



COSME Programme

CORRIGENDUM of Call for Proposals

European Cluster Excellence Programme

COS-CLUSTER-2018-03-02

Version 1.1
31 January 2019

Corrigendum of Call for Proposals European Cluster Excellence Programme:

1. **The overall target of ClusterXchange pilot scheme was reduced to about 500 exchanges.**

Page 10

Original text (published on 8 January 2019)

“This action aims to act as **enabler and multiplier** of collaborations by initiating about 1000 matched exchanges and thus contributing to a better understanding of existing opportunities, for which the implementation and scaling-up activities could then be further supported through regional, national and EU programmes – such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, COSME and others.”

Corrigendum (published on 31 January 2019)

“This action aims to act as **enabler and multiplier** of collaborations by initiating about **500** matched exchanges and thus contributing to a better understanding of existing opportunities, for which the implementation and scaling-up activities could then be further supported through regional, national and EU programmes – such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, COSME and others.”

2. **The target as regards the implementation of ClusterXchange pilot scheme was reduced from 100 exchanges per partnership to 50 exchanges per partnership.**

Page 14:

Figure 2: Types of expected activities of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence **was replaced with an updated figure** to reflect the reduced target per partnership.

Page 19:

Original text

“This shall cover **promotion, recruitment, matching and follow-up of expected 100 or more short-term exchanges** between targeted members of clusters located in other (EU and other COSME participating) countries, per ESCP-4x, including the financial support to third parties, i.e. payment of lump sums to participants.”

Corrigendum

“This shall cover **promotion, recruitment, matching and follow-up of expected 50 or more short-term exchanges** between targeted members of clusters located in other (EU and other COSME participating) countries, per ESCP-4x, including the financial support to third parties, i.e. payment of lump sums to participants.”

Page 25:

Original text

“Expected results and deliverables:

- (a) A total of 100 achieved short-term visits per ESCP-4x;”

Corrigendum

“Expected results and deliverables:

- (a) A total of **50** achieved short-term visits per ESCP-4x;”

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication date	Change	Page
1.0	8.1.2019	▪ Initial version	
1.1	31.1.2019	▪ Implementation of ClusterXchange pilot scheme: (1) the target of 100 exchanges per partnership was <u>reduced to 50 exchanges</u> per partnership. (2) The overall target of the action was reduced to about <u>500 exchanges</u> .	10, 14, 19, 25

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) play a crucial role in reaching the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy¹. Whereas they are considered as crucial engines for growth and job creation, their competitiveness is affected by a limited exploitation of international opportunities and innovation prospects in the Single Market and beyond.

In this context, the Programme for the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (2014-2020)², hereinafter referred to as “COSME”, aims to promote growth and to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises in the European Union.

The Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises³ (hereinafter referred to as "EASME" or the "Agency") is entrusted by the European Commission with the implementation, *inter alia*, of parts of the COSME programme.

In this respect, this call for proposals, managed by EASME, implements parts of the COSME Work Programme 2018, as last amended on 26 October 2018⁴.

1.2. Policy Context

In its **Political Guidelines**, the European Commission has prominently placed a focus for its action on a new boost for jobs, growth and investment, and a deeper and fairer Internal Market with a strengthened industrial base⁵. While the decreasing trend of employment in industry during the crisis has been reversed since 2013, the challenge of stimulating jobs, growth and investment for the future of Europe’s economy remains – in the face of global competition for industrial leadership.

The Commission presented in September 2017 a **renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy** entitled "*Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable industry*"⁶ in order to help European industries stay or become the world leader in innovation, digitisation and decarbonisation. The strategic framework outlined in this Communication is summarised by the following illustration:

¹ COM (2010)2020 final of 3 March 2010 “Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”.

² Regulation (EU) No 1287/2013 of 11 December 2013 (Official Journal of the European Union L 347/33 of 20.12.2013).

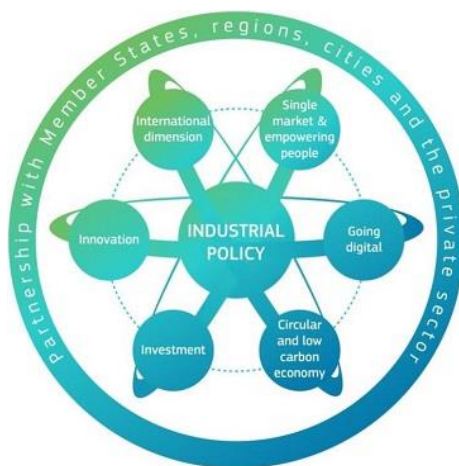
³ EASME was set up by Commission Implementing Decision 2013/771/EU of 17 December 2013 establishing the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and repealing Decisions 2004/20/EC and 2007/372/EC (Official Journal of the European Union L 341/73 of 18.12.2013).

⁴ Commission Implementing Decision C(2018) 6983 of 26.10.2018 amending Commission Decision C(2017) 7293 of 6.11.2017 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2018 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises.

⁵ 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

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=9252

Figure 1: Strategic Framework for EU Industrial Policy



© 2017, European Union
Source: COM/2017/0479 final

In its industrial policy strategy, the Commission highlighted its efforts to facilitate a dialogue on cluster policy excellence in order to make better use of **clusters as a strategic tool of industrial policy**, notably through announcing the set-up of a High-Level Expert Group on Clusters and a European Cluster Policy Forum. It also stressed that start-ups and dynamic SMEs throughout Europe need a favourable business environment to innovate and grow and help to connect with skilled people⁷, technology centres⁸ and support organisations within and across regions to accelerate diffusion of knowledge and to integrate into global value chains.

The strategy further clearly stated that this can only be achieved in partnership with Member States, regions, cities and the private sector, which had also been emphasised by the 2017 **Smart Specialisation Communication** on 'Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions'⁹. This called for stronger strategic inter-regional cooperation, sustainable linkages and investments between regional ecosystems along value chains to maximise Europe's innovation potential with smart specialisation and clusters. This echoed the plea of the 2016 **Start-up and Scale-up Communication**¹⁰, which emphasised also the need 'to connect clusters and ecosystems across Europe'.

Recent initiatives have shown that the **interest in strengthening cluster policy** has risen strongly at European, national and regional level. The 2018 Council Conclusions on EU Industrial Policy Strategy¹¹ called for a further development of European cluster policy and the Single Market Programme proposed by the Commission for 2021–2027¹² provides for Joint Cluster Initiatives as a

⁷ The EU Skills Agenda set out ten key actions for better skills in Europe and the Commission has developed a forward-looking blueprint approach for sectoral cooperation on skills. See https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/skills_en

⁸ Technology centres in Key Enabling Technologies are mapped by the European Commission: <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/kets-tools/kets-tc/map>. Digital competence centres and innovation hubs are mapped by the European Commission too: <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/digital-innovation-hubs-tool>

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/com_2017_376_2_en.pdf

¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/20262>

¹¹ Council conclusions on Industrial Policy Strategy, 12.03.2018 - <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/03/12/eu-industrial-policy-strategy-council-adopts-conclusions/>

¹² Commission proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Programme for single market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and European statistics and repealing Regulations (EU) No 99/2013, (EU) No 1287/2013, (EU) No 254/2014, (EU) No 258/2014, (EU) No 652/2014 and (EU) 2017/826 COM(2018) 441 final of 7.06.2018, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-single-market-regulation_en.pdf. Of particular relevance are its recital 28 on clusters and Article 3 point 2b) and Article 6 point 3. Furthermore, its accompanying Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2018) 320 final of 7.6.2018 that provides the impact assessment features relevant facts & figures and background, notably in sections 1.2.8, 2.1.5 and 3.4 in the annex 15

key tool for boosting industrial modernisation and strengthening the business environment for SMEs.

The feedback of **stakeholders** at the 2018 EU Industry Days¹³ and the 2017 GROW Your REGION conference¹⁴ further highlighted the strategic importance of strengthening cluster policy to promote growth, boost competitiveness and support the scaling-up of SMEs.

To achieve these objectives, the building of bridges between different policies, initiatives and actors at various levels is needed to facilitate strategic connections between clusters and specialised ecosystems across Europe as well as high-quality management of the actors to implement joint actions. This requires bringing together political and bottom-up commitment, industry engagement and regional efforts in **European Strategic Partnerships** and investing in the capacity of actors and strengthening cluster management excellence.

An important lever in this drive for growth are **clusters**¹⁵ and their innovation actors. Industrial excellence tends to be concentrated regionally and specialised clusters and business networks provide an opportunity for SMEs to better access innovation sources and overcome disparities. The 2016 Smart Guide to Cluster Policy¹⁶ advocates a modern approach that aims at building upon and connecting regional strength and smart specialisation priorities; creating innovation and investment opportunities through cross-sectoral collaboration; and supporting the growth of "groups of SMEs" in related industries – as opposed to supporting SMEs individually.

Investing in **cluster management excellence** is thus important in order to support the development towards more European world-class clusters. High quality management of cluster organisations¹⁷ helps in providing professional services to their members, notably SMEs. They assist their companies to add value, to become innovative or access global markets successfully, and to enhance strategic collaboration, networking and learning. Professional cluster management contributes to raise the innovation capacity and competitiveness of cluster firms in a wider sense.

This implies that **capacity-building** efforts should focus on the cluster management skills of cluster managers, the support services that cluster organisation offer and on strategies that drive cluster initiatives towards self-sustainability and wider economic impact.

This approach builds upon the experience of 11 projects supported so far under the Cluster Excellence Programme of COSME following two calls for proposals¹⁸ for supporting capacity

of part 2/2 specific on COSME, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10102/2018/EN/SWD-2018-320-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/eu-industry-day/eu-industry-week-2018_en

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/300-participants-co-create-inspiring-future-cluster-initiatives-grow-your-region-conference_en

¹⁵ 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/>

¹⁶ Available at <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e1fb9f84-2ba9-11e6-b616-01aa75ed71a1>

¹⁷ *Cluster organisations* are legal entities that support the "enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning" in innovation clusters and act as innovation support providers by providing or channelling specialised and customised business support services, especially to SME. In comparison, *clusters* are referred to both as a concept and a real economic phenomenon such as the Silicon Valley of which its revealed effects such as employment concentrations can be measured – as done by the European Cluster Observatory. For more information see the EU Cluster Portal at https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/cluster_en and the Commission Staff Working Document SEC (2008) 2637 on "The concept of clusters and cluster policies and their role for competitiveness and innovation: Main statistical results and lessons learned", including its glossary.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008SC2637&from=EN>

¹⁸ Call for proposals COS-CLUSTER-2015-3-02 and COS-WP2014-3-04. See also <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/eu-initiative/cluster-excellence-calls>

building in cluster management. The 11 **cluster excellence projects** brought together 57 cluster organisations that represented over 11,000 SMEs and worked together on benchmarking, training of cluster managers, mentoring, strategy development and cross-cluster learning.

A closer cooperation between cluster organisations¹⁹ – 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 and other scaling-up support organisations**, on the other side, offers great potential to improve the business environment for SMEs. The cooperation with such organisations maximises synergies and supports SMEs to have better access to innovation support and funding. This can provide a cross-fertilisation process and contribute to a wider diffusion of R&D results and innovation excellence towards strengthened European leadership in industrial value chains, bringing mutual competitiveness gains and regional economic convergence.

