



THE SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

The Seventh Framework Programme covers EC activities in the field of research, technological development and demonstration (RTD) for the period 2007 to 2013

Guiding principles

for setting up systems of

National Contact Points (NCP systems)

**for the Seventh Framework Programmes
for Research and Technological
Development (FP7)**

Guiding principles for setting up systems of National Contact Points (NCP systems) for the Seventh EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development (FP7)

Introduction

Under the 5th and 6th Framework Programmes, all Member States and Associated Countries have set up systems of National Contact Points (NCP systems) to inform and assist potential participants and contractors in ongoing projects. The basic principles for the NCP concept were laid down in the discussion paper "Guiding Principles for Setting up Information and Assistance Networks" (30 October 1998).

For the new structures and funding schemes of FP7, providing appropriate information and assistance to potential participants is vital for assuring transparency and equal access. Moreover, by transnational networking and by facilitating EU wide integration of research, the NCP network can contribute significantly to the implementation of FP7 and the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA).

The aim of this paper is to provide general guidance for setting up information and assistance networks (National Contact Points) in all Member States and Associated Countries (as well as FP7 contacts in some third countries), taking into account the experience of preceding Framework Programmes and the challenges of FP7. It addresses the network architecture, the nomination and recognition process and the operational modalities.

The guiding principles in this document have been discussed and unanimously agreed upon in a working group of personal representatives of ministers competent for the area of science and research of the Member States and Associated Countries and the Commission services. They serve as general guidelines for establishing and operating the NCP systems and for their relations with the Commission services and each other.

Basic Principles

The existing NCP systems in Member States and Associated Countries show a wide variety of architectures, from highly centralised to decentralised networks, and a number of very different actors, from ministries to universities, research centres and special agencies to private consulting companies. This reflects the different national traditions, working methodologies, research landscapes and funding schemes.

The unifying element of the different NCP systems is the capability of ensuring both competence in the different thematic and horizontal priorities of the Framework Programme as well as coherence of approach and high level of service. This general principle should equally apply to FP7.

It is proposed that the general approach of establishing, financing, nominating, supervising and monitoring NCP systems by national governments be maintained, while the Commission services provides the necessary information and training and acts as moderator for the trans-national networking. Liaison between the NCP systems by trans-national activities (networking, benchmarking, partner search, staff exchange schemes etc.) will be an important element in harmonising quality of service, at the same time contributing to the realisation of the European Research Area. Specific trans-national activities for NCP performance quality assessment and the development of international best practice will receive financial support from the European

Commission services. The programme committees of the FP7 will be kept informed of all such NCP trans-national activities supported by the European Commission services, and will receive the reports produced by these support actions.

FP7 contacts nominated by the national authorities in third countries will be invited to participate in trans-national NCP activities and meetings, but will in general not receive any financial contribution from the European Commission services.

Recommended tasks for the NCP system

The following list of tasks to be undertaken by NCPs and/or NCP hosting organisations is indicative, neither claiming to be exhaustive nor compulsory for all NCPs. The tasks might consist of –

- Informing, awareness raising

- Circulate general and specific documentation on the Community RTD programmes, including on conditions for participation, and on possibilities and conditions for submission of proposals.
- Organise promotional activities in liaison with the Commission services (e.g. info-days, seminars, conferences, newsletters, Web sites, fairs, etc.).
- Raise awareness for the Community objectives of increasing the participation of women in the Framework Programme and of strengthening the link between science and ethics and between science and civil society.
- Raise awareness for the Community objectives of increasing the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Framework Programme.
- Raise awareness for other European programmes in the field of research and innovation such as CIP, Eureka and COST.

- Advising, assisting and training

- Explain the scope and the modalities of the whole spectrum of funding schemes to be used in FP7.
- Advise on administrative procedures and legal issues (e.g. role and responsibilities of participants in a consortium, costs, rights and obligations of participants, respect of ethical rules and for the principles laid down in the Commission Recommendation C(2005)576 on the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment).
- Assist in partner search activities notably by disseminating calls for proposals (using Community tools such as CORDIS, co-operation networks, business support network services etc.).
- Assist organisations, in particular new actors and SMEs, with a view to increasing their participation in FP7.
- Organise training sessions on RTD programmes for intermediaries and information multipliers to ensure high quality of advice.
- Organise training seminars for specific target groups (SMEs, universities, professional organisations, women in science etc.) or on specific topics (legal aspects, modalities for participation, research areas covered by several specific programmes, ethical rules etc.).

- Provide information for and advise participants, in particular smaller organisations and SMEs, on the setting up of appropriate management and legal structures in projects with large budgets and/or numerous participants.
 - Assist the Commission services in assuring transparency and equal access to calls for new partners in on-going FP7 Projects.
- Signposting and Feedback
- Give feedback to the Commission services on any problems and difficulties in implementing and participating in the Framework Programme.
 - Signpost to other Community business support network services those potential participants who require assistance, for example on general EU matters or matters relating to innovation and technology transfer, typically dealt with by these networks.
 - Inform the Commission services about planned NCP activities and events requiring participation of Commission staff.

