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Call for proposals

Enterprise Europe Network
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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction 5

1. Background 6

2. Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact 7

2.1 Scope of the call 7

2.2 Objectives 7

2.3 Requirements for the Network 9

2.3.1 Purpose of the Network 9

2.3.2 Target group 10

2.3.3 Structure of the Network 10

2.3.4 The Network's client-centric approach 15

2.3.5 Synergies and cooperation 19

2.3.6 The role of the European Commission and the Agency 24

2.4 Activities that can be funded 25

2.4.1 Activity 1: Provision of value-added services to clients 26

2.4.2 Activity 2: Promotion of the Network and communication 35

2.4.3 Activity 3: Network development and capacity building 38

2.4.4 Activity 4: Network coordination and quality management 39

2.5 Expected impact 40

2.5.1 Expected results 41

2.5.2 Measuring performance and efficiency in the Network 41

2.5.3 Reporting and monitoring 43

3. Available budget 44

4. Timetable and deadlines 44

5. Admissibility and documents 45

6. Eligibility 46

6.1 Eligible participants (eligible countries) 46

6.2 Geographic location (target countries) 47

6.3 Consortium composition 48

6.4 Eligible activities 50

6.5 Duration 51

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion 51

7.1 Financial capacity 51

7.2 Operational capacity 52

7.3 Exclusion 52

8. Evaluation and award procedure 53

9. Award criteria 54

10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements 55

11. How to submit an application 59

12. Help 60

13. Important 61

Annex 1 64

Annex 2 66

Annex 3 73

Annex 4 75

Annex 5 82

0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs part of the **Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)**.

The regulatory framework for this EU Funding Programme is set out in:

- Regulation (EU) N° 2018/1046 (EU Financial Regulation)
- the basic act (Single Market Programme Regulation[1]).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2021 SMP Work Programme and its financing decision[2] and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('the Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

- **SMP-COSME-2021-EEN-01** – Enterprise Europe Network.

We invite you to read the **call documentation** on the Funding & Tenders Portal Topic page carefully, and in particular this Call Document, the Model Grant Agreement, the EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual and the EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement.

These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions you may have when preparing your application:

- the Call Document outlines the:
  - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
  - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
  - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
  - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
  - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
  - award criteria (section 9)
  - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
  - how to submit an application (section 11)
- the Online Manual outlines the:
  - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
  - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:

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1 Regulation (EU) 2021/690.
2 Commission Implementing Decision C(2021) 3046 final.

– detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant *(including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc.)*.

You are also encouraged to visit the Enterprise Europe Network and the COSME data hub to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

The European Union (EU) is in the process of making a major economic transition, spurred on by both opportunity and threat: opportunity from the rapid development of digital technologies and the enormous potential of innovation to change people's lives; and threat from climate change, a loss of biodiversity, social pressures, increasing global competition and threats to its sovereignty.

Europe's companies need to become more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, harness digitalisation and become more resilient to shocks of all kinds. By doing so, they will become more competitive in global markets and will be able to sustain that increased competitiveness in the decades to come. At the heart of this change will be Europe's Single Market, offering the world's largest market for innovative companies and connecting them up cross-border.

The urgency of this transition has been underlined by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a devastating effect on businesses across Europe, and worldwide, with the impact likely to continue to be felt over the medium-term.

Europe's 25 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have suffered particularly during the crisis, with falling revenue and liquidity, borders closed, and supply chains disrupted. But they also have the potential to be the major winners from the triple transition to sustainability, digitalisation and resilience, building on their flexibility, adaptability and innovation.

Making that transition will not be easy. Many SMEs are daunted by the cost and complexity of sustainability and digitalisation. They also face continued barriers in doing cross-border business and scaling up within the Single Market and beyond. And even before the crisis broke, they often struggled to access the finance they needed to innovate and commercialise.

In March 2020, the European Commission released two key communications: "A New Industrial Strategy for Europe"[3] and "An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe"[4] setting out key actions to address these barriers and put in place the support that companies need. These strategies not only remain valid in the light of the crisis: their importance has strengthened.

A central action in the SME Strategy is to upgrade the Enterprise Europe Network, ('the Network').

Since its launch in 2008, the Network has played a crucial role in facilitating the access of European SMEs to the Single Market and third country markets and in providing growth-oriented, integrated business and innovation support services to help them compete.

The Network has delivered an impressive number of services with significant impact in terms of market positioning, cost savings and job creation in SMEs. Over 2.6 million SMEs have benefitted, with more than 280,000 companies making over 850,000

[3] A New Industrial Strategy for Europe, COM(2020) 102 final.

[4] An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe, COM(2020) 103 final.

international business connections and more than 160,000 companies benefitting from tailored innovation support services. As a result, the Network is now the largest support network in the world for SMEs with international ambitions, active in over 60 countries.

A core part of the Network's success has been its willingness to continuously raise its standards and evolve to meet new challenges and opportunities, most recently through the introduction of Scale-up Advisors in 2017.

With grants for the current Network due to expire at the end of 2021 in line with the expiration of its parent programme, the EU Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs (COSME), the European Commission is now looking for proposals for the next Network, initially for the period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2025. This Network will be funded under the new Single Market Programme (SMP), which succeeds the COSME Programme.

This Network will be expected to build upon the existing strengths, expertise and achievements and take them to a new level, most notably by moving to a hub and spoke model for providing value-added services to individual SMEs; providing better quality services everywhere; stronger visibility, positioning and integration within national and regional industrial and support ecosystems; boosting SMEs access to finance needs by supporting them accessing the most appropriate funding relevant to their needs, and responding to new developments and policy priorities.

Most notably, the new Network will be expected to play a crucial role in helping all types of SMEs in their transition to more sustainable business models through dedicated Sustainability Advisors and other sustainability services. It will also be expected to support SMEs' digitalisation by helping them to adapt their processes, to use digital technologies and to develop new products and services using digital means. And above all, it will be expected to help SMEs to become more resilient, helping them to recover fully from the COVID-19 crisis and emerge stronger.

2. Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact

2.1 Scope of the call

The scope of this call is to set up and ensure the upgraded functioning of Enterprise Europe Network in the period 1 January 2022 until 30 June 2025 by selecting the consortia that will make up the Network.

To this end, applicants are invited to submit proposals:

- Defining the strategic approach and explaining how the objectives and requirements laid down in the present call will be addressed, taking account of the challenges faced by SMEs in the target region(s) and the specific strengths of businesses and the business environment; and

- Suggesting specific activities translating that strategic approach into action.

2.2 Objectives

The Network should contribute to the objectives of the SMP by improving the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in Europe and promoting entrepreneurship.

It should do so notably by:

- Assisting them to become more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable;

- Supporting their digitalisation and greater resilience to shocks;
- Supporting their innovation and innovation processes;
- Facilitating their access to the Single Market and third country markets;
- Helping them to cooperate and where appropriate integrate with local, regional, national and European clusters and industrial ecosystems and global value chains.

It should promote EU policies and programmes and, by collecting valuable feedback from SMEs on the effectiveness of EU policies, provide a link between SMEs and EU policy making. Finally, it should ensure the visibility, recognition and local awareness of its activities.

In doing so, it should aim to continually increase its effectiveness in creating impact for SME clients and should adapt as necessary to new challenges faced by SMEs.

This means focusing on the following points:

- Combine a continued no-wrong-door approach of initial access to all SMEs with in-depth services for SMEs that have the potential to innovate, compete and grow in the Single Market and beyond more widely, creating jobs;
- Help SMEs to benefit from opportunities and overcome barriers to doing business within the Single Market, and to internationalise and export outside the Single Market;
- Help SMEs make the most out of EU Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) in force with third countries;
- Ensure a client-centric approach with consortia working together to support SMEs to innovate, and grow in the Single Market and beyond, with all Network consortia delivering high-impact services;
- Support SMEs in the triple transition to sustainable business practices, digitalisation, and becoming more resilient;
- Provide specific expertise and advice to companies by:
    - Putting Sustainability Advisors in place in all consortia to provide tailored advice to help SMEs adapt for future-proof sustainable business models and activities;
    - Continuing the Scale-up Advisors function to provide high-end and tailored advice to help start-ups and scale-ups grow and innovate internationally;
- Provide a broad range of services that focus on access to finance and EU funding, working in close cooperation with relevant local financial intermediaries and providers;
- Build on the experience of services provided to SME beneficiaries of the European Innovation Council (EIC) Pilot, to provide Network services to potential applicants and beneficiaries of the EIC in Horizon Europe[5] and help SMEs tap into open innovation ecosystems, complementing Network activities

[5] The Next EU Research & Innovation Investment Programme (2021-2027). For more information: https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe_en.

supported under the EIC Work Programme;

- Build on the experience with the Enhancing Innovation Management Capacity (EIMC) services to support SMEs to develop innovative products and services by improving the way they manage their innovation processes with a focus on integration of digital and other advanced technologies into their business processes;
- Communicate and coordinate effectively at regional level, feeding actively into regional and macro-regional initiatives and strategies, such as the Smart Specialisation Thematic Platforms;
- Link with other networks such as clusters (via the European Cluster Collaboration Platform) to exploit synergies;
- Ensure high levels of visibility at local, regional and European level to ensure that the Network becomes a natural first port of call for SMEs with innovation and internationalisation potential;
- Provide support for learning and development, skills development and capacity building for SMEs.

The Network should be recognised by SMEs and stakeholders as the indispensable "European arm" of regional and national business support systems, leveraging the work those support systems and wider national and regional policies. It should provide clear European added value and providing services that are ever more highly valued by clients and help them to grow and become more competitive.

More details in section 2.4 Activities that can be funded.

2.3 Requirements for the Network

2.3.1 Purpose of the Network

The purpose of the Network is to help European SMEs innovate, grow and scale in the Single Market and beyond.

Specifically, the Network should aim to achieve high impact for its client businesses, for the regions in which it operates and for Europe; to create connections to lead markets, lead customers, finance and innovation partners; and to be acknowledged as the global business support network of excellence.

The impact Network services have on SMEs will be measured in terms of e.g. increased market share, increased turnover, optimised costs or realised savings in international activities, job creation or maintenance, improved quality of products, services or processes, introduced product or service innovations related to international activities.

To achieve this, the Network should provide continued support to increase SMEs' sustainable growth, digitalisation and resilience in the areas of:

- Participation in the Single Market;
- Internationalisation;
- Innovation.

The support should be translated into high-impact services available and accessible in all regions of the EU and third countries participating in the SMP based on a **client-centric approach** responding to the needs and challenges faced by the SMEs. This approach should be flexible and adaptable to respond to new challenges and opportunities.

2.3.2 Target group

The **Network's target group** are European SMEs with sustainable growth ambitions, ready to scale their activities in the Single Market and markets in third countries, and with the ambition to improve and take a leading position through product and service innovations.

Any SME is entitled to turn to the Network for assistance, regardless of their size, sector or business cycle. General services of the Network, such as, for example, awareness raising and purely information services should be accessible to all SMEs according to the no-wrong-door principle (see definition of 'basic Network services' in section 2.3.4).

For tailor-made advisory and partnering services, the Network should address companies with a high potential for internationalisation and/or innovation. Given the aim and nature of the Network, it is expected that most SME clients for the Network's advanced support services will be SMEs with high ambition and the potential to grow sustainably, to innovate, to engage in business and technology partnering activities and to exploit new opportunities in the Single Market and beyond (see definition of 'advanced Network services' in section 2.3.4).

Network partners may also tailor certain specialised activities to sectors or industrial ecosystems that are particularly important in their region, to companies with a particularly high potential as well as social enterprises or public authorities and public enterprises – e.g., by strengthening their capacities for innovation- and SME-friendly public procurement.

Some other types of organisations in the regional, national or local landscape may also receive Network support if the services provided to them are directly beneficial to the SMEs falling within the Network's scope.

The target group is referred to as "Network clients".

2.3.3 Structure of the Network

The Network should be a single, coherent and collaborative European network organised at regional level. It should cover all regions of the EU and the other countries associated to the Competitiveness and SMEs part of the SMP.

The Network can be made up of units, departments or operational teams of individual host organisations referred to as "Network partners".

Network partners must be embedded in host organisations committed to support Network activities described in the present call. Host organisations are expected to provide strong support for the implementation of the Network activities and to contribute to the excellence of the Network.

A strong positioning of the Network within the host organisation is essential to ensure a sense of ownership and avoid potential conflicts of interests or overlaps with other departments in the same organisation. The host organisation should demonstrate its interest in the project and highlight how its existing activities can be linked to Network services to achieve synergies and added value for SMEs.

The management of Network host organisations is required to integrate the Network as a strategic element in their organisation's portfolio and to ensure that the Network activities receive a high degree of visibility and connectivity with other activities carried out by the other departments within the same organisation.

At the same time, Network staff members should maintain a regular flow of information and collaboration with other relevant departments in the host organisation in order to keep them informed and involved in strategic matters, and to highlight the added value of the Network vis-à-vis the host organisation.

The Network must be also fully integrated into the regional/national business and innovation support infrastructure, to which end it should cooperate efficiently with all relevant regional stakeholders, service providers and other European networks, including clusters.

More details in sections 6.2 Geographic location (target countries) and 6.3 Consortium composition.

Network partners

Typical applicants are organisations with a proven experience to provide business support services to SMEs.

The success and quality of the Network's services depend largely on the skills and capacities of Network partners. They must have the organisational competences and suitably skilled staff to deliver the services of the Network locally, near SMEs and with all due reference to regional business and innovation conditions.

Core expertise that every Network consortium should demonstrate to ensure efficient support for SMEs as described in the present call include:

1. **Facilitation of SME internationalisation,** within the Single Market and/or third countries, notably through the development of market access advice and matchmaking services;

2. **Single Market support**, including *basic advisory services* and information tailored to SMEs' individual needs to help them fulfil regulatory requirements and overcome obstacles in the Single Market[6], and advanced advisory services in some of these areas;

3. **General innovation support for SMEs**, in the form of facilitating access to or management of national/regional innovation support schemes and/or provision of innovation management capacity building services for SMEs, in particular with focus on digital innovation and adaptation of business models using digital technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence, internet of things, e-commerce, 5G, etc.);

4. **Research and technology transfer related services** in at least one of the following fields: support to industry-academia cooperation, provision of technology expertise and technology infrastructure services to facilitate lab testing, validation and demonstration;

5. **Advice on access to finance to help businesses innovate and grow internationally**, including helping SMEs access EU-funded support programmes (e.g., Horizon Europe in cooperation with the National Contact Points (NCPs)[7],

[6] Including on goods, CE marking, standardisation and REACH, services and posting of workers, intellectual property services, procurement, VAT, e-commerce and digitalisation.

[7] The network of National Contact Points is the main structure to provide guidance, practical information and assistance on all aspects of participation in Horizon Europe. NCPs are also established in many non-EU and non-associated countries.

ERDF programmes in cooperation with Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies), raising awareness about EU financial instruments, and advising SMEs about other sources of finance relevant to their needs and how to prepare for seeking funding from investors and financial intermediaries;

6. **Resilience and sustainability related advisory services** focusing on the sustainability dimensions "people, prosperity and planet"[8].

Network staff

Host organisations are required to ensure that all staff members (referred to as "Network advisors") assigned to the Network have adequate qualifications to fulfil their tasks to high quality standards.

The set of requirements for the **general profile of a Network Advisor** delivering Network services include:

- Completed higher education or equivalent by experience;
- Experience in providing advice to SMEs on a broad range of innovation or internationalisation issues in the Single Market enabling SMEs to make the triple transition to sustainability, digitalisation and greater resilience;
- Good command of English (at least B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference[9]) – although no formal language regime is established, experience shows that the working language for the international activities of the Network tends to be English. Host organisations should therefore ensure that core staff members as well as project management and coordination staff have a strong command of English language to interact efficiently at professional level with colleagues of the Network from other countries;
- Good understanding of the local ecosystem (other potential sources of advice), and regional/national information sources;
- Excellent communications skills: ability to grasp the issue that the client is facing and to interact with local cooperation partners and experts, and other Network partners;
- Good analytical skills: ability to analyse the needs of the client, identify relevant information (often of legal character) and provide appropriate support services on the basis of this analysis.

In addition to that, staff assigned the roles of a Sustainability Advisor and Scale-Up Advisor should possess the following specific competencies to ensure appropriate and high-end service provision:

- **Sustainability Advisors**: have the ability to identify and address sustainability challenges and opportunities for SMEs, act as the key point of contact in the consortium for sustainability issues, and be able to advise SMEs on new sustainable business models, circular economy and resource efficiency, etc., as well as linking them to complementary forms of support and more specialised advice provided in the immediate business ecosystem (see section 2.4.1 for more details);

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8 As explained in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

9 https://europa.eu/europass/en/common-european-framework-reference.

