

European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI):

The Quality Label for Cluster Organisations (Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence) Criteria, Processes, Framework of Implementation

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This document is addressing cluster managers applying for the “Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence (***GOLD Label***)” developed by ECEI. It is to be used for the preparation of an on-site assessment of the cluster management excellence indicators by external experts. It describes in general the process of labelling of cluster organisations and the excellence indicators defined in the context of ECEI.

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1 Introduction

Cluster Management Excellence - Key Success Factor for Cluster Organisations

Excellent management is considered to be a general prerequisite for successful operation in

- industry and the private sector in general
- in public sectors, like education, health, environment, etc., and
- in public administration and governmental organisations

Therefore, it is quite obvious that excellent management should also be considered to be a main prerequisite for a cluster organisation to achieve the highest impacts of the cluster within a given technological, industrial, regional, and legislative framework:

- for the cluster participants,
- for the industrial sector in general, and
- for the development of regions

Furthermore, common standards for excellent cluster management enable better mutual understanding necessary for transnational cooperation between cluster and network organisations and by this are important to promote successful international cluster co-operation, in particular for the benefit of the participating SMEs.

The European Cluster Excellence Initiative – Assessing and Improving Cluster Management Excellence

2009-2012, the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI), initiated by the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, aimed for the development of methodologies and tools in order to support cluster organisations to improve their capabilities in the management of networks and clusters. Within this context, 13 project partners from 9 countries – all well experienced in the field of cluster management and support – created a uniform set of cluster management quality indicators and developed a quality labelling system for professional cluster management with the aim to have this methodology and proof of evidence accepted and recognised all over Europe.

Labelling clusters is not new as such. During the last few years, many member states all over Europe have started setting up cluster support programmes, which often focus on the most competitive cluster initiatives within the country. For example, in France, Germany, Hungary, and Sweden a certain number of clusters have been selected for further funding or support, due to their leading position. Being selected within such a programme is already in itself some kind of quality label, since it expresses recognition as “excellent cluster” among the entire variety of clusters in a country. However, the applied selection mechanisms often follow national priorities or politically driven objectives.



The “Cluster Organisation Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence (**GOLD Label**)” developed within the ECEI goes one step further. The overall approach is the creation of an independent, voluntary proof of cluster management excellence which is accepted and recognised all over Europe, or even beyond. It is not only aimed at the distinction between “good” and “bad”, but to motivate cluster managers to take part in an improvement process, to become better by comparing with others and learning from the best. Thus, the elements of “mutual learning” and “mutual benchmarking” play an important role, as highlighted again by the recommendations of the European Cluster Policy Group in September 2010. For the purpose of achieving a broad international recognition, all concepts and methodologies developed are in-line with the methodologies of continuous improvement followed by EFQM, the European Foundation of Quality Management, www.efqm.org.

There are some aspects which are very important to understand, in order to avoid any kind of misunderstanding:

1. The **GOLD Label** focuses on the cluster organisation management, not on the framework conditions or a cluster as such. (see also “the Shell Model”, fig. 1)
2. Participation in a labelling process is voluntary and intended for the cluster organisations that would like an independent third body to assess their cluster organisation management excellence according to harmonised and transparent cluster organisation management excellence indicators (**Quality Indicators**). The **GOLD Label** does not stand for any new type of mandatory cluster certification, neither for an official certification similar to “ISO 9000 for clusters”. However, it is possible and mandatory at a certain stage to achieve the label “Committed to Excellence” of EFQM as well, and by this an international accepted status, if desired.
3. The **GOLD Label** should enable cluster managers to demonstrate their management excellence towards interested third parties, like members, stakeholders, policy makers, etc.
4. The **GOLD Label** is based on a modular set of **Quality Indicators** and a transparent process of how to assess and benchmark them.
5. The **GOLD Label** is applicable to a broad spectrum of types of clusters all over Europe and worldwide.
6. The **GOLD Label** is to be considered as a process: Having proven cluster management excellence and having implemented means of keeping this excellence level and even improving further.

All in all, the **GOLD Label** and the procedures to be awarded with such label contribute to increasing the overall awareness for cluster organisation management excellence, they offer cluster managers the possibility of demonstrating such excellence to interested public, and they demonstrate the implementation of continuous processes for further improvement.



Cluster Organisation Management Excellence Indicators

The **Quality Indicators** focus on the cluster organisation hosting and operating the cluster management, not on the framework conditions or a cluster as such, as demonstrated in figure 1. The item to be managed (the cluster as such) does, however, have to fulfil certain minimum requirements when considering the excellence of its management (certain minimum size, age, etc.).

