

CLUSTER ACCELERATION PROGRAMME – ROADMAP

Chapter 1 - Why Collaborate?

Benefits of business collaboration Working collaboratively can help you to improve your business competitiveness, become more innovative, enhance staff skills and win new business.

Businesses who work collaboratively will frequently engage in information-sharing and work together on cost-reduction measures to maximise their profitability and increase opportunities. They will often collaborate on commercial ventures such as the development of new products or entry into new markets.

A business may work collaboratively to achieve a number of key business benefits:

- Financial benefits - the financial benefits of being part of a network can include an increase in domestic or export sales, submitting a joint tender to win larger contracts or a reduction in costs by sharing resources
- People - the benefits to staff can include developing employees' skills and abilities, safeguarding jobs, increasing employment and encouraging staff motivation
- Physical capital - the benefits of being part of a network can have an impact on the physical capital of the business by supporting the sharing of facilities, equipment and raw materials
- Intellectual capital - the intellectual capital of a business can benefit through informationsharing, engagement in collaborative research, development, and design activities. They may avail of other companies' complementary strengths, capabilities and also share best practice
- Develop new processes - joining a network can support a business to develop new or innovative products, processes or services. It may help increase company knowledge of a marketplace to help them identify potential new customers and allow them to compete more effectively.

Working collaboratively may provide member companies with access to resources that would otherwise be beyond the scope of a single business. Individual businesses can face a number of limitations when trying to compete in global markets. This may include scale and expertise.

Through collaboration, businesses can often complement each other and specialise in different areas to compete in markets usually beyond their individual reach.

How can the Cluster Acceleration Programme help?

The Cluster Acceleration Programme provides funding to SMEs who want to collectively work together to exploit opportunities arising from new products, services or ways of working.

Programme Details

The Cluster Acceleration Programme aims to increase the competitiveness of NI based SMEs initially through the establishment of collaborative networks who will carry out feasibility studies on particular projects or commercial opportunities. The formation of 5 Industry-led Clusters will then be derived from the outcome of successful feasibility studies.

The programme provides support for projects aligned to the 7 priority sectors identified by the Department for the Economy: Defining priority sectors/clusters | Department for the Economy (economy-ni.gov.uk)

The Programme support operates on two levels:

Phase one: Cluster Feasibility Study Phase One offers up to £60,000 at 100% grant rate for SME-led networks consisting of a minimum of 8-10 SMEs, to scope out innovative collaborative projects with the potential to increase business competitiveness.

Phase two: Cluster Project Phase Two offers up to £1,000,000 per annum, at 100% grant rate (for a maximum period of 5 years) for up to 5 Clusters emerging from the feasibility studies scoped at Phase One. There must be a minimum of 20 member organisations within the Cluster, including businesses, entrepreneurs, stakeholders from academia and government.

For more information on the Programme please visit the FAQs in the Cluster Acceleration Programme Toolkit.

What is a Network?

A Network comprises an informal group of businesses and stakeholders working collaboratively to take advantage of emerging opportunities and/or solve common problems. It is the embryonic foundation for a prospective Cluster and those with potential are referred to as 'emerging' clusters.

What is a Cluster Feasibility Study?

The Cluster Acceleration Programme provides funding to enable Networks of SMEs and stakeholders to carry out a Feasibility Study to assess the feasibility of a particular project/commercial opportunity. This Scoping Phase typically takes up to 24 months, although it is possible to complete a project in a shorter timeframe.

A Feasibility Study is not a Technical Report (although it may address the technical feasibility of any proposed solution), nor is it a business plan – rather it seeks to bring together a 'big picture' view of all the building blocks of a new venture. It allows participants to investigate the viability of the project, quantify the size, scale and value of the opportunity, identify priorities and risks, and devise a route map to take the project forward.

When considering a collaborative project, the Feasibility Study also provides an opportunity for individual members to assess whether or not they can work together, and if so, what the ground rules for engagement should be.

