Investment Fund in line with the competitive strengths of the regions. The resulting investments can act as decisive multipliers and allow for increased numbers of SMEs carrying out innovation and added value projects to boost competitiveness.

There is a need to improve the collaboration at EU level of the key actors that support innovation activities in SMEs with the ambition of maximising the uptake of innovative solutions and R&D results, including those resulting from Horizon 2020 and investments under the European Structural and Investment Funds. More political commitment and cooperation across regions in the EU with similar industrial competences, clusters and specialisations is, however, needed to leverage investments and joint activities and to create synergies at a practical level. The recently launched Vanguard Initiative is an example that shows that fostering collaborative projects across regions and Member States to boost the impact from smart specialisation strategies is possible if political commitment is gathered.⁹

What is required is the building of bridges between the objectives of making better use of R&D investments and results and fostering regional economic convergence by accelerating the implementation of smart specialisation strategies through closer cluster collaboration. Exchanging and matching both innovation solutions and innovation challenges amongst actors from different regional clusters offers scope for realising joint business projects and value chain linkages. This could contribute to a wider spreading and diffusion of R&D results and innovation excellence across SMEs towards mutual competitiveness gains and regional economic convergence.

⁶ European Commission (2008) *The concept of clusters and cluster policies and their role for competitiveness and innovation: Main statistical results and lessons learned*, Commission Staff Working Document SEC (2008) 2637.

⁷ See Horizon 2020 topic INNOSUP-1-2015: "Cluster facilitated projects for new industrial value chains" under the Innovation in SMEs work programme 2014-2015. For more information, see <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/2350-innosup-1-2015.html>

⁸ Smart specialisation is a concept for a more strategic innovation policy approach. It foresees an entrepreneurial discovery process of developing a vision, setting strategic priorities and making use of smart policies to build on regional strengths and competitive advantage in order to maximise the knowledge-based development potential of any region, strong or weak, high-tech or low-tech.

⁹ <http://www.s3vanguardinitiative.eu/>

This call for proposals concerns pilot projects within the meaning of Article 54(2) of Council regulation (EC, Euratom) n° 996/2012 of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) n° 1605/2002 (OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p.1).

The call for proposals is being implemented in accordance with Commission Decision C/2015/1980 of 26 March 2015 concerning the financing of pilot project "Towards EU Regional Economic Convergence (TREC)" and adopting amendments to the financing decision on the financing of actions of the activity "Market for Goods and Sectoral Policies" of the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs for 2015.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL

The main objective of this call is to launch pilot projects that reinforce cooperation among clusters and related technology centres in line with similar regional smart specialisation priorities with a view to exploit growth opportunities and accelerate regional economic convergence across the EU. This shall be achieved through a common identification and preparation of possible joint actions and required smart specialisation investments. These shall aim at maximising the innovation uptake and productivity increases by identifying R&D & innovation solutions and challenges, value chain linkages and business opportunities for collaboration across borders and sectors, notably between SMEs from less and more economically advanced regions.

This work will be instrumental in cross-fertilising good practices and launching joint activities by connecting and exploiting synergies between research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3). The proposed pilot projects shall specifically contribute to

- (a) undertake a benchmarking exercise of the growth potential of the participating regional clusters and identify bottlenecks and opportunities for collaboration;
- (b) explore concrete collaboration opportunities between clusters, technology centres and their SMEs towards improving industrial competences, exploiting available innovation and R&D results and adding value to existing industrial sectors and value chains;
- (c) develop a cluster partnership strategy for joint activities and related regional smart specialisation investment plans for organisational, skills and industrial development improvements to foster sustained growth across the participating regions.

As such, this cooperation can have a strong multiplier effect in the implementation of smart specialisation strategies and towards achieving synergies between investments from European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, COSME and other funds. It shall prepare for the implementation of **European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Smart Specialisation Investments** and identify possible joint activities.

The expected output of the pilot projects is the preparation of a **joint cluster partnership strategy** that shall outline possible joint activities **and related smart specialisation investment plans** at regional cluster level to be implemented in lagging and advanced regions alike. The pilot projects shall prepare for but cannot fund their implementation. They are intended to showcase possible approaches and crucial preparatory activities.

Applicants are therefore expected to demonstrate the commitment and possible means to do so in their proposal. Letters of Support or Letters of Intent signed by public authorities and Managing Authorities of European Regional Development Funds could serve as a strong indication for such commitment. Applicants shall further present their selected clusters and development levels as well as outline how they are linked to the **smart specialisation strategies** identified in their regions and offer complementarities across their regions for a European Strategic Cluster Partnership that promises synergies and impact.

The different regional clusters addressed by the pilot projects may represent groups of SMEs from the same industrial segment or related industrial sectors and smart specialisation priority areas that offer scope for cross-fertilisation. Clusters should exhibit **distinct levels of competitiveness** so as to bring into collaboration both lagging and more advanced regional clusters to exploit synergies and trigger not only radical but also relative innovation upgrades of a larger number of SMEs and start-ups.

In the proposed work of the pilot projects, **value chain linkages** should be addressed by either identifying gaps in the supply or demand side or by identifying spots in value chains where innovative SMEs could be better positioned. Facilitating the better positioning in value chains is seen as a promising approach together with manufacturing excellence and competitiveness upgrades. Cross-sectoral collaboration approaches, service innovation, and emerging industrial trends are also relevant dimensions for applicants to frame their proposal. Applicants should elaborate on ideas and possible examples for how to undertake this.

