

Terms of Reference TRANSNATIONAL CLUSTERING Call

Background

The Interreg NPA Programme is part of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective supported by the European Regional Development Fund. The programme contributes to and aligns with the European Cohesion strategy of a Greener and Smarter Europe, and a Europe closer to citizens, National and Regional policies and development strategies, macro regional and sea basin strategies, and other programmes covering parts of the geographical area. Furthermore, an increased interest and rapid developments in Arctic regions has resulted in a more explicit recognition of the programme's regional development contribution to the EU's Arctic Policy.

The programme's vision is a Northern Periphery and Arctic area where communities cooperate with each other to harness opportunities, find common solutions to shared challenges and together become more prosperous and resilient.

In 2017 and 2018, the NPA programme funded projects to encourage clustering activities between ongoing projects in Interreg programmes in the Arctic. Clustering activities were to take place with the objective to diversify and capitalise on outputs and results from two or more previously implemented or ongoing projects.

Based on previous experiences, the Interreg Aurora and NPA programme administration want to encourage clustering activities between the two programmes through a common/coordinated call. Interreg Aurora will fund cross-border clustering projects and Interreg NPA will fund transnational clustering projects as described in these Terms of Reference.

Expected outcomes

A clustering project is in general intended to lead to better outputs and results from the involved projects and a greater outreach for the dissemination of the results from the two programmes. Clustering projects are expected to give a higher profile to topics relevant to people living in the Arctic and contribute to the practical implementation of the EU Arctic Policy in communities.

Examples of outcomes are:

- Projects collaborating to explore transferring of project outputs to other organisations, sectors and/or regions, for example disseminating result and outputs beyond their ongoing or completed project activities.

Northern Periphery and Arctic

- Projects collaborating to maximize the cross-border/transnational impact of existing outputs on local level, to end users or widening the preparedness for cooperation to other beneficiaries, for example by organising collaboration initiatives that connect end users across regions.
- Projects collaborating to increase the awareness of the cross-border/transnational added value and the potential of cooperation. The establishment of a lasting network could be one such activity for example.
- Projects with complementary skill sets collaborating to focus on improving (the uptake of) project outputs.
- Projects collaborating to gain critical mass to inform decision makers.

Clustering projects are expected to demonstrate activities and deliverables that go beyond the achievements of their individual projects, for example, involvement of a wider group of stakeholders, excellence in promoting the results to the relevant target audiences including policy makers, and enhanced business plans for products/services such as combinations of solutions that meet a more complex demand.

Clustering projects are expected to carry out at least one major communication activity or event to make the project's work visible to the public and showcase the positive changes for the partner regions. The Northern Periphery and Arctic programme has labelled clustering projects as "Operations of Strategic Importance" (OSIs) and specific focus will be given to communicating the projects widely and in a coordinated way.

The Monitoring Committee is looking to fund projects in the following Priority and Specific Objective:

PRIORITY 3: Strengthening the organisational capacity among NPA communities to make use of cooperation opportunities.

3.1 Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies.

Furthermore, clustering projects shall comply within one of the below themes:

- SME competitiveness, including culture and sustainable tourism
- Research and innovation, including circular economy
- Climate change adaptation, including nature protection and biodiversity

Recognising the unique circumstances and challenges of the area compared to other parts of Europe, the clustering projects have the potential to bring strong regional and territorial development perspectives and contribute to a more coordinated implementation of territorial strategies that cover multiple programme areas, such as the EU Arctic Policy.

Project budget

The maximum total eligible project budget is 200 000 EUR, with a financing rate of 65% for all partner countries, except for Norwegian partners with a 50% intervention rate.

The support to the beneficiaries will be handled as a lump sum based on a draft budget established on a case-by-case basis and agreed ex ante by the Managing Authority.

NOTE: Funding is running low in a number of Non-Member State countries! Applicants from Non-Member States are strongly advised to check if there are any national restrictions to budget levels and programme match funding, for example by checking national information websites, or by contacting their Regional Contact Point.

Project duration

12 months for project activities, excluding final reporting

Partnership

Small-scale transnational clustering projects must involve partners from at least 3 NPA programme partner countries.

At least one partner from an ongoing or finalized project funded by the 2021-2027 Interreg Aurora programme and at least one partner from an ongoing or finalized project financed by the 2021-2027 Northern Periphery and Arctic programme. New partner(s) could be included, provided that there are clear synergies.

The partners in a transnational clustering project need to fulfil the Interreg NPA programme requirements for eligible partners, and they are expected to be located in the NPA area.

Partnerships are recommended to include at least 2 of the 3 geographical zones of the programme area: Finland-Sweden-Norway; Ireland; Faroe Islands-Greenland-Iceland.

In addition to expectations outlined in the Interreg Regulation (Article 26, Regulation 2021/1059), Lead Partners have to meet the following criteria:

- They are a public sector organisation.
- They are based in the NPA Programme area, unless they have a national remit that covers the Programme area.

For information about eligible partners, please see the Programme Manual, chapter 2.2.1.

Northern Periphery and Arctic

Organisations from outside the programme partner countries are welcome to participate as associated partners. They are not a part of the formal project partnership and cannot receive EU or ERDF equivalent funding but are nevertheless directly involved in the project's implementation.

Mandatory supporting documents to be submitted with JEMS application

- PDF of signed Lead partner statement
- PDF of signed Project partner statement

Timeline

OPENING OF CLUSTERING CALL:	September 8th 2025
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	October 2nd 2025
DECISION:	MC meeting Nov/Dec 2025

Selection procedure and decision making

1. Completed applications are submitted through Jems
2. The Joint Secretariat assesses application according to the programmes' admissibility, eligibility and selection criteria
3. A calibration meeting between Aurora/NPA takes place where information from each programme about the submitted cluster applications is shared
4. A regional appraisal takes place for input on the regional relevance of the clustering project
5. Decision proposal to the Monitoring Committees, decisions to be made at a meeting with the Monitoring Committee in Nov/Dec 2025.

Project development support events

To support the project development, a number of webinars and events for partner search and matchmaking will be arranged (see annexed time plan)

A draft project idea template will be used as a tool to better understand early project ideas and to guide applicants in the right direction and to the right programme. Both NPA and Aurora programme administrations will jointly discuss project ideas and give feedback to applicants.