

**Action Plan as part of the Interreg Europe Project  
“FAST FORWARD Europe”  
by Project Partner 2 – NBank,  
Niedersachsen/Germany**

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**An interregional cooperation project for  
improving SME competitiveness policies.**

Project Partners



Normandy Development Agency (FR)  
Investment and Business Development Bank Niedersachsen – NBank (DE)  
Murcia Business Innovation Center (BIC Murcia) (ES)  
IFKA Public Benefit NonProfit Ltd. For the Development of the Industry (HU)  
Metropolitan City of Turin (IT)  
Kaunas Science and Technology Park (LT)  
Podlaska Regional Development Foundation (PL)



## Summary of the project

The digital revolution that began at the end of the 20th century is changing the world of business and work and is taking place at great speed wherever the material prerequisites exist for the application and use of progressive digitalisation. It poses major socio-economic challenges to Europe and its citizens, both in public and in private life, and it can be seen, in addition to climate change, as an invitation to global competition and cooperation.

In order to comply with this, it has to be ensured that scientific findings, new ideas and intelligent business models are quickly transferred to the market and society, that their potentials can unfold and that they become internationally effective. This can be achieved, for example, by helping young technology- and IT-focused start-ups and companies to build their businesses and business ideas, facilitating access to finance in the form of grants and venture capital, and providing professional support for internationalisation efforts from the outset.

The Interreg Europe project FAST FORWARD Europe offers the participating European regions and their business development agencies the opportunity to present their previous experiences with and support measures for the above-mentioned target group and subject areas, to learn from each other and to develop sustainable new supporting or modified support measures.

The NBank is the investment and development bank of Niedersachsen and the managing authority for all funding instruments supported by the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) and European Social Funds (ESF) money in Niedersachsen.

The NBank and its stakeholders took the opportunity to present their own promotional measures on the topics to the partners, but most of all to learn from other partners. Through the exchange of experiences offered by all partners and stakeholders, it became clear that the NBank and its stakeholders wanted to set up a web platform on which all public services for internationalisation in Niedersachsen are offered digitally. In another action the good experiences and measures from a business angel network would be transferred to Niedersachsen - thanks to FAST FORWARD Europe.

## Policy context

### The Action Plan aims to impact:

The usage of the European structural funds ERDF and ESF.

### Name of the policy instrument(s) addressed:

The policy instrument addressed is the Operational Programme Niedersachsen ERDF/ESF 2014-2020” (CCI: 2014DE16M2OP001)<sup>1</sup>. The relevant thematic *objectives* of the Programme for this project are “01 Strengthening research, technical development and innovation” and “03 SMEs Competitiveness”. Important for this project are the *three* investment priorities:

- 1b Encouraging business investment in R & D, developing links and synergies between businesses, R & D centres and the higher education sector, in particular promoting investment in product and service development, technology transfer, social innovation, eco-innovation, public service applications, demand stimulation, networking, clusters and open innovation through intelligent specialisation and support for technological and applied research, pilot lines, measures for early product validation, advanced manufacturing capacity and initial production, especially in key technologies and the diffusion of general purpose technologies
- 3a: Support of entrepreneurial spirit by facilitation and support of entrepreneurship and business start-ups. The priority focusses on the transformation of acquired knowledge and research results in marketable, innovative products and services, realized by entrepreneurs and start-ups.
- 3d: Support of SMEs ability to participate in regional, national and international market growth.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm\\_Stand\\_04.03.2020.pdf](https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm_Stand_04.03.2020.pdf)

**Further details on the policy context and the way the Action Plan should contribute to improve the policy instrument:**

The „Operational Programme Niedersachsen ERDF/ESF 2014-2020“ parts dedicated to the start-up theme, base on a SWOT analysis, which states that Niedersachsen should focus on improvements in investments in R&I, innovation by start-ups and internationalisation of SMEs, especially in comparison to the other German federal states.

Missing links in the innovation value chain had been identified between research results and innovative ideas of universities and research institutes on one side, and the development of new products and services by companies and its market entry on the other side.

Start-ups can fill this gap, especially as IT-based technological developments are pushing their way into the market via young companies. Even though the number of start-ups in Niedersachsen increased in recent years, it remains weak in international and federal comparison.

The start-ups density in Niedersachsen is below the national German average in the high-tech sector and in the research-intensive sectors. Therefore, Niedersachsen is challenging a better exploitation of the knowledge- and technology-oriented foundation potential. The actions planned in this Action Plan intend to improve the regional measures, programmes and instruments to meet this challenge. This also means to support Niedersachsen’s start-ups with better financing and internationalisation instruments.