Applicants must be committed to create a European Strategic Cluster Partnership designed to implement joint activities and regional smart specialisation investment plans beyond the duration of the pilot project. They are expected to clarify the roles of cluster organisations, technology centres and other crucial actors in the process and steps to ensure a sustainable approach.

Expected type of activities and outputs

Applicant consortia are free to propose preparatory activities they consider relevant to the establishment of European Strategic Cluster Partnership for Smart Specialisation Investments and the development of a Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and related regional smart specialisation investment plans. However, it is essential that all preparatory activities are clearly related to the objective set out by this call and duly justified.

Possible preparatory activities include the following:

- Intelligence gathering for more in-depth strategic identification and benchmarking of the growth potential of the participating regional clusters and the identification of bottlenecks and opportunities for business collaboration (e.g. by conducting value chain analyses/studies for identifying and mapping of complementary R&D results, innovation competences and needs, skills and smart specialisations areas, support structures, industrial infrastructures, etc.);¹⁰
- Partnership building (e.g. through training/coaching activities on building collaboration, coordinating and leading a partnership, and organising cluster visits for partnership members and their SMEs, regional actors and other relevant stakeholders);
- Capacity building for the management of clusters and networks and provision of SME support (e.g. through a benchmarking of the organisational capacity and quality of SME support services offered by cluster organisation, business networks or technology centres that may allow for the identification of improvement needs and learning opportunities).¹¹
- Collaboration planning to elaborate possible implementation means for joint activities (e.g. coaching/advisory support for formulating a joint Cluster Partnership Strategy with a strategic vision and common goals; facilitating commitment/preparation to engage in cooperation relating to resources, staff, knowledge, IPRs; conducting value chain surveys among SME members and other relevant stakeholders to map their innovation challenges/needs as well as R&D results and innovation solutions according to different themes/parts of the value chains and identify possible matches and interests for collaboration; defining the scope and implementation modalities of joint actions; other relevant activities associating strategy development and operational collaboration actions with cluster actors, particularly SMEs);
- Joint actions and related smart investment planning (e.g. coaching/advisory support for mentoring SMEs to identify inter-regional collaboration opportunities; generating ideas for collaboration; identifying and developing joint actions for the partnership as well as the related smart investment for each participating region to be implemented after the pilot project);
- Identity shaping such as the development of a joint communication/marketing and branding strategy, development of a common logo and visual identity of the partnership;

¹⁰ The cluster mapping and trend analysis provided by the European Cluster Observatory at <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cluster/observatory/>, such as of the 2014 European Cluster Panorama and the forthcoming 2015 European Cluster Trend report can serve as input.

¹¹ The benchmarking methodology developed under the European Cluster Excellence Initiative can be used for this purpose. For more information, see: <http://www.cluster-analysis.org/>

- Legal advice for developing a legal representation for the consortium (e.g. by exploring the need for a coordination or management structure, to establish a legal entity and define its form, coordination and mandate);
- Identification of potential strategic partners that could offer additional complementary competences and value added for a widening of the partnership (e.g. by conducting a complementariness, compatibility and readiness check in terms of strategy, skills, industrial focus, smart specialisation prioritisation, innovation and R&D competences, etc.).

The proposed preparatory activities shall help define the added value of the partnership and identify promising collaboration areas for the further development of the participating clusters and their value chain linkages, which offer scope for innovation and productivity upgrades and new market opportunities. They shall also practically prepare joint actions (at the partnership level) and outline what related smart specialisation investments and actions this requires (at each regional level). This shall include the preparation of roadmaps, implementation modalities and a clarification of the specific roles and responsibilities of cluster organisations, technology centres and other key actors. These activities shall lead to and be complemented by mandatory activities to be carried out by successful applicants.

Mandatory activities include the following:

- At least two **peer review meetings** are to be foreseen during the pilot project duration to share experiences, learnings and results – including the obstacles faced, the success factors and novel approaches identified, and monitoring tools developed. These meetings shall be used to provide consortium partners with input and feedback from further key stakeholders within the participating regions as well as from outside peers and experts on the proposed approach. The projects ought to strive for participation from policy-makers and/or Managing Authorities of European Regional Development Funds to ensure relevance and likely translation of the proposed strategy in practice. The projects are also encouraged to engage with and review lessons learned from the model demonstrator regions supported by the European Cluster Observatory¹² and those of the European Service Innovation Centre¹³, other European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for SME Internationalisation¹⁴ already set-up, Regions of Knowledge projects¹⁵ supported under the European Union previous 7th Research Framework Programme, and cross-border, transnational and interregional cluster cooperation projects funded under INTERREG¹⁶. At least one of the peer review meetings should be scaled up and form part of a larger **final event** that shall present the Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and related smart specialisation investment plans and raise awareness of them. Joint peer review meetings between the two pilot projects supported under this call are encouraged to increase learning and gather wider interest. Participation should be open to other parties interested in joining the partnership or learning about possible approaches. Successful applicants must therefore be willing to share information and their good practices.
- **Establishment and awareness-raising of a European Strategic Cluster Partnership for Smart Specialisation Investments, to be concluded through a Partnership Agreement.** The Partnership Agreement should respect the characteristics and objectives of this call, identify the Partnership members (that can go beyond the beneficiaries of the pilot project), set out the modalities of cooperation between them, and express clearly their interests and plans for engaging in cluster cooperation. It shall include a long-term cooperation agenda with a view to fostering a sustainable Partnership beyond the lifetime of the pilot project. It shall also indicate targets for the

