Evaluation Plan
NWE Programme 2014-2020

I. Introduction and legal requirements

The present evaluation plan has been developed according to the provisions of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 (CPR, articles 50, 54, 56 and 114), Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013 (ETC Reg., article 14) as well as the guidance documents of the European Commission on monitoring and evaluation and evaluation plans.

The plan covers the Interreg NWE Programme specifically and only rather than all the programmes delivered under the auspices of the Managing Authority, in charge of the cross-border Interreg 2 Seas, Interreg Europe as well as the Urban Innovative Actions Programmes. No integrated approach could be applied at the Managing Authority level due to different thematic and geographic scopes of these programmes.

The evaluation plan sets out the strategy for the entire implementation period of the NWE programme, taking into account the lessons learned from evaluations made in the 2007-2013 period. In particular, the following reports produced by the sub-contractor SQW will be taken into consideration:

- The mid-term evaluation of the IVB NWE programme, due to its usefulness in assessing the efficiency of funding in 2020
- The IVB NWE capitalization report produced in 2015/2016

The evaluation plan is meant to:

1. Facilitate informed programme management and policy decisions
2. Support implementation of the programme and its result orientation
3. Set out the framework to properly plan and implement quality programme evaluations with the aim to ensure the programme's effectiveness, efficiency and impact
4. Secure a follow-up for evaluation findings and allow the Member States the flexibility to adjust the programme in line with these

The articles 56.3 and 54.1 of the Common Provision Regulation 1303/2013 require that the Programme Managing Authority undertakes at least one impact evaluation. This means that at least once in the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how

support from the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds has contributed to the objectives for each Priority Axis to fulfill the requirements 3 and 4 above and helped deliver "the targets under the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and (…) in relation to GDP and unemployment in the programme area concerned (…)". All performed evaluations shall be examined by the Monitoring Committee and sent to the European Commission.

In conclusion, the purpose of the impact evaluations is to assess:

- How the ERDF contributed to the objectives of each Priority Axis
- If and how the programme is contributing to the targets of the EU 2020 objectives
- If and how the programme is contributing to the GDP and (reduction of) unemployment
- If and how the programme contributes to Territorial Cohesion (reduction of disparities, territorial integration, boosting sense of belonging, solidarity)

Progress in the implementation of the evaluation plan as well as the outcomes of the evaluation activities will be reported in the Annual Implementation Report (AIR) for the years 2019 and 2023. By 31 December 2022, the Managing Authority of the programme will also submit to the EC a report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programming period.

The planned evaluations are set out in the present paper, although new evaluation needs might occur in the course of the programme. Therefore, the evaluation plan will regularly be reviewed by the Monitoring Committee and, depending on the needs, might require adjustments.

II. Elements of the evaluation plan

The Evaluation Plan consists of two main elements:

II.1. Objectives, coverage and coordination

The purpose of the plan is multifold. Apart from the provision of the framework for evaluations to be carried out in the course of the Programme in line with the regular requirements presented in section 1 above, the plan aims to:

- Secure substantial input for the NWE Annual Implementation Reports submitted to the European Commission

- Structure all necessary data that will be collected from the start of the Programme from its beneficiaries (in line with the Art. 56.2 CPR) in order to

enable its analysis, help the Programme decide where the evaluation efforts should be concentrating and how the evaluation process should be performed

- Provide qualitative information for the data collected by the projects and Programme in the course of monitoring (output indicators) as well as substantial information concerning the NWE progress in achieving its results and milestones/ target values for the result indicators

II.2. Evaluation framework

This part encompasses the function, process, data availability, partners, source of expertise, training, follow-up and communication, timetable, budget as well as quality management of the evaluation framework. The evaluation function is covered in section I and II.1 above looking into the purpose of the process.

II.2.1. Evaluation process

As the financial resources allocated to the Programme are fairly low in comparison of the territorial needs and the factors for NWE success are multiple, the Programme proposes a qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) approach to the evaluation taking into account all the factors contributing to the achievement of Programme targets.

a) Two-step evaluation

In addition to the 2 evaluations mentioned below (1 implementation and the final impact evaluation), the Programme will carry out an evaluation of the **switch the Programme has made between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, from a single step to the two-step application process**. The process was changed due to the need to simplify the application procedure and introduce result orientation of projects.

