



S3 Community of Practice

Guidance for expression of interest for new partnerships

20 October 2023

S3 CoP Secretariat

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1. Introduction

This practical guidance document aims to support regions that are looking to set up a new Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSP). This guidance report will be used to support regions who are interested in setting up a new partnership to identify whether their proposed collaboration area fits the profile of an interregional partnership.

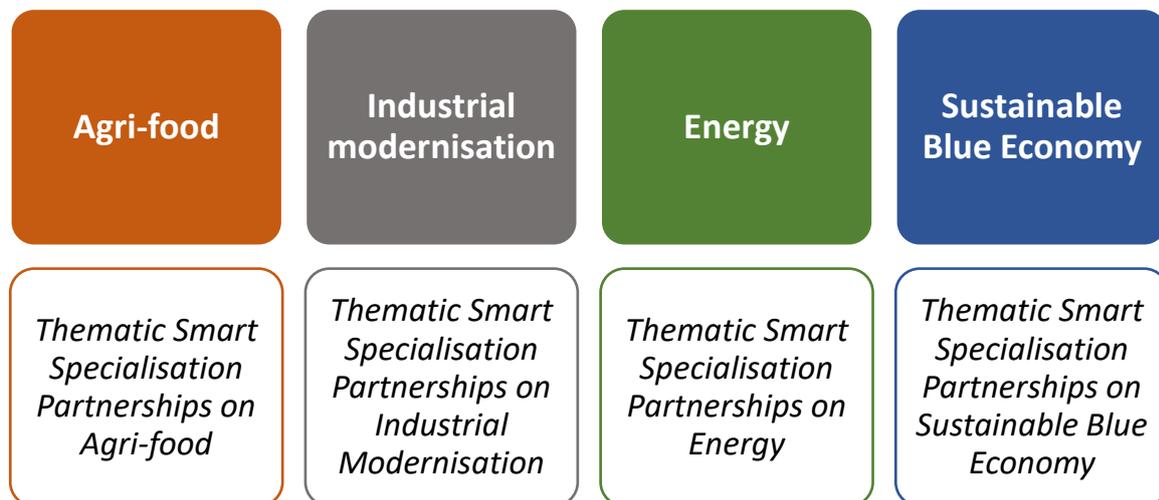
The document aims to address the activities foreseen in setting up a partnership and what resources are required to get involved. Beyond that, the document dives into the details of the Call for expression of interest and how to practically approach the application to set up a new TSSP. The Annex presents key definitions on a series of introductory questions, such as what are the S3 Thematic Platforms, what are Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships.

2. How are activities organised?

Regions can participate to the S3 Thematic Platforms on Agri-food, Industrial Modernisation, Energy and Sustainable Blue Economy through the Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs), see Figure 1 for an overview.

Figure 1: Overview of the organisation of the S3 Thematic Platforms and the Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships

S3 Thematic Platforms



Source: S3 CoP Secretariat

The activities of the S3 CoP in the area of the S3 Thematic Platforms are organised around the main pillars presented in Figure 2. At the level of the S3 Thematic Platforms Steering Committee, meetings will allow for participants to exchange and share experiences among

TSSPs and engage in tailored EC support. Further activities are related to TSSPs and include the Call for expression of interest for new partnerships, which is a call and subsequent selection procedure for regions to set up new thematic platforms in priority topics. New and existing partnerships have the opportunity to benefit from services to support their acute needs and development. Monitoring activities take place at six month intervals, related to website updates on the TSSPs. These main activities are outlined in further detail in the chapters below, with a focus on the activities related to the creation of new partnerships.

Figure 2: Activities related to Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs)



Source: S3 CoP Secretariat

3. What is expected of participating regions?

1) Role of lead region and partner region in S3 Thematic Platform

The S3 Thematic Platforms on Agri-Food, Energy, Industrial Modernisation, and the Sustainable Blue Economy is comprised of Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs). A lead region or partner region cannot directly apply to join a S3 Thematic Platform, however they can join through participation in an existing TSSP or by creating a new TSSP.