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cluster/observatory/cluster-policy/model-demonstrator-regions/index_en.htm

¹³ See http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/esic/large-scale-demonstrator/index_en.htm and also the European Service Innovation Centre report “Lessons from the Model Demonstrator Regions: Service Innovation Policy in Practice” at http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/esic/materials/conference/esic_synthesis_wp2_edited.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/escps>

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/research/regions/index_en.cfm?pg=regions_of_knowledge&lg=en

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/

mobilisation of additional private and public funding for the implementation of the Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and related regional smart specialisation investment plans. A description of the partnership and profiles of the participating cluster organisations are all to be registered at the European Cluster Collaboration Platform¹⁷. Awareness-raising actions should also be foreseen in the participating regions to create wider knowledge amongst regional stakeholders about the partnership approach. This should reach out to the relevant SMEs, public authorities, venture capital funds etc.

- **Development of a Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and related regional smart specialisation investment plans** that shall allow for immediate implementation at the end of the pilot project. It shall seek and exploit synergies, common assets, innovation sources and growth potential of the targeted clusters corresponding to similar or related regional smart specialisation priorities and include the following elements:
 - a concise description of the joint “European” strategic vision and common goals as well as of the smart specialisation focus areas for the envisaged collaboration and identified complementarities between the partnership members;
 - a prioritised list of joint actions and related required smart investments to be mobilised in each of the participating regions to act as catalysts in contributing to and/or leveraging private and public smart specialisation investments;
 - an implementation roadmap providing a comprehensive overview of the joint activities foreseen to be implemented following the pilot project, together with a detailed plan for implementation highlighting the different roles, steps and milestones;
 - joint branding, marketing statement and logo.

The joint activities and smart investments could address issues such as the shared use of innovation infrastructures; cooperation in the area of vocational training, education and skills; knowledge sharing, technology transfer, business matchmaking, joint innovation challenges, technological assessment and IPR & licensing support; pan-regional provision of venture capital and investment-readiness support; joint provision of entrepreneurship and business support including business and growth model development, innovation management, SME internationalisation as well as interactions with other initiatives and key networks supported by the EU for that purpose, such as the Enterprise Europe Network¹⁸, Knowledge Innovation Communities¹⁹ etc.

Targeted applicants

Applicant consortia shall include cluster organisations and/or technology centres from at least 3 EU Member States. At least one cluster organisation should be participating for each region represented. The participation of a technology centre for each region is also strongly encouraged. Should technology centres not become formal beneficiaries of the proposed project, then applicants should at least demonstrate in their application how they would reach out to them to build linkages during the project duration, e.g. through a Letter of Intent or Memorandum of Understanding signed and submitted as part of the proposal. Applicants also have to submit a description of each cluster organisation and technology centre involved in the consortia.

¹⁷ <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu>

¹⁸ <http://een.ec.europa.eu/>

¹⁹ <http://eit.europa.eu/activities/innovation-communities>

Expected results:

- Presentation of Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and related smart specialisation investment plans;
- European Strategic Cluster Partnership for Smart Specialisation Investments registered at the European Cluster Collaboration Platform;
- Co-signed Memoranda of Understanding between cluster organisations and technology centres participating in the pilot project and, where appropriate, with other partners that are not part of the pilot project;
- Setting of clear objectives, implementation modalities and targets for the implementation of actions after the preparatory phase of the pilot project in view of achieving productivity and competitiveness upgrade in the clusters; including SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) indicators and a monitoring plan for the implementation of activities after the pilot project duration;
- Awareness-raising action of the partnership in the regions covered by the pilot project;

Performance indicators for the action:

The action will be assessed, as a minimum, against the following performance indicators:

- Quality and scale of joint activities and smart specialisation investments foreseen and triggered by the joint cluster partnership strategy and related smart specialisation investment plans;
- Number of cluster organisations, business networks and technology centres from different EU Member States having participated from the supported pilot projects;
- Number of stakeholders involved in peer-review meetings, working group meetings, workshops and related events;
- Number and variety of regions covered by Memoranda of Understanding signed.

3. TIMETABLE

Indicative dates are marked with *

Scheduled start-up date for the action: January 2016 *

Maximum duration of actions is: 12 months

The period of eligibility of costs will start at the earliest on the day the agreement is signed by the last of the parties. If a beneficiary can demonstrate the need to start the action before the agreement is signed, the expenditure may be eligible as from a date before the agreement is signed. Under no circumstances can the eligibility period start before the date of submission of the grant application.

	Stages	Date and time or indicative period
a)	Publication of the call	27/04/2015*
b)	Deadline for submitting applications	28/07/2015 -17:00 hours Brussels time
c)	Information to applicants	12/10/2015*
d)	Signature of grant agreement or notification of grant decision	December 2015*
e)	Starting date of the action/ work programme	4 th January 2016*

4. EU FINANCING

Maximum budget allocated for EU financing under this call: € 500,000

Indicative number of projects: 2 projects

Maximum EU financing rate of eligible costs: 75 %

Maximum EU financing amount per project: € 250,000

Proposals with an EU co-financing beyond any of the above two maxima will not be eligible.

The Commission reserves the right to award a grant of less than the amount requested by the applicant. In such a case, applicants will be asked either to increase their co-financing, propose other co-financing means or to decrease the total costs without altering the substance of the proposal. Grants will not be awarded for more than the amount requested.

Publication of the call (on the Commission Internet site and/or in the Official Journal) does not guarantee the availability of funds for the above action.