Below are some of the key benefits of carrying out a Cluster Feasibility Study:

- Defines the scope, scale and value of an opportunity
- Improves focus by defining priorities and/or establishing options
- Provides an evidence base for future investment and/or funding
- Identifies risks and associated mitigations
- Scope out business model options
- Allows for the development of Terms of Reference or appropriate Rules of Engagement

To be eligible for funding a Network must consist of a minimum of 8-10 Northern Ireland SMEs, one of which must be an Invest NI customer and be willing to sign and take the Letter of Offer on behalf of the Network.

The remaining members of a Network may include representatives of large companies, and other stakeholders such as academic institutions and public sector organisations, as appropriate. These additional organisations do not necessarily need to be based in Northern Ireland.

The grant provided must be used principally to engage the services of an independent facilitator who will manage the project in conjunction with the members of the Network.

Please note, it is also possible to make an application on behalf of a Network consisting predominantly (or led by) 'large' companies, however in this instance the maximum rate of funding will be reduced to 50%.

What is a Cluster?

The Cluster Acceleration Programme adopts the 'Super Cluster' model which is defined as combining industry, government and academia, capital investors, venture capitalists and entrepreneurs that are linked by their economic activities (related sectors, value chains, markets, technologies etc).

The Cluster may form through multiple collaborative Networks, including the merging of Networks actively participating in Phase One that provide critical mass and economies of scale to tackle challenges and opportunities relevant to the Cluster members.

Clusters must draw members from across NI, including rural and urban areas. Through Phase two funding, Cluster managers are employed by the Clusters in order to administer and manage the relationship between member organisations and stakeholders. Cluster managers are also responsible for providing monitoring data to Invest NI.

What is a Cluster project? (Phase two project)

If a compelling evidence base has been gathered as part of a Cluster Feasibility Study, it may be possible to secure funding for a Cluster Project. The decision to provide this funding will be solely at the discretion of Invest NI. As with Phase One Cluster Feasibility Studies projects, the funding provided by Invest NI is intended to be used to engage the services of an independent facilitator (Cluster Manager) to carry out a project typically lasting for up to 5 years.

Cluster projects will require a detailed SMART (Specific; Measurable; Activity-based; Realistic; Time-bound) objectives project plan, a risk register, a detailed budget and evidence of robust governance processes.

More information on making an application for Phase Two Cluster Project funding will be published prior to the call opening for applications.

Please note, it is also possible to make an application on behalf of a Cluster consisting predominantly (or led by) 'large' companies, however in this instance the maximum rate of funding will be reduced to 50%.

Chapter 2 - Putting your project together

Start the conversation

If you are an existing Invest NI customer you are required to discuss the proposed project with your Client Executive.

Applications to the Programme are normally accepted in defined call periods, which take place at least once a year. However, we understand that it often takes time to independently engage with the relevant partners and stakeholders in the formation of a Network/Cluster, therefore we encourage early prior engagement to establish your grouping instead of starting from scratch when a call opens.

How to set SMART Objectives?

Each project funded under The Cluster Acceleration Programme is required to have a set of SMART Objectives along with the application form. These will form the basis of the project and will inform all subsequent project activities.

Each objective should demonstrate the following characteristics:

Specific: Your objective should be clear and specific, otherwise it will be difficult to achieve. When drafting the objective try to answer the four 'W' questions:

- What do I want to accomplish?
- Why is this goal important?
- Who is involved?
- Which resources or risks are involved?

Measurable: It is important to have measurable goals so that you can track your progress and stay motivated.

A measurable goal should address questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How regularly?
- How will I know when it's accomplished?

Activity-based: Your objectives need to be realistic and activity based in order to be successful. In other words you need to identify clear tasks that once undertaken will help you deliver against your objective/s.

An activity based objective will answer questions such as:

- What steps/tasks do we need to undertake to accomplish this goal?
- How realistic are these tasks based on other constraints, such as finance, resources, timing, regulatory, technical and operational limits?

