

enterprise europe



Business Support on Your Doorstep

An Introduction to the Enterprise Europe Network

Produced by the Quality & Performance
Working Group





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INTRODUCTION

This booklet aims to provide basic information about the Enterprise Europe Network, its context and how Enterprise Europe Network partners generally work.

It is intended to provide a short introduction to the Network both for new partners and for new staff, and to lead to further guidance which will help them in their day-to-day work.

This is the first version, created by the Network's Quality & Performance Working Group. This document will be updated regularly. For the accompanying documents, these will be totally restructured or updated progressively to fit with the context of the new Network.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any comments, feedback or suggestions on how these tools can be improved at *Business Services* Conference on the First Class.

WHAT IS THE ENTERPRISE EUROPE NETWORK?

The Enterprise Europe Network is a unique network of almost 600 organisations throughout the European Union (EU) and beyond. It is dedicated to helping small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to make the most of the business opportunities in the EU.

Launched in early 2008, the Network forms an important part of the EU's Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) which will run until 2013 and aims to encourage the growth and competitiveness of European firms.

However, the Network is not entirely new. It was built upon the knowledge and experience of two previous Networks: the Euro Info Centres and the Innovation Relay Centres.

Created in 1987 by the European Commission, the Euro Info Centres offered information and advice on European legislation and policies, as well as assistance in finding commercial business partners and accessing EU programmes. The Innovation Relay Centres, on the other hand, were established in 1995 and focused on facilitating the transfer of innovative technologies between European SMEs or between universities / research institutes and companies.

The Enterprise Europe Network aims to improve the services offered to European firms by integrating and developing these services, so that companies can access concrete and effective solutions to their business needs whoever they first contact (the "no wrong door" concept).

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE ENTERPRISE EUROPE NETWORK?

The Network has the following mission statement:

"We are the world's largest network connecting business to Europe. We help companies to improve and innovate through partnership, information and expert advice."

This mission is implemented practically through the provision of a range of integrated business and innovation support services, offered locally to SMEs and other organisations wherever they are located in Europe.



HOW IS THE NETWORK STRUCTURED?

The Enterprise Europe Network is made up of around 70 consortia, each comprising a number of partner organisations. Each consortium delivers services within a specific geographic region. In a few regions, there is just one partner but most have several and some have over 20.

The Network is represented in over 40 countries. In addition to the EU Member States, candidate countries, potential candidate countries and EEA members, have signed cooperation agreements to participate in the CIP. These countries are assimilated to member states and called “Article 4 members” (referring to the call for proposal). A number of other countries participate to the Network on a self financing basis like Russia, the USA or Chile. These third countries are called “Article 21.5”.

The organisations involved as Network partners are typically those who already have much experience in providing business and/or innovation support. They include chambers of commerce, regional development agencies, technology centres, innovation consultancies or other business support agencies. You can find a full list of these on the Network’s website at: http://www.enterprise-europe-network.ec.europa.eu/network_en.htm (the list is organised by country and then by region) or via the “who’s who” application in the intranet (you can find there also the list of staff working in the EACI and DG ENTR/E2).

Behind the “front-end” of the Network which interacts directly with the companies, there is the European Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation (EACI). The EACI’s role is to help the European Commission run both the Network and a number of other CIP programmes. As well as managing the consortia’s contracts and financial support, it offers practical help to the Network partners in the form of technical support, training sessions and promotion. For example, it oversees the Network’s intranet and communication platform (First Class) and organises both the Annual Conference and regular training sessions in Brussels. The EACI also links Network partners to relevant Commission services and Commission-related resources with value for companies.

EACI's website: <http://ec.europa.eu/eaci>

Last but not least, there is the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry, which has overall responsibility for the CIP programmes and for policy on entrepreneurship and innovation in Europe.

DG ENTR's website:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/index_en.htm

To ensure dialogue, participation and transparency between the Enterprise Europe Network Partners, DG ENTR and EACI, the Steering and Advisory Group (SAG) was set up. This forum composed of Network representatives, elected by National consortia, establishes a continuous and interactive process between the Network, ENTR and EACI with actions to be undertaken before, during and after the SAG meetings which take place three to four times a year.

SAG's website: <http://www.enterprise-europe-network.ec.europa.eu/src/intranet/documents/sag/sag.cfm>

The SAG is chaired by DG ENTR, with the support of the EACI. For Commission services, the SAG is an opportunity to provide guidance and listen to Network representatives and for Network representatives to raise issues of interest to Network partners. For instance, the SAG takes a decision concerning a set up of Working Groups. These gatherings of Network



experts discuss topics important for the Partners and provide deliverables with added value for the Partners' daily work.

Working groups' website: http://www.enterprise-europe-network.ec.europa.eu/src/intranet/documents/working_groups/workgr.cfm

Besides, partners can be grouped in Sector groups which are transnational. These groups give a framework to meet the specific needs of the particular segment of clients. For the moment, 18 sector groups have been set up.