4.1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF EU FUNDING

Non-cumulative award

Each action may give rise to the award of only one grant from the budget to any one beneficiary.

In no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice by the Union budget.

Applicants have to inform the Commission immediately of any multiple applications and multiple grants relating to the same action. The applicant shall inform about sources and amounts of EU funding received or applied for the same action or for part of the action. Applicants shall indicate if they receive EU funding for their functioning during the financial year in which the action takes place.

Non-retroactivity

No grant may be awarded retrospectively for actions already completed.

A grant may be awarded for an action which has already begun, provided the applicant can demonstrate the need to start the action before the grant agreement is signed. In such cases, costs eligible for financing may not have been incurred prior to the date of submission of the grant application.

Co-financing

Grants shall involve co-financing, which implies that the resources necessary to carry out the action or the work programme shall not be provided entirely by EU contribution. EU financing may not cover 100% of the total costs of the action.

Co-financing of the action or of the work programme may take the form of:

- the beneficiary's own resources,
- income generated by the action or work programme,
- financial contributions from third parties.

Co-financing may also take the form of in-kind contributions from third parties, i.e. non-financial resources made available free of charge by third parties to the beneficiary or to the consortium. The corresponding costs are not eligible.

Non-profit rule

EU grant may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the action of the work programme of the beneficiary.

Where a profit is made, the Commission is entitled to recover the percentage of the profit corresponding to the EU contribution to the eligible costs actually incurred. For this purpose, profit shall be defined as a surplus of the receipts over the eligible costs incurred, when the request for payment of the balance is made.

Balanced budget

The estimated budget of the action or work programme is to be attached to the application form. It must have revenue and expenditure in balance.

The budget must be drawn up in euros.

Applicants, who foresee that costs will not be incurred in euros, are invited to use the exchange rate published on the Infor-euro website available at http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/inforeuro_en.cfm

4.2. ELIGIBLE COSTS

In order to be eligible for funding, costs should be actually incurred by the beneficiary and meet the following criteria:

- they are incurred during the duration of the action or work programme, as indicated in the grant agreement, with the exception of costs relating to the request for payment of the balance and the corresponding supporting documents (audit certificates);
- they are indicated in the estimated budget of the action or work programme;
- they are necessary for the implementation of the action or of the work programme, in accordance with the description of the action, attached to the grant agreement;
- they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country where the beneficiary is established and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the beneficiary;
- they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- they are reasonable, justified, and comply with the principle of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

The beneficiary's internal accounting and auditing procedures must permit direct reconciliation of the costs and revenue declared in respect of the action/project with the corresponding accounting statements and supporting documents.

Please note that the exact scope of the eligibility of costs is defined by the grant agreement, which will be signed with the successful applicants.

4.2.1. Eligible direct costs

Direct costs of the action are those specific costs which are directly linked to the implementation of the action and can therefore be attributed directly to it. They shall not include any eligible indirect costs.

The following categories of costs can be considered as eligible direct costs:

- the costs of personnel working under an employment contract with the beneficiary or an equivalent appointing act and assigned to the action, comprising actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual policy on remuneration. Those costs may also include additional remunerations, including payments on the basis of supplementary contracts regardless of the nature of those contracts, provided that they are paid in a consistent manner whenever the same kind of work or expertise is required, independently from the source of funding used.
- salary costs of the personnel of national administrations to the extent that they relate to the cost of activities which the relevant public authority would not carry out if the project concerned were not undertaken.
- SME owners and other natural persons who do not receive a salary may declare eligible personnel costs for the work carried out under an action or work programme, on the basis of unit costs specific to the programme under which the call is launched. In other cases, owner managers that do not receive a salary cannot claim any reimbursement for their activities.
- costs of travel and related subsistence allowances, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual practices on travel;

- the depreciation costs of equipment or other assets (new or second-hand) as recorded in the accounting statements of the beneficiary, provided that the asset has been purchased in accordance with the conditions applicable to implementation contracts and that it is written off in accordance with the international accounting standards and the usual accounting practices of the beneficiary
- costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are purchased in accordance with the conditions applicable to implementation contracts;
- costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the grant agreement (dissemination of information, specific evaluation of the action, audits, translations, reproduction), including the costs of requested financial guarantees, provided that the corresponding services are purchased in accordance with the conditions applicable to implementation contracts;
- costs entailed by subcontracts, concluded for the externalisation of specific tasks or activities which form part of the action or workprogramme as described in the proposal, provided that the conditions with the conditions applicable to implementation contracts are met;
- costs of financial support to third parties, in accordance with the conditions set by the grant agreement for such financing;
- duties, taxes and charges paid by the beneficiary, provided that they are included in eligible direct costs, and unless specified otherwise in the Agreement.
Value added tax (VAT) is not eligible
Non-deductible VAT is eligible
- costs relating to a pre-financing guarantee lodged by the beneficiary of the grant, where that guarantee is a condition for the payment of a pre-financing;
- costs relating to external audits where such audits are required in support of the requests for payments;

4.2.2. Eligible indirect costs

A flat-rate amount of 7% of the total eligible direct costs of the action is eligible under indirect costs, representing the beneficiary's general administrative costs which can be regarded as chargeable to the action/project.

The beneficiary may opt for declaring indirect costs on a real cost basis. On condition that the beneficiary has a cost accounting system enabling him to determine the overheads charged to activities of the action in question, by means of distribution keys, these costs can be reported based on actual costs incurred. In such case, indirect costs are to be identified and substantiated in the accounts.