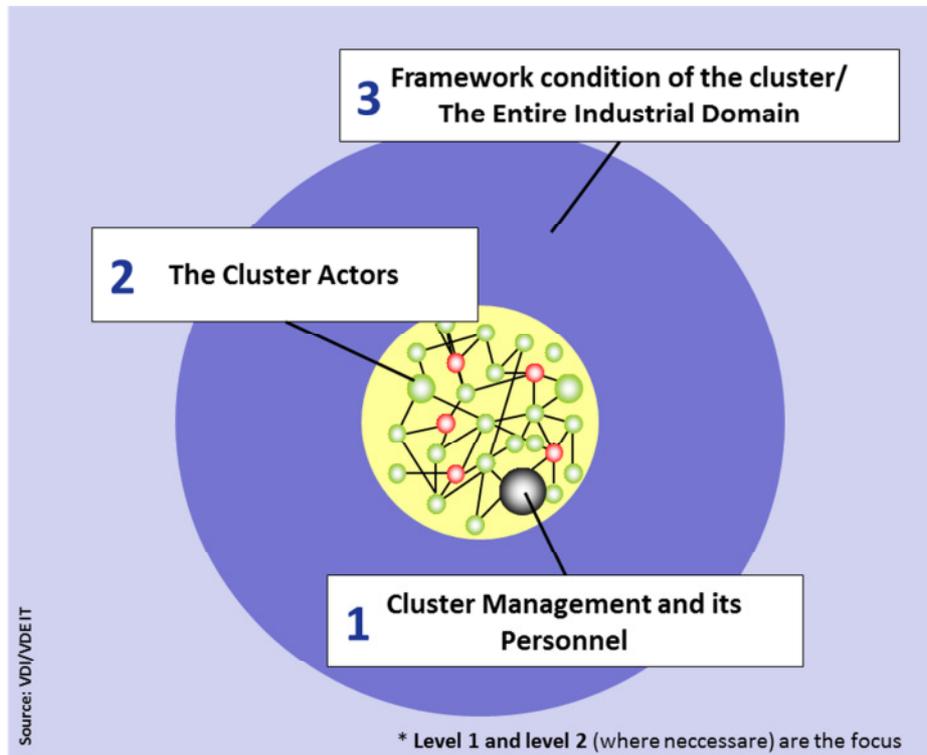


Figure 1: The Shell Model

Quality Indicators cover the following dimensions:

1. *Structure of the cluster (level 2)*
2. *Typology, governance, co-operation (levels 1 and 2)*
3. *Financing cluster organisation management (level 1)*
4. *Strategy, objectives, services (level 1)*
5. *Achievements, recognition (level 1)*

Specific scores and thresholds to be achieved for an “excellence status” exist for every single indicator. Achieving certain minimum thresholds for specific indicators and for all indicators as a whole leads to the eligibility of being awarded with a certain “Cluster Management Organisation Excellence Label”.

A total of 31 **Quality Indicators** were elaborated and are described in detail in this document.

2 The Cluster Management Excellence Labels

The rationale of the **GOLD Label** is the demonstration that a cluster organisation has proven an excellent status of cluster management (in conformity with a high level regarding the ECEI **Quality Indicators**) AND a cluster organisation has implemented a comprehensive and successful process of further improvement (in conformity with the EFQM journey to excellence). This indicates that being awarded with the **GOLD Label** a cluster organisation is successfully involved in a process of continuous improvement.



The **GOLD Label** certifies excellent cluster management according to a harmonized approach of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI) and the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM).

Meaning in particular:

- Excellence in Cluster management is reached (ECEI)
- Additional further improvement and learning processes are successfully implemented (EFQM)

This label is awarded to cluster organisations with a validity of two years having reached a cluster management excellence score of $\geq 80\%$ during an external expert assessment of the 31 **Quality Indicators** elaborated within the European Cluster Excellence Initiative.

It is extended in validity for another two years when improvement projects in conformity with EFQM during the course of the first two years were successfully implemented and validated according to „EFQM Committed to Excellence“.



Cluster organisations starting to systematically consider cluster management improvements can optionally get awarded with the **BRONZE Label**, which documents their will to compare with the best and to improve activities and services.

The **BRONZE Label** is awarded to cluster organisations having taken part in a cluster benchmarking exercise according to the „NGPExcellence-approach“(please refer to www.cluster-analysis.org), performed by the “European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA)”. Such benchmarking provides a documented entry level into improvement processes for cluster management and uses indicators similar to the **Quality Indicators** of ECEI. This means, everybody can reach the **BRONZE Label**. It is no justification of an excellence status, however.

The validity of the **BRONZE Label** is limited to two years from the month of a benchmarking interview on.



The two labels offer the cluster manager the opportunity to demonstrate the status reached regarding the improvement of cluster management. The following figure 2 visualises the integration of the labels within an overall process of development of a cluster organisation and increasing cluster management quality:

