Net4Mobility+
Network of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions National Contact Points for the mobile scientific and innovation community

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Guidelines on using the EEN database

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I. Introduction

MSCA in Horizon 2020 wants to better address companies, e.g. via the dedicated SE-Panel, thus leading to better career prospects of the fellows and to a strengthening of one of the principles of innovative doctoral training, namely the inter-sectorial mobility. Nonetheless, especially SMEs are often not aware about MSCA and often face challenges such as finding the right researcher matching with their research and innovation profile. On the contrary, researchers rather look for academic hosts or big industry than for SMEs.

One main task of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) is to match SMEs with partners, e.g. for Horizon 2020 projects. For this purpose, the EEN offers several partnering services. In particular, it manages Europe’s largest online cooperation database, the „Partner Opportunity Database” (POD). Furthermore, cooperation between different clients is facilitated via personal networks of EEN advisors, internal online forums and sector and thematic groups.

The results of an internal survey, conducted within the Net4Mobility+ Project has shown that many National Contact Points for MSCA (MSCA NCPs) are not aware about the different partnering opportunities that the Enterprise Europe Network offers. Nonetheless, many National Contact Points (NCPs) have shown interest in learning more about the EEN databases and how to use them. In order to address this issue, a half day training was organized on 20th November 2018 in Brussels under the title “How to match best with companies: Training on the EEN partner opportunity database”.

The training focused in particular on the following aspects:

- What is the rationale behind the EEN network and what do they offer? *Introduction in the mission and structure of the Enterprise Europe Network*
- What are the partner search opportunities and how do they work? *Presentation of the different ways, tools and instruments of the EEN partner search:*
  - Partner Opportunity Database
  - Sector Groups (e.g. for sector specific requests)
  - B2Match (Database, Matchmaking)
  - Additional: explaining the internal partner search options such as the Merlin Forum, Thematic Groups etc.
- How can MSCA NCPs benefit and better use these opportunities on a daily basis? *Group discussion on the chances the databases offer, but also to what extent other tools are better suited and where/how synergies could be benefitted of.*

The training was held by two experts namely Sibyl Scharrer from the EEN Hamburg, chair of the EEN Thematic Group Research, and Michelle Lemmers, Liaison Officer EEN at the Netherlands Enterprise Agency and
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member of the EEN Thematic Group “Partnering Opportunity Database and partnership process”. The training was especially designed for MSCA NCPs. In a mix of presentations and group-work sessions, the training provided the MSCA NCPs with know-how about the EEN partnering services and its structure, and interactive hands-on exercises on how to use the POD and how to read/write profiles. Altogether, 48 participants from European and also Third Country MSCA NCPs took the opportunity to participate in this training.

I. Background: What to build on and what has been done so far

Under the previous network Net4Mobility, there have been already numerous activities between the NCP MSCAs and the EEN Network:

- Two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed with Sector Groups of the Enterprise Europe Network: Sector Group HEALTHCARE & Sector Group ICT
- 1 Letter of Intent with the SG ENERGY
- Detailed Guidelines for Collaboration between EEN & MSCA NCPs have been delineated (bottom-up approach)
- Training on EEN-MSCA-NCP collaboration on 24/03/2017 where 33 MSCA NCPs participated.
- Presentation of Net4Mobility at EEN Thematic Group meeting in May 2018 (activity under the N4M+)

Resulting of these activities, the following impact has been identified:

- Three Directorate Generals (DG Research & Innovation, DG GROWTH & DG Directorate C-Innovation, International Cooperation and Sport) and EASME have been informed about training and guidelines for collaboration between EEN & MSCA NCP.
- 33 MSCA NCPs have been trained on how to efficiently collaborate with the Enterprise Europe Network and all MSCA NCPs have been informed about guidelines for collaboration
- More than 200 EEN members have been informed through Sector Groups forums, Sector Group meetings, Thematic Group meetings, trainings, face to face meetings and Brokerage events on H2020-MSCA funding opportunities for businesses and on guidelines for collaboration.
- At least 15 partner searches related to the H2020- MSCA Programme were uploaded in the POD database of the Enterprise Europe Network, leading to at least 130 Expressions of Interests and 11 Research Partnership Agreements.
- At least 5 Success Stories have been reached (H2020-MSCA proposals that through EEN-MSCA NCP collaboration and support have been submitted & funded)
II. Training: How to match best with companies

1. Structure and mission of the Enterprise Europe Network

The Enterprise Europe Network is a European funded network whose mission is to help businesses innovate and grow on an international scale. It is the world’s largest support network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with international ambitions. The Network is active in more than 60 countries worldwide. It brings together 3,000 experts from more than 600 member organisations, all renowned for their excellence in business support. Member organisations include: technology poles, innovation support organisations, universities and research institutes, regional development organisations and chambers of commerce and industry.