Scaling-up support organisations include technology centres²⁰, research institutes, fab labs²¹, (digital) innovation hubs²², creative hubs, resource-efficiency service providers²³, incubators and accelerators. They comprise any public or private organisations that is providing access to the testing and validation of technologies and concepts, market intelligence as well as business incubation and acceleration support services in relation to the uptake of innovation, advanced technologies, digitalisation, servitisation, new business models, low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions, creativity and design and skills upgrading.

Strengthened inter-regional collaboration among strong regional clusters and technology centres and other scaling-up support organisations with specific specialisations and different levels of competitiveness can open up **new opportunities for SMEs across all regions in Europe**, including for SMEs in less developed regions or transition regions. SMEs and clusters have the chance to increase their relative industrial competence, innovation uptake, productivity and value added, whilst taking their sector and cluster to a higher competitive positioning. Simultaneously, SMEs in more competitive regions or clusters can take advantage of innovation sources and greater demand, thus expanding the value creation along value chains. This approach enables more and better matching of both innovation solutions and innovation challenges amongst actors from different regional clusters offers thus scope for realising joint business projects and value chain linkages, which is often underexploited.

To support the scaling-up of SMEs and boost their competitiveness, SMEs need to have **better access to clusters and to scaling-up support services** to exploit growth opportunities from new technologies, service innovation and resource-efficient solutions.

¹⁹ 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](#).

²⁰ Numerous terms are used for “technology centres”, such as innovation centres, science parks, technology parks, fab labs, 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*, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/stp_report_en.pdf. The European Commission has defined and mapped *technology centres* that provide services to SMEs to innovate with Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) as any public or private organisation capable of delivering research and innovation close-to-market services to SMEs from Technological Readiness Level (TRL) 3 to 8, but with at least one TRL >5. See <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/kets-tools/kets-tc/map>. For an explanation of TRL, see https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-g-trl_en.pdf

²¹ Fab labs are the short term for digital “fabrication laboratories” that, for instance, provide manufacturing equipment (such as 3D printers) that allow for a flexible and customised, rapid prototyping.

²² *Digital Innovation Hubs* act as one-stop-shops where companies –especially SMEs, start-ups and mid-caps– can get access to technology-testing, financing advice, market intelligence and networking opportunities in relation to digital transformation and uptake of digital technologies. See also <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-innovation-hubs> and <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/digital-innovation-hubs-tool>

²³ <https://www.resourceefficient.eu/en/support-organisations>

The current action therefore provides for the implementation of a “**ClusterXchange**” **pilot scheme** to strengthen inter-regional, sectoral and cross-sectoral collaboration between clusters, scaling-up support organisations and SMEs. It therefore follows up on the suggestions of stakeholders during the 2017 GROW Your REGION conference²⁴ on the possible introduction of a Erasmus-like pilot scheme for clusters, which was also welcomed during the discussions of the second meeting of the European Cluster Policy Forum²⁵.

This action aims to act as **enabler and multiplier** of collaborations by initiating about **500** matched exchanges and thus contributing to a better understanding of existing opportunities, for which the implementation and scaling-up activities could then be further supported through regional, national and EU programmes – such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, COSME and others.

This call thus follows an **enlarged cluster excellence focus** that goes beyond benchmarking, training, coaching and learning. By adding the exchange element with a strong link to industrial modernisation and by encouraging work towards a joint strategy, activities and teaming up of clusters, the initiative adds another tool towards the creation of a project pipeline in the domains of smart specialisation investments, internationalisation and cluster management excellence. This therefore complements the support for interregional partnerships under the **thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms** on Industrial Modernisation²⁶, Agri-food²⁷ and Energy²⁸.

This approach towards **European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for cluster excellence** (ESCP-4x) links and builds on the experience of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships²⁹ for going international (ESCP-4i)³⁰ and for smart specialisation investments (ESCP-S3)³¹ under COSME. The former ESCP-4i aim at supporting SME internationalisation with strategic partners in third countries beyond Europe, while the latter ESCP-S3 aim at facilitating collaboration and investments in relation to the implementation of smart specialisation strategies linked to industrial modernisation. They are also supported via the European Cluster Collaboration Platform³² and the European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change³³.

The call continues – like the previous Cluster Excellence Program calls for proposals – to support investments of cluster organisations in acquiring high quality and professional management, including through benchmarking and follow-up training actions based on recommendations received in the course of **cluster management excellence labelling**. It builds thus upon the European Cluster Excellence Initiative launched in 2009 by the European Commission in order to support cluster management organisations in their efforts to improve their work. Since the end of 2011, the European Cluster Labelling Scheme has been operated by an independent private

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/300-participants-co-create-inspiring-future-cluster-initiatives-grow-your-region-conference_en

²⁵ Existing schemes and projects for cluster managers at several levels were presented at this occasion, including Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (supported by COSME), Cluster4Smart (Erasmus+), Clusterix 2.0 (Interreg Europe) and Innovation Express (macro-regional Baltic Sea Region). See http://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/second-european-cluster-policy-forum-outcomes-future-cluster-labelling-cluster-mobility_en

²⁶ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/industrial-modernisation>

²⁷ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/agri-food>

²⁸ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3p-energy>

²⁹ <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/eu-cluster-partnerships>

³⁰ As part of the Cluster Internationalisation Programme for SMEs under COSME.

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cos-cluster-2014-3-03-cluster-go-international>

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cos-clusint-2016-03-01-cluster-go-international>

³¹ See <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cos-clustpartn-2017-3-02-european-strategic-cluster-partnerships-smart-specialisation-investments> and <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/eu-cluster-partnerships/escp-s3>

³² <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/>

³³ The European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change follows up the work of the previous European Cluster Observatory. See https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/cluster/observatory_en

organisation under the brand European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis that coordinates activities conducted by a broad network of about 150 specifically trained experts/assessors from 32 countries.

Over 1000 cluster organisations from 43 countries have since applied the benchmarking and been awarded the Bronze label, while 107 cluster organisations have been awarded the Silver label and 98 the Gold label.³⁴ This comparative benchmarking offers opportunities to identify training needs and suitable collaboration partners to learn from. In order to better valorise this exercise and to ensure that European principles (such as transparency, EU-wide reach-out, fair pricing, cooperation options, data confidentiality & analysis, integrity of purpose and neutrality) are followed, the European Commission has launched a **second phase of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative** through an ad-hoc grant. This work involves about 25 experts from about 21 relevant organisations that will include the review, simplification and consolidation of the labelling criteria and process and the creation of a new inclusive and sustainable management structure for the labelling process planned for 2019.

In addition, the European Commission also plans to strengthen capacity-building support as part of the cluster partnering and support services under the next phase of the **European Cluster Collaboration Platform** in order to support the interests of the cluster community and European public support programmes. It thus consolidates and improves cluster excellence actions towards a tool of modern industrial policy that makes better use of clusters in supporting SMEs.

In this context, the European Commission is launching this call for proposals as part of the European Cluster Excellence Programme to the attention of cluster and business network organisations striving towards excellence, with a view to promoting growth and competitiveness for their SME members.

2. OBJECTIVE(S) – THEME(S) – ACTIVITIES – OUTPUTS

2.1. General and specific objectives

The **overall objective** of this action is to strengthen cluster management excellence and facilitate exchanges and strategic partnering between clusters and specialised eco-systems across Europe, including through implementing a new “ClusterXchange” pilot scheme. As high quality cluster management and strategic connections between clusters are key elements of world-class clusters, the action aims to foster SME competitiveness and assist companies to successfully access global markets by exploiting the innovation and growth potential that clusters can offer.

The **specific objective** is to enhance the collaboration, networking and learning of cluster organisations and their members towards the professionalization of specialised and customised business support services provided or channelled to SMEs. This shall further contribute to strengthen ties between European ecosystems across regional and sectoral silos with the view to support a sustainable inter-regional partnering process and joint actions for strategic collaboration in various industrial specialisation areas linked to industrial modernisation and improving their business environment.

The aim is to foster cluster excellence capacity-building and to promote cross-cluster learning in order to help cluster organisations and their members to acquire the necessary skills and take actions to explore and take up new solutions. This shall address training and business needs along the value chain that require SMEs and cluster managers to adapt to trends, challenges and opportunities that come along with industrial change. This shall also include the development of strategic approaches and plans for a better cooperation at regional, national and EU level to address

³⁴ See http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cluster/excellence/index_en.htm and <https://www.cluster-analysis.org/>

innovation, growth and globalisation challenges that SMEs face.

This measure shall further enable groups of specialised enterprises, notably SMEs, together with other innovation actors in clusters, to find partners with complementary competences, to access value chains that cut across national, regional and sectoral boundaries as well as facilitate their access to technology centres and other scaling-up support organisations. This shall focus on engaging actors from regions with different levels of economic development – including from less developed and transition regions³⁵ – and, likewise, cluster organisations with distinct stages of development and experience.

Building on the above, the European Strategic Cluster Partnerships shall specifically contribute to the following:

1. enhancing cluster managers' skills towards added-value SME support services;
2. supporting the development of a comprehensive cluster strategy for individual clusters, including for strengthened interregional collaboration and partnership development across EU value chains;
3. organising twinning, collaboration, networking and learning activities and cooperation projects; and
4. supporting the implementation of a new “ClusterXchange” pilot scheme.

For this purpose, this call aims to bring together cluster organisations and other business network organisations from EU Member States or countries participating in the COSME programme³⁶, interested in teaming up in European Strategic Cluster Partnerships.

The measure will be implemented by consortia of organisations that are interested in establishing and running a ‘**European Strategic Cluster Partnership for Excellence**’ (ESCP-4x). These partnerships shall be characterised by the following principles:

1. *European*, meaning being composed of partners established in a minimum of three different EU Member States or countries participating in the COSME programme under Article 6 of the COSME Regulation (in line with the eligibility criteria in section 6 of this call for proposals);
2. *Strategic*, meaning the partnerships shall develop and implement a joint ‘European’ strategy for strengthening cluster management excellence and facilitating cross-regional value chain collaboration between clusters and specialised eco-systems across Europe, notably linked to the industrial smart specialisation priority areas of the partners’ regions;
3. representing “*Clusters*” through cluster organisations or equivalent other business network organisations with an own legal entity that are providing or channelling specialised business support services especially to SMEs;
4. forming a “*Partnership*” with the aim to develop a long-term cooperation agenda, joint actions and an implementation roadmap around similar or related industrial thematic areas.
5. working towards cluster “*excellence*” capacity-building by striving towards the professionalisation of SME support and boosting the internationalisation of SMEs, their uptake of innovation and industrial modernisation, together with other innovation actors and scaling-up support organisations in view of supporting growth and jobs in Europe.

The **ESCP-4x Label** for a ‘European Strategic Cluster Partnership for Excellence’ will be awarded to all eligible and successful consortia, including interested non-funded proposals put on the reserve list of this call for proposals, that express their interest and commitment in developing them by

³⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/graph/poster2014/eu28.pdf

³⁶ For a list of third countries' participation in COSME see: <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme/>

signing a ‘ESCP-4x Charter’ which commits the partnership members to comply with the above ESCP-4x principles.