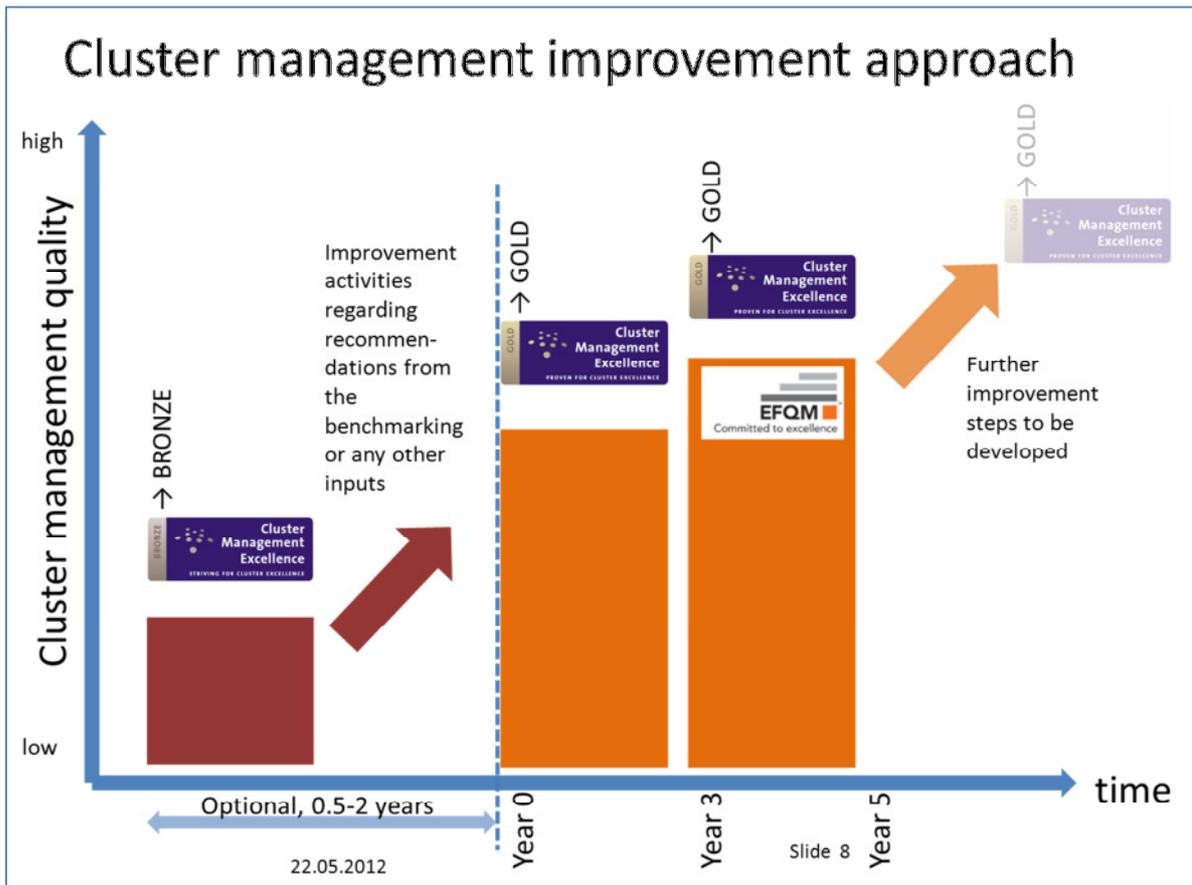


Figure 2: Cluster management improvement approach by ECEI

3 Quality Indicators

This chapter describes the 31 **Quality Indicators** and in doing so, supports the cluster manager in the preparation of an assessment for the **GOLD Label**. A web-based self-assessment and learning tool is available from ESCA, where cluster managers can pre-check possible results of the assessment. Nevertheless, experience has shown so far that it is strongly recommended to perform a benchmarking exercise (BRONZE label) and use the analysis of the benchmarking data to improve possible results to be reached during a **GOLD Label** assessment.



I Structure of the Cluster

Indicator 1.1.0: Committed Cluster Participation

Questions

- Does the cluster have committed actors, who have confirmed their participation in the cluster activities through some kind of written form, e.g. through membership fees, signing of a declaration of accession, a letter of intent, a partnership agreement, etc.?
- Does the cluster have non-committed cluster actors, who participate on a more or less regular basis in the activities of the cluster, without being formally linked to the cluster?

Additional Information:

- Organisations receiving public newsletters or having attended public events on rare occasions shall not be considered as committed or non-committed cluster participants.
- Numbers of committed and non-committed participants need to be compared. Only a specific share of non-committed participants is allowed, when considering a well-managed cluster with a committed partnership.

Indicator 1.1.1: Composition of the Cluster Participants

Question

- Does the cluster incorporate different types of organisations as committed participants?

Additional Information (different Types of Organisations)

Category a (Businesses within the cluster relevant sector(s): industry/service providers):

a.1 – Large enterprises (> 1000 employees):

a.2 – Medium-size enterprises (> 250 up to 1000 employees):

a.3 – SME enterprises (> 50 up to 250 employees):

a.4 – small enterprises (> 10 up to 50 employees):

a.5 – micro enterprises/individuals:

Category b (Organisations dedicated to R&D, training, and education):

b.1 – Universities:

b.2 – Non-university basic/fundamental research institutes:

b.3 – Non-university applied R&D institutes:

b.4 – Non-university education providers

b.5 - Others



Category c (Intermediates):

c.1 – Financial institutions (e.g. Banks, Venture Capitalists, Business Angels):

c.2 – Associations and networks:

c.3 – Others:

Category d (Marketing and communication):

d – Providers or actors for outbound marketing and PR issues:

Category e (Government and public administration):

e.1 – policy makers:

e.2 – public administration bodies:

e.3 – government organisations:

e.4 – Others:

Indicator 1.1.2: Number of Committed Cluster Participants in Total

Question

- How many committed participants altogether does the cluster currently have?

Indicator 1.2: Geographical Concentration of the Cluster Participants

Question

- What percentage of the cluster participants have their premises within a distance of around 150 km or 1.5 hour travel time from the headquarters or any regional offices (if existing) of the cluster organisation?

Additional Information

- Evidence should be provided by the cluster manager using geo-data, ZIP-codes or maps of the premises of the cluster organisation and the cluster participants. Proximity of cluster management and committed cluster participants should allow easy face-to-face contacts.



II Typology, Governance, Co-Operation

Indicator 2.1: Maturity of the Cluster Management

Questions

- In which year did the cluster management start its activities?
- For how many years have the cluster management tasks/actions been delivered?

Additional Information:

- The Cluster manager shall provide evidence in a written form (kick-off documentation, published history, etc.).

Indicator 2.2.1: Human Resources Available for the Cluster Management

Question

- How many people (full time equivalents/FTE) were on average employed by the cluster organisation for core cluster development activities (cluster management) during the last 12 months (INCLUDING its own personnel and sub-contracted personnel specifically for cluster management tasks)?

Additional Information

- Personnel for any additional projects, like delivering R&D projects or organising a trade fair booth as a commercial service, etc. shall NOT be considered here!
- The cluster manager has to provide a list of their team. Secondly the cluster manager has to provide evidence of how much time each of the team members has spent dedicated to the cluster management tasks. The results should be presented as a table, listing all team members and their actual utilisation within the cluster management tasks.

Indicator 2.2.2: Qualification of the Cluster Management Team

Question

- What skills and experiences do the personnel involved in the cluster management have (evidence to be provided by relevant documentation on life/work track records and/or education)?

