



THE SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

The Seventh Framework Programme covers EC activities in the field of research, technological development and demonstration (RTD) for the period 2007 to 2013

Guiding principles

for setting up systems of

National Contact Points (NCP systems)

**for the Seventh Framework Programmes
for Research and Technological
Development (FP7)**

Guiding principles for setting up systems of National Contact Points (NCP systems) for the Seventh EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development (FP7)

Introduction

Under the 5th and 6th Framework Programmes, all Member States and Associated States have set up systems of National Contact Points (NCP systems) to inform and assist potential participants and contractors in ongoing projects. The basic principles for the NCP concept were laid down in the discussion paper "Guiding Principles for Setting up Information and Assistance Networks" (30 October 1998).

For the new structures and funding schemes of FP7, providing appropriate information and assistance to potential participants is vital for assuring transparency and equal access. Moreover, by transnational networking and by facilitating EU wide integration of research, the NCP network can contribute significantly to the implementation of FP7 and the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA).

The aim of this paper is to provide general guidance for setting up information and assistance networks (National Contact Points) in all Member and Associated States (as well as FP7 contacts in some third countries), taking into account the experience of preceding Framework Programmes and the challenges of FP7. It addresses the network architecture, the nomination and recognition process and the operational modalities.

The guiding principles in this document have been discussed and unanimously agreed upon in a working group of personal representatives of ministers competent for the area of science and research of the 35 Member and Associated States (including the Candidate Countries) and the Commission. They serve as general guidelines for establishing and operating the NCP systems and for their relations with the Commission and each other.

Basic Principles

The existing NCP systems in Member and Associated States show a wide variety of architectures, from highly centralised to decentralised networks, and a number of very different actors, from ministries to universities, research centres and special agencies to private consulting companies. This reflects the different national traditions, working methodologies, research landscapes and funding schemes.

The unifying element of the different systems is the capability of ensuring both competence in the different thematic and horizontal priorities of the Framework Programme as well as coherence of approach and high level of service. This general principle should equally apply to FP7.

It is proposed that the general approach of establishing, financing, nominating, supervising and monitoring NCP systems by national governments be maintained, while the Commission provides the necessary information and training and acts as

moderator for the trans-national networking. Liaison between the NCP systems by trans-national activities (networking, benchmarking, partner search, staff exchange schemes etc.) will be an important element in harmonising quality of service, at the same time contributing to the realisation of the European Research Area. Specific trans-national activities for NCP performance quality assessment and the development of international best practice will receive financial support from the European Commission. The horizontal programme committees of the FP7 will be kept informed of all such NCP trans-national activities supported by the European Commission, and will receive the reports produced by these support actions.

FP7 contacts nominated by the national authorities in third countries will be invited to participate in trans-national NCP activities and meetings, but will in general not receive any financial contribution from the European Commission.

Recommended tasks for the organisation(s) operating the NCP system

The following list of tasks to be undertaken by NCPs is indicative, neither claiming to be exhaustive nor compulsory for all NCPs. The tasks might consist of –

- Informing, awareness raising

- Circulate general and specific documentation on the Community RTD programmes, including on conditions for participation, and on possibilities and conditions for submission of proposals.
- Organise promotional activities in liaison with the Commission services (e.g. info-days, seminars, conferences, newsletters, Web sites, fairs, etc.).
- Raise awareness for the Community objectives of increasing the participation of women in the Framework Programme and of strengthening the link between science and ethics and between science and civil society.
- Raise awareness for the Community objectives of increasing the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Framework Programme.
- Raise awareness for other European programmes in the field of research and innovation such as CIP, Eureka and COST.

- Advising, assisting and training

- Explain the scope and the modalities of the whole spectrum of funding schemes to be used in FP7.
- Advise on administrative procedures and legal issues (e.g. role and responsibilities of participants in a consortium, costs, rights and obligations of participants, respect of ethical rules and for the principles laid down in the Commission Recommendation C(2005)576 on the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment).
- Assist in partner search activities notably by disseminating calls for proposals (using Community tools such as CORDIS, co-operation networks, business support network services etc.).
- Assist organisations, in particular new actors and SMEs, with a view to increasing their participation in FP7.

- Organise training sessions on RTD programmes for intermediaries and information multipliers to ensure high quality of advice.
 - Organise training seminars for specific target groups (SMEs, universities, professional organisations, women in science etc.) or on specific topics (legal aspects, modalities for participation, research areas covered by several specific programmes, ethical rules etc.).
 - Provide information for and advise participants, in particular smaller organisations and SMEs, on the setting up of appropriate management and legal structures in projects with large budgets and/or numerous participants.
 - Assist the Commission in assuring transparency and equal access to calls for new partners in on-going FP7 Projects.
- Signposting and Feedback
- Give feedback to the Commission on any problems and difficulties in implementing and participating in the Framework Programme.
 - Signpost to other Community business support network services those potential participants who require assistance, for example on general EU matters or matters relating to innovation and technology transfer, typically dealt with by these networks.
 - Inform the Commission about planned NCP activities and events requiring participation of Commission staff.

