Framework Contract: Implementation of an integrated evaluation approach within the framework of a robust North-West Europe evaluation system (Reference 16B007)

TASK 1: Evaluation of the Two-Step approach

DRAFT INCEPTION REPORT

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Audit Authorities
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
CA	Certifying Authority
CCTP	Specific Technical Terms and Conditions
CF	Cohesion Fund
CP	Contact Point
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional Policy and Urban Policy
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EIB	European Investment Bank
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EU2020	Europe 2020 Strategy
EUR	Euro
EUSAIR	European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSALP	European Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSBSR	European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
INTERACT	Programme aiming to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy by promoting exchange of experience
INTERREG	ESIF programmes to enhance cooperation between EU regions
JCSEE	Joint Committee on Standard for Educational Evaluation
JS	Joint Secretariat
LAU	Local administrative units
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
NC	National Coordinator
NUTS	Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques
NWE	North-West Europe
OP	Operational Programme
PA	Priority Axis
PM	Project Manager
RC	Rules for Tender
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
SO	Specific Objective

1 Introduction

1.1 Structure of the Inception Report

The Inception Report defines the methodological approach of Task 1 of the Evaluation Framework Agreement, which focuses on the switch between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods, from a single step to a two-step application process.

This first section illustrates the evaluation context and objectives, the two-step approach in the Interreg North West Europe Programme 2014-2020 and the stakeholders' involvement in the evaluation process. The second section details the methodological approach and evaluation tools, notably the template of semi-structured interviews and the survey to applicants and beneficiaries.

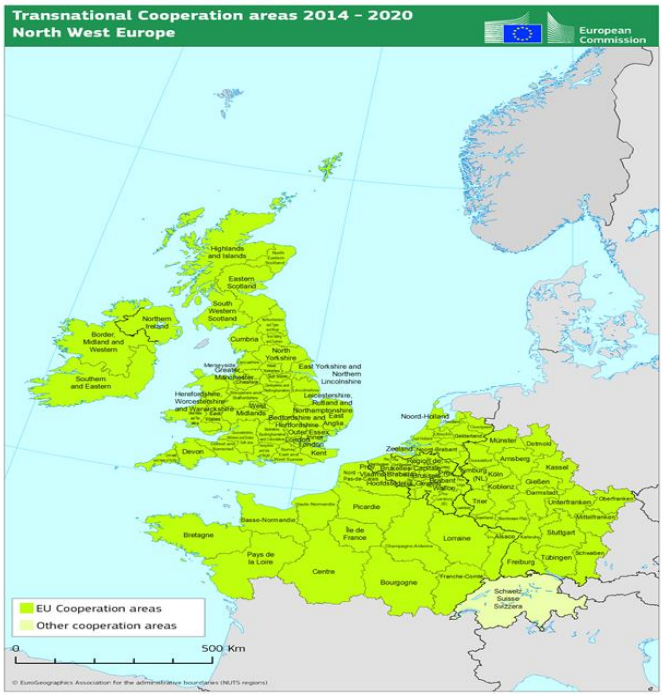
The third section describes the team and the organisation, while the forth reports the general timeline.

1.2 Evaluation context

The methodological approach builds on the regulatory requirements and the programme evaluation plan. Notably, the European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 regulatory framework, in particular the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) and the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) regulation, emphasises the central role of evaluation in the programme's lifecycle. Article 54 of the CPR indicates that evaluation should improve the quality of the programme as well as appraise its effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

The programme evaluation plan, developed in line with the regulatory provisions and the guidance documents of the European Commission, sets out the evaluation strategy for the entire programming period considering the lessons learned from the previous evaluations. The INTERREG North-West Europe (NWE) Programme 2014-2020 is a transnational European Territorial Cooperation Programme funded by the European Union. The areas involved in the NWE Programme are Ireland, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and parts of France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Figure 1: Interreg NWE Programme Area 2014-2020



Source: Interreg NWE programme 2014-2020

The programme area includes many of Europe's economic centres – including a number of large metropolitan areas. However, the NWE area also includes a number of rural areas with a remote or peripheral character. As evidenced in a number of socio-economic and environmental indicators, the area's diverse regions are characterised by significant disparities, which have been increasing with time. As a result, one of the main challenges for the NWE area is to support excellence while simultaneously addressing its disparities.

The NWE Programme's overall vision for the future development of the NWE area is "*to be a key economic player in the world and create an attractive place to work and live, with high levels of innovation, sustainability and cohesion*."[1]

In order to achieve this, 3 Priorities Axes have been set, under which 5 Specific Objectives are defined[2]. These will be in the centre of the evaluations within this framework contract, in particular, of the final impact evaluation.

Priority Axis	Specific Objective
1. Innovation	SO1: To enhance innovation performance of enterprises throughout NWE regions
2. Low Carbon	SO2: To facilitate the implementation of low-carbon, energy and climate protection strategies to reduce GHG emissions in NWE

[1] Cooperation Programme Interreg NWE 2014-2020
[2] The Priority Axis 4 for Technical Assistance will not be evaluated under the framework contract, unless a specific contract targets it, and is not analysed further in this tender.

Priority Axis	Specific Objective
	SO3: To facilitate the uptake of low carbon technologies, products, processes and services in sectors with high energy saving potential, to reduce GHG emissions in NWE SO4: To facilitate the implementation of transnational low-carbon solutions in transport systems to reduce GHG-emissions in NWE
3. Resource and materials efficiency	SO5: To optimise (re)use of material and natural resources in NWE

1.3 The two-step approach in the Interreg NWE Programme 2014-2020

During the 2007-2013 programming period[3] the project application procedure followed a single-step approach. A partnership that was in the process of developing an INTERREG IVB NWE project application was advised to contact the Secretariat or the Contact Point at an early stage to receive assistance in developing a high-quality project. Once the details of the project idea had been clarified and all organisations had expressed their commitment to the project, an Application Form could be completed.

The application form consisted in one MS-EXCEL file made available for download on the Programme website. The application form was structured in ten sections:

1. Project summary
2. Project Objectives and Implementation
3. Project Management
4. Communication Strategy
5. Detailed Investment sheet
6. Project Partnership
7. Budget details
8. Detailed Annual Budget Breakdown
9. Monitoring Success
10. Confirmation, certification, signature

[3] Guidance note no.12 - PROJECT APPLICATION PROCEDURE.
http://4b.nweurope.eu/index.php?act=page&page_on=documents&id=389

For each project, the assessment team was made up of Secretariat staff who had neither advised the applicants nor previously monitored the project partnership, to ensure fair treatment.