Additional Information

- The assessment shall be done for each person in the cluster management team and the scores shall be weighted according to the % of FTE each person contributes to the cluster management. Back-office personnel, like secretary, accountant, etc. shall only be included in the assessment if relevant for cluster management activities (to be decided and argued by the cluster manager).



Pure administrative personnel (book-keeping, personnel managing the facility of the cluster organisation, etc.) shall not be included in this assessment.

Qualification assessed:

- Tertiary level education
 - Work experience in the private sector, excluding experience in cluster organisations or cluster management in particular
 - Leadership and management skills
 - Social skills including intercultural skills
 - Communication skills
 - Project management skills
 - Language, skills in English
 - Language, valuable skills in at least one foreign language (excluding English)
 - Relevant sector and/or technical knowledge of > 3 years, due to education and/or work experience
 - Cluster and policy related training
- Possible documentation: certificates, CV, life history, ...

Indicator 2.2.3: Life Long Learning Aspects for the Cluster Management Team

Questions

- Are there programmes and budgets for continuous training (for cluster development as well as more generalised management and communication issues) of the cluster management team planned and are such training activities carried out in a significant manner?
- How many **documented training days / FTE** were realized in the last 12 months OR the 12 months before?
 - Is there a **regular training programme** for the cluster management staff in place?
 - Is there an **adequate budget planned** in a documented way for training of the cluster management staff?

Additional Information

- “Adequate budget” means that the cluster management annual budget foresees resources (personnel costs, external costs, etc.) for training of the cluster management team.
- Back-office personnel, like secretary, accountant, etc. shall only be included in the assessment if relevant for cluster management activities (to be decided and argued by the cluster manager).



Indicator 2.2.4: Stability and Continuity of Human Resources of the Cluster Management Team

Questions

- How many persons involved in key activities of the cluster management have left the cluster management team within the last 24 months?
- Were team members leaving replaced directly (within 3 months)?
- Did the operative cluster manager leave the cluster management team?
- Are there job descriptions for the key personnel available in written format?

Indicator 2.3: Stability of Cluster Participation

Questions

- How many cluster participants have terminated their committed participation during the last 24 months?
- How many new participants have become committed during the last 24 months?

Indicator 2.4: Clarity of Roles – Involvement of Stakeholders in Decision Making Processes

Question

- Who is involved in decision making processes and how are the processes of decision making implemented?

Tick yes to each item, where possible, proofs of evidence to be provided:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Legal form of the cluster organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Documented general terms & conditions or statutes / bylaws exist (regulating the constitution and termination of partnership, rights and duties of participants, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	General Manager of the cluster organisation is appointed and is in post: managing the team, the day-to-day business, as well as the strategic longer-term aspects of the cluster
<input type="checkbox"/>	A management board (in general consisting of non-executive directors), mainly composed of representatives of the range of cluster participants, especially industrial cluster participants, elected or nominated by the cluster participants in a transparent manner, and having the power of decision for instance regarding strategic orientations, new participation requests, recruitment of cluster organisation management personnel, budget control, etc.. Instead of a management board, specific high-level working groups could play this role.



<input type="checkbox"/>	Advisory board/ scientific board(s) exist OR thematic committees composed of participants exist; both to conduct decision making and to support the cluster manager in implementing the action plan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Regular general meeting held, at least every 12 months, allowing cluster participants to express wishes and to provide inputs to the aims, objectives and strategy of the cluster organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Documented general terms & conditions or statutes / bylaws exist (regulating the constitution and termination of partnership, rights and duties of participants, etc.)

Indicator 2.5: Direct Personal Contacts between the Cluster Management Team and the Cluster Participants

Question

- How many direct personal contacts between the cluster organisation management team and the cluster participants took place during the last 12 months OR the 12 months before (a “weak year” is allowed)?

Additional Information

- Passive attendance of cluster participants at seminars/workshops is not to be considered as a direct contact. Eligible contacts are for instance:
 - A contact during a visit to the cluster participant’s premises or a visit by the participant to the premises of the cluster organisation
 - An extensive bilateral exchange of information for instance via telephone and/or mail, etc.
 - Joint work of the cluster organisation management staff and representatives of the cluster participants in specific projects, working groups, and/or other joint activities

Indicator 2.6: Degree of Cooperation within the Cluster

Question

- How many cluster participants were actively involved in a significant manner in collaborative multi-member activities or collaborative projects during the last 12 months and/or the 12 months before?

Additional Information

- For example: participation in working groups, projects, delegation/trade visits (incoming and outgoing), joint trade fair activities, active lecturing activities, etc. with a minimum involvement per cluster participant of 2 days within the last 12 months OR the 12 months before (a “weak year” is allowed).



- A simple passive attendance at an event (seminar, workshop, get-together, etc.) shall not be counted here.
-

Indicator 2.7: Integration of the Cluster Organisation in the Innovation System

Questions

- Does the cluster organisation maintain good cooperation contacts with other institutional innovation support and service providers, business and innovation promoters, funding authorities, etc. in a regular manner?
- How many of such organisations are participants of the cluster? How many strategic or operational partner agreements with such organisations are in place?

Additional Information

- Organising joint events or seminars with other organisations shall not be considered here. The indicator shall express the level of integration of the cluster organisation in the overall innovation community.
- An implemented inter-cluster cooperation shall be counted as a valid cooperation as well.



III Financing Cluster Organisation Management

Indicator 3.1: Prospects of the Financial Resources of the Cluster Organisation

Questions

- Are the financial resources secured for the future? How many years in the future can be anticipated in this context?