2) Role of lead region and partner region in TSSP

Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) involve regions or organisations with a clear mandate from the regional authority as a core stakeholder. The role of the regional authorities is vital as the activities of the TSSPs build upon the smart specialisation strategies of regions. As such the regional authority must give a clear mandate for the involvement in a TSSP, however the regional authority is at liberty to engage other actors in the region that relate to the thematic priority. Typically, actors involved in the TSSP on behalf of the region include cluster organisations, innovation intermediaries and Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) who provide the necessary expertise relevant for the TSSPs.

In addition, regions, or organisations with a clear mandate from the region, can either take on the role of a so-called leading region or as a partner region.

Lead regions in the TSSPs are responsible for steering the partnership, with a particular strength in the thematic priority in their regional ecosystem and interest to develop existing value chains and explore new ones by strengthening their interregional collaboration and support the development of co-investment projects. Lead regions are also responsible for steering the collaboration among regions, as well as monitoring and reporting on activities of the partnership. In addition, lead regions participate to the steering committee meetings, support the development of guidance documents on interregional collaboration, and provide input to discussions and analyses related to cross-cutting issues. Regions interested in taking on a lead region role are required to demonstrate commitment and dedicated capacity to engage in this role.

Partner regions in the TSSPs aim to strengthen core areas of expertise complementary to and in collaboration with other regions. Partner regions participate with the aim of developing interregional co-investment projects with high technological, business, societal and ecological potential at regional and European level. Partners should ideally leverage this through combining their cluster organisations, businesses, and innovation actors with those of other regions. The involvement of the quadruple helix is vital to the activities underpinning the regional priorities and the interregional TSSPs.

3) Responsibilities of actors involved in S3 Thematic Platforms and TSSPs

- **Lead regions** are responsible for contributing to the S3 thematic platforms and TSSPs on behalf of their partnership. This includes the website updates, completing monitoring reports, attending steering committee meetings, facilitating interregional cooperation and stakeholder engagement, developing solutions to shared innovation challenges, sharing knowledge and best practices, developing project proposals, among others.
- For the **participating regions**, it is of paramount importance to be committed to working collaboratively with other regions. Participating regions are requested to remain available and provide input to the lead regions coordination efforts. This includes providing inputs about the stakeholders engaged in each region, related to KPIs, but also the website updates as needed. Also, information about upcoming relevant events and activities should be clearly communicated in order to ensure that the TSSP community remains active and animated.
- **Contribution to Steering Committee meetings:** Steering Committee meetings are an important moment for the regions and policy makers to come together to discuss the overall progress of the various TSSPs and to exchange experiences. These meetings will be organised twice a year, featuring general activities and discussions relevant across the TSSPs, as well as partnership specific exchanges around common themes. Lead regions are the central contributor to these discussions on behalf of the partnership.

Steering Committee meetings are important moments to speak about what works well in the collaboration model, but also the bottlenecks or challenges that the partnerships face in the current context.

4. How can I get involved?

Two routes are possible in terms of getting involved in a TSSP:

- You can set up a new partnership together with like-minded regions.
- You can join an existing TSSP.

While actors of the quadruple helix are participants to the TSSPs, regional authorities are the core actors coordinating the involvement in the partnerships. In case you are not a regional authority, however you want to participate to a TSSP, we encourage you to get in touch with your regional institution or body, responsible for S3 management to explore engagement for participation to the TSSPs.

1) How can I set up a Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnership?

Regional authorities and/or quadruple helix actors with a mandate from their regional authority can get involved by expressing interest **to form a new partnership** together with other regions. Five main elements should be considered when aiming to set up a new partnership:

1. The **number of regions** interested in joining the specific partnership, a partnership requires a minimum of three unique regions from three Member States or organisations with a mandate from the regional authority;
2. **Link with the underlying Smart specialisation strategy (S3)** of the participating regions;
3. **Relevance of the proposed thematic area** for agri-food, energy, industrial modernisation and the sustainable blue economy in an EU policy context;
4. A clear **interregional scope**, including the involvement of various regions across Europe (including less developed and outermost regions) outlining the scope and definition as well as the complementarities among participating regions and actors for the indicated activities;
5. Whether there is a **community** supporting the partnership such as cluster organisations, European-level networks, co-programmed European Partnerships, co-funded European Partnerships or Institutionalised European Partnerships (EIT KIC, Joint undertaking).

The application form to set up a new partnership is open continuously via an online application form on the S3 Community of Practice Website and can be accessed here <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/S3CoPExpressionofInterestNewPartnerships>

Further details on the process are outline in chapter 5.

