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Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME)

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
Clusters Go International

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COSME Work Programme 2016

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	4
1.1. Introduction	4
1.2. Policy Context	4
2. OBJECTIVE(S) – THEME(S) – ACTIVITIES – OUTPUTS	8
3. TIMETABLE	16
4. BUDGET AVAILABLE AND FUNDING OF PROJECTS	17
5. ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS	17
6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	17
6.1. Eligible applicants	17
6.2. Eligible consortia	19
6.3. Implementation period	19
6.4. Other conditions	19
7. EXCLUSION CRITERIA	20
7.1. Exclusion from participation:	20
7.2. Exclusion from award:	21
7.3. Supporting documents	21
8. SELECTION CRITERIA	21
8.1. Financial capacity	21
8.2. Operational capacity	22
9. AWARD CRITERIA	23
10. LEGAL COMMITMENTS	25
11. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCEDURES	26
12. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS	26
12.1. General principles	26
12.2. Funding forms	27
12.3. Payment arrangements:	31
12.4. Pre-financing guarantee	31

13. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:.....	31
14. PUBLICITY	32
14.1 By the beneficiaries.....	32
14.2 By EASME	32
15. DATA PROTECTION	32
16. PROCEDURE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS	33

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 partially the COSME Work Programme 2016 adopted on 18 January 2016⁴ and amended on 14 July 2016⁵.

1.2. Policy Context

In a globalised world, SMEs need to be able to confront increasing competition from developed and emerging economies and to plug into the new market opportunities these countries will provide. There is a direct link between internationalisation and increased performance of SMEs. International activities reinforce growth, enhance competitiveness and support the long-term sustainability of companies.

In order to unlock these opportunities, SMEs need to find the right partners to develop and produce globally competitive products and services. This calls for new and strategic forms of international cooperation that are often difficult for individual SMEs to manage on their own. SMEs have to increasingly integrate their activities into global value chains in order to become and remain competitive. As global value chains, by their nature, involve or are even controlled and managed by foreign companies, it is often difficult for European SMEs to link to them.

Clusters can help SMEs by acting as real "springboards" for getting access to global value chains and developing long-term strategic partnerships. SMEs benefit from specialised business support services of cluster organisations, like the organisation of international study visits, partnering or

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(2016)63 of 18.1.2016 on the adoption of the work programme for 2016 and the financing for the implementation of the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises.

⁵ Commission Implementing Decision C(2016)4344 final of 14.07.2016 amending the Commission Implementing Decision C(2016)63 concerning the adoption of the work programme 2016 and the financing for the implementation of the Programme for the Competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises.

“matchmaking” missions. These services enable SMEs to find international partners for research and prototyping as well as to bring products and services to new markets. Cluster organisations can thus support SMEs to identify growth opportunities worldwide, raise their excellence, innovation capacity and their overall competitiveness.

This action will contribute to fostering the development of 'European Strategic Cluster Partnerships – Going International' (ESCP-4i), i.e. European meta-clusters, with a view to help SMEs find easier access to global value chains and engage in long-term cooperation with strategic partners in third countries. This is a top priority for European actions as highlighted in the Commission Communication 'For a European Industrial Renaissance'⁶. This Communication identifies efforts to increase the internationalisation of SMEs and their integration into global value chains as a particular priority and acknowledges the need to better exploit the “potential of clusters to create favourable innovation ecosystems for groups of mutually reinforcing SMEs”. This action will reinforce also European Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker's priorities for growth and jobs as described in his political guidelines "A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change"⁷. These guidelines call notably "to complete the internal market in products and services and make it the launch pad for our companies and industry to thrive in the global economy (...)".

This action contributes to implement the Cluster Internationalisation Programme for SMEs under COSME which represents one of the key pillars of the European cluster policy agenda of the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs of the European Commission (DG GROWTH). The other focus areas of European cluster policy aim at facilitating interregional cluster collaboration and cross-sectoral value chains and promoting excellence in cluster management to improve the quality of services to SMEs members.

This action builds upon the 2014 "**Clusters Go International**" call for proposals (COS-CLUSTER-2014-3-03)⁸ that contributed to launch the first round of projects in January 2016 encouraging cluster organisations across Europe to establish 'European Strategic Cluster Partnerships-Going International' (ESCP-4i) and work concretely together to exploit synergies as well as to develop a joint internationalisation strategy for the benefit of their SMEs. This 1st call for proposals has supported the establishment of up to 26 Partnerships (ESCP-4i)⁹ including 15 co-funded projects gathering about 150 cluster organisations across 23 European countries and reaching out to more than 17.000 SMEs across Europe. The Partnerships are active in various industrial and cross-sectoral areas including health, aerospace, mobility and logistics, agrifood, energy, marine and environment, packaging, materials and photonics, ICT, construction and sports. The partnerships target economic cooperation with third countries, of which the main ones include Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico and USA.

This action further exploits synergies with other key initiatives of the Cluster Internationalisation Programme for SMEs that have been launched to promote transnational cluster cooperation within and beyond Europe with a view to better support SMEs in global competition, including:

- Firstly, the **European Cluster Collaboration Platform** (ECCP) which currently counts over

⁶ COM(2014)14 Final (see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0014&from=EN>).

⁷ *Political Guidelines for the next European Commission*, 2014, fourth priority dedicated to "A Deeper and Fairer Internal Market with a Strengthened Industrial Base" (p.7) see at: https://ec.europa.eu/priorities/sites/beta-political/files/juncker-political-guidelines-speech_en_0.pdf.

⁸ See <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme-projects>.

⁹ See ESCP-4i list at: <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/escp-list> and at <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/eu-cluster-partnerships>.