## Background of the project and summary of learning activities

In the early year 2016, when the proposal planning for FFWD Europe started, Niedersachsen had funding and support instruments targeting entrepreneurship and founding activities as well as internationalisation. At this time, no dedicated instruments and coordinated support structure directly targeted to start-ups were available.

Nonetheless, the “start-up theme” was on the agenda of Niedersachsen’s Ministry of Economic Affairs, Employment, Transport and Digitalisation (NMEETD<sup>2</sup>) as they summarized the economic importance of start-ups especially for:

- Job creation / keeping skilled people on site
- Promoting competition and structural changes
- Their innovation driving function for medium-sized companies
- Creating of a new entrepreneurial spirit and climate

A study performed by NMEETD summarised the following challenges for start-ups:

- High coaching and consulting needs of start-ups
- Relative high number of start-ups in the pre-seed phase / relative high number of start-ups don’t generate any turnovers
- Problematic income situation for founders during early stages
- High potential for internationalisation of start-ups products and services
- Missing visibility, linkages and networking of Niedersachsen and the start-ups in the federal and European start-up scene.
- Founding activities in Niedersachsen below the Federal average and shrinking
- Location focus of start-up in other German states or metropole regions
- Capital requirements of start-ups less than 250.000 EUR

The study also summarised the strengths of Niedersachsen’s economic structure with:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mw.niedersachsen.de>

- Outstanding universities and non-university research institutes
- Mix of traditional companies, strong medium-sized companies and global market leader in niche markets (German “Mittelstand”)
- Low costs of living and high quality of life compared to other German states

Out of these findings, NMEETD set up the “**startup.Niedersachsen**” initiative, which has the aims of:

1. Covering coaching and consulting needs of start-ups in the (pre-)seed phase
2. Provision of risk capital for the seed phase
3. Improving the visibility of the start-up location Niedersachsen
4. Ensuring income for innovative founders in the (pre-)seed phase
5. Empowering networking and linkages of start-ups with each other and with established companies (especially SMEs)

In March 2017, the initiative started with the first three instruments, which were:

- **NSeed**<sup>3</sup>, which aims to provide a better access to risk capital (please see FFWD Europe Good Practice Database<sup>4</sup>)
- **Funding of Start-up Centers**<sup>5</sup>, which aim to serve the high coaching and mentoring needs of start-ups in the pre-seed phase in form of acceleration programmes with a sectoral approach (please see FFWD Europe Good Practice Database<sup>6</sup>)
- **Startup-Plattform Niedersachsen**<sup>7</sup>, which is an online platform with the aim to improve the visibility of the start-up location Niedersachsen and its start-ups and support structures, as well as updated information on events and funding opportunities. Furthermore, the platform should contribute to ease networking and linkages between the start-ups and other actors.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nbank-capital.de/Angebot/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1168/funding-of-start-up-centers/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nbank.de/Öffentliche-Einrichtungen/Innovation/Förderung-von-Start-up-Zentren/index.jsp>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1167/access-to-finance-for-start-ups-venture-capital-fund-nseed/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://startup.nds.de/>

For the first two instruments (NSeed & Start-up Centers) Niedersachsen's NMEETD mandated NBank to perform the instrument; the third instrument (Startup-Plattform) had been mandated to the **Innovationszentrum Niedersachsen**<sup>8</sup>.

Since May 2019 a new funding instrument "**Gründerstipendium**"<sup>9</sup> is established (mandated to NBank), with the aim to ensure income for innovative founders in the (pre-)seed phase for the first eight month of their activities.

The idea to participate in the FFWD Europe project starting in January 2017 was to parallel establish own instruments, but also keep an eye to experiences of other regions with established or growing start-up support structures with the aim to:

- Better link with other regions' start-up ecosystems in order to improve options for Niedersachsen's start-ups to internationalise
- Identify missing links in the value chain of start-up support
- Generate ideas for improvements or new funding and support programmes and instruments and evaluation schemes
- Use "Lessons Learnt" from others to avoid own mistakes
- Use the project structure, especially the idea of regular regional stakeholder group meetings, to get regular market feedback in a project related trustful environment
- Use project findings and regional stakeholder market feedback to be involved in the discussions for the "Start-up and Founders" section for the next RIS3 strategy, derived out by **Niedersachsen's State Chancellery** prior to the new Operational Programme Niedersachsen 2021+<sup>10</sup>.