2) How can I join an existing partnership?

Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) are open to participation of regional authorities and/or quadruple helix actors with a mandate from their regional authority, that have a smart specialisation strategy with a clear link to the specific topic.

To join an existing partnership, it is necessary to reach out to contact persons from a particular TSSP to express interest in participation. Contact details of the lead regions or representative stakeholders of the TSSP are available on each partnerships' websites.

The lead region is responsible for the decision to open the TSSP to new actors and to welcome new actors. Once regional authorities or actors are accepted by existing TSSPs, they automatically also join the S3 Thematic Platforms to which the respective partnership belongs.

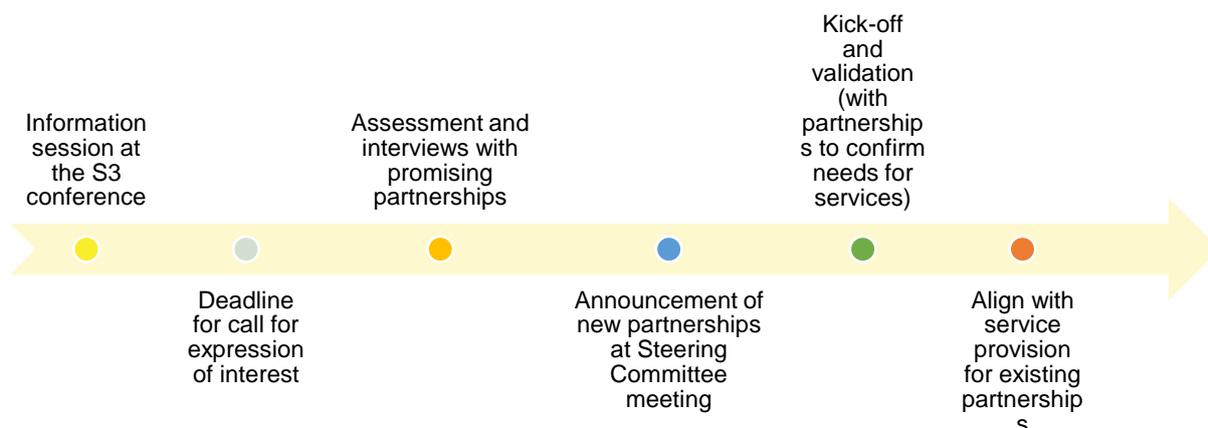
3) Is it possible to set up a new S3 Thematic Platform?

Regional authorities and/or quadruple helix actors with a mandate from their regional authority cannot create a new S3 Thematic Platform. A new S3 Thematic Platforms can only be created following a joint initiative between a Directorate-General of the European Commission and the Directorate-General of Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO).

5. What is the process surrounding the call for expression of interest for new partnerships?

Figure 3 presents the process surrounding the formation of new partnerships under the S3 Thematic Platforms.

Figure 3: Process surrounding the formation of new partnerships



Source: S3 CoP Secretariat

1) When is the deadline for submission?

The Call for expression of interest is open continuously. Two cut-off dates for applications are applied each year, with the next cut-off date scheduled for 29 March 2024.

2) What information is required in the Call for expression of interest for new partnerships?

Table 1 summarises the information that is asked in the Call for expression of interest for new partnerships. Actors will have the opportunity to upload a document, however this is not mandatory.

Table 1: Call for expression of interest for new partnerships template

Name of submitter	Name of the person submitting the application
Email address of the submitted	E-mail address of the person submitting the application
Name of proposed partnership	Information required / details
S3 thematic platform	Choice: Agri-food Energy Industrial Modernisation Sustainable Blue Economy
Number of regions participating	Total number: There should be at least three regions from at least three Member States
Contact details of lead regions and participating organisations	Lead region 1: Organisation, type of organisation, name of main contact, email of main contact, phone of main contact Lead region 2: Organisation, type of organisation, name of main contact, email of main contact, phone of main contact