The evaluation should take into consideration the recommendations provided in the IVB North West Europe evaluation delivered in the previous programming period by the sub-contractor SQW. These were:

- Supporting the project development on a continuous basis prior to submission
- Gaining a better understanding of the project pipeline created by the programme, knowing that bad projects will produce poor results
- Avoiding last minute and low quality projects
- Arranging more calls at the beginning of the programme or more targeted calls. This would allow more funding allocated at the beginning of the programme
- Encouraging projects to wait till the next call if they are not ready to submit good quality bids

- Reduce the possibility to apply several times (increasing quality of and decreasing the number of applications received)
- Setting a threshold for the project assessment score, below which the projects would not be further assessed (on the most important selection criteria)
- Removing the referred back status and the conditional approval as well as the need for project negotiations after the approval.

The goal of the two-step evaluation will be to verify whether the process has served its purpose, whether it is easier for applicants (alleviated administrative burden) and led to improved result orientation of projects. The timing and rhythm of calls should also be checked.

The initially defined objectives of such an application process were to increase the efficiency of the NWE funding and to:

- Improve the steering of the project development process from start to finish, resulting in a higher efficiency of the funding of the programme in the application process (administrative and financial)
- Simplify the application procedure, i.e. to offer a slim first step form and thus to decrease work for applicants; Reduce the efforts of the beneficiaries put into low quality/rejected projects
- Attract more newcomers
- Facilitate the decisions concerning the number of required calls and the attribution/contracting of funding and consequently the required capacity (TA capacity allocated over a long period)

In terms of the effectiveness of the funding, the evaluation will define if the programme has reached its objectives in terms of

- Improved result orientation of projects, increasing their quality
- Filtered project ideas at the first step and choose the most suitable ones for the step 2 of the application process
- Adapted types of projects which are being developed to what the programme wants to support
- A pipeline of mature projects that fit the SOs

The two-step approach chosen by the programme involved:

- A medium length first phase application form, which would provide enough content for the MC to make decisions (a strategic and general idea of the project, core partnership, the transnational approach, main objectives, actions and results to be achieved in line with the OP as well as a preliminary budget)
- Step 2 clarifying the details and operational aspects, including the detailed partnership, actions and investments/pilots)

- Involvement of both CPs and JS officers, with clear guidance and early steering. A clear separation of tasks between the CPs and the JS is required.

The evaluation involves the analysis of the:

- Stages of project development (including the separation of tasks between the national Contact Points of the Programme and the JS, in step 1 and step 2)
- Tools provided by the Programme to applicants to submit their proposals
- Assessment procedure performed by the Joint Secretariat and Member States
- Decision-making process regarding project selection (Monitoring Committee)
- Approach to the step 1 of the application process, whether it has served as a filter for the selection of result-oriented projects or their fit to the Operational Programme

The evaluation will ensure the involvement of the applicants in the discussions in order for the programme to appraise their workload and satisfaction levels in the process.

The main aim of such an evaluation is to facilitate the Monitoring Committee decisions on the effectiveness of the two-step process, if it has served its purpose and whether it should be changed to a single step approach.

The data required for the part of the evaluation that is dedicated to the effectiveness of the Programme will be generated from the programme monitoring system and provided to the sub-contractors. Should further quantitative or qualitative information be required, it will be the sub-contractor's responsibility to obtain it via surveys and interviews. An analysis of data and evidence collected from existing sources of information may also be required. As far as the efficiency part of the evaluation is concerned, the sub-contractors will also need to obtain the necessary quantitative and/or qualitative information via surveys and interviews.

This evaluation will be delineated from the evaluation focusing on the implementation of the communication strategy of the Programme.

The cost of the two-step approach evaluation is roughly estimated for 40,000 EUR on the basis of 400h and 100EUR per consultant hour (in line with the costings of the remaining evaluations and based on the assumption that the initial evaluation will require half of the time envisaged for the implementation evaluations).

Types of evaluation questions to the applicants:

- How do the applicants assess their workload (in particular those who are not successful in step 1)?
- How do applicants evaluate the time that the entire application procedure takes (step 1 and 2)?
- Are the step 1 and step 2 requirements clear to applicants?
- Is the support provided to the applicants suitable at each step of the procedure?

- To which extend are the project assessment criteria and procedures as well as selection process sound, transparent and fair, aiming at high quality projects to be funded?
- Are the results of project assessment and selection (be it approval or rejection) sufficiently explained to applicants?

