

Mid-Term Evaluation of the INTERREG IIIB North-West Europe Programme

Recommendations

Equivalent to
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11.4 Mid-Term Evaluation Recommendations and Actions

The mid-term evaluators formulated ten recommendations and thirty-one recommended actions for stakeholders of INTERREG IIIB NWE as well as the European Commission.

An overview table is provided below followed by more detailed explanations for each of the recommendations and recommended actions.

The complexity of the INTERREG IIIB NWE Programme is also reflected in the actions recommended by the mid-term evaluators. Almost all actions are interlinked with each other. A decision to implement an action could have direct or indirect effects on other actions. Therefore, the mid-term evaluators noted all related recommended actions at the end of each action description.

It is the PMC which is ultimately bearing the responsibility to decide upon the implementation of the mid-term evaluation recommendations. The actual responsibilities for carrying out recommended actions would usually be with the various Programme bodies, groups, and committees such as JTS, PMC, Supervisory Group, PSC, NWE Spatial Vision Working Group, Managing Authority, CP's. In some cases, the Member States and the Swiss Confederation would be involved in completing a recommended action, in other cases the envisaged Evaluation Initiative or external assessors. The mid-term evaluators identified clear responsibilities who or which Programme body should be charged with completing each of the respective actions.

In addition, the evaluators made suggestions for the optimal implementation time.¹ In general, distinctions were made between short-, medium-, and long-term recommended actions. In this context, short-term actions are those that should be implemented immediately, i.e. within 2003, medium-term actions should be implemented during the remainder of the Programme, i.e. between 2004 and 2006, while long-term actions should be considered when setting up a successor Programme after 2006.

**Responsibilities
for completing
actions identified**

**Optimal implementation
time for each action
identified**

¹ The implementation schedules for the individual actions was summarised in a Programme implementation timeframe presented in chapter 11.6.

Table 11: Overview of Mid-Term Evaluation Recommendations and Actions

Recommendations	Actions
<p>1 Focus the strategic orientation of NWE Programme and pave the way ahead</p> <p>Provide better focus and guidance in future Calls, enable NWE to take account of changes in North-West Europe and beyond, analyse in light of the Programme objectives and incorporate findings in a “Road Map” for future Calls.</p>	<p>1.1 Review Programme priorities & streamline for future Calls.</p> <p>1.2 Create an NWE observatory.</p> <p>1.3 Develop a “Road Map” for future Calls.</p>
<p>2 Streamline Programme structures and procedures</p> <p>Reduce overlaps between NWE committees by more clearly defining and separating tasks; provide for a more balanced representation of Committees and increase the efficiency of their work.</p>	<p>2.1 Separate project development and proposal assessment.</p> <p>2.2 Develop JTS profile as “NWE service provider”.</p> <p>2.3 Balance and increase efficiency of NWE committee structures.</p>
<p>3 Provide for effective project development</p> <p>Eliminate overlaps in project development tasks and responsibilities; introduce procedures which lessen the administrative burden on project applicants; provide training structures and opportunities.</p>	<p>3.1 Raise profile of CP’s to become the main supporters for applicants and project partners.</p> <p>3.2 Apply rules and procedures which reduce the administrative burden of applicants and project partners.</p> <p>3.3 Provide training for CP’s and project development opportunities.</p>
<p>4 Increase “quality” of proposal assessment and selection</p> <p>Utilise the expertise of Programme-external specialists in the proposal assessment process; adjust PSC voting procedure in order to reduce the vetoing power of one individual member state; streamline PSC meeting procedures; adjust project selection criteria.</p>	<p>4.1 Add external proposal assessors.</p> <p>4.2 Restructure PSC meeting procedures.</p> <p>4.3 Adjust selection criteria.</p>
<p>5 Increase efficiency of project monitoring and support</p> <p>Provide support to project partners (in questions of project administration, evaluation, dissemination, exploitation, etc.) and establish a project monitoring system that includes visits to project and partner sites</p>	<p>5.1 Offer training seminars and thematic workshops to all project partners.</p> <p>5.2 Encourage the submission of short & concise reports.</p> <p>5.3 Incorporate site visits as an integral element of project monitoring activities.</p>

6 Strengthen the evaluation of Programme and projects

Establish an Evaluation Initiative; define baseline indicators and few, but common, key indicators on the measure level to provide the basis for sound project and Programme evaluation; recognise the importance of evaluation early on in the application process

- 6.1** Establish an Evaluation Initiative.
- 6.2** Improve baseline data availability.
- 6.3** Strengthen commonality.
- 6.4** Reduce complexity & strengthen relevance.
- 6.5** Make (independent) project evaluation mandatory with beginning of the Fifth Call for Proposals.

7 Increase awareness of the Programme - communication & dissemination strategy

Increase awareness of the Programme and establish specific communication strategies to address specific groups, in particular potential “new” applicants and “multipliers”; Make use of all communication media; organise further events to bring together various NWE stakeholders

- 7.1** Increase awareness of the programme.
- 7.2** Identify target groups and address them with specific communication strategies.
- 7.3** Hold a “Conference of the Regions”.

8 Exploit results on a European level

Focus efforts and budget now on carrying over and utilising project and Programme results after the end of the Programme

- 8.1** Focus on “project sustainability” after NWE funding.
- 8.2** Compare “Good Practices” with other IIIB Programmes.

9 Create synergies between projects & policies

Create opportunities for co-operation and exchange on all levels, including NWE stakeholders, regions, politicians, staff members of Programme secretariats, project partners, and experts in specific areas

- 9.1** Create fora for exchange and transnational co-operation for stakeholders of IIIB NWE.
- 9.2** Involve politicians and other decision makers.
- 9.3** Cluster projects thematically.

10 Implement Recommendations

Distribute and discuss mid-term evaluation recommendations widely; provide a structure within the Programme to review and, if necessary over time, adjust the recommendations

- 10.1** Distribute Evaluation Report widely.
- 10.2** Frequently review mid-term evaluation recommendations.
- 10.3** Allocate “miscellaneous budget line” to implement mid-term recommendations.

Focus the strategic orientation of the NWE Programme and pave the way ahead

Provide better focus and guidance in future Calls, enable NWE to take account of changes in North-West Europe and beyond, analyse in light of the Programme objectives and incorporate findings in a "Road Map" for future Calls.

The NWE Programme priorities and measures are the result of a thorough consultation process during the end of 1999 and early 2001, including an ex-ante evaluation in 2000, using mostly data from 1999. There is little evidence that a major revision of the priorities is required, but a clear indication that the defined priority areas are too broad and in need of focusing.

North-West Europe is a very dynamic part of Europe, but the empirical data basis for monitoring socio-economic and policy changes is weak. The challenges of new developments (e.g. EU enlargement, knowledge society) on the future of transnational co-operation in NWE are not systematically considered.