First, the eligibility of all projects was checked by the Secretariat according to the eligibility criteria. The project would then be declared ineligible if any one eligibility criterion was not met. In that case, the application would be excluded from further assessment and not presented to the Programme Steering Committee.

For each eligible application received, the Secretariat consulted the National Authorities involved to ensure that the project did not conflict with national policy or legislation, especially with requirements regarding its environmental impacts.

As a second stage, the Secretariat assessed eligible project applications according to the selection criteria. A global assessment was made for each project and a ranking of all submitted applications was established within each call.

The Secretariat drafted a specific report for each Application Form, containing a brief note setting out its main findings and recommendations, supported by a standard assessment form. The reports on all project applications were circulated among the members of the Steering Committee before the meeting. The final decision (approved, referred back, or rejected) on each project application was made by the Steering Committee.

Ten calls for proposals have been held throughout the Programme's lifetime, following the procedure described above, resulting in 358 proposals received and 114 approved, with a success rate of 31.8%.

The main reason to change the single-step procedure for a two-steps approach in 2014-2020 was the belief that the two-steps approach would have produced more results-oriented projects. In addition, the introduction of the two-steps was meant to alleviate administrative burden for applicants to the Programme.

The expected results/improvements of the two-steps approach, as indicated in the ToR are[4]:

- A simpler application process for beneficiaries
- A result-based programme approach integrated throughout the project development process, facilitating the implementation of the programme
- Filtered project ideas at early stage in line with the programme requirements
- Higher quality of incoming projects, with the submission in two stages creating more opportunities to improve project development
- An efficient use of project promoters' resources during the application phase
- More newcomers and front runners participating in the calls for proposals.

[4] Single Framework Agreement - Implementation of an integrated evaluation approach within the framework of a robust Interreg North-West Europe evaluation system - Special Technical Terms and Conditions

To date four Calls for proposals have been launched by the Programme, resulting in 241 proposals received, 17 approved for funding after Step 2 decision for Calls 1 and 2, and 17 proposals from the third call approved at Step 1, so far. All the calls followed the two-steps approach. This data will be verified and updated during the first phase of desk research of the Two-Step-Evaluation.

The relevant documents on this procedure are all available on the programme website:

- INTERREG NORTH-WEST EUROPE 2014- 2020 Programme manual, version 4, June 2016
- Cooperation programme INTERREG NORTH-WEST EUROPE 2014- 2020 (CCI 2014 TC 16 RF TN 006), Approved by the European Commission on 18 June 2015
- Application form step 1
- Application form step 2
- Technical guidance – Online application system (version 1.0 7 April 2015).

1.4 Participative evaluation: involvement of stakeholders

One guiding principle for the evaluation system to be developed for the NWE programme is the involvement of all relevant partners and stakeholders of the programme into the evaluation processes. In particular, the target groups of the evaluation system are – according to the Specific Technical Terms and Conditions (CCTP) of this Call:

(a) Programme Partners: Monitoring Committee.

(b) Programme authorities: MA

(c) European Commission.

(d) Programme beneficiaries: Project lead partners and project partners of both successful and unsuccessful projects.

(e) Technical assistance: National Contact Points, Joint Secretariat and Evaluation Task Force.

The evaluation process is coordinated by the Evaluation Task Force established by the Monitoring Committee and composed of representatives of:

- The Managing Authority (MA)
- The Joint Secretariat (JS)
- The Network of National Contact Points (CP)
- 3 representatives of the Member States who are part of the Monitoring Committee (MC).

The Joint Secretariat (JS) is in charge of the daily contact with our consortium and of organising meetings and delivery of reports for the Evaluation Task Force.

During the evaluation, programme target groups are involved:

- Directly, through participation in the evaluation task force and/or regularly reviewing or discussing the list of proposed evaluations, methodological or evaluation reports, as well as recommendations and suggestions to the programme (e.g. in the Joint Secretariat or the Monitoring Committee);
- Directly, through being part of the data gathering process as a valuable source of information, in particular through interviews, surveys, focus groups or case studies;
- Indirectly, through participation in the aggregated figures of the project monitoring system (e.g. beneficiaries) and/or receiving the final evaluation report (all interested persons).

In general, the evaluation deliverables will be adapted as far as possible to the type of target groups involved. So, evaluation reports will generally be in English (or other languages required), plain and non-technical language, with an easy-to-read style adapted to the main target group.

Furthermore, in order to enhance the participation and the awareness of relevant stakeholders, the evaluation team will contribute to the dissemination of the findings of the evaluation and the final evaluation deliverables to be published.

2 Methodological Approach to Task 1

The 'Special Technical Terms and Conditions/Cahier des Clauses Techniques Particulières' (CCTP) – of the Call for Tender define in their Article 3 'Definition of needs' the main needs and the corresponding activities of the service. The structure of the service foresees the following for task 1:

Task 1 – Two-step approach evaluation: the evaluation of the switch the programme has made between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods, from a single-step to a two-step approach application process in order to improve result orientation of projects and to alleviate administrative burden for applicants to the programme. The main aim of this task is to generate knowledge on the effectiveness of the two-step process, verify whether it has served its purpose and whether and how it should be changed or improved for the remaining calls of the programme.

Below, the foreseen evaluation approach is presented with more detail.

As required by the terms of reference (CCTP), Task 1 is dedicated to evaluate "*the switch the programme has made between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods, from a single step to a two-step approach application process due to the result orientation and the need to alleviate administrative burden for applicants to the programme*". The evaluation will analyse the effectiveness of the two steps process, in order to help the Monitoring Committee in the decision on maintaining or not this approach for the remaining calls of the programme.