Participating quadruple helix actors per region	For each actor: Name of organisation, type of organisation, region name, country
Link with S3 of the participating regions	Please describe how the scope and activities of the partnership relate to the shared Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) priorities of the participating regions. 500 characters maximum.
Community involvement	Please describe how the partnership intends to involve the wider community. In doing so, please indicate whether the partnership is related to or part of a European-level network, co-programmed European Partnership, co-funded European Partnership, or Institutionalised European Partnership (e.g., EIT KIC, Joint undertaking). 500 characters maximum.
Relevance of proposed thematic area	Please detail how the partnership and its proposed activities relate to the proposed thematic area of agri-food, energy, industrial modernisation and the sustainable blue economy in an EU policy context. 500 characters maximum.
Specific objective	Please identify the specific objectives of the proposed partnership. 500 characters no spaces
Scope of the proposed collaboration	Please outline the scope and activities of the proposed partnership. Please include the topic of collaboration with a clear scope and definition of interregional collaboration activities. 2000 characters no spaces
Interregional scope	Please describe the interregional scope of the partnership, including the involvement of various regions across Europe (including less developed and outermost regions) 1000 characters no spaces
Role for each region and actors therein	Please outline the complementarities among the participating regions. In doing so, please clarify the role of each actor in the region with a clear added value for the indicated activities (e.g., identification of the competences and needs of each organisation related to the proposed thematic area, commitment of actors to the collaboration topic, identification of complementarities and a division of labour). 2000 characters no spaces
Potential for co-investment project development	Please highlight the potential for co-investment project development within the proposed partnership. Are there already considerations towards joint project development (e.g. considerations towards a roadmap of activities, steps towards the objectives that have been set, etc.)?

	2000 characters no spaces
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Source: S3 CoP Secretariat

3) How will the the expressions of interest be assessed?

The expressions of interest will be assessed based on the following criteria to assess the partnership proposals:

1. The **number of regions** interested in joining the specific partnership, a partnership requires a minimum of three unique regions from three Member States or organisations with a mandate from the regional authority;
2. **Link with the underlying Smart specialisation strategy (S3)** of the participating regions;
3. **Relevance of the proposed thematic area** for agri-food, energy, industrial modernisation and the sustainable blue economy in an EU policy context;
4. A clear interregional scope, including the involvement of various regions across Europe (including less developed and outermost regions) outlining the scope and definition as well as the complementarities among participating regions and actors for the indicated activities;
5. Whether there is a **community** supporting the partnership such as cluster organisations, European-level networks, co-programmed European Partnerships, co-funded European Partnerships or Institutionalised European Partnerships (EIT KIC, Joint undertaking).

Building upon the above criteria, the expression of interest will be assessed together with the S3 CoP Secretariat, DG Regio and the responsible thematic DGs. Promising partnerships will be invited to discuss their aims, objectives, regions participating and goals for their work together as well as potential demonstration cases, and vision for commercialisation and scale-up. Following the meeting DG Regio will take the final decision on the selection of new partnerships. Each applicant will receive information about the outcome of their expression of interest within three months of the deadline.

4) What will be the next steps following the submission?

Following the above mentioned **assessment**, a decision will be taken on which partnerships to move forward with.

An official **kick-off** will take place afterwards with each proposed partnership to discuss the desired services and the validation of the support they would need to proceed with their activities. This will include a proposal of what the desired services could look like for this

partnership. New partnerships will receive a formal letter acknowledging their partnership from DG Regio.

After the kick-off, the **service provision** will align with the overall service provision for existing partnerships. A partnership will then be assigned support from the S3 CoP Secretariat that will guide them through their support journey and keep regular contact. Based on the kick-off of the support, the needs assessment and the discussion between the S3 CoP Secretariat and the partnership, a first service will be selected and executed according to the partnerships wishes and the S3 CoP Secretariat's insight.

A tentative list of services that will be proposed to the TSSPs, depending on their specific needs includes, among others:

- Training and capacity building on interregional collaboration
- Guidance to set up interregional governance models
- Targeted support to enhance the regional engagement of quadruple helix actors
- Support in the search for relevant funding opportunities for interregional collaboration projects

With over 30 partnerships currently in place, it is envisaged that many partnerships face similar challenges. Hence, depending on the need, the provision of services will be proposed jointly to several partnerships where applicable. Conferences and steering committee meetings can be moments where joint services are offered in the form of workshops or trainings on specific topics to the extent that it is feasible to organise it in this way. Likewise, cross-fertilisation amongst regions, which occurs when regions or partnerships can gain insights or experiences from other regions or partnerships experiences can be organised in similar moments and with a similar design.