450 registered cluster organisations from across Europe. It represents the main instrument for European cluster organisations to profile themselves, exchange experiences and identify potential partners for transnational cooperation within and beyond Europe. The ECCP web-based platform shall be used as the online dissemination platform to promote activities and results of the "European Strategic Cluster Partnerships- Going international" that are to be established through this action. Applicants to this new action shall prepare to provide information material to the coordinator of the ECCP platform for their Partnership to be promoted and disseminated via the platform;

- Secondly, a number of specific **cluster matchmaking events** are being organised mainly by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform to promote closer cluster cooperation with partners within and outside Europe in areas of mutual interest. Five international cluster matchmaking events¹⁰ were organised in 2016 including with third countries (e.g. USA at Hannover Messe, Taiwan at Computex and the European Innovation Week, Iran in the context of the EU Economic Mission led by the EU Commissioner Bienkowska, Mexico at Green Expo in Mexico City, Brazil at Pollutec in Lyon) and one European event in Brussels in conjunction with the 2016 European Cluster Conference¹¹. Further cluster matchmaking events will be organised in 2017 and 2018 by the ECCP and Commission services. The "European Strategic Cluster Partnerships – Going International" to be established or strengthened through this action will be invited to participate on a voluntary basis to such forthcoming matchmaking events. Each Partnership undertaking activities under Strand 2 of this action (Implementation phase) can allocate a budget to participate in at least two international cluster matchmaking events organised in third countries and/or in Europe by the European Commission services;
- Thirdly, **policy exchanges** with third countries are being initiated and a first Cooperation Arrangement on Clusters was signed between DG GROWTH and the US Department of Commerce (DOC) in April 2015 in Washington, D.C. in parallel to the 6th US-EU SME Workshop organised in the framework of the Transatlantic Economic Council. The objective of such exchanges is to promote cluster cooperation with national authorities from third countries so as to facilitate linkages between clusters and equivalent organisations in mutual economic and strategic interest.

Furthermore, the present call for proposals is targeting actions that shall exploit cooperation potential and business opportunities in the context of current and forthcoming actions funded by the Partnership Instrument (FPI)¹², a financial instrument promoting EU and mutual interests with strategic partner countries, as part of the EU's instruments for financing external action and Regulation N° 234/2014, such as the 'Low Carbon Business Action in Brazil and Mexico' (LCBA)¹³.

The LCBA aims to establish Cooperation Partnerships Agreements between EU businesses and Brazilian and Mexican businesses to support commercially viable projects promoting the take-up of low carbon technologies. The implementation of LCBA phase 1 started in the second half of 2015, involved the participation of clusters and contributed to provide a mapping of the current situation in the green economy sector in Brazil and Mexico and to organise a series of businesses matchmaking events between Brazil/Mexican and European SMEs. This shall lead to signing Cooperation Partnership Agreements (CPAs) that should develop into concrete projects with

¹⁰ See matchmaking events at: <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/event-calendar/eccp-eu-supported>.

¹¹ See at: <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/event-calendar/eu-cluster-matchmaking-event-brussels-30-november-2016>.

¹² See http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/what-we-do-/partnership_instrument_en.htm

¹³ See <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/international-cooperation/low-carbon-business-actions>.

technical assistance provided by phase 2 of the LCBA. LCBA will thus effectively contribute to the exchange and uptake of low emission technology through industrial cooperation between companies in Brazil/Mexico and the European Union (EU) in the common effort to address the global challenge of climate change.

The general context above applies to all phases' and strands' applications. Furthermore Strand 1.b applications, which are reserved to focus on a specific thematic area, are supported by an additional specific context as detailed below:

Specific context for **Strand 1.b** applications supporting preparatory actions in the field of Earth Observation applications

Earth Observation (EO) refers to the use of remote sensing technologies – such as satellites and dedicated measurement systems – to monitor the state and evolution of our planet on land, at sea and in the atmosphere.

The European Union has developed an independent earth observation capacity through the implementation of the Copernicus programme¹⁴, previously known as GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security). Copernicus delivers operational data and information services on a full, free and open basis. These services cover a broad range of application areas, from climate change monitoring, sustainable development, transport and mobility to regional and local planning, maritime surveillance, energy, agriculture and health – to name only a few.

In the context of the digital revolution and of the "big data" paradigm shift, the exploitation of Earth Observation systems carries extraordinary business potential for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). By making the vast majority of its data, analyses, forecasts and maps freely available, Copernicus creates unprecedented opportunities for business innovation through the development of value-added applications and services tailored to the needs of specific groups of users. This segment of the earth observation industry is traditionally referred to as the "downstream sector".¹⁵

According to the European Association of Remote Sensing Companies (EARSC), more than 95% of the EU downstream sector is composed of SMEs¹⁶. The number of start-ups and innovative companies engaged in the development and sale of value added services and products drawing on Copernicus is steadily on the rise. It is estimated that the programme could create up to 48,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2030.

Earth Observation is by nature global and there is a growing demand from EU partners to benefit from Copernicus data. This opens up opportunities for European downstream companies, which have developed expertise in devising innovative, tailor-made products and services based on Copernicus. The development of the global downstream market is of sizeable importance for the EU, accounting for 58% of the global space economy¹⁷. The maturity of the EO market worldwide remains highly dependent on economic and technological factors. North America is by far the most developed market, followed by Europe and Australia. However, this trend is evolving rapidly due to political and technological developments in other parts of the world, which create additional demand for EO applications and attract new players in the market.

¹⁴ See www.copernicus.eu.

¹⁵ See Copernicus Market Report, PwC November 2016, available at http://www.copernicus.eu/sites/default/files/library/Copernicus_Market_Report_11_2016.pdf.

¹⁶ EARSC, 2015, European Geospatial services.

¹⁷ OECD, 2014, The Space Economy at a Glance 2014. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/sti/the-space-economy-at-a-glance-2014-9789264217294-en.htm>.

The European EO industry is showing strong interest in developing international activities and capturing new markets. However, it remains confronted to the traditional obstacles faced by European SMEs willing to expand into third countries, including challenges linked to different business and regulatory environments and to the identification of suitable local partners.

The Space Strategy for Europe¹⁸ adopted on 26 October 2016 highlighted the Commission's intention to further support space business internationalisation by mobilising existing instruments to help European companies, particularly clusters and networks of SMEs, access international markets. Strand 1.b is intended to contribute to this objective.

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

2.1. General and Specific Objectives

The main objective of the action is to intensify cluster and business network collaboration across European countries and also across sectorial boundaries and to support the establishment of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships to lead international cluster cooperation in fields of strategic interest towards third countries beyond Europe and notably in support of the development of emerging industries.

By reinforcing cluster and business network cooperation and supporting the shaping of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships-Going International (ESCP-4i) (i.e. European meta-clusters) in a more strategic manner at European level, this action will help European SMEs access new global value chains and take a leading position globally.

This action focuses on the promotion of cluster internationalisation where interested consortia have the opportunity to develop and implement a joint internationalisation strategy and support SME internationalisation towards third countries beyond Europe.