Rationale

Actions

1.1 Review Programme priorities & streamline for future Calls.

Much more analysis and consultation is needed for the review of Programme priorities and the determination of the focus of future NWE Calls than was feasible in the mid-term evaluation. Therefore, the mid-term evaluation team is proposing a process rather than "ready-made" solutions.

The current priorities and measures are too broad, the transnational dimension needs to become more tangible in projects and a more concrete contribution to the cross-cutting themes is highly desirable. The approach, therefore, should be to streamline and concentrate on fewer and more focussed topics in future INTERREG IIIB NWE Calls and to make use of more integrated packages of measures.

Issues for Review

An illustrative list of strategic issues to be considered when reviewing Programme priorities includes:²

- specific role of NWE in an enlarged EU; specifying unique qualities of NWE to build upon
- internal balance of NWE (selective concentration of functions)

Responsibilities

JTS
PMC & Supervisory Group
NWE Spatial Vision
Working Group

² Please note that these points are not meant to be new "priorities", but indicative criteria to review current priority sets.

- capacity building and human resource development
- institutional co-operation and involvement of the private sector
- social interpretation of NWE and its transnational aspects
- transnational policy framework for cities
- accessibility of (public) services and essential infrastructures for all (in social and geographic terms)

The results of the discussion on future Programme priorities and an analysis of how the current projects respond to current priorities is contained in chapter 5 of this document.

Priority Review Process

Implementation

1. The PMC should decide to review Programme priorities with a view to focus and to stronger integrate measures as from Call 5. This decision should be published widely to potential project proposers; the orientation of Call 4 should (obviously) remain unchanged.

Immediately

2. The PMC should decide to arrange for a two-day "think-tank" seminar with a wide selection of stakeholders (similar in format and representation to the mid-term evaluation workshop on 1 July in Lille). Its task would be to help and identify the key needs of transnational co-operation within NWE in 2004 to 2006 (considering tangible results likely to be produced by current projects).

Immediately

3. The NWE Spatial Vision Working Group, which met for the first time in September 2003, should be requested to

Feb 2004

- reflect on the results of the "think tank" from its strategic perspective,
- suggest more concrete definitions and examples of transnationality to proposers, and
- propose "corridors" of implementation (e.g. in terms of topics, institutional setting, possibly in generic geographic terms) where future projects could more concretely address transnationality.

4. Considering the results of the "think tank", Spatial Vision Working Group meetings, supportive work of the JTS (observatory; see 1.2), and considering input from the CP's (major project proposals currently under preparation), the PMC should decide on a new roadmap for future NWE Programme Calls (see recommended action 1.3).

Apr 2004

Related recommended actions: 1.2; 1.3

1.2 Create an NWE observatory.

Responsibilities

The Programme should remain at the cutting edge and be flexible to respond to key issues. It needs to be ensured that the Programme knows what is happening inside and outside of NWE in territorial development and related fields, including in other European Programmes. NWE needs to take socio-economic and policy trends and developments in North-West Europe (and beyond) into account when reviewing the strategic direction of the Programme, lobbying for its continuation after 2006, and monitoring its contribution towards achieving its original aims.

JTS

JTS (PDU) employees appear highly qualified to carry out the tasks involved in running the NWE observatory. Preference is given to keeping this important task within the JTS, rather than charging a "project " or external experts with it, even if some sub-tasks, or specific analyses could well be undertaken by specialised institutions. The JTS should, therefore, fulfil the functions of an "NWE observatory" (or NWE knowledge management centre) responsible for

- analysing changes (trends and developments) in North-West Europe and beyond,
- addressing Programme gaps by suggesting topics for new projects,
- highlighting new trends and identifying new challenges,
- supporting "Road Map" definition through (demand) analyses,
- supporting the collection of baseline data,
- keeping track of forthcoming project results.

Data exchange and co-operation agreements should be sought with national/ regional statistics offices, Eurostat, and INTERACT in order to facilitate efficient data exchange and analysis. A mapping facility should be set up (e.g. standard Geographic Information System software).

It is envisaged that the work load for the "NWE observatory" at the JTS is equivalent to one to 1.5 full-time positions. In order to allow for, as much as possible, a continuous accessibility of the observatory (also during holiday periods or in cases of sick leaves), two to three JTS employees should each devote 30-50 percent of their work to the "NWE observatory". Within the JTS organisational structure, the employees responsible for the "NWE observatory" should directly report to the Programme Manager. Furthermore, a liaison between the "NWE observatory" and the NWE Spatial Vision Working Group, and the PMC should be ensured; a close coordination of activities with ESPON (and INTERACT) will be required.

At its next meeting, the PMC should request the JTS to set up an NWE observatory as described above to become operational before the end of the year 2003.

Implementation

Immediately

Related recommended actions: 1.1, 6.1

1.3 Develop a "Road Map" for future Calls.

Responsibilities

The Programme needs to take stock now of what has been achieved (or is realistic to be achieved) by its projects and what still needs to meet the Programme aims during the remaining duration. Based on the review of Programme priorities (see recommended action 1.1) as well as the investigative work of the NWE observatory (see recommended action 1.2), the Programme should provide a clear guidance to potential proposers on the crucial transnational issues to be addressed in North-West Europe through new NWE projects.

PMC & Supervisory Group
JTS

It needs to be emphasised that a total of ten Calls for Proposals were foreseen during the Programme period. It is recommended not to deplete the Programme budget for priorities 1-5 already by Call 5 or 6, but to ensure a rather balanced budget commitment across the seven remaining Calls for Proposal.

A more targeted programming approach is required in order to

- allow for a more structured Programme planning by the PMC,
- increase the quality of proposals (especially their transnational element) by providing clearer guidance on expectations and a reliable timescale of Calls, and
- strengthen the integrative character of projects across priorities and to more directly address the cross-cutting Programme themes.

As the most appropriate tool an NWE "Road Map"³ of future Calls for Proposals is recommended; it should be defined as part of the Programme review process (see recommendation 1.1).

Without formally changing the CIP, a guidance document should be published, specifying clusters of themes expected to take priority in the remaining Calls. While it should be clarified that the new programming approach does not exclude funding of high-quality projects addressing other themes, the need for stronger and more concrete transnational co-operation, the emphasis on integrative projects, and the emphasis on cross-cutting issues should be stressed.

The "Road Map" should:

- include a sequence of about five targeted Calls (after Call 4),
- follow fewer and more specific priorities,
- guide proposers to submit highly transnational and integrative projects,
- be specific about the goals to be achieved, but leave it to the proposers to define their means of implementation,
- have a focus on (real) action and implementation projects, but focussed topics for studies should be identified for strategic is-

³ This practice has successfully been applied in other European Programmes (e.g. throughout the 5th and 6th Framework Programmes for Research).

sues,

- indicate roughly the likely budgets by Call/ priority topic,
- put less demanding topics as priority in Calls 5 and 6 and more ambitious themes in the remaining Calls.