As the support from the first service comes to an end, the S3 CoP Secretariat and partnership will assess the outcomes of the executed service and determine the next steps (if any) to further support the partnership. This can include the need for the assignment of another expert for specific expertise such as business plan development, access to finance, etc. The S3 CoP Secretariat will act as an interlocuter in engaging additional expertise as needed. The review will also serve as a moment to capture insights for the transversal learning, guidance for regions engaging in interregional innovation and to monitor the activities of the partnerships.

6. Contact

For questions and inquiries, please consult the S3 CoP website and regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). The S3 CoP Secretariat can be reached for all other inquiries related to the partnerships via partnerships@s3-cop.eu

Annex

What is the objective of the S3 CoP?

The Smart Specialisation Community of Practice (S3 CoP) is the central venue for exchange and the principle source of information on the development, implementation and governance of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). The S3 CoP also facilitates interregional cooperation in shared and complementary smart specialisation areas across Europe. **It is the Commission's one-stop shop for Smart Specialisation and provides advice and technical assistance to all S3 stakeholders.** It offers a platform for knowledge exchange that facilitates interregional collaboration.

By building on the extensive and practical experience gained from more than 10 years of developing Smart Specialisation Strategies, the S3 Community of Practice seeks to provide a fresh approach:

- To improve information flows through more effective and efficient S3 knowledge management, capitalisation and strategic communication;
- To offer to S3 practitioners at regional, national and European level new insights and solutions on how to better design, govern and implement their S3 strategies, and
- To boost interregional cooperation by strengthening the capabilities of S3 stakeholders to explore possibilities for cooperation in shared S3 areas and value chains as well as interactions with different innovation actors.

In order to achieve these goals, the S3 Community of Practice will carry out a wide range of activities including specifically work to support the thematic smart specialisation platforms and partnerships. The support will be provided equally to all S3 thematic platforms including agri-food, energy, industrial modernisation and the sustainable blue economy and includes:

- Support to the S3 thematic platforms, including a clear website on the overall activities of the platform and partnerships, hosting of steering committee meetings, and support through the secretariat
- Support to new and existing Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs), including the provision of guidance material for all stages of collaborations, and, where relevant, monitoring and analysis of partnerships and their activities, as well as tailored service provision to the partnerships
- Cross-cutting analyses in collaboration with a working group on interregional cooperation including insightful reports

What are the S3 Thematic Platforms?

Starting in 2015, the European Commission has launched dedicated S3 Thematic Platforms related to Agri-Food, Energy, Industrial Modernisation and since March 2022 a new platform on the Sustainable Blue Economy.

The **S3 Thematic Platforms** are joint initiatives between several Directorates-General of the European Commission under the lead of DG Regional and Urban Policy (REGIO) including Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), Energy (ENER), Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW), Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE), and Research and Innovation (RTD)). Since 2020 the management of the S3 Thematic Platforms has been transferred from the Joint Research Centre to the DG Regional and Urban Policy. The platforms provide the structure to support the creation of an interregional collaborative network of strategic Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) and enable these partnerships to work together, in shared smart specialisation areas.

What are Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs)?

Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) bring together regions interested in initiating and exploring new value chains in specific priority areas based on a shared interest in their smart specialisation strategies. TSSPs target specific areas with high potential for technological, societal, and ecological return at regional and European level, underpinned by shared smart specialisation strategy priorities across committed regions, cluster organisations, businesses, and innovation actors as well as civil society. TSSPs are open to participation of regional authorities and/or quadruple helix actors with a mandate from their regional authority and have a smart specialisation strategy that has clear links to the topic.

TSSPs rely on regional commitment, through the participation of the regional authority, or other stakeholders from the quadruple helix with a mandate from the regional authority. Collaboration builds on a common interest and particular strength in the region with the ambition to look beyond regional borders for complementary expertise, new insights and explore opportunities for further advancement. Interregional collaboration can take the form of exchange of practices and experiences, alignment of policies, design of co-investment projects, among others. Regions involved in the TSSPs aim to strengthen core areas of expertise complementary to and in collaboration with other regions based on shared smart specialisation priorities. Outcomes of the TSSPs include the development of interregional investment projects, interregional collaboration projects, the alignment of smart specialisation strategies between various regions, among others.