Types of evaluation questions to the programme authorities (Member States, Contact Points and Joint Secretariat):

- How do the programme authorities assess the quality of bids submitted in the two-step application procedure?
- Is the result-orientation sufficiently well filtered at step1 of the application process?
- To which extend are the project assessment criteria and procedures, as well as the selection process sound, transparent and fair, aiming at high quality projects to be funded?
- Is the support provided to the applicants sufficient at each step of the procedure, to ensure result orientation of projects? If not, how could it be improved?
- In the view of the programme authorities, has the relevance and suitability of projects changed in the two-step approach in comparison to the projects submitted in single step?
- In the view of the programme authorities, is the level of support provided in the two-step approach comparable to the one of the single step?
- How do the programme bodies evaluate their workload related to project assessment in the two-step approach in comparison to a single step?
- Is the project demand aligned with the service supply of the Contact Points?

b) An implementation/operational evaluation

As the projects of the NWE first call will not be completed before the end of 2018, no results will be available by 2019. For this reason and at this early stage of Programme implementation, it will be more useful to perform a qualitative **implementation evaluation in 2018 (also called an operational evaluation),** in order to verify the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme funding at that stage of implementation. Such an evaluation will therefore be two-fold and oriented towards Programme implementation and the consistency of the internal Programme processes in order to deliver results and the Europe 2020 objectives.
The evaluation will check the effectiveness of funding by assessing:

- Relevance and suitability of the approved project pipeline towards the Programme Specific Objectives and their target groups

- Contribution of the results expected from the approved projects towards the Programme results and the expected contribution to the change measured by the result indicators. Should the outcome prove that the result indicators are not achievable, the reasons for it should be provided.

- The evaluation will help the Programme assess the degree to which the planned results, grasped by the result indicators, can be achieved by 2022

- Contribution that the implemented projects are likely to make towards the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

- Identification of additional benefits brought by the programme to NWE

- Identification of additional result indicators suitable to measure the change and the project contribution to the objectives of the programme

- Identification of areas where alignment is required between the project demand and the CP work

As far as the efficiency of funding is concerned, the evaluation will check

- Whether the recommendations of the 2016 evaluation concerning the two-step approach have been implemented and whether this process brought the desired outcome, hence demonstrating the Programme's commitment to continuous process improvement

- The programme approval rates of calls to date and the facilitation of the project application process and the project achievement profile

- How the use of resources both financial and administrative contributes to the delivery of objectives, reduction of disparities and territorial cohesion (country specific annual analyses and our projects' contribution to it should be consulted as well as the Eurostat data

- Additional indicators that could be helpful for projects to understand the project contribution to the desired change and the objectives of the Programme

- Verify the project development, assessment and selection procedures in order to ensure that the thematic implementation and spending pace are suitable for the Programme to deliver its targets in terms of output indicators and spending profile per Priority Axis (hence Specific Objectives of the Programme)

This will be done, in particular, through the analysis of projects approved to date.

The evaluation findings will:

- Identify the areas of strength and weakness in terms of Programme delivery to avoid underachievement, so that additional efforts can be taken to ensure that NWE reaches its target groups and meets its objectives

- Assess the Programme approval rates of calls to date and the facilitation of the project application process and project the Programme achievement profile

- Define the extent to which NWE has reached and engaged its target groups as well as met its objectives

- Provide possible adjustments to the project development, selection and assessment procedures to ensure the result orientation of the programme

- Provide recommendations with improvements for the Programme, elaborated jointly with the Evaluation Task Force (please see the section II.2.3. "Involvement of partners" below).

- Feed the Monitoring Committee discussions and facilitate decisions concerning potential changes in Programme approaches to project development, assessment and selection to deliver the programme results and result indicators

- Ensure that the Programme is on the right track in terms the project selection process, all in order to deliver the results expected by the time the full impact evaluation is performed in 2022

- Provide a territorial analysis from the data obtained from publicly available sources and the reasons for the phenomena stemming from data as well as the relation to the aim of territorial cohesion

This evaluation will be based on the desk research analysis of available data and surveys of the Programme Authorities, the main national and regional stakeholders as well as beneficiaries. The data will be generated from the programme monitoring system and will be provided to the sub-contractors. It will be completed by the sub-contractors with quantitative and/or qualitative information required and obtained via surveys and interviews.

A clear report detailing how the programme implementation contributes to the objectives of the programme as well as the reduction of disparities, as well as the territorial cohesion in NWE will be produced as an outcome, including recommendations for improvement.

Types of evaluation questions to the applicants:

- How do the applicants assess the support provided by the programme in the project development?
- How do applicants evaluate the time that the entire application procedure takes?
- Are the application requirements sufficiently clear? In particular, is the result orientation sufficiently well explained?
- Is the support provided to the applicants sufficient at each step of the procedure?
- Are the project assessment criteria and procedures as well as selection process sound, transparent and fair, aiming at high quality projects to be funded?
- Are the results of project assessment and selection (be it approval or rejection) sufficiently explained to applicants?

