



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY

**CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR THEMATIC PARTNERSHIPS TO PILOT
INTERREGIONAL INNOVATION PROJECTS**

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

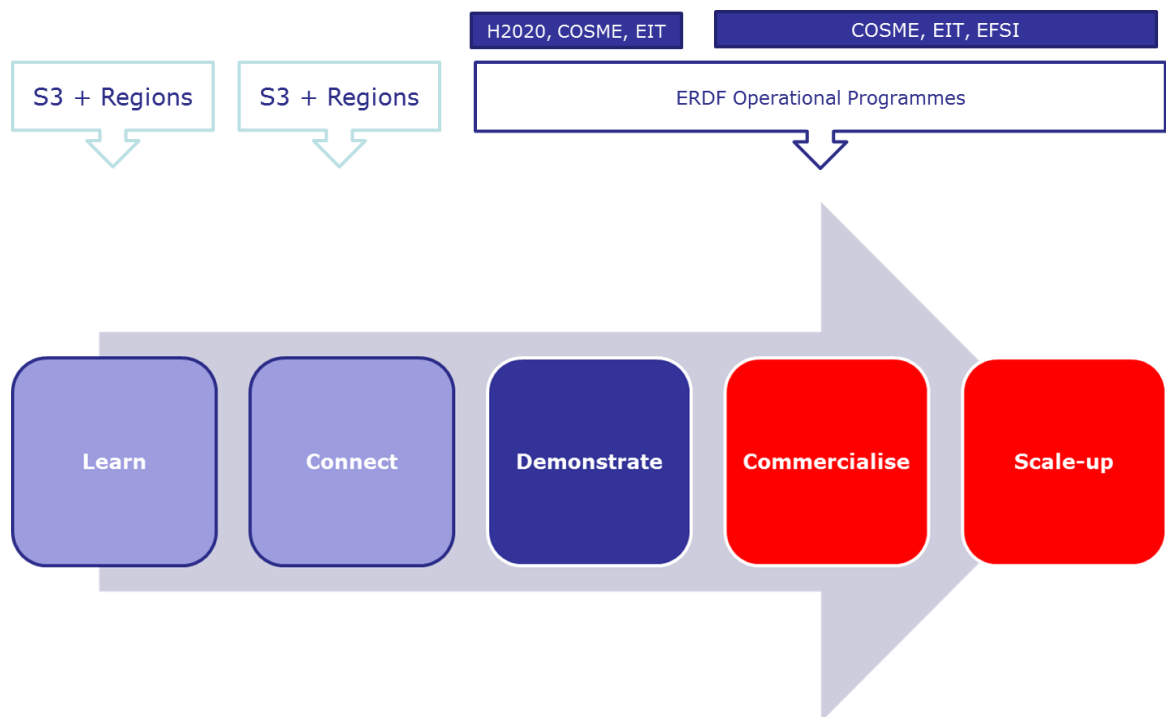
- 1.1 The EU has a crucial role to play in supporting all regions and Member States to activate their potential for innovation, competitiveness and sustainable jobs and growth.
- 1.2 In recent years the Commission has called on national and regional authorities to develop smart specialisation strategies for research and innovation. The aim was to encourage all European regions to identify their specific competitive advantages, as a basis for prioritising research and innovation investment under cohesion policy in the 2014-2020 programming period.
- 1.3 Smart specialisation strategies have been used to develop more effective innovation policies and encourage interregional cooperation in value chains across borders. Linking research and innovation actors with industrial stakeholders can help to develop complementarities in product development, production processes and take-up activities. This can contribute to building and reshaping EU-wide value-chains by leveraging private sector investments through public funding to go beyond the so-called "valley of death" and bring new innovations to the market. Stronger strategic inter-regional cooperation and sustainable linkages between regional ecosystems along smart specialisation priority areas could help increase competitiveness and resilience while better aligning investment pipelines across borders to create opportunities in new EU value-chains.
- 1.4 The Commission currently facilitates, with the support of the Smart Specialisation Platform and other related EU support actions, three Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms, namely, on industrial modernisation, energy and agri-food. These help regions to work together on shared smart specialisation priorities, by involving policy makers, researchers, business, clusters and civil society. These platforms provide a unique opportunity for policymakers at EU, national and regional level to pool experience to address these priorities in an interregional regional context. To date these Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms have brought together 100 regions working in 20 interregional partnerships in a broad range of areas¹ to foster innovation, business linkages along value chains in view of developing joint investments.
- 1.5 Further efforts are necessary to associate other European initiatives² with these Thematic Platforms and their regional partnerships, to facilitate the commercialisation and scale-