Realistic: This step is about ensuring that your objective matters to the Network and that it also aligns with other relevant objectives:

- Is the proposed objective worthwhile?
- Do we have control over achieving the objective?
- Does it match with our other efforts/needs?

Time-bound: Every goal needs a target date so that you have a deadline to focus on and something to work towards.

This part of the SMART objective criteria will help the Network ensure that the project tasks are allocated sufficient time/resources to ensure they are addressed in an effective manner.

You can find out more about setting SMART objectives in the CAP Application Guidance Notes.

How to identify other members

Think about the project and the skills you need to enable you to deliver against the project. What other SMEs are there that you might be able to work with? Can you approach them? Can you work with them?

How to identify project stakeholders

To ensure that your collaborative project creates the right conditions for success you will need to think about engaging with any stakeholders who are relevant to the project. According to the Project Management Institute (PMI), the term project stakeholder refers to 'an individual, Network, or organization, who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a project' (Project Management Institute, 2013).

These stakeholders may have an interest in, or stand to gain from the successful completion of a project; or may be in a position to exert a positive (or negative) influence on elements of the project.

In the context of The Cluster Acceleration Programme project stakeholders may include regulators, larger companies, public sector organisations etc. Government Departments, Local Councils, trade bodies, academia, entrepreneurs, start-ups.

How to identify a Lead Partner?

The company that signs and holds the Letter of Offer on behalf of the collective becomes the Lead Partner. They must have an established relationship with Invest NI through their existing Client Executive, and will be responsible for paying the facilitator and subsequently submitting the retrospective grant claims to Invest NI.

How to identify project risks?

In order to minimise potential barriers to the success of your project you should seek to identify possible risks and consider what steps you can take to mitigate against these. Risks can fall into a number of categories – operational, financial, regulatory etc. You will find more information on how to generate a project Risk Register in the CAP Application Guidance Notes.

Completing an Application Form

The Cluster Acceleration Programme Application Form (including SMART Objectives and Risk Register) should be filled out by the Network/Cluster and submitted by the Lead Partner on behalf of the entire collective.

Please ensure that all the members read the application form before it is submitted.

We cannot consider funding a project unless an application form has been completed.

You can find out more about how to complete an application form in the CAP Application Guidance Notes.

Chapter 3 - Starting your project

What is a facilitator/Cluster Manager?

The funding provided by the Invest NI Cluster Acceleration Programme is designed to be used to secure the services of an independent Facilitator (Cluster Manager for Phase two projects), who will work with the members to deliver against the project objectives.

The individual will enable Networks and/or Clusters to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. The Facilitator/ Cluster manager is a 'neutral' party who, by not taking sides or expressing a point of view during the project, can advocate for fair, open and inclusive procedures to deliver the Network's project.

A good Facilitator will display the following characteristics/skills:

- Ability to stimulate interaction and collaboration
- Creates a safe environment for the group to share and build trust
- Good listener
- Provides a structure for discussion and exploration of new opportunities
- Encourages all participants to contribute
- Uses open questions to stimulate new possibilities and/or ways of thinking
- Is neutral and responsive, rather than reactive
- Can synthesise often competing views
- Challenges (respectfully) patterns of behaviour/thinking
- Is conscious of project timeframes and can work within deadlines/reporting structures
- Appreciates the importance of good project governance
- Displays empathy and emotional intelligence
- Has good communication skills, both written and oral

A Facilitator/Cluster Manager will generally carry out the following tasks:

- actively involve all members of the Network in decision making
- ensure that the project objectives are met in a timely fashion
- maximise individuals' commitment and engagement
- build a team spirit that lasts
- scan the horizon for new opportunities
- achieve consensus by challenging assumptions
- articulate a shared vision
- take responsibility for project administration, including collecting timesheets, assist in preparing claims, and draft a final report and recommendations

How do I find a Facilitator/Cluster Manager?

Invest NI maintains a database of experienced service providers, including those who identify as facilitators. Although those on the list are not endorsed, vetted or approved by ourselves, we can filter the database by sectoral and functional knowledge and provide you with a list of names, contact details, linkedin profiles and websites of those who may be suitable for the role you are seeking to fill.