In particular, the task will analyse to what extent the two-steps approach has:

- simplified the application process,
- contributed to integrating the programme result orientation at project level,
- ensured a selection of better project ideas;
- promoted an efficient use of resources
- attracted newcomers and front runners

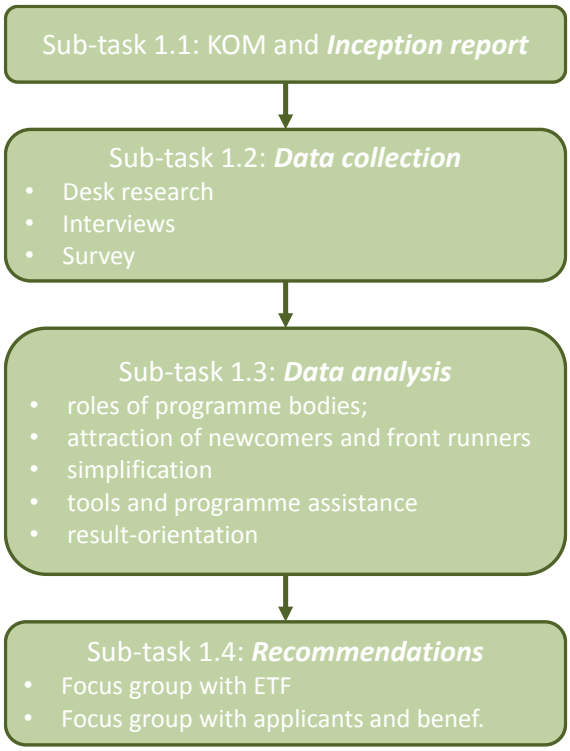
The task of the evaluation will be structured in seven sub-tasks:

- Sub-task 1.1: In-depth preparation, inception meeting and report.
- Sub-task 1.2: Desk research and additional data gathering with applicants and programme authorities.
- Sub-task 1.3: Analysis and evaluation of data and information collected, which is organised around the following key topics:
    - roles of programme bodies within the processes of application/advice, assessment, selection and decision-making;
    - attraction of newcomers and front runners;
    - simplification for applicants / for the programme;
    - clarity, quality and availability of tools and programme assistance;
    - result-orientation of projects.

- Sub-task 1.4: Recommendations, Reporting and Feedback to the Evaluation task force, in particular recommendations for improvements in the programme processes and recommendations concerning the guidance provided to applicants as well as the tools applied by the programme.

The overall organisation of sub-tasks within this evaluation is presented in the figure below.

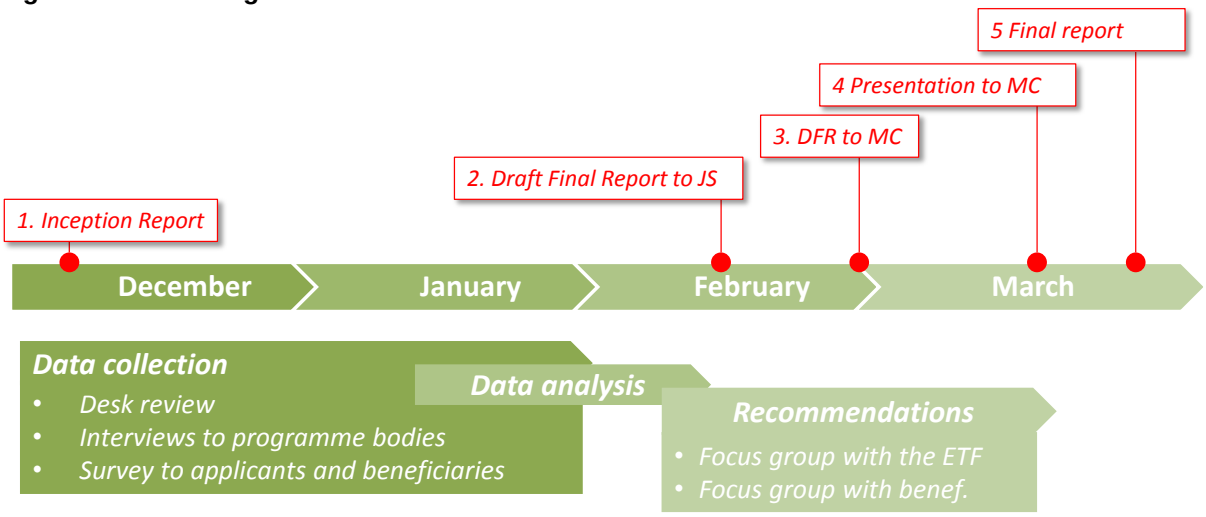
Figure 2: Flow chart of Task 1 organisation of work packages



Source: Own elaboration

The following figure illustrates the overall organisation of the evaluation activities foreseen under task 1:

Figure 3: Overall organisation of the evaluation activities



Source: Own elaboration

Data collection activities (**sub task 1.2**) will take place between December 2016 and January 2017. More precisely, during the month of December evaluators shall carry out all desk review activities (see the list of primary data detailed under Table 1), shall organise the interviews (to be carried out in January) and shall prepare (and test with the JS) the survey for applicants and beneficiaries.

The collection of secondary data (interviews and survey) shall be carried out in January. Interviews shall involve programme authorities (JS, MA), national contact points and MS representatives. All applicants and beneficiaries will be invited to respond via web to the questionnaire illustrated under Table 3.

In order to ensure the delivery of the Draft final report to the JS by the 15th of February, data analysis **(sub-task 1.3)** will take place during the first half of February. As previously mentioned the data analysis will be organised around five main topics. More information on the approach adopted to address the different topics are provided under the table below.

Based on the results of evaluation of the previous sub-tasks, evaluators will formulate recommendations for improvements of the programme processes and tools (**Sub-task 1.4)**. A first draft of conclusions and recommendations shall be presented in the draft final report submitted to the JS at mid-february. These draft recommendations will be then discussed in two different focus groups, one involving the ETF, the other a selected number of beneficiaries and applicants. :

- Focus group 1 with ETF members will take place during the third week of Febraury (between the 20th and the 24th). By taking into account inputs collected during this first the focus group, an updated version of the Draft final report will be submitted to the MC by the beginning of March.
- Focus group 2 with beneficiaries and applicants will take place during the first half of March. This focus group shall aim to validate with stakeholders the key evaluation findings. Inputs coming from applicants and beneficiaries will be discussed during the MC foreseen by mid-March.

The evaluation report will then be revised integrating inputs from beneficiaries and from the MC.

