



Call for Papers – Abstracts

Smart ECO Hub – Building cross border relationships in the energy sector

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Abstract:

The Smart ECO Hub is a cross border cluster organisation for the sustainable energy sector which covers 15 local authority districts in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The objective is to drive economic growth and job creation through leveraging the triple helix model to foster collaboration and innovation between private enterprise, local authorities and academic institutions in the region. Membership is mainly composed of SME's, micro SME's, start-up's and some larger businesses. Approximately 64% of the members are based in Northern Ireland with the remaining 36% in the Republic of Ireland. The project is funded for three years by the INTERREG IVA programme. This paper primarily addresses the Axis 1 theme: "Clusters as the driving power of the performance of the European SMEs abroad" and shares our experiences of building this new cross border network to over 100 members over a period of less than 18 months.

The paper reviews four key dimensions of the cluster operation: Terms of reference and organisation; business recruitment and ongoing network development; fostering growth & innovation; collaboration with other agencies. Each of these aspects contributes to the success of a cluster and the paper outlines the Smart ECO Hub experience and highlights learning that will benefit others. The paper considers the importance of membership diversity within a cluster; the challenges of operating within a cross border, multi-agency environment and the practical barriers to innovation faced by Micro SME's in this region. Examples of successes arising from the activities of the Smart ECO Hub are presented, along with feedback received from members in the context of future initiatives under consideration.

This paper is prepared by the project team as practitioners who have spent the last 24 months building a new cross border organisation with a sustainable energy focus in the North East region of Ireland which spans the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.