Please note that you are not obliged to choose a Facilitator from this list. Please ask your Cluster Acceleration Programme Executive for more details on how to access the database.

What is the appointment process for a facilitator/Cluster Manager?

The Network or Cluster is responsible for sourcing and appointing a suitable candidate. As this is the key role within the project we recommend that for Phase One Cluster feasibility studies a minimum of three quotes are obtained from potential candidates.

These quotes should consist of a tender document detailing the proposed project methodology, along with a pricing structure and evidence of previous (relevant) experience. The quotations should be followed up with an interview to ensure that the candidate is a good 'fit' for both the project and its participants.

For Phase Two Cluster projects we also recommend that you advertise the post in line with best practice recruitment processes.

What is a Letter of Offer? (LoO)

For Phase one Cluster Feasibility Studies the Letter of Offer forms the contract between the Network (via the Lead Company) and Invest NI;

For Phase two Cluster projects the Letter of Offer forms the contract between the Cluster and Invest NI;

Both contain all the obligations relating to the project, as well as the specific objectives relating to the project.

What is the Letter of Adherence (LoA)

The Letter of Adherence is sent to all the SME project members (aside from the Lead Company). It advises the project members of the programme rules and regulations, and their obligations under the scheme and must be signed by each participating company, and returned to Invest NI.

It also informs participating SMEs that for the purposes of State Aid the grant is deemed to have been shared across all the Network and Cluster member companies (see below for more information on State Aid).

What do you need to know about State Aid?

The assistance provided under The Cluster Acceleration Programme represents State Aid under Commission Regulation EU 651/2014, 17 June 2014 (the General Block Exemption Regulation - GBER), specifically Article 28: Innovation Aid for SMEs. The Programme is not De Minimis Aid. No single undertaking may receive in excess of EUR 220,000 of innovation aid in any 3 year period. For the avoidance of doubt, only grant aid awarded under Article 28 notified schemes offering 100% aid intensity are deemed to count towards the EUR 220,000 cumulative cap.

The Programme operates on the basis of the Lead Company receiving and holding any and all financial assistance provided to the project on trust for all the members. Therefore (and only for the administrative purpose of calculating levels of GBER aid allocated to any one undertaking under 100% funded Article 28 schemes) each Network/Cluster member shall Collaborative Acceleration Programme Roadmap 12 be deemed to have benefited to an amount equal to an equal share of any, and all, financial assistance provided by Invest NI pursuant to the Letter of Offer in question.

It is important that you understand the State Aid implications of participating in The Cluster Acceleration Programme. If you have any further questions please contact your allocated Cluster Acceleration Programme Executive.

What do you need to know about the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)?

All participating members fall under the requirements of GDPR, however to enable delivery of the Cluster Acceleration Programme we may share your contact information with other businesses, public sector organisations and academic institutions as appropriate, within the context of encouraging networking, access to new economic opportunities and/or knowledge transfer.

For details on how we use your personal data, including your rights, please visit: www.investni.com/privacy

What is a kick-off meeting?

Once you have signed and returned your Letter of Offer, and appointed a Facilitator or Cluster Manager, we will ask you to set up a kick-off meeting to enable all members of the project team, and your allocated Invest NI Programme Executive, to meet and officially start the project.

At this time Invest NI will provide an overview of the general commitments, reporting structures and financial processes associated with the project. This is an opportunity to ask any questions and ensure that everyone is aware of what will be expected from this as a result of participating in The Cluster Acceleration Programme project. It also allows for a 'sense check' to be carried out to establish that

all participants are still committed to the project and to confirm if the project objectives remain relevant (eg. a change in market conditions between the application phase and the start of the project may necessitate an amendment to the objectives).