Additional Information

- To be validated by documents, contracts, and plausible planning information, including a risk assessment

Indicator 3.2: Share of Financial Resources from Private Sources

Question

- What percentage of the budget of the cluster organisation management is received from private sources, like membership fees, donations, sponsoring, participation fees, commercial services, etc.?



IV Strategy, Objectives, Services

Indicator 4.1.1: Strategy Building Process

Questions

- Were relevant market challenges identified, value chains analysed, surveys among cluster participants carried out? Was the industry involved? And what types of methodological tools were used in the development of the strategy?
- Are companies involved in the strategy-building process in a significant manner?

Additional Information

- Industry involvement in the process of strategy-building is considered a “must”.
- Utilised sources, materials, and tools for strategy building are to be marked “yes” or “no” in the list:
 - (INDUSTRY/MARKET) Identification of the industry and market challenges, e.g. by conducting an industry analysis on the attractiveness of the strategic segments where the cluster participants (companies) compete or could compete, based on own studies and/or existing studies. Identify if the current strategic segment is attractive enough and/or analyse if new strategic segments are more attractive. Include opportunities around grand societal challenges, where appropriate.
 - (VALUE CHAIN) Understand the different business models by analysing the value chain and value systems for the existing industrial/technological sector and for needed value systems for the transformation of the cluster strategy into a new more attractive strategic segment. Describe the possibilities for accessing and exploiting necessary knowledge, from outside the cluster as well, to be used in this strategic process.
 - (BENCHMARKING) Include references of the new business model (new strategic segment) by identifying, analysing and learning from advanced buyers of new segments abroad and locally. Benchmark value chain activities by identifying weak areas of the current value chain of the companies according to the new value chain to achieve of the new business model/strategic segment.
 - (RELATED STRATEGIES) The links with other strategies need to be understood and articulated so that it can clearly be seen that the cluster strategy is in line with other strategies at European, member state, regional, sector and societal challenge levels. This will include an explanation of how the cluster strategy will help to deliver the other strategies and vice versa.
 - Further strategic planning tools like SWOT or similar instruments
 - Are results of cluster participants feedbacks (by surveys, specific feedback workshops, etc.) taken into account for strategy building



Indicator 4.1.2: Documentation of the Cluster Strategy

Questions

- Are the cluster's strategic challenges documented? If so, in what kind of format (written format, multi-media, etc. ...)?
- Are the results of the strategy building process (according to indicator 4.1.1) and the strategic options for the participants of the cluster described?
- Is it described how the cluster organisation plans to support the cluster participants in the long, medium, and short term?

Indicator 4.1.3: Implementation Plan

Questions

- Is there (at least) an annual action and implementation plan with measurable targets and dedicated budgets existing in a written form?
- Does the implementation plan fit the strategic challenges?

Indicator 4.1.4: Financial Controlling System

Questions

- Is there a day-to-day controlling system in place to monitor the financial status?
- What kind of financial reporting/controlling tool is available?
- How often is the financial status updated?

Indicator 4.1.5: Review of the Cluster Strategy and Implementation Plan

Questions

- Is there a process in place to review and update the documented strategic challenges for the cluster and the according implementation plan for the cluster organisation?
- How frequently is the cluster strategy reviewed and amended?
- How frequently is the implementation plan reviewed and amended?
- Who is involved in the process of the strategy and implementation plan review?
- What tools are used to review the strategy?



Indicator 4.1.6: Performance Monitoring of Cluster Management

Question

- Are there a method and/or a controlling system in place to monitor the activities of the cluster organisation?
(Key Performance Indicator System, e.g.: number of events, number of newsletters, number of projects initiated, etc.)

Indicator 4.2: Focus of the Cluster Strategy

Description

- This indicator looks into the future.
- The idea of this indicator is to match the “mindset of the cluster management” concerning the main strategic lines of the cluster with the documented cluster strategy.
- The general strategic priorities for clusters are listed below, where this matching shall be carried out.
- In order to allow prioritisation the cluster manager is explicitly allowed to exclude those main strategic lines from the assessment, which have no or only minor importance for the cluster strategy. Furthermore a cluster manager should identify those strategic issues which are specifically important for the cluster strategy. The prioritisation (positive/negative) will be considered when assessing the documented strategic challenges of the cluster.

1. Improving innovation capabilities	2. Exploring business opportunities
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ R&D of products, processes, technologies, services ▪ Implementation of new products, processes, technologies, services ▪ Initiation and facilitation of cooperation 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing business and market opportunities of the cluster participants ▪ Initiation and facilitation of co-operation ▪ Scouting of trends, technologies and markets
3. Exploring business opportunities	4. Education, training, human resources development
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting entrepreneurs ▪ Facilitating entrepreneurial infrastructures 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing curricula ▪ Operating courses, lectures, etc.
5. Marketing and Branding	6. Improving cluster-specific framework conditions



<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing visibility and recognition for the cluster topics and the cluster itself ▪ Location marketing 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lobbying, contribute to relevant policies (regulations, funding schemes, etc.)
<p>7. Developing the Cluster</p>	<p>8. Internationalisation</p>
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing the share of private financing and funding ▪ Increasing the cooperation among participants, etc 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initiation and facilitation of cooperation ▪ Initiating International R&D cooperation and projects ▪ Opening international business
<p>9. Other Priority</p>	
<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To be described in words by the cluster manager 	

Indicator 4.3: Activities and Services of the Cluster Management

Description

- This indicator describes on the one hand activities and services carried out by the cluster organisation and on the other hand outcomes, which may or may not be directly related to these activities, but which indicate activities being performed to achieve these outputs.
- The indicator looks 12 months into the past. A spectrum (type of service/output) and intensity (how many during the last 12 months) is to be assessed: either for only the three most important areas according to the judgment of the cluster manager, or for all relevant areas as listed in indicator 4.2.
- A quantitative measure for activities/outcomes within the last 12 months shall be given and justified. For further analysis, this quantitative measure is normalised on a scale from 0-4 and an intensity index is compiled.



