



InnoSME

Good Practices Guide

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1. How to use the Good Practices Guide

The Good Practices Guide is a collection of practices from the InnoSME project. InnoSME is a project with the challenge to promote and improve the participation of ICT SMEs from the New Member States in the EU RTD Framework programme. This objective has been approached using a network of stakeholders, organisations public and private working regularly with SMEs in the different countries and regions.

It is in this framework when, in the different activities of the project, InnoSME has identified the best way to do the activities necessary, with stakeholders and SMEs, to reach the objectives. These 'best ways' are the different good practices collected here.

The present collection is only the first step. It is open to the improvement for the different initiatives and projects working with related objectives, and addressed to the same target groups.

If you have any contribution, any suggestion to modify anyone of the practices, or if you want to add one new, please feel free to contact the InnoSME manager at any time: Francisco Loras (Francisco.loras@teleregionsnetwork.org).

Thanks for your cooperation.

2. Good practices

InnoSME has identified 7 good practices in the different fields in which the project has been working.

1. How to engage stakeholders in activities addressed to SMEs
2. How to support stakeholders in their work with SMEs
3. How to organise a workshop addressed to the SMEs
4. How to engage stakeholders in a RTD proposal
5. How to improve the participation of SMEs in a RTD proposal
6. How to coordinate the preparation of a RTD proposal
7. How to obtain synergies with other projects and initiatives

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| INNOSME GOOD PRACTICE | |
| Good practice title | <i>HOW TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN ACTIVITIES ADDRESSED TO SMEs</i> |

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| Good practice description |
| <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>To address SMEs is a hard work. SMEs are mainly focussed in short term objectives: sales, marketing, financial and production issues; with a lack of strategic thinking that difficult their participation in any activity out of these main concerns.</p> <p>Besides this aspect, trying to work with local and/or regional SMEs from an external location, Brussels for instance, is an additional difficulty: the characteristics and attitudes of these SMEs are unknown, as well as their particular interests and attitudes; even who are they and where to find them is a problem.</p> <p>The only way to start to solve the question is to work with local and regional stakeholders, organisations working regularly with SMEs that know well their problems, interests, capabilities and attitudes; and that are established prescriptors for the SMEs.</p> <p>The stakeholders could be public, Regional Development and/or Innovation Agencies, Business Innovation Centres, Universities; or private, SMEs Associations, Chambers of Commerce, etc.</p> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identify a list of potential stakeholders in each location that is needed to cover in the activities. 2. prepare a summary of the activities to do, explaining clearly the tasks that must be performed by the stakeholders, the requirements that the activities have, and the compensation arranged for the stakeholder, if there is one. 3. send the summary to the stakeholders via e-mail, and establish personnel communication with all of them, preferably via phone or videoconference if possible. 4. explain the benefits that can obtain both, the stakeholder and the associated SMEs, from the planned activities. 5. arrange a face-to-face meeting, visiting the stakeholders in their city, to know them and their activities personally, and to demonstrate the real commitment with the planned activities. 6. reach an agreement, and put it on paper. 7. define an Action Plan to apply in common, defining the tasks, the schedule, the responsibility of each part, the resources allocated, the existing budget and the monitoring system. 8. prepare joint marketing materials addressed to the SMEs in their national language. 9. follow the Action Plan, and monitor it. Use the time of common work to identify future possibilities of collaboration. 10. if there are payments or compensations to the stakeholder, do it in the terms agreed, without delays or other obstacles. |

Expected Result

A solid agreement between both parts allowing the deployment of successful activities addressed to the SMEs in a local/regional framework.

Monitoring

- number of stakeholders identified in the first list
- number of answers from the first contact
- number of agreements in each location
- number of SMEs contacted by the stakeholder
- number of SMEs participating in the activities
- agreement for future collaboration

| INNOSME GOOD PRACTICE | |
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| Good practice title | <i>HOW TO SUPPORT STAKEHOLDERS IN THEIR WORK WITH SMEs</i> |