Characteristics of the organisation(s) operating the NCP system

In order to fulfil the above-mentioned tasks, the organisations might have the following capacities. The first four points of the list would be considered as essential for all NCP organisations, whereas the remaining points are indicative and do not claim to be exhaustive or compulsory. :

- Compulsory characteristics:

- Have a good knowledge of Community RTD activities and the technological areas concerned.
- Be competent to provide assistance services to different kinds of actors (SMEs, industry, academics, etc).
- Be able to work to strict deontological requirements, that is, to act as independent organisation(s), being committed to complete impartiality in delivering their services and avoiding any situations which may give rise to a conflict of interests.
- Be able to act with complete confidentiality as regards the information which comes into their possession or has become known to them as part of their advisory activities towards clients.

- Recommended characteristics:

- Participate actively in trans-national NCP network activities with a view to seeking continuous improvement of their NCP services and practices.
- Have skills in RTD management and financing.
- Show the experience and acceptance necessary to reach the research community concerned and have good knowledge of the national research landscape.

- Have adequate human resources and equipment (e.g. IT).
- Be suitable to become part of an international system for stimulating participation in FP7 and for partner search.
- Be able to co-ordinate the different actors of the NCP system.

As a minimum service level it is considered essential that the NCPs are reachable by phone and/or e-mail during usual working hours and that they have a public website with basic information on their services.

Nomination and recognition process

Each Member and Associated State wanting to participate in the European NCP network, has the responsibility for the organisational structure of its NCP system. Third countries may participate in this European NCP network through their FP7 contact points, and will be encouraged to set up a national NCP-like organisational structure.

Member and Associated States are also responsible for the nomination of the organisation(s) of their own NCP system and for its setting up according to national prerequisites and requirements, taking into account the above guidelines.

In order to ensure the coherence of the system, a co-ordination mechanism should be foreseen in each Member and Associated State and participating third country to maintain its overall operational consistency. This mechanism should be a light, non-bureaucratic co-ordination. An NCP Co-ordinator should be nominated in each country, with the aim of providing this overall co-ordination of the national NCP activities. This NCP Co-ordinator should also maintain overall coordination of the NCP activities within the horizontal and cross-cutting actions in FP7. In addition, the NCP Co-ordinator should provide policy advice to the Commission regarding issues on the development and improvement of the NCP system in general.

The nominations (organisations and contact persons) should be communicated to the Commission in an official letter by the ministry competent for the area of science and research and technological development (or by an organisation empowered by the ministry/ies to do so, such as the permanent representations to the EU). In the case of countries with a federal governmental structure, all nominations should be coordinated and forwarded by the federal authorities. For practical management reasons, nominations should be structured following the thematic and horizontal priorities of the Framework Programme (see structure in annex I).

Once the organisation(s) are nominated by Member and Associated States, they will be recognised by the Commission for the duration of the 7th Framework Programme as being the preferential contact points for providing information, advice and/or assistance on the RTD programmes. For changes of organisations or persons, the same procedure should apply.

The organisation would use the name “National Contact Point Organisation” and would be mentioned as such in all Commission publications (NCP database on CORDIS, information packages, brochures, Web-pages etc.).

Co-operation between the NCPs and the Commission

The Commission considers the NCP systems of Member and Associated States and the similar FP7 contacts in third countries as important partners for the implementation and management of FP7. This partnership based on shared responsibilities is a major element in assuring transparency and equal access. The Commission sees in the NCP network the main structure to give practical information and assistance to potential participants and contractors in FP7. Therefore the Commission will:

- publish widely the nominated NCPs and FP7 contacts on the CORDIS, in the guides for applicants and in other information material.
- provide appropriate training for NCPs on all thematic and managerial aspects, legal and financial issues as well as relevant EU policies and ethical aspects, especially before and at the beginning of FP7.
- invite NCPs to participate in information and awareness actions related to the RTD activities that are organised by the Commission.
- invite NCPs to thematic conferences and seminars which the programme directorates organise.
- nominate contact persons for NCPs in the Commission services (NCP correspondents) for all thematic and horizontal priorities of FP7.
- provide timely information on work programmes and roadmaps, upcoming calls, changes in thematic priorities or administrative procedures, statistics of calls and evaluations, relevant information on funded projects etc., striving for equally high quality of information flow in all thematic and horizontal priorities.
- inform NCPs about the results of any possible invitations to submit expressions of interest.
- provide leaflets, brochures and other relevant information for further distribution by NCPs.
- establish and operate an NCP extranet Website for supplying information and as a discussion forum (CORDIS Forum or similar).
- actively support and moderate the European wide networking of NCPs, as a means of stimulating participation in Community RTD activities and a contribution to the realisation of the ERA.
- support, where appropriate, additional costs relating to special measures, activities and events of a transnational dimension. These measures could include information activities, conferences and workshops, benchmarking activities, training sessions arranged by the NCP organisations or extra costs linked with transnational co-ordination meetings between NCP organisations.