1. Improving innovation capabilities						
Type of Service	Number of activities	0	1	2	3	4
Activities						
1.1 Distribution of information about funding programmes and possibilities		0	≤3	≤6	≤9	>9
1.2 Organisation of task forces and/or working groups		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
1.3 Activities like innovation workshops, technology scouting and/or road mapping campaigns/projects, etc.		0	1-2	3	4-5	>5
Outcome						
1.4 Initiation of third-party funded innovation projects with participation by the cluster management (R&D and non-R&D), projects newly initiated and currently running projects shall be valid		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
1.5 Collaborative R&D and/or innovation projects initiated without participation of the cluster management: between participants / by participants, newly initiated and running projects shall be valid, funded and non-funded,		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
1.6 Other services/activities, please specify:		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6

2. Exploring business opportunities						
Activities						
2.1 Thematic and/or business/commercial-based events and workshops for cluster participants only		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
2.2 Internal cluster participants matching		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
Outcome						
2.3 Collaborative B2B projects (no R&D, innovation as a minor issue) initiated between participants / by participants, cluster management can, but most not be participating		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
2.4 Other services/activities, please specify:		0	1-2	3	4-5	>5

3. Fostering entrepreneurship						
Activities						
3.1 Consulting and coaching of entrepreneurs		0	≤3	≤6	≤9	>9
3.2 Support for acquisition of financial sources (venture capital, banks, public funds etc.) for and/or on behalf of entrepreneurs		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
3.3 Other services/activities, please specify:		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6

4. Exploring business opportunities						
Activities						
4.1 Specific training courses related to cluster development for cluster participants		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
Outcome						
4.2 Percentage of cluster participants trained (double-counting allowed)		0	≤ 10	≤ 20	≤ 30	>30
4.3 Recruitment of specialists, executive managers, and other human resources by the cluster participants where cluster management gave assistance		0	≤3	≤6	≤9	>9
4.4 Significant contribution of the cluster management to the establishment of vocational training courses as well as study courses at universities, no. of curricula initiated and/or courses carried out		0	1	2	3	>3
4.5 Other services/activities, please specify:		0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6

5. Exploring business opportunities						
Activities						
5.1	Availability of up-to-date print/web material, no. of electronic and/or paper sources (all languages)	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
5.2	Press releases	0	≤4	≤8	≤12	>12
5.3	Presentation of the cluster and its participants on trade fairs / conferences / etc.	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
5.4	Specific events / workshops organised by the cluster organisation to present the cluster and its participants to external parties	0	1	2-3	4	>4
5.5	Specific matchmaking / networking with external parties and other clusters, participation of the cluster organisation only, organised by third parties	0	≤3	≤6	≤9	>9
5.6	Other services/activities, please specify:	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6

6. Improving cluster-specific framework conditions						
Outcome						
6.1	Contribution to relevant policies (regulations, funding schemes, etc.)	0	1	2	3-4	>4
6.2	Contribution to regional development	0	1	2	3-4	>4
6.3	Other services/activities, please specify:	0	1	2	3-4	>4

7. Developing the cluster organisation and the cluster structure (only to be assessed for cluster organisations which are in place for more than three years)							
Activities							
7.1	Increase of private and public financial support for the cluster management (by x %) during the past 12 months		< 10	< 0	< 20	< 40	≥ 40
7.2	Increase of personnel for cluster management (by x %) during the past 12 months		< 10	< 0	< 20	< 40	≥ 40
7.3	Increase of committed cluster participants during the past 12 months (%)		< 10	< 5	< 0	< 10	≥ 10
7.4	Internal (for committed cluster participants only) newsletters/web-based information and information exchange		0	≤ 4	≤ 8	≤ 12	> 12
7.5	Other services/activities, please specify:		0	1	2	3-4	> 4

8. Internationalisation						
Activities						
8.1	Availability of print/web information in foreign languages, no. of “documents”, each document and each language counts separately	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
8.2	Participation of the cluster organisation in trade fairs / conferences abroad with own booth / speech etc. to present the cluster and its participants	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
8.3	Other activities managed/operated by the cluster organisation for intensifying international contacts and cooperation with foreign partners or clusters	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
8.4	Participation in the organisation of trade missions, international meet-the-buyer events, inward investment visits etc. and the facilitation of the participation of cluster participants in such activities	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
8.5	Offices or permanent representations of the cluster abroad (representatives count 0.5), representation by embassies is not to be included AND Participation as a cluster organisation in other international networks or cluster related	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6
Outcome						
8.6	Acquisition initiation and delivery of international innovation projects that were mainly initiated by the cluster management, funded and not-funded, newly initiated and running projects should be counted	0	1	2	3-4	>4
8.7	Other services/activities, please specify:	0	≤2	≤4	≤6	>6

Indicator 4.4: Performance of the Cluster Management

Question

- Are the performance targets of the cluster organisation achieved (in % compared to the implementation plan for the related time period)?

Additional Information

- Using the methodology for monitoring the activities of the cluster (indicator 4.1.6), the degree of achievement of the operational objectives within a maximum of four main activity areas during the past 12 months shall be assessed. Assessment shall be done in discussion with the cluster manager.



Indicator 4.5: Working Groups

Question

- Are working groups covering specific issues established and active and how many are there, how often do they meet/cooperate?
(Working groups can be organised physically or virtually.)

Additional Information

- The consensus of cluster practitioners is that the cluster organisation management should facilitate cooperation between cluster participants rather than being the driver and being involved directly in all activities. Initiating and implementing a structure of working groups can be considered as good practise for cluster organisation management.

