Meet & Exchange „The NCP System towards FP9„,
Rome, 30 and 31st of May 2018
Report

Report from the M&E workshop, NCP system towards FP 9. An activity organized by the task force on impact of NCPs projects, in the framework of NCP Academy
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Participants:

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 633563

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NCP system towards FP9 – important issues

Report from an NCP Academy M&E workshop

On 30 and 31st of May 2018, the NCP Academy organized a Meet & Exchange Workshop for NCP coordinators (coordinators of national NCP systems) and coordinators of NCP networks (Coordination and Support Actions for thematic NCPs funded by Horizon 2020). The goal of the workshop was to identify and describe hot topics for NCPs towards Horizon Europe (FP9) in order to enter an early dialogue with the European Commission and the Member States with the aim of ensuring the best possible conditions for NCPs to provide services for the research and innovation communities as well as other parties interested in Horizon Europe.

This paper is a summary of the main discussions.

Six hot topics were identified at the beginning of the workshop:

- Better and stronger cooperation with the European Commission services
- NCPs’ skills and knowledge
- NCP projects
- NCP system configuration
- Umbrella NCP project (NCP-Academy)
- NCP cooperation with others

During the workshop, participants agreed on the following:

- A common position on NCP projects will be formulated and sent by the NCP Academy to the NCP coordinators in due time before the Strategic Programme Committee on 6th of June 2018 for further action. The aim is to make Member States aware of the need to bridge the gap between Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe in order to ensure best possible services for potential applicants. (see Annex II)

- The minutes of the M&E workshop will be sent to all participants, as well as NCP coordinators and coordinators of NCP networks, who have not participated in this meeting for information.

- The minutes of the M&E workshop will be taken into consideration by the NCP Academy when planning the next M&E workshops.

- Some coordinators of NCP networks will consider using the input by this workshop for own papers on NCP needs for FP9.
Introduction

“By spreading awareness, giving specialist advice and providing on-the-ground guidance, highly professional support services operating nationally ensure that Horizon [Europe] will become known and readily accessible to all potential applicants, irrespective of sector or discipline. The system of National Contact Points will form an essential component of the implementation of Horizon [Europe] implementation.

This wording stems from the current Minimum Standards and Guiding Principles for setting up NCP systems under Horizon 2020. Only the words “Horizon 2020” have been replaced by “Horizon Europe”. The purpose of the NCP systems as described here is still relevant, also for the coming Framework Programme.

NCP services, however, are only as good as the NCPs and the structures behind them. With a new research and innovation framework programme on the European horizon, workshop participants identified five important issues that need to be addressed during the preparation of Horizon Europe in order to ensure a well-functioning NCP system from the start of the next framework programme. NCPs are ambassadors of the EU programs and thus an important partner of the EC. They would like to enter a partnership with the EC on the information on the programme.

- NCPs have to be better-informed than the community they are advising: they need timely information and excellent training on thematic as well as cross-cutting and horizontal issues.
- Transnational, thematic NCP projects provide an efficient and practical instrument to ensure targeted activities, both on horizontal issues as well as thematic and specific issues: they are of great added value in the beginning of the next programme. Bridging activities from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe are important in order to ensure that NCP services are of the highest possible quality from the beginning.
- NCP coordinators have an in-depth knowledge of the needs of the research and innovation community and, consequently, how NCPs systems can provide the best possible service. They should not only be consulted but be actively involved as co-designers and co-creators in the formulation of the new NCP Guidelines, possibly through a task force.
- NCPs have an outstanding insight into how stakeholders experience the application procedures and project implementation: this knowledge should be used actively by the EC. Two-way communication should be established so that NCPs can provide important input and feedback, for example before the implementation of new tools.
- There should be an umbrella NCP project providing training on comprehensive, cross-cutting issues as well as standard guides and tools to avoid duplication and as central entry point for all NCPs. Thematic NCP projects should cover the issues where they have the expertise, for example, SSH integration of widening participation.

In short, participants in the NCP Academy M&E workshop ask for NCPs and Member States being actively involved through a co-creation process in the formulation of Minimum Standards and Guiding Principles for NCPs, both with regards to key principles, core functions and, in particular, cooperation between NCPs and Commission services as well as NCP Structure.

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Better and stronger cooperation with the European Commission services

NCPs are important ambassadors of the Framework Programmes by providing a large number of services to interested parties, applicants as well as participants in the Framework Programs. At the same time, they gather a lot of information on the implementation of the programmes. NCPs are thus important partners to the European Commission services – both with regards to the promotion of the programmes and with regards to improving the tools and practicalities of the implementation of the program.

