Interreg
North Sea Region
European Regional Development Fund

EUROPEAN UNION

Communication Strategy 2014-2020

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1 I About this document

This document describes how the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme ("the Programme") will approach communication in the 2014 – 2020 programming period.

More specifically, the document lays out the background and methodology for developing the communication strategy and identifies the aims and objectives, target groups, tactics and main activities for programme communication. It also maps the timeline of programme communications as well as the responsibilities. Finally, monitoring and evaluation of the communication effort is described.

The aim of the document is to provide a common understanding and approach to communication between the Programme's Monitoring Committee, Joint Secretariat, National Contact Points and projects.

The strategy clarifies what programme stakeholders can expect from one another as well as how they can cooperate to achieve joint aims and bigger impact.

2 I Background

The communication strategy is developed based on legal requirements from the European Commission as well as a number of key principles in line with the overall strategy and aims of the 2014 – 2020 Programme.

2.1 Legal background

The framework for Programme communications in the 2014 – 2020 programming period is laid out in articles 115 – 117 of Regulation 1303 / 2013 of the European Parliament and Council.

Article 115 stipulates that the Managing Authority (ie. Joint Secretariat) is responsible for drawing up a communication strategy covering a number of activities specified in annex XII. Article 116 specifies that the communication strategy must be submitted to the Monitoring Committee for approval no later than 6 months after the adoption of the Cooperation Programme.

The Cooperation Programme for 2014 – 2020 was adopted by the European Commission on 17 August 2015, making the final deadline for submission of the communication strategy to the Monitoring Committee 17 February 2016.

Implementing Regulation (EU) No 821 / 2014 furthermore lays out specific requirements for the Programme's information and communication measures.

2.2 Communication in the 2014 – 2020 Programme

Communication is a key business tool in successful organisations and needs to be an integral part of Programme and project strategies and planning.

Key principles in our understanding of communications for 2014 – 2020 are:

❖ **Communication is a horizontal task** and not limited to one body or unit. Therefore, the capacity to communicate the Programme has to be strengthened across all programme bodies and among project stakeholders.

❖ **Communication has a strategic management function,** it supports Programme management in reaching intended results and changes. Communication is key to achieving the changes envisaged by the Programme.

❖ **Communication goes beyond passing on information and messages,** it also aims at engaging and empowering stakeholders. Persuasive one-way communication therefore has to go hand in hand with dialogue-centered two-way communication.

❖ **The Programme and projects cooperate and share responsibility** of communicating aims and results.

3 I Methodology

3.1 Strategy development

The development of the communication strategy for 2014 – 2020 has been an ongoing process since early 2013.

The process has been characterized by internal discussions and desk research at the Joint Secretariat, presentations and discussions with programme bodies as well as discussions on strategies and aims across programmes in the network of Interreg communication officers coordinated by INTERACT.

The key steps in the development of the strategy are summarised below:

❖ In **February 2013,** the Joint Secretariat produced a Strategic Orientation Report for stakeholders, which included recommendations on the key principles for 2014 – 2020 communications.

❖ In the **autumn of 2013**, all partner countries were invited to take part in a communication working group on 2014 - 2020 communications.

❖ Having reviewed an early draft communication strategy based on the results of the ongoing evaluation on communication and desk research, the communication working group met in Hamburg in **December 2013.** Representatives from Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom were present at the meeting. The early draft strategy was approved without comments and it was furthermore decided to support the development of a joint Interreg brand as suggested by INTERACT.

❖ At the Programme Preparation Group (PPG) meeting number 7 in London in **February 2014**, the Joint Secretariat provided input on communication concepts for 2014 – 2020 and invited feedback. Some concrete suggestions were received and noted.

❖ In **April 2014,** the Joint Secretariat consulted the communication working group regarding the selection of a joint logo for INTERACT's joint branding initiative for Interreg programmes. A preferred logo was selected among four candidate logos – the same was later selected as the final Interreg logo by participating programmes.

