



ClusterXchange Frequently Asked Questions by ESCP-4x collected by the ClusterXchange Support Office

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#	Eligibility criteria	
1	Q	Are large companies, public authorities at both regional and city/administration levels, innovation agencies and universities eligible in the ClusterXchange scheme?
	A	<p>The eligible organisations to participate in the ClusterXchange (CXC) scheme as Host Organisations (HO) and Visiting Organisations (VO) are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) cluster organisations profiled on ECCP or similar business network organisations b) scaling-up support organisations (technology centre, research institute, fab-lab, resource-efficiency service provider, [digital] innovation hub, creative hub, incubator or accelerator) that are members of cluster organisations profiled on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP); or c) small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are members of cluster organisations profiled on ECCP <p>Therefore, large companies, public authorities, innovation agencies, universities and other types of entities different from the above listed organisation types are not considered eligible.</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances, organisations under b) and c) that are not members of cluster organisations profiled on ECCP can take the role of the HO (but not the role of the VO). This will be accepted following a case-by-case assessment and pre-approval of the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME). For more information on these circumstances and the general eligibility rules, please check section 1.3.1 and Annex 2. of the ClusterXchange pilot scheme - Quality Manual for European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Excellence (ESCP-4x) (Quality Manual).</p>
2	Q	Can organisations from the United Kingdom still participate in the CXC scheme?
	A	Organisations from the United Kingdom are still eligible to participate in the CXC scheme under the current COSME programme.
#	Profile creation on the CXC IT tool	
3	Q	Can there be more than two profiles on the CXC IT Tool for one organisation?
	A	The CXC IT Tool only allows the registration of one VO or/and one HO profile for each organisation. This means any organisation can have maximum two profiles registered in the CXC IT Tool (1 VO+1 HO). Moreover, only one representative from an organisation can be included on each organisational profile on the CXC IT Tool (the representative in the organisation's VO and HO profiles can be different). This representative will also be the one representing the organisation in an exchange and will be indicated in the Commitment(s) to Quality for the organisation.
4	Q	Why does the CXC IT Tool show the message 'You have to be an administrator of a published ECCP Cluster Org profile in order to participate in the CXC as a Cluster Organisation' when creating a user profile?
	A	<p>The CXC IT Tool is linked to the Cluster organisation database of ECCP and this allows verifying whether a cluster organisation wishing to create a profile in the CXC IT Tool is profiled on ECCP. This is done as follows: all users registering their cluster organisations on the CXC IT Tool are cross-checked on the ECCP database to check if they belong to a cluster organisation profiled on ECCP. Therefore, all users that wish to register their cluster organisations' profiles as a VO or HO on the CXC IT Tool should be administrators of their cluster organisations' profiles on ECCP.</p> <p>Cluster organisations that do not have yet a profile on ECCP, should register here: https://clustercollaboration.eu/user/register. More information on how to register a profile for your organisation can be found here: https://clustercollaboration.eu/register-your-profile</p>
5	Q	Can an ESCP-4x reject a profile if it is of an organisation not part of its own Partnership (as a beneficiary / partner or a member of a partner) or not focusing on the sectors of activity covered by its respective ESCP-4x?
	A	CXC is open to any eligible organisations even if not linked to any ESCP-4x or not from sectors of activity covered by the ESCP-4x. A profile can only be rejected in justified circumstances, such as for instance ineligibility of the organisation applying for an exchange. In the eventual case the selected ESCP-4x does not have further funds to finance exchanges, a VO profile can be sent back to 'draft' requesting the user to select another ESCP-4x. Before doing this, the CXC Support Office's (CXC SO) assistance should be sought to find a suitable alternative ESCP-4x.
6	Q	How can a participant edit a profile after it has been submitted to validation?
	A	Once a VO or HO profile has been submitted to validation, the profile users cannot edit the profiles on the CXC IT Tool anymore. In this case there is a need to do so, the user has to contact either the ESCP-4x selected to validate the profile or the CXC SO by email (clusterXchange@clustercollaboration.eu) expressing the need and reason to edit the profile. In case the profile is still 'in review', both the ESCP-4x and the CXC SO can send back the profile to 'draft' and notify the user to make the modifications. In case the profile is already 'published', only the CXC SO can send the profile back to 'draft'.