A formal (annual) review of the "Road Map", as in other programmes, is not proposed. However, NWE should allow a certain degree of flexibility (in budget and content) in order to be able to accommodate emerging topics during the remainder of the Programme. For example, it could be considered to put a percentage of the budget aside for allocation in the last two Calls.

The principle of defining a "Road Map" of future Calls should be agreed by the PMC at its next meeting. An explanatory note should be published and disseminated widely via CP's and the JTS towards potential proposers.

The "Road Map" should be issued well in time for Call 5. Possibly the timing of Call 5 needs to be adjusted.

The definition of Programme Road Maps is considered as an effective programming approach. It should be based on a wider stakeholder consultation process and adopted in future transnational programmes.

Close monitoring of programme-external factors and road map reviews (or "dynamic road mapping") are recommended for future interregional co-operation programmes.

Related recommended actions: 1.1; 1.2; 3.2

Implementation

Immediately

mid 2004

after 2006
(beyond NWE)

Streamline Programme structures and procedures

Reduce overlaps between NWE committees by more clearly defining and separating tasks; provide for a more balanced representation of Committees and increase the efficiency and accountability of their work.

NWE follows a common structure for the management, co-ordination and supervision of the Programme implementation. While, in theory, tasks and responsibilities between authorities and committees are well-organised, in practice unfavourable overlaps and imbalances appear which should be reduced to streamline Programme structures and procedures and to ultimately improve the efficiency and accountability of Programme implementation.

The availability of a funded support mechanism for project development is a unique feature (in comparison to other European Programmes) and helps to increase the quality of proposals in INTERREG.

Rationale

Actions

2.1 Separate project development and proposal assessment.

The JTS Project Development Unit (PDU) and CP's in the Member States and the Swiss Confederation are sharing the task of supporting project applicants in the development of projects. At the same time, the JTS, as an organisation, is also responsible for the assessment of project proposals. In view of an unbiased task fulfilment and the credibility of the assessment process, support and assessment responsibilities should not be in the hands of one and the same organisation, in particular not a small one like the JTS which currently has sixteen employees.

There may be a strict separation between project development and proposal assessment (and project monitoring) as claimed by the JTS. However, it is apparent that many project applicants and project partners are critical of this separation and may be hesitant to communicate as openly with the JTS as they would with a more "neutral" person, knowing that anything they say may have a negative effect on the assessment of their proposal or the monitoring of their project reports.

It is therefore recommended to strictly separate project development and proposal assessment tasks in the long-term. In a possible INTERREG IV Programme, CP's should become the main project development supporters (and the only ones from the NWE Programme). In the long-term, the JTS should no longer be involved in project development, but concentrate its efforts on its various other tasks and it will be assigned new tasks (e.g. NWE observatory) leading to the JTS becoming the "NWE service provider" (recommended action 2.2).

Responsibilities

JTS
CP's

For a successor Programme to INTERREG III, it will be important to ensure continuity in the work force among CP's as well as JTS employees in order to not lose the knowledge gained.

It should also be noted that the recommendation to shift the support of applicants during the project development phase from the JTS to the CP's is by no means to be found in the quality of work by the PDU staff, but in the necessity to strictly separate support and assessment tasks within one organisation.

In view of the considerable experiences gained in project development in the JTS, and the need for a well-coordinated and homogeneous approach to project development, it appears feasible to separate project development and proposal assessment only after the current NWE Programme.

The European Commission is advised to require a formal institutional separation of project development and project support tasks from the proposal assessment and project monitoring functions in future Programmes.

Implementation

after 2006
(beyond NWE)

Although not desirable in principle, it is recognised that, for the remainder of the Programme, there is little alternative to the current practice of sharing project development tasks between CP's and JTS. However, this should be arranged in a more formally structured way:

- CP's should be the main supporters of the proposing consortia and concentrate on the initial project development phase from project idea generation until the submission of proposal drafts to the JTS.
- The JTS should (in an "extended assessment role") concentrate on providing feedback on the eligibility and overall quality in the more matured stages of the development process.

Implementation

February 2004

In the short term, JTS and CP's should establish close and regular links for transferring project development know-how and training (see recommended actions 2.2 and 3.3). Clear communication on who fulfils which kind of project development support roles at a given moment is important.

There should be a smooth, but clear shift to the recommended roles also for project proposals under development by the JTS until February 2004.

As another temporary measure, the JTS should - in close co-operation with the CP's - take on the task of strategic project development, i.e. developing ambitious new themes/ project approaches by contacting multipliers and stakeholders, but "hand over" once consortia are stable and ready to start the proposal preparation process.

Related recommended actions: 1.2; 2.2; 2.3; 3.1; 3.3

2.2 Develop JTS profile as “NWE service provider”.

By taking on the additional task of the NWE observatory suggested under recommended action 1.2, the JTS takes on new responsibilities in evaluation support and baseline data collection. While reducing efforts in project development, the JTS will shift its portfolio to strategic Programme support. This could be summarised under the title “NWE service provider”.

The JTS should fulfil the following roles (* = new tasks):

- Preparing and following-up all PMC, SG and PSC decisions
- Providing relevant information to the MA, PA and Presidency.
- Promote the Programme
- Project monitoring
- * Running the NWE observatory to provide information and strategic advice for the Programme review and the “NWE Road Map of Calls” as well as to contribute to the NWE common data pool
- Implementing the publicity strategy approved by the PMC
- Carrying out the operational (day-to-day) Programme management
- Monitoring projects (review of activity reports and cost claims)
- * Providing training to CP’s (in particular finance training)
- * Supporting project exploitation

The Managing Authority, in consultation with the PMC, should request the JTS to implement the recommendations to be operational by Dec 2003.

Related recommended actions: 1.2; 2.1

2.3 Balance and increase efficiency of NWE committee structures.

Balance national/ regional element in decision making

One of the characteristics of North-West Europe is the presence of large cities and their comparatively high degree of independence from national/ regional decision making. This fact is insufficiently reflected in NWE, including the structure of the Programme committees.

A balanced participation of the three tiers of government (national, regional and urban) should be followed in both PSC and PMC. This is for example practised by the Dutch delegation to the PSC and should be followed by all Member States.

Whether one specific city or region represents all cities/ regions from

Responsibilities

Managing Authority
JTS

Implementation

Immediately

Responsibilities

PMC
PSC
(Member States)

Implementation

next PMC/
PSC meetings

the relevant country or whether a representative institution takes this role should be agreed with relevant stakeholders.

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions or a similar body should be invited to join the PMC as observer.

The European Commission should emphasise the need for an adequate representation of all tiers of government (and other important stakeholders) in future programmes.

