

DIFASS GOOD PRACTICE FACT SHEET NO 16, Sardinia 19th – 20th June 2013
WORKSHOP THEME: MIXED GRANT/NON GRANT SCHEMES

PROGRAMME: CENTROPE TRANSNATIONAL INNOVATION VOUCHER (CTT)

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1. SUMMARY OF GOOD PRACTICE

▪ Overview & Aims

Set up as a transnational financial instrument in 2010, the aim of the **Centrope Innovation Scheme** was to set up an international community of service providers for technology transfer and innovation. Acting as an agent for innovative businesses, the CCT scheme facilitated knowledge exchange and cooperation between businesses in the central European i.e. Centrope region and expert R&D institutions from across the four regions participating in the scheme, irrespective of their country of origin.

Operating through a **fully subsidised voucher system**, the scheme provided access to financial support for up to 50 **transnational science/R&D institutions to business research partnerships** in the bordering regions of Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

▪ Key Resources

- **Programme Partners.** The intermediary and financing organisations included: **15 Partner Institutions** establishing the tools to stimulate cross border technology transfer **Knowledge Providers**, R&D institutions/facilities, Universities, research centres **Regional Contact Points/Project Approval Committee (PAC).** Centrope team members; 7 organisations representing 7 regions involved with monthly face to face/virtual forums.
- **Funding: Funding Body & SME Contribution**
Supported with funds from the Central European 2007-2013 Transnational Cooperation Programme, the Centrope budget was €250K, enabling 50 SMEs to benefit from €5,000 investment capital.

Eligibility Criteria

The Centrope scheme was open to all registered SMEs established/located in CENTROPE regions; Lower Austria, Burgenland, (Austria); Ihomoravsky Kraj; (Czech Republic); Bratislavsky Kraj and Trnavsky Kraj (Slovakia), West-Transdanubian Region (Hungary). Priority was given to technology orientated service projects and activities that demonstrate innovative and scientific approaches.

- **Terms and Conditions**, supported activities included:
 - Development of new products/prototypes
 - Preparation of a Business Plan for innovative products
 - Development of new concepts, pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, studies for problem solving
 - Development of a new service
 - Tailored training in new technologies

- Product/service testing
- Economic impact assessment of new technologies
- Analysis of technology transfer potential
- Purchase of raw materials

2. IMPLEMENTATION

▪ Key Steps – How it Works.

Running from 2010-2012, the 3 key components of the scheme included the Centrope R&D Map, the Centrope Academy and the Centrope Cooperation-voucher.

- **Aimed exclusively at providing support for transnational cooperation**, Centrope TT project partners were responsible for marketing and promotion of the scheme, providing technical assistance, i.e. helping applicants to prepare applications and necessary documentation. Partners also participated on the Project Approval Committee.
- Centrope TT used the learning points from previous voucher schemes and practice to develop a trilateral service contract between the SME, R & D Provider and national partner/contact point and a simple online application form/guidance process for applicants. Applications were presented in person to the committee with decisions made by a simple majority.
- With a maximum deadline of two months, partners were responsible for sourcing the most suitable R&D providers from the transnational R&D network for the winners, sourcing R&D Partners within 2 months and ensuring the project was completed six months afterwards. Partners/project contact points were also responsible for the day to day administration, finance and evaluation of the scheme.
- With a face value of up to €5,000, CCT Vouchers could be used to pay or contribute towards the costs incurred, enabling SMEs to source the most suitable expertise to help them develop their product and get their innovative idea out to market. Priority was given to technology orientated service projects and activities demonstrating innovative and scientific approaches.
- The first call made in July 2010 was originally scheduled to close on the 31st January 2011 and extended until 30th April 2011 to encourage further applications.

- **Key Stats** Running from 2010-2012 with nine rounds of decision making results were as follows:

KEY MEASURE	TOTAL
Applications Received	66
Applications Approved*	52
SMEs Starting/Contracts Raised For Voucher Scheme	40
SME Beneficiaries Completing R&D Centrope TT Projects	34

Three vouchers* were withdrawn following an unsuccessful R&D partner search, although SMEs involved were given the opportunity to resubmit applications. No other support e.g. grants/coaching outside of the above support was added to the scheme.

Examples of successful projects included the **development of new concepts; feasibility studies** e.g. growing special algae strains for polymer industry, **development of a new product/prototype** online surveillance system and **product/service testing** of fuel additives

3. KEY LEARNING POINTS & OPPORTUNITIES

The Centrope TT voucher program is considered by project partners to be very suitable for transfer with legacy benefits arising from the pilot project including the systems used and the Centrope TT map, a database of over 2,000 R & D facilities in the CENTROPE region.

– **What worked well**

Cooperation, commitment and organisation of all the partners involved with well designed operational and evaluation systems.

Selection of high calibre R&D service providers

Applicant SMEs were very confident with the results and as a result open to further cooperation and possibilities.

– **Challenges/Weaknesses**

Low motivation of the SMEs and R&D services providers at the start of the programme.

In many cases the value of vouchers is too small, only enough to cover part of the research costs.

The regulations of the CENTRAL EUROPE program provided a strict time and financial frame; the level of the administrative work was higher than expected.

The process for the R&D search needs to be improved.

▪ **Transferability**

– Opportunities:

Although designed for transnational cooperation the systems/processes can also be applied to new or existing projects at national or regional level, helping to add value to existing schemes.

The key element of the transfer process is the cooperative, dynamic nature of the programme.

Stimulating connection between (small) SMEs and (big) R&D institutes, the scheme also introduces a change of mindset and encourages export.

– Threats:

The future of the pilot programme depends on the availability of future financial resources.

Lack of network stability i.e. with hosting organisations.

A lack of innovative ideas.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

You Tube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PbaffRAIXc>

Pannon Business Network: <http://www.pbn.hu/>

Centrope TT Map: <http://www.centrope-tt.info/rd-map>