Types of evaluation to the beneficiaries:

- How do beneficiaries assess the support provided by the programme in project implementation?
- How do the beneficiaries evaluate the project monitoring process? Is it efficient and effective for them?
- Has the programme monitoring process and tools enabled reporting on the result orientation of projects?

Types of evaluation questions to programme authorities (Member States, Contact Points, Joint Secretariat):

- Has the implementation of the recommendations provided by the 2016 two-step evaluation brought the desired outcome (e.g. simplification of application procedures and stronger result-orientation of projects)?
- Has the policy of prevention introduced by the programme had an impact on project quality and implementation? Has it led to the desired strong result-orientation of projects?
- Is the project monitoring process (and related tools such as the programme indicators) of project implementation efficient (e.g. allowing effective verification of project progress and achievements, payment of beneficiaries in adequate time, reducing financial errors and de-commitment risks)?
- Is the project monitoring process effective in grasping the project results and project contribution to the Specific Objectives of the Programme?

- Does the programme have an effective electronic monitoring system which allows a complete documentation of relevant data? Are there bottlenecks or areas for improvement?
- Are there any additional benefits of the programme on its territory, apart from those defined as expected results in the Cooperation Programme?
- Are there any additional result indicators suitable for the programme to measure the change it brought on the territory?

c) Theory-based impact evaluation

NWE will undertake a **theory-based impact evaluation in 2022**. The main objective of the evaluation is to identify the mechanisms contributing to the change on the territory of the programme (the results of the Programme Priority Axes being rooted in these and grasped in the result indicators). This will be done:

- Following all the steps of the Programme intervention logic, identifying how an impact was achieved on the territory and the mechanisms that brought the change on the territory
- By answering the questions why and how the beneficiaries funded through NWE projects have worked together to produce an impact on the Programme territory (e.g. who is better off, what has improved on the territory)
- By identifying the additional benefits that the funded projects brought to the NWE territory (such as those related to the territorial, cooperation, capacity building impacts, improved governance)
- By demonstrating the added value of the programme on its territory via the analysis of the result indicators, also taking into account the output indicators

This evaluation will be based on the analysis of available data. The data will be generated from the programme monitoring system and will be provided to the sub-contractors. It will be completed by the sub-contractors with quantitative and/or qualitative information required and obtained via surveys and interviews.

The evaluation will produce a final report as well as individual case studies, 10 in total (2 per Specific Objective).

The evaluation will cover all three Programme Priority Axes (and hence all five Specific Objectives) in parallel, to a relatively similar extent.

- The Programme considers a theory based impact evaluation as most suitable due to the following reasons: Such a method allows the Programme to assess whether its intervention logic helped address and contributed to problem solving on the NWE territory

- It will help the Programme authorities understand why the Programme contributed to a change on its territory, how the change came about and what the programme's role in this process was
- It will facilitate the understanding whether the theoretically expected changes occurred as envisaged, what the influence of other external factors was and to which extend the Programme contributed to its results
- It can make very meaningful causal interferences to evaluate impact

The counter-factual evaluation methods are not recommended because of the heterogeneity of the programme beneficiaries, the wider context of the programme and the large population it covers. The counter-factual evaluations are rarely performed due the need for large sampling as well as homogeneity of data.

Evaluation questions

The final evaluation questions will be formulated by the Evaluation Task Force for the Terms of Reference. The questions will be closely linked to the Programme intervention logic and result indicators in order to generate data. The NWE Programme is constructed in a way that the projects and hence beneficiaries report on the output indicators and not on the result indicators. The beneficiaries are not requested to directly contribute to the result indicators, but the Programme results. The results relate to the main target group of each NWE Specific Objective.

Examples of questions for the impact evaluation of the Programme are presented below:

Specific Objective 1: To enhance innovation performance of enterprises throughout NWE regions
Result: *Increased SME innovation levels*
Result indicator: *Degree of SME involvement in collaboration with other institutions (including R&D)*

Q1: Has the programme acted as an innovation enabler for enterprises (including social enterprises)? If so, how has this been achieved?
Q2: Has the programme acted as an innovation enabler for other institutions? If so, how has this been achieved?
Q2: Has the programme facilitated support for testing and development phases for technologies, products, processes or services? If so, how has this been achieved?
Q3: Has the programme helped the beneficiaries access the mix of actors bringing the developed/tested products closer to the market? If so, how has this been achieved?
Q4: Has the programme contributed to a better exploitation of research outcomes for the development/testing of new technologies/products/processes /services? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q5: Has the programme contributed to the collaboration between the SMEs and other institutions (including R&D)? If so, how has this been achieved?