According to the participants, experience from Horizon 2020 shows that information to the NCPs often is conducted in a general manner, often at the same time as when information is becoming publicly available. Also, while it is expected that Horizon Europe will be formulated and implemented by a number of different DGs and Agencies, this scattered governance adds an additional level of complexity to the information flow to the NCPs, risking making NCP work inefficient and time-consuming.

NCPs can only do a good job with a good information flow from the EC services to the NCPs. The current NCP guidelines already declare that the Commission provides “general and specialist information” “at the earliest possible time”. Also, the guidelines state that the “Commission, together with the national NCP coordinators, periodically draw up a programme for general and specialist training courses for NCPs”. For the next framework programme, NCPs would like to enter a partnership with the EC to make sure that this is implemented. A high level of knowledge and expertise will be to the benefit of the research and innovation community and, thus, the EC.

With regards to concrete information needs, areas like EJPs, COST, JTIs, EIT were mentioned. Here, there is an expectation that NCPs help the research and innovation communities, but they have strong difficulties in obtaining information by the secretariats. Another concrete initiative that was mentioned during the workshop was a short film on NCP services done by the EC and provided on the Participant Portal.

NCP skills and knowledge

Horizon Europe means new policies, new rules, new instruments and NCPs need to adapt to this change quickly in order to provide the best possible guidance to the parties interested in Horizon Europe, and especially those interested in the earliest calls. Therefore, NCPs need to be trained adequately as soon as possible and earlier than the R&I communities. According to the participants, EC information days with mainly one-way communication from the EC to the NCPs do not fulfill these needs. A more informal concept, as well as an interactive exchange between NCPs, is perceived to be more appropriate.

Therefore, NCPs, possibly through the NCP coordinators, need to be involved in the drawing up of a training programme, as already envisaged by the current NCP Guidelines. It is crucial that these programmes then are implemented in practice, either by Commission Services, external experts or other NCPs, and enabled by the EU.
Concretely, with regards to Horizon Europe, there is a need for more information on how to deal with the announced mission approach; with multi-disciplinary and cross-cutting issues; with EIC, PCP, PPI-partnerships, financing instruments, innovation and private sector. Also, the NCPs invite the EC to work with them as an “intelligence network”.

This would result in improved services from NCPs to the benefit of a more informed research and innovation community.

**NCP projects**

Transnational NCP networks are an important information source for all thematic NCPs. Participants discussed that these NCP projects are a forum for knowledge transfer and a forum to cooperate with the EC and stakeholders. They also play an important role in making NCPs familiar with IT tools and proposal preparation by providing first-hand experience. Also, they provide the EC with easier access to the NCPs and a structured way to cooperate. Through brokerage events, conferences etc., NCP networks promote the framework programme on a wider, European level.

Participants mentioned that their impact was underlined by a review commissioned by the EC, where the reviewers Manfred Horvat and Tom Berland point out that “the capacity building measures [by the NCP networks] have a direct effect on the consistency and coherence as well as the improved quality of services and thus clear benefits for applicants”.

As mentioned before, it is important for the research and innovation community that NCPs are up to speed as quickly as possible in order to provide the best possible advice already at the beginning of the new framework programme. Therefore, careful attention should be given by the EC to enable projects bridging the transition phase.

Participants in the M&E workshop would like the EC to foresee specific topic calls in the respective work programmes to support the creation of projects for managing the phase-out/ phase-in period from the old and the new framework programmes. This action should be launched both for the NCP Academy and NCP Thematic networks. The two systems are not alternative, but complementary initiatives needed to assure a coherent and full intervention in favor of the European FP stakeholders. The ideal timeline of the bridging activity is from the early second half 2020 until second half 2021.

**NCP system configuration**

With a move towards missions and across several themes, participants expect that their NCP work will become more complex. Good NCP services require a good cooperation between NCP functions and with the EC. They also require the establishment of an NCP system that answers to the information needs of the research and innovation community. NCP coordinators have an outstanding insight into which structures best support knowledge exchange between NCPs on a national level and make NCP work efficient. In addition to that, national NCP systems are funded
nationally, and it is therefore expected that Member States participate in the formulation of the new NCP Guidelines. Therefore, the NCP Guidelines and, not only, but in particular, the NCP structure should not only be discussed, but co-designed and co-created with the NCP coordinators, possibly through a task force.