Indirect costs may not include costs entered under another budget heading.

Indirect costs are not eligible for beneficiaries that receive an operating grant from the European Commission.

4.2.3. Non-eligible costs

In addition to any other costs which do not fulfill the conditions set out in Article II.19.1, the following costs shall not be considered eligible:

- return on capital;
- debt and debt service charges;
- provisions for losses or debts;
- interest owed;
- doubtful debts;
- exchange losses;
- costs of transfers from the Commission charged by the bank of a beneficiary;
- costs declared by the beneficiary in the framework of another action receiving a grant financed from the Union budget (including grants awarded by a Member State and financed from the Union budget

and grants awarded by other bodies than the Commission for the purpose of implementing the Union budget);

- in particular, indirect costs shall not be eligible under a grant for an action awarded to a beneficiary which already receives an operating grant financed from the Union budget during the period in question;
- contributions in kind from third parties;
- excessive or reckless expenditure;
- deductible VAT.
- participation by any staff of the institutions in actions receiving grants
- any other costs which have been specified as ineligible in the call for proposal

In addition to the above, the Commission can refuse to finance certain costs included in the proposal. The beneficiary can decide to maintain and finance these costs out of his own resources, but they will not be taken into account as eligible costs.

4.3. CO-FINANCING AND JOINT AND SEVERAL RESPONSIBILITY

The beneficiary has to supply evidence of the co-financing provided. It can be provided either by way of own resources, or in the form of financial transfers from third parties.

In case of a joint application, all partners shall agree upon appropriate arrangements between themselves for the proper performance of the action.

In particular, they shall accept joint and several responsibility up to the value of the contribution that the beneficiary held liable is entitled to receive, as stipulated in the General Conditions of the draft grant agreement.

The final grant agreement shall be signed by each applicant. Alternatively it shall be signed by the appointed co-ordinator, provided that a power of attorney has been conferred to this entity (Annex IV of the draft grant agreement).

4.4. IMPLEMENTATION CONTRACTS/SUBCONTRACTING

Where the implementation of the action or the work programme requires the use of contracts (implementation contracts), the beneficiary must ensure that the contract is awarded to the bid offering best value for money or the lowest price (as appropriate), avoiding conflicts of interests and retain the documentation for the event of an audit.

Entities acting in their capacity of contracting authorities shall abide by the applicable national public procurement rules, in the meaning of Directive 2004/18/EC on the coordination of procedures for the award of public work contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts or contracting entities in the meaning of Directive 2004/17/EC coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors.

Sub-contracting for the purpose of the action

Sub-contracting refers to contracts concluded for the externalisation of specific tasks or activities which form part of the action or work programme as described in the proposal. Such contracts must satisfy the conditions applicable to any implementation contract and, in addition, the following conditions:

- Subcontracting may only cover the implementation of a limited part of the action up to 15 % of the eligible costs.
- It must be justified having regard to the nature of the action and what is necessary for its implementation;
- The proposal should clearly identify the subcontracted activities

Subcontracting does not in any way limit the responsibility of beneficiaries for the implementation of the action. Please note that the beneficiary(ies) should have the necessary capacity to perform the project. Only tasks that are not core business can be sub-contracted to consultants.

It is not necessary to have already selected subcontractors at the time the proposal is submitted. However, cost of contractors not selected in accordance with the applicable rules for procurement will not be eligible.

4.5. FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THIRD PARTIES

The applications may not envisage provision of financial support to third parties.

4.6. FINAL GRANT AND PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The draft grant agreement annexed to this call for proposals specifies the calculation of the final grant and the payment arrangements.

Your attention is in particular drawn to the General Conditions of the grant agreement, where the eligibility of costs is described. Detailed explanations and a description how costs should be budgeted and reported can be found in the Guide for Applicants.

EU grant may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the action of the work programme of the beneficiary. Where a profit is made, the Commission is entitled to recover the percentage of the profit corresponding to the EU contribution to the eligible costs actually incurred. For this purpose, profit is defined as a surplus of the receipts over the eligible costs incurred by the beneficiary, when the request is made for payment of the balance. Where such a surplus occurs, the Commission is entitled to recover the percentage of the profit corresponding to the EU contribution to the eligible costs actually incurred by the beneficiary.

The Commission may require the beneficiary to lodge a guarantee for grants exceeding € 60 000, based on a risk analysis.

In the event that the applicant's financial capacity is not satisfactory, a pre-financing guarantee for up to the same amount as the pre-financing may be requested in order to limit the financial risks linked to the pre-financing payment.

The financial guarantee, in euro, shall be provided by an approved bank or financial institution established in one of the Member State of the European Union. When the beneficiary is established in a third country, the authorising officer responsible may agree that a bank or financial institution established in that third country may provide the guarantee if he considers that the bank or financial institution offers equivalent security and characteristics as those offered by a bank or financial institution established in a Member State. Amounts blocked in bank accounts shall not be accepted as financial guarantees.

The guarantee may be replaced by a joint and several guarantee by a third party or by a joint guarantee of the beneficiaries of an action who are parties to the same grant agreement.

5. ELIGIBILITY

APPLICATIONS MUST COMPLY WITH ALL OF THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA SET OUT IN THIS SECTION.

5.1. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Applications from legal entities established in one of the following countries are eligible:

- EU Member States.

The transnational nature of the project must be demonstrated by submitting form A/2 to the submission set duly filled in and signed from the partner organisations in order to confirm their participation (original signatures required).

