Project extensions for clustering activities

The European Territorial Cooperation programmes operating within the Arctic have decided to work more closely together. This cross-programme collaboration is in particularly encouraged and mandated by the European Commission and the EU High Representative in their Joint Communication *A new integrated EU policy for the Arctic*, published in April 2016. In addition, it is a general goal that European territorial cooperation programmes shall contribute to implementation of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies.

The cross-programme collaboration within the Arctic is coordinated by the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme. Participating programmes are Interreg Botnia-Atlantica, Interreg Nord, Kolarctic CBC, and Karelia CBC. The collaboration works for including other programmes.

One way of cooperation and supporting implementation of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies is to encourage and support clustering activities between ongoing projects.

Clustering activities can take place between projects from different programmes dealing with the same theme or projects that are addressing the same territorial challenges. The cooperation has to take place between projects funded by different cooperation programmes and the objective is to ensure better implementation of the cooperating projects, more efficient use of the funding, better results and wider dissemination of the results.

The clustering activities shall contribute to the implementation of EU's Macro Regional and Sea Basin strategies, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the Action Plan for a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic, or to the EU Arctic Communication, An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic.

Typically, a clustering activity (a clustering project), runs for 6 to 12 months. However, the MC may decide on other arrangements on a call-by-call basis.

Purpose of clustering projects
- Synergy, mutual inspiration, complementing expertise and cross fertilizing between projects
- Ensure more resources and critical mass for solving important problems
- Ensure higher quality of outputs
- Ensure more resources for dissemination activities and bigger outreach
- Extend existing partnership and develop new

Minimum requirements
- An eligible project idea and a work plan for the clustering project
- The application should describe the expected tangible and lasting outcomes of the clustering activity
- The project involves, besides an ongoing NPA funded project, minimum two other project partnerships (normally represented by the lead partner) from two other programmes that cover/partly cover the NPA area
- An eligible Lead Partner (for the clustering activity)
- Eligible match funding in place
- Completion of the cluster project application form
- Financial information for all partners

Expected results

A clustering project is in general intended to lead to better outputs and results from the involved projects and a greater outreach for the dissemination of the results from the Arctic programmes.

In addition, it is expected that the clustering activities will result in new and stronger partnerships; potentially in the format of main applications for any of the Arctic programmes or EU mainstream programmes.

In order to measure the impact of clustering projects, applicants will be asked to select the output indicator(s) that they will contribute to during the project lifetime. Clustering projects are expected to demonstrate activities and deliverables that go beyond the achievements of their individual projects, for example, involvement of a wider group of stakeholders, excellence in promoting the results to the relevant target audiences including policy makers, and enhanced business plans for products/services such as combinations of solutions that meet a more complex demand.

During the project lifetime, clustering projects are expected to meet with the Joint Secretariat in Copenhagen. The project should budget for the travel costs. In addition it is expected that the partnership joins follow up events were relevant and after agreement with the Joint Secretariat.

At the end of the clustering project, the Lead Partner is expected to submit a final report describing the implemented clustering and dissemination activities and the final outcomes.

Budget size

Clustering projects can normally have a total budget of up to 45 000 EUR, with a maximum programme grant of 29 250 EUR. For clustering projects, a grant rate up to 65% of eligible costs applies to all partners (both Member State and Non Member State) with the exception of SMEs who are only eligible for a grant rate of up to 50%. The grant is on condition of public or private match funding confirmed through match funding commitments.

Clustering projects can cover- travel and accommodation, staff costs, and external expertise costs.

If a project is co-financed with private match funding, that private match funding has to be paid out and certified before an ERDF or ERDF equivalent co-financing payment can be issued.

Lump sums for clustering projects

It has been decided that the simplified cost option of "lump sums" will be applied to all clustering projects. This leads to a simplified payment procedure, as the clustering project payment will be made based on a pre-established lump sum, provided that the final report, describing project activities and the final outcomes as stated above, is approved by the Joint Secretariat.

The lump sum will be calculated based on the budget in the clustering project application **only**, and stated in the Offer of Grant from the MA. **Please note** that, according to the lump sum principle, only costs established through a fair, equitable and verifiable method are allowed when budgeting for the clustering project. This means that the budget should be based on reality and that flat rate and unit costs are not accepted except they comply with the NPA eligibility rules.

The lump sum principle means that there is no need for a separate claiming procedure with first level control, and there is no checking of the actual spending related to the project or activity. If the

result/outcome is reached and approved, payment will be made. If the result/outcome should not be reached, there will be no payment at all. It is not possible to make a partial payment.

Calls for Applications

Clustering project calls will normally be developed in cooperation with Joint secretariat for other programmes and will be announced on the NPA website. The call will normally address specific themes under one or more of the four Priority Axes. Please find the latest information on our website, or contact your Regional Contact Point, alternatively the Joint Secretariat.

Filling in the Project Application Form

Applicants should complete a project application in the electronic monitoring system eMS. Instructions for completing the different sections of the application form are available on the NPA website. Prior to completing the online application form, the partnership should familiarize themselves with the main NPA concepts and rules concerning a clustering project.

Electronic Submission of Application

Applications for funding should be submitted by the Lead Partner of the project, in accordance with the clustering project application instructions.

Selection Procedure

There is a simplified application process for clustering project applications and the assessment and decision procedure is expected to take approximately one month from submission of the application.
It proceeds as follows:

1. Completed applications should be submitted to the programme through eMS, after which the Joint Secretariat will assess them. Applications can be rejected at this first stage if there are already similar projects in the same field of work receiving funding from the NPA, or if the application is found inadmissible. For further information on admissibility and eligibility the applicant is advised to consult section 2.7.1 of the Programme Manual.

2. A check is carried out by the Joint Secretariat to verify the project's eligibility and relevance to the programme. The Joint Secretariat will consult the joint secretariats for the other involved programmes and the Regional Contact Points for regional input on the relevance of the clustering project and may also consult the Chair of the Monitoring Committee.

3. The Joint Secretariat has been delegated the mandate to make funding decisions on clustering project applications, and will take into account any comments from the joint secretariat for other involved programmes and the Regional Contact Points. The Joint Secretariat will inform the Monitoring Committee of all clustering project decisions.

4. The Joint Secretariat will inform the applicant whether the project application has been accepted or not. Details on all approved projects and a list of beneficiaries will be published on the NPA website.

5. For approved projects, the official decision and Grant Offer Letter will be issued by the Managing Authority. The Grant Offer Letter shows the start and end date for project funding. In addition, it states the obligations and rights of the contracting parties and constitutes the main agreement between the project and the programme.