The Enterprise Europe Network is decentrally organized. The European Executive Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises is responsible for central tasks like grant management, policy development and other centralized services.

Services to enterprises and other organisations are provided on a local/regional level by the single EEN consortia/partner organisations. The partner organisations are called „Local Contact Point” and can be researched over the central EEN website. The EEN service portfolio comprises three different service clusters:

1. International Partnerships
2. Advisory Support
3. Innovation Support
The mission of the Enterprise Europe Network is to provide support and services to businesses, in particular to SMEs. Thus, SMEs form the main target group of the EEN. However, the EEN services are available to all stakeholders as for example to universities, research organisations, innovation clusters or multipliers such as National Contact Points.

2. Partner search by the EEN – What is it and how does it work?

a. Process

The EEN offers different options to search for cooperation partners. Behind, there is a firmly defined process which is as such:

1 - In a first step, the client organisation looking for a cooperation partnership takes up a contact to their regional/local EEN contact point. This can be done by the client organisation itself or by the NCP on behalf of it.

2 - In an individual phone call or a personal meeting, the needs and requirements for this partner will be identified together by the EEN and the client and/or NCP.

3 – When the individual needs have been specified, the tool/instrument that is going to be used to conduct the partner search will be fixed together with the client. There are different tools available:

- conducting a partner search or/and publication of an own partner search profile in the EEN Partnering Opportunity Database;
- participation in an international matchmaking event;
- participation in a company/research mission;
- partner search / request via the personal EEN networks.

In many cases, it is a mix of a couple of the above described options. Also, the EEN makes sure that the client is aware about the EEN’s policy for the partner search: „Services are free of charge, but not free of obligations”. This means that the client organisation does not have to pay for the service as such, since in most cases the service is provided by a public entity. However, the organisation is requested to provide the necessary input and documents and to keep the EEN contact point updated on the results of the partnering process.
b. Partnering Opportunity Database

The Enterprise Europe Network manages Europe’s largest online database to find the right cooperation partner, named “Partnering Opportunity Database” (POD).

It can be accessed for free for the matching of three partnership types:

- Business opportunities
- Technological cooperation
- Research and innovation partnerships

As to R&I-partnerships, the database for example can help to find partners for the collaborative development of projects or to find the missing partner for a Horizon 2020 project.

Currently, there are more than 6,000 profiles published and updated on a daily basis, offering a cooperation / partnership or searching actively for cooperation partners.

The POD database can be accessed either via a regional EEN portal or via the central POD entry point: https://een.ec.europa.eu/partners
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It is either possible to search the database ad hoc using different key-words and filters or, if the search can be classified and is valid for a longer period, to sign-up for receiving personalized e-mail alerts for events and profiles. Therefore, and also in order to express an Expression of Interest (EoI), an account must be created.

Steps for POD – partner search:

First, check the POD for partner opportunities according to your criteria.

A selection of filters is available to classify by a) keyword, b) type of partnership (business, technological, RTD) and c) country (EU, Non-EU). The partnership opportunities will appear below the filter. Important: the database is managed decentralized. Even if there are guidelines on how to prepare a good partner search profiles, titles can be manifold. It is advisable to try various key words and combinations in order to achieve the right results, e.g. MSCA + H2020, MSCA + Horizon.
The headlines and a short summary of the matching partnership profiles are listed. In order to receive more detailed information on the offer, you have to click on the headline. More detailed information is given on:

- The country of origin;
- Number and publication/expiration date of the offer;
- Keywords that have been assigned to the offer;
- A short summary;
- A more detailed description of the cooperation offer/search;
- Information on the advantages, the innovations and the state of development of the offer and detailed information on the partner sought (requirements concerning the partner);
- Last but not least: information about the type of organization that published the offer and the size of it (e.g. SME, university, research organisation, NGO etc.).
All profiles are standardized and strictly follow the same scheme. This makes it easier to search and identify a suitable cooperation partner. In addition, the profiles are anonymized. Only the regional EENs dispose the contact data of the profile owner.

If the search results match the requirements, the next step would be to initiate the contact. Therefore, an Expression of Interest (EoI) must be created.

The EoI-Button can be found under the Keyword-list:

If no account has been created so far, this step must be done now.