Related recommended actions: 3.3

Increase efficiency and accountability

The **PMC** is the major decision making body within NWE. However it appears to be overburdened with administrative issues, while it should mainly provide strategic guidance and supervision of the Programme.

The **Supervisory Group** should take on a more complementary and pro-active role between PMC meetings.

A fundamental problem of both committees is their frequently changing participation, in particular in the Supervisory Group. A “constant” personal membership needs to be ensured at Committee level.

The **Managing Authority** has delegated most of its day-to-day obligations while it continues to be ultimately responsible in legal terms.

Especially the tasks of supervising the JTS and the decision taking between the PMC meetings appear to be in need of clarification. The PMC, MA, and the Presidency need to find a practical *modus operandi* of these functions. Especially, the role of the Supervisory Group should either be strengthened by means of a more “constant” personal representation and regular (personal or virtual) meetings. Alternatively, the Supervisory Group could be de-facto limited to the Presidency, Vice-Presidency, President-elect, and the Paying Authority.

The Managing Authority is in particular responsible for the JTS, whose employees are an essential resource for NWE. The Managing Authority and the Presidency need to ensure that pending personnel - related issues are resolved quickly.

Related recommended actions: 4.2; 6.1; 10.1

Responsibilities

PMC
Supervisory Group
Paying Authority
Managing Authority
Presidency

JTS

Implementation

agree before next
PMC/ PSC/ SG
meetings

Provide for effective project development

Eliminate overlaps in project development tasks and responsibilities; introduce procedures which lessen the administrative burden on project applicants; provide training structures and opportunities.

Project development is the first, and one of the most important steps of the project life cycle - as well as for laying the foundations of a successful programme.

Rationale

The Programme has structures in place to support (potential) applicants in the development of their project. This is an important support mechanism which should be retained and strengthened in future programmes.

As described under recommendation 2.1 above, the feasibility of changing the task allocation between the JTS Project Development Unit (PDU) and contact points (CP's) in the Member States in supporting project development is limited in the current programme - even if there were good reasons to do so.

In order to (further) improve the project development process in terms of quality and quantity, obstacles to submitting high-quality projects will need to be further eliminated. These obstacles include language barriers, complexity of the application process, and needs for training and support to projects.

Actions

3.1 Raise profile of CP's to become the main supporters for applicants and project partners.

Responsibilities

Most CP positions were filled only during 2002, i.e. only when the Programme had been operational for several months and had already issued Calls for Proposals. Meanwhile CP's are in place in all Member States and the Swiss Federation representing the crucial link and source of information between projects and the Programme. CP's are working well, also beginning to make use of a network structure which allows them to quickly exchange information among themselves.

CP's
JTS (PDU)

As described under recommendation 2.1 above, the **long-term** recommendation is to charge the CP's alone with project development. The CP's are closer to the project applicants in their region not only in geographical terms, but also because they share the same language and are aware of the specific circumstances (match funding, national programmes, etc.) in their region. At the same time, several of the CP's are directly employed by national or large regional authorities. While this may often have benefits, a more independent role would be desirable in future programmes.

Implementation

after 2006
(beyond NWE)

In the long term, it should be the aim to establish CP's as independent

and trusted service providers to applicants and project partners.

In the **short term**, the role and operating framework of the CP's needs to be strengthened, while it should be clear to them that their brief is to develop and support transnational partnerships, even if operating from a national base.

Related recommended actions: 2.1

3.2 Apply rules and procedures which reduce the administrative burden of applicants and project partners.

Complaints of the high administrative efforts in European projects are common, and INTERREG IIIB NWE is no exception in this respect. It is out of question that a large amount of information, in particular legal and financial information, is required to assess and monitor a project. However, if the administrative burden for a (potential) project applicant becomes so high that s/he restrains from submitting a project proposal (as evidence from the mid-term evaluation indicates), or mostly "professional proposers" are willing to do so, application rules and procedures should be simplified as much as possible.

Application form

The first step in this simplification is related to the current application form. The different sections of the application form (and guidance documents) ask for specific information. Still, a high degree of variation is obvious between different proposals, despite support by a joint structure.

CP's and PDU should make a joint effort identifying difficult and superfluous sections and to further improve guidance to proposers through training, and (anonymous) "good examples" of high quality applications (ideally for each measure).

Two-step application procedure and seed funding

For the long-term, a full separation of proposal preparation support and proposal assessment is recommended. This will mean that the current practice of informal feedback to potential proposers (as part of the support by the JTS) will not be available anymore.

In the short run, the current system of one-step applications has clear disadvantages - mainly for proposers:

- a considerable amount of effort is required to prepare a proposal,
- even after a positive informal evaluation the PSC may take a different position,
- ambitious proposals may not be submitted due the risk of not receiving any compensation for the proposal preparation efforts in case of failure.

Therefore, a two-step application procedure is recommended, even if it may initially be perceived to require additional efforts in support and decision making. In addition, it is recommended that "seed funding" is made available for potential high-quality proposals in need of support.

Responsibilities

JTS
CP's

PMC
PSC

Implementation

before Call 5

voluntary:
from Call 5
(beyond NWE)

compulsory:
after 2006
(beyond NWE)

Step 1:

Following a targeted Programme Call (see recommended action 1.3), a brief Expression of Interest (Eoi) is submitted to the JTS for assessment. An Eoi should be limited to five pages. It should describe, in a comprehensive manner, the basic project ideas and objectives as well as the set-up of the core project partnership.

Following an assessment by the JTS, the PSC decides which Eoi's are considered to have the potential to become high-quality projects. These Eoi's are placed on a short-list of project proposals. It needs to be emphasised to the applicants that their proposal being short-listed does by no means guarantee the final project approval. However, for short-listed proposals, the likelihood of success would be much higher compared to proposals submitted under the current application procedure. This would provide an extra incentive to develop a high-quality project.

The approval of an Eoi would also be the precondition to receive "seed funding". Receiving seed funding will be determined on the basis of the stated need, rather than as an indication of superior quality to other successful Eoi's.

The available budget for seed money should be pre-determined.

Step 2:

As long as the submission of Eoi's is voluntary, any project consortium can complete a full-fledged application.

After step 1 has been made compulsory, only successful consortia can proceed.

The advantages for project applicants should also have positive effects on the Programme itself. If such a procedure is applied, the Programme will be able to increase the efficiency of its assessment and decision making procedures. Under the new two-step procedure, fewer full-fledged applications need to be assessed by the JTS and decided upon by the PSC.

In order to avoid undue delays for proposers it is, however, recommended that the PSC meets also in between the regularly scheduled meetings in order to short-list Eoi's. It should be sufficient for these additional PSC meetings to convene in a smaller group, i.e. to have only one representative from each Member State and the Swiss Confederation present.

