



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Keeping up with the Euroclusters: Achievements and lessons learned

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
28 June 2023, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Keeping up with the Euroclusters: Achievements and lessons learned

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 28 June 2023, 8:30 – 9:45 CET, to hear about the work of the Euroclusters so far, any successful activities, and their lessons learned after the first calls for SMEs were published.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Chris Burns

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. First feedback and lessons learned for the Eurocluster initiative
Valentino Izzo, Programme Coordination Manager, EISMEA, European Commission
3. Panel debate
Giovanni Scaramuzzo, Project Manager, EXO Ricerca, CREATHRIV-EU Eurocluster
Laure de Tassigny, European Project Officer, Minalogic, Silicon Eurocluster
María Luisa Fernández, Cluster Manager, ZINNAE, CirclnWater Eurocluster
Ruben Eiras, Secretary-General, Fórum Oceano - Portugal Blue Economy Cluster, MedBAN Eurocluster
Silvana Sanfeliu, Senior EU Project Specialist, Fondazione Piemonte Innova, AIBC Eurocluster
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- The Euroclusters remain an ambitious initiative, but the preliminary results after the first cascading calls are encouraging and a high interest from SMEs was registered.
- The success rate for SMEs in the calls discussed in this Talk was around 20%.
- The clusters advise that calls should be kept as simple as possible, but with a clear and well-defined focus.
- The evaluation process of applications is time-consuming and should be calculated adequately. Involving external experts is, in most cases, a question of budget.
- International matchmaking events must have a clear benefit for SMEs, otherwise it is difficult to mobilise them. The value of in-person meetings can however not be replaced by purely online events.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Chris Burns, the following news item were presented:

1. [Feedback survey](#) to the EU Clusters Talks until 1 August
2. Register for the [Matchmaking Event in South Africa](#) on 24-26 October
3. Register for the [Matchmaking Event in Singapore](#) on 30 October – 1 November
4. [Data Protection Guide](#) for small business
5. [Feedback to evaluate COSME programme](#) until 18 September

2. First feedback and lessons learned for the Eurocluster initiative

Valentino Izzo, Programme Coordination Manager, EISMEA, European Commission

Valentino Izzo introduced the Euroclusters, which are pan-European partnerships of cluster organisations and other actors in the industrial ecosystem, funded under the Single Market Programme. Their primary purpose is to help address the green and digital transition as well as challenges in the industrial ecosystems, including energy prices, record inflation, commodity dependences, or disruptions in supply/value chains. All 30 Euroclusters have specific objectives: networking, innovation, adoption of processes and technologies, training, and internationalisation. In total, the European Commission funds 171 partners from 23 different countries with a total budget of 42 million EUR, of which at least 75% must go directly to SMEs via cascading calls.

Between February and June 2023, 21 Euroclusters published 32 cascading calls to financially support SMEs. These initial calls are expected to allocate approximately 17 million EUR. Around 1,500 SMEs are estimated to receive financial support through these calls. Most calls are for innovation grants, internationalisation grants, or training grants. There are still 14 calls open and more coming, so Valentino Izzo invited to be on the lookout for new opportunities. The calls can have different approaches regarding deadlines, applicants and consortia, the lump sum amount, the grant form, or the evaluation and payment scheme. There is no “one size fits all”, but the Euroclusters need to find the scheme that fits their goals.

Valentino Izzo emphasised that the Project Officers are there to help with these issues and that the Euroclusters should reach out to them with their questions. Valentino Izzo shortly presented the results of a survey for the Euroclusters. Regarding the main challenges for the calls, respondents mentioned drafting the call documents, ensuring a low financial risk, and managing the submission platform and evaluation. They highlighted the need to allow enough time for the evaluation select the right submission platform and better plan the timings of the launch of the calls to not overlap. From the Commission, they wish to receive legal and financial support and templates. Valentino Izzo emphasised that EISMEA Project Advisors are there to help with these issues as well to orientate in the choices to make when designing the call.



4. Panel debate

The panelists discussed the challenges, collaborations, and efforts made by the Euroclusters in managing their projects, designing and implementing the cascading calls, and facilitating application processes for SMEs.

The speakers shortly presented their respective Euroclusters, which are active in the creative and cultural industries (CREATHRIV-EU), electronics and manufacturing (Silicon Eurocluster), water management (CirclnWater), blue economy (MedBAN), and Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain (AIBC). The Euroclusters have different targets, e.g., the Silicon Eurocluster tries to do its part in delivering the EU Chips Act, or the CREATHRIV-EU Eurocluster offers networking and business activities with francophone Africa.

The speakers agreed that the Euroclusters are **challenging initiatives** that require work from the clusters in the definition of the cascading call, announcing the call, and in the engagement of the SMEs. Laure de Tassigny and María Luisa Fernández shared that their calls were met with **high interest** and that they received up to five times more applications than projects that can be funded. The success factor for SMEs in the calls is around 20%. Laure de Tassigny highlighted that especially SMEs with less than 10 employees applied to their call. Regarding concrete examples of funded projects, Ruben Eiras mentioned the development of sustainable business models for blue economy, and Silvana Sanfeliu talked about the application of AI and blockchain in different ecosystems.

The panelists shared the experience that applying for the calls can be complicated, but they made efforts to simplify the process through a platform called Good Grants. They provided support to SMEs and organised webinars to explain the evaluation and eligibility criteria. A lesson learned is to keep the calls **as simple** as possible, but to make them as **focused** as possible. They mentioned a learning curve and the need to consider risk factors. Regarding the available budget to SMEs, there are different approaches whether SMEs apply individually or within a consortium. A standard limit is 60,000 EUR as the maximum amount receivable per SME.

Talking about the evaluation of the submitted proposals, the Euroclusters rely on **both internal and external evaluation**. The determining factor is the budget available for external experts. For example, an internal evaluation is done by the consortium to identify applications meeting the required threshold. Subsequently, independent evaluators, not affiliated with the consortium, are selected to validate the evaluation. The speakers highlighted that the evaluation can be very **time-consuming** and that clusters can struggle to manage the workload with limited resources.

Regarding matchmaking events, the speakers confirmed the **importance of internationalisation activities** and the intention to organize meet-the-buyer events, e.g., in the US and in Canada. However, they stated that selling the idea of matchmaking events to SMEs can be difficult. The benefits of finding local partners in foreign markets must be very clear. They agreed that in-person meetings cannot be replaced by online meetings. Silvana Sanfeliu spoke of the **value of in-person interactions**, as it provides a different level of understanding, fosters meaningful conversations, and facilitates the formation of networks. It would be a good idea to organise follow-up missions and multiple matchmaking events to sustain contact with potential partners.



In conclusion, it was noted that it is still early to draw definitive recommendations and results, but it was emphasized that keeping the application process focused, simple, and clear would facilitate the management of the calls, enhance internal capacities, and make it easier for SMEs to apply to calls.

5. Funding opportunities

Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. ['Innovate to transform' support for SME's sustainability transition](#); Opening on 19 September 2023
2. [Accelerating uptake through open proposals for advanced SME innovation](#); Opening on 29 June 2023
3. [Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys](#); Deadline 17 October 2023
4. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)