7	Q	Can the preferred dates for an exchange indicated on an organisational profile on the CXC IT Tool be changed?
	A	All the information inserted in the preferences on the HO and VO profiles is only indicative and it helps formulate a match score for the matches. They can be changed after publishing the profiles. Note that an exchange can, therefore, take place on any dates other than the timeframe of availability indicated in the profiles under preferences.
#	Matching and Exchange building	

8	Q	What are the responsibilities of the ESCP-4x in the matching process?
	A	The ESCP-4x do not directly intervene during the matching process via the CXC IT Tool. However, the ESCP-4x are able to communicate with the VOs and HOs using a group chat on the CXC IT Tool and initiate a match but only the VOs and HOs can validate the match.
9	Q	What is a group of exchanges and how is it set up?
	A	A group of exchanges under CXC is an event bundling multiple exchanges, arranged between one HO and multiple VOs. All the participants of this event are expected to prepare individual Commitment to Quality documents (containing the same exchange plans) signed between each VO and the HO, as well as the ESCP-4x managing them. This will constitute each exchange individually between the HO and each VO. In case financial assistance is involved in the form of lump sums, a Financial Agreement (template included in the ClusterXchange IT Tool user manual available at https://clustercollaboration.eu/sites/default/files/clusterxchange_it_tool_user_manual.pdf) should additionally be signed between each VO and its ESCP-4x.
10	Q	Should the exchanges take place only within one sector of activity or can there be trans-sectorial exchanges?
	A	Exchanges can take place within the same sector or involve organisations from different sectors depending on the preference and experience of the participants.
11	Q	Is it possible to cover a sector of activity in an exchange that is not represented by any of the ESCP-4x?
	A	It is possible to cover sectors via exchanges that are not the focus of any of the ESCP-4x. The sectors and topics covered in an exchange should be agreed on by the respective VO and HO.
12	Q	Can a person other than the one registered on an organisation's profile on the CXC IT Tool perform the exchange?
	A	No, the person that is registered on an organisation's profile on the CXC IT Tool should be the one that participates in the exchange.
13	Q	If the VO and HO discover they have diverging plans during exchange building phase, can the exchange be cancelled and the participants match again with others?
	A	Ideally, the HO and VO should address their main ideas for the exchange before the matches are validated by both participants. Nevertheless, in the rare instances where a match is mutually considered by the participants as incompatible after its validation, the exchange can be archived by the responsible ESCP-4x. For physical exchanges, this process has to take place on the CXC IT Tool and only the ESCP-4x responsible for the exchange and the CXC SO can archive an exchange. However, before such action is taken, the Partnership should contact the SO by email and state the reasons why the action has to be taken. Only after a confirmation to move on with the action is received from the SO should the ESCP-4x archive the exchange. When an exchange is archived it is perceived by the CXC IT Tool as a completed exchange. The VO profile included in an archived exchange also becomes archived and cannot be used for further matches and an exchange. Therefore, after archiving, the SO will have to manually delete the exchange and retrieve the VO profile on the CXC IT Tool so that it can be used again for further matches and an exchange. The ESCP-4x will be informed when the profile of the VO has been retrieved. The profile of the HO will not be affected by archiving an exchange, as a HO profile remains available for matching even if engaged already in exchanges and/or having completed exchanges. For virtual exchanges the exchange building and execution phases are conducted outside the CXC IT Tool and, therefore, the matches can be cancelled without informing the SO until the Commitment to Quality has been developed.