Several applicants, submitting a joint proposal should choose within their midst a lead organisation, referred to as the coordinator.

The coordinator and other applicants must satisfy the same eligibility criteria.

- Applications must be submitted by a legal person.
- Applicants must correspond to the definition, of the following target organisations: **cluster organisations**²⁰ or **technology centres**²¹ that manage joint activities, facilitate networking and/or provide or channel specialised and customised business support services to specific groups of

²⁰ According to point 15(s) of the Commission Communication (2014) Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2014/C 198/01), an “innovation clusters” means structures or organised groups of independent parties (such as innovative start-ups, small, medium and large enterprises, as well as research and knowledge dissemination organisations, non-for-profit organisations and other related economic actors). The Commission has under point 12(e) identified aid for innovation clusters as a State aid measure that may, under specific conditions, be compatible with the internal market. This includes supporting the investment in open and shared infrastructures for innovation clusters, and supporting, for no longer than 10 years, the operation of clusters for the enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning. The communication’s annex I on eligible costs further clarifies that operating aid to this effect covers personnel and administrative costs relating to the animation of the cluster to facilitate collaboration, information sharing and the provision or channelling of specialised and customised business support services; marketing of the cluster; management of the cluster’s facilities; knowledge sharing and networking and transnational cooperation. Please refer to the document in this link: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0627\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0627(01)&from=EN)

²¹ Numerous terms are used in practices for “technology centres”, including innovation centres, science parks, technology parks, co-working centres and so on. The International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP) defines “Science Park” as organizations managed by specialized professionals, whose main aim is to increase the wealth of its community by promoting the culture of innovation and the competitiveness of its associated businesses and knowledge-based institutions. To enable these goals to be met, a Science Park stimulates and manages the flow of knowledge and technology amongst universities, R&D institutions, companies and markets; it facilitates the creation and growth of innovation-based companies through incubation and spin-off processes; and provides other value-added services together with high quality space and facilities.” (IASP International Board, 6 February 2002). See European Commission (2014) *Setting up, managing and evaluation EU Science and Technology Parks: An advice and guidance report on good practice*, http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/10157/47822/stp_report_en.pdf

SMEs. Applicants also have to submit a **description of each cluster organisation and technology centre** involved as a partner in the project that demonstrates that they correspond to the target group.

- Applications must be submitted by a consortium of eligible applicants from **at least three EU Member States**.
- **At least one cluster organisation should be participating per region**²² represented in the consortia.
- Corporate bodies must be properly constituted and registered under the law. If a body or organisation is not constituted under the law, a physical person must be designated to provide the legal responsibility.

Supporting documents

Subject to the eligibility criteria indicated above, the applicants should provide the following supporting documents to establish their eligibility:

- **private entity:** extract from the official journal, copy of articles of association, extract of trade or association register, certificate of liability to VAT (if, as in certain countries, the trade register number and VAT number are identical, only one of these documents is required);
- **public entity:** copy of the resolution or decision establishing the public company, or other official document establishing the public-law entity;
- **consortium:** in addition to the supporting documents referring to their legal status, consortium members will submit letters confirming their participation to the project,
- **natural persons:** photocopy of identity card and/or passport;
- **entities without legal personality:** documents providing evidence that their representative(s) have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf.

5.2. ADMISSIBLE AND ELIGIBLE PROPOSALS

Applications must comply with the following conditions in order to be eligible for a grant:

- Applications must be sent no later than the deadline for submitting applications referred to in section 9.
- Applications must be submitted in writing, using the application form and the electronic submission system, as indicated in the Guide for Applicants.
- Applications must be drafted in one of the EU official Languages. If your proposal is not in English, a translation of the full proposal would be of assistance to the evaluators. An English translation of an abstract may be included in the proposal (see Guide for Applicants).
- Proposals must be submitted in conformity with the call specifications;
- Only projects that are strictly non-profit-making and/or whose immediate objective is non-commercial shall be eligible.

²² A region is meant here as the economic territory defined at NUTS-2 level. See <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/overview>

- Applications must respect the maximum rate for EU co-financing.
- Applications must respect the maximum amount for EU co-financing.
- Applications must respect the maximum duration of projects.
- Applications must respect the requirements set for the start date.
- Applications may not include contributions in kind as part of their co-financing.

In this context, will be rejected any project directly or indirectly contrary to EU policy or against public health, human rights, citizen's security or freedom of expression.

6. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

6.1. EXCLUSION FROM PARTICIPATION

Applicants will be excluded from participating in the call for proposals procedure if they are in any of the following situations:

- they are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- they or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment of a competent authority of a Member State which has the force of *res judicata*;
- they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the Commission can justify, including by decisions of the European Investment Bank and international organisations;
- they are not in compliance with their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
- they or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of *res judicata* for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity, where such illegal activity is detrimental to the Union's financial interests;
- they are subject to an administrative penalty referred to in Article 109(1) Financial Regulation (see section 6.3).

6.2. EXCLUSION FROM AWARD

Applicants will not be granted financial assistance if, in the course of the grant award procedure, they:

- are subject to a conflict of interest;
- are guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the Commission as a condition of participation in the grant award procedure or fail to supply this information;

- find themselves in one of the situations of exclusion, referred to in article 106 Financial Regulation (see section 6.3)

6.3. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Applicants must sign a declaration on their honour certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to by filling in the “**Exclusion Criteria Form**” (form B4)

Administrative and financial penalties may be imposed on applicants, or affiliated entities where applicable, who are guilty of misrepresentation.