While this label is not supposed to be binding or create any legal rights nor financial obligations, it will help to promote the joint efforts of the partnerships. The labelled partnerships shall serve as models for others and pave the way for possible future approaches to mainstream a more strategic interregional partnering at European level. The European Commission may therefore support labelled European Strategic Cluster Partnerships as part of its approach to support cluster excellence capacity-building, internationalisation, smart specialisation and industrial modernisation. For instance, the labelled European Strategic Cluster Partnerships will **receive dedicated support services** – free of costs – from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform³⁷.

ESCP-4x will also receive support services from a Support Office³⁸, a specific IT matching tool, communication support and dissemination channels dedicated to support the implementation of the “ClusterXchange” pilot scheme as well as the organisation of annual partnering events of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships and the organisation of annual cluster excellence capacity-building events. This set of actions will help partnerships to fine-tune their strategy and joint actions, identify further collaboration opportunities and to receive guidance on good practice examples.

To **find suitable collaboration partners**, a number of tools are available to interested applicants. First, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform maps cluster organisations (e.g. by sectors, technologies and smart specialisation priority areas), organises matchmaking events and provides a partner search tool³⁹ that can also be used for this call. Second, it also maps the concentration of economic activities in 38 sectors and 10 cross-sectoral emerging industries across Europe provided by the European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change⁴⁰, previously known as the European Cluster Observatory, which can help to identify other promising regional industrial strongholds.

The list of all selected ESCP-4x will also be listed under a dedicated corner of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform⁴¹. This will allow partnerships to profile themselves and to promote their activities and interests for further cooperation, including in relation to regional authorities.

2.2. Description of types of expected activities

Applicant consortia have to propose relevant activities that contribute to the establishment and implementation of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x) in line with the objectives described above. Applicants are advised to elaborate in detail and explain well in the project proposal the choice of proposed activities under each activity below and the expected outcomes.

The activities proposed are expected to strengthen cluster management excellence and facilitate cross-regional value chain collaboration between clusters and specialised eco-systems across Europe towards supporting the professionalisation of specialised and customised SME support and boosting the internationalisation of SMEs, their uptake of innovation and industrial modernisation.

³⁷ <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/>

³⁸ The Support Office services will be provided by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform – see <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/32281>

³⁹ <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/partner-search>

⁴⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/cluster/observatory_en

⁴¹ <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/eu-cluster-partnerships>

Figure 2: Types of expected activities of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence

European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x)		
Development of cluster management skills, cluster strategy and learning (Mandatory activity)	Development of partnership strategy (Optional activity)	Implementation of joint activities , such as B2B and C2C collaboration (Optional activity)
Implementation of 'ClusterXchange' pilot scheme (Mandatory activity) <i>Eligible:</i> cluster organisations, SMEs and scaling-up support organisations, e.g. technology centres, research institutes, fab labs, (digital) innovation hubs, creative hubs, resource-efficiency service providers, incubators and accelerators of a cluster. <i>Target:</i> 50 exchanges per partnership, 50% involving SMEs		
Outreach and awareness-raising activities (Mandatory activity) Awareness-raising of the cluster and partnership activities and their impact within the regions and beyond, including outreach and engagement of the target group of the ClusterXchange scheme.		

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As summarised by the figure 2 above, the types of expected activities can comprise of supporting the development of cluster management skills, cluster strategy both at individual and Partnership level and the organisation of twinning, collaboration, networking and learning activities as well as joint activities for implementing business-to-business (B2B) and cluster-to-cluster (C2C) collaboration projects. It must also include the implementation of the new “ClusterXchange” pilot scheme by facilitating the promotion, recruitment, matching and follow-up of short-term exchanges from cluster organisations, technology centres and other scaling-up support organisations and SMEs are that members in a cluster from a COSME participating country. These are to be further supported by outreach and awareness-raising activities.

The following sections give more details on the expected and possible types of activities and presents examples of activities that are eligible for this action.

2.2.1. *Cluster excellence capacity-building activities*

Within the cluster excellence capacity-building activities, applicants can choose and combine activities that they consider most relevant to the cluster managers in their consortia, so as to activate and develop the full potential of their SME members. The activities can comprise, for instance, the following non-exhaustive activities:

- **Enhancing cluster managers' skills** towards generating added-value support services by cluster organisations for supporting the growth and competitiveness of their SME members.

This can include, for example, activities such as identifying the type of services that generate the greatest added-value and the ways to deliver these services in the most effective manner. These support services can cover, amongst others, efforts to boost internationalisation, market research, technology/knowledge transfer and promoting SME's uptake of innovation, advanced technologies, digitalisation, servitisation, new business models, low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions, creativity and design, and skills upgrading.

The enhancement of cluster manager skills shall take into account the benefit of networking and peer learning, notably in view of future synergies and partnership building in the longer term for facilitating the integration of cluster actors into existing or new industrial value-chains. Such benefits can originate from organising joint activities such as, for instance, twinning, mentoring, matchmaking, peer learning, knowledge sharing and/or action learning workshops, the development of platforms for knowledge sharing and mutual study visits within each consortium as well as across the consortia selected under this call for proposals.

The objective of facilitating cluster cooperation and synergies on skills enhancement and strategy development shall be pursued to further enhance the design and delivery of added-value support services to cluster members, especially SMEs. Members of the partnerships are therefore encouraged to share experiences in analysing, designing and delivering a common strategy and/or implementation roadmap for the cluster (see following activities) in line with industrial trends and public policy priorities, especially decarbonisation and resource efficiency. It may also include activities aiming at the definition, organisation and delivery of collaborative activities within and across partnerships set-up under this call to further enhance the design and delivery of added-value support services to cluster members, especially SMEs.

This is a **mandatory** activity.

Examples of possible actions for *Enhancing cluster managers' skills* include:

- **Assessment of cluster organisation(s) through the European Cluster Management Excellence Labelling and benchmarking currently carried out by the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA)**⁴² for which the costs for the cluster excellence benchmarking and labelling are eligible up to EUR 1000 of EU contribution per partner for any of the current three labels (i.e. Bronze, Silver or Gold).
- **Targeted training actions for cluster managers** addressing identified areas for improvement. This may include skills improvements aiming for future benchmarking assessments for Silver or Gold Cluster Management Excellence labels. Training could also address topics related to industrial transformations such as emerging industries, global value chain analysis, internationalisation, market research, technology/knowledge transfer and promoting SME's uptake of innovation, advanced technologies and manufacturing systems, digitalisation, servitisation, new business models, low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions/Circular Economy, creativity and design, and skills upgrading.
- **Training activities** with regard to digitalisation and the creative Economy as well as

⁴² <https://www.cluster-analysis.org/>

resource-efficiency/decarbonisation and circular Economy are especially encouraged.

- **Coaching and mentoring** aimed at the development of strategic cluster management skills and/or the achievement of clearly defined activities.

Expected results and deliverables

- (a) cluster managers skills improvement through training and/or mutual learning between cluster organisations focusing, for instance on related smart specialisation strategies and European and global value chains;
- (b) cluster managers skills improvement through skills upgrade on supporting scaling-up support organisations in the cluster, such as technology centres, incubators, accelerators and early-stage and venture capital organisations, etc.;
- (c) enhanced awareness on and exposure to scaling-up support organisations in the cluster, such as technology centres, start-up incubators, accelerators and risk capital in the region by cluster managers;
- (d) review of cluster management processes, including in the light of regional smart specialisation strategies and value chain innovation where relevant.

- **Developing comprehensive cluster strategies** for the individual clusters of the partnership.

This includes supporting cluster managers to **develop a comprehensive strategy for the cluster** they manage, with a view to support the growth and the competitiveness of its members, **as well as a roadmap for its implementation**. This translates into assisting SMEs to make the most out of business opportunities brought about by new cross-cutting technologies, creativity and all forms of innovation and by addressing industrial trends and sustainability aspects towards a sustained development over time. Addressing strategic development opportunities of clusters thus should not take a too narrow sectoral approach but instead consider possible dynamics with related sectors and emerging industries⁴³, technological and industrial transformation, servitisation and sustainability approaches.

With regard to cluster strategy development, this includes the promotion of strategic **collaboration between cluster managers and other stakeholders of the regional innovation ecosystems, notably regional authorities** in charge of cluster policies. This shall help to ensure coherence and compliance with regional priorities, especially in the context of the implementation of smart specialisation strategies⁴⁴ and to capitalise on regional public and private research, innovation and infrastructure investment dynamics.

This is a **mandatory** activity. While this in principle should be carried out by all partners, the activity can be limited to updating the strategy for the purpose of identifying

⁴³ Please see the 2014 European Cluster Panorama presented by the European Cluster Observatory that identified 10 emerging industries (Advanced Packaging, Biopharmaceuticals, Blue Growth Industries, Creative Industries, Digital Industries, Environmental Industries, Experience Industries, Logistical Services, Medical Devices and Mobility Technologies), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/cluster/observatory/cluster-mapping-services/cluster-panorama_en.

⁴⁴ The Eye@RIS tool of the Smart Specialisation Platform at <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/map> can give an overview of smart specialisation priorities selected by regions within the EU.

complementarities within the partnership where a strategy has already been formulated for a cluster.

The strategy and roadmap for implementation for each cluster organisation and the partnership overall (see next point) must include measurable objectives and verifiable impact indicators to be monitored over time, such as increased turn-over and jobs, innovation projects and patents, new or adapted products and services etc.

This activity expects to raise the competitiveness of European clusters and to contribute to the implementation of smart specialisation strategies in the regions where possible. It aims to boost innovation in European value chains to which the clusters belong and to improve their positioning in global value chains.

Examples of possible actions for *Developing comprehensive cluster strategies* include:

- Strategic consultation and collaboration with regional authorities.
- Cluster innovation and growth potential analysis.
- Value-chain analysis.
- Cross-sectoral and trends analyses towards digitalization, the creative Economy as well as resource-efficiency/decarbonisation and the Circular Economy.

Expected results and deliverables

- (a) strategic analysis of cluster potential to grow and innovate through taking advantage of smart specialisation strategies in the region where relevant;
 - (b) strategic analysis of innovation potential in the European value chain the cluster belongs to, including surveying SMEs, and scaling-up support structures;
 - (c) strategic analysis of cross-sector and trend analysis to enhance cluster competitiveness;
 - (d) development/updating of cluster strategy and the implementation roadmap linked to smart specialisation strategy in the region where relevant and innovation and growth potential in the European value-chains.
- **Developing a comprehensive strategy for the cluster partnership**, including activities to strengthen interregional collaboration and partnership development across European value chains.

The development of a comprehensive strategy for the partnership shall build upon cluster strategies and analyses of the individual clusters, their regional context and priorities and capitalise upon the specific value-added support services provided by the individual clusters. It may further gather and/or build upon insights into cluster members' positioning in value chains (e.g. through value-chain analyses), to take stock of industrial transformation trends and cross-sectoral dynamics in view of developing a shared vision and branding of the partnership's members.

In order to shape-up strategies and implementation roadmaps for sustainable inter-regional cluster collaboration, this requires to engage and establish a dialogue with the cluster firms and other members in the cluster and across the partnership. This comprises identifying

activities to strengthen interregional collaboration and partnership development with other clusters across European value chains and in global markets. This further includes reflecting on potential new opportunities and synergies as well as liaising with relevant interregional partnerships of public authorities, such as those set up under thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms that support joint activities for the implementation of smart specialisation strategies.