Indicator 4.6.1: Communication of the Cluster Organisation

Question

- How many communication activities (internal and external communication) were carried out during the last 12 months?

Additional Information

- Internal (within the membership) and external (towards the broad public or the relevant industrial/scientific communities) communication both are considered. Actions to be considered are: Newsletters, Information campaigns, trade fair participations, press releases, active (with presentation) participation in conferences and other “important” events in order to promote the cluster as well as the cluster organisation. Individual communication with specific cluster participants is not to be considered as communication activity regarding this indicator.

Indicator 4.6.2: Cluster Organisation’s Web Presence

Question

- How informative and accessible is the internet presence of the cluster?
- How frequently is the internet content reviewed and updated?

Additional Information

- Regularly updated content on the cluster organisation should be made available in the local language on a website and on social networks/platforms like LinkedIn, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform or facebook, giving a general overview and details on the work of the cluster and possibly the sectoral and/or technological sector as well as important contact points. As internationalisation of clusters is an important issue, the public part of the web presence



should be available in the English language, plus the languages of the key countries targeted for collaborations and market opportunities. Furthermore, contacting cluster participants should be possible via the web presence where the appropriate contact details should be available.



V Achievements, Recognition

Indicator 5.1: Recognition of the Cluster in Publications, Press, Media

Question

- How many times was the cluster and/or the cluster organisation mentioned in the press, technical journals, media, web (more detailed than just a directory listing), etc. during the last 12 months at regional/national and/or international level?

Indicator 5.2: Success Stories

Questions

- What are the three main success stories of the cluster achieved during the last 24 months?
- What was the impact on the majority of the cluster participants and industry in general?
- What was your role?

Additional Information

Assessment and evaluation of the three most impressive success stories of the cluster achieved during the last 24 months in relation to:

- Complexity of the objective and actions necessary for achievement
- Positive impact on the majority of the cluster participants and industry in general
- Relevance and degree of contribution to the cluster strategic challenges
- Contribution of the success story to the sustainability of cluster organisation development

Assessment shall be done in discussion between the assessor and cluster manager.

The means of assessment are intensively discussed in the assessor trainings, assessors can do their individual assessments alone and then compare results, leading to a “negotiated result”§ of the assessment.

Indicator 5.3: Customer and Cluster Participants' Satisfaction Assessment

Question

- Are surveys carried out in order to assess the satisfaction of cluster participants and other customers with the work of the cluster management?
- How often?
- Are the results implemented in the review of the cluster strategy or the implementation plan?



4 The GOLD Label Assessment/Awarding Procedure

The “European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA)”, hosted by VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH in Berlin/Germany is mandated by the ECEI-consortium and the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, for taking over the responsibility of implementing the **GOLD Label** and making the processes available to cluster organisations internationally, including management and organisation of assessment and validation procedures. ESCA shall be contacted for any questions and requests.

Thus, ESCA is acting as a one-stop shop for all issues of cluster labelling in the described context (www.cluster-analysis.org). It should be noted however, ESCA is only managing and organising the processes, all final decisions regarding the award of the **GOLD Label** are taken by a dedicated decision-making body, the “Cluster Excellence Expert Group (CEEG)”. Launched March 2103, this group consists of representatives of cluster organisations holding a currently valid **GOLD Label**. Thus, the composition of the group underlies a constant change since all newly labelled cluster organisations can nominate a representative to join this group. CEEG is asked to approve the assessments and the results according to the methodology and criteria developed in ECEI. By this, an international acceptance and recognition of the **GOLD Label** can be stated. Issues of quality control regarding the correct use of the **Quality Indicators** and further development thereof will be considered in a “Technical Advisory Board” mainly consisting of representatives being involved in the ECEI-project and the developments of the **GOLD Label** and the **Quality Indicators**. Such board is currently in a definition phase.