In the EoI-form, you specify your interest according to three standardized questions:

a) What kind of cooperation are you looking for?
b) Which information is missing or unclear?
c) Some facts about your company
If no match can be found, the second option is to write a profile in order to distribute your partnership request/offer widely over the database. The preparation of the profile must be done together with your local EEN. To do so, the first step is to take up contact with your local/regional EEN partner organization, either directly or if you do not know your local/regional EEN contact point, over the “Get in touch”-button:

The EEN will provide you with an online template you need to fill in in order to create your profile. Information in five main sections is requested:

- Details (about the client and its desired cooperation)
- Dissemination (where the profile is to go, e.g. country, sector etc.)
- Client (size, location etc.)
- Partner sought (criteria for desired partner)
- Attachments (photos, drawings etc.)

**Important:** You will be requested to deliver the content for the profile, your local EEN writes and inserts the profile in the database. The reason for this procedure is that all profiles need to be quality checked by the EEN in order to keep up the homogeneity of the POD, for better-targeted searches and queries and to lift up the chance to attract prospective partners.

**Research Profiles: Partner search for Horizon 2020 projects**

The POD offers the opportunity to find partners for a consortium for a research project under a specific call in Horizon 2020. A partner search under the field “Research Profile” can be prepared by partners / coordinators provided that a consortium has been partly formed.

If you wish only to offer know-how, skills and/or technology to join in general a project consortium, consider drafting a “Technology Offer profile” and select “Research cooperation agreement”.
c. Brokerage Events

The Enterprise Europe Network organizes manifold brokerage events. Such brokerage events are mostly organized in combination with an international trade fair or conference of any thematic focus or sector. Brokerage events offer the possibility to meet prospective cooperation partners in prescheduled individual meetings of 30 minutes time on average. The EEN events database lists a broad variety of brokerage events, trade missions or conferences / workshops. Similar to the POD, events can be filtered according individual search criteria:

If you have found a brokerage event which fits your needs, you have to register and create a profile for participating in the brokerage event. Most EENs use the software “B2Match” for managing their brokerage events. All information regarding the event can be displayed over the B2Match-Eventplatform.

LINK: https://een.ec.europa.eu/events
Subsequently, you need to complete your profile. Example:

Afterwards, you can request individual meetings with your favored partner organizations, describing your interest and indicating your availability for meetings in defined time slots. You will receive a message if an organization has accepted your request. Also, you will receive meeting
requests which you need to accept / reject. Before the brokerage event, the EEN sends you an individual schedule with all meeting slots.

For NCPs, the participation in brokerage events provides an additional opportunity to offer their NCP advisory services to a broader target group, and in particular to non-academic organisations.

d. Personal contacts: Partner search via your local EEN contact point – use their network

Beyond the above two standardized options the EEN disposes of other channels to look for suitable cooperation partners. Therefore, mostly informal methods and personalized contacts are used.

The three most important informal channels are:

- Sector Groups
- Thematic Groups
- EEN internal IT forum

Most EEN partner organizations are participating in so called Sector and Thematic groups which gathers EEN experts around one business sector or one thematic focus. E.g. the thematic group “EU research” gather EEN experts for Horizon 2020 from all European EENs. In these groups it is...
easy to exchange quick partner offers/requests on an informal basis. This especially applies if e.g. a partner is needed to complete a H2020 consortium at short notice.

III. Conclusion – Further suggestions

The EEN partner search is best suited for academic institutions to find cooperation partners from the non-academic sector and in particular to get contact to highly innovative small and medium enterprises. The Partnering Opportunity Database offers a broad range of up-to-date profiles from enterprises but also from research organisations or other entities, offering highly innovative expertise in many research fields and business sectors.

For MSCA NCPs, the EEN partner search services offer the opportunity to enrich their consultation and partnering services for their target groups. Cooperating closer with the Enterprise Europe Network contact points in their regions / countries allows them also to offer support to academic institutions to get access to non-academic beneficiaries or partner organisations in a very efficient way. Also, the EEN could help with „quick partner requests”, e.g. to find partners for a MSCA consortium at short notice, using the different internal contact networks.

Furthermore, the participation in brokerage events can be considered as a good tool to find partners for consortia in specific research domains. Also MSCA NCPs can use the EEN brokerage events to offer their services and to promote the MSCA to their non-academic target groups.

However, the discussion has shown that the EEN partner search services do not aim nor are they suited to bring researchers together with their future host-organisations (no research-to-research partnering). For this purpose, the EURAXESS-database is much more specialized and offers better opportunities.

In order not to double already existing services of European funded networks, a stronger linkage is envisaged between the EEN and the N4M+ network. This could be facilitated either through stronger mutual promotion and public relation activities, or – as basis – via a stronger individual collaboration between the single MSCA NCPs and their regional/national EEN contact points.

If you need help to find out which is the right EEN contact point for Horizon 2020 in your region/country, please contact the EEN Thematic Group Research:

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