GUIDANCE FOR THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL INNOVATION HUBS, ENTERPRISE EUROPE NETWORK PARTNERS AND CLUSTER ORGANISATIONS

1. Introduction

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) is the world's largest support network for small and medium sized enterprises. SMEs can receive a wide variety of services, ranging from access to finance to support for internationalisation. Industrial clusters are groups of specialised enterprises, often SMEs, and other related supporting actors in a location that cooperate closely. Many European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) will be based on existing clusters, or include organisations that are part of an EEN consortia. The SME Strategy also commits to expand Digital Innovation Hubs in connection with Startup Europe and the EEN and provide a seamless service within local and regional ecosystems. This document will provide guidance to proposers on how such a seamless service could be set up both between the EEN and EDIH and with cluster organisations. There will be centrally organised collaboration between the different networks, and there will be specific collaborations between (groups of) EEN consortia, EDIHs and clusters, who are geographically near each other or who find reason to work with each other to offer a seamless service to their customers.

2. CENTRAL COORDINATION BETWEEN THE NETWORKS THROUGH AN EU-LEVEL WORKING GROUP

To create as many synergies and structured exchanges as possible among the EDIH, EEN partners and industrial cluster organisations, a joint EU-level Working Group with equal number of representatives¹ from each participating network will be established. This Working Group will elaborate yearly plans with recommended actions to be implemented jointly by their members at regional/national level. The Working Group will hold two annual meetings which will also be used to monitor and plan joint actions, as well as to give a platform to exchange good practices of regional/national EDIH-EEN-cluster cooperation.

The working group may also guide the organisation of EU-level events, which the three networks may benefit from, to facilitate community building and the dissemination of information. From the side of the EDIH, the Digital Transformation Accelerator would be supporting the organisation of these events.

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE SPECIFIC COOPERATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Regional/national specificities

At the local level, related EEN, EDIH and Clusters need to provide a seamless service to the SMEs. Possible activities where they could collaborate are:

• the (co)organisation of awareness raising events and dedicated workshops (including also virtual formats) on digital technologies and their application in specific sectors;

¹ Each network will pre-select volunteering partners among their members to participate in this Working Group. The decision on the final set-up of the group will be taken jointly by DG CNECT, DG GROW and EISMEA, aiming for an appropriate geographical balance.

- organising demonstration projects and providing information on potential technologies to be used;
- the (co)organisation of matchmaking events (including virtual formats) to facilitate cooperation on new digital technologies and their potential application to dedicated sectors;
- the exchange of offers/request of cooperation profiles to give clients more opportunities to find the right digital technology;
- the (co)organisation of joint investor-related events including hackathons and pitching preparation for SMEs.

Client referrals - joint client journeys

Even though regional/national specificities are an essential requirement for concrete and effective joint actions, it is strongly recommended that cooperation partners put in place well elaborated client referral systems. These referrals should include loop-backs to those cooperation partners who initiated the client referral so as to make sure that joint client journeys can be subsequently managed the most effective way with the most relevant services offered to the client in question by the different cooperation partners.

The client referral should also be facilitated by the use of the results of the EU-level project "Collaborative mapping of innovation support actors" which will create a common database with information and contact details of innovation support actors.

Regional/national cooperation agreements

Cooperation partners are recommended to sign regional/national cooperation agreements or Memoranda of Understanding that should outline their cooperation methods including planned joint actions which should be regularly reviewed³.

a) Multiple memberships

One organisation might be a member of an EEN, a cluster and an EDIH. This is possible as long as this organisation has the right capacity to carry out the services that are expected of these networks, and there is no double funding of the activities (see below). However, even if there is no overlap in partners a seamless collaboration is expected.

b) Financial aspects of the cooperation

No double funding

All throughout the operations of the different networks and their joint actions, double funding must be avoided.

² The "Collaborative mapping of innovation support actors" (CMISA) is still under development. Once released, all parties will be promptly notified and provided with further information on its functioning.

³ The Commission might provide the cooperation partners with a template for regional/national cooperation agreements. Notably, a dedicated EEN Working Group will develop a template for cooperation agreements between EEN partners and EDIHs. Any provided template will need to be adapted to the very specific situation of the cooperation partners.

Project teams – work programmes - accounts

Every cooperation partner belongs to one of the participating networks and for that purpose it will have its own 'home base' in an EEN/EDIH/cluster (project) team. These teams are – through their participations in the different networks – assigned separate project budgets with corresponding work programmes.

In case of multiple memberships, different project teams (e.g. EEN and EDIH) might exist under the same 'roof'. However, even in these cases the different project teams are assigned to their specific projects and specific project-related tasks with corresponding budgets that are derived from the corresponding work programmes.

Who incurs the costs 'pays'

As a common principle, those cooperating partners who incur costs for the implementation of any joint action will need to 'pay': this means that the incurred costs will need to be booked onto the accounts of the network project they represent⁴.

There might be joint actions that give rise to different cost items being incurred by all involved cooperating partners. In these cases and before the implementation of any joint action, a common agreement should be achieved as to the operational and financial role of all involved cooperating partners.

c) Next steps

As the future EDIH network is about to be rolled out and also the EEN will renew itself with a new Call for proposals in the course of 2021, the very final set-up of the two networks will only be known in late 2021 at the earliest.

Notwithstanding this time constraint, preparatory works for joint actions can already be undertaken as the cluster organisations are stable in their structures and the predesignated entities for the future EDIHs are already known and equally the future EEN consortia that will be applying to the new call for proposals are also formed. Therefore, it is recommended – in as far they have not yet taken place – that first exchanges at regional/national level among the cooperation partners be made with the objective to better understand each other's expertise and service range as a prerequisite to map out common joint actions in the future.

Parallel to that, DG CNECT with DG GROW and EISMEA will launch their selection procedures to identify the future members for the Working Group that will guide the overall cooperation as referred to at the beginning of this note.

⁴ If all the costs of a B2B event are incurred by EEN partners, these costs will have to be booked on the EEN project and cannot be booked on the EDIH or the cluster project.