NBank – or Investitions- und Förderbank Niedersachsen, as the development bank for the German federal state of Niedersachsen – supports the state in fulfilling its duties with regard to

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<sup>8</sup> [www.iz-nds.de](http://www.iz-nds.de)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nbank.de/Privatpersonen/Existenzgründung/Gründungsstipendium/index.jsp>

<sup>10</sup> During this project the responsibility for the new Operational Programme 2021+ and the development of a new RIS3 changed from Niedersachsen's State Chancellery to the newly created Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Bundes- und Europaangelegenheiten und Regionale Entwicklung (Niedersachsen Ministry for Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development, NMFELD)

structural and economic policies. As the regional provider of all Niedersachsen's funding instruments containing ERDF or ESF money, NBank stands for the professional development of business, the labour market, housing and infrastructure.

In this function, NBank is the ideal partner for Niedersachsen to perform the FFWD Europe project. Mandated by NMEETD for the dedicated start-ups funding instruments NSeed, Start-up Centers, Gründerstipendium as well as the organiser of the annual DurchSTARTer start-up prize, NBank is strongly involved in the market feedback and recommendations of start-up funding to Niedersachsen's Ministries.

### **Summary of the activities of phase 1**

Essential point for the phase 1 activities was to build up the regional stakeholder group. Beside the FFWD EUROPE project ideas and aims, it was important to explain also the new funding scheme Interreg Europe. There was a phase of expanding the regional stakeholder group with representatives of the "Start-up Centers" beginning in semester 2 of the project, to further involve additional market feedback knowledge to the exchange. To build on a trustful and open environment for the bi-annual stakeholder group meetings, it was essential to first meet individually.

Convincing stakeholders to join the international learning events and receive some own insights and direct contacts abroad is essential for a successful project participation in Interreg Europe. The positive stakeholder feedback from these learning events had been involved in the preparation and execution of the regional stakeholder meetings.

Additionally the Ministry of European and National Affairs and Regional Development (NMFELD) invited regularly the project and its stakeholders to events to prepare with other stakeholders of Niedersachsen the future RIS3.

To select the "right" inspiring good practices that should be transferred to Niedersachsen, the decision-making based on the following two pillars:

- a) The "Lessons Learnt" and "Good Practices" collected by the project were presented and prioritized by the regional stakeholder group to ensure the knowledge transfer in the frame of:





- importance for Niedersachsen
  - transferability to Niedersachsen.
- b) Together with some key messages collected during the regional stakeholders meetings the original SWOT analysis (see above) from the NMEETD was updated, because there is one point of the startup.Niedersachsen initiative that is not yet fully established. This is point 5 of the initiative: “Empowering networking and linkages of start-ups with each other and with established companies (especially SMEs)”. Initial activities have started to fulfil this point, but further actions must follow.

Key message/Gap	Calls for...
Attract more sectoral focused VC	Promotion of success stories (VCs are following good experiences, good personal contacts and try to catch the low hanging fruits. ...”).
The German “Mittelstand” has money to invest, but there is no common language between established and traditional SMEs and start-ups.	A translator accepted by both parties.
Need of more targeted company building to serve dedicated innovation requests of the German “Mittelstand”.	Someone who builds the start-up and fill it up with the right people and the right knowledge.

The selected actions to inspire this Action Plan consider all of these findings. This Action Plan describes, how the actions

- XPORT ACCELERATOR (XA<sup>11</sup>) from Normandy

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.teamfrance-export.fr/xport-normandie> and <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/847/export-accelerator/>

- and MurciaBan<sup>12</sup>, Business Angels Network from Murcia

will be incorporated into Niedersachsen's regional context.

The XPORT ACCELERATOR (XA) is a web-platform that bundles expertise of different regional organisations to support companies in their internationalisation efforts. Based on a self-diagnosis with 12 questions to define the export readiness level, the different regional support institutions can deliver a more coordinated, quicker and better advisory service to the company.

This "Good Practice" will contribute especially to deal with the selection of good practices from the stakeholder group as well as one of the collected key messages.

The action derived from this good practice has an impact on a measure under specific objective 3 of the investment priority 1b of the Operational Programme Niedersachsen (OP): "Knowledge and technology transfer in the region through cooperation, networks and consulting"<sup>13</sup>. This measure aims "...to qualify the management of different networks and to increase the innovative and competitive ability of the network members. The networks support the specific objective by helping their member companies to implement innovation-relevant activities". This includes cooperation on innovative topics as well as measures for internationalisation with regard to strengthening Lower Saxony's companies with regard to international contacts<sup>14</sup>.

Under Action 1, the network-like cooperation will enhance the work of the participating business development agencies and the joint digital offering and the joint processing will enhance their internationalisation services; both will support companies in the implementation of their internationalisation efforts beyond the current range.