¹ Marine Renewable Energy, Sustainable Buildings, Bio-energy, Smart Grids, Solar Energy, High-Technology Farming, Traceability and Big Data, Smart Electronic Systems, Bio-economy applied to the agri-food sector, Advanced Manufacturing for Energy Applications, Bio-economy applied to the industrial sector, Efficient and Sustainable Manufacturing, High Performance Production through 3D Printing, New nano-enabled Products, Industry 4.0 for SMEs, Innovative Textile, Medical Technologies, Sports, Tourism and Photonics.

² Such initiatives may include Interreg Europe programme, Joint Undertakings on health, bioeconomy, energy, transport, nanoelectronics and embedded systems; EIT-Knowledge and Innovation Communities

up of inter-regional innovation projects and to incentivise joint interregional investment. These should build complementarities through matching of interregional capacities and know-how, notably through networking.

- 1.6 The recent communication by the Commission "Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth"³ foresees the launch of a pilot action on further supporting innovation projects proposed by interregional partnerships to strengthen particularly commercialisation and scale-up activities and foster investments.
- 1.7 This pilot will involve close collaboration between the Commission, and associated Member States or Regions on the basis of five to ten thematic partnerships involving policy-makers, researchers, businesses and other innovation actors.
- 1.8 The pilot action should build on the work already undertaken under the Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms⁴ on learning, connecting and demonstration to encourage a more hands-on and tailored approach to **support concrete actions** during the commercialisation and scale-up phase⁵.



- 1.9 Applicants could work on areas such as advanced manufacturing and industry 4.0, the bioeconomy, big data, energy, low carbon transition, clean and connected mobility,

(EIT-KICs) on energy, climate actions, digital, health, raw materials and food; European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) on active and healthy ageing, agri-food, raw-materials, smart cities and water, etc.

³ COM(2017) 376 final

⁴ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3-thematic-platforms>

⁵ This corresponds to the terminology used in the Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms i.e. scoping, mapping, industrial cooperation and design of project, business plan and funding mix

health, cybersecurity, water and innovation in traditional sectors. The applicants can represent:

- A partnership which is currently being developed under any of the existing Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms on Industrial Modernisation, Energy and Agri-Food.
- A partnership which is willing to propose a new Thematic Area e.g. water or security. However, this should not overlap with the already existing partnerships under Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms on Industrial Modernisation, Energy and Agri-Food.

1.10 The purpose of the pilot action is therefore:

- To **focus on commercialisation and scale-up** of concrete investment projects. In particular, the forthcoming COSME action on technical assistance to be launched in the second quarter of 2018 will provide dedicated financial advisory support for partnerships that are currently supported under the Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform on Industrial Modernisation.
- To **attract private investment** for promising but risky innovation projects and address the gap for financing the step from technology development and validation to market.
- To **explore and strengthen synergies** and develop investment pipelines for projects which are bankable for support from financial instruments, in particular through the European Fund for Strategic Investment, and other EU initiatives and projects supported under INTERREG, Horizon 2020, EIT KICs, Joint Undertakings, European Innovation Partnerships and Macro-regional strategies.