- **Scale-Up Advisors**: have the ability to accompany SMEs to scale up and grow internationally, capitalising on the expertise built up in the Network and using Network services as well as linking them to other more relevant and often more specialised support**.**

Staff involved in communication activities should have proficient knowledge of media and online services and should have access to social media for project-related activities. Each consortium should define a **communication correspondent**.

Further to the general profile, **communication correspondents** should have at least 2 years of experience in communication in one of the following areas: drafting, implementing and evaluating communication strategies, plans and projects, management of events, web and social media management, media relations, writing articles, and one year of seniority in the Network and/or the host organisation (see section 2.4.2 for more details).

Consortium and project coordination tasks should be assigned to senior staff members with sufficient authority to represent the Network in the management of the host organisation, the European Commission, the Agency and other Network partners. Strong leadership skills and experience with managing teams should be additionally demonstrated in the profile of the advisors occupying these roles.

Staff continuity is very important in the Network. Where staff changes are unavoidable, the integration of new staff should be facilitated as much as possible. Host organisations should therefore operate procedures for transferring knowledge to new staff members. In terms of competence and seniority, new staff members carrying out Network tasks should fulfil the same criteria as the staff member they replace. Training courses provided by the Agency should be seen as an addition to the (essential) induction of new staff provided by the host organisation. The latter should at least include information about the consortium and its work programme, the regional environment and the services provided by the Network in general, and the host organisation in particular.

Sectoral and thematic specialisation in the Network

The sectoral knowledge of Network staff members is a key asset for the Network. In order to make particularly efficient use of existing expertise, and to facilitate networking and cooperation across consortia, all Network consortia are encouraged to take part in **Sector Groups** covering economic sectors that are particularly relevant in their region and to the needs of their clients.

Sector Groups are groups of Network advisors with specific background and experience in a certain economic area who commit to work together in order to meet the specific needs of their clients operating in this area. Sector Groups therefore represent a framework to plan and implement collaborative activities in a particularly efficient way.

The primary aim of Sector Groups is to give a specific sectoral focus to Network activities while at the same time recruiting clients for Network services and contributing to the defined outcomes and objectives of the Network. Sector Groups play a strong role in the implementation of annual (sectoral) priorities set by the European Commission for the Network. They enhance cooperation and pool the resources that the Network has at its disposal to address a specific segment of clients.

As part of the EU’s renewed industrial approach, there is a greater focus on industrial ecosystems, capturing the complex set of interlinkages and interdependencies among sectors and firms spreading across countries in the Single Market. Such ecosystems allow for a bottom-up approach that takes account of specificities of business models, the high percentage of vulnerable players such as SMEs and interdependencies.

The European Commission services have identified 14 industrial ecosystems: Tourism, Mobility-Transport-Automotive, Aerospace & Defence, Construction, Agri-food, Energy Intensive Industries, Textile, Creative & Cultural Industries, Digital, Renewable Energy, Electronics, Retail, Proximity & Social Economy, and Health.

These industrial ecosystems have a marked pan-European nature, but their composition is very heterogeneous in terms of sectoral composition, size and scope. Industrial activities represent a significant share of course, but services play a fundamental role. SMEs represent a very significant share of these ecosystems.

The Sector Groups in the Network will contribute to the success of these ecosystems using their solid experience and many good practices and where necessary, their mandate and organisation may be adjusted to best do this.

In addition to specialised sectoral issues, several cross-cutting topics concern all Network consortia. They are organised in **Thematic Groups** with a coverage ranging from internal Network matters to broad issues concerning most clients of the Network in the areas of its operations (e.g. Single Market, internationalisation and innovation). In order to create a better networking environment and to encourage contacts between experts in the Network, contact persons specialising in those topics will be appointed by each consortium. Staff members should be appointed on the basis of their professional expertise and their role within the Network. They will act as a point of contact for other Network partners sharing an interest in the respective area and as an interlocutor for a mutual flow of information and feedback with the Agency and the European Commission. Suitable internal online communication channels will be made available.

Working Groups may be also organised with temporary assignments depending on the specific issue they will deal with.

Membership in any Network group is voluntary, but conditional on a sufficient degree of activity, which is monitored by the chairperson of the group in cooperation with the Agency.

All types of groups are convened by the Agency and the European Commission. They will have a common, lean structure, consisting of one chairperson, one or more vice-chairs and ordinary members. Practical working arrangements, including division of tasks, are left to the groups.

Network governance

The Network will have a representative body with an advisory role. It will be chaired by the European Commission.

Its role will be to receive and disseminate information on strategic decisions for the Network made by the Commission and the Agency, inform and advise them about views and issues in the Network, provide feedback on changing needs or implementation difficulties, and take a lead in implementing changes in the Network, acting as an interface with Network members in their respective countries.

The representative body will have a structure consisting of a plenary and a bureau with purely organisational functions. The bureau has a coordinating role whereas the plenary represents the opinion of Network members in the EU and associated countries participating in the Network. The term of members will be limited to a period of 12-18 months and be renewable. The selection of members will be made by means of election at the level of each national Network. International Network partners from third countries are expected to participate as observers.

Each national member of the representative body will be in charge of informing the rest of the Network in their country of matters discussed in meetings, communicating significant issues to the Agency and the Commission, driving the implementation of actions and, ensuring a common approach to Network operations in countries where there is more than one Network consortium. This means that the members of the representative body should coordinate closely with the Network partners and other Network consortia in the country.

2.3.4 The Network's client-centric approach

Enterprise Europe Network should be built on a **client-centric approach**.

This means designing the services from the client's perspective where a focal point is identifying the needs and following up of the individual client. This approach aims at creating positive experience for companies by maximising quality and building relationships, and reaching a concrete success for the SMEs in terms of impact. As the needs of each client span different service and policy areas, there is a need for continued efforts to break down silos and provide fully integrated services to SMEs.

Adopting working methodologies based on a client-centric approach allows Network partners to create the most favourable business support offer and to be most effective in delivering impact and contributing to the sustainable growth of the European SMEs.

Whereas all SMEs can turn to the Network for assistance according to the no-wrong-door principle, ambitious SMEs with potential to innovate, scale and grow in the Single Market and internationally require tailoring the service offer and providing specific support in response to their needs.

To explain the Network's client-centric approach, the different levels of interaction with the clients, and the resulting different levels of impact for SMEs, Network services are categorised as follows:

- **Basic Network services** give direct and straightforward solutions to a company's problem, so that the company does not need further assistance on the specific query.

  Often short-term in nature, basic services are standard; they are not specifically customised and provide off-the-shelf solutions to companies. They are usually, but not necessarily, one-to-many.

  An example for basic services are the simple direct answers to clients providing up-to-date information to queries, e.g. via referral to existing websites, other stakeholders, frequently asked questions (FAQs), information events, webinars, etc. without any requirement for further analysis of the client's needs.

- **Advanced Network services** support clients facing more complex issues or barriers, and help them prepare for realisation of their medium- and longer-term business plans. When basic services are not sufficient to provide a direct (off-the-shelf or standard) solution to a company's problem, Network partners can propose advanced services, tailored to the specific needs of the company.

  Advanced services require an elaborate analysis to address the client's needs in the short- and medium- to longer term, as part of a client journey. They are often more technical and specialised, and require higher level of competences from Network advisors. Consultation among Network advisors, e.g., via Sector and Thematic Groups, can in many cases be necessary. They are usually one-to-few or one-to-one.

The advanced Network services can be two types: advisory and partnering. They lead to Achievements considered as milestones in the client journey (see Annex 3):

- **Advisory services**: all types of services aiming at increasing SMEs' sustainable growth, competitiveness or resilience in an international scope, including access to finance, capacity building services, such as coaching and training aiming at increasing clients' knowledge, capacity for innovation and adaptability to new economic conditions, etc. In the client journey, they lead to Advisory Achievements (AAs).

- **Partnering services**: all types of international brokerage and matchmaking services with the aim to generate SMEs' sustainable growth through international business and technical collaborations between Network partners' clients. In the client journey, they lead to Partnering Achievements (PAs).

More information in section 2.4.1 Provision of value-added services to clients.

Not necessarily all Network partners in a consortium possess the entire range of competencies to solve complex issues or barriers to client SMEs. Where expertise or special knowledge is missing to address a client need, the other Network partners can contribute. This is where the Network effect of the hub and spoke model steps in (see below).

The advanced Network services should generate impact for the client's business expressed in increased market share, turnover, optimised costs or realised savings in international activities, job creation or maintenance, improved quality of products, services or processes, introduced product or service innovations related to international activities.

The client-centric approach guarantees that the Network continues reaching and supporting a large number of SMEs through basic services, while it customises behaviours and provides specific expertise to SMEs most likely to benefit from advanced services in their individual client journeys.

This approach clearly focuses on quality and impact of the services for the client companies, and recognises the importance of the positioning and visibility of the Network in the geographic areas covered by the proposals. It underpins the professionalisation of the Network focusing on the need to invest constantly in and develop the competencies and skills of the Network advisors.

It avoids the one-size-fits-all philosophy and takes into account the variable geometry of the Network[10].

To enable the client-centric approach, Network partners are expected to integrate **a hub and spoke model** in their working methodologies and business models, and while still reaching out the broad SME community in Europe with provision of general advice, focusing to follow the most prospective and ambitious of them in their **client journeys**.

A set of performance indicators is designed to encourage this client-focused Network, which rewards services aiming to increase client impact. They encourage cooperation between Network partners within and beyond their consortium for the benefit of its

[10] The principle of variable geometry considers the expected Network variety – size of the consortia, interaction with the business support ecosystem and embeddedness in the host structures of the Network partners.

target group and the impact of its services. See section 2.5.2 for more information.

Each proposal should clearly identify how the consortium will implement the Network's client-centric approach during the project lifetime.

Hub and spoke model

The Network should implement a hub and spoke model for designing services around a client (a company), ensuring that Network partners make the best use of their resources and work better together to use and share services across the Network and across the local, regional, national and/or the EU ecosystem.

The hub and spoke model brings together knowledge, excellence and competence to deal with the complex challenges the Network clients face. It brings at the forefront the Network effect as enabler deriving from the connection of partners. It is through the sharing of information, resources, activities, and competences of several Network partners supporting each other and jointly serving SMEs that they achieve a higher impact than when one partner provides individual support alone.

In the hub and spoke structure different entities (partners and stakeholders), each remaining individually managed and accountable under their contracts, pool their assets together contributing to one central goal – providing high-end customised services to a Network client. All Network partners should have this same objective and work with each other and external stakeholders in the same way.

The partner in the region where the SME is located and through which the SME is introduced to the Network is the primary contact for the client and is referred to as the "local hub". The hub holds also the client account (the client card) followed in the Network IT platform. The contributing partners or stakeholders are referred to as the "spokes".

The Network local hub, represented by a Network Advisor, is a relationship manager for the individual client. This establishes relationship of trust. It reflects the proximity principle according to which a Network partner located in the same geographic area, knowing the socio-economic environment, having connections with other service providers and speaking the local language best serves a client. However, according to the individual needs of the client, another hub can be identified, including from a different region, where the expertise can be found.

Within their role of Network hubs, Network partners act as support integrators for their individual client, providing tailor-made advisory and partnering services and pulling together the spokes of other partners of the same consortium (or other consortia) to provide additional or more specialised services available in regions and countries across the EU and internationally, where the Network is present.

A coordinated involvement of other partners in and/or outside the consortium, or of other relevant stakeholders, ensures that there is a clear EU added-value in this sustained model. This in turn enhances the Network's visibility towards both its own clients and the other stakeholders.

Network client journey

Placing the client's needs at the heart of the Network service provision, the relationships and interactions between Network partners and clients are reflected in the client journey. Adopting the notion of the client journey in the Network service design should lead to better understanding of clients' needs, expectations and potential, and is crucial for optimising the Network offer according to the specificities of each region and each company.

The **Network client journey** is the complete experience that clients go through when interacting with the Network – a sum of all services, Achievements and touchpoints between the Network and a client SME.

The client journey is the company's growth path realised with the help of the Network services. Whereas the Network continues reaching and supporting a large number of SMEs through basic services, the client journey is associated with provision of advanced services.

The active contribution of the Network to the SME growth journey finds place in a variety of advisory and partnering services (see section 2.4.1). They aim at supporting SMEs to innovate, enhancing their capacity to internationalise successfully, supporting them to a successful transition by adopting and implementing sustainable business models and activities, and empowering them to be better prepared for facing the challenges of the Single Market and to find effective solutions to barriers they encounter.

These services should be tailor-made and adapted to the client's needs. Action plans and the client journey should determine and document the concrete actors (including identification of the hub and the spokes), timing and steps addressing the needs, as well as the desired targets. They should be customised; one-size-fits-all approach is inapplicable to the client journey. Action plans should be revisable and adjustable in the course of time.

The main factor in service delivery should be to maximise the impact of the Network services in each region and to define in which areas the Network can offer (maximum) European added value to already existing regional and national support offers. This should imply an activation of the potential that the Network as a whole can offer to its target group.

Network advisors should ensure recording and tracking of the activities with their clients in a specifically designed IT platform to ensure continuity, and to allow for analysis and improvement of the Network strategies.

Measuring and analysing the results of a provided service along a client journey should help understand the degree of its impact on the client's business. A set of performance and efficiency indicators are designed to encourage the development of a client-focused Network (see section 2.5.2) and to suggest how the service provision can be improved, and how the interactions at the touchpoints can be enhanced and become even more conclusive.

In the same line, the client journey cycle suggests also measuring the level of satisfaction with the services. This covers the complete experience that clients go through when interacting with the Network and provides valuable information for improvements. Keeping Network clients happy increases the interactions at the touchpoints and is a factor for greater successes.

Lastly, an important aspect of the client journey concept is smooth and clear communication along the process. Proactive, frequent and expert communication contributes to a higher client retention which as critical as new clients acquisition. Also, sharing the successes in the client journey with the rest of the Network and with the involved stakeholders ensures the sustainable development of the model. The Network's achievements should be proclaimed, best practices should be identified and can serve to inspire others.

A visualisation and more details on the Network client journey concept can be found in Annex 3.

2.3.5 Synergies and cooperation

Cooperation with national, regional and local stakeholders

Network services should be embedded in the national, regional and local business and innovation support service ecosystem. Ensuring coherence of the Network activities and their seamless integration in the regional environment is a priority and a strategic issue for all consortia. This also includes cooperation with other EU networks present in their region that provide services or outreach activities targeted at SMEs.

In order to address this, the proposal should:

- Avoid duplication and seek complementarities and synergies with existing services and actions such as clusters or other relevant SME support actors present in the regional ecosystem;

- Position the Network and its members through a thorough communication strategy (see section 2.4.2), providing added value with a European dimension to SMEs in the regional support environment;

- Identify and provide value-added services with a European dimension that fit into and complement the existing regional business and innovation support ecosystem and contribute to its quality. This should also include systematically transferring good practices developed at the European level to stakeholders in the regions covered by the consortia;

- Plan regular stakeholder meetings to provide updates on current EU-related issues, Commission initiatives and services.

If relevant, the proposal may also foresee the conclusion of formal or informal stakeholder agreements.

To be successful, the cooperation implies a high degree of regular stakeholder involvement in Network activities at all levels (local, regional, national, local members of EU networks/initiatives) and constant dialogue with other support service providers. This could be carried out in a variety of ways, including, for example, regional working groups involving all relevant stakeholders, or the establishment of advisory boards or regular meetings of relevant bodies.

Stakeholders could include actors such as:

- Local/regional/national authorities, regional development agencies, regional innovation hubs, associations, representative organisations of SMEs, industrial alliances;

- Digital innovation hubs, innovation agencies, business and incubation centres, universities, knowledge centres, clusters, environmental agencies, social innovation incubators and social actors;

- Organisations promoting trade and foreign direct investment (TPOs), chambers not involved in the Network;

- Financial intermediaries and support providers for access to finance;

- Bodies providing advice on issues, such as certification, intellectual property rights, access to finance, internationalisation, energy and resource efficiency;

- Any other relevant support service providers.