By using the “Exclusion Criteria Form” applicants shall declare on their honour that they are not in one of the situations referred to in Articles 106 and 107 of the Regulation (EC, Euratom) n° 966/2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (Financial Regulation).

Please note that, according to articles 109 and 131.4 of Regulation (EC, Euratom) n° 966/2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (Financial Regulation) and according to article 145 of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EC, Euratom) n° 2342/2002 on the rules of application of the Financial Regulation, administrative and financial penalties may be imposed by the Commission on applicants who are excluded in relation to points a) to h) of the form in question.

For grants with a value exceeding € 60 000, the Commission may require further evidence, as indicated in article 143 Rules of Application.

7. SELECTION

7.1. FINANCIAL CAPACITY

Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the action is being carried out or the year for which the grant is awarded and to participate in its funding. The applicants' financial capacity will be assessed on the basis of the following supporting documents to be submitted with the application:

For grants of a total value < EUR 60 000:

- a declaration on honour

For grants of a total value ≥ EUR 60 000, in addition:

- a declaration on honour and,
- form B/5 provided for in the submission set, filled in with the relevant statutory accounting figures. Other documents may be submitted if needed (see IV.4 Guide to applicants)

For grants for an action ≥ EUR 750 000 or operating grants ≥ EUR 100 000, in addition:

- an audit report produced by an approved external auditor certifying the accounts for the last financial year available.

In the event of an application grouping several applicants (consortium), the above threshold regarding audit reports applies per applicant.

7.2. OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

Applicants must show they have the **operational (technical and management) capacity** to complete the operation to be supported and must **demonstrate their capacity to manage scale activity** corresponding to the size of the project for which the grant is requested. In particular, the **team responsible** for the project/operation must have **adequate professional qualifications and experience**.

In this respect, applicants have to submit:

- a declaration on their honour, accompanying the proposal as an annex, where they can confirm their involvement in managing joint activities, facilitate networking and/or provide or channel specialised and customised business support services to specific groups of SMEs in compliance with the definition and elaborations given in point 15(s), 12€ and Annex I on 'innovation clusters' in the EU's new "*Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation*".²³
- the following supporting documents:
 - curriculum vitae or description of the profile of the people primarily responsible for managing and implementing the operation;
 - an exhaustive list of previous projects and activities performed in the area of clusters and connected to the policy field of the call or to actions to be carried out, including projects and activities supported through EU's Research and Innovation Framework Programmes (Horizon 2020, FP7, FP6 etc.) and cross-border, transnational and interregional cluster cooperation projects funded under INTERREG;
 - a description of each cluster organisation and technology centre involved as a partner in the project that demonstrates that they correspond to the target group.
 - the organisations' activity reports;

The selection procedure is described in further detail in the Guide for Applicants.

8. AWARD

An evaluation of the quality of proposals, including the proposed budget, will be carried out in accordance with the evaluation criteria set out in annex 3 to this call for proposals.

The evaluation procedure is described in further detail in the Guide for Applicants.

9. SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Please note that only electronic submissions are allowed for this call.

Please consult the Guide for Applicants for the modalities of preparing the proposal.

Submission of a grant application implies acceptance of the conditions of the grant agreement, attached to this call.

The deadline for submission of proposals is:

28/07/2015 - 17:00 hours Brussels time

²³ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0627\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0627(01)&from=EN)

10. CONTACTS

Contacts between the contracting authority and potential applicants can only take place in certain circumstances and under the following conditions only:

Before the final date for submission of proposals,

- At the request of the applicant, the Commission may provide additional information solely for the purpose of clarifying the nature of the call.
- Any requests for additional information must be made in writing only to the coordinates stated below.
- The Commission may, on its own initiative, inform interested parties of any error, inaccuracy, omission or other clerical error in the text of the call for proposals.
- Any additional information including that referred to above will be published on the internet in concordance with the various call for proposals documents.

After the deadline for submission of proposals:

- If clarification is requested or if obvious clerical errors in the proposal need to be corrected, the Commission will contact the applicant provided the terms of the proposal are not modified as a result.
- If the authorising officer finds that those proposals, which have been listed for award needs limited adaptations to their proposal. In such case, these applicants will receive a formal letter setting out the requested modifications. Any such modifications must stay within the limits of the request. This phase will not lead to a re-evaluation of the proposals, but a proposal might be rejected if the applicant does not wish to comply with the modifications requested.

Contact coordinates for the call:

European Commission

Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Directorate-General

Entrepreneurship and SMEs Directorate, SMEs: Clusters and Emerging Industries Unit

E-mail address: GROW-F5@ec.europa.eu

Office address: BREY, 06/028, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

11. DATA PROTECTION

The reply to any call for proposals involves the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, address and CV). Such data will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data. Unless indicated otherwise, the questions and any personal data requested are required to evaluate the application in accordance with the specifications of the call for proposal will be processed solely for that purpose by the authorising officer.

Details concerning the processing of personal data are available on the privacy statement at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dataprotectionofficer/privacystatement_publicprocurement_en.pdf

Personal data may be registered in the Early Warning System (EWS) only or both in the EWS and Central Exclusion Database (CED) by the Accounting Officer of the Commission, should the beneficiary be in one of the situations mentioned in:

- the Commission Decision 2008/969 of 16.12.2008 on the Early Warning System

(for more information see the Privacy Statement on:

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/legal_entities/legal_entities_en.cfm),

or

- the Commission Regulation 2008/1302 of 17.12.2008 on the Central Exclusion Database (for more information see the Privacy Statement on

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm)

12. PUBLICITY

Beneficiaries must clearly acknowledge the European Union's contribution in all publications or in conjunction with activities for which the grant is used.

