



EUCLES

European Clusters Excellence
Labelling Structure

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Cluster Management Excellence and its European Labelling „World“

The „5 Ws“ of the Labelling Process:
What, Why, Who, When, Where
Plus the „HOWs“



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Measuring Quality of Cluster Management

- *Kompetenznetze Deutschland (2007-2012)*
- *European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI) (2009-2012)*
- *Cluster Excellence in the Nordic Countries, Germany and Poland (NGPExcellence) (2010-2011)*
- *European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA) www.cluster-analysis.org (since 2011)*
- *European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI, Phase 2) (2017-2019)*
- *European Clusters Labelling Structure (EUCLES) www.eucles.be (since 2021)*



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European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis

The “one-stop-shop” for benchmarking and labelling of cluster organisations:

- Founded 2011, hosted by *VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH* (Berlin-based consulting company with long experience in cluster [policy] development and regional economic development)
- ESCA consists of a back-office and an international network of around 200 trained cluster experts worldwide
- ESCA organises and/or conducts the various labeling activities
- As of January 2022: reports to EUCLES (European Clusters Excellence Labelling Structure) based on a partnership agreement.



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EUCLES Implementation Status as of August 2024

- EUCLES is a non-profit association in charge of the promotion of cluster management excellence based on a coordinated European approach, as well as the delivery of quality Labels to qualified cluster management organisations, with the objective to gradually take over the labelling system currently operated by ESCA (EUCLES foundation is a result of ECEI, Phase 2).
- The EUCLES association brings together national and regional clusters networks which are involved in the implementation of the ECEI labelling scheme at national or regional levels.
- Since Sep 2021, partnership agreement EUCLES – VDI/VDE-IT:
 - EUCLES is responsible for marketing and communication and relationship to the EC
 - All labelling processes should be continued to be organised by ESCA, unchanged to the original approach
 - Step by step, processes and intellectual property should be transferred to EUCLES
 - In implementation: provision of data regarding labelled cluster initiatives to EUCLES
 - Planned (partly implemented already): Integration of new indicators/aspects regarding resilience, digital transformation, and circular economy, but maintaining the general approach of the assessments
 - Planned: Award of the labels by EUCLES
 - Planned: Transfer of the „ownership“ of the experts network from ESCA to EUCLES



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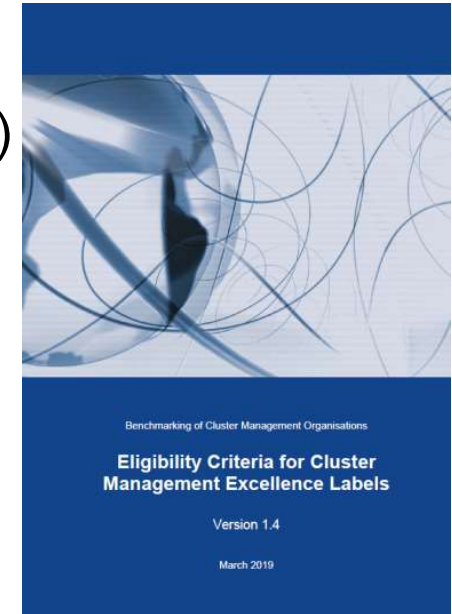
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Eligibility Criteria for a Cluster Label

(as of end 2019, implemented as a result of ECEI, Phase 2)

- Dedicated personnel cluster management existing?
- Minimum number of „committed cluster participants“?
- Geographic Proximity
- Clear common focus
- Services are implemented and offered making use of the proximity of the cluster participants
- Listing on ECCP
- The Cluster Management Organisation supports the “enhancement of collaboration, networking and learning” and “provides or channels specialised and customised business support” to stimulate innovative activities, especially to SME ((in accordance with the EU Commission’s definition of a cluster organisation or a business network)
- Experts’ recommendation for a “Cluster Label”





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> 1300



> 190



> 150

Benchmarking / BRONZE Label

Recognises the **intention** of a cluster management organisation **to strive for excellence by improving its management capabilities and performance levels.**



SILVER LABEL

Recognises the **successful implementation of improvement processes** that were initiated following a previous Bronze Label benchmarking exercise.