The action will be implemented by consortia of organisations that are interested in establishing and running a 'European Strategic Cluster Partnership-Going International' (ESCP-4i). The Partnerships are expected to develop a joint 'European' strategic vision with a global perspective and common goals towards specific third markets.

In addition, the Partnerships are expected to demonstrate swift adaptability to future developments in international trade and coherence of their strategic priorities with EU strategies, notably as regards trade policy.

"European Strategic Cluster Partnerships – Going International (ESCP-4i)" are characterised by the following principles:

1. Being **European**, meaning ESCP-4is must be composed of a minimum of three partners all established in EU Member States or countries participating in the COSME programme under Article 6 of the COSME Regulation (in line with the specific eligibility criteria in section 6).

¹⁸ COM(2016)705 final.

2. Being **Strategic**, meaning the ESCP-4i's members aim to develop and implement a joint internationalisation strategy with common goals and fostering complementarities between them, promoting cooperation across related industries and sectoral boundaries notably in support of emerging industries.

Concerning the focus of cross-sectorial cooperation and outreach to related industries, applicants may seek inspiration from the work of the European Cluster Observatory, which has identified, analysed and reported on several “emerging industries” such as in the “European Cluster Panorama 2016”¹⁹. Yet, such identified emerging industries or growth trends must not be followed without reflection. Instead of merely prioritising new technologies or industrial growth areas where there might be little pre-existing strength, applicants should seek to unlock complementarities across existing and related economic activities²⁰.

3. Representing **Cluster(s)** through cluster organisations or equivalent business network organisations that have an own independent legal entity. Each Partnership member must also be registered on or have submitted a registration request to the European Cluster Collaboration Platform²¹ with a detailed profile of its cluster or network;
4. Forming a **Partnership**, with the aim to set-up a Partnership Agreement engaging ESCP-4i members to develop common actions and setting out the modalities of cooperation between them. The ESCP-4i members commit to develop a roadmap for implementation with a long-term cooperation agenda to foster their sustainability of the Partnership, notably beyond the lifetime of the project funded under COSME.
5. Working towards **Going International** by developing and implementing a joint 'European' strategy for going international beyond Europe. The ESCP-4is strive to successfully support the internationalisation of their SME members towards specific third countries, and/or attracting strategic foreign direct investment and cooperation partners and/or securing critical imports, knowledge and technologies with a view to support growth, jobs and investment in Europe.

The "European Strategic Cluster Partnership - Going International" (ESCP-4i) label will be awarded to all applicant consortia that fulfil the ESCP-4i characteristics as defined above and express their interest and commitment in developing them by signing a "ESCP-4i" Charter²² which commits the Partnership members to comply with the above principles.

The "ESCP-4i" label will be awarded to all eligible and successful consortia, including non-funded proposals put on the reserve list of this call for proposals after the evaluation. All currently labelled ESCP-4is, except those already funded under Strand 2 (implementation phase) of the 2014-2015

¹⁹ See at <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/20381>. In the search for regional industrial strongholds with similar or related competence profiles, the European Cluster Observatory's cluster mapping of concentrations of economic activity in 38 sectors across Europe's regions on the basis of employment statistics as well as for 10 “emerging industries” may also be useful sources (available at: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cluster/observatory_en).

²⁰ See "The Smart Guide to Cluster Policy" at: <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/16903/attachments/1/translations>.

²¹ See at: <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/>.

²² The "European Strategic Cluster Partnership – Going International (ESCP-4i)" Charter is a document that confirms the interest and commitment of the Partnership members in developing the main characteristics of an "ESCP-4i" as indicated under the section above on "*European Strategic Cluster Partnerships – Going International (ESCP-4i) are characterised by the following elements*" on p. 9 of this call for proposals. This document must be signed by all the Partnership members to commit them to comply with these characteristics.

"Cluster Go International" call²³, are invited to apply to this call for proposals to renew their label. Unsuccessful applicants (not funded or not put on a reserve list) which were previously labelled will lose their label.

The non-EU funded "ESCP-4is" will therefore still benefit from visibility and dissemination support about their activities and results through the European Cluster Collaboration Platform for a duration of two years. They will also be invited to participate in European events promoting learning and cross-fertilisation between the Partnerships. They will equally be invited to participate in international cluster matchmaking events organised in European and third countries by the European Commission services and EASME, with up to half of the seats available for these missions reserved for ESCP-4is members.

The present call for proposals is targeting actions for two phases, divided in three Strands. **Applicant consortia can submit proposals for one Strand only and applicant organisations can be part of maximum one consortium per Phase.**

Preparatory phase

- **Strand 1.a** will support the establishment of European Strategic Cluster Partnership – Going International (ESCP-4i) open to a wide range of European industrial sectors and value chains, except the one targeted in Strand 1.b.
- **Strand 1.b** will support the establishment of European Strategic Cluster Partnership – Going International (ESCP-4i) specifically for clusters involved in earth observation (EO) applications. Applicants under Strand 1.b are encouraged to build on the cross-sectorial dimension of the EO downstream market and on the diversity of application domains, in particular by involving different clusters and business network organisations engaged in the EO value-chain.

Implementation phase

- **Strand 2** will support the initial implementation, testing and further development of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships - Going International (ESCP-4i) including those labelled "ESCP-4i" through the previous 'Cluster Go International' call COS-Cluster-2014-3-03 (except those already funded under the Strand 2 of the 2014 call for proposals pursuing the same or related objectives) and similar existing pan-European alliances of cluster and business network organisations complying with the characteristics of an ESCP-4i as described above.

Sustainability of Partnerships (ESCP-4i) names and acronyms: whereas the Partnerships' name and acronym used in the context of the Strand 1 (Preparatory phase) of the previous "Cluster Go International" action 2014-2015 can be re-used for external communication purposes in the development of actions under an 'Implementation phase' to ensure the continuity of the branding and visibility strategy of the Partnerships, they will have to be slightly changed for application and grant management purposes. As regards the "Voluntary" Partnerships (ESCP-4i) not funded but labelled by DG GROWTH of the European Commission following the 2014 "Cluster Go International" call for proposals, they can re-use the same name and acronym for their proposal.