The two steps of the application process should be used to mark the envisaged task separation between CP's and the JTS during project development (see recommended action 2.1). In this regard, CP's should concentrate on the initial project development phase until the completion of step 1. The JTS should then focus its efforts more on the later stages of project development (beginning with step 2).

The NWE Programme should voluntarily apply a two-step application procedure with beginning of Call 5. This will enable NWE to judge whether this is indeed an effective process for future programmes.

Related recommended actions: 1.3; 5.2; 6.5

3.3 Provide training for CP's and project development opportunities.

Responsibilities

JTS
CP's

Training

CP's should be trained in all relevant project development areas in order to be able to communicate with project partners on a common knowledge basis and, ultimately, to contribute to high-quality project proposals.

Implementation

before Call 5

JTS employees should fill the trainer role, in particular for financial and administrative issues. Financial training for CP's was already held by members of the Finance Unit and is intended to be continued in the future. There should also be the opportunity for CP's to participate in events and information days of other European Programmes in order to broaden their horizon.

“Thematic Workshops”

NWE should continue the so-called “Thematic Workshops” which focus on a specific Programme measure. It has proven to be a good project development opportunity for applicants to not only learn about the specific workshop topic in relation to spatial planning, but also to meet potential project partners.

Related recommended actions: 5.3

Increase “quality” of proposal assessment and selection

Utilise the expertise of Programme-external specialists in the proposal assessment process; adjust PSC voting procedure in order to reduce the vetoing power of one individual member state; streamline PSC meeting procedures; adjust project selection criteria.

The assessment and selection process must ensure above all that:

- the basic eligibility criteria are met,
- projects contribute significantly to the Programme objectives in tangible form,
- the selection process is considered as fair and independent by potential proposers.

Rationale

Actions

4.1 Add external proposal assessors.

The professional quality of proposal assessments should be beyond doubt by any NWE stakeholder, and any party should avoid the impression of trying to influence assessments carried out by the JTS staff. The JTS itself should make clear that it cannot be responsive to such “requests” by its very nature.

It is an observation from interviews that the JTS needs to emphasise its image of executing fair and objective assessments. Due to its continued involvement in proposal preparation, the JTS should continue to seek more strongly the assistance of independent experts (as was already done for “water projects”) in order for them to support the JTS in the assessment of proposal.

As a general rule, one external expert by measure could be called in to support the JTS staff in the assessment process (at JTS premises).

In order to enable the JTS to seek advice at short notice, it should issue an open Call for Experts. Experts would be asked to register themselves (or their organisation) and to provide the relevant information concerning their work experience and expertise (for example in an online database).

Related recommended actions: 5.3; 9.1

Responsibilities

Managing Authority
PMC
Supervisory Group
JTS

Implementation

before Call 4
assessments

4.2 Restructure PSC meeting procedures.

Responsibilities

Project introduction by the JTS

PSC
PMC

The practice that both the representative of the Lead Partner country and the JTS (which has assessed the project proposal) introduce a project to the PSC should not be used in future PSC meetings. It is sufficient and time saving if only the JTS or an external assessor introduces a project.

Implementation

before PSC4

Proposal discussion by priorities and measures

In previous PSC meetings, proposals were discussed according to the JTS assessment ranking. It would be more efficient if proposals were to be discussed by priority and measure. This would allow for a better focus among PSC members on the specific (measure) topic as well as a better comparability between proposals of the same measure.

Avoiding replication and covering gaps

Rather than only judging projects on their individual merits, the PSC also needs to consider how proposals would – collectively – address the objectives of a specific measure vis à vis ongoing projects in order to avoid replication and to cover gaps in the Programme. The JTS should provide a comparative analysis in this respect.

Majority voting

While unanimity should be the rule for any committee decision involving legal matters, majority voting should be introduced in project selection. A 6/8 majority vote is recommended for project selection decisions. This would not allow one member state alone to veto a project. The following basic rules should apply:

- Each country (Member States and the Swiss Confederation) has one vote (“yes”, “no”, or abstaining from voting)
- A proposal or Expression of Interest (Eol) needs at least six votes of approval, including all from the countries with a project partner, and no more than one vote against.
- In order to approve a proposal or to short-list an Eol, all countries having a partner in the project need to vote in favour of a project proposal or Eol.

Observers

Based on the experience of PCS 3 in Cardiff, the number of observers per country should be limited to a maximum of two observers in order to increase the meeting efficiency. It needs to be ensured that observers do not participate in any discussions during the meeting. Seating arrangements should be in place which clearly separate (PS) Committee members from observers.

Managing conflicts of interest

All PSC members should declare any conflict of interest of their organisation in proposals beforehand in writing and should be asked to leave the room by the president of the meeting while these proposals are being discussed for funding.

Comment:

As a means to tackle the n+2/zero-decommitment issue, the Programme allowed for a so-called “written procedure” which provided the opportunity to submit a project proposal in between Calls 3 and 4. This exceptional procedure was not taken up widely and finally resulted in the conditional approval of one project (ProBois-ProHolz) at the PSC 3bis meeting in early September. This procedure is not considered to be a suitable mechanism, and should not be used in the future.

Related recommended actions: 2.3

4.3 Adjust selection criteria.

The implementation of some mid-term evaluation recommendations requires the adjustment or the addition of selection criteria. It would be reasonable to make the following adjustments for Call 5 and beyond:

- The feasibility of a project to continue to have an effect after the NWE-funding phase, i.e. its exploitation and replication potential should be more explicitly recognised in the selection criteria (than now in selection criterion 9).
- The level of subcontracting should be limited. If this is deemed “too high”, the partner commitment could be questioned.
- Plans for project evaluation, including clear objectives, identified indicators, as well as methodologies to gather data should be recognised in the selection criteria.
- Especially for investment projects it will be important to provide clear justification of the required level and nature of costs (especially large investments) in the proposal.

The PMC (in providing guidance to the PSC) and the JTS (in its assessments) must re-emphasise the relevance of eligibility criteria. Before Grant Offer Letters are issued to projects selected at PSC 3 and PSC 3bis meetings, the JTS should take care that:

- recommendations made during the selection process are implemented in project work plans, and
- the transnational dimension of projects is fully exploited.

If in doubt, an “inception report” should be added as a first project milestone in order to address these issues satisfactorily before the project commences in full.

In this context, it is recommended to use eligibility and selection criteria with particular strictness in the assessment and selection of Call 4 proposals.

Responsibilities

PMC
JTS

Implementation

before Call 5

Immediately

Increase efficiency of project support and monitoring

Provide support to project partners (in questions of project administration, evaluation, dissemination, exploitation, etc.) and establish a project monitoring system that includes visits to project and partner sites

Project support and monitoring aim to ensure the quality of the ongoing INTERREG IIIB projects.

Rationale

Twice a year (on 30 June and 31 December), the Lead Partner of a project has to submit an Activity Report accompanied by a Payment Claim to the JTS. The Report needs to specify details concerning:

- the Action Plan submitted with the original application and
- all planned project milestones.