Specific Objective 2: To facilitate the implementation of low-carbon, energy and climate protection strategies to reduce GHG emissions in NWE

Result: *Increased capacity level of the public authorities in NWE in implementing low-carbon measures effectively*

Result indicator: *Effectiveness of the NWE public organisations in the implementation of low-carbon strategies*

Q6: Has the Programme contributed to increased energy efficiency in the domestic and non-domestic sector? If so, how has that been achieved?

Q7: Has the programme contributed to the acceleration the use of energy efficiency infrastructure on the NWE territory? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q8: Has the Programme contributed to the public acceptance of the low-carbon, energy and climate protection strategies of the NWE regions? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q9: How else has the programme contributed to enable the public sector in NWE to implement their low-carbon strategies?

Specific Objective 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

Result: *Removed barriers to the adoption of and improved conditions for low carbon technology deployment*

Result indicator: *Status of conditions for low carbon technology deployment*

Q10: Has the programme contributed to improvements in the market penetration for the low carbon technologies? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q11: Has the Programme contributed to the engagement of consumers to better understand their needs and to transform the market for low carbon technologies? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q12: Has the Programme contributed to the increase in share of renewable energies in the sectors with high energy saving potential? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q13: Has the Programme contributed to an increase in the match between the supply and demand for the tested technologies/products/processes/services of the private sector? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q14: Has the cooperation beyond borders contributed to an acceleration of the deployment process of small infrastructure leading to GHG emission reduction? If so, how has this been achieved?

Specific Objective 4: To facilitate the implementation of transnational low-carbon solutions in transport systems, to reduce GHG emissions in NWE

Result: *Improved conception and coordination of low carbon transport and mobility solutions by the sector*

Result indicator: *Status of competences of the transport sector in the use of low carbon solutions in the transport systems*

Q15: Has the Programme contributed to the shift from road transport to more environmentally friendly modes, for both passenger and freight transport? If so, how has that been achieved?

Q16: Has the programme contributed to improved conception or coordination of low carbon transport and mobility solutions in NWE? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q17: Has the programme helped enable the actors of the value chain of the sector to maximise the potential of heterogeneity of the NWE public-private partners? If so, how has this been achieved?

Specific Objective 5: To optimise re(use) of material and natural resources in NWE

Result: *Accelerated transition of the NWE economy to a circular model (3Rs – Reduce, Re-use, Recycle) by enabling spill-over effects of eco-innovation in the resource intensive industry*

Result indicator: *Status of competences in the resource intensive sectors in NWE for eco-innovation diffusion*

Q18: Has the new programme facilitated the reduction of natural resources on its territory? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q19: Has the Programme helped the development and testing phases of solutions that are less material intensive than those currently on the market? If so, how has this been achieved?

Q20: Has the programme facilitated the application of environmental management requirements in the resource intensive sectors in NWE? If so, has it helped increase their level of environmental awareness and management capability? If so how has this been achieved?

Evaluation questions for additional impacts – to be evaluated across all priorities and SOs:

Q21: Has the programme contributed to an increased coordination of national and transnational agendas? Has the programme contributed to stronger alignment of national and transnational priorities in political processes? If so, how has this been achieved (e.g. though the development and implementation of transnational strategies and work plans)

Q22: Has the programme contributed to an increased use of social, political or technical innovation across all Specific Objectives? If so, how has this been achieved (e.g. though improved conditions – access to networks for cooperation between research institutions and enterprises)?
Q23: Has the programme contributed to an increased capacity of decision makers to solving challenges? If so, how has this been achieved (e.g. through the development of new solutions, methods, technologies adapted to the needs of decision makers)?
Q24: Has the programme contributed to the application of more efficient and effective processes and work flows in both public and private sector? If so, how has this been achieved (e.g. through the development of more environmentally friendly processes, standardised processes, etc.)
Q25: Has the programme contributed to placing topics higher on the political agenda and to the increased awareness of topics among decision makers (on regional, national, European level)? If so, how has this been achieved? Has this resulted in any changes to laws and regulations?
Q26: Has the programme contributed to making regions more attractive as a result of economic, ecological, social or structural improvements? If so, how has this been achieved (e.g. though the improvement of planning and steering processes or pilot implementation)?
Q27: Has the programme contributed to a greater territorial cohesion in the NWE area? If so, how has this been achieved?

The horizontal principles

In terms of horizontal principles, the main impact the Programme can have a contribution to a behavioural change in terms of equality between men and women as well as inclusion and diversity and the approach to sustainability.

II.2.2. Data availability - output indicators

The output indicator data will be collected systematically via the Programme eMS (in line with art. 54 (2)) which significantly decreases the costs of collecting them retrospectively and prevents a situation when the evaluator needs to reconstruct the data. The data will be collected automatically by the eMS system per Specific Objective and hence Priority Axis.