The Letters of Adherence from Network members are to be returned to Invest NI at this point. Please note that if you do wish to change any of your project objectives once a Letter of Offer has been issued you will need to discuss this with, and obtain approval from, your allocated Cluster Acceleration Programme Executive

Chapter 4 - Managing your project

Methodology

When carrying out your project you should seek to use a number of tools to help you identify opportunities, solve problems and reach consensus. Providing evidence of the outcome of using these tools will help strengthen your final report and provide a robust set of recommendations.

An experienced facilitator or Cluster Manager will be familiar with the following activities and will seek to make use of them throughout the project:

- Business Model Canvas <https://strategyzer.com/canvas/business-model-canvas>
- SWOT Analysis <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/swot-analysis-example>
- Benchmarking <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/benchmark-your-business-performance>

Governance.

It is good practice when establishing a collaborative project to agree a Terms of Reference (ToR) at the start of the project. Terms of reference define the purpose and structures of a project, committee, meeting, negotiation or any similar collection of people who have agreed to work together to accomplish a shared goal.

Terms of reference show how the Network in question will be defined, developed, and verified. They should also provide a documented basis for making future decisions and for confirming or developing a common understanding of the scope among Network members.

Creating detailed terms of reference is critical as they define the:

- vision, objectives, scope and deliverables (i.e. what has to be achieved)
- stakeholder roles and responsibilities (i.e. who will take part in it)
- resource, financial and quality plans (i.e. how it will be achieved)
- work breakdown structure and schedule (i.e. when it will be achieved)

Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)

A Non-Disclosure Agreement is a contract by which one or more parties agree not to disclose confidential information that they have shared with each other as a necessary part of doing business together. You might consider having one as part of your collaboration.

You can find out more about Non Disclosure Agreements here:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/types-non-disclosure-agreements>

Consortium Agreements

As an alternative to a Terms of Reference agreement you may prefer to have a Consortium Agreement; you can find out more about Consortium Agreements here:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/sites/default/files/Joint-venture-agreements-template.pdf>

Finance

The Lead Company is responsible for paying invoices submitted by the facilitator throughout the project and subsequently claiming the costs back from Invest NI. The claims for costs can be submitted at regular intervals throughout the project to facilitate cash flow, via a claim form. Claim guidance is available here:

[Submitting your claim | Invest Northern Ireland \(investni.com\)](#)

How to build Trust within a collaborative working relationship?

Successful collaboration is built as much on trust as on the viability of the project itself. Many organisations, with individual interests and goals, brought together for a common purpose can lead to tension. Ensuring that members work honestly and build trust is a priority.

The simplest way to achieve trust is establishing effective channels of communication between Network members. This could be through scheduled meetings at regular intervals, or identifying clear roles for individuals in project changes or challenges. It is vitally important that the Network ensures that each member follows procedures and protocols. These should be clearly communicated to all members.

Timesheets

All participating members are required to complete monthly timesheets when participating in a project. These should be collated by the Facilitator/Cluster Manager and submitted to Invest NI on request (typically to accompany claims).

The purpose of the timesheet is to demonstrate that members have been engaged in genuine collaboration.

Chapter 5 - Raising your profile

Once your collaborative project is underway you should give some consideration as to a communications strategy. Ensure that you maintain ongoing contact with The Cluster Acceleration Programme Executive who is allocated to your project. Make him/her aware of any achievements or impacts experienced by the companies as a result of participating in the project, as it may be possible to arrange additional PR via internal and external Invest NI channels.

Those participating in Phase One projects will be required to (in addition to fulfilling quarterly monitoring requirements) provide regular verbal and written updates on the projects, as and when requested by the relevant Programme Executive.

If you are taking part in a Phase Two Cluster project (in addition to fulfilling project monitoring requirements) you will be asked to make a formal quarterly update presentation to the relevant Invest NI team members – this is your chance to raise awareness of the good work being undertaken by the Cluster, and also provides an opportunity to establish relationships with other members of the Invest NI team who may be able to assist you and/or provide signposting to other sources of support .

Make use of social media channels, as appropriate, to promote your work (please note that if you are intending to embark on any major PR initiatives you must first clear any messaging via the Invest NI Corporate Communications team).