To ensure the continuity of high project quality during the whole project life time, the support and monitoring activities need to be working efficiently.

Actions

5.1 Offer training seminars and thematic workshops to all project partners.

Responsibilities

JTS

Lead Partner (LP) seminars (picked up from the North Sea Programme) have proven to be very beneficial and should be continued. Besides knowledge transfer and exchange, training seminars offer the possibility to get in contact, discuss and network with other INTERREG IIIB NWE projects. It could be considered to organise training seminars (beyond NWE) across IIIB Programmes, for example in the context of thematic clusters. As far as feasible, co-operation with INTE RACT could be possible.

Implementation

Immediately

Training should be open to Lead Partners as well as other project members. Issues to be covered should comprise project administration, finances, evaluation and dissemination.

Related recommended actions: 9.1

5.2 Encourage the submission of short & concise reports.

Responsibilities

JTS
CP's

Nine Activity Reports from Call 1 and 2 projects were available for analysis by the mid-term evaluation team. These Activity Reports are of very different character. Some provide detailed information supported by several documents, others are limited to a sentence per action/topic only.

Implementation

Upcoming activity reports in December 2003

Not the Activity Report form itself (except part VII.), but the way it is filled out by the projects poses problems and should be streamlined. Short and concise information needs to give real insight into the

project status.

Respectively, the assessment of the Activity Report (and Payment Claim) needs to follow clear guidelines, resulting in comparable documents. At the moment, the degree of detail of the comments varies considerably.

CP's should provide assistance to project partners in drafting reports, but should have no role whatsoever in their assessment.

Neither in the project application nor in the bi-annual Activity Reports the projects provide a brief assessment of project risks, especially related to implementation. While it might be too early in to be included in the application, running projects should be encouraged to consider risks (and their assessment) as well as contingency plans. It should be mandatory to provide a brief assessment of project risks in the bi-annual activity reports.

Related recommended actions: 3.2

5.3 Incorporate site visits as an integral element of project monitoring activities.

A valuable and complementary (to paper reporting) input for monitoring is on-site information. Real achievements (and barriers) are best assessed on site, political and planning structures/arrangements best understood when local conditions can be observed directly and insights are highlighted by (local) project partners.

So far, no site visits have been carried out. To ensure high-quality monitoring, site visits are recommended as an integral element of project monitoring activities. The significant gain in information by carrying out site visits compensates in great parts for (human and time) resources spent.

Whereas the JTS should clearly be the single body to monitor projects, in some cases it may be useful to seek the assistance of independent external experts.

CP's should have no role in on-site monitoring, since their role is to be (become) "advocates of the projects".

Site visits should be co-ordinated with on-site checks of the Member States, even if they are of a different scope.

Related recommended actions: 4.1

Responsibilities

JTS
Independent external
experts

Implementation

First site visits

Strengthen the evaluation of Programme and projects

Establish an Evaluation Initiative; define baseline indicators and few, but common, key indicators on the measure level to provide the basis for sound project and Programme evaluation; recognise the importance of evaluation early on in the application process

Evaluation is a means to investigate a Programme or project to the effect of finding out whether pre-defined goals have been met. In the context of INTERREG IIIB NWE, Programme success will be judged on the basis of the aggregated project results. In addition, project promoters need to know what impacts a project has generated.

Evaluation of impacts relies on a sufficient amount of valid data. Ensuring the availability of such data on the project and Programme level is, therefore, instrumental for a meaningful evaluation.

Commonly applied reference cases, indicators, data gathering tools, and methods of analyses facilitate the comparability across projects and Programmes.

The non-availability of baseline data and real operational guidelines for common evaluation is a major weakness of NWE at present.

Rationale

Actions

6.1 Establish an Evaluation Initiative.

Responsibilities

Following a Call for Tender, the Programme should establish an Evaluation Initiative in order to enable a founded and well-structured Programme and project evaluation.

PMC

It should be the aim of the Evaluation Initiative to:

- Identify common baseline indicators (by measure)
- Gather baseline data (or co-ordinate gathering process)
- Co-ordinate a joint evaluation working group of project representatives and external experts
- Train project representatives
- Identify indicators commonly used by all projects
- Identify core indicators commonly used by project clusters
- Elaborate an evaluation methodology (data gathering tools, see recommended action 6.3 “common toolbox”)
- Analyse data and interpret results
- Develop Programme Evaluation Report

The Evaluation Initiative should be financed as a “service contract” from the priority 6 budget for technical assistance, since an INTERREG IIIB project is not considered to be an appropriate framework for this task.

At its next meeting, the PMC should request upon the establishment of an Evaluation Initiative as described above to become operational before the end of the year 2003. The Evaluation Initiative is expected to be active until 2008 when the last results (of projects approved towards the end of the Programme) will be available.

Related recommended actions: 2.3; 6.2 – 6.4; 8.1

6.2 Improve baseline data availability.

Baseline or reference indicators are required to put evaluation results into perspective. In the optimal case, all baseline data refer to the same reference year, for example the year 2000 – the first year of the NWE Programme.

The Programme needs to ensure that baseline data availability will be improved. It should first clearly define which data will be required as baseline data. A close co-operation with the Member States’ national as well as with the European Statistics Offices is encouraged. Considering the recommendation to thematically cluster NWE projects, common indicators should be defined by the respective project clusters for which baseline data will have to be gathered (compare data acquisition method described in chapter 6 of the Evaluation Report).

Related recommended actions: 6.1; 6.3; 6.4

6.3 Strengthen commonality.

The NWE Programme is funding projects in five different priorities and ten different measures. The results of the various projects will vary considerably from one measure to the other, but also within one single measure. In order to allow for a reasonable comparison of results on the Programme level, NWE should strive for commonality in the evaluation of projects. It is recommended to develop a “common toolbox” for projects comprising common indicators and common data gathering tools. The Evaluation Initiative (see recommended action 6.1) will take up the development of a “common toolbox” as one of its main tasks.

Related recommended actions: 6.1; 6.2; 6.4

Implementation

Immediately following PMC4 decision

Responsibilities

Evaluation Initiative
JTS – NWE observatory
Member States and the
Swiss Confederation
Project Partners

Implementation

Immediately

Responsibilities

Evaluation Initiative
JTS – NWE observatory
Member States and the
Swiss Confederation
Project Partners

Implementation

Immediately

6.4 Reduce complexity & strengthen relevance.

In addition to strengthening commonality (see recommended action 6.3), the complexity of evaluation could be reduced by focussing on (a relatively small number of) key indicators. Such key indicators could be identified and defined on the Programme measure level. It would also be possible to identify key indicator sets for project clusters sharing the same topic (but not necessarily the same measure). The Evaluation Initiative (see recommended action 6.1) should take up these tasks.