Table 1: Evaluation framework for task 1 (proxies and data sources)

To pic	Evaluation Question	Proxies/indicators	Primary data	Secondary data				
				Int. to JS	Int. to MA	Int. to MC/MS	Int. to CP	Survey
Roles of programme bodies	How efficient and effective are the a) assessment procedure performed by JS and b) the decision-making process regarding project selection (MC)?	• Correspondence between technical assessment and MC decisions	Programme manual Sponsors reports (sample) Assessors reports (sample)	✓		✓		
		• Correspondence between first step and second step ranking and reasons for rejections • Correspondence between step 1 reasons for rejection and step 1 original aim of filtering out project ideas that do not fit the programme strategy at early stage		✓		✓		
		• Perceptions of the programme bodies with regard of the soundness of the assessment process: mapping of the bodies involved; clear/unclear responsibilities; possible duplications (also considering the assessments made at national level)	If available, evaluation reports on other ETC decision making process (ie ASP or CE)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Has the two-step approach with different stages of project development (separation of tasks between the national contact points of the programme and the JS, in steps 1 and 2) been efficient / effective in comparison to the one-step process? Has the two-step approach made the application process more efficient (workload and time) with regards to support to applicants, assessment, decision-making (MC, CP, JS)?	• Number of approved project/total presented project at step 1; • Number of approved project/total presented project at step 2; • Share of approved project: comparison with 2007-2013 programming period	Data from the monitoring system					
		• Time needed to beneficiaries to follow the entire process		✓			✓	✓
		• Workload of the programme bodies in the 2 periods		✓		✓	✓	
		• Perceptions of the programme bodies to the regard to the efficiency/effectiveness of the new approach in relation to the project development		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	What are the concrete benefits/costs noticed at the programme level after the switch (i.e. less or more cost for human resources, input etc.)?	• Workload of the programme bodies in the 2 periods	Existing reports and evaluations (also from the previous programming period),e.g. "*Maximising and Sustaining Impact – an overview of the results and achievements of the INTERREG IVB NWE Programme" (2015) and "NWE Project development and selection procedures" (2012)*	✓		✓	✓	
		• Perceptions of the programme bodies to the regard to the benefits/costs or trade-off of the new approach		✓		✓	✓	
	What are the challenges in terms of use of programme resources?	• Possible additional needs in terms of skills and competences needed by the programme bodies • More complex work organisation (mix up of sponsor and evaluator role)		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Attraction of new comers	Has the new approach helped to attract more newcomers and/or more and more diverse applicants in their respective fields? Has the new approach helped to attract applicants in	• Type of applicants compared to 2007-2013 (CP priority, localisation, public vs private sector, legal status, profit/non-profit) • Number of newcomers • Number of applicants (compared to 2007-2013); (alsoevolution during 4 calls in 2014-2020)	Data from the monitoring system					✓

Topic	Evaluation Question	Proxies/indicators	Primary data	Secondary data				
				Int. to JS	Int. to MA	Int. to MC/MS	Int. to CP	Survey
	general, even if they are not newcomers? Are there new entities joining the projects? (in which form, sector, country, role, etc…)	• Effectiveness of the activities organised at MS level (ie communication events) to attract newcomers • Effectiveness of the programme events organised by the JS (i.e. communication events)		✓		✓	✓	✓
		• Effectiveness of the subsidies offered in some MS to attract newcomers (e.g. match-funding provision)				✓	✓	✓
		• Type of newcomers (i.e. new to NWE or to ETC or the EU-funded programmes as a whole?)					✓	✓
Quality of the support	Are the tools provided by the programme to the applicants to submit their proposals adequate and useful for the applicants?	• Level of satisfaction of applicants regarding the tools provided						✓
	Does the support available for the project application process meet the needs of prospective project applicants?	• Level of satisfaction of beneficiaries regarding the support provided (if possible consider variables • Perception of the quality of support provided by the CPs and the JS in the project development process (Steps 1 and 2) – whether the officers and CPs consider it suitable for the needs of prospective applicants		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Is the outcome of the application process sufficiently transparent for all applicants?	• Level of satisfaction of beneficiaries regarding the level of transparency of the assessment process (reasons for rejection, recommendations, technical requirements)		✓			✓	✓
Simplification	Has the new approach helped to make the application process easier for applicants (less administrative burden)?	• Workload in terms of time and persons required for the project preparation considering the different steps						✓
		• Time needed to complete the process (starting from the set -up of the project idea)	Data from the monitoring system					✓
		• Level of satisfaction of beneficiaries regarding the approach adopted in step 1 (*is it a simplification in comparison to a 1 step procedure?*						✓
Integration of result-based approach	Has the new approach helped to increase relevance, suitability and quality of the projects and to avoid low-quality projects?	• Number of projects approved/rejected (different axes, different calls)	Data from the monitoring system					
	How has the filter applied at the first step of the application process helped to choose the most result-oriented projects and the projects fitting best	• Score on quality criteria: comparison between first and second step for a sample of project to understand what the most difficult quality criteria to meet are	Assessor reports (sample), Development Reports (between step 1 and 2)	✓		✓		

Topic	Evaluation Question	Proxies/indicators	Primary data	Secondary data				
				Int. to JS	Int. to MA	Int. to MC/MS	Int. to CP	Survey
	the programme Specific Objectives?	• Perception of programme authorities regarding the improvement of the projects, amongst others in terms of result orientation, between step 1 and 2 (and considering possible variation in the different calls)		✓		✓	✓	
		• Perception of beneficiaries regarding the possible improvement in their understanding of the result orientations between step 1 and 2 (and considering possible variation in the different calls)						✓
		• Perception of beneficiaries on result orientation						✓

As illustrated in the table above, data collection activities are based on three different data sources:

1 **Desk research and document review** in particular of data from the monitoring system, previous studies, surveys and existing documents used in the two-steps approach (e.g. application form, guidance, etc..), project assessment reports.

2 **Semi-structured interviews with programme bodies**: approximately 20 interviews shall be conducted (1 MC member per country, 1 CP per country, 7 with the JS, 1 with the MA). The final list of the interviewees shall be agreed with the JS during the first half of December in consultation with the MS representatives and CPs. The following table details the key questions around which the interview will focus. The following table illustrates a list of questions about five topics:

- Roles of programme bodies and processes (encompassing project assessment, JS/CP/MC efforts in step 1 and 2, applicants' efforts in step 1 and 2);
- Attraction of newcomers and front runners;
- Simplification;
- Clarity quality and availability of tools and programme assistance;
- Result-orientation

The table below illustrates the matching between questions and the type of interviewee.