14	Q	How are virtual exchanges conducted on the CXC IT Tool?
	A	All prospective participants (VO and HOs) have to register on the CXC IT Tool to take part in virtual exchanges under CXC. The process of creating a profile and matching will follow the same as that of the physical exchange. The registered users need to select an ESCP-4x to oversee their exchange at the 'profile creation' stage and once the profiles have been validated by the chosen ESCP-4x and published, the participants can initiate a match. Once the HOs and VOs agree on the match and decide to conduct a virtual exchange, the remaining processes have to move offline and communication between the HO and VO and the responsible ESCP-4x can be done by email or phone calls. For virtual exchanges, the participants must NOT validate the matches on the CXC IT Tool, as a match validated by both the participants would automatically move to the 'exchange phase'. In the case a match would move to the exchange phase although it is related a virtual exchange, the profile of the VO will be made inaccessible to form matches for a physical exchange in the future. Therefore, in case of such incident, the CXC SO should be contacted by the ESCP-4x responsible for the exchanges and the exchange made on the IT Tool will be manually removed and the VO profiles recovered for future matches. It is important that all virtual exchanges are recorded on the CXC IT Tool as non-validated matches for the purpose of keeping records of virtual exchanges and the validation of the participants as eligible. Please note that by the CXC rules an organisation can participate as VO in one virtual exchange and one physical exchange later on. However, an organisation can participate as HO in multiple exchanges, both virtual and physical. For more information, please visit the Guidelines for ClusterXchange virtual exchanges accessible from the CXC SO.
15	Q	Who should sign the Commitment to Quality and Financial Agreement?

	A	<p>The Commitment to Quality has to be signed by all the parties involved in an exchange: the HO and VO and their ESCP-4x. The Financial Agreement (not required for virtual exchanges) is signed between the VO and its ESCP-4x. For the VO and HO, the signatories should be the authorised representatives of the organisations (e.g. directors, managers, or anyone with the authorisation to sign on behalf of the organisation). This person is often different from the representative of the organisation participating in the exchange.</p> <p>It is of note, however, that the person registered in an organisation’s profile on the CXC IT Tool should be the one that will represent the organisation in the exchange and, therefore, this person should appear in the Commitment to Quality in this role.</p> <p>As for the ESCP-4x, the signatories must be the authorised personnel that can sign in the name of an ESCP-4x (e.g. coordinator).</p>
16	Q	<p>What is the procedure for signing the Commitment to Quality and Financial Agreement?</p> <p>A</p> <p>The Commitment to Quality and Financial Agreement can contain handwritten and/or electronic signatures. The following rules apply to the signature of these documents.</p> <p><u>The documents containing only electronic signatures:</u> Only the qualified electronic signature (QES) within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 (eIDAS Regulation) is accepted. Documents signed with a QES benefit from the highest level of security and legal certainty under the eIDAS Regulation.</p> <p>A qualified electronic signature is an advanced electronic signature which is additionally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - created by a qualified signature creation device (QSCD); - and is based on a qualified certificate for electronic signatures. <p>How to create a Qualified electronic signature?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obtain a digital certificate from a Trust Service Provider (TSP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European Union Trusted List : https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/tl-browser/#/ can be consulted to find trusted providers of qualified certificates and the private key related to the certificate which will be usually stored by providers on a ‘qualified electronic signature creation device’ (QSCD). To make sure that the QES used is compliant to eIDAS Regulation, the ESCP-4x need to check that both the service provider and the qualified certificate generation service used are included in the EU Trusted List Browser. 2. Using Trusted List Browser, go to “Search by Type of service” (top left of the screen). Select “Qualified certificate for electronic signature” and click “Next”. Then, select any country you may found appropriate and click “Search”. You will then see the list with all available Trusted Providers in your country which you can contact. 3. An electronic signature is issued for a physical person associated with a business and the provider may ask you to provide evidence for this during the process. Once you have a qualified certificate for electronic signature, you will be able to sign documents. It is recommended that ESCP-4x check the signatures and the validity of their certificate with the following tool: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The DSS Demonstration validation tool available at https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/DSS/webapp-demo/validation can help check the validity of a certificate by indicating the number and type of valid signatures in a document. <p>Please note that TSPs might offer their own step-by-step process for signing digitally.</p> 4. More background information can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/wiki/display/CEFDIGITAL/eSignature If you have a specific question you can also contact the CEF Digital Help Desk. <p>If all electronic signatures are valid, then the signed document is valid too.</p> <p><u>The documents containing only hand-written (BLUE INK) signatures:</u> The document must be signed in BLUE INK in original, which is a hand-written signature, and should be sent by post to the ESCP-4x that is collecting it (VOP). In this case, an advanced scanned pdf copy is sufficient to initiate the virtual exchange, but it does not replace, in anyway, the posting procedure.</p>