GOLD LABEL

Awarded to cluster management organisations that **demonstrate a high level of professionalism and sophisticated cluster management**, besides others including expertise in strategic management, internationalisation, financing, sector strategy, networking, and communication.



ECEI-Labeling processes implemented by ESCA (Aug 2024)



> 1300

Benchmarking

- 1) Interview of 3-4 hours by 1 expert (videoconference or face-to-face)
- 2) Report by ESCA
- 3) As of ?: award by EUCLES



> 190

Quality audit of three selected indicators

- 1) Benchmarking and description of three indicators
- 2) Audit (videoconference or face-to-face), 1 experienced, expert, 4-6 hours
- 3) Report by expert and check by ESCA
- 4) As of ?: award by EUCLES



> 150

Quality audit of 31 indicators

- 1) Initial benchmarking (videoconference)
- 2) Audit on-site (interview and check of documents), 2 experts, 2 days
- 3) Report by experts and check by ESCA
- 4) Decision for Award by CEEG
- 5) As of ?: award by EUCLES





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Cluster Benchmarking Screening-Tool for Comparison with Peers

- Assessment of characteristics of a Cluster Management Organisation, by the cluster manager in a self-assessment manner, animated/supported by a cluster benchmarking expert using a structured questionnaire
- Analysis of the data by ESCA, including:
 - ✓ Comparison to cluster organisations in the same „technology area“ worldwide
 - ✓ Comparison to „excellent“ cluster organisations worldwide
 - ✓ Comparison to cluster organisations in the same country (if enough data is available)
 - ✓ Recommendations for improvement based on the comparisons and using cluster management quality related data



Cluster Management Excellence Label **BRONZE**



- Validity of the BRONZE label:
two years from month of award onwards / extension by three years with repeating the process
- Benchmarking provides a documented entry level for labeling cluster management excellence and into improvement processes for cluster management
- Benchmarking exercise performed by the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA) relying on an international pool of trained „Cluster Benchmarking Experts“
- Procedure internationally accepted,
so far > 1300 cluster organisations from nearly 50 countries participated

Cluster Management Excellence Label **BRONZE**



ALONE OR TOGETHER?

If open for sharing information, the opportunity of creating synergies in:

- Benchmarking interview in a group workshop
- Mutual learning during the process
- Learning from the joint evaluation
- Cost reduction feasible (to be individually negotiated)

Cluster Management Excellence Label SILVER Dedicated to Cluster Excellence



- Searching for improvements. A cluster organisation can apply for the SILVER Label around **1.5-2 years after the first Benchmarking (and BRONZE Label)** by providing a written description of three areas of improvements with regard to selected quality indicators of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative; improvements should be achieved during the last two years and should be demonstrated and evidenced.
 - First step: a cluster organisation repeats the benchmarking process and renews the BRONZE Label
 - Full self-assessment of the benchmarking data by the cluster manager
 - Cluster organisation receives the new benchmarking report
 - Second Step: providing descriptions of three areas of improvement
 - Third step: On-site assessment (4.5 - 6 h) by one very experienced ECEI GOLD experts:
 - a) validation of fulfilment of the “minimum criteria GOLD indicators”;
 - b) validation of the improvements;
 - c) individual assessment report including a recommendation for/against award of the SILVER Label.
- SILVER Label is valid for two years; renewal leads to validity extension by three years

Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD



- 31 Quality indicators currently published (www.cluster-analysis.org):
 - „European Cluster Excellence BASELINE - Minimum Requirements for Cluster Organisations
 - „The Quality Label for Cluster Organisations - Criteria, Processes, Framework of Implementation
 - Supporting preparation: MS-Excel-based self-assessment tool for all 31 Quality Indicators
- External assessment procedure with two experts, two full days on-site):
 - Local expert: Specifically trained by ESCA, knowledge of the Quality Indicators and local language
 - Lead expert: Specifically trained by ESCA, proven experience in benchmarking and assessment methodologies, detailed knowledge of the Quality Indicators and the further related procedures for the renewal alternative
- Assessment of the 31 indicators against quality thresholds defined by ECEI:
GREEN, YELLOW, RED
- ≥ 80 % need to be reached for GOLD
- Validity period of two years; extended in validity for another three years when successfully renewed
- Decision on award of the GOLD label by an „International Cluster Excellence Expert Group (CEEG)“ (a group consisting of cluster managers holding a valid GOLD label)