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| Good practice description |
| <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>A Stakeholder is an Organisation, public or private, offering regularly services to SMEs; it can be a Regional Development or Innovation Agency, a Business Innovation Centre, the knowledge transfer section of a University, a Technological Centre, a SMEs Association, a Chamber of Commerce, etc.</p> <p>These Organisations are offering some services to the SMEs, in some specific fields. It can be grants, funding for projects, RTD services, market surveys, support to their internationalisation, etc. Thus, stakeholders have regular contacts with the SMEs, and know very well the characteristics of these companies in their territories.</p> <p>But all of these organisations cannot cover all the issues related to SMEs. One of the most common weaknesses is related to the participation in RTD Framework Programme projects and proposals, including the analysis and improvement of the innovation capabilities and skills that are behind it.</p> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the starting point must be the services regularly offered by stakeholders to SMEs, that must be analysed, including the feed-back from the SMEs, looking for the most related ones with the new service to be offered 2. involve more than one stakeholder in a territory; a good combination could be a Regional Agency and a SMEs Association, covering each one different aspects in the relation with SMEs 3. define an Action Plan to apply with the stakeholder, defining the objective to be reached, fixing the tasks, the schedule, the responsibility of each part, the resources allocated, the existing budget and the monitoring system 4. start working with a short group composed by the most active SMEs in related questions, and with the SMEs more strongly linked to the stakeholder, and use the results of this work to do marketing activities to the entire SMEs' collective existing in the area 5. include information about the activities developed, the participants SMEs, and the results, if any, inside the normal communication channels of the stakeholder. Try to include these informations in other channels related to the SMEs composing the target group; the independence of these other channels can reinforce the credibility of the message 6. communication must be always a channel between people; for SMEs the personal relation, the face-to-face is the only way to be sure that they are receiving, and understanding, the message. The establishment of a sound network and partnership takes time; and there are no short cuts to do it 7. organise activities, as a Workshop or Seminar, addressed to the SMEs to explain the services offered. Include always presentations from the participant SMEs as 'best practice', and give the floor to all the stakeholders and other Organisations in the territory than can carry any related action |

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. enlarge the short group of SMEs with new ones, exploiting the results of the activities and the best practices from the initial SMEs, looking in each case for the perspective that can be more profitable for SMEs 9. monitor the activities, trying to obtain the largest feed-back from SMEs as possible. SMEs are reluctant to loose their time answering surveys, etc; so, try to obtain the data from indirect instruments, web statistics, questions in Workshops, etc. 10. use the feed-back to update and correct the plan, adequating it more and more to the real needs of the local SMEs |
| <p><i>Expected Result</i></p> <p>Delivery of new services to SMEs, related to their participation in EU, National and Regional RTD programmes, promoted by European initiatives and provided by local stakeholders, obtaining a high participation and impact in SMEs</p> |
| <p><i>Monitoring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - number of stakeholders involved - number of SMEs targeted - number of SMEs in the short list - number of SMEs with feed-back - number of SMEs participating in activities - number of SMEs using services |

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| INNOSME GOOD PRACTICE | |
| Good practice title | <i>HOW TO ORGANISE A WORKSHOP ADDRESSED TO THE SMEs</i> |

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| Good practice description |
| <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Workshops, as all the networking activities, are key factors for establishing sound relations and partnership among the participant organisations and persons. At the same time they are a good tool to disseminate specific knowledge and ideas, to put in common information, and to generate joint proposals.</p> <p>But, SMEs have not too much time to dedicate to generic activities, without a specific objective and a clear added value for them. EU RTD programmes and funding, and innovation as a whole, are not key questions to attract SMEs.</p> <p>However, these are crucial aspects to survive in this global competition. Thus, the only solution is to find the adequate messages, and the right messengers to transmit them, in order to commit SMEs to attend a Workshop.</p> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. use the Workshop as a tool, and not as an end-objective activity. A Workshop must be part of an overall plan to reach an objective related with the SMEs, and not an isolated activity that must produce results by itself without any other complement 2. establish clear and measurable objectives for the Workshop, as a whole; for the stakeholders organising and promoting it; and for the participant SMEs 3. define the Agenda thinking in the needs and interests of the attendants, and not of the organisers. Include interesting persons and interventions; and always give the floor to a local SME to share their experience, as a best practice, with the attendants. It is the only way to reach the attention of the SMEs: to show them how a company like them, that they know personally, can perform the proposed activities with good results 4. fix a realistic date, in terms of the time needed to organise the activity and do the preparatory activities and the communication, and not coincident with other major events addressed to the same target group that can compete in advantage with the Workshop 5. Prepare a list with the SMEs that are the target group, including all the contact details needed to do the promotion campaign: name of the company, name of the contact person, email address, phone number, activity, etc. And be careful that this is a public information, and no confidential sources are used for this purpose 6. prepare correct, but not luxurious, marketing materials, thinking in the reaction from the SMEs managers if they think that too much money, which they can invest in a more profitable way in their business, is spent for nothing in the Workshop complementarities. The same advice is valid for the venue and the catering: think always in terms of the local habits, and do not give the idea that there is waste of Money |