17	Q	<p>What financial assistance are ESCP-4x partners (beneficiaries) entitled to when participating in exchanges?</p> <p>A</p> <p>ESCP-4x partners participating in an exchange are not allowed to claim the lump sum foreseen for VOs. In case beneficiaries (of call for proposals European Cluster Excellence Programme - COS-CLUSTER-2018-03-02) themselves take part in ClusterXchange as VOs, beneficiaries should comply with their travel policies or usual practices and the incurred travel costs should be reported under ‘other direct costs’ (travel). All the ESCP-4x partners must be registered under their own ESCP-4x on the CXC IT Tool and sign the Commitment to Quality to make sure that the exchange is funded by their ESCP-4x’s budget.</p>
18	Q	<p>How are exchanges counted towards the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of an ESCP-4x?</p>

	A	An exchange can be counted just once towards KPIs. This rule is particularly important when the ESCP-4x that manage the VO and HO in an exchange are different (VO and HO are related to different ESCP-4x). The exchange is only counted towards the KPIs of the ESCP-4x that organises the exchange and <u>pays the financial assistance to the VO</u> . This means that an exchange can only be counted towards the KPIs of the ESCP-4x to which the VO is linked (as this ESCP-4x is in charge of paying the financial assistance) and not towards the KPIs of the ESCP-4x to which the HO is linked. This counting system is also applied to virtual exchanges, even if no financial assistance is involved.
19	Q	How many of the exchanges under the management of each ESCP-4x should include participants from outside of the respective ESCP-4x?
	A	CXC is not limited to the direct beneficiaries of the ESCP-4x and their members. 25% of the exchanges of an ESCP-4x must include a participant (either a HO or VO) that is not a beneficiary, nor a member of a beneficiary of the respective ESCP-4x. The external participant may though be a beneficiary (or a member of a beneficiary) of another ESCP-4x for an exchange to count towards the 25% KPI.
#		Exchange execution and finalisation
20	Q	What type of feedback is needed from the HOs and VOs as proof of having participated in the ClusterXchange scheme?
	A	HOs and VOs are required to present a Final Activity Report through the CXC IT Tool (found under the “My exchanges” tab) at the end of the exchange. The Final Activity Report will be evaluated and approved or rejected by the ESCP-4x responsible for the exchange. This report is a primary source of evidence of the exchange having taken place. However, as the travelling party in an exchange, the VOs are also required to present evidence of having travelled to the HOs’ countries. In this case, it is the responsibility of the ESCP-4x that provide funding for the VOs to request the type of proof (e.g. hotel invoice, rent contract, boarding passes, letter from the HO) they need. The ESCP-4x are encouraged to inform the VOs before the exchange arrangements are finalised about the type of proof they need and when it should be delivered.
21	Q	Can there be third parties involved in the activities envisaged for an exchange?
	A	Yes, the activities planned for an exchange can also include elements with third parties, other than the HO and VO representatives, if their involvement increases the impact of the exchange e.g. widen networking opportunities, exposure to new markets and methods, increasing skills and knowledge through the involvement of a professional trainer.
22	Q	After an exchange has concluded, what documentation is needed?
	A	An exchange is considered final when two Final Activity Reports have been submitted respectively by the HOs and VOs and the ESCP-4x have validated them. The reports should be sent by email to the CXC SO (from the ESCP-4x) for validation within 10 days after the virtual exchange ends. For physical exchanges, the Final Activity Reports will be submitted through the CXC IT Tool within 7 days after the exchange ends.
#		Other
23	Q	How can an ESCP-4x add administrators to the CXC IT Tool?
	A	Each ESCP-4x needs to have access to the CXC IT Tool as an administrator in order to validate and monitor activities related to profile creation, matching and exchanges. For the admin access, the ESCP-4x need to arrange internally who will monitor the activities on the CXC IT Tool. It is possible to have one admin person with one access to the CXC IT Tool or multiple people can also access the admin profile of the ESCP-4x to which they belong. However, the person(s) to have the admin access on the CXC IT Tool has/have to be associated to the respective ESCP-4x profile on ECCP as administrators.