²³ Call for proposals 'Cluster Go International' (2014), COS-CLUSTER-2014-3-03, European Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, 26p. Strand 2 in the call for proposals 'Cluster Go International' (2014) equates to Strand 2 (Implementation phase) in the call for proposals 'Clusters Go International' (2016).

2.2. Description of the eligible activities

Preparatory phase (Strands 1.a and 1.b)

Under the Preparatory phase, applicants are invited to propose preparatory actions that contribute to establish a "European Strategic Cluster Partnership – Going International" respecting all the characteristics defined above (see section 2.1) to develop a joint internationalisation strategy for the Partnership with common goals towards specific third markets and a roadmap for implementation facilitating the internationalisation of its SME members.

Mandatory actions under the 'Preparatory phase' are:

- Dissemination about all project activities, news, events, testimonials and results shall be channelled through the dedicated partnership section of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)²⁴. In case of the development of another website for project implementation purposes, all information on project activities, news, events, testimonials and results must be fully transferred to the ECCP website on an on-going basis.
- Learning and monitoring activities, such as promoting exchanges between Partnerships and enabling cross-fertilisation and learning from their successful and unsuccessful experiences as well as monitoring activities measuring the outcomes of the Partnership based on a clear set of performance indicators (see section 2.3). Representatives of the Partnership must participate in one European event per year promoting the learning and monitoring activities carried out by the different Partnerships.

Possible actions under the 'Preparatory phase' can include the following (non-exhaustive list):

- Identification of initial strategic partners across Europe (e.g. by conducting a complementarity, compatibility and readiness check in terms of strategy, skills, language capabilities, etc. to find the appropriate partners);
- Partnership building (e.g. through training/coaching activities on building collaboration, coordinating and leading a Partnership, and organising cluster visits for Partnership members and their SMEs, regional actors and other relevant stakeholders, including technology centres and science parks);
- Legal advice for developing a legal representation for the consortium (e.g. by exploring the need for a coordination or management structure, to establish a legal entity and define its form, coordination and mandate);
- Identity shaping such as the development of a joint communication/marketing and branding strategy, development of a common logo and visual identity of the Partnership;
- Intelligence gathering (e.g. studies/analyses on market insights, value-chains and global mega trends²⁵ and opportunities; knowledge about competing players, relative positioning, market trends and opportunities – and defining the added value of the Partnership's

²⁴ www.clustercollaboration.eu.

²⁵ The European Cluster Observatory will publish a “Global Mega Trends Report” in 2015 that will be available at the EU Cluster Portal: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/cluster/index_en.htm.

combined competencies in relation to this; identification of cooperation opportunities to target in third countries (non-COSME participating countries); initial exploratory visits to third countries or invitation of experts from third countries);

- Collaboration planning (e.g. coaching/advisory support for formulating a joint strategic vision and common goals; facilitating commitment/preparation to engage in cooperation relating to resources, staff, knowledge, IPRs; strategically-oriented consultation of cluster SME members and other relevant stakeholders (e.g; technology centers as appropriate) to assess their needs and interest in cooperation and target third countries with focus on high value objectives, including soft-landing facilities, direct investment facilitation mechanisms, business potential of product markets, leading edge product markets, positioning in global value-chains, next generation of relevant products; defining the scope and implementation modalities of common actions; other relevant activities associating strategy development and operational collaboration actions with cluster actors, particularly SMEs);
- Joint actions planning (e.g. coaching/advisory support for mentoring SMEs to identify international opportunities in strategic third countries; generating ideas for collaboration with third countries and identifying the joint actions to be developed and implemented in a second phase taking into account the readiness of cluster SME members to engage in cooperation with third countries).

Expected results and deliverables for the preparatory phase (Strands 1.a and 1.b)

The consortium members are expected to develop and submit a joint internationalisation strategy defining a joint 'European' strategic vision with a global perspective and common goals and actions towards specific third markets as well as an implementation roadmap.

The **joint internationalisation strategy** must comprise:

- a **Partnership Agreement** respecting the principles of the "European Strategic Cluster Partnerships – Going International" defined above, identifying the Partnership members, committing them to develop common actions, setting out the modalities of cooperation between them, and expressing clearly their interests and plans for engaging in international cluster cooperation together.

The Partnership Agreement must include a long-term cooperation agenda with a view to fostering a sustainable Partnership, notably beyond the lifetime of a possible project funded under COSME. In particular, it must indicate which additional public-private co-financing is envisaged to be mobilised for the development of the international plan during a possible project funded under COSME and beyond. It must also include Letters of Intent by selected clusters, SMEs and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. technology centres) confirming their readiness to engage in internationalization activities in the context of the Partnership internationalisation strategy and as outlined in the implementation roadmap.

- an **internationalisation strategy plan** providing (in a note of maximum 10 pages) a detailed description of the purpose of the collaboration and its strategic objectives through a SWOT analysis; the different fields of competences and the envisaged complementarities between the Partnership members; the expected advantages, the minimum two selected targeted third countries (i.e. non-COSME participating countries), the cooperation interest in terms of thematic area/application/technologies per targeted third country; the potential international cooperation partners; the expected mutual added value and interest among the Partnership members and the

international partners; the expected economic impact expressed through quantitative indicators, notably in terms of growth, jobs and investment in Europe for the Partnership SME members²⁶.

The plan must present how the Partnership will seek and exploit synergies with the inter-regional activities, notably further cluster cooperation funded under COSME e.g. as through the future “European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for smart specialisation investment (ESCP-S3)²⁷ or the European Territorial Cooperation Regulation (INTERREG) and the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF), e.g. in the context of smart specialisation strategies as well as the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, notably the Horizon 2020 INNOSUP-1 action for “Cluster facilitated projects for new industrial value chains”²⁸. To this end, the Partnership members shall therefore demonstrate how their approach has the potential to act as a catalyst in contributing to and/or being leveraged by other activities supported under COSME, Horizon 2020 and European regional funds.

Moreover, the plan must also include:

- background information about previous international activities and cross-sectorial cooperation activities of each Partnership member and between them;
 - benchmarking information on existing international cooperation initiatives directed at similar target countries and thematic areas;
 - a joint branding and marketing strategy statement (incl. proposal for a joint logo) and plan.
- an **implementation roadmap** providing a comprehensive overview of the joint activities foreseen to be developed with a detailed plan for implementation highlighting the different roles and steps aimed at facilitating the internationalisation of SME members (in particular those pre-identified and that have signed a Letter of Intent as described in the Partnership Agreement section above).