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. promote the Workshop among the interested SMEs, and use other stakeholders that can be reaching the SMEs from other point. Highlight the benefits that SMEs can obtain attending the Workshop, using as key argument the experience from other local SMEs doing the same activities. Adequate always the communication channels to the nature of the planned activities and attendants. 8. do last phone calls to confirm the people registered and to avoid last cancellations 9. monitor the quality of the Workshop using, if possible short survey forms to obtain in place feed-back about the interest of the proposed themes, the quality of the interventions and speakers, and the usability for the attendant SMEs 10. do a follow-up action from the Workshop, by mail and phone, to attract the attendant SMEs to use the proposed services or to participate in the proposed activities |
| <p><i>Expected Result</i></p> <p>Organise an efficient Workshop addressed to the SMEs, with the objective to obtain their use of services related with the participation in RTD programmes and innovation empowerment.</p> |
| <p><i>Monitoring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - number of SMEs in the target - number of SMEs reached in communication - number of SMEs in person contacted - number of persons registered - number of attendants - number of SMEs attendants - number of SMEs with positive answer |

| INNOSME GOOD PRACTICE | |
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| Good practice title | <i>HOW TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN A RTD PROPOSAL</i> |

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| Good practice description |
| <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>There are not too many RTD programmes open to the participation of the stakeholders themselves. Depending of the nature of the stakeholder, Research for SMEs Associations, Research for the Benefit of SMEs, Regions for Knowledge, some Support or Coordination actions in the 7FP, etc. can be used.</p> <p>In some cases, stakeholders will be the only participants in the proposal; in some others, some individual SMEs will take part together with the stakeholder. This will depend both on the programme and on the specific project proposal.</p> <p>In general, participation in a RTD project, as consequence of the approval of a proposal, is not related with a monetary profit. The main objective is to share knowledge with other partners, and to contribute to the development of the activities and the obtention of the objectives.</p> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. start from a point of common interest for all; this common interest can be shared by the different stakeholders to be involved, or by the SMEs ‘represented’ by the stakeholders, or by all of them. It does not matter, the idea must be interesting for the participants, not only for the promoter, or the facilitator 2. prepare an outline¹ with the shortest information necessary to understand the idea, the objectives, the work to be done, the role of each participant, and the resources to allocate 3. select a short list of organisations that could be interested in such idea. The EU programmes have strong requirement about the number of different countries that must be represented in the consortium; as this is only a legal requirement, and not all the contacted organizations will answer positively, it is better to contact initially a bigger number than needed 4. contact them by mail, and follow-up by phone, asking for their interest, their opinion regarding the topic and the approach, and for their suggestions to improve the idea and the proposal 5. draft as soon as possible an initial budget; all the potential partners will be interested in knowing how many resources must be allocated, and how much funding they will obtain. Try to be balanced in the distribution of the resources among the different partners, thinking in an adequate correspondence between tasks and budget 6. after obtaining the agreement in the participation, define an initial ‘Consortium Agreement’ among the partners, not thinking in signing it at this stage, but clearly establishing the role and responsibility of each one, the management procedures, the decision taking system, and the conflict resolution procedures |

¹ see the good practice ‘How to Coordinate the Preparation of a RTD Proposal

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. maintain informed all the partners involved about the different stages of the preparation of the proposal, sending the relevant information, and communicating all the proposed changes, especially if it affects to strategic issues in the project 8. require information on time; all the partners, at least, must fill in their own A2 form, and provide their description and the CV of the involved person. In some Organisations, due to their size or procedures, this takes time 9. give to all the partners the opportunity to collaborate in writing the proposal; it is better to have different points of view, and each one could have specific skills that can improve different aspects. Moreover, persons that are daily related with writing can forget some clarifications or misunderstandings that can be detected by more external ones 10. after submitting the proposal, send the final version and thank to each one of the partners involved |
| <p><i>Expected Result</i></p> <p>A strong engagement of the stakeholders in the RTD proposal, actively collaborating in the definition and writing of the proposal, and obtaining a high quality result</p> |
| <p><i>Monitoring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - number of stakeholders contacted - number of stakeholders participating - number of countries participating (if the case) - number of SMEs participants (if the case) - proposal over thresholds - proposal funded yes/not |