Examples of possible actions for *Developing a comprehensive strategy for the cluster partnership* are:

- Development or update of a mid-term strategy (three to five years horizon) for the partnership, taking into account specific roles for each of the clusters of the partnership.
- Development or update of an implementation roadmap for the strategy, including plans for the timing and the respective short-term and mid-term actions to be implemented.
- Value chain and market analysis, both within the Single Market and as part of global value chains, corresponding to the cluster organisations' needs and building upon identified results of SME member's need analyses, surveys and/or alternative feedback methods.
- Design of a monitoring system for impact indicators capturing impact on supporting the growth and the competitiveness of SME members.

This is an **optional** activity that can be carried out by a partnership.

Expected results and deliverables

- (a) Development/update of a partnership strategy and implementation roadmap;
- (b) Value chain and market analyses.

- **Organising twinning, networking and learning activities and implementing joint collaboration activities**, such as business-to-business (B2B) and cluster-to-cluster (C2C) cooperation projects.

This can include, first, promoting cross-cluster learning, exchange of knowledge and expertise, both across cluster organisations in each partnership and between the various partnerships that will be set-up through this call for proposals, on content and format of support services that excel in quality, added-value and strategic fitness to enhance cluster SMEs competitiveness, innovation and growth⁴⁵. It can include, for instance twinning, networking and other learning activities such as organising workshops, study trips, training and education activities for cluster organisations teaming up in European cluster

⁴⁵ Specific objective inspired by the report "Let's make a perfect cluster policy and cluster programme. Smart recommendations for policy makers" - resulting from the work carried out in 2001 and 2012 by policy makers from Germany, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Poland and Denmark. According to the report, different types of clusters require different forms of support in order to develop. Effectively promoting cluster management excellence therefore starts with targeting the organisations that will benefit most from the type of support offered within the scope of this call. The report argues that investing in the professional management of cluster organisations can be particularly effective for newly established embryonic clusters or for immature clusters.

partnerships, its SME members as well as for technology centres and other scaling-up support organisations SMEs of their cluster.

Secondly, this comprises the facilitation of cluster-to-cluster (C2C) collaboration activities that help cluster organisations to team up at European level and exploit synergies based on a common partnership strategy as well as business-to-business (B2B) collaboration activities, such as matchmaking etc. The focus of these activities can cover, amongst others, efforts to boost internationalisation, market research, technology/knowledge transfer and promoting SME's uptake of innovation, advanced technologies, digitalisation, servitisation, new business models, low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions, creativity and design, and skills upgrading.

This is an ***optional*** activity.

Examples of possible actions for *Organising twinning, networking and learning activities and implementing joint collaboration activities* include:

- Peer learning, knowledge sharing and/or learning workshops.
- Joint events and study visits to exchange of best practices in relation to cluster support services and strategy design, formulation and implementation.
- Cluster-to-cluster (C2C) and business-to-business (B2B) matchmaking collaboration activities.
- Platforms for knowledge sharing and expertise.
- Strategic collaboration activities with scaling-up support organisations including technology centres, research intitutes, fab labs, (digital) innovation hubs, creative hubs, resource-efficiency service providers, incubators and accelerators.

Expected results and deliverables

- (a) Twinning, networking and other learning activities.
- (b) Strengthened B2B and C2C cooperation across participating clusters.
- (c) Joint project/cooperation agreements where relevant.

2.2.2. *Activities for the implementation of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme*

Applicant consortia are required to envisage adequate support for the implementation of the “ClusterXchange” pilot scheme to foster cluster excellence capacity-building and cross-cluster learning as well as to facilitate strategic interregional collaboration and the strengthening of ties between clusters and ecosystems across Europe. This shall cover **promotion, recruitment, matching and follow-up of expected 50 or more short-term exchanges** between targeted members of clusters located in other (EU and other COSME participating) countries, per ESCP-4x, including the financial support to third parties, i.e. payment of lump sums to participants.

The focus of short-term exchanges shall be placed on **promoting new growth opportunities for SME and industrial transformation** by supporting collaboration efforts to boost internationalisation, market research, technology and knowledge transfer and promoting SME's uptake of innovation, advanced technologies, digitalisation, servitisation, new business models, low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions, creativity and design, and skills upgrading.

Moreover, the short-term exchanges shall support **cluster excellence capacity-building** by the

following possibilities:

1. providing on-the-job-training for visiting participants elsewhere in COSME participating countries in order to facilitate and/or consolidate a successful development of their cluster and explore partnering activities;
2. fostering the sharing of experience and information between visiting organisation and host organisation on the obstacles and challenges as well as potential solutions in a pre-identified area;
3. enhancing market access and identification of potential partners for new and established cluster organisations/SMEs/technology centres and other scaling-up support organisations in other COSME participating countries;
4. supporting the networking between clusters from different COSME participating countries by sharing of knowledge and experience; and
5. supporting activities of ESCP-4x under section 2.2.1.

The participation in this pilot scheme will not be limited to the direct beneficiaries of the European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x), but must be **open to**:

- all cluster organisations and business network organisations from COSME participating countries,
- scaling-up support organisations⁴⁶ from COSME participating countries that are cluster members and
- SMEs from a COSME participating country that are cluster members.

Only in duly justified circumstances and **pre-approved by EASME** on an ad hoc basis, the partnerships may be allowed to deviate from above limitations.

It is expected that at least 50% of the supported exchanges shall involve SMEs.

The financial assistance to cluster organisations, technology centres and other scaling-up support organisations and SMEs participating in the ClusterXchange pilot scheme must take the form of a **financial contribution of up to a maximum of EUR 1 100 per visiting organisation** to be provided in all cases, in form of a lump sum.

The minimum duration of a supported exchange visit abroad is three working days (travel time excluded) and the maximum duration is one month. The lump sum shall be reduced by half if the duration of the stay is shorter than five working days (travel time excluded) or if the distance between the two involved organisations is shorter than 200 kilometres.

	Distance ≥ 200 km	Distance < 200 km
Stay ≥ 5 working days (travel time excluded)	100% lump sum	50% lump sum
Stay < 5 working days (travel time excluded)	50% lump sum	50% lump sum

⁴⁶ Scaling-up support organisations include technology centres, research institutes, fab labs, (digital) innovation hubs, creative hubs, resource-efficiency service providers, incubators and accelerators. They comprise any public or private organisations that is providing access to the testing and validation of technologies and concepts, market intelligence as well as business incubation and acceleration support services in relation to the uptake of advanced technology, digitalisation, new business models, low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions, creativity and design and skills upgrading.

The purpose of the financial assistance provided to visiting organisations is to support the costs of their visit (e.g. travel and accommodation costs).

The maximum amounts are determined per country of visit. The respective amounts are indicated in the Quality Manual (Annex) and are fixed for the entire duration of all co-financed projects selected under the present call for proposals.

As indicated in section 4 on the budget available and funding of projects and section 12.2 on Specific funding conditions under this call for proposals, a maximum of **100% co-financing can be applied for the lump sum financial support to the visiting participants of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme.**

Each eligible member of a cluster may benefit from the pilot scheme only once as a *visiting organisation*.

Taking into account that the participation in this pilot scheme will not be limited to the direct beneficiaries of the ESCP-4x, it is expected that a minimum of 25% of exchanges are by participants not being part of an ESCP-4x.

Host organisations, on the other hand, can host more than one visiting organisation, at different times or simultaneously.

Exchanges implemented under the ClusterXchange pilot scheme and clusters involved in these visits will be monitored through the IT matching tool that will be made available to ESCP-4x (see below).

A **prioritisation for the matching**⁴⁷ of the short-term visits may be applied by taking into account the following matching criteria:

1. Participants to the exchange (i.e. aiming at achieving that **at least 50% involve SME representatives**);
2. Duration of the stay (matching the preferences of potential visiting and host organisations);
3. Strategic sector of interest (matching the preferences of potential visiting and host organisations as well as being linked to the thematic specialisation priority of the partnership, the strategic analysis of cluster potential or relevance for skills development);
4. Geographical preference (matching the preferences of potential visiting and host organisation well as achieving an overall geographical balance of supported visiting organisations, including from less developed and transition regions);
5. Reversed exchange (i.e. where a visiting organisation will also become a host organisation afterwards, and vice versa).

The implementation of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme is a ***mandatory*** activity, which has to be carried out by successful applicants. The cluster organisations of the ESCP-4x will **act as contact points** for the implementation of the programme. They will be required to cooperate with other organisations and authorities involved in the ClusterXchange pilot scheme, enabling visiting participants to take part⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ See section 2 “Building exchanges” of the Quality Manual.

⁴⁸ The IT tool must be used by all organisations in order to manage registration and matching of visiting and host organisations as well as execution of the visiting process between the participants. All successful ESCPs-4x will

Complementary support to ESCP-4x is foreseen to be provided by a **dedicated “Support Office” under the European Cluster Collaboration Platform⁴⁹, an IT matching tool and promotional activities** in order to facilitate the implementation of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme by the ESCP-4x. The support office will help the ESCP-4x with the coordination and management of the pilot scheme across countries. It will help them to develop high quality visits between clusters. Its main tasks are to promote the scheme at EU and European levels to provide guidance and support to ESCP-4x, especially in daily operations, monitor activities of the ESCP-4x, manage the central website, develop training material and foster networking/cooperation among the ESCP-4x.

ESCP-4x must participate to the online testing process and training activities relating to the IT matching tool and more specifically all functions dedicated to the implementation of the pilot scheme between the starting date of the grant and the official release of the IT matching tool in order to allow for a smooth introduction. Discussion and feedback aiming at the continuous improvement of the IT matching tool shall take place between ESCP-4x and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform during mandatory half-day specific events organised by the European Commission services (once per year). Consequently, consortia selected under this call for proposals must foresee budget for at least one and maximum two participants representing their partnership at these events. Each of these events will take place back-to-back (before or after) with a one and a half-day conference on cluster excellence capacity-building organised by the European Commission services. Applicants are encouraged to foresee budget for travel and accommodation to participate to these non-mandatory free-of-charge events as well.

The activities expected to be implemented by successful applicants are further guided by “**Quality Manual** for European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x)” for the implementation of the “ClusterXchange” scheme. The document thoroughly describes the tasks to be performed by ESCP-4x, by the Support office, the European Commission and EASME.

It covers the rules to be respected and procedures to follow: it includes the eligibility criteria of participants (visiting and host organisations), the procedures for registration of participants to the scheme and building of exchanges, as well as the responsibilities of the different actors involved, including deadlines to be respected.

As a minimum requirement, the following mandatory actions for the implementation of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme are to be proposed by applicants:

a) Promotion of the programme

Applicants must describe the proposed communication and promotion measures to effectively raise awareness, disseminate information on the ClusterXchange pilot scheme and reach a maximum number of potential candidates. Communication activities will be supported by the Support Office provided under the European Cluster Collaboration Platform. The audience targeted by communication activities should include the cluster community present on the platform as well as potential participants who are not. The promotion activities must be clear in that potential participants can understand that the exchanges organised under the scheme are not internships.