The MurciaBan, Business Angels Network has the mission to match Business Angels, with their financial power and business leadership, and entrepreneurs, with financing need and growth potential. Objectives of the network are:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.murcia-ban.es/> and <https://www.interregueurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1724/murciaban-business-angels-network/>

<sup>13</sup> See page 69: [https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm\\_Stand\\_04.03.2020.pdf](https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm_Stand_04.03.2020.pdf)

1. Identification of innovative business projects with growth potential that require finance.
2. Identification of Business Angels willing to be part of the network.
3. Promotion of successful Business Angels investments in Murcia.
4. Establishment of an adequate infrastructure.
5. Promotion of learning and continuous updating of investors.
6. Providing specific trainings for entrepreneurs.
7. Network creation and matching events.

This “Good Practice” will contribute especially to deal with the selection of good practices from the stakeholder group as well as three of the key messages collected, results from the review and evaluation of the established instruments and the remaining point 5 of startup.Niedersachsen initiative.

Due to existing structures and finding, the transfer will focus on the points 5. and 6. of the original good practice from Murcia.

The action derived from this good practice has an impact on the measure (or political instrument) “Beteiligungsfonds Niedersachsen“under specific objective 5 “Increasing the competitiveness of Niedersachsen’s SMEs” of the investment priority 3b. This is intended “to accompany investments in fixed and/or current assets - in the event of growth-related liquidity requirements and to compensate for temporary liquidity bottlenecks - in the phases of establishment, start-up, growth and company succession”. The activities described in Action 2 focus on the NSeed fund for founders and start-ups derived from the measure "Beteiligungsfonds Niedersachsen".

The regulations in the NSeed Fund have so far stipulated that the target group of the fund, start-ups in the market entry phase or initial sales phase, can only be served with a co-investor from the fund. To make the political instrument successful, the employees and users of the fund must find private investors (with an average investment ticket of 150T to 600T Euro from NSeed these can be business angels).

On the other hand, the start-up centres<sup>14</sup> supported by the State of Lower Saxony have the objective of establishing regional seed funds. Their activities to concerning this objective are also accompanied by the activities of the action 2.

As the Managing Authority for Niedersachsen, the NBank is responsible for many measures in Niedersachsen, which are co-financed by the federal state from the ERDF or ESF funds. By advising, approving and implementing the programmes and measures, the NBank can pass on to the federal state a wealth of experience and opportunities for improvements. Unfortunately, however, NBank is not in a position as a Managing Authority itself to be the recipient of funding for the measures on offer. For this reason, possible proposals for an action plan could not be realised with the government programmes on offer and are limited to improvements in services and the financial framework as described in the pilot action for Action 1.

## Details of the Actions envisaged

The selected actions inspiring Niedersachsen's Action Plan are:

1. XPORT ACCELERATOR (XA) from Normandy
2. and MurciaBan, Business Angels Network from Murcia

### Action 1: Creation of a website “Internationalisation Support Niedersachsen”

Development of a virtual entity as an instrument of economic development to support young innovative companies and SMEs starting in internationalisation with the aim of creating added value that exceeds the sum of internationalisation services and products offered by the participating stakeholders of the action

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1167/access-to-finance-for-start-ups-venture-capital-fund-nseed/>

**Relevance to the project:**

The action derives from the “Good Practice” of project partner AD Normandy: XPORT ACCELERATOR (XA).

The XPORT ACCELERATOR (XA) from Normandy is a web-platform that bundles expertise of different regional organisations to support companies in their internationalisation efforts. Based on a self-diagnosis with 12 questions to define the export readiness level, the different regional support institutions can deliver a more coordinated, quicker and better advisory service to the company.

Niedersachsen offers a diverse public support ecosystem for SMEs and start-ups wishing internationalise with several institutions delivering each a bunch of services and funding instruments. It seems relevant for the region to facilitate the access to this network and services and further drive and test the digitisation of public advisory support services. It is not only an advantage to bring together all relevant service providers for the internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises. But it will also optimise the political instrument “Knowledge and technology transfer in the region through cooperation, networks and consulting” particularly in that the service offering institutions develop “measures for internationalisation with a view to strengthening Niedersachsen's position as a centre of innovation”<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, several years ago (funding period 2007-2013) Niedersachsen had a funding instrument to cover up to 50 percent (max. 10 TEUR) of the expenses for external consulting by consulting firms authorised by the KfW Bank Germany (Beratungsförderung für Unternehmen in Niedersachsen - Beratungsrichtlinie)<sup>16</sup>. One of the topics for external consultancy was internationalisation. The aim for this instrument is that often there is a lack of time and personnel resources to keep up with the latest international market information, regulations and procedures, IP protection, export and custom regulations and certifications, finance for international growth etc.. This is where there was a need for advice. However, a

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<sup>15</sup> See page 69 in [https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm\\_Stand\\_04.03.2020.pdf](https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm_Stand_04.03.2020.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> See [https://cms2.niedersachsen.de/download/10828/Flyer\\_Beratungsrichtlinie.pdf](https://cms2.niedersachsen.de/download/10828/Flyer_Beratungsrichtlinie.pdf)

similar national instrument had replaced it from 2014 onwards, with the result that regional public support structures and stakeholders were no longer involved in the consultation process. Applications for the new support programme were no longer submitted to the NBank and were forwarded by it. Part of the statement process was to highlight the public consultancy services to the applicant. This process is interrupted now. The action proposed will contribute to improve this process.