1.11 The selected partnerships will benefit from support from the Commission services notably through technical assistance from the ERDF. This support could be complemented, where appropriate, by other EU programmes and initiatives including the Smart Specialisation Platform (S3 Platform⁶) managed by the Joint Research Centre. Complementarities with other EU instruments will be promoted, including COSME, Horizon 2020 (notably the INNOSUP calls), the European Cluster Observatory, the KETs Observatory, InnovFin, Start-up Europe initiative, European IPR Helpdesk, European Institute of Innovation and Technologies (EIT), European Joint Undertakings, etc.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL

⁶ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

- 2.1. Under this Call, DG REGIO seeks **expressions of interest from transnational partnerships of regional authorities, which include regional stakeholders (universities, research centres, clusters, SMEs, etc.),** willing to pilot interregional innovation partnerships aimed at facilitating the commercialisation and scale-up of interregional innovation projects and to incentivise business investment.
- 2.2. The expected result of this Call is a **shortlist** of five to ten expressions of interest.
- 2.3. DG REGIO has allocated a total budget of **EUR 1 million to provide technical assistance** directly to the partnerships in addition to other support provided by the Commission services referred to in point 1.11.

3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- 3.1. By the end of 2018, each selected partnership should have defined a **set of actions** to support the **commercialisation and scale-up of** interregional investment projects. Each partnership submitting an application is expected to have already gone through the "Learn" and "Connect" phase and launched actions to complete a "Demonstrate" phase with in-depth analysis and concrete results up to the Technological Readiness Level - TRL5⁷ and TRL6⁸.
- 3.2. By the end of 2018, the selected partnerships should have analysed the financial and legal obstacles to commercialisation and scale-up, and developed cooperation with other EU programmes and initiatives as well as with partnerships already established under other Thematic Areas that are covered by the three Smart Specialisation Platforms.
- 3.3. In order to draw lessons from the pilot projects, there will be a **capitalisation and evaluation exercise** in the first half of 2019 with a particular focus on drawing conclusions concerning (i) the implementation of interregional smart specialisation post 2020; (ii) how to improve collaboration between the European Commission and interregional partnerships; (iii) broader lessons on building up European value chains through interregional cooperation. This exercise will provide the European Commission with evidence to underpin post-2020 policies and programmes.

4. WHO CAN APPLY UNDER THIS CALL? ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- 4.1. An Expression of Interest can be submitted by a partnership made up of statutory regional authorities. Partnerships should be composed of regional authorities from at **least 4 different EU countries** and **represent to the extent possible the whole value-chain** involving representatives of the "quadruple helix": research, business, public administration and end-users from different countries.

⁷ Technology validated in a relevant environment.

⁸ Technology demonstrated in a relevant environment.

4.2. To be considered eligible, the expression of interest will have to meet **all** the following **eligibility criteria**:

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
(1)	The partnerships proposed for the pilot are coherent with smart specialisation strategies established at national or regional level satisfying the relevant regulatory requirements.	Section 2
(2)	A lead partner or equivalent body has been nominated to act as coordinator and be the main contact point with the European Commission.	Section 1.4
(3)	The partnership is currently supported under one of the three existing Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms or has identified a new thematic area of cooperation for developing or reshaping a European value chain.	Section 1.3 and 1.6
(4)	Partnerships should be composed of regional authorities from at least 4 different EU countries and represent as much as possible the whole value-chain involving representatives of the "quadruple helix": research, business, public administration and end-users from different countries.	Section 1.4 and 1.5

5. CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

5.1. The eligible expressions of interest will be assessed against the following **criteria**:

CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
(1)	<u>Rationale</u> – clear and justified explanation for why supporting the thematic interregional partnership, what support is expected and how it will promote commercialisation and scaling up of innovation projects across EU member states.	Section 2
(2)	<u>Engagement</u> – track-record of the involvement of various stakeholders in the development of the partnership and the existing coordination mechanisms.	Section 3
(3)	<u>Preparation status</u> – a description of the learning, connecting and demonstration activities which have already been carried out or foreseen.	Section 3, 4
(4)	<u>Identification of bottlenecks</u> – what bottlenecks are expected during the commercialisation and scale up phase? What further services are needed to make investments happen?	Section 4, 5

6. ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- 6.1. Expressions of Interest will be assessed against the eligibility criteria and shortlisted based on the criteria listed in the paragraph 5.1. of this Call.
- 6.2. The assessment will be carried out by a selection panel consisting of representatives of the European Commission. The final decision on a shortlist will be taken by the European Commission.
- 6.3. Each applicant will be informed about the decision taken.
- 6.4. At this stage of the Call, the shortlisting of an expression of interest does not constitute a binding commitment – either implicit or explicit – on the part of the European Commission to provide support to a partnership.

7. PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

- 7.1. Partnerships willing to submit the expression of interest are requested to complete the application form provided in the Annex 1 of this Call.
- 7.2. The application form shall be completed in English, French, or German.
- 7.3. The expression of interest should be submitted electronically to the following email address: REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu

8. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

- 8.1. The deadline for submitting an expression of interest is 31st October 2017.
- 8.2. Expressions of interest submitted after the date indicated in paragraph 8.1. of this Call will not be considered.

9. CONTACT

- 9.1. In case of any questions, please contact REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu
- 9.2. All information related to this Call will be published online at:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/calls-for-expressions-of-interest/.

Annex 1: Application Form

Call for Expression of Interest for Thematic Partnerships to Pilot Interregional Innovation Partnerships

Please complete this form electronically and send it to the REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu

1. Information about the Applicants													
1.1.	Name of the lead body												
1.2	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%; padding: 5px;">Contact Person for this application</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Name, Last Name</td> <td style="width: 70%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Job title</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Phone (e.g. +32-000000000)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Email</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Contact Person for this application	Name, Last Name			Job title			Phone (e.g. +32-000000000)			Email	
Contact Person for this application	Name, Last Name												
	Job title												
	Phone (e.g. +32-000000000)												
	Email												
1.3	Thematic area of cooperation												
1.4	Leading Region, partner Regions and number of total EU countries represented												
1.5	<table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%; padding: 5px;">Representatives of the quadruple helix within the partnership (name, country)</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Academia/research centres:</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Industry sector:</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Governments/public institutions:</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">End-users' representatives from different countries:</td> </tr> </table>	Representatives of the quadruple helix within the partnership (name, country)	Academia/research centres:		Industry sector:		Governments/public institutions:		End-users' representatives from different countries:				
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	Industry sector:												
	Governments/public institutions:												
	End-users' representatives from different countries:												
1.6	Is the partnership already a beneficiary of support from any of the three existing Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms (if yes, please indicate the name of the partnership and the Thematic Area).												

1.7	Is the partnership already a beneficiary of support from the European Union budget (if yes, please indicate the programme/instrument)?	
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2. Rational and linkage with regional smart specialisation strategies

Please provide a clear and justified explanation why support to your research and business collaboration activities at interregional level can add value to smart specialisation strategies in the chosen Thematic Area. Explain how the commercialisation and scaling up of the partnership's activities will contribute to the creation or reshaping of a EU value chain?

(max 500 words)

3. Partnership maturity

Please explain the existing mechanisms for partnership coordination and the track-record of the partnership. Please explain the extent to which learning, connecting and demonstration activities have already been carried out as well as their main outcomes.

(max 500 words)

4. Identification of bottlenecks

Please explain which bottlenecks to commercialisation and scale-up have been identified and the possible solutions already identified by the partnership, where appropriate.

(max 500 words)

5. Potential synergies with other EU initiatives and projects

Please explain how other EU programmes and initiatives such as Horizon 2020, INTERREG, EIT KICs, Joint Undertakings, European Innovation Partnerships and macro-regional strategies can be beneficial to your activities and how your potential involvement in these could be further exploited e.g. which projects you have already identified to establish synergies or what kind of results/deliverables can be helpful for your partnership?

(max 500 words)

6. Please use this space to provide any other relevant comments/ clarifications, if necessary

(max 500 words)