You can find out about the various social media channels here <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/social-media-platforms>

Chapter 6 - Other support available

This section focuses primarily on other support available from Invest NI (organisations such as InterTradeIreland and Local Councils also offer a range of support to SMEs; you can find out more about support available more generally to businesses through the by contacting:

Invest NI's Business Support Team - 0800 181 4422

NI Business Information Website www.nibusinessinfo.com

Please note that some support is only available to those companies that are Invest NI clients, while other support is available to the wider business base.

Collaborative research and development support

Collaborative Networks and Clusters with a focus on product and/or service development may also avail of collaborative research and development (R&D) opportunities available throughout the UK and Europe, and via Invest Northern Ireland Invest NI can help you access the following:

- Innovate UK funding competitions
- EU funding for innovation
- Innovation networks
- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- Innovation Vouchers
- Small Business Research Initiatives (SBRI)

Call the Invest NI Business Support Team on Tel 0800 181 4422 and speak to an innovation adviser to find out more.

Collaborate through knowledge transfer Knowledge transfer partnerships (KTPs) are a three way partnership between a business, an academic institution and a graduate. Funding may be available for those looking to participate in the scheme, if the eligibility criteria is met. You can find out more at this link: <https://www.investni.com/support-for-business/discover-the-knowledge-transfer-partnership.html> or by calling Invest NI's Business Support Team on Tel 0800 181 4422

Innovate UK funding competitions

Innovate UK is the UK's innovation agency. They support and fund business-led innovation across a range of industries. Innovate UK's funding competitions are open to all UK based businesses - from pre-start-ups and new companies to large multinational organisations. Some competitions aim to support collaborating projects and are open to research organisations working with business.

For additional advice and guidance on Innovate UK's programmes, you can contact Invest Northern Ireland's Collaborative R&D Support Service on Tel 0800 181 4422.

Collaborate through IUK Business Connect

Invest NI hosts Northern Ireland's branch of the Innovate UK's Business Connect, the largest innovation and business network in the world.

IUK Business Connect supports new technology coming into or being developed in Northern Ireland that involves international co-operation. If you are a small to medium-sized enterprise, IUK Business Connect can help you:

- find new markets for your products
- find new ways of sourcing, selling or licensing technology
- connect to new partners for commercial, technology and R&D collaborations
- to be investment ready and understand how to access funding and finance
- with one to one tailored specialist support to improve the way you manage innovation
- understand how to protect your intellectual property
- with support and coaching to increase your capability to innovate and grow

You can find out more here: <https://www.investni.com/support-for-business/innovation-research-and-development/innovateuk-business-growth>

Innovation Vouchers

An Innovation Voucher provides funding to small and medium sized businesses to work with an expert Knowledge Provider from a University, College or other Public Sector Research Body bringing new knowledge to help businesses innovate, develop and grow.

In some instances Collaborative Networks and Clusters may find it beneficial to collectively pool Innovation Vouchers. Typical projects we support include:

- Ideas for new or improved products, processes and services
- Access to information and expertise on new materials
- Tapping into research and scientific expertise

You can find out more information here: <https://www.investni.com/support-for-business/innovation-vouchers.html> Intellectual

Property Advice

Protecting your intellectual property is crucial if your business is developing a new product, service, brand or process. Our specialist advisors can help with international patents and patent searches, trademarks and trademark searches and designs and copyright.

From time to time, we also run seminars and events in partnership with the UK Intellectual Property Office, The British Library and the European Patent Office.

Eligible businesses can get financial assistance to carry out an Intellectual Asset Management Audit and to protect patents, trademarks, design registration and licensing agreements.

You can find out more here: <https://www.investni.com/support-for-business/protectyourintellectual-property.html> Export /

Trade Missions

Opportunities also exist to take part in Invest NI trade missions and/or shows. You can find more information here: <https://www.investni.com/trade-mission/export-events.html>

Chapter 7 - Outcomes and Impacts

Why do we need a report? Who is the report for? Who will be reading it? Regardless of whether you are participating in a Phase One or a Phase Two project you will be required to complete a Final Report at the end of your project.