Table 2: List of questions of the interviews with programme authorities

Topic	Question	Interviewee			
		MC	CP	JS	MA
Roles of programme bodies and processes	Project assessment				
	• Is there correspondence between technical assessment and MC decisions?			X	
	• What is your view on the ratio of successful applications to the total of submitted applications when compared to 2007-2013? Do you see any trends with the number of calls growing?			X	
	• Are there any modifications to the project development, assessment and selection procedure necessary?	X	X	X	X
	• Do you feel that all programme bodies have a consistent approachwith the strategy of the 2-step approach (for instance, are the reasons for rejection at step 1/2 consistent with the requirements at this step)?	x	x	x	x
	JS / CP/NA efforts and roles in step 1 and step 2 application procedure				
	• Are the roles of the programme bodies (in particular CPs and JS) clearly defined and complementary in Step 1 and 2 of the application process?	x	x	x	x
	• How long does the two-step application approach take in terms of average man-days workload for you (for step 1 and for step 2 application)?	x	x	x	x
	• Is the workload comparable to the previous programme? Is it more (or less, or equally long) time consuming than the one step approach for you (JS / CP/MC/MA)?	X	X	X	X
	• Does the two-step approach make the work with the projects more complex (mix-up of sponsor and evaluator role, different competences needed for assessment, sponsoring, advice provision, etc.? Could this be organised in a different manner, in your opinion?)	X	X	X	
	• Do you think there are additional needs in terms of skills and competences to work with the 2-step approach for the MC, JS and CPs?	X	X	X	
	• How can the JS and CP involvement in step 1 and step 2 project development be improved in practice?	X	X	X	
	• What are your views about the cooperation of different programme bodies in the support provided to applicants in the two-step process?	x	x	x	x
	Applicant's efforts in step 1 and step 2 application procedure				
	• In your opinion, is the applicant workload similar to the one of the previous programme? Is it more/less/equally time consuming for the applicants?	X	X	X	
	• When compared to the previous programme, do you think that additional knowledge or expertise is required by the applicants to work with the two-step approach?	X	X	X	
	• In your opinion, if the two-step approach implies higher costs for applicants (e.g. due to time and expertise required), are these costs compensated by prospective benefits for the programme (more suited and relevant project ideas, better quality projects, more result-orientated projects and programme funding better allocated)	X	X	X	
	• In your opinion, if the two-step approach implies higher costs for applicants (e.g. due to time and expertise required), is the cost compensated by long-term benefits (e.g. higher chance of project approval, fewer problems in the project implementation due to a solid and clear project contents in the application form, etc…)	X	X	X	
Attraction of newcomers and front runners	• In comparison to the applicants of the previous programme (2007-2013, have you seen newcomers submitting their projects? (if so, from which sector, country, role, organisation type, etc.)		X	X	
	• In comparison to the previous programme, do you see a greater thematic project diversity or applicant diversity (front-runners, private sector, etc.)?		X	X	
	• In comparison to the previous programme, do you see higher number of applicants in the projects (even if they are not newcomers)?		X	X	
	• Do you think that two-step approach has any relationship with the attraction of newcomers or applicants in general?	X	X	X	X
			X	X	

Topic	Question	Interviewee			
		MC	CP	JS	MA
	• Have you noticed an increase in the number of newcomers in the period between the first and fourth call? If not an increase, is there any other trend that you have noticed?				
Simplification	• Do you think that the two-step approach has simplified the application process for applicants? • If so, please explain how or why?	X x	X x	X x	X x
Clarity, quality and availability of tools and programme assistance	• Are the application tools provided by the programme suitable and useful for the applicants? In other words, do they meet the needs of applicants? • Should any of the tools be changed? If so why and how should this be done?	X X	X X	X X	X X
Result-orientation	• In comparison to the previous programme, has the new approach helped increase relevance and suitability of the projects and avoid low-quality projects? (ask how quality is defined by each interviewee, as their may be differences; Programme manual chapter 2 – paragraph 2.1 defines what makes a good project, going beyond the result-orientation focus)	X	X	X	X
	• In your opinion, are the projects more result-oriented than in the previous programme (single step)? If so, have you noticed an increased result orientation in the second step of the application process?	X	X	X	
	• In your opinion, does the result-orientation imply any side benefits? • Is the result-orientation accompanied by any negative side effects (e.g. programme indicator requirements difficult to fulfill, limited creativity of partnerships, less diverse projects, less unexpected ideas/activities etc.)?	X x	X x	X x	
	• Has the Step 1 helped the programme choose the most result-oriented projects? If so, how? • How has the Step 1 help choose the projects fitting the programme Specific Objectives best? If so, how?	X X	X X	X X	
	• Can you notice a change to project result-orientation, from step 1 to 2? If so why and how is this change visible?	X	X	X	

3 **Survey on applicants and beneficiaries**. Information on applicants and beneficiaries shall be collected through a specific survey which will addressed to all applicants and beneficiaries (partners and lead partners). Email contacts of the respondents will be provided by the JS during the month of December. The survey will be launched via web during the first week of January. The web survey will be closed the 27th of January. The following table illustrate the survey questionnaire. The survey will focus on call 1, 2, 3 and 4. The survey questionnaire is divided in four sections:

- (I) Introduction, collecting information on the applicants and beneficiaries,
- (II) Step 1-focused about effort needed, received support and information, clarity of the application form, project assessment
- (III) Step 2-focused about effort needed, received support and information, clarity of the application form, project assessment
- (IV) Two-step vs one-step approach and result orientation, comparing the two approaches and getting inputs on the result orientation.

Table 3: Template of the survey with applicants and beneficiaries

The questionnaire is **anonymous** and is directed to project partners (lead partner or other partners of successful projects) as well as unsuccessful applicants. The questionnaire has been elaborated to **assess the two-step application procedure** which has been applied in the first calls of the 2014-2020 North West Europe programme. Respondents' inputs will be used to improve and / or revise the tool, modifying the application procedure and increasing the performance of programme bodies where needed.

Section I - Introduction

This section is about your experiences

Question 1 Please indicate if you are: (**multiple answers are possible** if you submitted two applications in two different calls)

Lead partner of a project approved at step 1	
Partner of a project approved at step 1	
Lead partner of a project approved at step 2	
Partner of a project approved at step 2	
Lead Partner of a project rejected at step 1	
Partner of a project rejected at step 1	
Lead Partner of a project rejected at step 2	
Partner of a project rejected at step 2	
Applicant waiting for the assessment	
Other (please specify)	

Question 2 Please indicate under which call your project application (s) was submitted (**multiple answers are possible** if you submitted two applications in two different calls)

Call 1	
Call 2	
Call 3	
Call 4	

Question 3 Please indicate under which specific objective your project was submitted (**multiple answers are possible if you submitted more than one project**)