Network consortia should work closely with representatives of other European networks such as:

- Europe Direct[11], EURES[12], SOLVIT[13], Your Europe Advice[14];
- The European Business and Innovation Centres[15];
- The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)[16] (including the European Resource Efficiency Knowledge Centre (EREK)[17], which is integrated into the ECCP);
- Relevant actors implementing macro-regional strategies;
- The future Single Digital Gateway service which will provide comprehensive information on the Single Market, access to related assistance and problem-solving services, and support the gathering of feedback. Network consortia are requested to promote this service, and make use of the information it provides.

Moreover, Network consortia should take advantage of existing regional/national initiatives and regional/national participation in EU-led initiatives, such as:

- National Contact Points (NCPs) for SMEs for the EU Research and Innovation framework programme[18];
- European Institute of Technology – KICs (Knowledge and Innovation Communities)[19];
- Smart Specialisation Thematic Platforms;
- European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH)[20];
- Advanced Technology for Industry centres (ATI);
- Joint Cluster Initiatives (Euroclusters).

The European Commission in collaboration with the Agency will also support the Network in its regional integration, positioning and visibility on a case-by-case basis. Good practices are already applied specifically with Macro-Regional Strategies[21] and Sea Basin Strategies[22] in collaboration with other Commission services. Beyond that, Network partners are encouraged to provide their SME-related expertise to the Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies of their countries/regions, which design and implement the Operational Programmes under EU regional policy.

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[11] Europe Direct – European information network, https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en.
[12] EURES – European cooperation network of employment services, https://ec.europa.eu/eures/.
[13] SOLVIT – EU-wide problem-solving network, https://ec.europa.eu/solvit/.
[14] Your Europe Advice – EU advice service for the public, https://europa.eu/youreurope/advice/.
[15] EBN, http://www.ebn.eu/.
[16] ECCP, https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/.
[17] EREK, https://www.resourceefficient.eu/en.
[18] In line with the Minimum standards and guiding principles for National Contact Points (Annex IV on Cooperation with the EEN), https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/support/ncp/h2020-standards-principles_en.pdf .
[19] In line with the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) 2021-2027 (page 19), https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/proposal-decision-eit-2021-2027-annex.pdf.
[20] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-innovation-hubs.
[21] https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies.
[22] https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/sea_basins/outermost_regions_en.

The Network is also expected to contribute to the effectiveness, connectedness and inclusiveness of European innovation ecosystems, complementing and – when deemed relevant – participating in activities carried out under Horizon Europe's European Innovation Ecosystems activities. Network partners are invited to consider participation in relevant calls for proposals from the European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme, and potential dedicated feedback activities on European innovation ecosystems.

Specific attention have to be brought to promote practices for collaboration with the most relevant of these stakeholders – including in the context of sustainability, such as:

- Common action plans with relevant third parties;
- Common information and capacity building days for SMEs at national and EU level;
- Pitch trainings;
- Common B2B events – bridging academic and entrepreneurial communities and promoting transnational collaboration/research/technological projects.

The overall goal is to increase synergies and improve cost-effectiveness by involving regional stakeholders in joint activities, such as matchmaking activities with cluster organisations.

The European Commission representations in EU Member States are also useful interlocutors for the Network and may help ensure the coherence of different European initiatives across the EU. Where possible, it is therefore recommended that Network consortia, in cooperation with their communication correspondent, agree on a national or regional approach (depending on national circumstances) for liaising and cooperating with the Commission Representation(s) in their country.

Cooperation partners at European level

If need be, the Commission may conclude separate bilateral agreements or memoranda of understanding with other organisations acting at European level (e.g., the European Digital Innovation Hubs) that are in a position to support the operations of the Network as a whole.

If established, the aim of such cooperation agreements will be to provide support to the Network in the area of expertise of the respective cooperation partner and to cooperate with Network partners in specific areas of their technical and/or sectorial expertise. As an example, Network partners are invited to cooperate and raise awareness on the services of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA)[23], and contribute to the activities of the focal points put in place (Network's OSH ambassadors[24]).

Cooperation partners do not receive EU funding for any activities with the Network, are not entitled to provide Network services directly to SMEs, nor to enter into competition with the Network. The EU-level memoranda of understanding as broad strategic cooperation frameworks might also be customised at regional/national level, taking account of the regional/national specific cooperation needs.

[23] https://osha.europa.eu/en.
[24] https://osha.europa.eu/en/enterprise-europe-network.

In addition, specific memoranda of understanding may be concluded with international organisations that provide the Network with a substantial input, for example of new technologies or innovation opportunities.

These cooperation agreements or memoranda of understanding are concluded at the Commission's or Agency's initiative during the lifetime of the action in a separate procedure from this call for proposals.

Cooperation with international partners

There is a continued need for the Network to be also present in major international growth markets outside the EU and the countries associated to the SMP ("third countries"). To this end, organisations from third countries will, via a separate call, be invited to apply for participation in Enterprise Europe Network as "international partners" on a self-financed basis, without receiving grants from the Single Market Programme.

The focus will be on those markets and/or trade blocks with which the EU has:

- Concluded free trade or economic partnership agreements (FTAs/EPAs);
- Established a functioning and vibrant research and innovation partnership (via participation in joint European R&D programmes) or those that have signed an administrative arrangement on cluster cooperation with the European Commission[25];
- Agreed on close regulatory alignment (e.g., via Single Market membership or other bilateral agreements).

International partners will contribute to the purpose of the Network helping ambitious and dynamic SMEs to grow in third country markets and linking up with other EU initiatives abroad. They will be hosted in client-oriented business support organisations in third countries with a strong national or regional mandate and experience to support the internationalisation and innovation process of European and local companies.

The focus of international partners will be on the provision of partnering services fostering cross-border commercial as well as research, development and innovation cooperation, particularly through business matchmaking activities. Moreover, international partners will exchange market intelligence information with Network partners and their clients, e.g. on national rules and regulations, standards, customs information, etc.

Provided that they aim at supporting European companies to exploit commercial opportunities in international markets, Network partners can engage in the following activities with international partners:

- Provision of advisory and partnering services to SMEs targeting third countries (see section 2.4.1) that do not participate in the Single Market Programme, but where international partners are present. Network partners will be asked to cooperate with these international partners, in particular with regard to:

[25] Including Canada, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and the USA.

  - The organisation of brokerage events and company missions, among others international cluster matchmaking events organised in Europe or third countries[26];

  - Advisory services on access to international markets designed to create better trading opportunities and/or overcome related barriers to client SMEs;

  - Where useful, the organisation of capacity building activities (trainings, seminars, information sessions) to companies on access to specific markets targeted by the SMEs where the international partners are present, cross-cultural communication, etc.;

- Promotion of the Network and communication (see section 2.4.2), e.g.:

  - In the framework of EU economic diplomacy initiatives Network partners may be invited to contribute to the organisation of trade missions to selected growth markets where international partners are present. Connecting with the local international partners to maximise the added value of the activity and ensuring follow-up, they will be expected to promote such missions and encourage European businesses to participate;

  - The Network is encouraged to invite its clients to take advantage of the opportunities provided by other EU programmes fostering the internationalisation of SMEs, such as the international cluster matchmaking events organised by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, the Low Carbon Business Action in the Americas and the Joint Cluster Initiatives (or Euroclusters);

- Engaging in Network development activities through sectoral and/or thematic cooperation with international partners involved in Sector or Thematic Groups of relevance to the profile of the target group and the market they cover (see section 2.4.3);

- Contributing to the Network quality management (see section 2.4.4), e.g.:

  - Co-design and delivery of trainings, seminars and information sessions for the Network related to internationalisation, such as on particular markets, cross-cultural communication, international trade techniques, etc.;

  - Acting as a mentor to an international partner. The mentoring scheme aims at developing and maintaining high quality of the Network operations and services, explaining and promoting the Network principles and values, integrating the international partners in the Network and fostering the exchange of knowledge and good practices with them[27].

Applicants should indicatively identify the countries of strategic interest based on the profile and the needs of the target group, as well as the possible areas of cooperation with international partners in their proposals.

[26] In international cluster matchmaking events, Network partners will be asked to cooperate with the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and relevant international Network partners to mobilise clusters and SME members and support their participation in the matchmaking sessions.

[27] The modalities of participation in the mentoring scheme are set by the Agency and will be managed in the course of the implementation of the action.

2.3.6 The role of the European Commission and the Agency

The European Commission provides political and strategic steering, sets the thematic priorities of the Network and is responsible for all policy-making activities linked to the Network.

Each year the Commission drafts a guidance note to the members of the Network with key actions to take in the following year in the light of new EU policy priorities and initiatives and on synergies at European, national and regional level.

Acting under powers delegated from the European Commission, the Agency oversees the operational management of the Network.

The Agency will enable the functioning of the Network and provide tools for the daily operations and activities of the Network partners. This includes:

- Project management through the entire lifecycle, from preparation of the grant agreements with the successfully evaluated applicants and signature of the contracts, to approval of the final reports and closure of the projects;
- Advice and guidance on the implementation of the Network activities and eligibility of costs;
- Sector- and country-specific follow-up of Network operations;
- Common website as a communication platform to enhance the Network's visibility at EU level – https://een.ec.europa.eu/;
- Network IT platform[28] which will enable the application of the client-centric approach and the hub and spoke model, develop the Network potential and enact knowledge-based interactions between Network partners:
    - Help Network partners efficiently support their clients, follow-up the services provided to them, identify and call on expertise of other Network advisors to provide the best available support to clients in an efficient manner;
    - Provide a collaborative space for communication, exchanges, knowledge-sharing and networking;
    - Provide support for learning and development (including e-learning);
    - Include an online directory of Network staff members with their professional and contact details[29];
    - Provide Network consortia with reference data on their activities and results;
- Common Network brand and visual identity;
- Common working standards designed in cooperation with Network partners.

28 Use of Network IT tools shall be compulsory for all operational Network staff.

29 Processing of personal data in the Network IT platform will be based for the Agency and the Commission Regulation (EU) N° 2018/1725 and for network partners and other stakeholders the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, Regulation (EU) N° 2016/679).

2.4 Activities that can be funded

All consortia should carry out the following four types of activities and describe them in their proposals:

1) Activity 1: Provision of value-added services to clients
2) Activity 2: Promotion of the Network and communication
3) Activity 3: Network development and capacity building
4) Activity 4: Network coordination and quality management

These four types of activities are mandatory – the combination of expertise, skills and positioning of all Network partners in a consortium should guarantee that the full range of activities is provided in the region covered by the proposal.

Individual partners in a consortium are not obliged to run all types of activities. However, all of them should be capable to provide basic Network services in compliance with the no-wrong-door principle applied in the Network (see section 2.3.4). This concept lays down the basic rules for service delivery to clients, signposting of clients and building synergies with other providers of business support.

All Network services must be provided **free of charge** to the client companies. However, registration fees for events, seminars and workshops may be charged. Travel and accommodation expenses incurred by the clients are not eligible under this action.

⚠ Applicants are required to respect certain thresholds in terms of share of the total effort (full-time equivalent (FTE) or person-months)[30] for each of the Network activities (see Table 1).

Moreover, a ceiling is set for Activity 4 due to the different nature of funding of this activity (lump sums reimbursed at 100% – *see sections 2.4.4 and 10 for more information*).

Activity	Effort
Activity 1: Provision of value-added services to clients	Minimum 65% of the total FTEs
Activity 2: Promotion of the Network and communication	Between 15% and 20% of the total FTEs
Activity 3: Network development and capacity building	Maximum 10% of the total FTEs
Activity 4: Network coordination and quality management	Lump sum up to 5% of the budgeted personnel costs

Table 1. Required thresholds of effort per activity, and threshold for the lump sum in Activity 4.

The four types of activities should be described in separate work packages in Part B of the Application Form.

[30] The proposal uses person-months to measure effort: 1.0 FTE (a full-time employee) = 12 person-months.

2.4.1 Activity 1: Provision of value-added services to clients

The Network's primary aim is to provide value-added services that help European SMEs to enhance their competitiveness, sustainability and innovative capacities to grow and do business in Europe and beyond.

In this context, Network partners should provide advisory and partnering services focusing on EU programmes, policies and legislation that are relevant to SMEs, and other innovation, sustainability, internationalisation and access to finance advisory services.

2.4.1.1 Advisory services to clients

The Network will offer advisory services on innovation and technology transfer, EU legislation and standards, EU policies and programmes, access to finance, internationalisation and access to markets, enhancement of management capacities, and cooperation with clusters.

In addition, as part of the SME Strategy, the Network should help companies to increase their resilience and help SMEs in their transition to more sustainable and digital business models. Where appropriate and in the client's interest, the Network should also promote open innovation models and guide SMEs through the related processes. The Network should focus on the European dimension of these topics.

Advisory services provided by the Network focus on EU topics and the other service areas described below. The aim remains to increase the competitiveness of SMEs, and/or to support growth and internationalisation in Europe and beyond.

In the Network client journey, advanced advisory services carried out by one or more Network partners leading to a significant positive outcome for the client result in **Advisory Achievements (AAs)**.

AAs facilitate and consequently mark the successful entry to market or international presence of a Network client in an EU Member State other than the one it is based or in a SMP associated country, or in one of the Network's international partners' countries (see section 2.3.5). The result is associated with considerable, measurable and/or identifiable impact for the client.

Value-added services in the **subject areas** listed below must be included in the service range of all consortia (except those marked as optional).

SME capacity building

Network consortia are expected to provide:

- Tailor-made, value-added advice and support to client SMEs or to other Network partners. This will focus on resolving specific issues/challenges that SMEs need to overcome during the client journey, moving beyond a question/answer-based approach;
- Tailor-made services to overcome barriers to the internationalisation of innovation-oriented and technology-driven European SMEs with high-growth potential and help them scale up their activities in the Single Market and beyond;
- Support to improve the capacities of SMEs to raise business performance and achieve sustainable growth – in particular with a view to withstanding the competitive pressures in the Single Market and international markets;
- Client journey assessments and follow-up, including business, technology and

innovation reviews of companies to ascertain their support requirements;

- Preparatory (online) visits and discussions with client SMEs to establish their requirements in the framework of the client journey and relying on the hub and spoke support when needed;
- Events (including workshops where customised individual advice, training and other relevant Network services are provided to businesses).

In addition, as an option consortia may:

- Organise SME peer-to-peer learnings, offering the opportunity for SMEs to meet with peers from around Europe and exchange knowledge and experience (possibly as part of the business-to-business (B2B) events);
- Organise study visits, seminars or workshops for specific sectors, where associations and clusters may also be involved;
- Provide personalised coaching activities in main fields as internationalisation, innovation, and access to finance;
- Provide other advisory services on topics identified by Network partners as relevant in the respective regional context.

Sustainability

As part of the SME Strategy, the Network will help SMEs in their transition to more sustainable business models and more resource-efficient and circular processes and infrastructures. In particular, the Strategy committed to upgrading the Network with dedicated **Sustainability Advisors** and other sustainability services.

Each Network consortium must nominate at least one Sustainability Advisor. When human resources capacity allows, the Sustainability Advisor(s) will be supported by an extended sustainability team. Specific access to sectoral expertise will also need to be ensured within the Network, notably by relying on Sector Groups.

The Network Sustainability Advisor(s) will act as the key point of contact in the consortium for sustainability issues and will maintain close relations with key local, regional, national and European stakeholders. He/she needs to have the required skills and expertise in the overall UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, new sustainable business models, circular economy and resource efficiency, sustainable finance including EU Taxonomy[31], etc., to be able to provide advanced services to SMEs (see section 2.3.3 Structure of the Network: Network staff).

In addition, sustainability is a cross-cutting aspect that each Network Advisor should be aware of when providing the full range of Network services to their client SMEs. The Sustainability Advisor(s) will help identify consortium members' needs and provide access to relevant trainings and capacity building activities.

Network consortia are expected to provide:

- Awareness raising activities amongst SMEs on the challenges and opportunities of implementing sustainable business models and activities, including the environmental and social aspects of sustainability;

[31] Regulation (EU) N° 2020/852 (Taxonomy) on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment.

