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“go-cluster” decade programme

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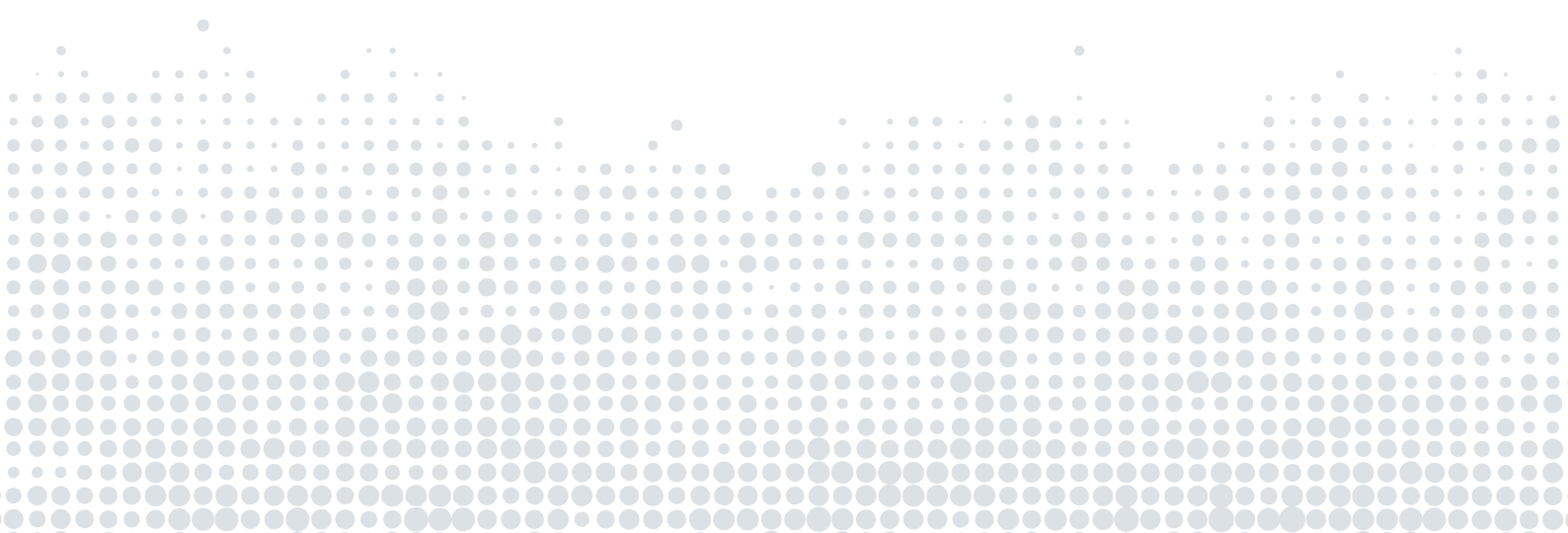
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Foreword

Dear readers,

This year the “go-cluster” programme celebrates its ten-year anniversary. The cluster policy excellence programme of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) brings together Germany’s most efficient cluster initiatives. These are pioneers of innovation and reflect Germany’s high level of competence in numerous fields of industry and technology.

Launched in mid-2012, the “go-cluster” programme has since made a significant contribution to the development of a diverse and flourishing cluster landscape in Germany with cluster networks in all regions:

More than 14,000 cluster actors are currently involved in the 80-plus innovation clusters of the “go-cluster” programme, including more than 12,000 companies, of which more than 10,000 are small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, there are more than 700 professorships and institutes, more than 500 non-university research institutions and 1,300 other organisations.

The advantages of long-term co-operation with various actors from business, science and other co-operation partners are obvious: working together, more can be achieved! The success factors that make innovation clusters efficient and highly competitive are numerous. However, as a rule the basis is professional cluster management. With the “go-cluster” programme, the BMWK supports clusters in the further development of their performance and management excellence and thus strengthens the innovative power and competitiveness of the whole of Germany – and indeed beyond.