While the focus should be on few quantitative indicators, qualitative indicators should not be forgotten in a high-quality evaluation.

It is important, in the project set-up, to be clear and realistic in the formulation of project goals, since any results will be put in relation to these goals formulated early on in a project proposal.

Related recommended actions: 6.1-6.3; 8.1

6.5 Make (independent) project evaluation mandatory with beginning of the Fifth Call for Proposals.

European tax payers have a right to know happens to their money, but also the NWE Programme needs good evaluation results to show its (the Programme's) benefits and added value after completion.

Beginning with the Fifth Call for Proposals, it should be mandatory for projects to include evaluation elements, such as clear objectives with related indicators, an evaluation methodology, an independent evaluator, if feasible, or even an evaluation workpackage.

There should be a "transitional rule" for projects that have already been approved in previous Calls for Proposals (or that have received their Grant Offer Letter) to subsequently include evaluation elements in their project. Projects that have received their Grant Offer Letter should be requested to ensure a state-of-the-art evaluation concept as part of their workplan.

It should be considered to allocate additional funds to projects (already running) to carry out such an evaluation where necessary.

Related recommended actions: 3.2

Responsibilities

Evaluation Initiative
JTS – NWE observatory
Member States and the
Swiss Confederation
Project Partners

Implementation

Immediately

Responsibilities

JTS
Project partners

Implementation

For Call 5

Increase awareness of the Programme - communication & dissemination strategy

Increase awareness of the Programme and establish specific communication strategies to address specific groups, in particular potential “new” applicants and “multipliers”; Make use of all communication media; organise further events to bring together various NWE stakeholders

Raising awareness of INTERREG IIIB NWE among stakeholders is instrumental for the success and the sustainability of the Programme. Internal and external communication should support Programme promotion in general and project performance in particular.

Rationale

INTERREG IIIB NWE has been operational for almost two years and various communication tools have been developed and are in use today. General dissemination of the Programme and projects is ongoing. As intended by the JTS, dissemination should be intensified in order to raise the awareness of the INTERREG IIIB NWE Programme, its projects and results as well as attract future applicants.

Actions

7.1 Increase awareness of the Programme.

Responsibilities

The level of INTERREG, and more specifically NWE, awareness in the participating countries varies considerably. Raising the awareness of the Programme is a valuable contribution to informing (potential) project applicants and to creating (more) political backing for the Programme goals. It is recommended that the Programme continues working towards an “NWE Programme identity” and makes use of all communication media, for example website, newsletter and (other) media to raise the awareness of INTERREG IIIB NWE. The website, the main and most easily accessible internal and external communication medium, though considered to be user-friendly by questionnaire respondents, has to be “overhauled” in order to make it easier for users to find particular information; a “document store” should be introduced. Project partners should find a “private section” for sensitive project communication. Discussion fora for various topics should be offered in order to make the website more interactive.

JTS “communication Unit”

Implementation

Immediately

Related recommended actions: 9.1; 9.2; 10.1

7.2 Identify target groups and address them with specific (targeted) communication strategies.

Responsibilities

The Programme should increase efforts to stimulate participation of those regions not yet well represented (see NWE map concerning ERDF funding after three Calls in chapter 4 of the Evaluation Report).

JTS “communication Unit”

Implementation

Potential private sector partners could be directly targeted in order to encourage their involvement in the Programme.

Immediately

As outlined in the Programme Complement (selection criterion 7), projects should take into account experience from earlier EU-funded programmes. In the current projects, many partners have already worked together in INTERREG IIC or IRMA projects. To broaden the spectrum of the participating organisations, the Programme should further encourage participation of “new” project clientele (new in the sense of not formerly being involved in INTERREG or even other European projects).

Multipliers, i.e. individuals, organisations/institutions, networks able to support the Programme in disseminating its ideas and outcomes, Members of the European Parliament, etc. could play an important role in the Programme. The contact with multipliers should be further intensified. They should be informed about NWE and encouraged to further disseminate the “ideas” and results of the Programme.

When identifying target audiences and further developing the stakeholder database, synergies with other IIIB Programmes should be taken into account.

Specific communication strategies should be used to address individual target groups. Links from specific website to the Programme website, thematic focus in Programme newsletter, organisation of and presence at targeted events, articles in specialised thematic media, etc. could be considered.

The Programme is already considering many of these aspects and has carried out a number of tasks such as organising targeted events; more of the good ideas have to be translated into action soon, as the budget is available and NWE is already at “mid-term”.

Related recommended actions: 9.1; 9.2

7.3 Hold a “Conference of the Regions”.

The INTERREG IIIB Alpine Region held a “Conference of the Regions” in July 2003 in Marcy-l’Étoile, France. NWE should follow this positive example of the Alpine Region, and hold its own “Conference of the Regions”, if feasible, in co-operation with another Programme such as the INTERREG IIIB North Sea Region. A possible theme for a first NWE “Conference of the Regions” could be “Future Challenges of NWE in an Enlarged Europe”. A successful event could foster the participation of “new” regions in the Programme. NWE is discussing such an event, which could probably be co-financed by INTERACT.

Quote from mid-term assessment workshop in Lille: “It is good to finally meet other stakeholders of the Programme”. Considering this statement, it is recommended that NWE concentrates on the already foreseen two mid-term events mainly focusing on politicians and new actors, and envisages a “Conference of the Regions” together with one or more INTERREG III Programme as well.

Related recommended actions: 9.1

Responsibilities

JTS “communication Unit”

Implementation

2004 –2006 annually or bi-annually in alternation with another IIIB Programme’s “Conference of the Regions”

Exploit results on a European level

Focus efforts and budget now on carrying over and utilising project and Programme results after the end of the Programme

It is often observed that projects and even Programmes, once finished, do not exploit (utilise) their results. If that is the case, experiences, knowledge or tangible results could be lost with the end of a project or Programme. The NWE Programme and the projects it is co-funding should not run into this danger. Instead, it should provide structures and devote efforts now to being able to exploit any results it may achieve.

Rationale

Actions

8.1 Focus on “project sustainability” after NWE funding.

NWE will have provided funding to dozens of projects in the amount of about three hundred million Euros until 2006 – the end of the Programme. The sum of all project results will represent the result of the Programme itself. It is, therefore, in the interest of the NWE Programme to focus on carrying over results of each individual project after NWE funding runs out.

Once fewer projects need to be generated (because a major share of the funding budget has already been committed to projects), the Programme should shift efforts towards exploiting project results. It should be a JTS task to support projects in their exploitation efforts, for example by providing or organising training in business development, putting emphasis on institutional co-operation and helping to develop private-public-partnerships (PPP's).

It should be considered to reserve some Programme budget for exploitation purposes, i.e. to carry over results into the future (after NWE funding runs out).