- First-level sustainability assessments taking place at the stage of the client needs assessment in the client journey, by the local hub and/or the Sustainability Advisor (making use of the Network's proposed methodologies and assessment checklists);

- Dedicated advisory services based on the degree of awareness and willingness of the SME to engage in more sustainable business models and activities. This ranges from an introduction into the aims of a sustainable business approach to tailored advisory services;

- Services that help SMEs understand and embrace the long-term benefits of the transition to more sustainable business models and activities, such as:

    - Advice on access to finance,

    - Partnering and technology transfer services,

    - Advice on EU legislation and standards,

    - Support for EU certification schemes such as the EU Ecolabel[32] or EMAS[33],

    - Advice on new sustainable business models, circular economy, green entrepreneurship, resource efficiency and clean energy – in cooperation with relevant service providers such as clusters and members of the European Resource Efficiency Knowledge Centre (EREK),

    - Innovation support services (including eco-innovation and social innovation),

    - Other specialised services with a strong sectoral focus;

- A mapping of organisations relevant to sustainability, including relevant stakeholders, actors, platforms and initiatives; the mapping will also refer to the map and knowledge database of EREK;

- Joint activities and close collaboration with relevant organisations (common information days, trainings, B2B events, etc.) and efficient signposting where necessary;

- A mapping – and keeping up-to-date – of available sources of funding/finance for sustainable investments at EU, national and regional level, including public procurement, crowdfunding/crowd-investing and community-based finance.

- Good practices to share between Network partners.

In order to carry out the dedicated services, different assessment tools focusing on sustainability might be used. In case there is a need to purchase a license to use one of these tools, the license costs may be eligible under the future grant agreement.

Internationalisation

Network consortia are expected to provide:

- Support to help companies access international markets and business opportunities, advisory services supporting the partnering process, focusing for example on market intelligence, identification of suitable growth markets, local

[32] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel.
[33] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/index_en.htm.

business conditions, and on capacity building for SMEs;

- Support to SMEs on FTA-related issues for better exploitation of business opportunities offered by new EU trade and economic partnership agreements, establish a Network FTA contact point in each consortium;

- Active support to Network international partners in third countries to better integrate them in the Network's activities (see section 2.3.5 Synergies and cooperation: Cooperation with international partners).

Digitalisation

Network consortia are expected to:

- Raise awareness (*inter alia*, via workshops and webinars) amongst SMEs on the challenges and opportunities of digital technologies to improve their business models and the public support available for them. The Network should rely on the participation of experts from the European Digital Innovation Hubs where possible;

- Help SMEs make use of the EDIH services: refer SMEs to the regional/national members of the EDIH network;

- Carry out basic digital assessments[34].

In case of need to purchase a license to use one of these tools, the license costs may be eligible under the future grant agreement. The European Commission might also put at the disposal of the Network partners an appropriate assessment tool in the future.

In addition, as an option, consortia may:

- Facilitate cross-border cooperation between SMEs and the hubs, serve EDIH SMEs with specialised services such as internationalisation, including organisation of dedicated B2B events, joint investor-related events and hackathons.

Regional integration

Network consortia are expected to:

- Liaise with the national/regional managing authorities in charge of SME and innovation-related programmes in order to build up well-functioning working relations and seek for potential collaboration possibilities that might include the organisation of common workshops, info-sessions on upcoming European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) calls, advising SMEs on how to access these funding possibilities;

- Provide Network services and tools that might enrich ERDF-funded programmes including Interreg[35] in accordance with the already identified good practices. Develop a stakeholder map that targets and prioritises communication with different groups of stakeholders; develop bottom-up strategies for efficient stakeholder communication in the region(s) covered by

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[34] These assessments will look at the potential for the company to benefit from further digital transformation, including from e-commerce, but also from more advanced technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, and how to best support the SME in that transformation, including with the support of regional/national members of the EDIHs. For this purpose, different assessment tools might be used, e.g. DIQ or equivalent.

[35] https://www.interregeurope.eu.

the proposal;

- Cooperate with other providers of SME support and activities contributing to the quality increase of the national/regional SME and innovation support ecosystem, in particular through activities connecting ecosystem actors and SME to European quality initiatives, such as the Interregional Innovation Investments and Horizon Europe's European Innovation Ecosystem activities.

Single Market

Network consortia are expected to:

- Provide basic advisory services on EU legislation and policies in the Single Market[36]. An important part of this service is to help clients plan ahead to ensure that they are aware of formalities they may need to comply with. There will also continue to be a need for basic advice to help clients tackle specific barriers they face in the Single Market;

- Cooperate with other advisors in the Network, and making expertise available to other Network partners;

- Cooperate with other EU Single Market networks to deliver advisory services, for example by signposting relevant cases to SOLVIT and signposting questions on behalf of clients to Your Europe Advice;

- Identify a small number of EU and local stakeholders that could benefit from guidance on the Single Market.

In addition, as an option consortia may:

- Provide support to identified stakeholders of Network consortia who may signpost specific questions to their local Network partner to receive general orientations;

- Provide advanced advisory services in a small number of fields specifically relevant to the identified needs of Network clients and where Network members have built up specific expertise;

- Provide legislation watch services, alerting SMEs on new EU and national legislation.

Innovation

Network consortia are expected to:

- Provide innovation (management) capacity building services for SMEs when a need is detected as part of the client journey with a particular focus on digitalisation and sustainability, utilising certified tools for innovation (management) audits (building on experience with tools such as IMP³rove[37], IHC[38], DIQ, Corporate Sustainability Navigator, etc.) This service may include an innovation (management) capacity assessment, a gap analysis and the provision of targeted services to address recognised gaps;

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[36] In particular in areas such as free movement of goods, standards, CE-marking and REACH, services and posting of workers, procurement and tender opportunities, cross-border VAT, e-commerce, digitalisation and contracts, Single Market advice for Network IP services, and other EU legislation.

[37] https://www.imp3rove.de.

[38] https://www.leanbusinessireland.ie/funding-supports-overview/are-you-an-enterprise-ireland-client/innovation-health-check.

In case of need to purchase a license to use one of these tools, the license costs may be eligible under the future grant agreement. The European Commission might also put at the disposal of the Network partners an appropriate assessment tool in the future.

- Organise in-depth competence-building workshops for SMEs on the EIC Accelerator[39]: as part of the Network's general innovation support and competence-building activities, appropriate emphasis should be placed on in-depth competence building workshops for groups of SMEs about the EIC and, in particular, the EIC Accelerator. The purpose of these competence-building workshops is to improve the ability of SMEs to design and write good EIC Accelerator proposals and to support their proposals in the EIC Accelerator evaluation process. They should be addressed directly to SMEs (rather than intermediary organisations of any kind) and be organised in close cooperation with the relevant EIC NCPs. While this activity is pertinent in all EU Member States and Horizon Europe associated countries, it is expected that such workshops are organised more frequently and with higher intensity in countries where success rates of EIC applications is low (e.g., countries eligible for widening support[40]);

  One-to-one advice on accessing Horizon Europe EIC Accelerator calls from widening countries and for women-led enterprises (without any geographical limitation), as well as dedicated support to EIC Seal of Excellence for accessing alternative sources of funding/finance, are not eligible under the grant agreement as a result of this call, but will be supported under the Horizon Europe EIC Work Programme.

- Provide technology transfer (TT) services to facilitate the brokerage of transnational technology transfer agreements. Beyond the transnational aspects, technology transfer activities may also foster technology transfer at regional/national level to support research intensive SMEs all the way through from R&D to successful market maturity of products, processes and services. The Network partners are also encouraged to organise virtual and physical road mapping workshops involving different actors of the innovation value chain by reinforcing the Network Advisors' role as innovation ecosystem integrators;

- To raise awareness on intellectual property issues and provide support to facilitate the use of IP rights and help SMEs trade and exploit their intellectual assets at international level;

- To act as a multiplier for the European IP Helpdesk and the international IP Helpdesks[41]. In their capacity of associate members, these helpdesks provide the Network with training, guidelines and other services. Cooperation with them should be foreseen to provide SMEs with access to their IP services (including joint training events and mutual signposting of clients). Consortia or host organisations that are not able to deliver IP services for legal reasons may rely on collaboration agreements with other providers outside the consortium.

In addition, as an option consortia may:

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[39] https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/section/sme-instrument/eic-accelerator-funding-opportunities.

[40] From the EU Member States, these countries are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, for the whole duration of the Programme. For Horizon Europe associated countries, the list of eligible countries will be defined based on an indicator and published in the Horizon Europe Work Programme.

[41] https://intellectual-property-helpdesk.ec.europa.eu.

- Support SMEs to benefit from the services of the centres for Advanced Technology for Industry in both regional and cross-border context. Dedicated cooperation activities with the ATI centres (including matchmaking activities) could also be envisaged. In order to facilitate this activity, the European Commission will provide the Network partners with a database with single-entry-access on all ATI centres.

Access to finance and EU funding

Network consortia are expected to:

- Provide advice on the types of EU funding and other sources of finance that are likely to be relevant to a client's needs to help them plan ahead and prepare to request finance/funding at the appropriate moment, and respond to immediate requests for advice;

- Provide advisory services on R&D funding in close cooperation with Horizon Europe National Contact Points[42]. This includes the organisation of general awareness-raising events, as well as competence building workshops focusing on hands-on advice to prepare high quality Horizon Europe proposals;

- Provide advice on the financial instruments of InvestEU, Horizon Europe and other funding sources such as the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) programmes, in particular funding specifically available for SMEs under these programmes, and under national Recovery and Resilience Plans. Network consortia should also provide information/advice about other sources of funding/finance, guidance on investment readiness and access to specialised advice. These other sources of funding include banks, public finance schemes, venture capital, seed capital and business angels, and alternative sources of finance for SMEs in their country (including crowdfunding). It will be important to establish good relations with financial providers and financial intermediaries, to gain a good understanding of the type of projects/businesses they invest in and their specific criteria. A mapping of key financial providers in the region should be made for this purpose;

- Each consortium should identify at least one reference person with specific expertise in the area of access to finance, with a special focus on financing available for the green transition of SMEs (this person should liaise closely with the Sustainability Advisor).

In addition, as an option consortia may:

- Provide more complex services focusing on individual advice, SME investment readiness programmes, advice on related matters such as business planning, pitching techniques and partnership activities to put SMEs into contact with potential investors (including using innovative methods such as investor hackathons) and sources of finance. The scope to provide these services may depend on national legislation and this type of service provision should be adapted to avoid overlap with other regional services.

SME feedback

The Network is a key communication channel for SMEs to the European Commission. It will therefore gather feedback from SMEs on selected EU policies, actions and legislation, in response to specific priorities announced by the Commission and complementing the role of other business organisations in this context. All consortia

[42] As also described in Annex IV of the NCP Minimum Standard and Guiding principles.

must nominate at least one SME feedback contact person who will act as an intermediary in relation of the above-mentioned activities.

Network consortia are expected to:

- Contact, inform, invite and consult SMEs in the framework of SME consultations launched through the Network;
- Promote on-line public consultations launched by the European Commission (organise events and provide advice or support to SMEs for understanding the consultation and encouraging them to respond), and inform SMEs of evaluations, roadmaps and consultations on new Commission initiatives that are likely to affect businesses;
- Respond to ad-hoc feedback requests from the Commission, related to EU policies especially in the framework of impact assessments and evaluations;
- Collect feedback on Single Market issues from SME clients and relay it to the Commission via available feedback channels and/or redirect to SOLVIT;
- Disseminate the results of this feedback in their region, when applicable (for instance to sector-specific organisations, regional and national authorities, etc.).

2.4.1.2 Partnering services to clients

Partnering services are at the core of the Network. The aim is to help clients of the Network engage in establishing successful partnerships in:

1) Business / commercial collaboration;
2) Innovation / technology and knowledge transfer;
3) Collaboration fostering R&D activities of SMEs and leading to participation and funding of SMEs in European research programmes (such as Horizon Europe or Eureka Eurostars).

As part of a client journey, the Network's assistance covers the entire partnering process, from the identification of suitable partnering opportunities to accompanying advisory services and assistance to ensure a successful entry into the target market(s) or sector(s).

Some of the activities carried out in this context may be aimed at increasing sustainability and digitalisation in SMEs, helping them to develop sustainable business models, embrace digitalisation, increased competitiveness and new innovation and business opportunities.

The Network's partnering services comprise:

- Searching the partnering tools to find profiles that suit their clients' needs and creating expressions of interest on their behalf;
- Drafting of high-quality partnering profiles (offers and requests), following a prior in-depth analysis of client’s needs and capacities, entry of these into the Network's partnering opportunities database for them to be disseminated. The focus should be on quality not quantity;
- Timely response to expressions of interest about their own profiles once they have been published;

- Active dissemination of profiles entered by other Network partners to local companies and potential business partners, as well as active search for matching companies;
- Assistance and advice in the conclusion of transnational partnership agreements and follow-up of the partnering process from start to end, including cross-border cooperation with other Network partners to clarify the partnership needs of their clients and integrated services to help Network clients resolve other matters related to their cooperation venture (legal and administrative formalities, standards, etc.);
- Organisation of transnational brokerage and matchmaking events for SMEs, including sectorial events and large brokerage events that might be linked to international fairs. Such events should be organised in cooperation with other Network partners. The Network will collaborate with other organisations and EU initiatives organising these events, such as the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, to allow for more business exchanges, including with clusters, and maximise the results of these events. This also includes supporting the organisation of cluster-to-business and business-to-business matchmaking meetings in the framework of cluster matchmaking events organised by the ECCP and in close cooperation with its contractor;
- Sector Groups are encouraged to play a coordinating role. Network partners whose region/country holds the annual fora of the different macro-regional strategies are encouraged to organise matchmaking events; to facilitate this, the European Commission and the Agency will help to establish contacts with the organisers of the fora;
- Organisation of inward and outward company missions for SMEs from/to other countries covered by the Network;
- Use of the brokerage tools in the organisation of the events or activities, as well as assistance to SME participants with the necessary preparations;
- Ensure follow-up on the outcome of the activities, and keep a track record of the impact on the company and duly reported to the Agency as required. Particularly successful cases should be highlighted in success stories;
- Help SMEs exploit and use research results from public programmes, in particular the European programmes. To this end, the European Commission may conclude collaboration agreements with relevant EU or international bodies. This activity should primarily be aimed at bringing new products to the market or at significantly improving existing processes or products.

Specific priorities for innovation partnering services include:

- Inward transnational technology and knowledge transfer partnerships with foreign suppliers and related services to help businesses acquire the necessary competences to manage the TT process;
- Outward transnational and knowledge technology transfer aimed at opening new international markets for solutions produced in the region covered by a Network consortium;
- International cooperation for innovation and technology based on networking and open innovation;
- While these services primarily address SMEs, they may also involve cooperation between SMEs and research organisations, clusters, large

corporations or other actors in technology-based industries.

The provision of partnering services may evolve over time as new methodologies or technologies change the way businesses get in touch with each other. Network partners are invited to adapt their services to changing client requirements throughout the programme period[43]. In some cases, this may mean that Network services shift away from the traditional one-to-one contact brokering towards guiding and animating international groups of potential business partners. Network partners may therefore also explore the possibility of new forms of partnering services. This should, however, not cause any detriment to the Network's standard partnering services as long as these are in sufficient demand.

In the Network client journey, partnering services carried out by one or more Network partners leading to a significant positive outcome for the clients concerned lead to **Partnering Achievements (PAs)**.

PAs mark the successful conclusion of a concrete medium- to long-term collaboration between two Network clients located in different EU Member States, SMP associated countries or in a country of one of the Network's international partners[44] (see section 2.3.5). The result of this collaboration is associated with considerable, measurable and/or identifiable **impact** for the client.

The different partnerships imply different levels of complexity, take different periods of time to lead to concrete achievements and have different levels of average impact for the involved SMEs. Applicants should search for the right mix adapted to the clients' needs and the characteristics of the region(s) they cover.

In addition, the partnering services should reflect the political priorities of the European Commission. For instance, helping SMEs address the triple transition towards sustainability, digitalisation and greater resilience will imply more effort and investment in terms of innovation and research. Related Network partnering support services should address these priorities and proposals should reflect the need to meet the important challenges and changes that affect our economy and society.

In the light of these considerations, the quantitative component is always important, but the quality of the proposals for partnering services and the extent to which they are well designed, balanced and reflect EU priorities, will be considered carefully during the evaluation of proposals.

2.4.2 Activity 2: Promotion of the Network and communication

The Network has the potential to reach a much wider audience of SMEs and achieve higher visibility than in its previous phases. Applicants must demonstrate how they will achieve this considering the situation in their region. They should take into account the following three key communication objectives of the Network:

- Raise awareness about the Network;
- Promote the achievements of the Network;
- Enhance the visibility of the Network and its brand (a corporate brand of a network of excellence of integrated business and innovation services).

Each consortium must promote awareness among local SMEs and multipliers (e.g.,

[43] Coherence with the Network's common approach and any joint European scheme that might be used for this purpose shall be ensured.

[44] In the latter case, one of the Network clients concluding the partnership should be based in the EU or in a SMP associated country.

media, other SME services suppliers) about its excellence in service supply, enhance the visibility of the Network and its brand, highlighting the quality and the value to SMEs of its services, and the successful results and impacts on SMEs.