Implementation phase (Strand 2)

Strand 2 shall support the initial implementation and testing of the joint internationalisation strategy proposed by applicant consortia. It shall foster the further development of the “European Strategic Cluster Partnerships – Going International” by building cooperation activities with international partners in minimum two third countries (i.e. non-COSME participating countries) or world regions and initiating business partnerships for European SMEs in each target market.

Mandatory actions under Strand 2 are:

- Development and signing of cooperation agreements both at intermediary organisations level and business level with international partners in each target market. This must include the signing of:
 - (a) cooperation agreements between the Partnership and international business and/or research intermediaries (incl. cluster or business network organisations, academia, technology centres and research or economic development organisations) in each target country and

²⁶ The European Cluster Observatory published a “Global Mega Trends Report” in 2015 which is available at the EU Cluster Portal: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/cluster/index_en.htm.

²⁷ To be selected through a separate call for proposals under COSME early 2017.

²⁸ See at: <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/innosup-01-2016-2017.html>

- (b) business partnership agreements (or equivalent formal cooperation documents) to develop joint collaborative project between the Partnership SME members and business and other relevant stakeholders from third countries, eventually leading to increase exports, investment opportunities and international ventures generating employment for European businesses;
- Dissemination about all project activities, news, events, testimonials and results to be channelled through the dedicated partnership section of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)²⁹. In case of the development of another website for project implementation purposes, all information on project activities, news, events, testimonials and results must be fully transferred to the ECCP website on an on-going basis.
 - Preparation of an exit strategy for the Partnership with a long-term cooperation agenda by involving the different relevant stakeholders (eg. local, regional or national public authorities) with the aim to foster the Partnership sustainability, notably beyond the lifetime of the project funded under COSME;
 - Learning and monitoring activities, such as promoting exchanges between Partnerships and enabling cross-fertilisation and learning from their successful and unsuccessful experiences as well as monitoring activities measuring the outcomes of the Partnership based on a clear set of performance indicators (see section 2.3) including business and innovation oriented results derived from their international cluster cooperation activities. The monitoring activities shall be linked to the cooperation goals of the Partnerships. Representatives of the Partnership must participate in one European event per year promoting the learning and monitoring activities carried out by the different Partnerships.

Possible actions under Strand 2 (Implementation phase) can include the following (non-exhaustive list):

- Cooperation building with third countries aimed, notably, at identifying the right partners in third countries, organising minimum one tailored fact-finding mission in each target market, joining relevant networks and hosting tailored fact-finding missions in Europe for international partners;
- Tailored identity shaping and joint promotional activities such as the development of a joint communication/marketing and branding strategy adapted to the target third countries; study on the feasibility and assistance needed for establishing an "Ambassador" function or opening a joint representation office in third countries (e.g. legal advice, identification of a permanent representative); study on the feasibility of establishing a (permanent) representation in Europe for hosting international delegations; exploration of the possibilities for using existing regional/national offices abroad for supporting joint promotion and visibility;
- International matchmaking activities with third countries involving also the cluster Partnership SME members with the aim to initiate concrete business and research & technology collaboration projects, such as through the organisation of international business matchmaking missions and site visits in third countries and in Europe, facilitating C2C (cluster-to-cluster) and B2B tailored meetings; conducting follow-up activities on cooperation potential identified at matchmaking events, etc. Such missions abroad shall focus on economic impact for companies, have specific, individualised B2B programmes

²⁹ www.clustercollaboration.eu.

organised for each company, prepare possible “return” visits of foreign partners to Europe, promote common identity of the European clusters through the Partnership; evaluate economic impacts after 6 and 12 months;

- In addition, each Partnership can allocate a budget, within the scope of Strand 2 projects and without relying on additional COSME funding, to participate in at least two international cluster matchmaking events to be organised in third countries and/or in Europe by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and/or supported by the European Commission services or EASME;
- Operational collaboration activities with third countries, supporting notably the implementation of business partnership agreements between the Partnership SME members and business and other relevant stakeholders from third countries to develop joint collaborative projects with an international partner and build the projects into viable and bankable proposals for investments, such as by conducting technical and financial feasibility studies ; supporting the identification of relevant financing sources; funding for pilot/experimental practical collaboration actions involving SME members and actions providing various types of assistance for SME members in order to a) identify tailored business and innovation cooperation opportunities in target third countries, b) prepare joint business plans with an international partner, c) draft legally binding international collaboration agreement, and d) access available funding opportunities for internationalisation.

Expected results and deliverables for the implementation phase (Strand 2):

- Reports on collaboration activities developed and implemented with international partners in each target market; fact-finding mission reports; matchmaking mission reports with details on potential cooperation actions identified and initiated through international cluster and business matchmaking events; reports on possible pilot operational collaboration projects developed between Partnership SME members and international partners; proposed IPR collaboration and standards setting initiatives;
- Signature of minimum one cooperation agreement/ Memorandum of Understanding between the Partnership members and one international partner for each target market, targeting at least two third countries or world regions. Each cooperation agreement should include a concept note outlining the intended cooperation objective and activities.
- Signature of minimum two business partnership agreements to develop collaborative projects between the Partnership SME members and business or other relevant stakeholders from third countries for each target market. Each business partnership agreement should include a concept note outlining the intended collaborative project and planned activities, and detailing the need for customised assistance for the implementation of further operational collaborative activities with a view to lead to increased exports and investment opportunities generating employment for European businesses;
- A monitoring scoreboard with verifiable indicators of the project results and their expected impact such as increased exports, increased jobs in Europe, increased visibility of European SMEs in foreign markets, innovation projects (including patents), new or adapted products and services, critical imports secured and direct foreign investments or cooperation partners attracted, or expertise in support of these activities;
- A mid-term report on the cooperation activities undertaken and lessons learned, with a monitoring scoreboard as set out above and practical recommendations for improving the implementation of the strategy, at the end of the first year of implementation;

- A final report on the cooperation activities undertaken and lessons learned, with a monitoring scoreboard as set out above and practical recommendations for improving the implementation of the strategy at the end of the project with a plan for a long-term cooperation agenda fostering a sustainable Partnership beyond the lifetime of the project.