**Umbrella NCP project – NCP Academy**

Participants suggest that a follow-up project of the next NCP Academy should become an efficient interface between Commission services and NCPs (both thematic NCPs and Legal and Financial NCPs) on general training activities and tools as well as an experience exchange with regards to the implementation of Horizon Europe.

In order to avoid duplication and improve the overall quality of NCP services, the NCP Academy could become an “academy” for all NCP projects and provide training on a large number of horizontal and cross-cutting issues relevant to a large number of thematic NCPs. Providing funding to enable this should be considered. Also, general guides and tools should be developed and provided centrally by the NCP Academy in order to avoid the duplication of efforts. The NCP Academy could thus become the central entry point for all NCPs.

In addition, the NCP Academy could act as main contact to the European Commission and its agencies and provide qualified feedback on new tools before they are applied to beneficiaries and applicants (providing a pilot function on certain new features). This would enhance the quality of these tools before roll-out.

**NCP cooperation with others**

Lack of timely information is a crucial challenge for NCPs. In order to gain efficiency and reduce overlap, participating in Program Committee Meetings, or receiving official information on the content being discussed during the Program Committee meetings, would help fill that gap. PC meetings are much more informative than the NCP meetings. Many participants therefore shared the view that NCPs should be nominated as experts for the PCs, or, if this is not possible due to national decisions, are provided minutes and presentations of the PC meetings by the EC. This is a wish and NCPs are very much aware that this is a national choice. The need, though, is coming from the perceived gap in the information given to NCPs by EC services.

In addition to that, participants in the M&E workshop noted that cooperation and communication with the EEN should be improved.
Main highlights of the Meet & Exchange Workshop

All participants, both NCP coordinators of national systems and coordinators of NCP networks, agreed that the transition phase from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe requires particular attention to knowledge and of NCPs. Meeting this need early by the European Commission services ensures a good start of Horizon Europe. Potential applicants have a strong need for up-to-date and reliable information on the new programme, and NCPs have to provide this information at a very early stage.

Participants agreed that NCP Information Days in many thematic areas provide too general information in an unsuitable way. Participants encourage the EC to investigate the concrete information needs before-hand and to build on more interactive formats for the meetings to stimulate an exchange of experience and a better learning experience.

Participants agreed that NCPs, due to their daily contact with beneficiaries and applicants, to a much higher degree could play a more active role in the development of user tools and formulation of guidelines for the implementation by the EC, for example through task forces.

In sum, participants agreed that they would like to make their knowledge and experience available to the EC to a much higher degree instead of acting as information receiver only by acting as co-creator of both NCP guidelines and hands-on information to be made available to the users of the framework programmes.
# Annex I - List of participants

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Klein</td>
<td>DLR</td>
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<td>Ann</td>
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<td>AREVALO</td>
<td>Gonzalo</td>
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<td>Barrionuevo</td>
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From Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe – build the bridge!
As experience from previous programmes has shown, there is a significant demand by the research and innovation community of official information and specialized knowledge by trusted sources especially at the starting phase of each new framework programme. National Contact Points (NCPs) play an important role in ensuring that potential applicants are made aware of the funding possibilities, understand the rationale behind and know how to apply for funding. In other words, NCPs play a very important, instrumental and recognized role in ensuring that each new framework programme takes smoothly off the ground.

Mind the gap
During the transition phase between the two consecutive framework programmes a demand for knowledge by interested parties is the highest and the level of knowledge by NCPs is lowest. Therefore, an important focus by European Commission and Member States should be to bring NCPs up to speed and equip them as quickly as possible. The experience from the transition phase from FP7 to Horizon 2020 shows that NCP network projects could not cover this important phase as their project duration was explicitly set to end before the start of Horizon 2020. Networks had to apply for a new proposal and could only start several months after the launch of Horizon 2020. This meant that mutual and transnational capacity building did not take place at that time, creating a vacuum of a first-hand information on new rules and new contents.

NCP services are only as good as the level of knowledge and understanding by the NCPs behind. The main information sources are the European Commission services and its Agencies. It is of paramount importance to guarantee a structured co-creation activity between the Commission services and the NCP community to design together how do the current NCP systems have to be evolved to better respond to the transitional scenario and being able to be fully operative at the right time.