As part of this, each consortium should promote success stories to showcase how the Sustainability Advisors helped SMEs to increase their sustainability, to inspire other SMEs to do the same.

This should incorporate the regular use of cost-effective external communication, including social media and online tools as well as speaking at events. Communication partnerships, for example with the media, representative organisations with a wide reach into the SME community or with organisations in charge of important events for SMEs, such as large trade fairs, are also encouraged.

Network partners should also promote the Network and its services to the wider business support system in the region and organise joint promotion activities with key local partners. Promotion messages should highlight the Network's services, stressing that the Network is there to provide added value, not to create competition.

Network partners, in particular the communication correspondents (see below) will also occasionally be invited to contribute to outreach activities on EU initiatives of specific relevance to SMEs[45] (outreach by social media, and occasional contribution to awareness-raising campaigns).

Communication strategy and work plan

Network partners must coordinate their communication activities in order to attract the widest number of potential clients in their region. A communication strategy for the entire period of the action and a work plan for the first year of operations are therefore required in the proposals.

The communication strategy should be described in the relevant work package in Part B of the Application Form and should explain:

- How you plan to achieve the key communication objectives of the Network;
- Your target audiences for communication;
- The communication channels you will use;
- How you will measure the results of your communication activities and define success.

Moreover, the strategy should provide a clear definition of Network-related promotional and public relations activities, as opposed to host organisation activities. It should include a commitment from host organisations to give adequate visibility to the Network and its services and to ensure that the Network is clearly featured on the host organisation's website, as well as a commitment to follow the Network's branding guidelines in full.

Whereas the communication strategy gives the major direction, the communication work plan acts as a detailed step-by-step guide. A strategy answers the question of 'why' and 'what'; a plan answers the question of 'how'. A strategy is ongoing until review, a plan has a very rigid timeline of one year.

A communication work plan for the first year of operations should be submitted in the proposal in a specific template and should include:

[45] For example, about EU funding for SMEs, other EU support measures and services for SMEs.

- A list of detailed communication activities to be developed within a year;
- Specific objectives, target audiences, draft messages, proposed tools and channels;
- Specific indicators for each communication activity.

Consortia should update the work plan on an annual basis and submit it as a deliverable every year in the course of the action.

The communication work plan template is available on Funding & Tenders Portal Reference Documents.

Websites

Each consortium is furthermore obliged to maintain a common consortium website.

The consortium's communication activities may be carried out by one or more Network partners fully or partly devoted to promoting the Network in the region covered by the consortium.

In countries with more than one consortium, all consortia should coordinate at national level and carry out common communication actions in addition to individual regional activities. Examples include a national event, media relations or promotional campaigns. A commitment to taking part in national and EU-wide visibility activities should also be made.

A **communication correspondent** must be nominated by each consortium and in the cases of countries with more than one consortium, they should work closely (in a group) with the communication correspondents of the other consortia.

Communication correspondents should have at least two years of experience in communication and one year of seniority in the Network and/or a host organisation (see section 2.3.3 Structure of the Network: Network staff).

These correspondents will act as interlocutors for the Agency and the European Commission's communication activities and promote good communication within their own country, including sharing of good practices. In the course of implementation of the action, among the communication correspondents national Communication Champions will be selected who will contribute to improving the standards of communication across the Network.

A common **national Network website** must be put in place (in countries where there is only one Network consortium, one website with a national reach is sufficient). The website should be available in the national language(s) and in English.

For reasons of coherence, all consortia are asked to create a generic e-mail address with the same structure. This address should be "info@consortium-web-address". While it does not have to be the only e-mail address used by a consortium, it should be monitored every day and enquiries sent to it should be forwarded to the most appropriate consortium partner.

Branding

Consortia are required to follow the Network's Visual Identity Guidelines and apply the branding rules in full on all their publications, electronic communication products, posters, programmes and other communication and event material realised under the co-financed project. Each Network partner should also place the Network logo and an explanatory text of the project on a principal and widely visited page of their website.

The full range of Network services must be described on dedicated regional and national Network webpages.

Furthermore, partners should show their membership in the Network by placing the Network logo in an easily and publicly visible place outside their premises and advertise the related services in an adequate fashion.

Host organisations will be required to comply with the branding guidelines of the Network. These will provide for co-branding between the Network and the host organisations. Tools, templates, training and support will be provided by the Agency once the Network is operational.

The Visual Identity Guidelines will be made available to all Network partners via the EEN intranet.

Story leads and success stories

In the Network client journey, when an Achievement is reached, the success of a client's case and the positive impact on its business is explained in a story. Stories are a powerful communication tool to share and interpret experiences, inspire and engage others, and make the best use of the Network effect. Furthermore, stories promote and increase the visibility of the Network towards the stakeholders and the public.

Each consortium must provide the Agency with at least once per year solid and validated example of a good story that demonstrates the impact of the Network services on the SME clients (a so called "story lead").

Some of those story leads, depending on the quality, but also in view of the communication priorities will be promoted at EU level via corporate communication channels as success stories of the Network.

Communication within the Network

All Network partners are required to play an active role in communicating with the rest of the Network. To this end, all core staff members should connect regularly and frequently to the Network's intranet and the Network IT platform.

Furthermore, an online directory of Network staff members providing professional and contact details will be made available. All Network partners are required to provide the relevant information for their staff members and to keep it updated.

2.4.3 Activity 3: Network development and capacity building

Interactive support between Network partners is a key factor for the quality and success of the Network as a whole following the client-centric approach and in compliance with the adopted hub and spoke model (see section 2.3.4).

Therefore, Network partners should dedicate sufficient resources to collaborating with other Network partners and invest in developing and improving the Network, as well as working on the constant upgrade of their own skills and expertise, exchanges and dissemination of good practices.

Some of the activities are linked to increasing the competences of the Network advisors, reflecting the fact that the strength of the Network lies in the professionalisation of every individual, as well as in the fostering of the Network common capital of knowledge and expertise. They boost and expand the internal Network capital and positive track record of knowledge, expertise and tools, while at the same time ensure that both existing and new Network advisors adhere to the same values, principles, quality standards and modus operandi of the Network.

Participation in the activities listed below should be done according to the principle of the variable geometry in the Network, considering the size and the specific needs of each Network partner and based on its strategic positioning and role in the consortium.

The activities falling within this category include:

- Active membership in Sector, Thematic or other groups, task forces or any other type of expert groups formally organised by the Network, the Agency and/or the European Commission;
- Participation in centralised trainings (organised by the Agency or the European Commission) and decentralised trainings (organised by the Network), seminars and workshops, annual conferences of the Network. The Network training programme is open to all Network partners. It combines training events organised in Brussels and in Network countries. The trainers are a mix of Agency staff, Network partners, external experts and European Commission speakers;
- Participation in staff exchanges and study visits approved by the Agency;
- Participation (as recipient) in peer-to-peer learning events approved by the Agency:
    - Mentoring or coaching schemes provided by other Network partners with vast experience and/or specific expertise in the Network;
    - Buddy system for coordinators – a peer-to-peer initiative helping Network coordinators to learn from each other, exchange practices and enhance their leadership and management capacities;
- Participation in consortium, national and regional meetings of Network staff;
- Contribution to or participation in EU campaigns organised and run by the European Commission[46].

2.4.4 Activity 4: Network coordination and quality management

Network partners are encouraged to actively contribute to activities that are of general benefit for the Network. These activities are of common interest and pinpoint the internal Network processes related to coordination and governance of the Network. They lead to better and efficient functioning of the Network, increase and ensure the quality of the processes, to finally drive expected positive outcomes for the client companies.

Whereas Activities 1, 2 and 3 are performed at partner and consortium level, Activity 4 relates to tasks of individual Network advisors where they have a specific role or have taken on specific responsibilities on coordination and quality management of the Network.

Participation in the activities listed below is not mandatory for all Network partners in a consortium – in some cases assuming the tasks will be based on a specific mandate or follow a selection process. However, it should always match the competences, experience and expertise of the individuals, take into account the available resources and comply with the strategic positioning and role of the Network partner in the

[46] The EU campaigns aim at raising awareness among relevant stakeholders and EU citizens about EU policies, programmes and its achievements. The most relevant campaigns for the Networks partners to participate in are included in the yearly communication work plans.

consortium.

Furthermore, since the activity valorises the Network effect and helps embedding it into the Network's day-to-day modus operandi, Network advisors and teams are strongly encouraged to get actively engaged in Network-level efforts and endeavours. This contributes directly to enforcing and enhancing the Network capacity and capital on the grand scale, while, also contributing to the progress and purpose of each the daily activities.

More specifically, the activities under this category include:

- Chairing, co-chairing or acting as a deputy chair of Sector, Thematic, Working or other groups, task forces or any other type of expert groups formally organised in and by the Network, the Agency and the European Commission;
- Active membership in Agency-initiated Working Groups for the development of Network-wide processes or tools;
- Acting as a trainer or speaker in Network trainings, seminars and workshops, annual conferences of the Network;
- Organisation of decentralised Network trainings, seminars and workshops;
- Membership in representative bodies or steering groups at Network level;
- Acting as a mentor or coach for other Network partners or for international partners within a scheme approved by the Agency;
- Acting as a buddy in the Buddy system for coordinators approved by the Agency;
- Substantial contributions to the quality of content in the Network Community platform on the Agency's request, e.g., acting as community manager, editing or quality control;
- Coordination of Network activities at national and/or regional level where there is more than one consortium per country, including activities related to the organisation of national and/ or regional Network meetings, maintenance of national and/or regional Network websites, specific tasks serving several consortia, e.g., acting as a communication correspondent for the Network.

2.5 Expected impact

The Network services should result in:

- SMEs who are more innovative in terms of products and services, and how they manage their innovation processes, and integrate digital technologies and processes;
- SMEs who have better awareness of sustainability and existing support for their transition, and improved sustainable business models and activities;
- SMEs who are more economically resilient;
- SMEs with improved international activities;
- SMEs who are better adapted to deal with the challenges in the Single Market helping them to become more aware of the requirements or challenges that they may face in future for their specific types of business activities so that they can plan ahead and prepare, and support for overcoming immediate

barriers they face for doing business in the Single Market;

- SMEs who are aware of sources of EU funding (including for research and innovation) and other sources of finance for expanding their business internationally, and what they need to do to apply and/or to establish fruitful contacts with potential investors;

- SMEs who understand the importance of showcasing their successes and are ready to share them in a systematic way.

2.5.1 Expected results

- Increased number of SMEs linked with other entities across Europe and beyond for cross-border business cooperation, technology and knowledge transfer and technology and innovation partnerships;

- Increased number of SMEs aware of sustainability challenges and opportunities and integrating them in their business processes;

- Increased number of SMEs integrating digitalisation to improve the business processes and developing new business opportunities;

- Higher rate of European SMEs exporting within the Single Market and outside the EU;

- Higher rate of European SMEs participating in EU programmes;

- Better understanding by European SMEs of EU legislation and of opportunities offered by EU programmes and EU access to finance;

- Increased number of companies reporting a successful impact on their business in terms of market share, turnover, optimised costs or realised savings in international activities, job creation or maintenance, improved quality of products, services or processes, introduced product or service innovations related to international activities;

- Better visibility of the Network by promoting success stories;

- Better knowledge in EU institutions of SMEs' opinions, difficulties and expectations.

2.5.2 Measuring performance and efficiency in the Network

A set of performance and efficiency indicators is set up in Enterprise Europe Network to encourage the client-centric approach and drive the focus on services with positive impact on client's businesses. Built on the client journey concept, they encourage cooperation between Network partners within and beyond their consortium, and seek to develop the Network potential and enact knowledge-based interactions between partners for the benefit of SMEs.

Performance in implementing the action will be measured through two types of indicators: key performance indicators (KPIs) and activity indicators (ACTs). Furthermore, ratios will be used as an internal management tool to assess efficiency.

Network partners should set KPI targets in their proposals, use KPIs and ACTs to report on the achieved progress and results, and include the ratios in the monitoring and analysis of their project-related activities to adapt their strategies and ensure continuous quality of their operations.

The system of performance and efficiency indicators in the Network is shown in the table below.

Indicator		Ratio >> Internal tool (no targets, no reporting)
Key Performance Indicator (KPI) >> Targets and reporting	**Activity Indicator (ACT)** >> Reporting	
KPI1 SMEs served by Enterprise Europe Network	ACT1 Contribution to other Network partners' client journeys	R1 Achievements per unique clients in the Network client journey
KPI2 Unique clients in the Network client journey	ACT2 Clients in SME feedback-related actions	R2 Clients reporting impact per unique clients in the Network client journey
	ACT2a Clients in SME feedback-related actions reached on a wider basis	
	ACT2b Clients in SME feedback-related actions reached individually	
KPI3 Achievements	ACT3 Network development activities	R3 Achievements per FTE
KPI3a Advisory Achievements (AAs)		
KPI3b Partnering Achievements (PAs)		
KPI4 Unique clients with an impact assessed in their client journey	ACT4 Network coordination, quality management and capacity building activities	

Table 2. Performance and efficiency indicators in Enterprise Europe Network.

Key performance indicators

Key Performance Indicators are measurable values that demonstrate how effectively Network members achieve their objectives in the period of the action.

They are built on the multi-step approach to services in the client-centric model presented in section 2.3.4 which facilitates the creation of an optimised impact for Network clients and is based on cooperation between the Network partners (hub and spokes).

Applicants **should set targets for all KPIs** in their proposals:

- Individually for every partner in the consortium, and cumulatively,
- On annual basis, and for the entire period of the action.

Although every partner sets individual targets, the progress on their achievement will be assessed at consortium level. Assessment will be carried out on continuous basis according to the reporting requirements set in section 10.

To be successful in their target setting, each consortium should make a thorough analysis of their target group rather than apply a one-size-fits-all approach regardless of their needs. KPI targets will reflect the variable geometry of the Network, i.e. the relative size of the consortium and the region it covers.

KPIs will be counted automatically in the Network IT Platform except for KPI1 where information provided by Network partners' from their CRMs will be used.

More information can be found in Annex 4.

Activity indicators

Activity Indicators (ACT) are a measurable result of a Network partner's day-to-day operations set in place to reach the objectives of the Network. It holds a record of all the activities related to defined internal processes facilitating the functioning of the Network.

ACTs work in tandem with the KPIs within the entire logical framework of the Network services implementation. They pinpoint the types of internal processes that will drive expected positive outcomes. Moreover, some of the ACTs are directly related to the roles and competences of the Network advisors, stressing the fact that the strength of the Network lies in the professionalisation of every advisor, as well as in the fostering of the Network common capital of knowledge and expertise.

Applicants **should NOT set targets for ACTs** in their proposals, but **should report** on them according to the requirements set in section 10.

ACTs should be recorded timely and continuously individually by each Network partner and will be assessed at consortium level.

ACTs will be counted automatically in the Network IT Platform.

More information can be found in Annex 4.

Ratios

While KPIs and ACTs provide information on performance and activities in absolute numbers, ratios make the link between them and provide relative information on performance and efficiency. Ratios act as comparison-ready data for a qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Specific targets for the ratios are not requested, nor are there any reporting obligations on them.

Performance and efficiency ratios should be used as internal tools by consortia and each individual Network partner to adjust their client support offer and strategy and improve their overall project advancement and by the Agency in monitoring and evaluation of day-to-day actions or during reporting assessment exercises of deliverables according to contractual obligations.

More information can be found in Annex 4.

2.5.3 Reporting and monitoring

Desk monitoring

Consortium coordinators have the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the work programme and to monitor whether all partners carry out their respective deliverables. They must raise any risk of underperformance with the partner(s) concerned and notify the Agency if the concerns are not addressed swiftly.

On-site monitoring visits

The progress of the project implementation will be assessed and discussed during periodic on-site monitoring visits performed by the Agency.

Assessment at reporting stage

At the end of each reporting period, the Agency will carry out a risk-based assessment of the performance of the Network. In this context, Network partners whose performance is significantly below Network averages will be identified and suitable training and mentoring procedures will be put in place.

3. Available budget

The indicative call budget is **EUR 164 500 000**.

This amount refers to the participation of entities from the EU Member States *(see section 6.1)*. Additional budget will be available for non-EU countries participating in the SMP under Article 5 of the SMP Regulation.

The allocation of the EU funding is based on the number of population and the cost of living in each country, and takes into account the resources estimated to ensure the appropriate delivery of the activities described in this call.

The indicative budget distribution per country for EU27 can be found in Annex 5.

