Guidance note for applicants Priority 1 – social innovation topic

Inclusion is a major challenge for the NWE territory, and our Programme is convinced that social innovation can strongly contribute to the growth and development of NWE.

After 3 calls however, only a few projects tackling the topic of social innovation have been approved in step 1, and for the moment, none of them have been fully approved.

Through this guidance note, the NWE programme would like to clarify some of the recurring issues for applications focusing on social innovation, and encourage once again project ideas addressing this topic.

1. Situation after 3 calls

After 3 calls, 26 projects tackling the topic of social innovation have been submitted.

A closer look at the reasons for rejection showed that a majority of these 26 projects have similar weaknesses in their applications:

* Lack of transnational relevance, i.e. projects tend to cluster local activities that are independent of each other.
* Lack of precise and / or quantified baseline and results, i.e. projects tend to lack precision in presenting and quantifying the current situation and to define their anticipated results clearly.
* Lack of focus of the projects objective; i.e. projects tend to address too many issues and to have several objectives, which leads unfocused project set-ups.

Two other very frequent reasons for rejection appeared to be that:

* The project’s target groups are not well identified.
* The innovative aspect of the project idea is weak.

1. **What is social innovation for NWE?**

Within our Cooperation Programme, social innovation is part of Priority 1 (ToA3). It is not a specific objective and does not have a specific budget – it is only a type of action and what is most important is ‘innovation’.

Social innovation is defined in our Cooperation Programme as:

***Delivering societal benefits through innovation.*** *Actions aim at all territories of NWE and specifically target excluded population or population at risk for exclusion and communities under pressure. Actions aim at supporting development, testing and implementation of innovative solutions for social needs and problems (‘social innovation’).*

Social innovation projects must therefore give ‘tools to act’ to excluded groups. For Priority 1 projects, actions must *“aim at supporting development, testing, and implementation of innovative solutions”,* and should neither focus on research nor on the roll out of an already existing solution.

Based on this definition, the programme accepts the variety of sub-themes which can derive from it, as well as the diversity of potential stakeholders.

Nevertheless, in order to have a clearer understanding of what “*excluded populations or populations at risk of exclusion”* covers, the 4 following areas of exclusion can be used as reference:

* **exclusion linked to health** **problems** (disability, illness…)
* **exclusion linked to** **economic circumstances** (unemployment of youth, long-term; poverty)
* **geographical exclusion** (rural isolated areas, suburban peripheral areas, urban areas far away from transport hubs…)
* **exclusion linked to prejudice** (gender equality…)

Within these areas, projects dealing with migration issues focusing on the integration of recognised refugees on the mid and long term will be considered, in particular in the domain of entrepreneurship, employment and access to the labour market.

1. **What to pay attention to when developing a social innovation project?**

Social innovation projects often have difficulties to apply the Interreg NWE intervention logic.

In order to start off in the right direction, the following aspects should be taken into consideration when developing your project idea:

* **The need:** is there a specific demand identified for this project? What need does it answer? Identifying this need clearly will help in defining the scope of the project and to focus its objective.
* **The target group:** within the sphere of *“excluded populations or populations at risk of exclusion”*, projects needs to be as precise and detailed as possible – looking at the ‘elderly’ or ‘young’ is not precise enough. The project should also value ‘end-users’ and think about who will be better off at the end of the project.
* **The transnational dimension:**  a strong territorial analysis is needed, to identify common needs across countries and across communities. The project needs to prove that it is tackling a transnational challenge, and bringing together the relevant partners in order to address it. As with any Priority 1 projects, the leader / follower dimension should also be taken into account.
* **The innovative aspect** of the project: social innovation comes within the Innovation priority and the project needs to show how it will go beyond usual practices. As all innovation, it needs to contain a disruptive aspect, i.e. something that will create a change in the usual process of things.

The NWE programme will also be looking very specifically at some more general aspects of social innovation projects:

* + Their viability and long term impact
  + Their sustainability both with regards to the environment and the durability
  + Their systemic potential (i.e. the capacity of a local, community-based approach to be replicated throughout NWE)
  + Their scalability

1. **Measuring and quantifying baselines and results**

The lack of measurable and quantifiable baselines and results appears as one of the recurring reasons for rejection in the first three calls, and one of the major difficulties for social innovation projects. As any other projects, they must show clearly what societal change they will produce on the North West Europe territory.

In priority 1, all projects have to address one of the two following output indicators:

* Number of new or enhanced transnational clusters or innovation networks
* Number of enterprises receiving support

The programme recognises that these output indicators might be difficult to relate to for some social innovation projects. Therefore, a weak performance on the mandatory output indicators of Priority 1 will not automatically lead to a rejection of the project as a whole, if this project has managed to prove otherwise that it will reach tangible and measurable results, in coherence with a solid intervention logic.

To do so, projects can in addition to the mandatory indicators choose from 9 other indicators -some of which are specifically related to the social innovation theme- to clarify their intervention logic. It is also possible for them to develop their own indicator framework.

What should prevail for social innovation projects is the attention brought to the coherence and the strength of their intervention logic.

For further information

The Joint Secretariat and Contact Points in the 8 NWE member states remain available for any questions you may have on social innovation and to support you in the development of your project idea.