Proposed Action: we ask to foresee specific topic calls in the respective work programmes for 2020 to support the creation of projects for managing the phase-out phase-in period from the old and the new FPs. This action should be launched for the NCP Academy and NCP Thematic networks too. The two systems are not alternative, but complementary initiatives needed to assure a coherent and full intervention in favor of the European FP stakeholders. The NCP Academy involving the NCP coordinators should function as a central provider of basic trainings and measures as well as tools and instruments, while the sector specific NCP networks will be responsible for training and activities which will be sector specific activities closely linked to the contents of the part of Horizon 2020 they are responsible for.
Annex III – Discussion

Better and stronger coordination with the European Commission services

Collection of topics:

Discussion in the working groups:

Report from the M&E workshop, NCP system towards FP 9. An activity organized by the task force on impact of NCPs projects, in the framework of NCP Academy
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NCP skills and knowledge –

**Collection of topics:**

*Discussion in the working groups:*

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Report from the M&E workshop, NCP system towards FP 9. An activity organized by the task force on Impact of NCPs projects, in the framework of NCP Academy.
THE NCP SYSTEM TOWARDS FP9

Topic: SKILLS/knowledge

What is the problem?
Change of framework conditions

What is the solution we recommend?
EC Guidelines & new requirements
- new NCP job description
- more cooperation

Concretely, this means:
- new rules
- new instruments
- new policies/activities

Increased risk/prioritisation handled by other EU individual programmes
- risk of wrong door increase

Concretely, this means:
- tools - online, digital
- proposal check
- cooperation with EEN
- ensure common understanding of the programme, activities
- common ground
- EC best placed
- to ensure sustainability of knowledge

Why is it important?
- to us as NCPs?
- to the EC?
- to the research and innovation community?

Sustain the benefits of NCP Academy

IMPROVED SERVICES from NCPs

Say it in a tweet: Timely NCP in need to gain new knowledge & skills with support from EC

Report from the M&E workshop, NCP system towards FP 9. An activity organized by the task force on impact of NCPs projects, in the framework of NCP Academy
NCP projects

Collection of topics:

- Uncertainty of keeping NCP projects and what format?
- EC financial support to NCP networks
  - Collaboration between NCP networks moved well but it should be more efficient and consistent across all networks, should be planned
**Discussion in working groups:**

## THE NCP SYSTEM TOWARDS FP9

### TOPIC: NCP PROJECTS

#### What is the problem?

- The future of the projects is uncertain.

**Concretely, this means:**

- There is a need for bundling projects.
- No direction; everyone start possible.
- Not all NCPs have an objective.
- What type of projects, how many, timeline, scope?

#### What is the solution we recommend?

- Projects to cover whole portfolio.
- Mixture of instrument specific, thematic and cross-cutting effort to avoid duplication e.g. umbrella projects (NCP Academy).
- NCPs to take care of potential gaps.

**Concretely, this means:**

- List objectives of projects.
- For some NCPs need to be favorised if EU wants to compete with other NCP.

**Example:**

- Projects to be notified of new NCP appointments.
- Definition of advanced NCP Academy versus thematic network.

### Why is it important?

**- To us as NCPs?**

- We need support (internal) for knowledge transfer.
- Forums to cooperate with EC on stakeholders.
- Better cooperation in welcoming countries.

**- To the EC?**

- They provide easier access to the NCPs.
- Structured way to cooperate.
- We can work on need (knowledge, experience, etc.).

**- To the research and innovation community?**

- They help us to be better serve this community.
- Help raise quality (knowledge, innovation, etc.).

**Partner search helps them find partners.**

### Say it in a tweet:

"EC must support European dimension through NCP."

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Report from the M&E workshop, NCP system towards FP 9. An activity organized by the task force on Impact of NCPs projects, in the framework of NCP Academy.
NCP system configuration

Topic collection:

Discussion in the working groups:
What is the topic?
NCP System Configuration - The NCP system is changing between the Programmes.

What is the problem trying to solve?
We can’t decide on the system, but we can suggest guidelines for the NCPs – since the funding is national, and offer suggestions to the Commission.

There is the constant debate over should the Commission fund NCPs – the reasoning for this is obvious – to help with funding. The reasoning against is that it comes with strings attached.

The European Commission should take into consideration more the opinions and input of the NCP Coordinators. In a Programme moving more towards missions and across several themes, therefore being more complex, there needs to be better cooperation.

