



STRENGTHENING EEN & NCP COLLABORATION IN VIEW OF HORIZON EUROPE

Background

This paper is based on the results of the „Meet-and-Exchange“ workshop that took place between 28 SME/ARF NCPs and EEN advisors, co-organised by Access4SMEs and EEN on the **25th of October 2018** in Vienna (Austrian Research Promotion Agency) and the Webinar on the **1st of February 2019**.

STATE OF PLAY

EEN and NCPs are two important actors in the innovation value chain acting together or independently for the benefit of companies or organisations on a European level. The following points have been highlighted as a brief state-of-play through preliminary activities:

- There is a **different level of cooperation** between NCPs and EEN in different countries
- NCPs have a clear **national** role whereas EEN has a **regional** approach, which mainly targets SMEs
- NCPs focus is on H2020 and EU and national R&I funding while EEN is strong in regional contacts, innovation & internationalisation.
- There are best practices where tools of NCPs are used by EEN for the benefit of R&D intensive clients, such as the **“annotated proposal template for the SME Instrument”, regional pitching trainings, national info-days, joint brokerage events.**
- There are also best practices of synergies where tools of EEN are used for the benefit of NCPs: **Partner Search, Matchmaking Events, joint workshops and events and they help increase reach-out of NCP activities to SMEs in regions**
- **Communication, information flow and collaboration are the most critical parameters.** Still in some regions, people are unaware of the respective contact points of the other network.
- Key Account Management is the first **“obligatory” common interface** between NCPs and EEN, which has great acceptance from the beneficiaries and is positively evaluated from all sides (SMEs, NCPs, EEN).
- **Thematic Groups of EEN:** this is a specific bottom-up tool that enables a dialogue exchange on topics of common interest and devising new actions with NCPs or other support networks (DGs, IPR Helpdesk etc). A one-to-many approach here would be beneficial e.g. Access4SMEs collaborates for different objectives with different Thematic

Groups: TG Research (Horizon 2020), TG Innovation (Innovation Management) and TG ICT (ICT Events and clientele). A communication flow between Access4SMES and relevant EEN people, namely from DG Grow, EASME and TGs and SGs chairwomen/men, has been set-up.

CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE ROLES OF EEN AND NCPS

The transition to the new programming period **brings a new landscape and poses challenges affecting the roles of both NCPs and EEN**. Identifying the most important of these parameters was the first objective of the workshop. Then the aim was to turn the identified issues and the challenges of the future into a set of advantages for the collaboration between these networks.

- New funding landscape
- New Programme Committees
- New target groups
- New vision for EEN focusing on the client-centric approach and the hub-and-spoke model
- New processes along the support chain (due to European Innovation Council)
- A new digital platform for Enterprise Europe Network (opportunity)
- Differentiation of grant schemes, introduction of equity schemes
- Termination of SME Instrument Phase 1 – possibly fewer clients available to join the EIC Accelerator or Pathfinder
- Extra funding for EEN through Horizon 2020 for KAM and EIMC will be differentiated – the future of both services under one programme is uncertain
- Role of regional funding organisations are supposed to be enhanced based on the current priorities of the Open Innovation Pillar in Horizon Europe through co-fund schemes
- Access to Risk Finance scene is diversified with InvestEU Programme
- New Single Market Programme
- Synergies with other new Programmes like Digital Europe.

Amongst the greater challenges for both Networks, the following were identified as critical:

- **Client management:** Personalised approach to clients (hub-and-spoke model, client-centric approach)
- **Communication:** Information flow and direct communication channels
- **Knowledge and Expertise:**
 - New processes, tools and evaluation systems along with the EIC Enhanced Pilot and Pathfinder and Accelerator
 - Understanding the financial and investment scenes
 - Defining TRLs for different industrial sectors
 - Defining the focus of EIC
 - More information on deep-tech, market-creating innovation and upcoming buzzwords