We reserve the right not to award all available funds or to redistribute them between the call priorities, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)			
	1st cut-off date	**2nd cut-off date**	**3rd cut-off date**
Deadline for submission	**11 August 2021 17:00 CET (Brussels)**	2 December 2021 17:00 CET (Brussels)	27 April 2022 17:00 CET (Brussels)
Evaluation	August – October 2021	December 2021 – February 2022	May – June 2022
Information on evaluation results	November 2021	March 2022	July 2022
GA signature	December 2021 – March 2022	April – May 2022	August – September 2022

The **first submission deadline** will be open to all eligible applicants as defined in section 6 below.

The **second submission deadline** will aim to get proposals of applicants:

- From EU Member States and overseas countries and territories (OCTs) covering EU regions not included in the Network after evaluation of the proposals submitted at the first cut-off date. Note that proposals covering regions for which a successful proposal was submitted and evaluated positively will be excluded from the second cut-off.

- From non-EU countries that have been associated or by the submission deadline have started negotiations for association to the SMP according to section 6.1.

The **third submission deadline** will target mainly applicants from non-EU countries that joined the SMP at a later stage, as well as applicants from regions from the EU and associated countries, and OCTs that are not included in the Network after evaluation of the proposals submitted at the second cut-off date.

5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** (cut-off dates) *(see timetable section 4)*.

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the Search Funding & Tenders section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the Submission System (⚠ NOT the documents available on the Topic page — they are only for information).

You can submit your proposal in any official EU language. However, for reasons of efficiency, we kindly invite you to submit your proposal in English.

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents:

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project *(to be filled in directly online)*
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project *(to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded)*
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** *(to be uploaded)*:
  - detailed budget table *(mandatory excel template available in the Submission System)*
  - CVs (short outlines) of core project team
  - communication work plan.

Please note that, for EEN additional coordination and networking costs (see Activity 4 in section 2.4.4; cost category D.3 in section 10), the detailed budget table will serve as the basis for fixing the lump sums for your grant. The costs you include in the detailed budget must therefore comply with the basic eligibility conditions for the underlying types of costs of the coordination and networking activities (personnel) in EU actual cost grants *(see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6)*. This is particularly important for purchases and subcontracting, which must comply with best value for money (or if appropriate the lowest price) and be free of any conflict of interests. If the budget table contains ineligible costs, the grant may be reduced (even later on during the project implementation or after their end). Please also note that this budget category is subject to a ceiling of 5% of the budgeted personnel costs.

Please note that the amounts entered into the summarised budget table (filled in directly online) must correspond to the amounts calculated in the detailed budget table. In case of discrepancies, the amounts in the online summarised budget table will prevail.

At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the **mandate to act** for all applicants. Moreover, you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that the participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc.). Before signing the grant, each beneficiary will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be **readable**, **accessible and printable**.

Proposals are limited to maximum **70 pages**. Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

You may be asked at a later stage for further documents *(for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc.)*.

For more information about the submission process (including IT aspects), consult the Online Manual.

6. Eligibility

6.1 Eligible participants (eligible countries)

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:

- be legal entities (public or private bodies,
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
  - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
  - non-EU countries:
    - countries associated to the COSME part of the Single Market Programme (associated countries) or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature.

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the Participant Register — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc. *(see section 13)*.

Specific cases

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible.

International organisations — International organisations are not eligible.

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf, and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons[47].

EU bodies — EU bodies (with the exception of the European Commission Joint Research Centre) can NOT be part of the consortium.

[47] See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation (EU) N° 2018/1046.

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'[48]. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate as beneficiaries otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations may participate as from the entry into force of these agreements if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement).

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities *(e.g. entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)[49] and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05[50])*. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

ℹ For more information, *see Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment*.

6.2 Geographic location (target countries)

Enterprise Europe Network is expected to be present in all regions of the European Union, including outermost regions, and the other countries associated to the Single Market Programme to provide its services in close proximity to SMEs.

Each proposal should refer to a clearly defined geographic area. The NUTS classification[51] with the administrative division of the EU and its partner countries can be used for the purpose.

The typical area covered by a proposal corresponds to **NUTS1 administrative regions**. While consortia are expected to serve the entire area covered by them, individual members of a consortium may be assigned smaller geographic areas (i.e. at NUTS2 level) provided this does not result in any service gaps in the geographic area covered by the proposal.

Should the NUTS1 level not correspond to domestic structures, coverage of alternative geographic areas of comparable size may be considered.

Provided this contributes to a higher efficiency and accessibility to the Network services for SMEs, the following options can be envisaged:

- Consortia in smaller countries with several NUTS1 regions may be formed on a **nationwide** principle.
- **Cross-regional** consortia may be acceptable in larger countries.
- Consortia may also be **cross-border**, i.e. cover administrative regions in more than one country.

[48] For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation (EU) N° 2018/1046.
[49] The EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the EU Sanctions Map.
[50] Commission guidelines No 2013/C 205/05 on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).
[51] NUTS 2021 classification: Statistical regions in the European Union and partner countries — NUTS and statistical regions 2021.

In all cases, proposals should cover geographically coherent areas enabling broadest access to SMEs and delivery of the full range of Network services. The suggested approach should be clearly explained in the proposal.

6.3 Consortium composition

Consortia should be composed of the appropriate mix of entities ('host organisations' as described in section 2.3.3 Structure of the Network: Network partners) to ensure delivery of the full range of Network services in their designated geographic area.

An indicative and non-exhaustive list of host organisations for Enterprise Europe Network includes:

- SME support organisations: sector and industry associations, export agencies, chambers of commerce, chambers of crafts, technology transfer companies, business incubators…;
- Organisations with proven experience on resource efficiency and circularity support services, such as members of the European Resource Efficiency Knowledge Centre (EREK) and other sustainability platforms Financial intermediaries;
- Trade promotion organisations (TPOs);
- Business organisations and representative organisations of SMEs;
- Regional development agencies;
- Innovation agencies;
- Research organisations or foundations;
- (Business support units of) higher education institutions.

To achieve the Network objectives, proposals should typically be submitted by a consortium made up of **at least two entities (host organisations)** in the covered geographic area.

Proposals from single entities can be accepted in duly justified cases if these entities are able to provide the full range of services described in the call in the entire geographic area covered by the proposal.

Cross-regional consortia (consortia spanning over several administrative regions, including cross-border consortia) must have organisations in all regions they cover.

An efficient service delivery and coordination must be a determinant factor in establishing the adequate size of a consortium.

Organisational competences

Host organisations of the Enterprise Europe Network project must be highly committed to the aims of the Network and to have all the necessary skills and expertise to implement the required activities. The professional capacity to successfully support, advise and inform SMEs and a long-standing experience in those areas are key qualifications for Network partners.

In order to demonstrate their capacity, complying with the required core expertise explained in section 2.3.3 Structure of the Network: Network staff, consortia are required to:

- Demonstrate that they have the capacity to reach out to the target group of the Network and to address the SME community, including services and crafts. To this end, Network consortia should avail of a wide, suitable client base[52];

- Demonstrate how they provide value added partnering, advisory and capacity building services through a clearly defined, documented and monitored impact-driven delivery process. This should include a description of the following capacities:

    - Experience in assisting and advising enterprises on EU legislation in order to allow them to become active in the Single Market and beyond (e.g. CE marking, product conformity, Services Directive, VAT, public procurement);

    - Experience in assisting companies in transnational commercial and/or technology and research oriented partnerships from identification of specific needs to the signature of long-term business and technology cooperation, including access to specific tools for the provision of such services and for ensuring their quality;

    - Experience in provision of sustainability and digitalisation services;

    - Experience in contributing to SME feedback mechanisms that collect the opinion of SMEs on EU policy options;

    - Experience in assisting SMEs undergoing periods of high growth and international expansion based on innovative products and services;

    - Experience in providing services on research and innovation, including activities linked to the EU's recent Framework Programmes for R&D including exploitation of results.

- Prove their ability to work with foreign organisations in a European, international business and technology oriented Network. Specific knowledge of European initiatives and the ability to share expertise and to build complementarities and synergies with other partners in diverse sectors should also be demonstrated. To this end, applicants must demonstrate:

    - Their experience in working in transnational projects supporting international business cooperation, research and innovation;

    - Their capacity to organise general or specific brokerage events and focused or sectoral company visits abroad and their experience in using dedicated tools (including those for follow-up and reporting).

- Explain how they are embedded in the regional SME/innovation support environment. This should include a description of:

    - Their experience in working with regional and national organisations, including cooperation with other national, regional and local business service providers relevant for the proposed activities;

    - Their experience in working with regional and national public authorities in order to ensure that the implementation strategy fits into the wider context of the national and regional strategy of the country.

[52] The 'client base' criterion applies at consortium level as the roles of some individual partners may not require a strong SME client base – e.g. provision of highly specialised thematic support or purely administrative/coordinating roles.

Applicants should give in their proposals an overview of the activities to be performed by each partner in the consortium. This will form a basis for the assessment of the overall capacity of the consortium and the expertise of each Network partner.

Network staff

The staffing requirements are expressed in terms of competence (qualification, experience and skills) and in terms of time assigned to the project (total full-time equivalent (FTE), personnel availability).

Short CV outlines must be provided in the proposal for all Network advisors, i.e. employees assigned to the Network with the exception of administrative, secretarial and other support staff.

The outline should match the requirements for knowledge and skills possessed by the Network advisors (including in communication and project coordination roles), and demonstrate the relevance of their profile if they are assigned a specific role of a Sustainability or Scale-Up Adviser as explained in section 2.3.3 Structure of the Network: Network staff.

Each host organisation must ensure that the staff members listed in their proposal are effectively available and assigned to the Network when the project begins.

Host organisations are encouraged to support a high degree of staff continuity within the Network. Applicants should therefore explain their strategy to motivate and retain staff members of the Network.

Regular staff training and capacity building within the framework of the Network are assets in this context. Host organisations should therefore encourage their staff members to participate regularly in relevant training events organised for the Network. Furthermore, staff members should have access to internal training opportunities within their organisation to ensure a continuous enhancement of relevant knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, host organisations should make sure that Network staff and activities will not be subject to any internal rules that are in conflict with the Network activities and tasks *(see section 2.4)*. There should not be any restriction on international travel to attend Network training sessions, events and meetings requested by the Agency. Staff members should be free to engage in any international communication that is required for the services to operate in a transnational context.

6.4 Eligible activities

Eligible activities are the ones set out in section 2.4 above.

In their proposals, applicants should show that they respect the principle of additionallity, which stipulates that in order to achieve a genuine economic impact, the EU funding contribution may not replace public or other equivalent expenditure by a Member State. In other words, the EU funds may not replace national or regional funding, but must be additional to these.

Furthermore, applicants should describe the European dimension and European added value of the proposed activities and achievements. European added value means that the goals, methodology and nature of the co-operation is not merely confined to local, regional or national interests, but has a European scope. Applicants should also show how they will make use of this European dimension.

Applicants are also asked to explain the expected impact of their project (the impact-driven principle), in particular in terms of increasing the competitiveness and innovation capacities of European SMEs and enhancing their ability to become active in the Single Market and beyond.

Projects must clearly demonstrate that they are complementary to the efforts in the area covered by the proposal already made in the countries of the applicants.

Activities should be complementary to and should not overlap with activities financed through other financial instruments of the EU.

Projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes.

The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities.

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

6.5 Duration

The duration of the projects should be of 42 months, from 1 January 2022 until 30 June 2025.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

7.1 Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be carried out on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the [Participant Register](#) during grant preparation *(e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc.)*. The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will be done for all beneficiaries, except:

- for public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations
- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

If needed, it may also be done for affiliated entities.

If we consider that your financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information
- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries *(see below, section 10)*
- prefinancing paid in instalments
- (one or more) prefinancing guarantees *(see below, section 10)*

or

- propose no prefinancing
- request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

For more information, *see* *Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment*.

7.2 Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how, qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share (including sufficient experience in projects of comparable size and nature).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Quality' award criterion on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

If the evaluation of the award criterion is positive, the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

Applicants will have to show their operational capacity via the following information:

- profiles (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project
- description of the consortium participants

The requirements set in section 2.3.3 should be met.

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

7.3 Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate[53]:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct[54] (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant*]*)
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child

[53] See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation N° 2018/1046.

[54] Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain advantage.

labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)

- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation (EC) No 2988/95 (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that[55]:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information
- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

8. Evaluation and award procedure

The proposals will follow the **standard submission and evaluation procedure** (one-stage submission + one-step evaluation).

An **evaluation committee** (assisted by independent outside experts) will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated against the operational capacity and award criteria *(see sections 7 and 9)* and then ranked according to their scores.

For proposals with the same score (*ex aequo* proposals) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

1) The ex aequo proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Quality'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'.

2) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

3) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the

[55] See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation N° 2018/1046.

geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (**evaluation result letter**). Successful proposals will be invited for grant preparation; the other ones will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

⚠ No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc*.

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending are considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access *(see also Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions)*. Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

Grant preparation will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

9. Award criteria

The **award criteria** for this call are as follows:

- **Relevance:** clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; European/trans-national dimension; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); possibility to use the results in other countries; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation (30 points)

- **Quality:**

  - **Project design and implementation:** technical quality; logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money) (30 points)

  - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (30 points)

- **Impact:** ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends (10 points).

Award criteria	**Minimum pass score**	**Maximum score**
Relevance	16	30
Quality — Project design and implementation	16	30
Quality — Project team and cooperation arrangements	16	30
Impact	6	10
Overall (pass) scores	**70**	**100**

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 16/30, 16/30, 16/30 and 6/10 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

This Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments.

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on Portal Reference Documents.

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 1)*. Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons— even before proposal submission date back to 1 January 2022.

Project duration: 42 months, from 1 January 2022.

Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the Portal Grant Management System and will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

The project activities must be organised in the following mandatory work packages and with the following deliverables:

- WP 1 – Project management
- WP 2 – Provision of value-added services to clients
    - Deliverable 2.1 Mapping of the local business support ecosystem (due in month 6)

  - Deliverable 2.2. Updated mapping of the local business support ecosystem (due in month 22)

- WP 3 – Promotion of the Network and communication

  - Deliverable 3.1 Communication work plan 2023 (due in month 12)

  - Deliverable 3.2 Communication work plan 2024 (due in month 24)

  - Deliverable 3.3 Communication work plan 2025 – until the end of the action (due in month 36)

- WP 4 – Network development and capacity building

- WP 5 – Network coordination and quality management.

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters *(maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc.)* will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5)*.

Project budget (maximum grant amount): *see section 3*. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement *(see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a)*.

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement (100% for EEN additional coordination and networking costs and 60% of the eligible costs for the other cost categories).

The grant may NOT produce a profit. If there is a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs), we will deduct it from your final grant amount.

Moreover, the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement *(e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc.)*.

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 3, art 6 and Annex 2)*.

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
  - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
  - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
  - C.1 Travel and subsistence
  - C.2 Equipment
  - C.3 Other goods, works and services

- D. Other cost categories
  - D.3 EEN additional coordination and networking costs
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
  - SME owner/natural person unit cost[56]: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost[57]: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
  - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
  - EEN coordination and networking costs lump sum: amount fixed by the granting authority based on a detailed estimation by the applicants of the effort and resources they plan to commit for the additional coordination and networking activities work package (see Activity 4 in section 2); subject to a 5% ceiling of the budgeted personnel costs
- indirect cost flat-rate : 25% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs, subcontracting costs, financial support to third parties, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
  - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
  - personnel costs of staff of national administrations is eligible to the extent that they relate to the cost of activities which the public authority would not carry out if it were not for the project
  - eligible cost country restrictions: No
  - other ineligible costs: No

Reporting and payment arrangements

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4 and art 21 and 22)*.

After grant signature, beneficiaries will normally receive **prefinancing** to start working on the project (float of normally 25% of the maximum grant amount exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10 days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) – whichever is the latest.

56 Commission Decision of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7715).

57 Commission Decision of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35).

There will be 1 **additional prefinancing payment** of maximum 30% of the grant amount (without financial reporting) and 1 **interim payment** (with detailed cost reporting).**Payment of the balance**: At the end of the project, we will calculate your final grant amount. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, we will ask your coordinator to pay back the difference (recovery).

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

Please note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done and the costs declared.

Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4)*. The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount *(by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc.)*. It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

If agreed with us, the bank guarantee may be replaced by a guarantee from a third party.

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement.

Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the grant agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24)*.