Sector groups' website: http://www.enterprise-europe-network.ec.europa.eu/src/intranet/documents/sector_groups/secgr.cfm

WHAT SERVICES DOES THE NETWORK OFFER?

The Enterprise Europe Network offers a comprehensive range of services for European SMEs and entrepreneurs, providing tailor-made solutions at any stage of a company's life cycle.

Typically, these services include:

- Providing information and practical advice on market opportunities, European legislation and policies relevant to a company or sector. This might be in direct response to an enquiry from a company or pro-actively via websites, newsletters, workshops or other information products;
- Helping SMEs to find suitable business partners using the business and technology cooperation databases available via the EACI;
- Providing information on tender opportunities and helping companies to bid for contracts, for example via workshops or seminars;
- Developing the research and innovation capacities of SMEs by helping to create links with universities and research institutes, foster technological cooperation, holding brokerage events and providing innovation support services;
- Helping SMEs to share research results, participate in research programmes and apply for funding, particularly from the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research & Development (FP7);
- Involving SMEs and other business organisations in the policy-making process, in particular by providing feedback to the Commission on problems encountered with existing rules and encouraging companies to give input on forthcoming legislation.

WHAT TOOLS ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP?

The EACI makes available to the Network partners a number of tools, which not only are designed to help them in their day-to-day work but also to facilitate "networking" between the partners. A new integrated cooperation database is planned for 2010 onwards.



Existing tools:

- **First Class:** this is a communication platform, allowing Network partners, the Agency and the Commission to share information and good practice disseminate messages and ask each other for assistance. All Network partners are given access to this tool, but you will only be able to access those parts (known as “conferences”) which are relevant to you. For example, if you are based in France, you will not be able to access a conference organised for Network partners in Poland. Further guidance on how to use First Class is available in a separate booklet and the EACI offers training on that subject at sessions intended for newcomers.
- **Intranet:** there is an intranet available to all Network partners and you will be given a unique username and password to enter this site. Via the intranet, you will not only be able to access the cooperation databases (see below) but also a library of useful documents (including copies of this booklet and other guides) and a list of Network Partners. You will also find there access to the Performance Enhancement Systems (PES) – see below for more details.

<http://www.enterprise-europe-network.ec.europa.eu/home.cfm>

- The **EU and Services Bulletin:** EACI is producing this document on a weekly basis. Published on the “EU and Services news” conference every Friday afternoon, it contains useful information for both Partners and their clients.
- The **graphic charter and templates:** The Network has its own visual identity, which all partners are encouraged to use. A full set of guidelines, templates and visuals in various formats are available through the FirstClass Communication conference and from the intranet. The conference also features a rapid-response helpdesk.
- **Business Cooperation Database (BCD):** this is one of the databases available to Network partners and is designed to help firms find partners for **commercial** types of cooperation, for example for agency or distribution agreements or joint ventures. There is separate guidance available on how to use this tool.
- **Bulletin Board Services (BBS):** this is the other cooperation tool currently available to Network partners which aims to help disseminate **technology offers and requests**. There is separate guidance available on how to use this tool.
- **Automatic Matching Tool (AMT):** After registration, this allows you and your client to receive technology offers and requests relevant to a pre-determined profile of your clients’ interests. The information is sourced from the new profiles published in the BBS.
- **Brokerage Events Matching Tool (BEMT):** this tool is designed to help you run brokerage events, where companies can meet up with potential partners in their sector.

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- **Performance Enhancement System (PES):** designed by the EACI, the PES allows a comparison of partners across the Network on the basis of 50 data items. The aim is to allow you to benchmark your performance against the rest of the Network and to encourage you to improve by learning from others. Further information is available in the guidance on reporting.
 - **SME Feedback Tool:** run by the European Commission, this tool allows you to give feedback (anonymous) on any problems that your client has encountered whilst seeking to do business in the internal market. Separate guidance on how to use this tool has been provided by the Commission.

WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER INFORMATION AND HELP?

Alongside this introductory booklet, you will find in the “Enterprise Europe Network Toolbox” a series of guides which are designed to help you in your work.

In addition, you will find a Glossary of acronyms and terms used by the Network, to help you find yourself in all the jargon!

Useful information can be found also in the Intranet:

The “training” section includes presentations from “Newcomers” training sessions, on subjects like: Access to finance, Information sources about EU programmes, FP7, Internal market and Public procurement, IT Tools, Market Access and business services, TTT and IPR. This training material can be useful in the preparation of information activities you organise for your clients.

The “Archives” section contains important documents produced by the former EICs and IRCs. However, be careful while using them, as they have not been updated.

And finally, if you are unsure of something, please do not hesitate to contact either Network colleagues or the Agency: they will undoubtedly be happy to help!