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| INNOSME GOOD PRACTICE | |
| Good practice title | <i>HOW TO IMPROVE THE PARTICIPATION OF SMEs IN A RTD PROPOSAL</i> |

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| Good practice description |
| <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>SMEs are reluctant to use their time in the preparation of a proposal to participate in a programme that they do not know well; and from which the companies do not expect real results justifying the resources invested in this preparation.</p> <p>However, sometimes SMEs have real interesting ideas, and they can develop and present them. It is important to consider that this can be a good result of previous activities with the SMEs, as Workshops² or Seminars informing about the programme opportunities, and giving advice about proposals preparation.</p> <p>A common problem normally found from this point of view is to clarify with the SMEs that the idea that they have, and that they think is a good idea and really important for the company, could be unsuitable to be presented to an RTD programme.</p> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. start from a previous relation with SMEs, knowing their innovation capabilities and skills, assessing their innovation system, and obtaining information about their weak and strong points and their improvement priorities 2. work with the SME looking for ideas, helping them with tools as brainstorming, etc., and support them to analyse in-depth, studying their innovation degree and their feasibility, as well as the impact in the future of the company and in the market 3. guarantee the confidentiality of all the information provided, offering to the SME the signature of a ‘confidentiality agreement’ before the SME asks for it. To keep confidentiality is the strong requirement to work with SMEs 4. guarantee a professional service, being for free or under a fee, providing an upper-class standard level of quality to the SMEs. It could be better to establish a written agreement between both parts defining the tasks to be done by each part, and the compensations, if any 5. maintain informed the SME management about all the contacts and arrangements done in their name, without going over the limits defined in the contract 6. support the SME with the preparation of an outline³ of the proposal with the shortest information necessary to understand the idea, the objectives, the work to be done, the role of each participants, and the resources to allocate in 7. require information to the SME on time; the coordinator partners, besides filling in their own A2 form, and providing their description and the CV of the involved person, must take the responsibility of the overall coordination of the proposal preparation, assuring that all the partners provide the necessary information in due time and format |

² see the good practice ‘How to Organise a Workshop addressed to the SMEs’

³ see the good practice ‘How to Coordinate the Preparation of a RTD Proposal’

8. advise the SME in all the aspects related with the preparation of the proposal, and assure that the rules for a correct coordination of the proposal preparation have been applied⁴
9. take special care that neither the proposal nor the project, can affect in a negative way the competitiveness of the company, can put in danger their strategic assets, or have any kind of negative results
10. be ready to support the SME in the contract preparation and negotiation if the proposal is successful; a proposal preparation does not end until the contract is signed
11. never forget that the real owner of the proposal and the project is the SME, and not the organisations supporting them to define and prepare the proposal; the final decision always corresponds to the SME

Expected Result

A good proposal having behind a real project, trying to solve a real need, corresponding with the company strategy, looking for new and innovative solutions for a problem shared in the Consortium

Monitoring

- number of ideas presented
- number of suitable ideas
- number of ideas developed
- number of working hours in preparation
- proposal over thresholds
- proposal funded yes/not

⁴ see the good practice ‘How to Coordinate the preparation of a RTD Proposal’

| INNOSME GOOD PRACTICE | |
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| Good practice title | <i>HOW TO COORDINATE THE PREPARATION OF A RTD PROPOSAL</i> |