❖ At the PPG meeting in Edinburgh in **May 2014** (meeting number 8), an update on communication strategy development was provided by the Joint Secretariat.

- ❖ **In June 2014,** a tender procedure was launched to find the developer for the new website, content management system and online monitoring system. The developers were confirmed in **September 2014** upon approval from the Programme Preparation Steering Group (PPSG).

- ❖ In **October 2014**, future programme communications were discussed with stakeholders and project representatives at the Billund 5.1 workshop in Billund, Denmark. Several ideas and suggestions were made and taken note of, both for the tactical and activities levels.

- ❖ In **November 2014**, a kick off meeting for the new website, content management system and online monitoring system was held in Viborg, Denmark with the selected providers. Development consequently kicked off in December.

- ❖ In **January and February of 2015**, the draft communication strategy was further developed prior to the PPSG meeting in April 2015.

- ❖ In **April 2015**, the draft communication strategy was presented and discussed at the final PPSG meeting. Following the meeting, comments from the group were edited into a final draft, which was approved at the first Monitoring Committee meeting of the 2014 – 2020 Programme in **October 2015**.

3.2 Approach

This communication strategy has been developed based on four central questions moving from the overall perspective to a concrete level:

- ❖ **Aims and objectives:** What does the programme wish to achieve with communication?

- ❖ **Target groups:** Who does the programme need to communicate with?

- ❖ **Tactics:** How does the programme interact with the target groups to achieve the aims and objectives?

- ❖ **Activities:** Which activities are suitable to achieve the aims and objectives?

4 I Aims and objectives

The main aim in communications for the 2014 – 2020 Programme is to **support project implementation and communication in order to maximize delivery of Programme and project objectives.**

The main objectives for 2014 – 2020 Programme communications are:

- ❖ **Attracting relevant stakeholders:** Ensuring that potential partners and stakeholders are informed about the Programme, including funding opportunities, relevant rules and regulations and the Cooperation Programme.

- ❖ **Supporting the project community:** Ensuring that project partners and stakeholders are informed of and have access to relevant tools and assistance needed to effectively implement and communicate the projects.

- ❖ **Making project results and outputs visible:** Ensuring that project results and outputs are collected and communicated throughout the project lifecycle to ensure that they are taken up throughout the North Sea Region and beyond.

- ❖ **Facilitating effective administration and support:** Ensuring that all bodies relevant for the administration of the Programme are fully informed and have easy access to relevant documentation to deliver effective administration of the Programme.

- ❖ **Keeping policy makers and stakeholders involved:** Ensuring that relevant policy makers and stakeholders are not only informed about the potential value, effectiveness and relevance of the projects and the Programme, but also actively involved in communicating the Programme.

5 I Target groups

As the Programme operates in 49 regions across seven countries, an extensive geographical area and a variety of sectors, it is necessary to clearly define which target groups are to be reached with Programme communications.

The key target groups are:

❖ **Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities**

  o Educational and research institutions

  o Non-governmental organisations

  o Small and medium sized enterprises

❖ **Beneficiaries**

  o Lead beneficiaries

  o Other beneficiaries

❖ **Programme bodies**

  o European Commission including DGs

  o Monitoring Committee

  o Steering Committee

  o National Contact Points

❖ **Other relevant stakeholders**

  o North Sea Region networks and potential multipliers, such as information centres in partner countries, European Commission representation offices and information offices of the European Parliament in the partner countries, thematic networks and interest groups

❖ **External non-professional audiences**

  o Relevant groups among the general public

Annex 2 outlines an indicative list of target groups.