1 - To enhance innovation performance of enterprises throughout NWE regions	
2 - To facilitate the implementation of low-carbon, energy and climate protection strategies to reduce GHG emissions in NWE	
3 – To facilitate the uptake of low carbon technologies, products, processes and services in sectors with high energy saving potential, to reduce GHG emissions in NWE	
4 - To facilitate the implementation of transnational low-carbon solutions in transport systems to reduce GHG-emissions in NWE	
5 - To optimise (re)use of material and natural resources in NWE	

Question 4 Please indicate which type of partner you are (legal entity) (**select one answer**)

Local public authority	
Regional public authority	
National public authority	
Sectoral agency	
Infrastructure and (public) service provider	
Interest groups including NGOs	
Higher education and research	

Education / training centre and school	
Enterprise / SME	
Business support organisation	
EEIG, EGCT	
International organisation	

Question 5 Please indicate the country you come from (**select one answer**)

Ireland	
UK	
Belgium	
Luxembourg	
Germany	
Switzerland	
France	
The Netherlands	
Outside the North West Europe programme area	

Question 6 Were you a partner of North West Europe programme in previous programming period (2007-2013)? (**select one answer**)

Yes	
No	

Question 7 Have you ever applied to other EU programmes? (**multiple answers are possible**)

Programme	Yes	No
Other Interreg programmes		
Horizon 2020 (or 7th FP)		
COSME		
LIFE		
Regional/national mainstream programmes		
Other		

Question 7.1. *If a tick next to Other Interreg programmes:* Please indicate which programme you applied to

Question 8 Were you advised by a consultant at any stage of the project development or application process?

Yes	
No	

Question 8.1 *If yes to Q8:* Please indicate how substantial the consultant support was and what it consisted of.

Section II – Step 1 application

This section is about the assessment of the effort needed (time and man-days), the received support and the clarity of the application form of Step 1.

Effort needed for step 1

Question 9 How many man-days did the preparation of Step 1 application form take your organisation (from the conception of the project idea to submission of the application form at Step 1)?
(Please consider only the people/days spent on the project development in your institution/company, not other partners)

Number of man-days	

Question 10 How long did the preparation of the Step 1 project take, as a total? (**select one answer**)

1-4 weeks	4-8 weeks	8-32 weeks	More than 32 weeks

Question 11 From your point of view, is the step 1 application procedure ….? (**select one answer**)

More time-consuming than expected	Less time-consuming than expected	As time-consuming as expected	Don't know

Received support and information in Step 1 of the application process

Question 12 How do you evaluate **the events** put in place by the programme and Member States to attract project ideas and to support the application in Step 1 (i.e. infodays, workshops, ideas labs)? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful	Don't know

Question 13 How do you evaluate the possibility to upload project ideas on the **programme website** to find project partners? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful	Don't know

Question 14 How do you evaluate the information provided in the **programme manual**? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful	Don't know

Question 15 Would you like to introduce any changes to the support provided by the Programme to the applicants (programme manual, events and the website)?

Question 14 Were you in contact with the Contact Points in the course of the preparation of the application form for Step 1? (**select one answer**)

Yes	
No	

If Q14 YES, **Question 14.1** How often were you in touch with the Contact Points?

Very often	
Often	
Rarely	

If Q14 YES, **Question 14.2** How do you evaluate the support provided by the Contact Points during the development of project ideas? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful

Question 14.3 Would you like to introduce any changes to the support provided by the Contact Points at Step 1?

Question 15 Were you in contact with the Joint Secretariat during the preparation of the application form for Step 1? (**select one answer**)

Yes	
No	

If Q15 YES, **Question 15.1** How often were you in touch with the Joint Secretariat?

Very often	
Often	
Rarely	

If Q14 YES, **Question 15.2** How do you evaluate the support provided by the Joint Secretariat during the development of project ideas? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful

Question 15.3 Would you like to introduce any changes to the support provided by the Joint Secretariat at Step 1?

Question 16: Was the division of roles between the Contact Points and the Joint Secretariat clear to you as an applicant of the step 1?

(1) Very clear	(2) Somewhat clear	(3) Not very clear	(4) Not at all clear	Don't know

Clarity of the step 1 application form

Question 17 How do you evaluate the process of filling in the **application form** at **Step 1**? (**select one answer for each row**)

Section	Very easy	Quite easy	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	I don't know *(for project partners who are not involved in bid writing)*
Section A - Indicative budget					
Section B - Partnership					
Section C - Project relevance (Identification of specific challenges, added value of cooperation, etc…)					
Section C - Definition of project objective					
Section C - Project's baseline					
Section C – Quantification of project results					
Section C – Description of project result					

Question 17.1 In case of difficulties encountered, please explain why you found certain parts of the Step 1 application form more challenging than others.

Project assessment

Question 18 In your view, is the outcome of the Step 1 project assessment and selection process sufficiently explained to applicants? (**select one answer**)

Very clearly explained	Rather clearly explained	Partially explained	Very badly explained	Don't know

Question 18.1 Would you like to propose changes to the notification letter provided to the applicants?

Question 19 In your view, how extensive were the changes recommended by the programme after the step 1 approval? (**select one answer**)

A strong change of the project proposal was required	A partial change of the project proposal was required	Only details of the project proposal were required to be changed	No changes of the project proposal were required	Don't know

Section III – Step 2 application

This section is about the assessment of the effort needed (time and man-days), the received support, the clarity of the application form of Step 2 and of the communication on the project assessment.

Effort needed for step 2 submission

Question 20 How many man-days did the preparation for Step 2 take you in practice (from notification of the Monitoring Committee for Step 1 to the submission of the full application form for Step 2)?
(Please consider only the man-days of staff working for your institution/company)

Number of man-days	

Question 21 How long did the preparation of the entire Step 2 application form take, as a total? (**select one answer**)

1-4 weeks	4-8 weeks	8-32 weeks	More than 32 weeks

Question 22: Was the time between the notification of the Monitoring Committee at Step 1 and the Step 2 submission deadline sufficient?

Too long	
Sufficient	
Too short	
Much too short	

Question 23 From your point of view, the step 2 application procedure is ….? (**select one answer**)

More time-consuming than expected	Less time-consuming than expected	As time-consuming as expected	Don't know

Received support for step 2 submission

Question 24 How do you evaluate **the events** put in place by the programme to support the application in Step 2 (i.e. infodays, workshops)? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful	Don't know

Question 25 For what concerns the elaboration of the full application form for Step 2, how do you evaluate the information provided in the **programme manual**? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful	Don't know

Question 25.1 Would you like to introduce any changes to the programme events or manual?