In order to ensure the quality and quantitative accuracy of output indicator data in the eMS, the following approach will be taken in project data generation and monitoring:

- The output data provided by the beneficiaries in the Application Forms will systematically be checked by the JS officer at the moment of project development

to ensure the match with the Programme output indicators (both common and Programme-specific ones)

- Should any errors occur (noted at the moment of project submission to the Programme and spotted in the assessment process), the JS officers will request for the data to be corrected by the applicant in line with the Programme definitions of the output indicators provided in the Programme Manual. Such an approach will not only allow data accuracy but also help better define the Value for Money of the projects funded by the Programme. The full list of output indicator definitions is provided in the annex to this Evaluation Plan as well as the Programme Manual for beneficiaries.

- After project approval, the monitoring process will ensure, yet again, the output delivery is aligned with the Programme definitions and that only completed outputs are reported by the beneficiaries

Data availability - result indicators

The NWE result indicators are simple, not composite ones. Their baselines and targets are based on data available publicly; no specific stakeholder or beneficiary surveys were performed to establish them. This is why the evaluations of the Programme will need to be preceded by data collection to examine their natural progress and assess the NWE contribution to them, to check whether the initially planned targets were achieved.

The methods for data collection will be identical to those used in the process of baseline and target establishment for result indicators, to ensure consistency. The data will address all five Specific Objectives of the Programme. The methodology for the result indicators is provided in Annex I to this Evaluation Plan.

In order to verify the Programme progress towards the result indicators, the evaluators will be requested to:

- Undertake surveys of the beneficiaries and project participants as well as individual interviews (should the latter prove necessary). The surveys will focus on questions highlighted in the section II.2.2. (Evaluation process) above.

- Produce case studies embracing the individual Specific Objectives of the Programme as part of the three Priority Axes to assess progress towards the envisaged results and target values of the result indicators. 2 case studies will be produced per Specific Objective – 2 Priority for 1 (Specific Objective 1, 6 for Priority 2 (embracing 3 Specific Objectives – 2,3 and 4) and 2 for Priority 3 (Specific Objective 5). These will be based on a variety of data fed by the surveys and interviews.

Data concerning horizontal principles

This data will be collected by the Programme from individual projects via the electronic Monitoring System. It will be done on a regular 6-monthly basis (at the project claim time). The relevant sections have been incorporated in the project Progress Report as well as the internal JS monitoring module of the Programme eMS. The information will be aggregated at the level of the Programme as a whole, but will be qualitative in nature.

Data concerning the Europe 2020 Strategy

As the 2020 climate and energy targets will be provided by the Programme indicator framework, no additional data search will be necessary for these elements of the Union Strategy. Some reference to other publicly available data will be required (e.g. GDP, unemployment rates, poverty levels) to justify the contribution of the Programme to a smart, sustainable and inclusive NWE growth. The data will be obtained from publicly available data registers, including the data on territorial cohesion, regional disparities and territorial impact evaluation (e.g. ESPON and their INTERCO study on territorial cohesion indicators)

II.2.3. Involvement of partners

The evaluation process will be coordinated by the Evaluation Task Force established by the Managing Authority and comprise the representatives of:

- MA
- JS
- CP network
- Several representatives of the Member States who are part of the Programme Monitoring Committee (3 maximum)

The JS team will be the driving force of the process and in charge of the daily contact with the subcontracted consultant/consortium. The Programme Monitoring Committee, which bears the ultimate responsibility for the evaluation, will rely on the recommendations of the Task Force.

The Task Force will follow the whole evaluation process from the formulation of the Terms of Reference (ToR) to the conclusions, including:

- The Programme expectations
- Methodology used, with the evaluation questions included in the ToR

- Monitoring of the process to ensure that the recommendations fit the Programme context and its institutional setting
- Proposal of changes to the Programme in line with the evaluation findings
- Information for the Programme communication process

The list of the proposed evaluations will be regularly reviewed by the Monitoring Committee. Should a need for new ad hoc evaluations emerge in the Programme life cycle, the Evaluation Task Force will make the necessary recommendations to the Committee.

The recommendations flowing from the evaluations will be jointly developed by the Evaluation Task Force as the representatives of the Monitoring Committee and the evaluators to ensure that they tailor made and improvement driven. The recommendations will be endorsed by the Evaluation Task Force.

II.2.4. Source for evaluation expertise

The Programme will subcontract a consultant or a consortium of consultancies. They will remain in daily contact with the JS assisted by the Managing Authority.