In planning how to address the different target groups successfully, Programme stakeholders are mapped according to their level of interest in Programme work as well as their level of influence, using a matrix such as the following:

Figure 1: Stakeholder mapping based on stakeholder interest and influence
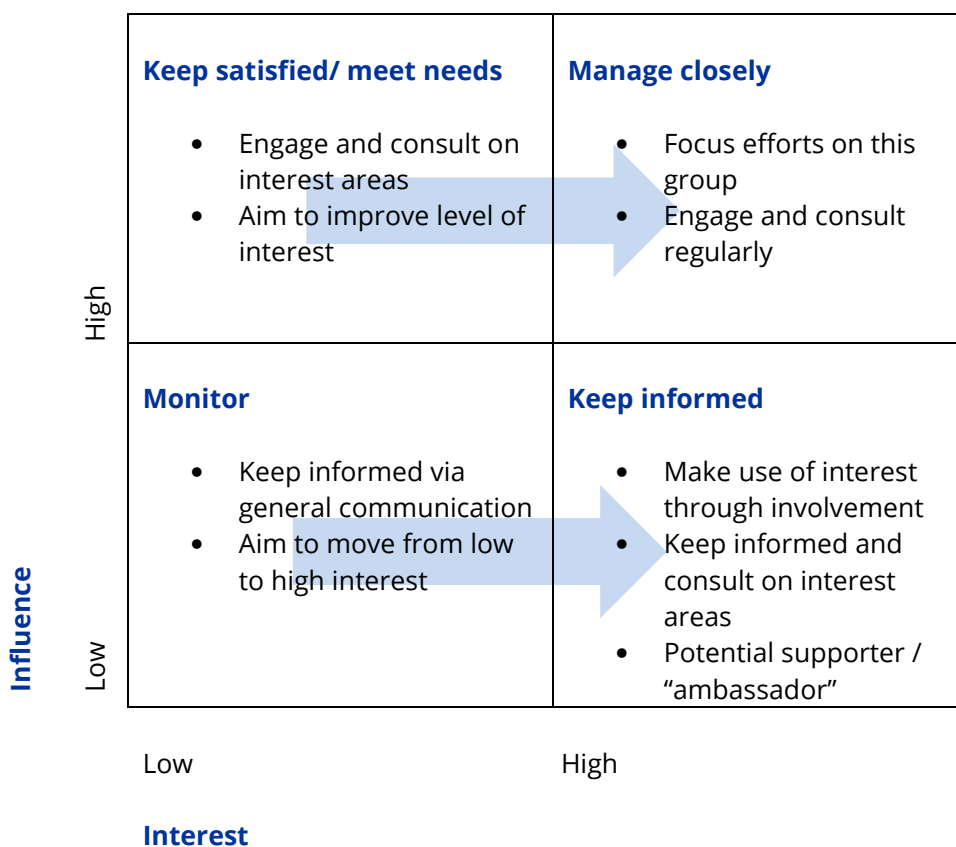
In this respect it is important to notice that whereas we can influence the level of interest our target groups have in the Programme, we cannot change our target groups' level of influence.

The general public is an example of a target group, which is classified as "low interest / low influence", and thus should be informed via general communication with the aim of increasing interest. In the other end of the spectrum, programme bodies such as European Commission Directorate-Generals and the Programme Monitoring Committee are examples of "high interest / high influence" target groups, which should be engaged and consulted regularly.

6 I Tactics

Having defined the aims and objectives of Programme communication as well as the target groups, it is necessary to consider which tactics to use to best accomplish the aims and objectives. Defining a set of tactical principles is necessary before moving on to defining specific communication activities.

The tactical principles for 2014 – 2020 communication are:

❖ **Tangible and relatable:** Presenting the Programme, its staff and management as approachable, professional and committed to creating change for the Region. Showing that the Programme is less "Brussels" and more concrete change for people across the entire region. Using visual means such as infographics, videos and photo material to facilitate better understanding of the Programme.

❖ **Project and priority focused**: The Programme can only become more tangible and relatable by showing more concretely what projects funded by the Programme accomplish. Project results are more easily understood in a Programme perspective when communicating the priority areas as an overarching theme.