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| Good practice description |
| <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>One of the main difficulties for an SME to participate in a proposal, especially if it is looking to be the coordinator, following their own idea for a project, is the coordination of the other partners to prepare and write the proposal.</p> <p>SMEs usually do not have the internal resources with the capabilities and skills to do this work in an appropriate way. But, even if SMEs can contract or use external services for these tasks, a basic knowledge of the rules to follow is absolutely necessary to obtain accurate results.</p> <p>A general advice could be the integration as partner in a consortium as a first step, but sometimes this is not a solution: it is not possible to find a consortium adequate to the company needs or the company has its own idea and wants to develop it as a leader.</p> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. analyse and discuss internally the idea to be sure that the Project is aligned with the strategic objectives of the Company 2. anticipate the information needed to prepare the proposal: current Work programme, to be sure that the idea is addressed to a topic in the programme, the Call for proposals, to know the areas opened, the characteristics of the proposals expected and the deadline, the Proposers' Guide, to know the contents to include in the proposal, and the Evaluation guide, to know how the proposal will be evaluated 3. contact with EC Officers responsible of the programme and the call, and the NCP, to check if the idea is suitable for the specific call, and it is in the range that is expected to be presented 4. write an initial outline, simple and understandable (3-5 pages), with publishable information: show the background and the justification of the project, define the objectives, draft the work programme needed to reach the objectives, give an idea about the expertise and characteristics that must be represented in the Consortium, and define the rules that must be followed by the partners 5. search for partners, using the facilities set-up by the Commission and other initiatives (www.innosme.eu, www.ideal-ist.net), taking care to include all the necessary competences to implement the project, assuring a well balanced typology, and improving the participative involvement of all the partners 6. design a work plan to prepare the proposal (including non-productive time as holidays, etc.); and follow it, monitor it and update it 7. assure that the team to write the proposal, and from a strategic point of view, includes experts in the different aspects needed, technology, management, market, exploitation... to assure the quality of the work 8. include always in the proposals the way to do the internal and external evaluation, the main ideas for exploitation, and how to manage and distribute the property rights, licenses, etc. |

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| <p>9. write the proposal doing the preparation in common, under the coordinator, following basic rules: use the official forms, in a clear and simple English, including visual elements, as diagrams, tables, etc., define a budget that is adjusted and not overestimated, and take into account who and how will read it</p> <p>10. Do successive readings by different Consortium members, adjusting the details, and a final reading by somebody external to the preparation, with two main questions: do you understand what the project wants to do? and how the project wants to do it?). And, finally, do not forget that this is a competition</p> |
| <p><i>Expected Result</i></p> <p>A good proposal having behind a real project, trying to solve a real need, corresponding with the company strategy, looking for new and innovative solutions for a problem shared in the Consortium</p> |
| <p><i>Monitoring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - number of ideas analysed - number of suitable ideas - number of proposals started - number of potential partners contacted - number of partners confirmed - number of proposals presented - number of proposal approved |

| INNOSME GOOD PRACTICE | |
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| Good practice title | <i>HOW TO OBTAIN SYNERGIES WITH OTHER PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES</i> |

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| Good practice description |
| <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>At any time, there are different initiatives and projects with the same or related objectives: to improve the innovation capabilities and skills in SMEs, and to support them in their participation in the RTD programmes.</p> <p>Unfortunately, usually all these initiatives and projects are unknown to the others, and potential synergies are not obtained. Sometimes, resources are allocated that duplicate efforts without any added value; some others a bigger impact is not reached because activities are fragmented and non cumulative.</p> <p>There is a special responsibility to coordinate actions and activities in the benefit of the target groups, especially if they are SMEs, always difficult to contact and to motivate.</p> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. collect all the possible information about projects and initiatives with related objectives, analyse them and identify the opportunities to cooperate, in terms of services and users 2. attend the events organised by these projects and initiatives or related with the objectives of the project to learn more about them 3. establish personal contact with the responsables of the other projects and initiatives to obtain more in-depth information and propose them a collaboration 4. try to do a joint exploitation of the information that can be obtained by the projects, putting in common databases, etc. 5. propose to share the tools that the different projects can use working with the SMEs, as patner search facilities, assessment tools, validating ideas, writing proposals, etc. 6. try to offer and provide common services addressed to the SMEs; this will allow having a more accurate image in front of the users, and always stimulate their use in a virtual one-stop-shop 7. propose common activities to be carried by the different projects and initiatives, as joint Workshops or Seminars, Info-Days; as more useful information and offer is concentrated in a single event, it will become easier to attract SMEs, and the event will be more useful to them 8. define and sign agreements to define the conditions of the common work, establishing the different tasks, the responsibilities, the resources to allocate, the objectives, the monitoring 9. take the tasks with responsibility, doing always a professional work to provide the best possible service 10. act always in the benefit of the target groups, the SMEs, without any kind of egoistic or exhibitionist purposes |

Expected Result

A better service to the SMEs, offering better services with highest impact at lowest cost in term of resources and time, avoiding duplications.

Monitoring

- number of projects and initiatives identified
- number of projects and initiatives contacted
- number of agreements signed
- number of common services
- number of common activities
- number of common SMEs users