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet point 4.4 and art 22).*

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up* to their maximum grant amount
- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

or

- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts*.

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

Provisions concerning the project implementation

IPR rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 16 and Annex 5):*

- list of background: No
- rights of use on results: Yes
- access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: No

Communication, dissemination and visibility of funding: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 17 and Annex 5):*

- communication and dissemination plan: Yes
- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

Specific rules for carrying out the action: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 18 and Annex 5)*: n/a

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

The Grant Agreement (chapter 5) provides for the measures we may take in case of breach of contract (and other non-compliance issues).

For more information, *see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement*.

11. How to submit an application

All proposals must be submitted directly online via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System. Paper applications are NOT accepted.

Submission is a 2-step process:

a) **create a user account and register your organisation**

To use the Submission System (the only way to apply), all participants need to create an EULogin user account.

Once you have an EULogin account, you can register your organisation in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

b) **submit the proposal**

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the Search Funding & Tenders section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online

– Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file

– Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots; the budget table can be uploaded as Excel file).

The proposal must keep to the **page limits** *(see section 5)*; excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the **right category** in the Submission System otherwise the proposal might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the IT Helpdesk webform, explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the Online Manual. The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

12. Help

As far as possible, ***please try to find the answers you need yourself***, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

– Online Manual

– FAQs on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)

– Portal FAQ (for general questions).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates.

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the IT Helpdesk.

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@ec.europa.eu.

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and topic to which your question relates *(see cover page)*.

13. Important

IMPORTANT

- **Don't wait until the end —** Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions *(e.g. congestion, etc.)* will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.
- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).
- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System —** By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the Portal Terms & Conditions.
- **Registration —** Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the Participant Register. The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.
- **Consortium roles —** When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

  The roles should be attributed according to the level of participation in the project. Main participants should participate as **beneficiaries** or **affiliated entities**; other entities can participate as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions. **Associated partners** and third parties giving in-kind contributions should bear their own costs (they will not become formal recipients of EU funding). **Subcontracting** should normally constitute a limited part and must be performed by third parties (not by one of the beneficiaries/affiliated entities). Subcontracting going beyond 30% of the total eligible costs must be justified in the application.
- **Coordinator —** In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the grant agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget —** Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully *(e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc.)*. You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).

- **No-profit rule —** Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.

- **No double funding —** There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances declared to two different EU actions.

- **Completed/ongoing projects —** Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).

- **Combination with EU operating grants —** Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice *(see AGA — Annotated Model grant agreement, art. 6.2.E)*.

- **Multiple proposals —** Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded a funding for them).

  Organisations may participate in several proposals.

  BUT: if there are several proposals for the *same/very similar* project, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw one of them (or it will be rejected).

- **Resubmission —** Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.

- **Rejection —** By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this this Call Document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be **rejected**. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.

- **Cancellation —** There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.

- **Language —** You can submit your proposal in any official EU language. However, for reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, *see section 12*).

- **Transparency —** In accordance with Article 38 of the EU Financial Regulation, information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the Europa website.

  This includes:

  - beneficiary names
  - beneficiary addresses
  - the purpose for which the grant was awarded
  - the maximum amount awarded.

  The publication can exceptionally be waived (on reasoned and duly substantiated request), if there is a risk that the disclosure could jeopardise your rights and freedoms under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or harm your commercial interests.

- **Data protection —** The submission of a proposal under this call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable legal framework. It will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating your proposal, subsequent management of your grant and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation and communication. Details are explained in the Funding & Tenders Portal Privacy Statement.

Annex 1

List of acronyms

AA	Advisory Achievement
ACT	Activity Indicator
AGA	Annotated Grant Agreement
ATI	Advanced Technology for Industry
B2B	Business to business
CRM	Client Relationship Management
DIQ	Digital Innovation Quotient
DoH	Declaration of Honour
EBPT	European Business Test Panel
EC	European Commission
EDIH	European Digital Innovation Hub
EEN	Enterprise Europe Network
EIC	European Innovation Council
EISMEA	European Innovation Council and SME Executive Agency
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EREK	European Resource Efficiency Knowledge Centre
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Fund
EU	European Union
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GA	Grant Agreement
IHC	Innovation Health Check
IP	Intellectual Property
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
IT	Information Technology
KIC	Knowledge and Innovation Community
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LEAR	Legal Entity Appointed Representative
NCP	National Contact Point
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OCT	Overseas Countries and Territories
OJ	Official Journal
PA	Partnering Achievement

PIC	Participant Identification Code
REA	Research Executive Agency
REACH	Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (EC Regulation)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises
SMP	Single Market Programme
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the EU
TPO	Trade Promotion Organisation
TT	Technology Transfer
UN	United Nations
VAT	Value Added Tax

Annex 2

Glossary

This glossary aims to provide information to applicants on some terms and definitions used in this document and to refer them to other sources, where necessary. The terms are listed in alphabetical order.

A

Achievement

Achievements are milestones in the Network client journey. They capture the significant positive outcome of advisory and partnering services provided to clients.

Action plan

In the Network client journey the action plan describes, starting from the needs assessment, the concrete actions of the hub and all the foreseen touchpoints (interactions) between the client and the spokes to respond to the identified need. It contains information on the actors and the objectives and sets deadlines for completion of the services.

B

Brokerage services / events

Brokerage events (also matchmaking, business speed dating or B2B events) are a series of pre-arranged transnational meetings organised at a single venue for SMEs. They are often arranged at trade shows, fairs, exhibitions or conferences, but can also be stand-alone events.

Brokerage events is the great opportunity to meet potential cooperation partners and make new contacts. Participants meet during facilitated face-to-face meetings (usually 20-30 minutes), where they can explore potential business and technological cooperation opportunities.

For more information, see the video.

C

Centralised / decentralised training

"Centralised" trainings are events organised in Brussels by the Agency for (staff members of) the Network.

"Decentralised" trainings are supported and approved by the Agency, but organised by Network partners and take place in the country/city of the organising Network partner. They must be open to all other Network partners (within the limits of the space available).

Client-centric approach

The Network's client-centric approach implies designing the services from the client's perspective where a focal point is identifying the needs and following up of the individual client. The approach aims at creating positive experience for companies by maximising quality and building relationships, and reaching a concrete success for the SMEs in terms of impact.

Client journey

The client journey is the company's growth path realised with the help of the Network services.

The client journey in the Network is associated with the provision of advanced Network services (see *Network services*) where Network advisors invest considerable efforts and time to respond to a complex query or help the company design a course of action and develop it.

Company mission

A mission with one or more Network clients visiting and meeting one or more Network clients from a different country with a view to establishing a partnership.

Consortium

A group of host organisations joining their respective expertise in a given country or region to provide all required services under the Enterprise Europe Network, who agree to submit a joint proposal and carry out all proposed activities in collaboration with each other (provided the proposal is accepted).

H

Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever with funding available over 7 years (2021 to 2027) for research, development and innovation projects.

For more information: https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe_en.

Host organisation

The legal entity which carries out the Network activities and in which the department/group of staff members assigned to this activity are employed or engaged.

Hub

In the Network, the local hub is the entity that employs the Network advisor who plays the role of a case manager for the client: providing needs assessment and following the entire journey of the client into the Network ecosystem, checking the outputs, outcomes and impact of the journey for the client.

Hub and spoke model

The hub and spoke model ensures that Network partners make the best use of their resources and work better together to use and share services across the Network and across the local, regional, national and/or the EU ecosystem.

The hub and spoke model brings together knowledge, excellence and competence to deal with the complex challenges the Network clients face. It brings at the forefront the Network effect as enabler deriving from the connection of partners.

I

Impact

Impact is associated with the client's financial growth, and will be measured in terms of increased market share, increased turnover, optimised costs or realised savings in international activities, job creation or maintenance, improved quality of products, services or processes, introduced product or service innovations related to international activities.

Impact assessment

In the Network's client journey, the impact assessment is a cumulative measurement providing an overview of all impact achieved throughout the span of the individual action plans in a client's journey.

N

National Contact Points (NCP)

The National Contact Points are the main structure to provide guidance, practical information and assistance on all aspects of participation in Horizon Europe. NCPs are national structures established and financed by governments of the 27 EU Member States and the states associated to the research framework programme. The NCP systems can vary from one country to another from highly centralised to decentralised networks, and a number of very different actors, from ministries to universities, research centres and special agencies to private consulting companies.

Needs assessment

In the Network client journey, the starting point of the client journey is to assess the needs and capacity of the client as well as the ability of the individual partner to assist with the identified needs and if not, signpost the client to another Network partner or local stakeholder.

Network advisors

Staff members from host organisations participating in Network consortia that provide value-added advisory and partnering services to clients.

Network clients

Any organisation receiving a service from one or more Network partners. Clients should be part of the target group of the Network referred to in section 2.3.2.

Depending on the level of interaction with the Network, clients can be:

- *Unique clients*: those Network clients are counted once in a given timeframe. They cannot be counted again, no matter how many times they revisit the services;
- *Returning clients*: the clients who have interacted with the Network and turn to it again, at least once more;
- *Repeat clients*: the Network's most loyal clients who return to the Network for services time and time again.

Network effect

The Network effect is the enabler deriving from the connection of partners. It is through the sharing of information, resources, activities, and competences of several Network partners supporting each other and jointly serving SMEs that they achieve a higher impact than when working alone.

This effect is primarily based on the principles of cooperative behaviour and the fact that the organisations in the Network are equally concerned about the impact and success of their fellow partner organisations as they are of their own.

Network members

Any member of a consortium.

Network partners

The units / departments / operational teams within the host organisations that implement the activities of the Enterprise Europe Network.

Network services

Services provided by Network advisors to the target group, implementing the activities as defined in section 2.4 and within the support framework (client journey, hub and spoke model).

Depending on the complexity of the request, the need to tailor and the effort to address it, Network services are categorised as:

- *Basic Network services* give direct and straightforward solutions to a company's problem, so that the company does not need further assistance on the specific query. Often short-term in nature, basic services are standard; they are not specifically customised and provide off-the-shelf solutions to companies;

- *Advanced Network services* support clients facing more complex issues or barriers, and help them prepare for realisation of their medium- and longer-term business plans. When basic services are not sufficient to provide a direct (off-the-shelf or standard) solution to a company's problem, Network partners can propose advanced services, tailored to the specific needs of the company.

Depending on the relationship between the Network advisor and the client, Network services can be:

- *One-to-many*: services offered to large groups of clients (referrals to webpages; general seminars, etc.);

- *One-to-few*: services offered to a limited defined group of clients (dedicated workshops for scale-ups, specific sectors, etc.);

- *One-to-one*: individual services delivered to one single client.

No-wrong-door principle

The no-wrong-door principle is one of the key standards of Enterprise Europe Network and entails the implementation of an effective mechanism for signposting towards other providers of services in their consortium or region, for the benefit of all clients. The aim is to ensure that all services of the Network are accessible via (not provided by) any Network partner, and that the Network can act as a gateway to the entire SME support system for their clients.

NUTS

The abbreviation NUTS stands for nomenclature of territorial units for statistics. It is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the European Union and is used in EU (regional) statistics, socio-economic analyses of the regions and the framing of EU policies, in particular the regional policy.

For more information: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background.

P

Partnering profile

All requests for partnerships of Network clients are recorded in the so-called "partnering profiles". They outline the type (offers or requests), objective and potential outcome of the desired partnership that the Network client aims to achieve.

Partnering profiles are created in the partnering process when Network advisors identify suitable partnering opportunities for their clients abroad (see section 2.4.1.2).

R

Regional business and innovation support structure

This term refers to the full set of arrangements that are in place in a given region to support business development and innovation, in particular with regard to SMEs. Network services are expected to complement and tie in with the existing support offer in the region.

S

Sector group

Sector groups are groups of Network advisors with specific background and experience in a certain economic area (sector) who commit to work together in order to meet the specific needs of their clients operating in this area. Sector groups represent a framework to plan and implement efficiently collaborative activities.

Signposting

Signposting occurs when a Network partner, after making full use of the hub and spoke model, is not in a position to deliver a service required by an SME. Typical situations include cases where the SME is looking only for local opportunities without having any international ambitions, or when specific expertise in the Network is missing to respond to the request (rare, but hypothetically possible). Then the respective SME is directed to the most suitable business support provider outside the Network who could (better) address the client’s needs.

Single Market

The common (single) market comprising all Member States of the European Union in which the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons is ensured and in which European citizens are free to live, work, study and do business.

For more information: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market_en.

SME

Small and medium-sized enterprise under the definition of EU recommendation 2003/361.

For more information: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/sme-definition_en.

Spoke

In the Network, spoke is the entity that employs the Network advisor who contributes to an advanced advisory or partnering service provided to a client.

Stakeholder

A regional or local stakeholder is any type of actor (including individual persons) located in a Network consortium's local or regional environment that is not a member of the consortium but with which it might collaborate within the framework of its activities.

Stakeholder agreement

An agreement (formal or informal, written or not) between a Network consortium and any number of stakeholders, outlining the relationship and possible areas of collaboration between a Network consortium and a stakeholder/group of stakeholders.

Stories / storytelling

In the Network client journey, when an Achievement is reached, the success of a client’s case and the positive impact on its business is explained in a story.

- *Story lead*: story leads provide a brief description of a client case that concretely demonstrates the impact of the Network services on the SME. They are used to assess whether a story has the potential of becoming a success story.

- *Success story*: success stories are built on story leads and are and promoted at Commission / Agency level. They play a crucial role for the visibility of the Network and contribute strongly to making best use of the Network effect.

For more information: https://een.ec.europa.eu/success-stories.

T

Technology transfer

Transnational technology transfer is at the heart of Network activities and services that are provided to assist SMEs in transferring technologies across national and European borders. The aim is to foster innovation in SMEs by helping them adapt existing technologies or apply new ones so they can develop new products or services.

In the Network, technology transfer is the successful application or adaptation of an innovative technology from one organisation or industrial sector to another.

Thematic group

Thematic groups are formed around cross-cutting topics of concern to all Network consortia. They have for objective to create a better networking environment and to encourage contacts between experts in the Network on horizontal issues.

Third country

For the purpose of this call, "third countries" are defined as countries outside the European Union that do not participate in the SMP programme.

V

Variable geometry

The principle of variable geometry acknowledges the Network variety in terms of size of the consortia, interaction with the business support ecosystem and embeddedness in the host structures of the Network partners.

W

Working group

Working groups are temporary groups of Network staff members set up as and when required by the Agency in order to create common working standards, guidelines or tools for the benefit of the entire Network.

Annex 3

Network client journey

Basic Network services usually address requests of purely informative nature and they do not require specific preparation, expertise or tailoring.

The client journey in the Network is associated with the provision of advanced Network services where Network advisors invest considerable efforts and time to respond to a complex query or help the company design a course of action and develop it. Therefore advanced services require specific expertise, much deeper research and thorough support.

The figure below illustrates the client journey concept and gives information on the main elements in the process.

Fig.1. The Network client journey

- **Needs assessment**

The initial step in the client journey is to assess the main characteristics and the needs of the SME as well as the ability and capacity of the Network to respond to these needs.

If the company does not meet the requirements to be served by the Network (e.g. due to missing international component, i.e. the potential of the SME to engage in international business activity), the Network partner signposts the client to a stakeholder outside the Network who could (better) address the client's needs.

At this point, the Network partner identifies the main contact point to interact with the client (the hub). This will be the case manager for this client.

The needs assessment should be duly revisited to reflect the client's capacity, dynamics and expectations (or ambitions) and any changes in the external factors of the environment.

- **Action plan**

The action plan describes, starting from the needs assessment, the concrete actions of the hub and all the foreseen touchpoints (interactions) between the client and the spokes to respond to the identified need. It contains information on the actors and the objectives and sets timeline for completion of the services.

The client's engagement in the process should be ensured.

The action plan can be revised and should be regularly updated. If a new need is identified or a new complex query is formulated and taken up by the Network (not signposted), the action plan should be updated.

During the Network client journey, the hub or the spokes can change if deemed appropriate to provide the best support to the client.

Since the client journey is about maximising quality of the service and building relationships with the client, smooth communication with the companies should be maintained at all stages.

- **Achievements**

The successful delivery of advanced Network services is expressed in reaching an Achievement. Achievements bring high impact to the client's business and are considered as milestones in the client journey.

The achieved results for each client will be measured against the objectives set in the action plan.

- **Impact assessment**

Every 12 months an impact assessment on all action plans with at least one Achievement will be carried out to determine the effect of the Network services delivered during the previous year as well as ensuring an update on matured impact from services carried out in previous years.