Key Take Away Message #1

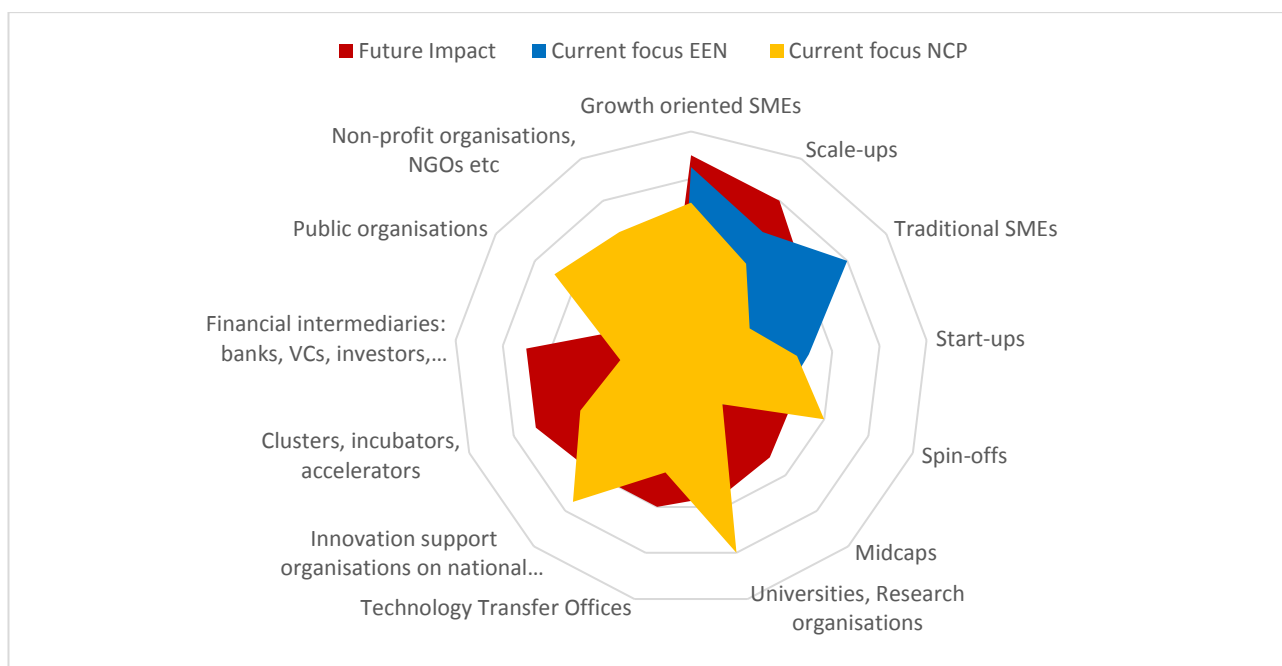
The changing landscape offers an opportunity to reshape the collaboration foundations between National Contact Points and the Enterprise Europe Network in a **strategic, participatory and inclusive manner** that will address the future needs of both actors, both on a timely and a relevant way. A **restructuring of current working principles** based on the previous experience and best practices could strengthen their future collaboration. This paper also applies to the collaboration with other important European Innovation Support Networks, such as Eurostars/Eureka and other actors.

NEW TARGET GROUPS

In order to redefine the ways of collaboration, we tried to identify the major target groups that both NCPs and EEN will be focusing on in the next programming period:

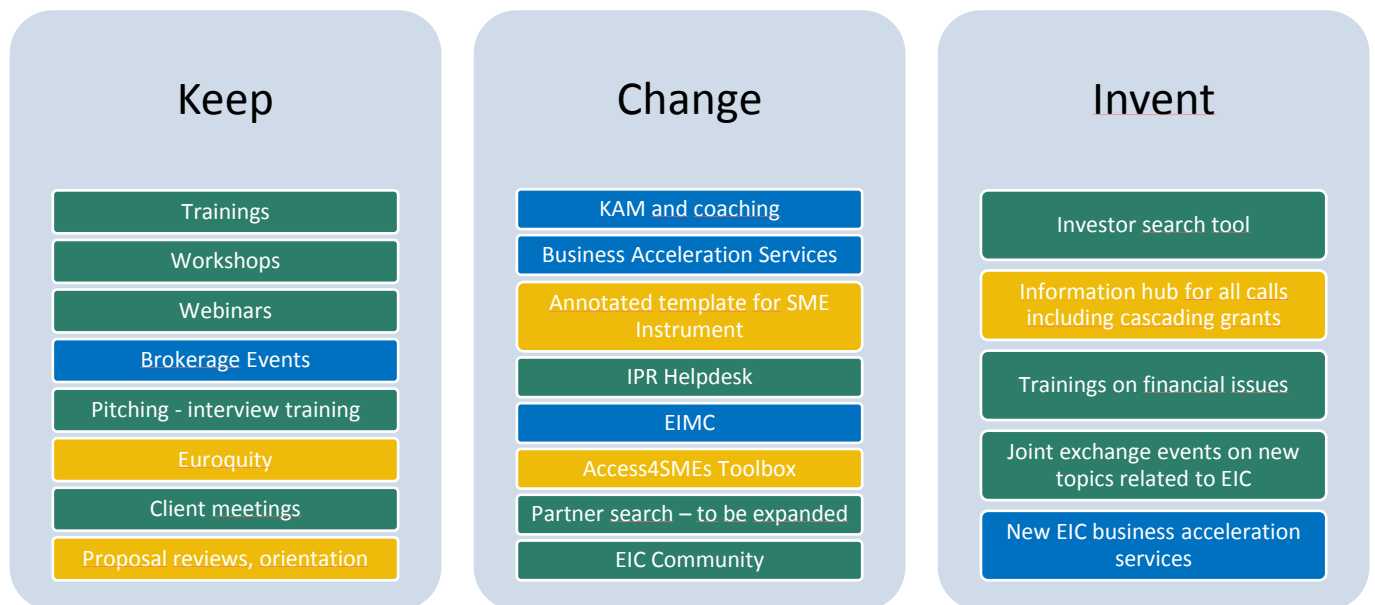
- Growth-oriented SMEs (deep-tech, market creating innovation)
- Scale-ups
- Traditional SMEs
- Start-ups
- Spin-offs
- Midcaps
- Universities, Research organisations
- Technology Transfer Offices
- Innovation support organisations on national and regional level
- Clusters, incubators, accelerators
- Financial intermediaries: banks, VCs, investors, business angels
- Public organisations
- Non-profit organisations, NGOs etc
- Others

