

Cooperation Guidelines

Enterprise Europe Network and European Institute of Innovation and Technology

Introduction

This document outlines cooperation guidelines designed to optimize synergies and foster linkages between the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). These two EU-funded instruments have complementary roles in supporting innovation, entrepreneurship, and growth within the European Union (EU). By collaborating effectively, they can enhance their impact on the European innovation ecosystem.

The EEN is the world's largest support network for Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs)⁽¹⁾, currently encompassing around 600 member organisations spread over 57 countries⁽²⁾. It provides advice, training and international partnership services to innovative and export-oriented SMEs on accessing finance and scaling up. It is funded under the Single Market Programme (SMP).

The EIT is funded under Horizon Europe and is made up of ten Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs), each of them addressing a specific societal challenge. The EIT Community has a presence all over Europe with around 2,500 partners, making it the largest pan-European innovation ecosystem. The EIT Community bridges the gap between research and market by strengthening the links between education, innovation-driven research and business (Knowledge Triangle Integration). The EIT KICs are set up as independent entities.

This document shall encourage both networks to work systematically together by setting up structures and working methodologies to ensure complementary, mutually beneficial and seamless services to the EEN's and the EIT's stakeholders, with a special focus on deepening EIT KICs' connections with EEN services and extending EIT's regional and SME reach.

⁽¹⁾ SMEs with less than 250 employees, turnover less than 50 million EUR and balance sheet less than 43 million EUR: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en#sme-definition

⁽²⁾ All EU Member States' and non-EU countries' EEN contact points: <https://een.ec.europa.eu/local-contact-points>

Goals of the Cooperation

1. **Enhance Innovation and Competitiveness of European businesses, and in particular SMEs**, by maximising cooperation, cross-promotion and leveraging resources, networks, tools, and services.
2. **Promote Knowledge and Technology Transfer and uptake** by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, expertise, technologies, innovative solutions between SMEs, start-ups, and scale-ups to other private and public actors.
3. **Support scale-up, technology and innovation uptake** by supporting SMEs and start-ups in scaling their operations and entering all relevant EU Member States' and international markets by leveraging EEN's and EIT's regional presences.
4. **Foster Sustainable Growth and Prosperity** by encouraging sustainable practices within European businesses and innovations.

Areas of Cooperation

1. Networking and Partnerships:

Co-organize events, seminars, and workshops that bring together academia, industry, research, start-ups and SMEs and facilitate matchmaking opportunities for SMEs with relevant KICs, and potential business partners and collaborators through joint events and available platforms. Both networks shall tap into potential of the cooperation on topical level, i.e. relevant EEN Thematic and Sector groups with EIT KICs and on regional level EEN country contacts with the EIT RIS Hubs. Establish referral pipelines between EEN's local offices and KICs' acceleration and entrepreneurship services. Leverage EEN as an access point for KICs' education and innovation opportunities for regional SMEs and entrepreneurs across the EU and candidate countries, including the Western Balkans.

2. Information and Knowledge Exchange:

Exchange market intelligence, best practices, research findings, and innovation trends to inform strategic decisions.

3. Joint Projects and Initiatives:

Identify and pursue joint research and innovation projects, including joint piloting and testing of digital tools (e.g. AI-based tools), that align with EU strategic priorities and collaborate on EU funding proposals to pool expertise and resources. Explore developing an EEN-EIT KICs Dealflow mechanism, whereas: EEN promotes KIC opportunities (calls, accelerator programs, courses, etc.) to its network; and KICs direct SMEs and ventures with potential towards EEN services for business support, internationalisation within the EU Single Market and beyond as well as EU market access services.

4. Skills Development and Training:

Co-design and offer joint training sessions and workshops to develop skills in for instance innovation management, intellectual property (IP), scaling-up, futureproofing and internationalization strategies among stakeholders.

5. Support Services:

Provide complementary advisory services; EEN could focus mainly on business diagnostics and support, internationalisation, market access and scale-up services while EIT could provide entrepreneurial education/skills training, deliver available innovation tools and incubation and acceleration services (including through its KICs, EIT Academies and EIT Campus).

Implementation Mechanisms

1. EU-level working group:

This group with members representing EEN and EIT and relevant services from DG GROW, DG EAC and EISMEA will oversee cooperative activities and annual Action Plans, evaluate progress, and propose new areas for collaboration.

- **Dedicated Contact Points** - contact persons within all specified organizations to facilitate communication and coordination will be designated at the kick-off meeting to be initiated by DG GROW in Q4 2025.
- **Annual Action Plans** – These will define the specific joint activities to be implemented each year. The drafting process will be initiated in Q4 of the preceding year and finalised and agreed in Q1 of the implementation year. Drafts will be discussed at operational level among the designated contact points, who will engage their management for final approval.
- **Periodic Meetings** – these meetings will take place online at least biannually to assess collaborative efforts and address any challenges or new opportunities.
- **Tool Pilots** – to enable jointly pilot or test EIT tools with EEN advisors, especially in the context of AI tools or other KIC services and connect it to the EEN work on digital tool mapping.

2. EEN and EIT level:

EEN will accommodate the coordination of this cooperation under a dedicated sub-group of the EEN Thematic Group Research and Innovation. It will coordinate the collaborative actions with other relevant EEN Thematic and Sector groups and adjust strategies as needed. Regular meetings will take place to contribute to annual Action Plans on the EEN-EIT cooperation.

EIT will accommodate the coordination of this cooperation under its Innovation and Business Creation Panels (comprising the EIT KICs' Innovation and Business Creation Directors). It will coordinate the collaborative actions with other relevant EIT Panels and Groups, notably the Education and RIS Panels, and adjust strategies as needed. Regular meetings will take place to contribute to annual Action Plans on the EEN-EIT cooperation.

Communication Strategy

1. Cross-promotion and mutual promotional materials

Develop co-branded information materials to highlight collaborative efforts, case studies and shared successes.

2. Stakeholder Engagement:

Communicate the benefits of cooperation to stakeholders, including businesses, research organisations, policymakers, and academia, through newsletters, reports, and public events.

3. Digital Presence:

Use digital channels and social media to share insights, opportunities, and success stories from collaborative initiatives.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Joint framework to measure and evaluate collaboration will be agreed and included in the Annual Action Plans, making use of existing functionalities and developing new ones where relevant.

These indicators will be strictly informative, as all assignments will be on a voluntary basis corresponding to resource availability and benefits for EIT and EEN stakeholders.

Annual review meetings will assess progress, and adjust strategies as needed.

Conclusion

By fostering close cooperation, the Enterprise Europe Network and the European Institute of Technology can significantly enhance their impact on Europe's innovation ecosystem and contribute to close the innovation gap which is one of the main priorities of the EU, as set out in the Competitiveness Compass as well as the Startup and Scaleup Strategy. These guidelines provide a framework to enhance synergies and complementarity, contributing to a more competitive, resilient, sustainable, and innovative Europe and better use of the EU resources.

E-signed

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Annex:

Pilot Activities 2025 (version valid to the date of the Cooperation Guidelines' signature, subject to revisions as needed)

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