The impact assessment is a cumulative measurement providing an overview of all impact achieved throughout the span of the individual action plans in a client journey.

Annex 4

Performance and efficiency measurement: KPIs, ACTs and ratios

Key performance indicators

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are measurable values that demonstrate how effectively Network members achieve their objectives in the period of the action.

They are built on the multi-step approach to services in the client-centric model presented in section 2.3.4 which facilitates the creation of an optimised impact for Network clients and is based on cooperation between the Network partners (hub and spokes).

Figure 1 explains the place of the KPIs in the Network client journey.

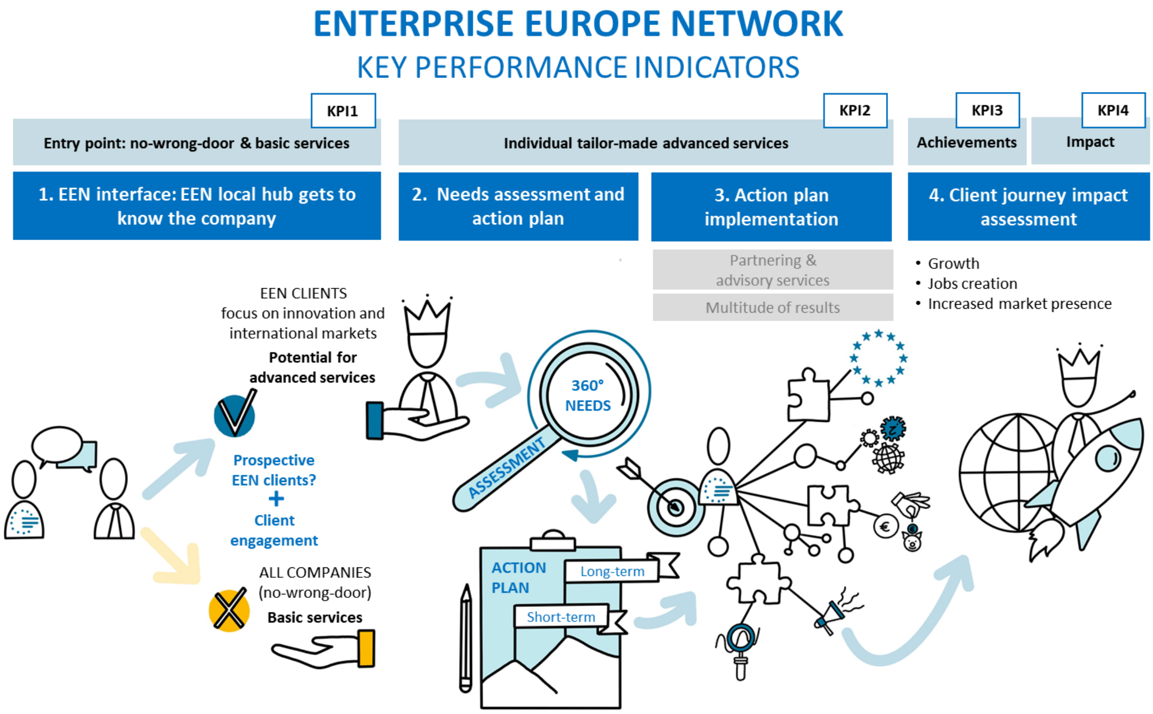

Figure 1. KPIs in the Network client journey

KPI1. SMEs served by Enterprise Europe Network

KPI1 counts the number of SMEs receiving any kind of service, **basic and/or advanced**, including **one-to-one**, **one-to-few** and **one-to-many**.

This indicator counts the companies served by the Network under the 'no-wrong-door' principle. It captures the Network's outreach within the SME community in the geographical area covered by the consortium. It measures the number of SMEs that have been in contact with the Network in any capacity, regardless of characteristics like effort, duration, or impact.

In the Network client journey, KPI1 is linked to the entry point of the interaction with all companies. Some of the SMEs counted in this indicator will continue in the client journey becoming returning or repeat clients (for definitions, see Annex 2 Glossary of Terms).

For reporting, data will be extracted in combination between the Network partners' CRMs and the Network IT Platform.

KPI2. Unique clients in the Network client journey

KPI2 counts the number of unique Network clients receiving tailor-made **advanced services** based on needs assessment and drafted action plan. These are typically customised **one-to-one** and **one-to-few** in-depth services to companies that have already started their client journey.

The indicator measures how many clients get active, strong and continuous Network support in any of the areas described in section 2.4.1.

In the Network client journey, the SMEs counted here are **returning clients**, who often turn into **repeat clients**. The support requires close ties with and deep knowledge of the client developed in both initial and regularly updated needs assessment, supported by a detailed action plan to maximise the positive impact on its business.

KPI2 captures the Network's **effective client base** receiving value-added and impact-driven support through advanced services (as described in Activity 1). It is a subset of KPI1. In contrast to KPI1, KPI2 includes only advanced services provided during the client journey.

All services delivered to clients in KPI2 are aiming at Achievements (KPI3) – advisory or partnering – and a positive impact for the client in a short- and/or long-term perspective.

KPI3. Achievements

KPI3 counts the number of Achievements from Network advisory and partnering services. They result from tailor-made **advanced**, **one-to-one** and **one-to-few** in-depth services with considerable, measurable and/or identifiable **impact** for the client.

Impact is associated with the company's financial growth: increased market share, increased turnover, optimised costs or realised savings in international activities, job creation or maintenance, improved quality of products, services or processes, introduced product or service innovations related to international activities.

KPI3 captures the outcome of the Network support to clients. Achievements can be reached with the participation of one or more Network partners (hub and spoke model) and are reported by both. They have a clear international dimension and capitalise on the Network effect.

In the Network client journey, Achievements are milestones for the clients counted under KPI2.

KPI3a. Advisory Achievements

Advisory Achievements (AAs) result from advanced advisory services described in section 2.4.1.1. They are carried out by one or more Network partners leading to a significant positive outcome for the client.

AAs facilitate and consequently mark the successful entry to market or international presence of a Network client in an EU Member State other than the one it is based or in a SMP associated country, or in one of the Network's international partners' countries (see section 2.3.5).

The result of the service is associated with considerable, measurable and/or identifiable **impact** for the client.

KPI3b. Partnering Achievements

Partnering Achievements (PAs) result from partnering services described in section 2.4.1.2. They are carried out by one or more Network partners leading to a significant positive outcome for the clients concerned.

PAs mark the successful conclusion of a concrete medium- to long-term collaboration between two Network clients located in different EU Member States, SMP associated countries or in a country of one of the Network's international partners[58] (see section 2.3.5). The result of this collaboration is associated with considerable, measurable and/or identifiable **impact** for the client.

In specific cases and always in the interest of the client, PAs can be concluded between a Network client and a company or organisation that are not Network clients (yet). These **single-party PAs** cannot exceed 20% of all PAs of a consortium[59].

KPI4. Unique clients with an impact assessed in their client journey

KPI4 counts the number of unique clients that have received **a series of tailor-made advanced services** and completed an impact assessment, which showed clear evidence of important benefit for the client.

KPI4 captures the **long-term impact** of the Network support to clients.

Impact is associated with the company's financial growth: increased market share, increased turnover, optimised costs or realised savings in international activities, job creation or maintenance, improved quality of products, services or processes, introduced product or service innovations related to international activities.

The impact assessment is conducted by the Network partner acting as the hub according to an **impact assessment questionnaire**, which will be made available by the Agency. It will measure the positive effects of the Network's services on the SME clients provided by Network partners in the following areas:

- Business development;
- Financial development;
- Organisational development;
- Cooperation development.

The questionnaire must also gather information about the client satisfaction from the provided services.

The encoding and proceeding with the impact assessment questionnaire will be through the Network IT platform ensuring measurement of the cumulative impact of advanced services in a certain timeframe for every unique client.

[58] In the latter case, one of the Network clients concluding the partnership should be based in the EU or in a SMP associated country.

[59] In single-party PAs with participation of non-EEN countries, the cooperation with the country should be identified in the work programme of the consortium or, if not, it should be explicitly approved in advance by the Agency.

Activity indicators

Activity indicators (ACTs) are a measurable result of a Network partner's day-to-day operations set in place to reach the objectives of the Network. It holds a record of all the activities related to defined **internal processes** facilitating the functioning of the Network.

ACTs work in tandem with the KPIs within the entire logical framework of the Network services implementation. They pinpoint the types of internal processes that will drive expected positive outcomes. Moreover, three out of the four ACTs are directly related to the roles and competences of the Network advisors, stressing the fact that the strength of the Network lies in the professionalisation of every advisor, as well as in the fostering of the Network common capital of knowledge and expertise.

Figure 2 gives an overview on the ACTs in the Network.

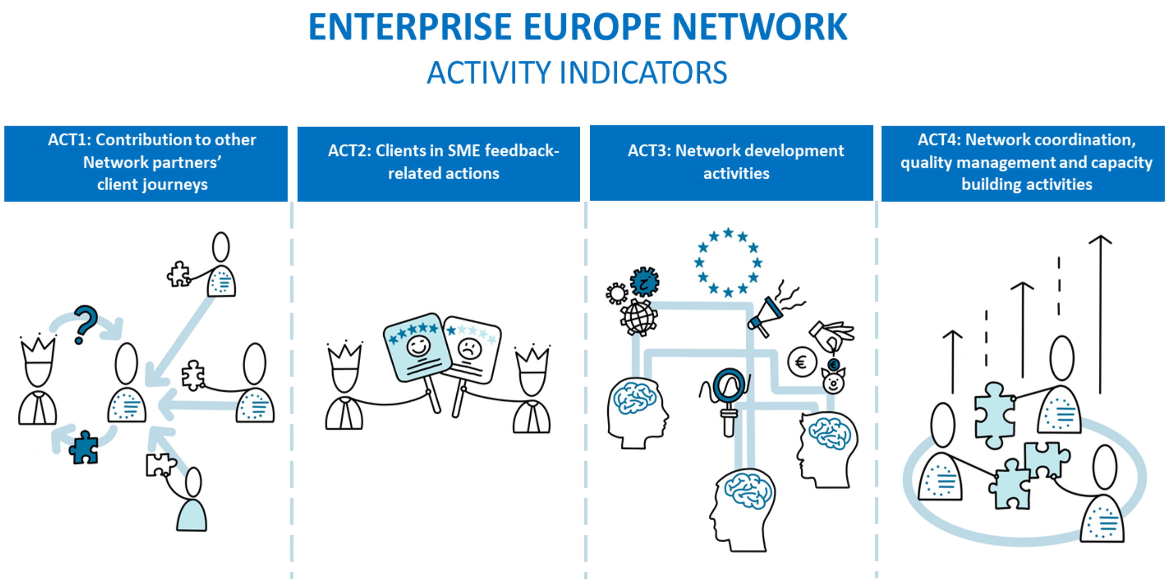

Figure 2. Activity indicators in the Network

ACT1. Contribution to other Network partners' client journeys

ACT1 counts the number of advanced services provided to another Network partner's client journey case. This indicator relates to the Network effect and captures the hub and spoke model.

The indicator measures the contribution as a spoke to the client journey of another Network partner.

There are often situations encountered during the work of the Network Advisor, when one needs to reach out for further knowledge and experience-based support from Network colleagues in other partner organisations, other consortia in his / her own country or consortia from other countries in order to address their client's needs. This type of support is sought with the aim of getting one-to-one professional support to dealing more effectively and productively with the needs of their own clients.

Adhering to this, Network advisors are expected to provide advanced support services to other Network partners in matters where they have highly skilled or specialised competencies that can address the needs of that partner's client.

The contribution could include, but is not limited to technical, specialised, higher competences services in the following areas:

- VAT legislation
- Labelling legislation
- IPR
- Public procurement
- Enhancing innovation management capacities services utilising certified tools for innovation audits, such as IMP3rove, IHC, DIQ, etc.
- CE marking
- Funding and access to finance…

ACT2. Clients in SME feedback-related actions

ACT2 counts the number of clients in SME feedback-related actions consulted on their opinion about legislative proposals or initiatives of the European Commission likely to have an impact on businesses.

Given the fact that the activity can imply different intensity of interaction with the Network client, the indicator has two subcategories:

ACT2a. Clients in SME feedback-related actions reached on a wider basis

This subcategory refers to **basic one-to-many services**. It counts the SME clients who are contacted, informed, invited and consulted to fill in questionnaires on EU legislation sent typically through the EU Survey[60]. The provided service does not open a case for the client, it has a mass character and is not customised.

The subcategory is counted also in KPI1.

ACT2b. Clients in SME feedback-related actions reached individually

This subcategory refers to **advanced one-to-one services**. They imply individual SME feedback cases followed through the SME feedback database and/or client journey recordings of SOLVIT and EBPT cases in the Network IT platform.

The subcategory is counted also in KPI2.

ACT3. Network development and capacity building activities

ACT3 counts the participation of a Network advisor in activities that contribute to the development of the Network as defined in section 2.4.3.

This indicator aims to incentivise and measure the activities that help in building the Network capital and competences. It stimulates the uptake, promotion and dissemination of good practices, unique competences and skills' uptake and improvements at wide Network level, while at the same time rewarding accountability and ownership of the Network advisor in horizontal roles.

ACT4. Network coordination and quality management activities

ACT4 counts the participation of a Network advisor in activities that contribute to the Network coordination and quality management as defined in section 2.4.4.

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[60] EUSurvey is an online survey management system for creating and publishing forms available to the public, e.g. user satisfaction surveys and public consultations.

This indicator aims at encouraging Network advisors and teams to actively engage in Network-level efforts and endeavours, which contribute directly to enforcing and enhancing the Network capacity and capital on the grand scale, while, also contributing to the progress and purpose of each of the daily activities.

In most of the cases, the Network advisor is assigned a specific individual role or takes on specific responsibilities supporting the Network development.

Ratios

While KPIs and ACTs provide information on performance and activities in absolute numbers, ratios make a link between them and provide relative information on performance and efficiency. Ratios act as comparison-ready data for a qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Performance and efficiency ratios should be used as internal tools by consortia and each individual Network partner to adjust their client support offer and strategy and improve their overall project advancement and by the Agency in monitoring and evaluation of day-to-day actions or during reporting assessment exercises of deliverables according to contractual obligations.

R1. Achievements per unique clients in the EEN client journey

Ratio 1 gives information on the number of Achievements (KPI3) over the number of unique clients getting advanced Network support in their client journey (KPI2). This is a **performance** ratio.

$$\text{Ratio \#1} = \frac{\text{KPI3 Achievements}}{\text{KPI2 Unique clients in the Network client journey}}$$

It reflects the level of efficiency of partners in selecting clients with high growth potential and the offer of appropriate set of services. The ratio shows how many unique clients end up with evidenced **short-term** impact of the Network support in their businesses.

R2. Clients reporting impact per unique clients in the Network client journey

Ratio 2 gives information on the number of successful client journeys (KPI4) over the number of unique clients getting advanced Network support in their client journey (KPI2). This is a **performance** ratio.

$$\text{Ratio \#2} = \frac{\text{KPI4 Unique clients with an impact assessed in their client journey}}{\text{KPI2 Unique clients in the Network client journey}}$$

It shows the unique clients with successful, impact-inducing client journeys, effectively measuring the **long-term** impact of the Network support.

R3. Achievements per FTE

Ratio 3 gives information on the number of Achievements (KPI3) over the total number of FTEs dedicated towards supporting unique clients through advanced Network services. This is an **efficiency** ratio.

$$\text{Ratio \#3} = \frac{\text{KPI3 Achievements}}{\text{FTE}}$$

It measures the efficiency of services by relating successful services (Achievements) to the effort – resources needed to reach the latter.

Annex 5

Indicative budget distribution per country for EU27[61]

Country	Indicative grant (EUR)
Austria	3.300.741
Belgium	4.421.330
Bulgaria	2.557.641
Croatia	1.398.660
Cyprus	1.004.886
Czechia	3.580.550
Denmark	2.478.167
Estonia	613.002
Finland	2.145.033
France	24.891.846
Germany	31.765.999
Greece	4.455.719
Hungary	3.433.180
Ireland	2.231.129
Italy	22.587.699
Latvia	839.953
Lithuania	1.080.920
Luxembourg	792.376
Malta	610.109
Netherlands	6.499.339
Poland	11.284.652
Portugal	3.578.653
Romania	5.592.130
Slovakia	1.400.903
Slovenia	1.421.924
Spain	16.760.626
Sweden	3.772.834
TOTAL	**164.500.000**

61 Linked to section 3. Available budget.