What is the solution we recommend?
- A taskforce to decide on NCP guidelines to be followed by all national organisations –
  o Getting information in time to provide feedback to the Commission
  o The taskforce should decide on a standard for the countries in collaboration with the NCP coordinators
  o How many NCPs minimum per topics for example
  o The Commission should make sure they all qualify, with additional funds if needed for countries who don’t – structure funds
  o Define how many NCPs per number of people in the R&I community of the country - To assure the capacity of NCPs corresponds to the needs – this should be based on a study of current success rates based on NCPs

- Adding specific NCP roles to the list provided by the Commission
  o Such as an EIT, JPI and COST NCP
  o Each country defines what they need separately currently, and there needs to be a mirroring of the EC Programme in the countries – so the Commission should define a list of topics that there should be an NCP for.
  o Each country will then decide of they want a separate person doing each role, or one person in charge of more than one role.
  o Adding an NCP that deals with cross cutting issues - a mini helpdesk

- The legal and financial NCP role needs to be better defined – what does it include?
  o One offer is for the role to include gender and ethics issues
There is a need for them to have their own PC
- There might also be a need for an NCP network for this to foster collaboration

Coordination between the NCP coordinators and the Commission with better communication
- Thematic meetings for NCP coordinators where there is the option to bring with you a few NCPs that relate to those themes is a suggestion not approved by everyone
- There should be more meetings between the NCP coordinators and the EC, and they should be more interactive and involve more dialog
- There should be a dialog between the NCP and the NCP coordinator sponsored by the Commission – sharing minutes with the NCPs for example so they are aware of the political section of the job

Keep autonomy of the NCP under the national funding and decisions
- It is therefore impossible to measure the impact of the NCP networks because the activity is nationally funded
- KPI should not be defined to projects because you can’t measure the KPI of a project but rather only the KPI of each national agency

Funding from the Commission should be more equal to the NCP networks, or should be defined as a minimum because it is a service provided nationally on behalf of the Commission
- NCP networks should remain as a service for the NCP community. But should not be used for funding the NCP activity

NCPs are not given any training sessions and are missing firsthand information –
- There should be better support and more emphasis on the NCP Training – training that is provided to evaluators for example
- NCPs should be invited to the plenary explanation of evaluation
- Sharing the contact list of the Commission representatives for each theme – in addition to having the PO for the NCP network (that only the coordinator can talk to), there is someone in charge of the policy side – all NCPs should be able to talk to this person and know who it is
- There should be joint training sessions for all NCPs not based on themes, but rather cross cutting issues – there should be at least one gathering of NCPs funded by the Commission (although this is something done by the NCP networks and funded by them)
- ERA conferences should explain and give information, not so much train

Why is this important to us as NCPs, to the Commission and to the R&I community?
- To us as NCPs –
  - This can affect funding, national restructuring and ideas

- To the Commission –
  - The better the NCP the less work for the Commission – we should be invested in to help them
  - The Commission is based in the end on the national system, and in order to get more proposers that are of high quality proposals, the NCPs need to be able to do their job
  - The Commission wants a Programme that is efficient, and so there is a need for NCPs that can do their job in the best way possible

- To the R&I community
  - There is a need for easier communication
  - More efficient transfer of information
  - Clear objective on who to ask what question

Summarize in a tweet (142 characters)
Make the NCP system great again!!
NCP System configuration = EC+ NCP Coordinators
Co-design of the NCP System Configuration

Report from the M&E workshop, NCP system towards FP 9. An activity organized by the task force on impact of NCPs projects, in the framework of NCP Academy
Umbrella NCP project – NCP Academy

Collection of topics:

Discussion in the working groups

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Report from the M&E workshop, NCP system towards FP 9. An activity organized by the task force on impact of NCPs projects, in the framework of NCP Academy
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NCP cooperation with others

*Topic collection:*

- Networks
- Other stakeholders
- Cooperation
- Relationship
- EEN & NCP in FP9
- Citizen engagement
Discussions in the working groups:

**THE NCP SYSTEM TOWARDS FP9**

**Topic:** Networks / other stakeholders

**What is the problem?**
1. Cooperation with EC
2. Relationship EC - NCP
3. EIC

**What is the solution we recommend?**
1.1. NCPs formally appointed as experts in Rs (?)
1.2. Improve the work of NCPs
2.1. Increase the work of NCPs
3.1. Increase the work of NCPs

**Concretely, this means:**
1. Lack of information for NCP
2. New responsibilities
3. EIC - how to split the work
4. New provisions

**Why is it important?**
- To us as NCPs?
- To the EC?
- To the research and innovation community?

**Say it in a tweet:**