In the Pilot Action the participating institutions form a virtual network, pool their capacities and offer an extended and improved service for the internationalisation of SMEs via the website.

The website guarantees the best possible data protection, opportunity to share client data in conformity to GDPR, facilitates the client centric exchange between the participating organisations. The bundling of services leads to additional benefits and simplifies access to the services of different regional institutions supporting internationalisation. It will contribute to test the acceptance of digitisation of some steps in the advisory processes and to establish other ways of service provision within the target group. It is agreed among the partners NBank and AD Normandy that the two and will share results and experiences from their XPORT ACCELERATION service.

This will contribute to improve internationalisation of Niedersachsen's SMEs and start-ups.

The website "Internationalisation Support Niedersachsen" will not only react on single requests of companies, but also will offer tailor-made advice in structuring company's internationalisation strategy and provide information on public support services and instruments. As in the Normandy, a short online self-assessment will be the basis for the selection of the network stakeholders to be involved in serving the client.

**Nature of the action:**

It is planned to set up a similar support structure in Niedersachsen like in the Normandy. Companies in need of support for internationalisation (export business, search for partners or establishment of new business premises abroad, etc.) should have access to professional support

via a website and be accompanied by the stakeholders' network in the medium and long term.

Expected outcomes are:

- easy access for companies
- lower time to sufficient information
- bundle resources and expertise of several regional institutions active in internationalisation support
- value added services
- easy exchange of company data among the stakeholders of the platform
- Qualification of the virtual network members concerning digitalised internationalisation support services

**The following activities have to be implemented:**

**1. Find the stakeholders/partners for the network behind the website**

- a. Involvement of relevant stakeholders
- b. Involvement of relevant partner

Based on the experiences made in the Normandy and the project specifications, the stakeholders will be informed about the planned actions in semester 7. For the first action, we will also address the Niedersachsen business development institutions to cooperate in the action. In an event, they will be informed about the FFWD Europe project and the planned action. After the presentation and a possible discussion, they will be invited to participate in the planned action. After the acceptance, the period and milestones for the implementation of the action will be set.

**2. Collection of the existing services and products of the stakeholders in the field of internationalisation**

Each of the interested stakeholder has a different portfolio of services and products offered to companies interested in internationalisation. These must be collected and in addition, the already existing informal business promotion networks active in the field of internationalisation and foreign trade promotion in Niedersachsen must be integrated into the support process derived from the online self-assessment.

For this reason, we (the stakeholder and NBank) will analyse the services and products in working groups during the first semester of phase 2 in order to identify the best ones for the support process. In the case of overlaps, a standard will be defined in a coordination process. In parallel, we have to identify the services and products, which are particularly important for the actual target group(s). These are young, newly founded, innovative companies as well as established SMEs starting their international activities. The identified services and products must then be accessible to all companies, regardless of their legal form.

### **3. Analysis of the XPORT Accelerator's self-diagnosis tool from Normandy for Niedersachsen**

Based on the experiences of the stakeholders, the next step is to analyse whether and to what extent the questionnaire used by the Norman XPORT Accelerator is suitable for use in Niedersachsen. This is a particularly important activity, since some possible stakeholders have their own self-diagnosis tool, but none of them works online (e.g. the internationalisation audit of stakeholder EEN@NBank). The stakeholders therefore have the opportunity at this point to contribute their individual expertise to the development of a new or existing online tool adapted to digital and regional needs.

The aim of this activity is to develop an online questionnaire, which is able to record all planned internationalisation activities of companies.

### **4. Development of a system for the analysis of the answers from the questionnaire**

In contrast to the XA from the Normandy, it should be possible to deduce from the pattern of responses which of the interested stakeholder or NBank will become lead partner and contact the participating company within three days and determine a date to discuss its international needs and projects. The lead partner will then develop a personal Action Plan for the company within 15 days, involving the other stakeholders, if necessary. For this, it is necessary to analyse the existing questions in working groups, to supplement them if necessary and to derive four profiles from the combinations of answers, which determine the respective lead partner.