Characteristics of the NCP system

In order to fulfil the above-mentioned tasks, the NCP systems might have the following capacities. The first four points of the list would be considered as essential for all NCP systems, whereas the remaining points are indicative and do not claim to be exhaustive or compulsory. :

- Compulsory characteristics:
- Be fully capable of communicating competently with their European and international colleagues, and to be already well informed about the nature, objectives and principles of the EU Framework Programmes and the technological areas concerned.
 - Be competent to provide assistance services to different kinds of actors (SMEs, industry, academics, etc).
 - Be able to work to strict deontological requirements, that is, to act as independent organisation(s), being committed to complete impartiality in delivering their services and avoiding any situations which may give rise to a conflict of interests.
 - Be able to act with complete confidentiality as regards the information which comes into their possession or has become known to them as part of their advisory activities towards clients.
- Recommended characteristics:
- Participate actively in trans-national NCP network activities with a view to seeking continuous improvement of their NCP services and practices.
 - Have skills in RTD management and financing.
 - Show the experience and acceptance necessary to reach the research community concerned and have good knowledge of the national research landscape.
 - Have adequate human resources and equipment (e.g. IT).
 - Be suitable to become part of an international system for stimulating participation in FP7 and for partner search.
 - Be able to co-ordinate the different actors of the NCP system.

As a minimum service level it is considered essential that the individual NCPs are reachable by phone and/or e-mail during usual working hours and that they have a public website with basic information on their services.

Nomination and recognition process

Each Member State and Associated Country wanting to participate in the European NCP network has the responsibility for the organisational structure of its NCP system. Third countries may participate in this European NCP network through their FP7 contact points, and will be encouraged to set up a national NCP-like organisational structure.

Member States and Associated Countries are also responsible for the selection of the hosting organisation(s) of their own NCP system and for its setting up according to national prerequisites and requirements, taking into account the above guidelines.

In order to ensure the coherence of the system, a co-ordination mechanism should be foreseen in each Member State and Associated Country and participating third country to maintain its overall operational consistency. This mechanism should be a light, non-bureaucratic co-ordination. An NCP Co-ordinator should be nominated in each country, with the aim of providing this overall co-ordination of the national NCP activities. This NCP Co-ordinator should also maintain overall coordination of the NCP activities within the horizontal and cross-cutting actions in FP7. In addition, the NCP Co-ordinator should provide policy advice to the Commission services regarding issues on the development and improvement of the NCP system in general.

The nominations of individual NCPs or FP7 Contacts should be communicated to the Director-General of DG RTD in an official letter by the ministry competent for the area of science and research and technological development (or by an organisation empowered by the ministry/ies to do so, such as the permanent representations to the EU). In the case of countries with a federal governmental structure, all nominations should be coordinated and forwarded by the federal authorities. For practical management reasons, nominations should be structured following the thematic and horizontal priorities of the Framework Programme (see structure in annex I).

Once the NCPs have been nominated by the Member States and Associated Countries, they will be recognised by the Commission services for the duration of the 7th Framework Programme as being the preferential contact points for providing information, advice and/or assistance on the RTD programmes. For subsequent changes of the nominated persons, the same procedure as above should apply. However, for minor changes like title, address, telephone number, e-mail, etc., these changes may be reported by the NCP Co-ordinator directly to the unit of the Commission services in charge of the NCP database.

Co-operation between the NCPs and the Commission services

The Commission services considers the NCP systems of Member States and Associated Countries and the similar FP7 contacts in third countries as important partners for the implementation and management of FP7. This partnership based on

shared responsibilities is a major element in assuring transparency and equal access. The Commission services sees in the NCP network the main structure to give practical information and assistance to potential participants and contractors in FP7. Therefore the Commission services will:

- publish widely the nominated NCPs and FP7 contacts on the CORDIS NCP database, and refer to this database in the guides for applicants and in other information material.
- provide appropriate training for NCPs on all thematic and managerial aspects, legal and financial issues as well as relevant EU policies and ethical aspects, especially before and at the beginning of FP7.
- invite NCPs to participate in information and awareness actions related to the RTD activities that are organised by the Commission services.
- invite NCPs to thematic conferences and seminars which the programme directorates organise.
- nominate contact persons for NCPs in the Commission services (NCP correspondents) for all thematic and horizontal priorities of FP7.
- provide timely information on work programmes and roadmaps, upcoming calls, changes in thematic priorities or administrative procedures, statistics of calls and evaluations, relevant information on funded projects etc., striving for equally high quality of information flow in all thematic and horizontal priorities.
- inform NCPs about the results of any possible invitations to submit expressions of interest.
- provide leaflets, brochures and other relevant information for further distribution by NCPs.
- establish and operate an NCP extranet Website for supplying information and as a discussion forum (CORDIS Forum or similar).
- actively support and moderate the European wide networking of NCPs, as a means of stimulating participation in Community RTD activities and a contribution to the realisation of the ERA.
- support, where appropriate, additional costs relating to special measures, activities and events of a transnational dimension. These measures could include information activities, conferences and workshops, benchmarking activities, training sessions arranged by the NCP hosting organisations or extra costs linked with transnational co-ordination meetings between NCPs.