In this respect, beneficiaries are required to give prominence to the name and emblem of the European Commission on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products realised under the co-financed project.

To do this they must use the text, the emblem and the disclaimer available at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/visual-identity_en. If this requirement is not fully complied with, the beneficiary's grant may be reduced in accordance with the provisions of the grant agreement or grant decision.

With the exception of scholarships paid to natural persons and other direct support paid to natural persons in most need, all information relating to grants awarded in the course of a financial year shall be published on an internet site of the European Union institutions no later than the 30 June of the year following the financial year in which the grants were awarded.

The Commission will publish the following information:

- name of the beneficiary;
- address of the beneficiary (legal persons) or reference to the region (natural persons);
- subject of the grant;
- amount awarded.

Upon a reasoned and duly substantiated request by the beneficiary, the publication shall be waived if such disclosure risks threatening the rights and freedoms of individuals concerned as protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union or harm the commercial interests of the beneficiaries.

13. ANNEX 1 SUBMISSION SET

The Submission Set can be downloaded from the following page: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/contracts-grants/calls-for-proposals/index_en.htm

14. ANNEX 2 GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

The Guide for Applicants can be downloaded from the following page: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/contracts-grants/calls-for-proposals/index_en.htm

15. ANNEX 3 EVALUATION CRITERIA

When assessing the below evaluation criteria, the evaluation committee generally pays attention to the elements indicated below each criterion. Please note that these elements, which are indicative and non-exhaustive, are given on the basis of transparency and in order to help applicants to improve their applications.

EVALUATION CRITERIA AND KEY ELEMENTS LIKELY TO BE ASSESSED BY THE EVALUATION COMMITTEE	MAX. SCORE
1. Relevance	15
<i>How relevant is the proposal and proposed activities to the main objectives of the call to reinforce cooperation among clusters and related technology centres in line with similar regional smart specialisation priorities with a view to exploit growth opportunities and accelerate regional economic convergence across the EU?</i>	
<i>To what extent does the proposal bring together regional clusters with distinct levels of competitiveness, i.e. are clusters from more advanced and lagging regions participating?</i>	
<i>To what extent does the proposal demonstrate that the envisaged European Strategic Cluster Partnership is based cooperation in line with similar or related smart specialisation priorities?</i>	
<i>How relevant are the proposed activities to prepare for the establishment of a European Strategic Cluster Partnership for Smart Specialisation Investment and the development of a Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and related regional smart specialisation investment plans?</i>	
2. Visibility	10
<i>To what extent will the Community involvement in the project or activity be publicised and are awareness-raising actions foreseen?</i>	
<i>To what extent does the proposal foresee to contribute to and cooperate with other regional, national and European level initiatives (e.g. Interreg, Enterprise Europe Network, Knowledge and Innovation Communities, European Cluster Observatory, European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for SME internationalisation etc.)</i>	
3. Impact	35
<i>To what extent is the project likely to have a tangible impact on the competitiveness of the participating regional clusters and how many regions are likely to benefit from the activities of the Partnership?</i>	
<i>To what extent are the proposed activities likely to lead to a Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and concrete related regional smart specialisation investment plans to be ready implementable immediately after the end of the pilot project?</i>	
<i>To what extent is a long-term cooperation agenda envisaged to foster a sustainable Partnership after the end of the project? Is the involvement of crucial third parties, like policy-makers and Managing Authorities of European Structural and Investment Funds, foreseen and how likely is a political commitment to implement Strategy and investment plans of the Partnership?</i>	
<i>To what extent does the proposal contain potential multiplier effects, including possibilities for replication and extension of project outcomes and dissemination?</i>	
<i>To what extent does the proposal contain ambitious and objectively verifiable and achievable targets as well as SMART indicators to measure project outcomes?</i>	

4. Quality	30
<i>How coherent, feasible, suitable, acceptable and practical are the activities proposed to prepare for the development of a Joint Cluster Partnership Strategy and related regional smart specialisation investment plans?</i>	
<i>To what extent does the proposal contain specific elements of added value, such as innovative approaches, models of good practice for business support and the management of clusters, and sound methodologies for the benchmarking of clusters and value chain analysis that identifies and matches innovative solutions and challenges across the SMEs and innovation actors in the targeted clusters?</i>	
<i>To what extent has the project been well thought out, clearly defined and prepared? Are the coordination mechanisms, milestones and deliverables proposed sufficiently robust to ensure the goals of the action?</i>	
<i>To what extent does the proposal demonstrate how the Partnership will seek and exploit synergies through inter-regional cluster collaboration and leverage different private and public investments?</i>	
5. Budget and Cost-effectiveness	10
<i>To what extent is the budget clear and detailed? Does the breakdown of the budget, category by category, offer a way of ensuring that the amount of the grant awarded is the minimum necessary for the operation to be completed, especially with regard to sub-contracting, if any?</i>	
<i>To what extent is the proposed expenditure necessary for the implementation of the project?</i>	
Maximum total score	100

If a total score lower than 70 points or a score lower than 50% for any of the above five criteria is obtained, the proposal will not be evaluated further.

16. ANNEX 4 - AGREEMENT

- Multi-beneficiary Grant agreement for action
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