## **5. Definition of the process “From first contact to personal Action Plan”**

In a final step, the process “From first contact to personal Action Plan” has to be defined for the stakeholders involved. From the answers of the online tool derives a characteristic pattern. In an iterative process, it is determined, which of the stakeholders involved becomes a lead partner for a defined pattern. The requesting company’s data will be accessible to all stakeholders. The responsible stakeholder contacts the company and arranges an appointment, etc. All data generated from this are available to the stakeholders involved.

## **6. Support of the activities described so far**

All activities described so far should be closely coordinated with the stakeholders from the Normandy. It is planned to rely on their experience for each activity. Suitable for this are regular telephone conferences and an exchange via email. Beneficial for the ongoing process would be a personal meeting in advance of the described activities between the stakeholders of the planned action in Niedersachsen and the organisers of the XPORT Accelerator.

## **7. Creating the technical conditions**

With the results of the described activities, a website will be programmed in coordination with digital specialists (subcontractors) in order to meet the elaborated requirements. In the best case, a separate internet page will be used, to which the stakeholders refer in a corresponding case.

## **8. Online tests**

After the website has been published, the participating stakeholders will test it with selected customers. The first benefit for the stakeholders involved will be derived from the application of the process. In previous practice, a company interested in internationalisation turned to one of the stakeholders after a pre-selection based on various factors. Now the lead partner identified by the response pattern will be able to use services and products of all stakeholders and in collaboration with them.

## **9. Integration of further stakeholders**

During ongoing operations, further stakeholders in Niedersachsen will have the opportunity to use the developed website for their internationalisation newcomers. It must be ensured that they

remain visible in the process and to their customers. It must also be ensured that their internationalisation services and products can be integrated.

## 10. Evaluation and outlook

At the end of phase 2, an evaluation will be carried out in order to consolidate the action started and, if necessary, to further develop it into an interactive online accelerator. Furthermore, the transferability to other thematic areas will be evaluated.

### Stakeholders involved:

Please indicate the organisations in the region that are involved in the implementation of the action and explain their role.

- NBank's start-up and innovation adviser. They have direct customer contact and existing networks in the field of internationalisation support in Niedersachsen, even close contacts to the public start-up centres.
- NBank Capital Beteiligungsgesellschaft (Stakeholder): They have direct customer contact
- EEN@NBank: Core business, they have direct customer contact and existing networks in the field of internationalisation support in Niedersachsen

It is planned to involve the following stakeholder and organisations:

- NMEETD, Head Office 24 Foreign Trade, Settlement, Marketing, Trade Fairs<sup>17</sup>, in charge for among other things responsible for foreign trade, delegation trips, fairs and settlement; its role: provider of services
- Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Niedersachsen; its role: providers of services<sup>18</sup>
- Chambers of Handicrafts<sup>19</sup>, their role: providers of services
- German Management Academy<sup>20</sup>; its role: provider of services

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.invest-in-niedersachsen.com/en/services/international>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ihk-n.de/themen/international-ihkn-3602996>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.handwerk-lhn.de/Home/de/Schwerpunkte/Aussenwirtschaft/NHI.php>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.dman.de/en/home/>

- Hannoverimpuls<sup>21</sup>; its role: provider of services

**Timeframe:**

	Activity	Start	End
1	Find the stakeholders/partners for the network behind the website	01/20	02/20
2	Collection of the existing services and products of the stakeholders in the field of internationalisation	02/20	04/20
3	Analysis of the XPORT Accelerator’s self-diagnosis tool from the Normandy for Niedersachsen	03/20	05/20
4	Development of a system for the analysis of the answers from the questionnaire	04/20	06/20
5	Definition of the process “from first contact to personal Action Plan”	07/20	08/20
6	Support of the activities described so far	09/20	09/20
7	Creating the technical conditions	10/20	12/20
8	Online tests	12/20	06/21
9	Integration of further stakeholders	05/21	11/21
10	Evaluation and outlook	11/21	12/21

**Indicative Costs:**

Three cost models are possible

- Additional site on EEN-niedersachsen.de, costs low (+), integration of stakeholders very difficult (-)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.wirtschaftsfoerderung-hannover.de/hannoverimpuls>

- Additional site on one stakeholder website, cost middle (+/-), integration of stakeholders very difficult (-)
- New neutrally designed website, costs 10.000 EUR (+/-), integration of stakeholders easy (+)

**Indicative funding sources:**

A pilot action is requested to finance the action 1 website; it is not indicated through the policy instruments in part 2. If no pilot action is approved, the planned website will become part of a website of one of the stakeholders, with the loss of some benefits for a joint digital presence, acceptance of stakeholders and clients and willingness to contribute and use the website.

## Action 2: Investors relations +

Creation of a virtual structure in order to facilitate the access for start-ups supporting organisations to capital and Business Angels and to facilitate the presentation of the way of working and the self-understanding of BA-Networks and industry associations.

