

PROGRAMME: Innovation and Technology Support Network
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1. SUMMARY OF GOOD PRACTICE

▪ Overview & Aims

Launched in 2000 in a region previously dependent on heavy industry, the **Technological and Innovation Business Support Centre** network was set up to stimulate a culture of entrepreneurship and respond to the need for a changing economic mix.

Established following implementation of the necessary technological infrastructure, nine Support Centres providing businesses with support for ICT and Innovation were set up in business parks and business associations across northern Spain. Aiming to improve the competitiveness of SMEs through the incorporation of intensive ICT support, companies are able to access personalised support, advisory and training services/e skills. This in turn, helps them to **accelerate their digital maturity** i.e. their human and technological capital, and develop a culture of innovation. Offering a sustained approach the overall objective of the scheme is to contribute to **a sustainable increase in business competitiveness through digital maturity and micro innovation in SMEs**, maximising potential for business and the regional economy.

▪ Key Resources

– Programme Partners

The Institute for Economic Development of the Principality of Asturias (IDEPA) – lead partner
CTIC Foundation – management company

In collaboration with Business Parks, Business Associations, Chambers and key stakeholders

– Funding: Funding Body & SME Contribution

Financed from regional funds allocated for implementation of ICT, technological leadership, innovating markets, clusters and technology transfers, with €5.2M invested since 2004 and a programme budget of €550,000 in 2012.

How much investment could the SME obtain?

Financed in full from regional funds, support and training services are provided at **no cost** with no upper limit imposed on what/how much support companies can access. Participating SMEs are issued with an invoice illustrating the value of the services received.

The overall programme is estimated to have leveraged c€23.5M in regional funds and public and private resources including physical infrastructure and connectivity costs through to SME time and the software implemented in companies.

- **Eligibility Criteria/Terms & Conditions**

Support is available for all types of SMEs and professionals with economic activity located in Asturias. This includes entrepreneurs and employees as well as business associations, business centres and stakeholders promoting the programme to their members.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

The scheme is delivered by 9 ICT advisors working directly with companies, one for each Centre and 3 central support staff/additional pro rata administrative support. The application process is 'not difficult at all'. Decisions are made immediately and **all applications accepted**.

In addition to information, companies are able to access a wide range of support; workshops, training and grants, providing them with intensive, sustainable support to develop their ICT skills as quickly as possible. Current resources are targeted at companies with low use of IT and companies with standard ICT practices and processes with plans to support more advanced and high tech SMEs in the near future.

- **Key Steps – How it Works**

Promoted through outreach and awareness activities (talks, workshops, conferences, media etc), options range from personalised support i.e. 'innovation' diagnosis and intensive advisory/support services, through to sectorial intervention programmes and one-off training seminars. Participants are also offered the opportunity to benchmark their ICT capability against other organisations and can also be awarded certification of their innovative capacity.

Working to encourage wider collaboration amongst SMEs, local technology suppliers are also encouraged to take part in the programmes, with the promotion of creativity and an innovation culture also encouraged between companies involved.

Although no other direct support is included in the programme, publicised and promoted through an extensive stakeholder network (national, regional and local), enables programme beneficiaries to access a wide range of other business support activities. The programme itself is subject to annual review and ongoing development with new elements added on a regular basis.

Typical indirect costs for SMEs accessing support, including implementation of physical infrastructure, connectivity costs, software and time are estimated at c€7,800.

- **Key Stats** Running since 2004 activity in 2012 was follows:

KEY MEASURE	NUMBER
Companies participating in activities	1,573 (8.5% of all companies)
New Clients	51%
Applications Accepted	100%
Number of Training & Awareness Activities	304 activities 3,708 people
Consultancy Services Provided	4,151

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Evaluation to date also indicates high take up rates; i.e. introduction to new ICT Tools and activity following Support Centre interventions with 53% of companies participating in the project going on to access other ICT Advisory support and incorporate their own 'in house' technological solutions and 68% of companies implementing external technological/ICT solutions.

3. KEY LEARNING POINTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Legacy benefits arising from the programme include improvement in Information Society Indicators resulting in above national average performance. Qualitative feedback from companies supported by the scheme is also very positive, resulting in a more sustainable business able to take advantage of the global market and more able to survive the economic crisis than those not participating in the scheme.

– **What worked well**

Agreement/implementation of a regional strategy, providing a common framework and cooperation of all stakeholders.

Decentralised delivery, routing awareness and take up through established stakeholder/business networks.

A methodological/ordered process. Different formats for learning materials, with some sector specific materials. A support centre team committed to the territory.

The opportunity for organisations to benchmark ICT use and improvement.

– **Challenges/Weaknesses**

Formerly more used to supporting larger nationalised industries before recession, one of the big problems was the lack of cooperation and collaboration between support organisations themselves who later went on to encourage business participation and benefit from the scheme. Originally focusing on technological demonstrations, the programme was reoriented towards support services (mainly training for e-Skills building and ICT consultancy), proven to be more effective.

The programme has resulted in a high digital maturity for many SMEs, enabling them to incorporate advanced services needed to support innovation. The next challenge is to encourage basic digital maturity amongst 'late adopters', companies not taking advantage of the scheme.

▪ **Transferability**

– **Opportunities**

The programme is, subject to financial resources, considered highly transferable and has itself been exported/transferred to regions in Central America contributing to the improvement of business support/training services with other developing countries also expressing interest.

– **Threats**

Lack of funding, with the programme dependent on future financial resources

FURTHER INFORMATION:

DIFASS You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cj-IFSUugWw&list=PLdapWZuBHseXkalzIhy0mecxQR269pFOt>
Asturias Technological & Innovation Support Centre Network www.fundacionctic.org/sat