Lessons Learnt Over the Time: Key Characteristics of Excellence in Cluster Management

- **Customer orientation** regarding a manifold customer portfolio (more than only cluster members)
- **(Excellent) Strategy**, its development, implementation, monitoring, update ...
- **Services**: demand-oriented, reasonable spectrum and intensity
- **Communication**: internal, external, visibility, recognition, ...
- **Experience**: industry sector, industrial, R&D, management, leadership, inter-cultural and language, ...

WHY DO IT?

It is in principle a VOLUNTARY action. But it also costs ...

Well, almost voluntarily and costly

(if we consider the cluster programmes sometimes supporting) ...

BENEFITS ARE INDIVIDUAL and can be for example:

- ✓ *Learning in the preparation phase* (self assessment, self reflection, self questioning the internal processes) – (SILVER, GOLD)
- ✓ ***Learning during the assessment with the experts***
 - Discovering new perspectives from various cluster experiences
 - Enabling the whole team to benefit via participation (if wanted)
- ✓ *Using the experts' evaluation report for continuous improvement and possible change in the region*
- ✓ *Recognition, image, positioning (differentiation), national and international*
- ✓ *Possibly access to (more) funding*

TIPS AND TRICKS

Prepare, prepare, prepare, prepare ...

- *make use of the support offered by ESCA and by the selected local ECEI expert*
- *make sure you understand well the demands behind each indicator*
- *strategy is (always) key!*
- *plan ahead within a reasonable timeframe (more time better than short time)*
- *prepare to communicate with the ECEI experts*

Make sure to have every single statement documented and/or evidenced with a written proof!

Keep an (open) eye on:

- *funding opportunities*
- *synergies via joint assessments*
- *synergies via coordination in a region*
- *smart integration in European projects*

ECEI GOLD Label Indicators

Structure of the Cluster		
1.1.0	✓	Committed Cluster Participation
1.1.1	✓	Composition of the Cluster Participants
1.1.2	✓	Number of Committed Cluster Participants in Total
1.2		Geographical Concentration of the Cluster Participants
Typology, Governance, Cooperation		
2.1	✓	Maturity of the Cluster Management
2.2.1		Human Resources Available for the Cluster Management
2.2.2	✓	Qualification of the Cluster Management Team
2.2.3		Life Long Learning Aspects for the Cluster Management Team
2.2.4		Stability and Continuity of Human Resources of the Cluster Management Team
2.3		Stability of Cluster Participation
2.4	✓	Clarity of Roles – Involvement of Stakeholders in the Decision Making Processes
2.5	✓	Direct Personal Contacts Between the Cluster Management Team and the Cluster Participants
2.6	✓	Degree of Cooperation within the Cluster
2.7	✓	Integration of the Cluster Organisation in the Innovation System
Financing Cluster Management		
3.1		Prospects of the Financial Resources of the Cluster Organisation
3.2		Share of Financial Resources from Private Sources
Strategy, Objectives, Services		
4.1.1	✓	Strategy Building Process
4.1.2	✓	Documentation of the Cluster Strategy
4.1.3	✓	Implementation Plan
4.1.4	✓	Financial Controlling System
4.1.5	✓	Review of the Cluster Strategy and Implementation Plan
4.1.6	✓	Performance Monitoring of Cluster Management
4.2		Focus of the Cluster Strategy
4.3	✓	Activities and Services of the Cluster Management
4.4	✓	Performance of the Cluster Management
4.5		Working Groups
4.6.1		Communication of the Cluster Organisation
4.6.2	✓	Cluster Organisation's Web Presence
Achievements and Recognition		
5.1		Recognition of the Cluster in Publications, Press, Media
5.2		Success Stories
5.3		Customer and Cluster Participants' Satisfaction Assessment
✓ = minimum requirement		



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