Any form of promotion and publicity must make the EU co-financing for the project clearly visible. The applicants will at least include a link to the European Cluster Collaboration Platform's dedicated web section on their respective websites, and the European Union logo in their communication tools for the programme. Other means of awareness-raising are also encouraged.

get access to this tool as well as relevant training by the support office. Further details are available in the above-mentioned Quality Manual.

⁴⁹ See Commission implementing decision C(2018) 6983 final - <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/32281>

For more details how to use the EU logo please refer to: <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/communication-toolkit>

b) Enrolment of participants (visiting and host organisations)

Applicants need to explain how they will engage participants to the programme, and the specific channels and efforts they will use for this purpose as well as an estimated number of those that will be matched.

The proposal has to contain enough information about access to and contacts with potential participants, that the applicants have, whether this access is direct or indirect (via their own or other networks), and the kind of relationships they maintain, giving figures where possible.

c) Assessing applications from visiting and host organisations

A new, dedicated IT matching tool for the implementation of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme will be developed and provided, offering support for the implementation of the pilot scheme for clusters including registration whereby participants will apply for the scheme. It will be necessary to screen applications and advise candidates to ensure a high quality of registrations and, in particular, to gauge how committed the applicant – host and visiting organisations – are to make the most of the exchange (clear objectives, motivation, and commitment, roadmap of actions, follow-up after the exchange) and to derive positive benefit from the collaboration. Applicants must describe how they will check the quality and ensure the eligibility of applications – in full respect of the Quality Manual.

The ESCP-4x shall assess, manage and follow-up on applications both from applicants from within and outside their target groups (e.g. from spontaneous applications), even if their activity is targeted to specific groups (e.g. linked to the activities of the partnership). Equally, ESCP-4x must not allow any discrimination for reasons of sex, sexual orientation, religion, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features or membership of a national minority.⁵⁰ Furthermore, applicants also need to ensure full respect of data protection rules and compliance to General Data Protection Regulation⁵¹ (GDPR).

d) Building exchanges

The process of successfully matching visiting and host organisations is a key element of this pilot scheme and it shall be supported by using the IT matching tool.

ESCP-4x are invited to describe how they plan to identify the best matches, support contacts and monitor relationships before, during and after the stay abroad.

e) Management of grant agreements, commitments and financial assistance

There are **two** written commitments visiting organisations, host organisations and ESCP-4x have to engage in:

- 1) Once the agreed match between visiting and host organisations has been approved by all parties involved, the ESCP-4x concerned have to ensure that the relevant actors (visiting and

⁵⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/justice-and-fundamental-rights/data-protection/2018-reform-eu-data-protection-rules_en

⁵¹ [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC \(General Data Protection Regulation\) \(Text with EEA relevance\).](#)

host organisations, ESCP-4x) sign the Commitment to Quality form that shall be included in the IT matching tool in accordance with the provisions of the Quality Manual.

- 2) The visiting organisation and the respective ESCP-4x must sign a standard financial agreement, to be provided by the Support Office that specifies the tasks that will be carried out during the exchange, responsibilities, financial conditions and legal implications. Applicants need to describe how they will arrange this in an efficient and effective way, allowing for potential amendments and the handling of payments and reports.

The ESCP-4x that has the responsibility of an exchange must pay the concerned visiting organisation financial assistance from the EU contribution, provided that the exchange has taken place. The ESCP-4x will be responsible for sound management of this financial assistance, including payment arrangements to visiting organisations. Further details will need to be given in the financial agreement mentioned above.

The European Commission has set the amounts of financial support per country in the table provided as Annex 1 to the Quality Manual. The lump sum shall be reduced by half if the duration of the stay is shorter than five working days or if the distance between the two involved organisations is shorter than 200 kilometres.

The application must describe how the consortia intend to organise the management and control of this financial support in an effective and efficient way, including avoidance of any financial abuse.

f) Preparation of the exchange

In relation to the information and induction trainings to be provided by ESCP-4x, the application must present how many and when those activities will be undertaken. Applicants must also deliver information on the pilot scheme and important EU-related business subjects, such as the Internal Market, European law issues (in particular regarding business and contract law) and support services including inter alia the Enterprise Europe Network and SOLVIT.

g) Follow up of the exchange

ESCP-4x must offer local and/or remote assistance to both visiting organisations during stays with host organisations as well as to host organisations themselves. The proposal must specify the services the consortium intends to offer to visiting organisations and their host organisations with a particular focus on addressing practical questions (housing, transport, insurance, etc.), the modalities they will implement to follow up the exchanges and the mechanisms to be put in place to avoid problems and potential conflicts.

h) Management, quality control and evaluation

Applicants and the project coordinator in particular, should describe the measures they will take to:

- ensure sound management of the project, especially the role of the coordinator,
- ensure that high quality standards are applied by all consortium partners, i.e. how they will monitor the achievement of objectives and take appropriate corrective measures, such as redistribution of objectives and budget, while ensuring compliance with the ClusterXchange programme rules and procedures. The main risks that might be encountered and the corresponding mitigating measures should also be described.

i) Active outreach, networking and engagement

Applicants must describe how they will actively reach out, network and engage the target group, which will include taking part in annual partnering events of EU Cluster Partnerships and annual cluster excellence specific events taking place back-to-back with capacity-building events organised by the European Commission in COSME participating countries during the period of the grant agreement.

Sufficient budget must be foreseen to allow for the participation of minimum one and maximum two partners in the meetings mentioned above (i.e. annual EU Cluster Partnerships partnering events and annual cluster excellence specific events). Regional cooperation of ESCP-4x has to be envisaged too, e.g. with regard to promotion activities.

j) Reporting

The selected projects are expected to report regularly to the EASME (and the Support Office) on their activities, matching relationships, problems encountered, solutions implemented and resources spent. The applicants must describe how they intend to organise this reporting in an efficient and effective way, according to the provisions of the Quality Manual and in line with the provisions of the model grant agreement (modalities see Section 13 "Reporting Requirements").

Expected results and deliverables:

- (b) A total of 50 achieved short-term visits per ESCP-4x;
- (c) Participation to the two annual EU Cluster Partnerships partnering events organised by the European Commission services (half day, back-to-back with major events);
- (d) Participation to the two annual cluster excellence specific events organised by the European Commission services (half day, back-to-back with 1½ day capacity-building events);

2.2.3. *Outreach and awareness-raising activities*

Applicants are expected to propose outreach and awareness-raising activities notably to support the activities of the partnership for cluster excellence capacity-building, such as the organisation of peer learning, knowledge sharing and learning events which could be organised under the umbrella of future EU Cluster Weeks⁵² and for implementing the ClusterXchange pilot scheme.

The project proposal shall include detailed information about the expected outcomes of the project and foresee related activities to promote them. Activities should consist of raising awareness about the developed cluster strategies and the partnership as well as about providing general dissemination and information about project activities, including on the opportunities of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme. This needs to address not only the stakeholders within the region in which the cluster organisation is based but also stakeholders outside, notably for outreach, networking and engagement towards the target group of the pilot scheme.

During the project, the partners are expected to demonstrate how participating in the project has advanced their approach to cluster management, for each cluster organisation and for the consortium as a whole and what benefits this has brought. Awareness-raising events shall also discuss and embed the developed strategy and the designed impact indicators with regional stakeholders within each cluster, as well as within the formed consortium.

The active involvement and participation of local regional authorities and other stakeholders in this part of the project is strongly recommended for the pivotal role they can play in maximising the impact of the project results and of the adopted strategy for the cluster, notably in relation to regional priorities responsible for designing and implementing smart specialisation strategies.

⁵² A second edition of the EU Cluster Week will be organised during the duration of the ESCP-4x projects. The first edition is taking place between November 2018 and April 2019. For preliminary information see <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/news/eu-cluster-weeks-kick-soon>

A dissemination, outreach and communication plan must be designed to identify and communicate the key activities and achievements. Making adequate use of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform for this purpose is necessary as it can facilitate the awareness-raising and dissemination of project outcomes to cluster stakeholders. Any form of promotion and publicity must make the EU support for the project clearly visible.

The consortium is also expected to prepare a short report focussing on the activities undertaken, especially on the lessons learned, to be used in the dissemination and awareness-raising events and other events as appropriate. The report should further outline how the project partners envisage working on cluster excellence after the end of the project.

This is a ***mandatory*** activity.

Examples of possible actions for *Outreach and awareness-raising activities* are:

- Design of a dissemination, outreach and communication plan.
- Dissemination and communication activities and events, e.g. to implement dissemination, outreach and communication plan.
- Other relevant outreach and awareness-raising activities appropriately justified.

Expected results and deliverables

- (a) Dissemination, outreach and communication plan.
- (b) Awareness-raising events.
- (c) short report on outreach and awareness raising activities undertaken, on lessons learned and on the partnership sustainability beyond the grant period.

2.3. Project indicators

To facilitate the monitoring, evaluation and assessment of the progress made and achievements, successful applicants will be asked to put in place, from the outset, indicators for the on-going monitoring and evaluation of the project in relation to the objectives and activities they propose.

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

1. Number of educational visits and key networking activities such as visits (including those to regional authorities), incubators, accelerators, risk-capital providers of a cluster partnership.
2. Number of cluster organisations engaged in benchmarking, accreditation, labelling.
3. Number of staff benefitting from training activities.
4. Number of joint projects/cooperation agreements where relevant.
5. Number of exchanges through the ClusterXchange pilot scheme, including a breakdown by type of organisation (cluster organisations; SMEs; technology centres; other scaling-up support organisations).
6. Number of cluster strategies, implementation roadmaps developed or updated.
7. Number of new or updated mission and vision statements for the cluster.

8. Number of workshops and meetings with cluster members including those with regional authorities, European Structural and Investment Funds managing authorities and implementing bodies where relevant.

9. Number of strategic analyses produced (e.g. cluster innovation and growth potential, value chain analysis, European and global, smart specialisation analysis).

10. Number of cross-sectors analyses including industrial transformation trends, relating to digitisation, servitisation, creativity and resource-efficiency/Circular economy, SMEs and other cluster members surveys.

Applicants must include these indicators and also propose further SMART (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) indicators.

Indicators in relation to the implementation of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme shall also be discussed with the support office at the beginning of the projects.

3. TIMETABLE

Stages	Dates
a) Deadline for submitting applications	4 April 2019, 17:00 h Brussels time
b) Evaluation period*	April – June 2019
c) Information to applicants*	July – October 2019
d) Signature of grant agreements*	October – December 2019
e) Starting date of the action*	February 2020

* indicative

In February 2019 EASME plans to organise an Information Day for potential applicants. The exact date and agenda will be published on the call webpage - <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme/cos-cluster-2018-03-02-european-cluster-excellence-programme>.

4. BUDGET AVAILABLE AND FUNDING OF PROJECTS

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects is estimated at EUR 3.600.000.

This amount could be increased if additional budgetary appropriations are made available⁵³.

The maximum grant per project will be EUR 360.000.

EASME expects to fund up to twelve proposals.

The grant is limited to a maximum reimbursement rate of **75%** of eligible costs⁵⁴, **except** for financial support to third parties. For financial support to third parties the maximum amount of

⁵³ Article 4 of the COSME work programme 2018, Commission Implementing Decision C(2017) 7293 final, provides for the changes to the allocations to specific actions not exceeding 20% of the maximum contribution for the implementation of the programme for the year 2018.