Question 26 Were you in contact with the Contact Points in the course of preparation of the application form for Step 2? (**select one answer**)

Yes	
No	

If Q26 YES, **Question 26.1** How often were you in touch with the Contact Points in the course of the Step 2 preparation?

Very often	
Often	
Rarely	

If Q26 YES, **Question 26.2** How do you evaluate the support provided by the Contact Points during the development of the Step 2 application form? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful

Question 26.3 Would you like to introduce any changes to the support provided by the Contact Points at Step 2?

Question 27 Were you in contact with the Joint Secretariat in the course of preparation of the application form for Step 2? (**select one answer**)

Yes	
No	

If Q27 YES, **Question 28** How often were you in touch with the Joint Secretariat?

Very often	
Often	
Rarely	

If Q27 YES, **Question 28.1** How do you evaluate the support provided by the Joint Secretariat in the development of the Step 2 application form? (**select one answer**)

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful

If Q27 YES **Question 28.2** Would you like to introduce any changes to the support provided by the Joint Secretariat at Step 2?

Question 29: Was the division of roles between the Contact Points and the Joint Secretariat clear to you as an applicant of the Step 2?

(1) Very clear	(2) Somewhat clear	(3) Not very clear	(4) Not at all clear	Don't know

Clarity of the step 2 application form

Question 30 How do you evaluate the process of fiiling in the application form for Step 2? (**select one answer for each row**)

Section	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Quite easy	Very easy	**I don't know** *(for project partners that were not involved in bid writing)*
Section A - Project main outputs					
Section A – Workplan overview					
Section A – Project partners overview					
Section B – Partnership					
Section C - Project relevance					
Section C – Cooperation intensity					
Section C - Project objective and sub-objective					
Section C - Project's baseline and quantification of project results					
Section C – Description of project result					
Section C – Policy context fitness					
Section C – Horizontal principles					
Section C – Project risks					
Section D – Workplan and packages					
Section E and F - Project Budget					

Question 30.1 In case of difficulties encountered, please explain why you found certain parts of the Step 2 application form more challenging than others.

Project assessment

Question 31 In your view, is the outcome of the Step 2 project assessment and selection process sufficiently explained to applicants? (**select one answer**)

Very badly explained	Partially explained	Rather clearly explained	Very clearly explained	Don't know

Question 31.1 Please provide your changes you would like to make to the notification letter provided to the applicants

Question 32 In your view, how extensive were the technical requirements that the partnership needed to fulfill after the Step 2 approval? (**select one answer, only for successful applicants**)

A strong change of the project proposal is required	A partial change of the project proposal is required	Only details of the project proposal are required to be changed	No changes of the project proposal are required	Don't know

Section IV – Two-step vs one-step approach and result orientation

Question 33 In your view, the full- application procedure (including Step 1 and Step 2) is ….? (**select one answer**)

More time-consuming than expected	Less time-consuming than expected	As time-consuming as expected	I don't have an opinion

Question 34 Which application procedure do you prefer? (**select one answer**)

(1) I prefer a pre-selection step before the submission of the full application form (two-step approach)	
(2) I prefer a direct submission of the full application (single-step)	
(3) I don't see a major difference between the single step and a two-step approach	
(4) I would prefer a different approach for application process	
(5) I don't have an opinion	

Question **34.1** Please explain why this is your preference for the application procedure **(to any answer of question 34)**

Question 35 When compared to the previous programme (Interreg IVB NWE 2007-2013 applying a single-step approach), the two-step application process of the current North-West Europe programme, is (**select one answer – only for applicants that applied to the IVB programme – see question 7**):

(1) More simple and clear	
(2) Less simple and clear	
(3) Equally simple and clear	
(4) In some aspects, more simple and clear, in some others less	
(5) I don't have an opinion	

Question 35.1: Please explain the reasons why you think the application process is more/less/equally simple and clear or why you think some aspects are more clear/simple than others.

Question 36 Compared to the previous programme (Interreg IVB NWE 2007-2013, applying a single-step approach), the two-step application process of the North-West Europe is (**select one answer- answer– only for applicants that applied to the IVB programme – see question 7**):

(1) Faster (it takes less time)	
(2) Slower (it takes more time)	
(3) Equally long (it takes the same amount of time)	
(4) In some aspects faster, slower in others	
(5) I don't have an opinion	

Question 36.1: Please explain the reasons why you think that the two-step application process is faster/slower/equally long or faster in some aspects and slower in others.

Question 37: When compared to the single-step procedure, the two-step application procedure…(**select one answer**):

(1) Facilitates the formulation of a result-oriented project	
(2) Does not facilitate the formulation a result-oriented project	
(3) Makes no difference to the result-orientation of the project	
(4) I don't have an opinion	

Question 37.1: Please explain the reasons why you think that the two-step procedure facilitates/does not facilitate/makes no difference to the result orientation.

Question 38: As far as the result of my project (common to all partners) is concerned, the partnership:

Formulated it before the project activities and individual partner contibutions were defined	
Formulated it after the project activities and individual partner contributions were defined	
Formulated the partner contributions, project activities and the project result at the same time	
I don't know	

Question 39 How useful do you think it is to start the application process with a result common to all partners at Step 1 and define the activities and contributions of each partner afterwards, at Step 2 (**select one answer**)?

(1) Very useful	(2) Somewhat useful	(3) Not very useful	(4) Not at all useful	Don't know

Question 40 Are you and your partners used to working with programme performance indicators (**select one answer**)?

(1) Yes	(2) No	(3) To a limited extent	(4) I don't know

Question 41 In your opinion, how much did your project change between the initial concept and the approved Step 2 application? (**select one answer**)?

It has changed significantly	It has changed partially	Only some details changed	The project has not changed at all	Don't know

Question 42: In case of significant changes, please explain why they were necessary.