The expertise required will combine the following elements:

- Previous justified experience in evaluation of transnational programmes
- Proven record of implementation and impact evaluations performed
- Knowledge of the societal challenges of the Programme area as well the changes to these challenges appearing in the course of the Programme
- Knowledge in the area of the Specific Objective of the Programme targeted by the evaluation

Socio/economic/environmental analyses of the Programme area previously delivered will be taken into consideration as well.

Further specific expertise will be defined in the Terms of Reference following the recommendations of the Evaluation Task Force and the decisions of the Programme Monitoring Committee on this subject.

II.2.5. Training programme

The Programme has reserved a budget, provided human resources and a training to meet the legal obligations of the Art. 54.2 of the CPR regulation.

- NWE has increased its evaluation capacity by dedicating one FTE staff member to the Programme risk management and evaluation functions. This ensures that

the knowledge gained in the effectiveness of the funding remains in house and measures can be taken pro-actively to prevent issues relating to Programme underperformance or data availability.

- The staff member attended the training organised by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht on "Evaluation and Monitoring Methods, Concepts and Indicators for EU structural and Cohesion Funds in 2014-2020", as well as the administrative capacity building training organised by DG Regio and EIPA "Ensuring result-orientation in Operational Programmes 2014-2020". All the follow-up trainings organized either by EIPA or DG Regio will also be attended.

- Last but not least the Programme remains an active member of the Evaluation network established by INTERACT and has participated in their meetings on evaluation in the course of 2015 and 2016.

Even though the JS staff member will be in charge of data accuracy and provision as well as steer the evaluation process on the JS side, the structure and contents of the evaluation will be in the responsibility of the subcontracted consultant/consortium monitored by the Task Force. In this way the evaluators will be independent of the Programme to ensure constructive feedback. It is also useful to note that the implementation of the Programme and its evaluation are assigned to different units in the JS.

II.2.6. Timetable

The guidance for evaluations recommends that the planned impact evaluations should be delivered at a moment allowing enough time for the findings to feed the policy process (as early as possible) and at the same time enable the results to become available (as late as possible).

The timetable below envisages the performance of evaluations individually as separate contracts rather than a framework contract. The proposed planning of the evaluations is realistic and includes the breakdown of individual evaluations into stages and further activities:

Evaluation stages	***Estimated timing for the evaluation of the two-step approach***	***Estimated timing for the first implementation evaluation***	***Estimated timing for the final impact evaluation***
Preparation		January 2018	January 2021

	October 2016	February – April 2018 (3 months)	February-April 2021 (3 months)
Inception	November 2016 (2 weeks)	By end May 2018 (1 month)	By end May 2021 (1 month)
Desk research	December 2016 (1 month)	June 2018 (1 month)	June – September 2021 (3 months)
Field work		July 2018 (1 month)	October - December 2021 (3 months)
Analysis, Feedback and Reporting	January 2017 (1 month)	By end September 2018	By end March 2022

The final impact evaluation will be carried out in time to feed into the report for the European Commission on evaluation results due in December 2022 (impact evaluation of all programmes).

II.2.7. Budget

A portion of the Technical Assistance budget will be used for the evaluation purpose. The total of EUR 500,000 was set aside for the purpose of the externalisation of the service only. It does not cover the JS staff costs (dedicated officer) or the costs linked to collection of the output indicator data, as these will be provided by the eMS system. Costs related to the collection of result indicator data are however included.

The final cost will be linked to the evaluation methods selected by the Evaluation Task Force and the final duration of the contract with the evaluators. Nevertheless, the estimate based on the average consultancy rate (100 EUR per hour or 800 EUR for an 8-hour working day, excluding VAT) is as follows:

Evaluation stages	***Estimated cost for the evaluation of the two-step approach***	***Estimated cost for the implementation (operational) evaluation***	***Estimated cost for the final impact evaluation***
Preparation	0 EUR	0 EUR	0 EUR

Inception	8,000 EUR (2 weeks = 80h)	32,000 EUR (1 month of work for 2 consultants = 320 h)	16,000 EUR (1 month = 160 h)
Desk research	16,000 EUR (1 month = 160h)	32,000 EUR (1 month of work for 2 consultants = 320 h)	48,000 (3 months = 480 h)
Field work		32,000 EUR (1 month of work for 2 consultants = 320 h)	48,000 (3 months = 480 h)
Analysis, Feedback and Reporting	16,000 EUR (1 month = 160h)	64,000 EUR (2 months of work for 2 consultants = 320 h)	48,000 EUR (3 months = 480 h)
Total per evaluation	**40,000 EUR**	**160,000 EUR**	**150,000 EUR**
TOTAL	**350,000 EUR**		

The Evaluation Task Force activities will also be covered from the Technical Assistance budget dedicated to the evaluation.