❖ **Programme as moderator and facilitator – projects as co-creators:** The Programme and Joint Secretariat cannot communicate project results and perspectives alone – projects will be empowered to communicate more effectively themselves as well as take ownership of how their project is communicated by the Programme. The Programme will support this effort by moderating and facilitating project communication.

❖ **Demand-oriented:** Making relevant information and guidance material available in smaller packages users can consume when they need it.

7 I Activities

A wide range of activities will be used to effectively communicate the Programme according to the aims and objectives. The central ones are described in the following sections, whereas details and specifics will be part of the annual business plans.

7.1 Programme website

The new Programme website will be an easy-to-use one-stop information hub for all Programme target groups.

All information related to all stages of the project life cycle will be available on the website in the shape of a Programme Manual, fact sheets, videos, graphics and other guidance material and background documents. Furthermore, there will be easy access to results and outputs from previous programmes through a programme results video and links to results databases.

A key feature of the new website and content management system is that it will host project websites ("project webspaces"), which will be closely integrated with the Programme website and content management system. This has the clear benefit that projects no longer have to maintain a project section of the Programme website as well as a separate website (unless they wish to do so). Furthermore, all project results and outputs will be promoted through the Programme website, creating a clearer picture of the overall value of the Programme and the relevance of its projects.

A section of the website for each of the four priorities will highlight the new focus on project results communicated at priority level. In each section, the priority will be explained in brief, and stakeholders with interest in this specifc area of Programme work will find downloads, links to further information and project results and relevant news flashes.

A project ideas section closely integrated with the online monitoring system will publicise current project ideas, providing potential beneficiaries with a unique opportunity to connect, discuss ideas and develop partnerships.

Close integration with the new online monitoring system will ensure that updated project data can be used strategically across project webspaces and project and priority sections of the Programme website.

Related aims (all)	Related target groups (all)
❖ Attracting relevant stakeholders ❖ Supporting the project community ❖ Making project results and outputs visible ❖ Facilitating effective administration and support ❖ Keeping policy makers and stakeholders informed	❖ Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities ❖ Beneficiaries ❖ Programme bodies ❖ Other relevant stakeholders

7.2 Social media

Since the 2007 - 2013 programming period, the Programme has had accounts on LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and flickr. Besides functioning as the Programme's communication channels, the tools foster and support communities of practice by facilitating knowledge sharing and creation of online networks.

In 2014 – 2020 communications, the Programme will enhance the strategic use of its social media channels and to a much larger extent than in 2007 – 2013 moderate and share relevant news and debates, rather than focusing on producing own material and stories. Projects will be empowered to create quality social media content, which reflects the nature of their cooperation, day-to-day activities and results.

The Programme will use each of its social media channels for what they do best, and a dedicated social media plan will be developed to set the framework. As an example, LinkedIn is an appropriate channel for the Programme to create online networks and facilitate discussions for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, whereas YouTube could feature project results videos in playlists created for each priority. Priority related twitter lists can serve as daily news feeds for subject matter experts, while at the same time promoting the Programme to relevant, potential beneficiaries.

Developments in social media will be monitored closely and the social media plan revised when deemed necessary. Furthermore, user activity and statistics will be evaluated regularly and used as a basis to adapt the Programme approach according to user needs and interests.

The Programme will only use the most common and accessible social media channels, aiming to go where target groups are already present. And to avoid discriminating stakeholders not using social media, all important news and information will always be available on the Programme website.

Related aims	Related target groups (all)
❖ Attracting relevant stakeholders ❖ Supporting the project community ❖ Making project results and outputs visible ❖ Keeping policy makers and stakeholders informed	❖ Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities ❖ Beneficiaries ❖ Programme bodies ❖ Other relevant stakeholders

7.3 e-guidance

A key learning point from the 2007 – 2013 Programme was that there is a need to provide stakeholders with up-to-date information while minimizing the need to present standard information face-to-face and reducing the time used on answering repeated requests for the same information. To meet this demand, an online learning tool with the working title "e-guidance" will be developed.

e-guidance will use a micro-learning approach by teaching and delivering content to stakeholders in small, very specific bursts and encouraging users to go back to important content when they need it. In essence, stakeholders will be in control of what they are learning and when they are learning.