The work on task 1 will be carried out between November 2016 and March 2017. The planning of the task can be summarised as follows:

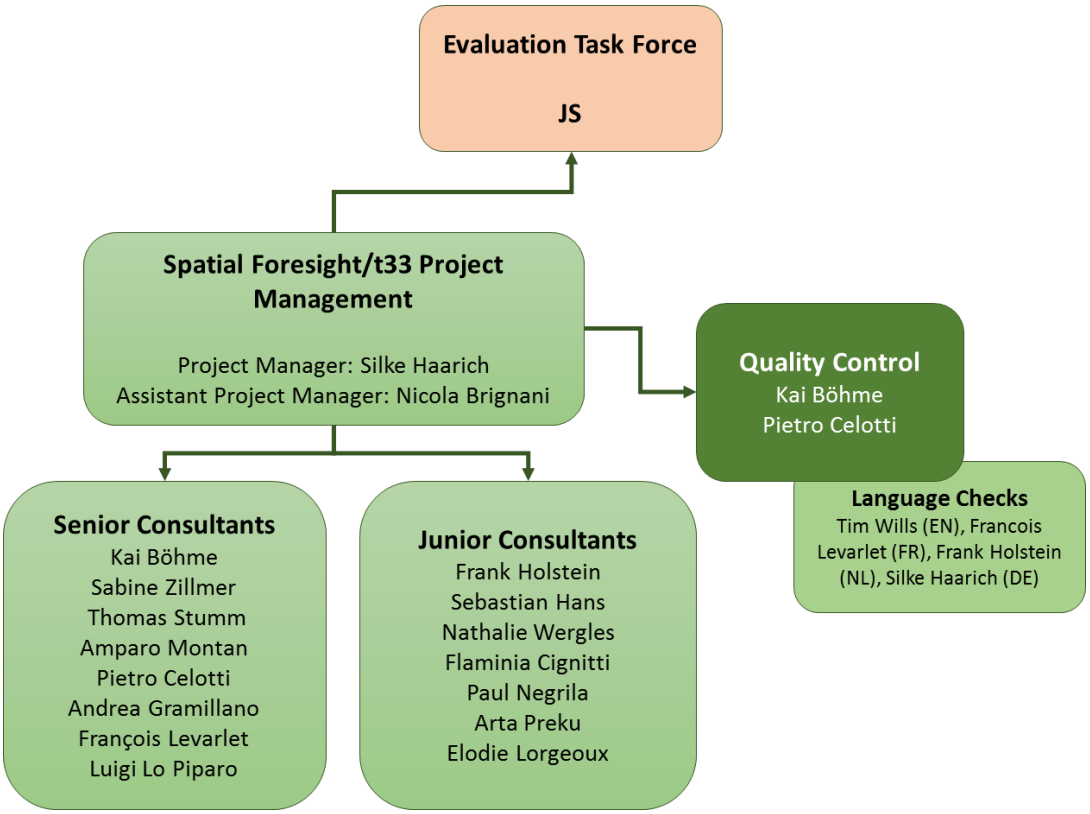
Task 1:	**Evaluation of the two-step approach**		
Output:	Inception Report, Draft Final and Final Evaluation report on the two-step approach		
Input:	66 working days		
Sub-tasks	**Main partners**	**Working days**	**Timing (month)**
1. Preparation and Inception	t33	6	11-12/16
2. Data Collection	t33, Spatial Foresight	16	12/16-01/17

3. Data Analysis	t33	9	02/17
6. Recommendations, reporting and feedback	t33, Spatial Foresight	10	03/17
7. Project Management	t33, Spatial Foresight	10	On-going

3 Team and Organisation

The section illustrates the role and responsibilities of each member of the evaluation team, as well as the overall organisation of tasks and team members.

Figure 4: Team Organisation



As illustrated by the figure above, the team is led by **project manager Dr. Silke Haarich** (Spatial Foresight). Silke will be the main contact for the Joint Secretariat and the Evaluation Task Force and will organise and coordinate the execution of all evaluation tasks. She will ensure a full methodological coordination thanks to her expertise in both qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluation and a deep knowledge of Interreg Programmes, evaluation of EU Cohesion Policy and the NWE programme territory. Silke will be supported by the **assistant project manager Nicola Brignani** (t33). Nicola will actively contribute to the coordination and execution of all evaluation tasks and will also support Silke Haarich in the coordination of the experts and in the overall project management.

Every member of the team has been selected because of his or her specific experience and/or special qualities related to specific functions to be carried out in the course of this work. The below table provides a quick overview on the different roles each team member takes in the single tasks. The team will be assigned to the specific evaluation tasks in accordance to the specific workload and methodological

needs of each task. A priori, we propose the following team structure for the upcoming tasks, offering the possibility to change the division of responsibilities if needed.

Staff involved	Task 1
Project Management	Silke Haarich
Co-Project Management	Nicola Brignani
Methodological Lead	Andrea Gramillano
Methodological co-lead	Sabine Zillmer
Senior Consultants	Pietro Celotti, François Levarlet, Silke Haarich, Nicola Brignani, Amparo Montan
Junior Consultants	Frank Holstein, Sebastian Hans, Nathalie Wergles , Flaminia Cignitti, Paul Negrila, Arta Preku, Elodie Lorgeoux
NWE and Interreg Experts	Thomas Stumm, Luigi Lo Piparo
Quality control and language check	Kai Böhme, Tim Wills

There will be a **quality control team** in charge of the quality control procedures composed by Dr. Kai Böhme and Pietro Celotti.

In order to ensure an appropriate level of linguistic quality, there will be a specific **sub-team responsible for the linguistic check**. The team is composed by four mother tongue experts, Tim Wills (English), François Levarlet (French), Silke Haarich (German) and Frank Holstein (Dutch). In general terms, English will be the working language of the evaluation team and the main deliverables (e.g. evaluation reports of Task 1) will be produced in English. However, the executive summary of the final evaluation reports will be provided in the languages of the programme. Ad-hoc tools of analysis (e.g. case study fiches, questionnaire surveys, presentations) will be produced in the languages of the interview partner in order to facilitate his/her participation. Tim Wills, as native speaker, will be the English reviewer and one of the English experts.

Furthermore, the team will count with two experts in the field of territorial cooperation and with specific experience and insight knowledge from the NWE programme: **Dr. Thomas Stumm** and **Luigi Lo Piparo**. They will support the evaluation work with expert knowledge and complementing the data gathering and analytical work, in particular during task 1 with regard to Interreg procedures and implementation evaluation.

4 Time table

The work plan presents a tentative schedule for the implementation of the Interreg NWE task 1 Evaluation 'Two-Step Approach'.

	December				January				February				March	
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2
Inception report	■													
Desk review	■	■	■	■										
Scheduling of the interviews			■	■										
Interviews					■	■	■	■						
Set up of the web survey			■	■										
Web survey					■	■	■	■						
Analysis of data									■	■				
Draft final report to JS										■				
Draft final report to MC													■	
Focus group with ETF											■			
Focus group with beneficiaries													■	
Presentation of the final report to the MC														■