2.3. Indicators for the proposed action

The actions to be implemented under the 'Preparatory phase' and the 'Implementation phase' will be assessed, as a minimum, against the following performance indicators:

- Number of cluster organisations and business networks from different COSME participating countries having benefited from the supported actions;
- Number of Partnership agreements resulting from the supported actions;
- Number of events (workshops/ matchmaking events/ working group meetings) organised;
- Number of cluster and business matchmaking meetings supported;
- Number of SMEs having directly or indirectly benefited from the supported actions, resulting in cooperation projects,
- Increase in the percentage of the turnover from international activities, and employment in Europe, of the SMEs having benefited directly and indirectly from the supported actions, as measured through a survey by the end of the action;
- Impact of the supported actions in terms of number of resulting cooperation projects between international cluster and business network partners.

Projects must report on these indicators, but applicants should also propose further performance indicators to be integrated into their monitoring plan, which will be discussed and adjusted to each strand activities upon discussion with EASME and the Commission services at the beginning of the project.

3. TIMETABLE

Stages	Dates
a) Deadline for submitting applications	23/05/2017, 17:00 h Brussels time
b) Evaluation period*	June and July 2017
c) Information to applicants*	July-August 2017
d) Signature of grant agreements*	November 2017
e) Starting date of the action*	November-December 2017

* indicative

4. BUDGET AVAILABLE AND FUNDING OF PROJECTS

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects is estimated at EUR 5.790.000 divided as follows:

- For Strand 1.b: EUR 400,000 and
- For Strands 1.a and 2: EUR 5,390,000.

The maximum grant per project will be EUR 200,000 per project for Strands 1.a and 1.b. The maximum grant per project for Strand 2 will be EUR 448,750.

EASME expects to fund two proposals for Strand 1.b, nine proposals for Strand 1.a and eight proposals for Strand 2.

If there are no sufficient proposals passing the overall and individual thresholds of the award criteria in Strand 1.b, the budget allocated can be used to fund proposals in reserve lists in Strand 1.a or Strand 2. EASME also reserves the right to readjust the estimated budget between Strands 1.a and 2.

The grant is limited to a maximum reimbursement rate of 75% of **eligible costs**.

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:

- Established in EU Member States and countries participating in the COSME programme pursuant Article 6 of the COSME Regulation³⁰, according to the specific provisions applicable to each Strand as described in section 6.2;
- forming a consortium;
- all representing a cluster organisation or a business network organisation involved in supporting the enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters and providing or channelling specialised and customised businesses support services to stimulate innovation activities, especially in SMEs, in compliance with the coverage of innovation clusters given in the section 1.2 (e), 1.3 (s) and Annex I in the “EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation”³¹;
- registered or planned to be registered on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP).

Applicant organisations must be independent legal entities. They can be fully or partly public or private bodies; private bodies must be properly constituted and registered under national law.

Affiliated entities, 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.

In addition, for **Stand 1**:

- Eligible applicants under **Strand 1.b** are cluster and business network organisations involved in the development and provision of downstream applications and services building on earth observation (EO) data, such as geo-information services, value-added

³⁰ 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.

³¹ 2014/C 198/01. According to this definition: *‘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;*

See at: [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) with further information available at http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/modernisation/rdi_framework_en.pdf and http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/legislation/horizontal.html amending the Community Framework (2006/C 323/01 see at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:323:0001:0026:en:PDF>).

applications based partly or fully on earth observation data and information, or relevant information and communication technologies and applications. Applicant consortia may also include cluster organisations or business network organisations from specific application domains (e.g. agriculture, energy, environment, transport, health, insurance, tourism, etc.)³².

For the purpose of assessing their eligibility, applicants have to submit:

- A description of each cluster organisation or business network organisation involved as a partner in the project demonstrating that it is involved in supporting the enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters and providing or channelling specialised and customised businesses support services to stimulate innovation activities, especially in SMEs, in compliance with the coverage of innovation clusters given in the section 1.2 (e), 1.3 (s) and Annex I in the “EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation”³³;
- A link to the complete cluster profile of each applicant registered on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)³⁴ or a declaration on their honour that a cluster profile has been submitted to the ECCP for those planned to be registered on it.

6.2. Eligible consortia

Applicant organisations must form consortia composed of at least three different cluster or business network organisations.

For all Strands consortia must be composed of at least three legal entities established in three different COSME participating countries, among which at least two EU Members States.

6.3 Implementation period

The project duration must be between 12 and 24 months.

Applications for projects scheduled to run for less than 12 months will not be accepted.

Applications for projects under the 'Preparatory phase' scheduled to run for more than 24 months will not be accepted.

Applications for projects under the 'Implementation phase' scheduled to run for a longer period than 24 months can be considered based on duly justified arguments.

6.4 Other conditions

Applicant consortia in Strand 2 will have to submit with their proposal a complete description of their **joint internationalisation** strategy, ready to be implemented, including the Partnership Agreement, international strategy plan and implementation roadmap as described in section 2.2 of this call.

It has to be noted that ESCP-4is in all Strands must not target cooperation activities with third countries that are subject to embargoes or sanctions imposed by the EU and/or its Member States. The activities of the ESCP-4is must be fully in line with the EU sanction policy and its restrictive

³² An indicative list of Copernicus/EO application domains is available at <http://copernicus.eu/main/application-domains>

³³ Please see note 35.

³⁴ Cluster organisations can register their cluster profile at <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/user/register> (a print-out of the cluster profile of all applicants shall be submitted with the application).

measures in force³⁵. In particular, ESCP-4is must not target countries that are subject to arms/dual use items embargoes imposed by the EU and/or its Member States. The activities of the ESCP-4is must be fully in line with Council Regulation (EC) No 428/2009 on the control of exports, transfer, brokering and transit of dual-use items.

Applicant consortia can apply for one strand only, i.e. only strand 1.a, 1.b or 2, and eligible organisations can be part of maximum one applicant consortium for each phase.

Applicant consortia eligible to apply under strand 1.b are not eligible to apply to strand 1.a.

Applicant consortia must verify that their members are not part of another application under the same phase and not part of more than one application under the other phase.

Applicant consortia currently funded under Strand 2 (Implementation phase) of the 2014 call for proposal 'Cluster Go International' (COS-CLUSTER-2014-3-03) pursuing the same or related objectives are not eligible to this call.

7. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

7.1. Exclusion from participation:

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

- (a) they are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- (b) they or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment of a competent authority of a Member State which has the force of res judicata;
- (c) they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify including by decisions of the EIB and international organisations;
- (d) they are not in compliance with their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the RAO or those of the country where the grant agreement is to be performed;
- (e) they or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity, where such an illegal activity is detrimental to the Union's financial interests;
- (f) they are currently subject to an administrative penalty referred to in Article 109(1) of the Financial Regulation³⁶.

³⁵ See at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/423/sanctions-policy_en
https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/sanctions-policy/8442/consolidated-list-of-sanctions_en and
https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/restrictive_measures-2016-10-11-clean.pdf.

³⁶ Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and council of 25.10.2012, as amended by Regulation 2015/1929 (Official Journal of the European Union L 286 of 30.10.2015 p.1).

7.2. Exclusion from award:

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

- (a) are subject to a conflict of interest;
- (b) are guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the Commission as a condition of participation in the grant award procedure or fail to supply this information;
- (c) find themselves in one of the situations of exclusion, referred to in section 7.1.

The same exclusion criteria apply to affiliated entities.

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

7.3. Supporting documents

When submitting an application the coordinator will sign a declaration on honour stating that the applicants are not in one of the situations of exclusion mentioned in Article 106(1) and 107 of the Financial Regulation detailed in the application form.

8. **SELECTION CRITERIA**

8.1. Financial capacity

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

- 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.

In the event of an application grouping several applicants (consortium), the above thresholds apply by 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 RAO considers that financial capacity is not satisfactory, he may:

- request further information;
- propose a grant agreement without pre-financing;
- propose a grant agreement with a pre-financing paid in instalments;
- propose a grant agreement with a 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;
- 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, applicants have to submit the following supporting documents:

- a declaration on their honour accompanying the proposal as an annex per partner where they can confirm their involvement in supporting the enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters and providing or channelling specialised and customised businesses support services to stimulate innovation activities, especially in SMEs, in compliance with the coverage of innovation clusters given in the section 1.2 (e), 1.3 (s) and Annex I in the “EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation”³⁷.
- a list containing the description of previous projects and activities performed in the cluster area and connected to the policy field of the strand to which the consortium applies, aimed notably at promoting cluster cooperation within or beyond Europe or to the actions to be carried out, including projects and activities supported under COSME or through European regional or research funding as, for instance, under the European Territorial Cooperation Regulation (INTERREG) and the European Structural and Cohesion Fund and the Horizon 2020 or 7th Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP7).

Consortia must assign to the project at least three highly qualified experts primarily responsible for managing and implementing the proposed action with at least three years of experience each in running cluster or business networks activities. The curricula vitae of the three persons must be submitted with the application.

³⁷ 2014/C 198/01. According to this definition:

‘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;

See at: [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) with further information available at http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/modernisation/rdi_framework_en.pdf and http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/legislation/horizontal.html amending the Community Framework (2006/C 323/01 see at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:323:0001:0026:en:PDF>),

9. AWARD CRITERIA

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

For Strands 1.a and 1.b (Preparatory phase):

CRITERIA	MAX. SCORE
1. Relevance of the actions in view of the objectives of the call	35
<p><u>For Strand 1.a.</u></p> <p>How relevant is the proposed action to the objectives of the published theme of Strand 1.a to develop a European Strategic Cluster Partnership leading international cluster cooperation in strategic areas and supporting SME internationalisation collectively as a Partnership beyond Europe?</p> <p><u>For Strand 1.b</u></p> <p>How relevant is the proposed action to the objectives of Strand 1.b to develop a European Strategic Cluster Partnership leading international cluster cooperation in the Earth Observation (EO) downstream sector and supporting SME internationalisation of EO companies collectively as a Partnership beyond Europe?</p>	
How strategically chosen are the project partners (relevance of the partners to the project)?	
How relevant is the proposed action to foster complementarities between consortium members?	
To what extent the proposal reflects all 5 principles characterising a "European Strategic Cluster Partnership – Going International" leading the applicant consortium to be awarded an "ESCP-4i" label?	
To what extent does the proposed action demonstrate that the Partnership is based on or will pursue cooperation across related industries and sectoral boundaries (e.g. involving another sector or related industry)?	
2. Quality of the proposed actions	30
How coherent, ambitious and suitable are the overall work plan and the proposed actions?	
To what extent are the proposed actions clearly defined and the work plan clearly presented in terms of milestones, deliverables and a sound management structure?	
To what extent does the proposed action demonstrate how the Partnership will seek and exploit synergies with other inter-regional activities, notably cluster cooperation funded under COSME (e.g. forthcoming European strategic cluster partnerships for smart specialisation investment), Horizon 2020 (e.g. INNOSUP-1 Cluster facilitated projects for new industrial value chains) and European regional funds (i.e. European Territorial Programmes and European Structural and Investment Fund)?	
3. Impact on target audience	25
What are the expected outcomes, potential impact and EU added value of the project (e.g. degree of complementarity across the applicant cluster consortium in terms of value-chain, technologies and applications markets being addressed)?	
Are the expected multiplying effects of the project reasonable to support SME internationalisation beyond Europe (e.g. degree of involvement of SMEs in the preparation of the Partnership's internationalisation strategy)?	

How effective, innovative and convincing are the promotional and communication activities? Does the proposal contain a comprehensive communication strategy?	
Does the proposal describe how to measure the impact of the project results on the basis of specific indicators?	
Are concrete measures planned in order to ensure that the project can be continued after the termination of EU funding?	
4. Cost-effectiveness	10
To what extent the detailed budget is coherent with the work plan of the proposed action?	
To what extent is the budget clear enough and detailed, as well as effective to implement the proposed actions?	
Do the expected results stand in a reasonable relationship to the amount of the grant?	
Does the budget seem justified when compared to the expected impact?	
Maximum total score	100

For strand 2 (Implementation phase):