100% reimbursement rate can be applied⁵⁵. See section 12.2 for more details on specific funding conditions under this call for proposals.

EASME reserves the right not to distribute all the funds available.

5. ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The following requirements must be complied with:

- Applications must be submitted no later than the deadline for submitting applications referred to in section 3;
- Applications must be submitted in writing, using the electronic system specified in section 16;
- Applications must be drafted in one of the EU official languages.

Failure to comply with those requirements will lead to the rejection of the application.

Incomplete applications may be considered inadmissible. This refers to the requested administrative data, the proposal description and requested grant amount, and any supporting documents specified in this call for proposals.

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

6.1. Eligible applicants

Applicants must be legal entities forming a consortium. Each legal entity must:

- a) be established in EU Member States and countries participating in the COSME programme pursuant to Article 6 of the COSME Regulation⁵⁶;

⁵⁴ Cost categories of "Direct personnel costs", "Direct costs of subcontracting", "Other direct costs" and "Indirect costs".

⁵⁵ Cost category of "Direct costs of providing financial support to third parties" only.

⁵⁶ The following groups of countries are eligible for participation in COSME according to Article 6 COSME Regulation:

- a. European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries which are members of the European Economic Area (EEA), in accordance with the conditions laid down in the EEA Agreement, and other European countries when agreements and procedures so allow;
- b. acceding countries, candidate countries and potential candidates in accordance with the general principles and general terms and conditions for the participation of those countries in the Union's programmes established in the respective Framework Agreements and Association Council Decisions, or similar arrangements;
- c. countries falling within the scope of the European neighbourhood policies, when agreements and procedures so allow and in accordance with the general principles and general terms and conditions for the participation of those countries in the Union's programmes established in the respective Framework Agreements, Protocols to Association Agreements and Association Council Decisions.

The updated list of eligible third countries is available on the following webpage: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme/index_en.htm. Proposals from applicants in Article 6 countries may be selected provided that, on the date of award, agreements have been signed setting out the arrangements for the participation of those countries in the programme.

- b) be a **cluster organisation or a business network organisation** involved in supporting the enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters to **stimulate innovative activities**:
- by promoting or channelling specialised and customised business support services especially to SMEs
 - and/or promoting the sharing of facilities and exchange of knowledge and expertise, in compliance with the coverage of 'innovation clusters' as described in the sections 1.2 and 1.3 and Annex I of the "EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation"⁵⁷ and
- c) be registered or have requested to be registered on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform⁵⁸.

The applicant must be a legal entity with a legal personality. This may include both profit-making or non-for-profit legal entities as well as fully or partly public or private bodies. In the case of private bodies, they must be properly constituted and registered under national law.

Natural persons are not eligible to apply.

Linked third parties, i.e. legal entities having a legal or capital link with applicants, which is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation, may take part in the action as applicants in order to declare eligible costs.

6.2. Eligible consortia

Proposals must be submitted by consortia:

- a) composed of at least three different legal entities and
- b) established in a minimum of three different EU Member States or countries participating in the COSME programme according to Article 6 of the COSME Regulation⁵⁹ and

⁵⁷ According to point 15(s) of this Commission Communication (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) designed to stimulate innovative activity by promoting sharing of facilities and exchange of knowledge and expertise and by contributing effectively to knowledge transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the undertakings and other organisations in the cluster”. Point 12(e) Point 12(e) also 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. Its annex I on eligible costs further clarifies that operating aid to this effect covers personnel and administrative costs relating to the (a) animation of the cluster to facilitate collaboration, information sharing and the provision or channelling of specialised and customised business support services; (b) marketing of the cluster; (c) management of the cluster’s facilities; and (d) knowledge sharing and networking and transnational cooperation. See: [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).

⁵⁸ <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu>.

⁵⁹ Regulation (EU) No 1287/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing a Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (COSME) (2014 - 2020) and repealing Decision No 1639/2006/EC.

- c) including at least one consortium member representing an organisation established in a region classified as 'less developed' or 'in transition', according to the mapping proposed for Structural Funds eligibility for the period 2014-2020⁶⁰.

Consortia must verify and declare through their coordinator that none of their members participates in another proposal within this call for proposals. If such a case is detected by the funding body, it will **lead to the exclusion of the organisation concerned from all respective proposals.** The respective consortia affected by the exclusion of (a) partner(s) must still fulfil the eligibility criteria as stipulated in sections 6.1 and 6.2 in order to be considered eligible.

6.3. For British applicants

Please be aware that eligibility criteria must be complied with for the *entire* duration of the grant. If the United Kingdom withdraws from the EU during the grant period without concluding an agreement with the EU ensuring in particular that British applicants continue to be eligible, you will cease to receive EU funding (while continuing, where possible, to participate) or be required to leave the project on the basis of Article 34.3.1(b) of the grant agreement.

6.4 Implementation period

Activities may not start before 1st February 2020.

The project's duration should be between 20 months and 24 months.

Proposals for projects scheduled to run:

- for less than 20 months will not be accepted.
- for more than 24 months may be considered only if duly justified by the applicant.

7. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

7.1. Exclusion

The authorising officer shall exclude an applicant from participating in call for proposals procedures where:

- (a) the applicant is bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, it is in an arrangement with creditors, its business activities are suspended, or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under EU or national laws or regulations;
- (b) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;
- (c) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the applicant belongs, or by

⁶⁰ See: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/what/future/img/eligibility20142020.pdf.

having engaged in any wrongful intent or gross negligence, including, in particular, any of the following:

- (i) fraudulently or negligently misrepresenting information required for the verification of the absence of grounds for exclusion or the fulfilment of eligibility or selection criteria or in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision;
 - (ii) entering into agreement with other applicants with the aim of distorting competition;
 - (iii) violating intellectual property rights;
 - (iv) attempting to influence the decision-making process of the Agency during the award procedure;
 - (v) attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon it undue advantages in the award procedure;
- (d) it has been established by a final judgment that the applicant is guilty of any of the following:
- (i) fraud, within the meaning of Article 3 of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Article 1 of the Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 July 1995;
 - (ii) corruption, as defined in Article 4(2) of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 or Article 3 of the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 May 1997, or conduct referred to in Article 2(1) of Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA, or corruption as defined in the applicable law;
 - (iii) conduct related to a criminal organisation, as referred to in Article 2 of Council Framework Decision 2008/841/JHA;
 - (iv) money laundering or terrorist financing within the meaning of Article 1(3), (4) and (5) of Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council;
 - (v) terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities, as defined in Articles 1 and 3 of Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA, respectively, or inciting, aiding, abetting or attempting to commit such offences, as referred to in Article 4 of that Decision;
 - (vi) child labour or other offences concerning trafficking in human beings as referred to in Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council;
- (e) the applicant has shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision financed by the Union's budget, which has led to its early termination or to the application of liquidated damages or other contractual penalties, or which has been discovered following checks, audits or investigations by an authorising officer, OLAF or the Court of Auditors;
- (f) it has been established by a final judgment or final administrative decision that the applicant has committed an irregularity within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95;
- (g) It has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that the applicant has created an entity in a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or any other legal obligations of mandatory application in the jurisdiction of its registered office, central administration or principal place of business;
- (h) it has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that an entity has been created with the intent referred to in point (g);
- (i) for the situations referred to in points (c) to (h) above, the applicant is subject to:

- (i) facts established in the context of audits or investigations carried out by European Public Prosecutor's Office after its establishment, the Court of Auditors, the European Anti-Fraud Office or the internal auditor, or any other check, audit or control performed under the responsibility of an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body;
- (ii) non-final judgments or non-final administrative decisions which may include disciplinary measures taken by the competent supervisory body responsible for the verification of the application of standards of professional ethics;
- (iii) facts referred to in decisions of persons or entities being entrusted with EU budget implementation tasks;
- (iv) information transmitted by Member States implementing Union funds;
- (v) decisions of the Commission relating to the infringement of Union competition law or of a national competent authority relating to the infringement of Union or national competition law; or
- (vi) decisions of exclusion by an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body.

7.2. Remedial measures

If an applicant declares one of the situations of exclusion listed above (see section 7.4), it must indicate the measures it has taken to remedy the exclusion situation, thus demonstrating its reliability. This may include e.g. technical, organisational and personnel measures to correct the conduct and prevent further occurrence, compensation of damage or payment of fines or of any taxes or social security contributions. The relevant documentary evidence which illustrates the remedial measures taken must be provided in annex to the declaration. This does not apply for situations referred in point (d) of section 7.1.

7.3. Rejection from the call for proposals

The authorising officer shall not award a grant to an applicant who:

- (a) is in an exclusion situation established in accordance with section 7.1; or
- (b) has misrepresented the information required as a condition for participating in the procedure or has failed to supply that information; or
- (c) was previously involved in the preparation of documents used in the award procedure where this entails a breach of the principle of equal treatment, including distortion of competition, that cannot be remedied otherwise.

The same exclusion criteria apply to linked third parties.

Administrative sanctions (exclusion) may be imposed on applicants or linked third parties where applicable, if any of the declarations or information provided as a condition for participating in this procedure prove to be false.

7.4. Supporting documents

Applicants must provide a **declaration on their honour** certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to in Articles 136(1) and 141 of the EU Financial Regulation (FR)⁶¹, by filling in the relevant form attached to the application form accompanying this call for proposals.

8. SELECTION CRITERIA

8.1 Financial capacity

Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the duration of the grant and to participate in its funding. The applicants' financial capacity will be assessed on the basis of the following supporting documents:

a) Low value grants (\leq EUR 60 000):

- a declaration on their honour.

b) Grants \geq EUR 60 000:

- a declaration on their honour and,

EITHER

- the profit and loss account, the balance sheet for the last financial year for which the accounts were closed;
- for newly created entities, the business plan might replace the above documents.

OR

- the table provided for in the application form, filled in with the relevant statutory accounting figures, in order to calculate the ratios as detailed in the form.

c) Grants for an action \geq EUR 750 000: not applicable.

In the event of an application grouping several applicants (consortium), the above thresholds apply to each applicants.

The above-listed documents will have to be provided at later stage, via the electronic submission tool and only upon request of EASME.

On the basis of the documents submitted, if the authorising officer considers that financial capacity is weak, s/he may:

- request further information;
- decide not to give pre-financing;

⁶¹ See Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012, (OJ L 193/30.07.2018, p.1).

- decide to give pre-financing paid in instalments;
- decide to give pre-financing covered by a bank guarantee (see section 12.4 below);
- where applicable, require the joint and several financial liability of all the co-beneficiaries;

If the RAO considered that the financial capacity is insufficient s/he will reject the application.

8.2 Operational capacity

Applicants must have the professional competencies as well as appropriate qualifications necessary to complete the proposed action.