The following diagram depicts the current focus of Enterprise Europe Network and NCPs related to these new target groups and tries to link them to their expected future impact under European Innovation Council. EEN is better positioned in the business support ecosystem whereas NCPs on the public/university research ecosystem, but a shift of their focus will be required. It is evident that in order **to address the new target groups efficiently, synergies and new working methods that bridge NCPs and Enterprise Europe Network will be required**. Moreover, new methods and tools to address **target groups** that were not currently in focus will need to be developed.



TOOLBOX OF BOTH NETWORKS

In a next step, we went through the tools offered by both networks to proposers or to clients, in order to identify what works well (“to keep”), what should be changed/improved/adapted (“to change”) and what could be of help based on the current understanding of the future landscape (“to invent”). This list is not exhaustive and be further enhanced and filled with information from other EEN partners and NCPs, using the common interfaces of collaboration (like the Thematic Groups).



Legend: Tools mainly used by EEN Tools mainly used by NCPs Tools used from both

SUGGESTIONS FOR AN IMPROVED COLLABORATION

The following suggestions could increase the efficiency of the collaboration between EEN and NCPs to a high extent. DGs and Executive Agencies should consider them, while devising the operating framework for the next programming period. These items should be the basics of an improved communication flow and a more coherent and active collaboration between Enterprise Europe Network (focusing on EEN partners with expertise in funding programmes for R&D&I) and National Contact Points.

- Sharing of key information related to project submissions to both NCPs (national results) and EEN (regional results)
- Sharing information on new calls relevant to the target groups with both Networks
- EU-Level Exchange at specific events
- Meeting of regional agencies with NCPs on a regular basis – national activity (NCP initiates the contact)
- Common Exchange Meetings: EEN + NCPs
- Include the need to have an active “NCP <-> EEN Exchange” in the Code of Conduct of both parties and provisions allowing that time and resources could be used by both sides to develop individual meetings at national/regional level and joint events at European Level
- Share information on all relevant developments, activities, events, services related to the EIC with both Networks
- Thematic Groups of EEN, Access4SMEs initiate and support actively the dialogue with DGs for the new programming period
- Use Google Groups, Fora or other electronic tools to enhance communication exchange in regions or nationwide
- The model where EEN + NCP are hosted in one organisation „under one roof“ works efficiently
- Define roles and duties of EENs and NCPs for EIC as soon as possible, reflecting on the current best practices (e.g. Key Account Management)
- Adjustment of EIMC and KAM from 2020-2021: EIMC service as an entry-level service in the clients journey has a great impact and needs to remain, adjustment and widening of the KAM role
- Consolidate Partner Search tools and update the way they operate involving social media aspects – this could be an opportunity for the new Enterprise Europe Network new digital platform in order to include NCP partner searches or EC Portal partner searches
- Define the new business acceleration services for EIC support taking advantage of current tools (e.g. coach database, networking events) by taking also into consideration both EEN and NCPs.