CRITERIA	MAX. SCORE
1. Relevance of the actions in view of the objectives of the call	35
How relevant is the proposed action to the objectives of the published theme of Strand 2 (Implementation phase) to further develop a European Strategic Cluster Partnership- Going International by building cooperation activities with international partners in third countries with a view to implementing international cluster cooperation in strategic areas and to supporting SME internationalisation collectively as a Partnership beyond Europe?	
To what extent the proposal reflects all 5 principles characterising a "European Strategic Cluster Partnership – Going International" leading the applicant consortium to be awarded an "ESCP-4i" label?	
To what extent does the proposed action foresee an adequate exit strategy demonstrating that the Partnership fosters complementarities between applicant members and pursues cooperation across related industries and sectoral boundaries (e.g. involving another sector or related industry)?	
2. Quality of the proposed actions	30
How coherent, ambitious and suitable is the overall joint internationalisation strategy, including the Partnership Agreement, the internationalisation strategy plan and the proposed activities included in the implementation roadmap?	
To what extent are the proposed actions clearly defined and the work plan clearly presented in terms of milestones, deliverables and a sound management structure?	
To what extent does the proposed action demonstrate how the Partnership will seek and exploit synergies with other inter-regional activities, notably cluster cooperation funded under COSME (e.g. forthcoming European strategic cluster partnerships for smart specialisation investment), Horizon 2020 (e.g. INNOSUP-1 Cluster facilitated	

projects for new industrial value chains) and European regional funds (i.e. European Territorial Programmes and European Structural and Investment Fund)?	
3. Impact on target audience	25
<p>What is the expected outcome, potential impact and EU added value of the project (e.g. degree of reinforcing complementarity across the applicant cluster consortium in terms of value-chain, technologies and applications markets being addressed)?</p> <p>Are the expected multiplying effects of the project reasonable to support SME internationalisation beyond Europe?</p> <p>What is the expected impact of the cooperation agreements and business partnerships agreements?</p> <p>How many European SMEs are expected to benefit directly or indirectly from the supported action?</p> <p>How effective, innovative and convincing are the promotional and communication activities? Does the proposal contain a comprehensive communication strategy?</p> <p>Does the proposal describe how to measure the impact of the project results on the basis of specific indicators, including in terms of growth and employment in Europe for the Partnership SME members?</p> <p>Are concrete measures planned in order to ensure that the project can be continued after the termination of EU funding, including by using local, regional or European funding to support future activities in this respect?</p>	
4. Cost-effectiveness	10
<p>To what extent the detailed budget is coherent with the work plan of the proposed action?</p> <p>To what extent is the budget clear enough and detailed, as well as effective to implement the proposed actions?</p> <p>Do the expected results stand in a reasonable relationship to the amount of the grant?</p> <p>Does the budget seem justified when compared to the expected impact?</p>	
Maximum total score	100

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 beneficiary, as well as the procedures in view to formalise the obligations 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.

11. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCEDURES

Unsuccessful applicants may request the review of the admissibility and eligibility procedures and the evaluation procedures 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.³⁸

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 resources which are necessary to carry out the action may not be entirely provided by the EU grant. It 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 which foresee that costs will not be incurred in euros, are invited to use the exchange rate published on the Info-euro website available at: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/infoeuro/infoeuro_en.cfm.

³⁸ Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC (Official Journal of the European Union L 94, of 28.3.2014, p. 65).

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.

Entities acting in their capacity of contracting authorities in the meaning of Directive 2014/24/EU³⁹ or contracting entities in the meaning of Directive 2014/25/EU⁴⁰ shall abide by 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.

Sub-contracting, i.e. the externalisation of specific tasks or activities which form part of the action as described in the proposal must satisfy the conditions applicable to any implementation contract (as specified above) and in addition to them the following conditions:

- it may only cover the implementation of a limited part of the action;
- it must be justified having regard to the nature of the action and what is necessary for its implementation;
- it must be clearly stated in the proposal.

Core activities cannot be subcontracted.

f) Financial support to third parties.

Applications may not envisage provision of financial support to third parties.

12.2 Funding forms

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 reimbursement 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**

³⁹ 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).

⁴⁰ 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).

Eligible costs are costs actually incurred by the beneficiary of a grant which meet all the following criteria:

- ✓ 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;
- ✓ 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.

Further details are included in the model grant agreement.

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.

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 the beneficiary's instructions and, unless otherwise agreed with the beneficiary, on the beneficiary's premises;
- (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.

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. Other direct costs

C.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.

C.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.

C.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 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 costs.

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

Applicants's attention is drawn to the fact that in the case of beneficiaries receiving an operating grant⁴¹ financed by the EU or Euratom budget, they cannot declare indirect costs for the period covered by the operating grant.

➤ **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 operating grant financed by the EU or Euratom budget in the same period.

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 of costs actually incurred;
- a certificate on the financial statements of the action for each beneficiary, if
 - the (cumulative) amount of payments it requests as reimbursement of actual costs (and for which no certificate has yet been submitted) is EUR 325 000 or more and
 - the maximum grant amount indicated, for that beneficiary in the estimated budget (see Annex 2) as reimbursement of actual costs is EUR 750 000 or more.

⁴¹ For the definition, see Article 121(1)(b) of Regulation 2015/1929 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 (Official Journal of the European Union L 218, of 26.10.2012, p.1): '**operating grant**' means direct financial contribution, by way of donation, from the budget in order to finance the functioning of a body which pursues an aim of general EU interest or has an objective forming part of and supporting an EU policy.

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 of the receipts over the eligible costs incurred by the beneficiary**, when the request is made for payment of the balance. 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.

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 up to the same amount as the pre-financing may be requested in order to limit the financial risks linked to the pre-financing payment.

The financial guarantee, in euro, shall be provided by an approved bank or financial institution established in one of the Member State of the European Union. When the beneficiary is established in a third country, the RAO 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 as the pre-financing is gradually cleared against interim payments or payments of balances 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:

- 6 month technical progress report(s), not linked to a request for payment;
- 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 RAO 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.

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 level⁴² 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 (EC) No 45/2001⁴³ on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community

⁴² 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).

⁴³ Official Journal of the European Union L 8/1 of 12.01.2001.

institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data. Unless indicated otherwise, the questions and any personal data requested are required to evaluate the application in accordance with the specifications of the call for 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 Article 106(1) and 107 of the Financial Regulation 966/2012⁴⁴ (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.

➤ Electronic submission

Applicants are requested to go to <http://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme-eu-programme-competitiveness-enterprises-and-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-smes> 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-GO-INTERNATIONAL@ec.europa.eu;

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

Annexes (available via the link under section 16):

- Application form (Description of the action and estimated budget)
- Model Grant Agreement
- Guide for Applicants

⁴⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32012R0966> .