In this respect, all applicants have to submit a declaration on their honour, and the following information in the description of the action and its annexes:

1. A list containing the description of skills, expertise and role of key staff involved in the project (to be provided in the section B.2.2. of the “Description of the Action“).
2. A list containing the description of relevant previous projects and activities performed, which are related to cluster development and capacity-building, collaboration, industrial modernisation and to the specific thematic area of the proposed European Strategic Cluster Partnership, aimed notably at facilitating cluster cooperation within Europe, supporting the enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters or to projects and activities supported under COSME and its predecessor CIP, the EU’s Research and Innovation Framework Programme (Horizon 2020, FP7, FP6) or the European Structural and Investment Funds, notably cross-border, transnational and interregional cluster cooperation projects funded under INTERREG (to be provided in section B.2.3 of the "Description of the Action").
3. Completion of the relevant Annex 1 or 2 of the “Description of the Action”:
 - For cluster organisation and business networks already registered at the at the European Cluster Collaboration Platform⁶²: a link to the completed cluster profile of the applicant registered on the Platform and information concerning their industrial focus (to be provided through annex 1 of the “Description of the action”),
 - For cluster organisation and business networks not yet registered at the at the European Cluster Collaboration Platform⁶³: a declaration on their honour that they represent a cluster organisation or a business network organisation that is offering or channelling innovative support services to businesses in compliance with the definition of 'innovation clusters' provided above and that a cluster profile has been submitted to the Platform for registration with the respective information included in the descriptive form (to be provided through annex 2 of the “Description of the action”)

⁶² See at: www.clustercollaboration.eu.

⁶³ See at: www.clustercollaboration.eu.

9. AWARD CRITERIA

Eligible applications will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Max. score</i>
Relevance of the actions in view of the objectives of the call (<i>meeting objectives of the call; appropriate results; appropriate partnership: competences and European dimension</i>)	30
How relevant is the proposal to the overarching objective to strengthen cluster management excellence and strategic partnering in the EU as a way to provide more professional and added value business services to European SMEs through clusters?	
How relevant is the proposal to the objective of supporting cluster or business networks organisations and SMEs from regions with different levels of economic development and distinct stages of development and experience?	
To what extent does the partnership respect the 5 principles for establishing “European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence”, including the extent to which the thematic orientation and project partners have been strategically chosen?	
Quality of the proposed actions (<i>clear and feasible description of actions; appropriate allocation of resources, including management</i>)	30
How clear, coherent, and ambitious is the work plan?	
To what extent are the proposed actions and expected results linked to the identified needs and specific objectives? To what extent is this link well described and justified?	
To what extent are the proposed actions and the work plan's methodology clearly and presented, feasible and effective, such as in terms of schedule milestones, deliverables?	
How suitable and appropriate is the contribution of each partner to the activities proposed, per work package/task considering partners’ skills and responsibilities?	
To what extent can the methodology and management set up be effective and ensure the high quality of the action proposed?	
Impact on target audience (<i>appropriate impact indicators; dissemination; project continuation</i>)	20
How appropriate is the proposed methodology to contribute to a tangible impact for enhancing cluster managers skills, designing robust individual cluster strategies, and improving the business support services to cluster SMEs, including for associating regional authorities to discussions on cluster excellence capacity-building?	
How appropriate is the proposed methodology for facilitating strategic and sustainable partnering in the EU by designing or implementing a partnership	

strategy and joint collaboration activities to promote growth and competitiveness for the cluster SMEs, including through an innovative and effective outreach and awareness-raising and implementation of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme?	
To what extent does the project suggest ambitious, objectively verifiable and achievable SMART performance indicators to measure its outcomes?	
Cost-effectiveness (<i>coherence, detail and clarity between actions proposed and budgeted resources</i>)	20
To what extent is the detailed budget coherent with the work plan of the actions?	
To what extent is the budget clear and detailed, as well as effective to implement the actions?	
To what extent is the proposed expenditure necessary for the implementation of the project?	
To what extent do the expected results stand in a reasonable relationship to the amount of the grant?	
TOTAL	<i>100</i>

In order to be considered for funding, proposals will need to have passed an overall threshold of 70% in terms of total score. In addition, thresholds of 50% will be applied to each individual award criterion described above in order to ensure a consistent minimum quality for all award criteria. Proposals will be ranked according to their total score.

10. LEGAL COMMITMENTS

In the event of a grant awarded by EASME, a grant agreement drawn up in euro and detailing the conditions and level of funding, will be sent to the applicant, as well as the information on the procedure to formalise the agreement of the parties.

Please note that the award of a grant does not establish an entitlement for subsequent years.

The authorising officer may draw a reserve list of proposals that have passed the above thresholds. In the event that the original budget of the action is increased or that selected proposal(s) fail to conclude the grant agreement, a grant may be awarded to proposals from the reserve list, following their order on the ranking list in accordance with the scores obtained.

11. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCEDURES

Unsuccessful applicants may request the review of the admissibility and eligibility procedure and the evaluation procedure with regard to their proposal as specified in section V of the Guide for applicants.

12. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

12.1 General principles

a) Non-cumulative award

An action may only receive one grant from the EU budget.

In no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice by the Union budget. To ensure this, applicants shall indicate the sources and amounts of Union funding received or applied for the same action or part of the action or for its functioning during the same financial year as well as any other funding received or applied for the same action.⁶⁴

b) Non-retroactivity

No grant may be awarded retrospectively for actions already completed.

A grant may be awarded for an action which has already begun only where 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

c) Co-financing

Co-financing means that the applicant(s) must ensure that the resources which are necessary to carry out the action may not be entirely provided by the EU grant. Co-financing may take the form of:

- the beneficiary's own resources;
- income generated by the action;
- financial contributions from third parties.

d) Balanced budget

The estimated budget of the action 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 for whom costs will not be incurred in euros, should use the exchange rate published on the Info-euro website available at: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/inforeuro_en.cfm.

e) Implementation contracts/subcontracting

Where the implementation of the action requires the award of procurement contracts (implementation contracts), the beneficiary must award the contract 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.

In the event of procurement exceeding EUR 60 000, the beneficiary must abide by special rules as referred in the grant agreement annexed to the call. Moreover the beneficiary is expected to clearly document the tendering procedure and retain the documentation for the event of an audit.

⁶⁴ Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC (Official Journal of the European Union L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 65).

Entities acting in their capacity of contracting authorities in the meaning of Directive 2014/24/EU⁶⁵ or contracting entities in the meaning of Directive 2014/25/EU⁶⁶) must comply with the applicable national public procurement rules. The beneficiary is expected to clearly document the tendering procedure and retain the documentation for the event of an audit.

Beneficiaries may sub-contract tasks forming part of the action as described in the proposal. If they do so, they must ensure that, in addition to the above-mentioned conditions of best value for money and absence of conflicts of interests, the following conditions are also complied with:

- (i) subcontracting does not cover core tasks of the action;
- (ii) recourse to subcontracting is justified because of the nature of the action and what is necessary for its implementation;
- (iii) the estimated costs of the subcontracting are clearly identifiable in the estimated budget;
- (iv) any recourse to subcontracting, if not provided for in description of the action, is communicated by the beneficiary and approved by the Commission. The Commission may grant approval:
 - (i) before any recourse to subcontracting, if the beneficiaries requests an amendment
 - (ii) after recourse to subcontracting if the subcontracting:
 - is specifically justified in the interim or final technical report and
 - does not entail changes to the grant agreement which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or be contrary to the equal treatment of applicants;
- (v) the beneficiaries ensure that certain conditions applicable to beneficiaries, enumerated in the grant agreement (e.g. visibility, confidentiality, etc.), are also applicable to the subcontractors.

f) Financial support to third parties.

Financial support to third parties (visiting organisations in ClusterXChange pilot scheme) must be part of the project. The financial assistance paid to third parties shall be included under the corresponding cost heading. It covers the financial assistance paid to visiting organisations in the ClusterXChange pilot scheme in support of the costs linked to their expenditure for travel, accommodation, subsistence and other miscellaneous expenses occurred during a stay with the host organisation in another participating country. Details are mentioned in the Annex – ClusterXChange pilot scheme – Quality Manual for European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x).

The amount of financial support per third party (visiting organisation) must not exceed EUR 1100.

⁶⁵ Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC (Official Journal of the European Union L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 65).

⁶⁶ Directive 2014/25/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and repealing Directive 2004/17/EC (Official Journal of the European Union L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 243).

12.2 Funding forms

➤ **Specific funding conditions under this call for proposals:**

Funding	Amount or percentage
EU contribution to eligible project costs ⁶⁷ (all eligible costs except for financial support to third parties) (per partner)	Max. 75% co-financing rate
EU contribution to financial assistance to visiting organisations in ClusterXchange pilot scheme (financial support to third parties) ⁶⁸	Up to 100% co-financing rate
Financial assistance to third parties (i.e. visiting organisations in ClusterXchange pilot scheme)	Max. EUR 1100 per visiting organisation in the ClusterXchange pilot scheme (in the form of a scale of unit costs) ⁶⁹

Grants are calculated on the basis of a detailed estimated budget indicating clearly the costs that are eligible for EU funding. The grant amount may neither exceed the eligible costs nor the amount requested. Amounts are indicated in euros.

➤ **Maximum EU contribution requested**

The EU contribution is limited to a maximum co-financing rate of eligible costs indicated in section 4. Consequently, part of the total eligible expenses entered in the estimative budget must be financed from sources other than the EU grant (see section 12.1c).

➤ **Eligible costs**

'**Eligible costs**' shall meet all the following criteria:

- ✓ they are incurred by the beneficiary;
- ✓ they are incurred during the duration of the action, with the exception of costs relating to final reports and audit certificates;

The period of eligibility of costs will start as specified in the grant agreement. If a beneficiary can demonstrate the need to start the action before the agreement is signed, expenditure may be authorised before the grant is awarded. Under no circumstances can the eligibility period start before the date of submission of the grant application (see section 12.1 b).

- ✓ they are indicated in the estimated budget of the action;

⁶⁷ Cost categories of "Direct personnel costs"; "Direct costs of subcontracting"; "Other direct costs"; "Indirect costs".

⁶⁸ Cost category of "Direct costs of providing financial support to third parties" only.

⁶⁹ See Annex 1 of the Quality Manual for European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x).

- ✓ they are necessary for the implementation of the action which is the subject of the grant;
- ✓ 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 requirements 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.

The same criteria apply to costs incurred by linked third parties.

In addition for **unit costs**:

- ✓ the number of actual units must comply with the following conditions:
 - the units must be actually used or produced during the duration of the action;
 - the units must be necessary for implementing the action or produced by it, and
 - the number of units must be identifiable and verifiable, in particular supported by records and documentation.

Further details are included in the model grant agreement.

Eligible costs may be direct or indirect.

Eligible direct costs

The eligible direct costs for the action are those costs which, with due regard for the conditions of eligibility set out above, are identifiable as specific costs directly linked to the performance of the action and which can therefore be booked to it directly, such as :

A. Direct personnel costs

Types of eligible personnel costs:

A.1 Personnel costs are eligible if they are related to personnel working for the beneficiary under an employment contract (or equivalent appointing act) and assigned to the action ('**costs for employees (or equivalent)**'). They must be limited to salaries (including during parental leave), social security contributions, taxes and other costs included in the **remuneration**, if they arise from national law or the employment contract (or equivalent appointing act).