Besides serving beneficiaries and programme stakeholders, the accessible approach will make it easier for potential beneficiaries and Programme newcomers to gain a basic understanding of key concepts and tools.

New technologies mean that it is relatively easy and low cost to produce audio-visual content that is accessible. Practically, e-guidance will be series of easily accessible "How to" short videos, animations and screencasts accessible through the Programme website.

Related aims	Related target groups
❖ Supporting the project community ❖ Facilitating effective administration and support ❖ Keeping policy makers and stakeholders informed	❖ Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities ❖ Beneficiaries ❖ Programme bodies

7.4 Events and online events (webinars)

As in previous programming periods, the Programme will continue to host events such as project development and partner search seminars, First Level Control seminars and conferences. To actively support communities of practice, attention will be given to user-driven workshops, speed dating sessions and the like when relevant and appropriate.

Physical events will however be scaled down in 2014 – 2020 and supplemented by webinars and other online fora and networks where appropriate.

However, as face-to-face events provide a unique and relevant networking opportunity and learning environment, they cannot be replaced entirely by web-based meetings and networks and continue to be key in error reduction.

Related aims (all)	Related target groups (all)
❖ Attracting relevant stakeholders ❖ Supporting the project community ❖ Making project results and outputs visible ❖ Facilitating effective administration and support ❖ Keeping policy makers and stakeholders informed	❖ Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities ❖ Beneficiaries ❖ Programme bodies ❖ Other relevant stakeholders

7.5 Newsletters and publications

Since towards the end of the IVB Programme, the Programme has published THE UPSHOT, an online newsletter on IVB project results. The approach has been to provide stakeholders with project results in a short and digestible way, serving bits of information in the shape of short stories from projects, project photos and results videos, short info boxes and links to further reading and related projects.

As this has been well received by Programme stakeholders, a similar approach is expected for communicating 2014 – 2020 project results. Furthermore, there will be an ongoing evaluation on the best way to capitalize ongoing project results.

The use of print media will be limited to targeted materials, such as leaflets for events, and will be printed on demand. Publicity material will be made available on the Programme website for stakeholders to print as needed.

Related aims	Related target groups
❖ Making project results and outputs visible ❖ Keeping policy makers and stakeholders informed	❖ Beneficiaries ❖ Programme bodies

7.6 Visual identity

Creating and adhering to a consistent visual identity ensures that the Programme is recognized, remembered and respected. Visual identity is an integrated part of Programme communications and supports the overall aims, objectives and tactical principles of the communication strategy.

As the Programme has opted to be part of INTERACTs joint branding of Interreg programmes, the programme logo has been developed according to a harmonised design. The many benefits of this approach include an increased profile of the Programme as being part of European Territorial Cooperation and better recognition among potential beneficiaries and policy makers.

While the programme logo will have a standardised appearance, the previous North Sea Region Programme brand, the starfish, will still be used as an additional design element when possible, for example in the programme's letterhead, on the programme website and in other publicity materials as appropriate. New additional design elements include the four priority icons, as defined as part of the joint branding initiative, and the wave element, which brings together the colors of the four priorities.

The joint branding initiative also influences communications on project level, as projects will be provided with a standardized project logo based on the Programme logo. Projects will however be able to add their own touch to the design, and the Programme will make the necessary templates and brand guidance available to the beneficiaries.

In the efforts to make the Programme more tangible and relatable to target groups, the Programme will strive to use clean, modern and professional graphics, infographics, photos and videos to support messages. The Programme will make use of programme and project photos, rather than relying entirely on stock material, and projects will be encouraged to illustrate their work and results visually as well as in writing.