Related recommended actions: 6.1; 6.4; 8.2; 9.3

Responsibilities

JTS
Project partners

Implementation

Immediately

8.2 Compare “Good Practices” with other IIIB Programmes.

Co-operation with INTERACT should be sought in comparing good practices with other IIIB Programmes. Following a generic outline, good practice case (GPC) studies should be developed telling success stories of NWE. At the end of the Programme, a compiled “book” of all GPC's could be promoted as a documentation of NWE successes.

Related recommended actions: 8.1

Responsibilities

JTS

Implementation

Immediately

Create synergies between projects & policies

Create opportunities for co-operation and exchange on all levels, including NWE stakeholders, regions, politicians, staff members of Programme secretariats, project partners, and experts in specific areas

During the mid-term evaluation workshop in Lille in June 2003, a participant said that “it is good to finally meet other stakeholders of INTERREG IIIB from NWE”. This statement expresses that there is a lack of exchange opportunities for stakeholders.

Rationale

Actions

9.1 Create fora for exchange and transnational co-operation for stakeholders of IIIB NWE.

The Programme would benefit from the input, experience and information exchange of all Programme stakeholders, including regional representatives, Programme employees, project partners, experts, as well as politicians and other decision makers.

Fora for exchange and transnational co-operation could have various formats and settings:

- Workshops such as the moderated focus group workshop organised by the mid-term evaluation team in Lille in June 2003 offer discussion opportunities for a relatively small amount of people. In general, the participation at focus group meetings should not exceed 15 participants per group in order to allow for efficient discussions.
- Annual Conferences are a platform for a large amount of stakeholders. NWE should consider to follow the example of the IIIB Alpine Space Programme and to hold a “Conference of the Regions” allowing regional representatives to gather, co-operate and exchange in the context of INTERREG IIIB (see also recommended action 7.3).
- Electronic fora or virtual discussions could be envisaged. The Internet as an information exchange medium can potentially reach the largest amount of people, but more importantly, it offers citizens with an interest in INTERREG IIIB a useful forum to share their opinions.
- “Policy Round Tables” as discussed in recommended action 9.2.
- The exchange of staff members, for example between the JTS and national or regional authorities in the Member States or between member state authorities would provide a very practical opportunity for exchange and transnational co-operation.
- “Learning from each other” is an often-stated benefit of transna-

Responsibilities

JTS Communication Unit
Member States and Swiss
Confederation
CP's

Implementation

Immediately

tional co-operation. A temporary exchange of employees would allow for first-hand experiences with the culture, language and working habits of the project partner. Several project have already included this idea in their action plan.

Related recommended actions: 7.1; 7.2; 7.3; 9.1

9.2 Involve politicians and other decision makers.

The political backing of the Programme, while different from region to region, generally appears to be weak. NWE should be perceived as a relevant Programme, also concerning lobbying for "INTERREG IV". The involvement of politicians and other decision makers in the Programme, in particular concerning the orientation of the Programme would foster the creation of synergies between project and policies.

It should be the task of the JTS communication unit supported by Member States and their CP's to organise events bringing together politicians, project partners and other stakeholders. Such a "policy round table" could be organised on an annual basis. It should, however, be emphasised that the same politicians and decision makers participate in these annual "policy round tables".

Related recommended actions: 7.1; 7.2; 9.1

9.3 Cluster projects thematically.

The creation of synergies and the avoidance of duplications between projects could be realised by clustering NWE projects which share the same topic or which belong to the same Programme measure. Even across IIIB projects, it could be considered to cluster projects thematically. Via a co-operation with INTERACT, synergies could be exploited with projects in other IIIB Programmes or even IIIC.

A project "cluster":

- co-operates closely on agreed topics
- without requiring contractual modification of individual projects.

Clustered projects could join efforts to share horizontal tasks, such as evaluation, dissemination. They could also use a common approach to exploiting their (complementary) project results after the end of the projects.

Related recommended actions: 8.1

Responsibilities

JTS Communication Unit
Member States and Swiss
Confederation
CP's

Implementation

Immediately
First policy round table in
early 2004

Responsibilities

JTS
CP's

Implementation

Immediately

Implement Recommendations

Distribute and discuss mid-term evaluation recommendations widely; provide a structure within the Programme to review and, if necessary over time, adjust the recommendations

There is a danger that, comparable to results of a project after project's end, recommendations of the INTERREG IIIB NWE mid-term evaluation exercise may not carry over into the future if no exploitation or implementation structures are in place.

Rationale

Actions

10.1 Distribute Evaluation Report widely.

The INTERREG IIIB NWE mid-term evaluation is a mandatory task for the Programme. There is, however, no formal obligation to implement any of the recommendations formulated by the Evaluation Team. In order to make use of and implement these recommendations they should be discussed and distributed widely among people with an interest in INTERREG IIIB NWE.

Instead of the entire Mid-Term Evaluation Report, a comprehensive "recommendation implementation plan" could be circulated.

Related recommended actions: 2.3; 7.1

Responsibilities

JTS Communication Unit

Implementation

Throughout the remainder of the Programme

10.2 Frequently review mid-term evaluation recommendations.

Recommendations in this Evaluation Report were formulated by the Mid-term Evaluation Team (based on research findings and a thorough analysis of interviews, questionnaires, Programme documents and Focus Group Workshops).

It will be up to the PMC and the Supervisory Group to initially review these recommendations and the respective timeframes, to prioritise recommendations and to decide which of them (if not all) should be included in a "recommendation implementation plan". In this plan, implementation methods need to be laid out as well.

Until the end of the Programme, mid-term evaluation recommendations should be reviewed frequently and as a fixed agenda item in PMC meetings. Institutional or policy changes may make some recommendations obsolete while others may become a higher priority.

It should be considered to also review and discuss recommendations in (moderated) focus group meeting comprised of a wide range of NWE stakeholders. Such meetings would allow including views and inputs from Programme-external experts in the review and possible adjustment of recommendations.

Related recommended actions: 7.1; 10.3

Responsibilities

PMC

Implementation

Standing PMC agenda item

10.3 Allocate “miscellaneous budget line” to implement mid-term recommendations.

Out of the NWE budget for technical assistance (priorities 6.1 and 6.2), a total budget of €4.399.000 is available for allocation in the Programme between 2004 and 2008 under the budget line “miscellaneous”.

In allocating the “miscellaneous” budget, emphasis should be placed on the Programme-level co-ordination tasks, in particular:

- Evaluation Initiative and other tasks related to project and Programme evaluation (considering the relevance for the Programme and the urgent need for action, a major part of the “miscellaneous” budget should be allocated)
- Strengthening assessment and monitoring tasks through support of external experts
- Project clustering, good practice case study activities, Conference of the Regions

Related recommended actions: 10.2

Responsibilities

PMC

Implementation

Immediately