They may also include **additional remuneration** for personnel assigned to the action (including payments on the basis of supplementary contracts regardless of their nature), if:

- (a) it is part of the beneficiary's usual remuneration practices and is paid in a consistent manner whenever the same kind of work or expertise is required;
- (b) the criteria used to calculate the supplementary payments are objective and generally applied by the beneficiary, regardless of the source of funding used.

A.2 The costs for natural persons working under a direct contract with the beneficiary other than an employment contract or **seconded by a third party against payment** are eligible personnel costs, if:

- (a) the person works under conditions similar to those of an employee (in particular regarding the way the work is organised, the tasks that are performed and the premises where they are performed);
- (b) the result of the work carried out belongs to the beneficiary, and
- (c) the costs are not significantly different from those for personnel performing similar tasks under an employment contract with the beneficiary.

The costs of the personnel of **national administrations** are eligible 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;

A.3 Costs of owners of beneficiaries that are small and medium-sized enterprises ('**SME owners**'), who are working on the action and who do not receive a salary are eligible personnel costs, if they correspond to the amount per unit set out in Annex 2a of the model grant agreement multiplied by the number of actual hours worked on the action.

Further details of the calculation of personal costs included in the model grant agreement

B. Direct costs of subcontracting (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as non-deductible value added tax (VAT) paid by beneficiaries that are not public bodies acting as public authority) are eligible if the conditions set out in the grant agreement are met.

C. Direct costs of providing financial support to third parties are eligible if the conditions set out in the grant agreement are met.

D. Other direct costs

D.1 Travel costs and related subsistence allowances (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as non-deductible value added tax (VAT) paid by beneficiaries that are not public bodies acting as public authority) are eligible if they are in line with the beneficiary's usual practices on travel.

D.2 The depreciation costs of equipment, infrastructure or other assets (new or second-hand) as recorded in the beneficiary's accounts are eligible, if they were purchased in accordance with the conditions set out in the grant agreement and written off in accordance with international accounting standards and the beneficiary's usual accounting practices.

The **costs of renting or leasing** equipment, infrastructure or other assets (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as non-deductible value added tax (VAT) paid by beneficiaries that are not public bodies acting as public authority) are also eligible, if they do not exceed the depreciation costs of similar equipment, infrastructure or assets and do not include any financing fees.

The only portion of the costs that will be taken into account is that which corresponds to the duration of the action and rate of actual use for the purposes of the action.

D.3 Costs of other goods and services (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as non-deductible value added tax (VAT) paid by beneficiaries that are not public bodies acting as public authority) are eligible, if they are purchased specifically for the action and in accordance with the conditions set out in the grant agreement.

Such goods and services include, for instance, consumables and supplies, dissemination, protection of results, certificates on the financial statements (if they are required by the Agreement), translations and publications.

E. Eligible indirect costs (overheads)

Indirect costs are costs that are not directly linked to the action implementation and therefore cannot be attributed directly to it.

Indirect costs are eligible if they are declared on the basis of the flat-rate of 7% of the eligible direct costs⁷⁰ (excluding cost category of "Direct costs of providing financial support to third parties").

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

Applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that in the case of beneficiaries receiving an operating grant⁷¹ financed by the EU or Euratom budget, they cannot declare indirect costs for the period covered by the operating grant unless they can demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action.

➤ **Ineligible costs**

- (a) costs related to return on capital;
- (b) debt and debt service charges;
- (c) provisions for future losses or debts ;
- (d) interest owed;
- (e) doubtful debts;
- (f) currency exchange losses;
- (g) bank costs charged by the beneficiary's bank for transfers from the Agency;
- (h) excessive or reckless expenditure;
- (i) deductible VAT;
- (j) costs incurred during suspension of the implementation of the action;
- (k) in-kind contributions provided by third parties;
- (l) costs declared under another EU or Euratom grant (including grants awarded by a Member State and financed by the EU or Euratom budget and grants awarded by bodies other than the Agency for the purpose of implementing the EU or Euratom budget); in particular, indirect costs if the beneficiary is already receiving an

⁷⁰ 7% of cost categories "Direct personnel costs"; "Direct costs of subcontracting"; "Other direct costs".

⁷¹ For the definition, see Article 180(2)(b) of the EU Financial Regulation 2018/10146: '**operating grant**' means financial contribution to the functioning of a body which has an objective forming part of, and supporting an Union policy by means of a financial contribution to its work programme..

- operating grant financed by the EU or Euratom budget in the same period, unless they can demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action.
- (m) costs for staff of a national (or local) administration, for activities that are part of the administration's normal activities (i.e. not undertaken only because of the grant);
 - (n) costs (especially travel and subsistence costs) for staff or representatives of EU institutions, bodies or agencies.

Further details are included in the model grant agreement.

➤ **Calculation of the final grant amount**

The final amount of the grant to be awarded to the beneficiary is established after completion of the action, upon approval of the request for payment containing the following documents:

- a final report providing details of the implementation and results of the action;
- the final financial statement must detail all eligible costs (actual costs, unit costs and flat-rate costs);
- a certificate on the financial statements of the action for each beneficiary or linked third party, if
 - it requests an EU contribution of EUR 325 000 or more as reimbursement of actual costs and
 - the maximum EU contribution indicated, for that beneficiary or linked third party in the estimated budget (see Annex 2) as reimbursement of actual costs is EUR 750 000 or more.

In the event of non-execution or clearly inadequate execution of an activity planned in the work programme annexed to the grant agreement, the final grant will be reduced accordingly.

EU grants may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the action. **Profit shall be defined as a surplus, calculated at the payment of the balance, of the receipts over the eligible costs of the action**, where receipts are limited to the Union grant and the revenue generated by that action. In this respect, where a profit is made, the EASME shall be entitled to recover the percentage of the profit corresponding to the Union contribution to the eligible costs actually incurred by the beneficiary to carry out the action.

The 'final grant amount' depends on the actual extent to which the action is implemented in accordance with the Grant Agreement.

This amount is calculated by the Agency at the payment of the balance in the following steps:

Step 1 — Application of the reimbursement rate to the eligible costs:

The reimbursement rate is applied to the eligible costs (actual costs, unit costs and flat-rate costs) declared by the beneficiaries and approved by the Agency.

Step 2 — Limit to the maximum grant amount:

If the amount obtained following Step 1 is higher than the maximum grant amount, it will be limited to the latter.

Step 3 — Reduction due to the no-profit rule (not applicable to low value grants):

The grant must not produce a profit. 'Profit' means the surplus of the amount obtained following Steps 1 and 2 plus the action's total receipts, over the action's total eligible costs. The 'action's total eligible costs' are the consolidated total eligible costs approved by the Agency. The 'action's

total receipts' are the consolidated total receipts generated during its duration. The following are considered receipts:

- (a) income generated by the action;
- b) financial contributions given by third parties to the beneficiary or to a linked third party, specifically to be used for costs that are eligible under the action.

The following are however not considered receipts:

- (a) financial contributions by third parties, if they may be used to cover costs other than the eligible costs;
- (b) financial contributions by third parties with no obligation to repay any amount unused at the end of the action period.

If there is a profit, it will be deducted in proportion to the final rate of reimbursement of the eligible actual costs approved by the Agency (as compared to the amount calculated following Steps 1 and 2).

Step 4 — Reduction due to substantial errors, irregularities or fraud or serious breach of obligations:

If the grant is reduced, the Agency will calculate the reduced grant amount by deducting the amount of the reduction (calculated in proportion to the seriousness of the errors, irregularities or fraud or breach of obligations) from the maximum grant amount.

The final grant amount will be the lower of the following two:

- the amount obtained following Steps 1 to 3 or
- the reduced grant amount following Step 4.

12.3 Payment arrangements:

Pre-financing payment

A pre-financing payment corresponding to 70 % of the grant amount will be transferred to the beneficiary within 30 days of the date when the last of the two parties signs the agreement, provided all requested guarantees have been received.

Final payment

EASME will establish the amount of the final payment to be made to the beneficiary on the basis of the calculation of the final grant amount (see section 12.2 above). If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, the beneficiary will be required to reimburse the amount paid in excess by EASME through a recovery order.

12.4 Pre-financing guarantee

In the event that the applicant's financial capacity is not satisfactory, a pre-financing guarantee for an amount not exceeding the amount of the pre-financing and shall be valid for a period sufficiently long to allow it to be activated, 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 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.

The guarantee shall be released when the pre-financing is deducted from interim payments or payments of the balance to the beneficiary, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the grant agreement.

13. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Beneficiaries will be requested to submit the following reports:

- technical progress reports covering every 6 months of the project implementation, not linked to a request for payment⁷²;
- A final technical and financial report, linked to the request for the payment of the balance.

Further details are included in the model grant agreement.

14. PUBLICITY

14.1 By the beneficiaries

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 in accordance with the details provided in the grant agreement.

If this requirement is not fully complied with, the beneficiary's grant may be reduced in accordance with the provisions of the grant agreement.

In addition to the text and logo relevant to the EU programme, the authorising officer will provide beneficiaries with a disclaimer stating that the EU is not responsible for the views displayed in the publications and/or in conjunction with the activities for which the grant is used.

⁷² Example: A project with 24 months duration is expected to submit three technical progress reports: 1st technical progress report covering months 1-6 and due in month 7; 2nd technical progress report covering months 7-12 and due in months 13; 3rd technical progress report covering months 13-18 and due in months 19.

14.2 By EASME

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.

EASME will publish the following information:

- name of the beneficiary,
- address of the beneficiary when the latter is a legal person, region when the beneficiary is a natural person, as defined on NUTS 2 level⁷³ if he/she is domiciled within EU or equivalent if domiciled outside EU,
- 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.

15. 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 (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data⁷⁴. Unless indicated otherwise, the questions and any personal data requested that are required to evaluate the application in accordance with the specifications of the call for proposals will be processed solely for that purpose by the Head of Unit A.1 of the EASME. Details concerning the processing of personal data are available on the privacy statement at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/support/legal_notice/h2020-ssps-grants_en.pdf.

Personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) should the beneficiary be in one of the situations mentioned in Articles 136 and 141 of the EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046⁷⁵ (for more information see the Privacy Statement on: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/explained/management/protecting/privacy_statement_edes_en.pdf).

16. PROCEDURE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with the requirements of section 5 and by the deadline specified under section 3.

⁷³ Commission Regulation (EC) No 105/2007 of 1 February 2007 amending the annexes to Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) (Official Journal of the European Union L 39 of 10.02.2007).

⁷⁴ OJ L 295/39 of 21.11.2018.

⁷⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R1046>

➤ **Electronic submission**

Applicants are requested to go to <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme-0> and follow the procedure for submitting an application.

No modification to the application is allowed once the deadline for submission has elapsed. However, if there is a need to clarify certain aspects or for the correction of clerical mistakes, the EASME may contact the applicant for this purpose during the evaluation process.

Applicants will be informed in writing about the results of the selection process.

➤ **Contacts**

EASME is available to answer questions relating to the content of the present call for proposals. All questions must be sent by e-mail to EASME-COSME-CLUSTER-EXCELLENCE@ec.europa.eu.

Answers will be published at <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme/cos-cluster-2018-03-02-european-cluster-excellence-programme>.

17. ANNEXES:

- ClusterXchange pilot scheme - Quality Manual for European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x)
- Application form (Description of the action and estimated budget)
- Model Grant Agreement
- Guide for Applicants