### Relevance to the project:

This action derives from the participation in the FFWD Europe Interregional Thematic Workshop in Murcia in October 2017. At the event, the Spanish project partner presented the good practice “MurciaBan”.

“MurciaBan” is a private non-profit organisation, whose mission is to provide a meeting place for Business Angels and Entrepreneurs who have developed innovative projects that need investment and advice to make them prosper and grow. The organisation developed a structure and built up a network that regulates all relationships among the components of the network, putting in contact the demand and the private investors, who are willing to finance, give advice and work in new companies or in their initial stages of life. The Network aims to relate SMEs in the process of creation or expansion with investors. In detail MarciaBan’s tasks are

1. Identification of innovative business projects with growth potential that require finance.
2. Identification of Business Angels willing to be part of the network.
3. Promotion of successful Business Angels investments in Murcia.
4. Establishment of an adequate infrastructure.
5. Promotion of learning and continuous updating of investors.
6. Providing specific trainings for entrepreneurs.
7. Network creation and matching events<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> See also <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1724/murciaban-business-angels-network/>

As described above we presented all good practices validated by INTERREG Europe to our regional stakeholders by adding our impressions made during the different project meetings organised by the project partners.

During the regional stakeholder meetings, the presented good practices were discussed openly and partly controversially. It was recognised that there are already many support possibilities for start-ups in Niedersachsen, but that many measures do not run as smoothly as they were originally planned. One key finding among others was that most interest and room for improvements in Niedersachsen is the access to finance and the work of a bunch of dedicated services within Business Angel Networks and other actors (like the good practice: MurciaBan).

By keeping in mind, that Niedersachsen already has three Business Angel Networks (BANSON Business Angel Netzwerk e.V., Business Angels Weser-Ems-Bremen and the Business Angels Netzwerk Niedersachsen), it was surprising that during the discussions with the regional stakeholders additional issues concerning BA networks were identified.

It came up that the locally driven networks and other companies and organisations interested in start-ups might need a better access to "new" start-ups or a new kind of start-ups<sup>23</sup> and a better access to entrepreneurs at a very early stage of financing.

On the other hand, one industry association reported that there were many member companies interested in start-ups and that they lack the opportunities to present themselves as potential customers, financiers and development partners.

It should also be mentioned that a participation from the NSeed fund, which is derived from the measure "Beteiligungsfonds Niedersachsen" of the OP<sup>24</sup>, is only available as a co-investment for the target group of the start-ups. Business angels and other private investors must necessarily participate in the seed financing of start-ups. These have to be approached, informed, supported and shared with other actors of Niedersachsen in order to successfully apply the policy instrument.

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<sup>23</sup> In the sense of IT-based start-ups as well as to start-ups which business idea based on new business models.

<sup>24</sup> See page 99: [https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm\\_Stand\\_04.03.2020.pdf](https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/download/153009/Multifondsprogramm_Stand_04.03.2020.pdf)

A strong inspiration in the choice of this action was provided by the first evaluation of Niedersachsen's support programme "Förderung von Start-up-Zentren" ("Funding of Start-up Centers", FFWD Europe Good Practice delivered by NBank). The results of the evaluation can be summarised as follows:

- The duration of the support is too short, it should be extended to three years,
- The learning content in the funded centres should be harmonised and
- The Start-up Centers need to offer more support for finding investors.

The second call includes now an additional point that it needs to be shown during the project how the Start-up Centers will manage to include BA and investment contacts for their start-ups<sup>25</sup>.

Action 2 thus contributes to the successful application and implementation of the measure described above.

#### **Nature of the action:**

The objective of this action will focus especially on the points 1, 3, and 5, of the objectives of MurciaBan (described above). Based on the inspiration given by the Spanish partner with the Good Practice "MurciaBan", with this action a virtual structure should be created, which makes it possible for start-ups supporting organisations to find capital and Business Angels and which facilitates the presentation of the way of working and the self-understanding of BA-Networks and industry associations.

#### **1. Collecting and contacting all relevant organisations**

Contacting all organisations that should participate in the virtual structure (unless they are already stakeholders). In detail, these are the BA networks existing in Niedersachsen, private and public funded Start-up Centers and accelerators as well as interested industry associations.

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<sup>25</sup> See also: <https://www.nbank.de/medien/nb-media/Downloads/Programminformation/Produktinformationen/Förderaufruf-Start-up-Zentren.pdf>

## 2. Defining the Status Quo

All relevant organisations needed for the virtual structure have already some defined processes and procedures for specific offers and services in order to address their respective target groups. They will also work together in one way or another. This has to be compiled, analysed and processed in a matrix whose logic points out fields of action and confirms the assumptions made during the stakeholder meetings.