The budget is based on the assumption that the evaluation service is fully externalised. This approach can change on the basis of the Task Force recommendations and consequently the decisions of the Programme Monitoring Committee.

II.2.8. Quality management strategy

This element of the evaluation framework will focus on:

- Drafting solid Terms of Reference
- Introducing good practice in contract management

The quality management strategy will ensure that the evaluation is use and user oriented and that the processes applied serve the evaluation process.

The Task Force will follow the practice of:

- Early agreements with the detailed timetables and milestones
- Regular review meetings/web conferences between the Evaluation Task Force and the sub-contractors
- Monthly progress reports to the Task Force will be required to the Evaluation Officer of the JS to ensure the smooth running of the process

- Formal recording of all the agreed changes to the evaluation process, including the methods applied, modifications of timescales and human resources involved in carrying out individual evaluations (guarding against experienced evaluators being included in the evaluation proposals by potential sub-contractors and their modifications in their course, including time allocated by them to this task) and consequently
- Reporting on spending levels against the original budget
- Implementing the evaluation recommendations and putting in place a relevant action plan

For all evaluations, the submission of the inception report will always be required for the first payment to be released by the Programme.

II.2.9. Strategy to ensure use and communication of evaluations

In line with the official requirements, all the evaluation reports including the final impact evaluation report will be submitted to the European Commission via the SFC system together with the Terms of Reference, the budget and the evaluation methodology. In most cases this will be done with the relevant Annual Implementation Report.

The communication of evaluation results will be done with two main foci, consistent with the Programme's Communication Strategy 2014-2020:

1. **Accountability** or, in other words, implementation of evaluation findings and communication *about* the Programme results. This is about the application of recommendations of the Evaluation Task Force and the use of evidence to communicate to external audiences that transnational cooperation through Interreg NWE is working. It seeks to strengthen the Programme's accountability to decision-makers and gain their support. The evaluation findings will be used in this case to perform the following communication task set down in the Communication Strategy: "Gain the support of decision makers". Indicative activities include a combination of "proactive" actions (meetings with key people, events, etc.) with tools that allow this target audience find specific Programme/project data such as online search tools in the Programme's website, among others.

2. **Learning** or, in other words, communicating *for* Programme results: This is about making the findings available to the Programme members to inform learning as a means of improving the effectiveness of the Programme. Communication activities included here focus on internal audiences, but the learnings resulting from them will contribute to the following communication tasks set down in the communication strategy: "Attract relevant applicants and

guide them into the application process in Step 1" and "Help applicants to transform concept notes into successful full work plans (Step 2)". Indicative activities include seminars for internal audiences, written briefs, etc.

II.2.10. Plan to evaluate the Programme Communication Strategy

Referring to the ETC Regulation, in the Implementation Reports in 2017 and 2019 shall include information about the *results of the information and publicity measures carried out under the communication strategy.*

The results of the communication activities will be regularly monitored and an annual report will be provided to the Monitoring Committee. This permanent monitoring of activities will allow the Programme to adapt the approaches and specific activities as needed.

Following the art. 111, point b) of the CPR regulation, the results of the information and publicity measures of the Funds carried out under the communication strategy will need to be reported to the European Commission in the annual implementation reports submitted in 2017 and 2019 (for the years 2016 and 2018 respectively). Interreg NWE will measure the effectiveness of the communication efforts separately to this evaluation plan. It will be done on the basis of the following factors:

Inputs	**Outputs**	**Outcomes**	**Impact**
Resources allocated to the campaign or effort	Activities conducted to influence audiences to perform a desired behaviour	Audience response to outputs	Indicators that show levels of impact
• Money • Staff time • Distribution channels used • Materials used	• Number of materials disseminated, calls made, events held, social media tactics employed • Reach and frequency of communications • Free media coverage	• Changes in behaviour intent • Changes in knowledge about the Programme • Changes in beliefs • Responses to campaign elements (e.g. videos shared, Twitter followers, number of attendees at events, etc.)	• Average number of eligible applications per call • Average number of successful applications per call, etc

The communication performance indicators, baselines and targets are specified in the Programme Communication Strategy.

Documents of reference

Guidance document on Monitoring and Evaluation, March 2014, European Commission
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf

Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation_plan_guidance_en.pdf

Guidance for the Terms of reference for Impact Evaluations, European Commission, October 2013
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/guidance_tor_impact_evaluation_102013.pdf