

ECEI II-Update: Taking “Cluster Management Excellence” to the Next Level

A European Consortium comprising 20 partners with a strong background in cluster development, led by VDI/VDE-IT, spent the second half of the last year advancing the objectives of the Second Phase of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI II). The ECEI II project is funded under the COSME programme and aims at developing a process leading to an improved European Cluster Labelling Scheme with a particular focus on a higher level of transparency, accountability and efficiency of the current benchmarking and labelling system.

Following a series of intensive working group meetings and discussions with the European Commission and EU Member States, major achievements could be accomplished in various areas:

1. A New Legal Entity for Cluster Management Excellence

Key outcome of the intense discussions was an agreement to set up a new legal entity for the future governance of Cluster Management Excellence. The new entity is foreseen to operate as a non-for-profit Association under Belgian law. Membership of the new entity should be open to all interested European parties carrying a public mandate for implementing cluster policy and/or cluster management excellence. The governance of the new entity as well as criteria and processes for becoming a member and the role of any support bodies will be detailed in statutes of the new entity which are currently being developed as part of the ECEI II project.

2. A New Focus on Impact Assessment

The existing methodology of the cluster labelling scheme has been further developed in order to adapt it to today's cluster challenges. In particular, by revising the underlying set of GOLD Label indicators and improving the efficiency of the assessment process, the Consortium is taking up valuable input by European cluster managers and assessors that had been gathered in recent online surveys. In addition, the Consortium is working on a new methodology that allows for better assessing the *impact* of cluster management organisations' services and activities. Last but not least, both the BRONZE and the SILVER Label processes are currently being revised in order to address procedural shortcomings.

3. New Training Opportunities for New and Existing Assessors

Once the revised methodology and the new set of procedures are available, current assessors will be invited to a webinar in April 2019 to familiarise them with the new methodology and the new procedures. In addition, the Consortium plans to organise two additional webinars in April 2019 for potential *new* assessors. VDI/VDE-IT is shortly going to circulate a call for expressions of interest to be submitted by cluster experts who want to become a BRONZE Label expert.

The ECEI II project terminates at the end of April 2019. The achieved results and the prospects of their implementation will be communicated subsequently. A smooth transition of the current system into the new improved Cluster Labelling Scheme is foreseen. Until then, there will be no changes in the current labelling system.

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