FP7 contacts in third countries will be invited to participate in any of the activities and events mentioned above, but will normally not receive financial support from the European Commission unless otherwise specifically agreed.

The Commission will provide the data and information necessary for the proper performance of the NCP organisations. In doing so, the Commission requires that the national authorities will ensure that the NCPs comply with the confidentiality requirements for such information. The NCPs will receive, after the Programme Committee has been informed, information on the outcome of proposal evaluation

similar to the information provided to the Programme Committee Members, with the exception of details on proposal budgets and proposal abstracts.

Co-operation between national networks

NCP systems would co-operate in two ways:

- Co-operation with organisations in other countries, covering the same field of activity, exchanging staff, information and experience.
- Co-operation in the same country with other Community business support networks in order to avoid overlapping activities, and with national research networks and organisations.

Exchange of information at European level on performance of NCP systems

Monitoring of performance and quality assurance of NCPs is under the responsibility of the national authorities establishing the NCP systems.

Transnational exchange of experiences and dissemination of best practice can constitute an important supporting element in this endeavour, at the same time contributing to the realisation of the concept of the ERA. The Commission will actively support and moderate this kind of exchange. It will contribute to the additional costs resulting from such transnational activities. The horizontal programme committees of FP7 will monitor these actions.

Special National Contact Points for the Joint Research Centre (JRC)

In the course of FP6, the Joint Research Centre put in place a network of National Contact Points from the New Member States, Acceding Countries, Candidate Countries and Potential Candidate Countries with the aim of promoting integration of researchers and S&T organisations from these countries across its activities. In line with the JRC mission, the focus of this action was on the scientific and technical support to policymaking.

The specific tasks for the JRC NCPs include:

- Promoting networking of the JRC with research organisations in their countries within the JRC areas of competence;
- Identifying and suggesting potential participants in JRC workshops, seminars and training courses;
- Disseminating information relating to the JRC, including job and training opportunities and collaboration opportunities;
- Organising (in conjunction with the JRC) promotional activities such as JRC information days, Round Tables and Specialised expert workshops.

Based on the example and positive experience of the National Contact Points in Candidate Countries and New Member States, the JRC Board of Governors has now recommended exploring the benefits of also appointing National Contact Points in the "old" 15 Member States. Along these lines, the nomination of NCPs from Associated Countries will also be sought.

Annex I

Structure for nominations of NCPs

NCP short name	Fields of FP7 covered
NCP Co-ordinator	Overall co-ordination of NCP activities; Cooperation – Emerging needs and unforeseen policy needs*, Technology Platforms and Joint Technology Initiatives*, ERA-NET*, ERA-NET+*, Article 169*; Capacities – Coherent Development of Policies
Legal and financial NCP	Horizontal legal and financial issues, Intellectual Property Rights
Health NCP	Cooperation – Health
Bio NCP	Cooperation – Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology
ICT NCP	Cooperation – Information and communication technologies
NMP NCP	Cooperation – Nanosciences, Nanotechnologies, Materials, and new Production Technologies
Energy NCP	Cooperation – Energy
Environment NCP	Cooperation – Environment including Climate Change
Transport NCP	Cooperation – Transport (including Aeronautics)
SSH NCP	Cooperation – Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities
Security NCP	Cooperation – Security
Space NCP	Cooperation –Space
Ideas NCP	Ideas
Mobility NCP	People
Regional NCP	Capacities – Research Potential, Regions of Knowledge
SME NCP	Capacities – Research for the benefit of SMEs;
INCO NCP**	Capacities – Activities of International Co-operation**, third country participation
Infrastructures NCP	Capacities – Infrastructure
SiS NCP	Capacities – Science in Society
EURATOM NCP	EURATOM
JRC NCP	Joint Research Centre

* : These issues are largely dealt with by thematic NCPs, but overall co-ordination will be at the level of national NCP co-ordinators.

** : Any specific INCO activities within the themes of the Cooperation programme, although dealt with by the thematic NCPs, should be closely co-ordinated with the INCO NCP.

Annex II

Terminology

<i>National Contact Point (NCP):</i>	<i>generic term to be used for persons and/or organisations, an appropriate translation reflecting the concept of NCPs should be found for each national language</i>
<i>FP7 contacts</i>	<i>persons nominated by third countries with the aims of giving assistance to potential FP7 participants in these countries and representing their national interests in trans-national NCP network activities</i>
<i>NCP system</i>	<i>term used for the national system of NCP organisations in MS and AC</i>
<i>NCP network</i>	<i>term used for the totality of all NCP systems in Member and Associated States including NCP-like systems in third countries</i>