Related aims (all)	Related target groups (all)
❖ Attracting relevant stakeholders ❖ Supporting the project community ❖ Making project results and outputs visible ❖ Facilitating effective administration and support ❖ Keeping policy makers and stakeholders informed	❖ Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities ❖ Beneficiaries ❖ Programme bodies ❖ Other relevant stakeholders

7.7 Activities targeted people with disabilities

The wide range of audio visual materials produced will be suitable for the disabled, as information will be provided in sound and images as well as in written word. Furthermore, all documents will be made available electronically, allowing for easy use in combination with the range of electronic aids available, such as read-aloud features for the hearing impaired and zooming for the visually impaired.

All venues will be chosen taken into consideration the special needs of the disabled for easy access, elevators, etc.

8 I Timeframe

Communication of the Programme and its projects will be structured according to the main programming phases.

The main phases relevant for communications (taking into account overlaps) are:

2015 - 2016	• Inform and raise awareness of the Programme and the funding opportunities as well as relevant rules and regulations. • Build networks to maximize potential project partnerships at project idea and application stages. • Set up relevant structures and tools, eg. Programme website including project webspace functionality, and e-guidance. • Capacity building and empowering projects to communicate.
2017 - 2019	• Assist and support aspects of projects and Programme implementation related to communication and effective administration of the Programme.
2018 – 2023 (and onwards)	• Collect, co-create and share project and Programme results and outputs.

9 I Responsibilities

Programme communication is a shared responsibility of the Monitoring Committee, the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat, the National Contact Points and the projects. The responsibilities of the three parties are outlined in the following sections.

9.1 Monitoring Committee

The Monitoring Committee steers communication activities on the strategic level.

The Monitoring Committee is responsible for approving the communication strategy no later than 6 months after adoption of the Cooperation Programme. After approval, the Monitoring Committee decides on the annual business plan, which includes communication activities and budget.

9.2 Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat

On behalf of the Managing Authority, the Joint Secretariat is responsible for coordinating implementation of the communication strategy as well as ensuring that the legal requirements referred to in section 2.1 of this communication strategy are met.

The Joint Secretariat reports to the Monitoring Committee on the status of implementation.

The Joint Secretariat is furthermore responsible for providing communication training and the necessary tools including guidance on EU visibility requirements to the projects.

Resources

- ❖ One full time communications advisor as well as ad hoc internal working groups on eg. e-guidance and website development.

9.3 I National Contact Points

The National Contact Points provide information and advice to potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries from a national perspective.

Resources

- ❖ The level of involvement in Programme communications vary from member state to member state depending on national aims and objectives.

9.4 Projects

Projects are responsible for communicating their aims and results and contributing to communicating overall Programme results. Each project's communication plan must be clearly described in work package 2 of the application form and regularly reported on to the secretariat. Projects are furthermore encouraged to draft a more detailed communication plan for their own use.

Projects should maintain and update their designated project webspace hosted by the Programme. Projects can use the project webspace as their main website or, if they prefer to create their own website, simply use the project webspace as the place to store results and output.

Projects are expected to follow the rules and regulations as outlined in the Programme Manual and make use of the guidance, training and support measures offered by the Joint Secretariat.

Resources

- ❖ Clear structure for communication roles and responsibilities as well as a budget for communication activities.

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10 I Monitoring and evaluation

The Joint Secretariat will evaluate Programme communication efforts annually throughout the programming period and report to the Monitoring Committee. In addition, communication will be evaluated qualitatively within the ongoing and final programme evaluations.