### 2.1. Analysing the offers of private and public Start-up Centers

In addition to the publicly funded Start-up Centers, private Start-up Centers and accelerators were also established in Niedersachsen in recent years. In a first step, the institutions, the entry requirements for start-ups and the services offered by the organisations and the costs for the participating start-ups are compared in measurable terms. The results are summarised in an overview.

### 2.2. Analysing the BA Networks' offers

Here the same shall be done as in 2.1. In addition, a questionnaire is to be developed with colleagues from the NBank Capital Beteiligungsgesellschaft in order to ask for drive, motivation and interests in interviews with the BA networks.

### 2.3. Analysing the Industry associations' offers

Using the example of two industry associations, their interests and requirements for cooperation with start-ups will be analysed and summarised (Methods see 2.2.). It is planned to cooperate with NiedersachsenMetall (an employers' federation<sup>26</sup>) and the Marketinggesellschaft der niedersächsischen Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft e.V.<sup>27</sup> (Marketing company of the food industry, stakeholder).

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<sup>26</sup> <https://niedersachsenmetall.de/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mg-niedersachsen.de/>



## **2.4. Collecting and Analysing own services and products**

All services and products of start-up promotion and financing that are handled by NBank are to be collected and compiled.

## **2.5. Creating a matrix**

All collected data are merged and displayed in a matrix according to a previously defined order. These specifications are developed in an iterative process with the stakeholders involved.

## **3. Identification of good practices and derivation of measures**

With the matrix, good practices can be identified and recommendations for joint activities can be made. These are collected and presented to the stakeholders, it is decided which activities will be carried out together.

## **4. Implementation of joint activities**

### **4.1. Focus on Start-up Centers**

Developing and offering event formats together with the Start-up Centers (e.g. regular on-site visits of potential investors and business angels, start-ups of the Start-ups Centers need more contacts to specific companies, means the customers of tomorrow that are interested in the products and services of start-ups etc.).

### **4.2. Focus on BA-Networks**

Developing and offering event formats together with BA-Networks (e.g. presentation of good investment practices / disseminate success stories).

### **4.3. Focus on industry associations**

Developing and offering event formats together with industry associations (“Good Practices Events” How to build a fund of regional investors; trust building events with high level start-up pitches).

## 5. Analysis and evaluation of the implemented measures; recommendation to policy

At the end of phase 2, the joint activities and events will be evaluated together with the stakeholders in order to consolidate good practices and develop recommendations for action for the participating ministries.

### Stakeholders involved:

Please indicate the organisations in the region that are involved in the implementation of the action and explain their role.

- Public Start-up Centers; its role: access to start-ups
- Private accelerators; its role: access to start-ups
- BANSON Business Angel Netzwerk e.V. its role: access to BA and private investors
- NBank Capital Beteiligungsgesellschaft its role: fund manager, responsible for NSeed
- NiedersachsenMetall its role: access to technology driven Non-SME, Medium-Sized Enterprises
- Business Angels Weser-Ems-Bremen its role: access to BA
- Business Angels Netzwerk Niedersachsen its role: access to start-ups
- NBank its role: Managing authority

**Timeframe:**

Please specify the timing envisage for the action.

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>Ends</b>
1	Collecting and contacting all relevant organisations	01/20	03/20
2.	Defining the Status Quo	03/20	11/20
2.1	Analysing the offers private and public Start-up Centers	03/20	04/20
2.2	Analysing the BA Networks' offers	05/20	06/20
2.3	Analysing the Industry associations' offers	06/20	07/20
2.4	Collecting and Analysing own services and products	07/20	08/20
2.5	Creating a matrix	09/20	11/20
3	Identification of good practices and derivation of measures	11/20	12/20
4	Implementation of joint activities	01/21	12/21
4.1	Focus on Start-up Centers	01/21	04/21
4.2	Focus on BA-Networks	04/21	08/21
4.3	Focus on industry associations	08/21	12/21
5.	Analysis and evaluation of the implemented measures; recommendation to policy	09/21	12/21

**Indicative Costs:**

Please estimate the costs related to the implementation of the action

Voluntary meetings at the NBank and organised by NBank with a limited number of regional stakeholders (no additional catering costs).

NBank students and trainees will do data collection and processing.

A budget of 8,000 EUR of internal resources is planned for common events with the stakeholders, financed by internal resources common budget.

**Indicative funding sources:**

A budget of 8,000 EUR is planned for events with stakeholders and financed by them collaborating.

Own resources and applications by involved stakeholders for some further staff cost for coordination.

Town, Date: Hannover, 18.05. 2020

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Martin BARTÖLKE, Head of the Counselling Department of the NBank