The Facilitator/Cluster Manager will draft the report in conjunction with the members of the Network. The aim is to capture all the evidence gathered during the project and (in the case of Phase One cluster feasibility study) use this to inform the next steps, setting out the vision for the Network and a clear plan of action.

In the case of Phase Two Cluster project the report should capture and reflect outcomes, impacts and learnings as a result of the project (this is also the case for Phase One). More importantly, the report is also used to demonstrate the impact of the project on the participating members and stakeholders.

The primary audience for the report is the members of the Network/Cluster. These SMEs have defined the scope of the project and have agreed on the objectives; it is they who stand to benefit from the collaborative activity and therefore they must be satisfied that the report is comprehensive and fit for purpose.

As the project funders, Invest NI also have a stake in ensuring that the report addresses all the objectives in the Letter of Offer and represents value for money in respect of the public purse. The allocated Programme Executive will review the draft final report and will more than often share it with colleagues within Invest NI and the wider public sector, depending on the subject matter. This is to ensure that the findings/outcomes/recommendations contained therein are feasible, relevant and factually accurate and to take into account any feedback that might improve the document.

In some instances depending on the subject matter, Invest NI would wish to avail of the report as a reference point/ best practice document and share with other Government Departments.

Report Writing Guidelines

We acknowledge that the aim of the project is not simply to create a final report, however in order to demonstrate good project governance a final document is required. It is important that this document is of a professional standard and that it reflects the fact that public funding has been made available to support the work of the Network.

By 'professional' we mean the following:

- Devoid of typos
- Have numbered pages
- Contain an index page and an Executive Summary
- Be factually accurate
- Provide citations for all statistics and quotes
- Make use of the same font and layout conventions throughout
- Contain reference to the fact that funding from the project has come from Invest NI

Process for sign-off

The content of your final report should be agreed and signed off by all members of the Network, before being submitted to Invest NI. If there are elements of your report that you wish to remain confidential, please indicate these clearly; Invest NI is subject to Freedom of Information legislation and may be required to share final reports, subject to any confidentiality provisions arising from the inclusion of commercially sensitive material.

After having reviewed your report the Programme Executive responsible for your project is more than likely to have feedback on the document; therefore please do not pay your Facilitator/Cluster Manager in full until the final report has been signed off by Invest NI.

Invest NI will not pay out against any final claim from the Lead Company until the report is of a satisfactory standard and has addressed all the SMART objectives contained in the Letter of Offer.

Chapter 8 - Next Steps

The Phase One Feasibility Study under The Cluster Acceleration Programme will result in one of three outcomes, all of which are deemed to be successful in their own right.

No further action

Upon completion of the project, it was evident that the opportunities being sought either did not materialise as expected or additional development work needs to be completed before any commercial returns are realised. The result being that the companies forming the Network are better informed and able to focus on other areas, having explored their initial ideas.

Potential for Development

Upon completion of the project, the scoping study highlighted development opportunities in the areas scoped / or additional opportunities from work carried out throughout the project. The Network can proceed as an independent Network by self-funding any future development themselves or depending on the opportunities identified they may seek assistance from other organisations/ programmes.

Implementation Potential

If a compelling evidence base has been gathered as part of a Phase One Cluster Feasibility Study, it may be possible to secure funding for a Phase Two Cluster Project. The decision to provide Phase Two funding will be solely at the discretion of Invest NI.

As with Phase One projects, the funding provided by Invest NI is intended to be used to engage the services of an independent facilitator (Cluster Manager) to carry out a project typically lasting for up to 5 years.

Phase Two projects will also require a detailed SMART (Specific; Measurable; Activity-based; Realistic; Time-bound) objectives project plan, a risk register, a detailed budget and evidence of robust governance processes. More information on making an application for Phase Two funding will be published prior to the call opening date.