Quantitative evaluation:

- ❖ Potential beneficiaries reached with information about calls through digital channels and events

- ❖ Ideas elaborated by potential beneficiaries

- ❖ Number of applications received and assessed

- ❖ Applications recommended for approval per call (out of all submitted)

- ❖ Number of reports checked and paid

- ❖ Number of beneficiaries per country in approved projects

- ❖ Number of beneficiaries in approved projects

- ❖ Duration of report clarification

- ❖ Share of programme funding allocated to projects

- ❖ Percentage of output indicators met

- ❖ Targeted events and number of participants

- ❖ Percentage of participants at events rating the event as strong or very strong

- ❖ Number of stakeholders using e-guidance

11 I Annexes

Annex 1 I Budget

The below budget excerpt shows the budget lines related to communication. A specific budget for communication activities will be submitted with the annual business plans to be decided on yearly.

TA in Euro	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
IT including CMS/ OMS	147,000	47,000	47,000	47,000	47,000	47,000	31,020
Conferences, seminars and work-shops	60,000	117,000	191,465	124,500	193,489	102,000	92,449
Publications	19,207	19,661	19,970	20,284	20,602	20,926	13,929

Annex 2 I Indicative list of target groups

The list will be updated and developed as appropriate during Programme implementation.

Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities			
Name	**Type**	**Description**	**Reference**
To be detailed	Public authorities	Public authorities in our 49 regions	
To be detailed	Knowledge institutions	Knowledge institutions in our 49 regions involved in research related to the four priorities of the Programme	
To be detailed	Non-governmental organisations	Non-governmental organisations in our 49 regions involved in not-for-profit work related to the four priorities of the Programme	
To be detailed	Small and medium-sized enterprises	Small and medium-sized enterprises in our 49 regions involved in for-profit work related to the four priorities of the Programme	
.....	.....	.....	.....

Beneficiaries			
Name	**Type**	**Description**	**Reference**
Lead beneficiaries	Public authority in a North Sea region	Organisation managing a North Sea Region Programme project	As listed in our online monitoring system, in the project section of the website and in the relevant project webspace.
Other beneficiaries	Public authority, knowledge institution, NGO or SME in (or in some cases outside) the pro-gramme area	Organisation participating in a North Sea Region Programme project	As listed in our online monitoring system, in the project idea section of the website and in the relevant project webspace.
.....	.....	.....	.....
Programme bodies			
Name	**Type**	**Description**	**Reference**
European Commission	Transnational political body	Communication through designated contact person.	http://ec.europa.eu/
DG Regio	Transnational political body	The European Commission department responsible for EU policy on regional development.	http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/regional_policy
DG Environment	Transnational political body	The European Commission department responsible for EU policy on the environment.	http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/environment
DG Mare	Transnational political body	The European Commission department	http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries

		responsible for EU policy on maritime affairs and fisheries.	
.....	.....	.....	.....

Other relevant stakeholders

Name	Type	Description	Reference
To be detailed	Information centres in partner countries		
To be detailed	European Commission representation offices in partner countries		
To be detailed	Information offices of the European Parliament in partner countries		
ESFRI – European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures	Thematic network	Site on research and innovation including funding opportunities.	https://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/
European Cluster Observatory	Thematic network	Aimed at policy makers, government officials, cluster management staff, academics and researchers.	http://www.clusterobservatory.eu/
S3 – Smart Specialisation Platform S3		Assisting EU countries and region in developing, implementing	http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/

		and reviewing their Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) by providing information, methodologies, expertise and advice to national and regional policy makers as well as promote mutual learning.	
CRPM	Stakeholder network, interest group	CRPM is formed by approx. 150 regions working together to ensure that EU institutions and national governments take account fo their common interests and cooperate on practical projects in order to enhance their assets.	http://crpm.org/
Covenant of Mayors	Stakeholder network, EU-wide	European movement involving local and regional authorities voluntarily committing to increasing energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources on their territories.	http://www.covenantofmayors.eu/

…..	…..	…..	…..
External non-professional audiences			
Name	**Type**	**Description**	**Reference**
…..	…..	…..	…..
…..	…..	…..	…..