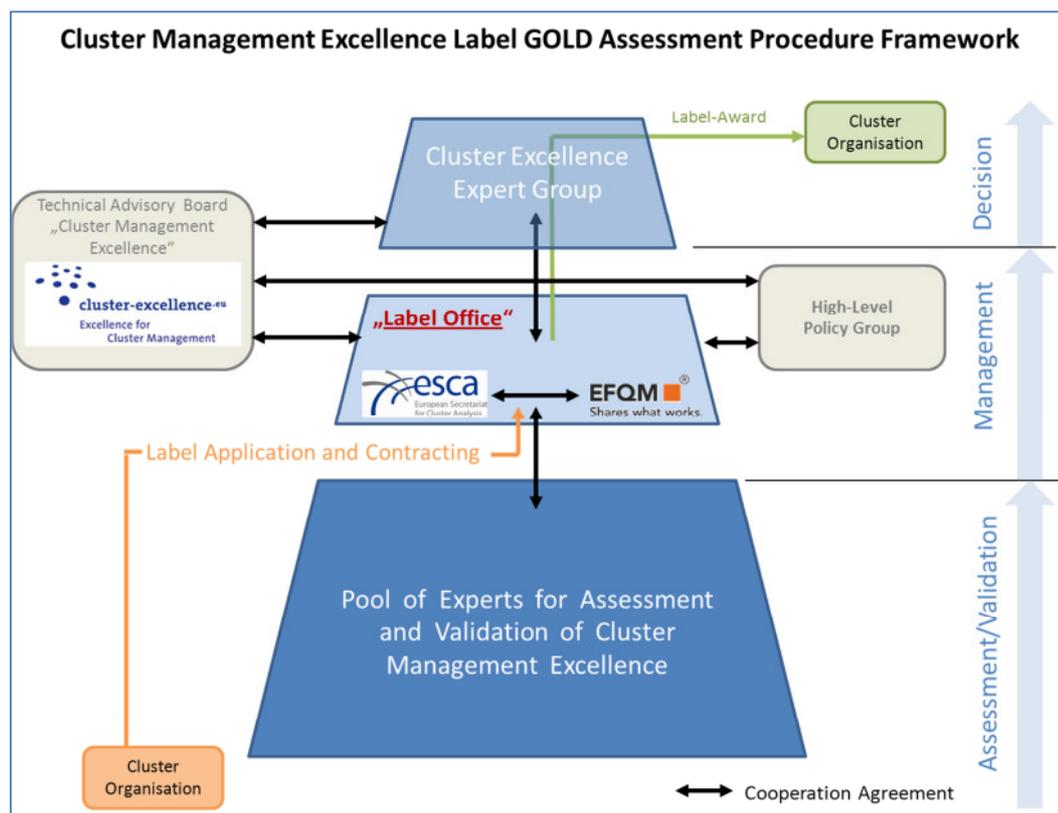


Fig. 3: Organisational Framework of the assessment and award procedure for the GOLD Label

The way towards the **GOLD Label** consists of six steps:

Step 1	<p>Check whether you meet the minimum requirements:</p> <p>Please check whether you meet the minimum requirements of the GOLD Label. For this purpose please refer to the document "<i>European Cluster Excellence Baseline - Minimum Requirements for Cluster Organisations</i>"</p>
Step 2	<p>Online-based self check of the Quality Indicators:</p> <p>Please contact ESCA for an application form. You will get access to an online-based self check that analyses in detail each quality indicator (described in this document) whether you have a fair chance to pass the excellence threshold. The self check is based on a self assessment by the cluster manager. The self check is free of charge.</p>
Step 3	<p>Decision is taken whether you should go for the full assessment:</p> <p>Based on the results of the self check it will be decided whether a full assessment will be conducted. Certain minimum requirements need to be fulfilled and at least 80% of the maximum points of the label scheme have to be achieved. The results will be discussed with the cluster manager and ESCA recommends whether a full assessment can be done. Please note that the information provided by the cluster management in the context of the self check needs to be substantiated by corresponding documentation.</p> <p>In case of discontinuation at this point, a small fee for the use of the tool will be charged and the application will be stopped.</p>
Step 4	<p>Full assessment: two-day on-site assessment conducted by two independent cluster analysis experts:</p> <p>Subject to the decision to conduct a full assessment a contract determining the costs will be concluded between ESCA and the cluster management organisation. ESCA will propose two independent cluster analysis experts who will visit the cluster management organisation. In the course of the on-site assessment the experts will check each indicator and ask for supporting documentation. At the end of the assessment the experts will give an initial feedback on the results. If necessary and agreed upon with the experts, the cluster management organisation may provide further documentation within six weeks after the date of the assessment.</p>
Step 5	<p>Report on the assessment:</p> <p>The cluster management organisation will receive a report on the results of the assessment. The report will be send to the CEEG for a final decision.</p>
Step 6	<p>Award GOLD Label:</p> <p>Depending on a positive decision of the CEEG the cluster organisation will be awarded with the GOLD Label.</p>
	<p>Cluster organisation is invited to nominate a member for CEEG on a voluntary basis.</p>



Upon application of a cluster organisation to become awarded with the GOLD label, an on-site assessment by two specifically trained international “Experts for Assessment and Validation of Cluster Management Excellence” will be performed (experts from the “Pool of Experts”). One of the experts (having knowledge of the local language) will give advice and support for the preparation actions.

The cluster management is pre-informed of the 31 **Quality Indicators** to be assessed (this document). The cluster management is required to prepare documentation/justification/proof of all information to be provided in the context of assessing these **Quality Indicators**.

The on-site assessment will last max. 2 days. The presence of the cluster manager or any other person providing all the information is at least required for day 1. Day 2 is used to study documents and at the end of day 2, the experts will give the feedback on their findings where again the presence of the cluster manager is required (max 2h).

During the assessment, the experts will not need to assess the full details for every indicator in every case. Instead, the experts will assess and validate the situation only in regard to reaching and/or extending certain limit values for every indicator:

- GREEN: excellent, however improvement might still be possible
- YELLOW: good, but clear room for improvement
- RED: not sufficient and improvement is required

For certain **Quality Indicators** minimum criteria apply, meaning a judgement RED would not be allowed for passing the criteria for labelling. Please refer to

http://www.cluster-analysis.org/downloads/20111128_European_Cluster_Excellence_BASELINE_web.pdf

for details regarding these minimal criteria.

Cluster organisations reaching at least 80 % of the overall theoretical maximum of all indicators together (maximum = all indicators GREEN) and not having any RED for indicators where minimum criteria apply, are awarded with the **GOLD Label**, valid for two years. The cluster manager as well receives a written feedback on possible improvements of cluster management, based on the results of the on-site assessment.

Within the first two years, the cluster organisation has to successfully implement improvement projects according to the EFQM methodology (Validation of Committed to Excellence) in order to maintain the **GOLD Label** for additional two years. For negotiation of the detailed procedures, ESCA can be contacted.

Steps of improvement and requirements for maintaining the **GOLD label** after four years, currently are not yet discussed nor elaborated.

For the assessment/award procedure for the **GOLD Label** and the BRONZE label, costs apply. Please contact ESCA for more details.

It is up to the cluster organisation to optionally use various existing instruments for preparation of the initial external assessment of the ECEI **Quality Indicators** for becoming awarded with the **GOLD Label**. In this context ESCA strongly recommends a benchmarking of the cluster organisation leading to the BRONZE label.