FP7 contacts in third countries will be invited to participate in any of the activities and events mentioned above, but will in general not receive any financial support from the European Commission services unless otherwise specifically agreed.

The Commission services will provide the data and information necessary for the proper performance of the NCPs. In doing so, the Commission services require that the national authorities will ensure that the NCPs comply with the confidentiality requirements for such information. The NCPs will receive, after the Programme Committee has been informed, information on the outcome of proposal evaluation similar to the information provided to the Programme Committee Members. For the FP7 contacts in the third countries, aggregated evaluation data which are not attributable to individual proposals will be provided.

Co-operation between national networks

NCP systems would co-operate in two ways:

- Co-operation with NCP systems in other countries, covering the same field of activity, exchanging staff, information and experience.
- Co-operation in the same country with other Community business support networks in order to avoid overlapping activities, and with national research networks and organisations.

Exchange of information at European level on performance of NCP systems

Monitoring of performance and quality assurance of NCPs is under the responsibility of the national authorities establishing the NCP systems.

Transnational exchange of experiences and dissemination of best practice can constitute an important supporting element in this endeavour, at the same time contributing to the realisation of the concept of the ERA. The Commission services will actively support and moderate this kind of exchange. It will contribute to the additional costs resulting from such transnational activities. The programme committees of FP7 will monitor these actions.

Special National Contact Points for the Joint Research Centre (JRC)

The Joint Research Centre has put in place a network of National Contact Points with the aim of promoting integration of researchers and S&T organisations across its activities. In line with the JRC mission, the focus of this action is on the scientific and technical support to policymaking.

The specific tasks for the JRC NCPs include:

- Promoting networking of the JRC with research organisations in their countries within the JRC areas of competence;
- Identifying and suggesting potential participants in JRC workshops, seminars and training courses;
- Disseminating information relating to the JRC, including job and training opportunities and collaboration opportunities;
- Organising (in conjunction with the JRC) promotional activities such as JRC information days, Round Tables and Specialised expert workshops.

Annex I

Structure for nominations of NCPs

| NCP short name | Fields of FP7 covered |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NCP Co-ordinator | Overall co-ordination of NCP activities; Cooperation – Emerging needs and unforeseen policy needs*, Technology Platforms and Joint Technology Initiatives*, ERA-NET*, ERA-NET+*, Article 169*; Capacities – Coherent Development of Policies |
| Legal and financial NCP | Horizontal legal and financial issues, Intellectual Property Rights |
| Health NCP | Cooperation – Health |
| Bio NCP | Cooperation – Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Biotechnology |
| ICT NCP | Cooperation – Information and communication technologies |
| NMP NCP | Cooperation – Nanosciences, Nanotechnologies, Materials, and new Production Technologies |
| Energy NCP | Cooperation – Energy |
| Environment NCP | Cooperation – Environment including Climate Change |
| Transport NCP | Cooperation – Transport (including Aeronautics) |
| SSH NCP | Cooperation – Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities |
| Security NCP | Cooperation – Security |
| Space NCP | Cooperation –Space |
| Ideas NCP | Ideas, ERC |
| Mobility NCP | People |
| Regional NCP | Capacities – Research Potential, Regions of Knowledge |
| SME NCP | Capacities – Research for the benefit of SMEs |
| INCO NCP** | Capacities – Activities of International Co-operation**, third country participation |
| Infrastructures NCP | Capacities – Infrastructure |
| SiS NCP | Capacities – Science in Society |
| EURATOM NCP | EURATOM |
| JRC NCP | Joint Research Centre |

* : These issues are largely dealt with by thematic NCPs, but overall co-ordination will be at the level of national NCP co-ordinators.

** : Any specific INCO activities within the themes of the Cooperation programme, although dealt with by the thematic NCPs, should be closely co-ordinated with the INCO NCP.

Annex II

Terminology

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>National Contact Point (NCP)</i> | <i>a person nominated by the national authorities in Member States and Associated Countries to provide assistance to potential FP7 participants in their countries according to this document, an appropriate translation reflecting the concept of NCPs should be found for each national language</i> |
| <i>FP7 contact</i> | <i>a person nominated by a third country with the aims of giving assistance to potential FP7 participants in this country and representing their national interests in trans-national NCP network activities</i> |
| <i>NCP hosting organisation</i> | <i>an organisation which is hosting officially nominated individual NCPs and FP7 contacts, and, if appropriate, may receive EC funding for NCP trans-national activities</i> |
| <i>National NCP system</i> | <i>term used for the national system of NCPs and NCP hosting organisations in a MS or an AC</i> |
| <i>NCP network</i> | <i>term used for the totality of all NCPs in Member States and Associated Countries including FP7 contacts in third countries</i> |