Read in this anniversary publication how cluster policy has developed over the past decade and how Germany has become a beacon for cluster policy with European appeal: from the focus on initiating networks through the “Compe-



tence Networks Germany” initiative to the professionalisation and internationalisation of cluster management organisations in the “go-cluster” programme. In three different programme phases from 2012 to 2022 there have also been a number of programmatic changes, which are illustrated here and on which those involved from the membership, programme advisory board and programme organisation also have their say. Join me in enjoying the programme and event highlights such as the clusterACHIEVEMENTS or the 2017 and 2019 cluster weeks and let us look forward to the future together. Clusters are increasingly developing into laboratories for the future and drivers of regional transformation processes – it is impossible to imagine Germany as a business and innovation centre without them.

I hope you enjoy reading this!

Yours,

Udo Philipp

Permanent State Secretary
at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs
and Climate Action

Cluster policy and cluster development in Germany and Europe



A model for success for regional and economic growth

Cluster initiatives and regional networks are proving time and again that they are trailblazers for innovation and technological progress. In Germany and Europe, there are forward-looking networks and intensive science-business co-operation ventures in almost all sectors and fields of technology. In addition to private-sector efforts to implement cluster initiatives and regional networks, their establishment and development over the past 30 years has also been supported by numerous cluster policy measures. Cluster policy measures at all levels – state, federal and European – have emerged as important instruments of a forward-looking innovation, economic, industrial and regional policy.

“Networking is not only about connecting people. It’s about connecting people with people, people with ideas, and people with opportunities.”

Michele Jennae (author, artist)

Development of cluster policy

Cluster policy as an independent policy field developed gradually following the academic work of Michael E. Porter on the subject of the “Competitiveness of Nations”¹. The focus on

cluster structures is based on the assumption that the companies involved in cluster initiatives, university and non-university research institutions as well as other actors from politics, economic and regional development and complementary institutions – such as innovation and technology parks – are essential actors in the innovation process. Cluster initiatives enable the actors involved

Development phases of cluster policy

Development and implementation of the cluster concept

1990 – 2000
Phase 1



1

Identification of clusters

Initiation of cluster initiatives with technol. focus

2000 – 2010
Phase 2



2

Management excellence
Consolidation of structure

2010 – 2015
Phase 3

2012

Implementation

Source: VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH

¹ Vgl. Porter, Michael E. (1990)

to participate continuously in the innovation process while generating innovations and thus contributing to higher value-added. At the same time, cluster initiatives are essential in the development of regional economic and industrial structures and also contribute to balancing out regional disparities.

From cluster mapping to the building of cluster management organisations

The chronology of the examination of cluster-related topics and the development of cluster policy measures at regional or state-wide, national and European level was almost the same. Thus, the period up to about the year 2000 was characterised by understanding the phenomena of clusters and cluster initiatives as well as the corresponding effects and implementing the first cluster concepts. In the years from about 2000 to 2010, a phase followed in which identification of clusters (cluster mapping) and development of cluster

initiatives, especially with a technological focus, as well as establishment of cluster management organisations were the main components of cluster-related measures.

Support for particularly high-performing cluster initiatives

This was followed by a phase that lasted from around 2010 to 2015 in which greater emphasis was placed on strengthening existing cluster initiatives, their further development and sustainable consolidation of structures. This development resulted, among other things, from a recommendation by the European Cluster Policy Group in 2010. The European Cluster Policy Group advised the European Commission on key issues for the future of cluster policy. It recommended a clearer focus on efficient and long-term cluster initiatives as well as cluster management organisations. This was also reflected in various cluster policy measures by explicitly including perfor-

Performance enhancement
Professionalisation
Internationalisation
Cross-clustering
Cluster-based regional development

Cluster initiatives as regional laboratories for the future
Transformation agency by means of addressing the megatrends
Active participation in the decarbonisation of industry



3

2015 – 2020
Phase 4



4

From 2021 onwards
Phase 5



5

mance-enhancing and qualifying activities in cluster programmes. In this phase, the “go-cluster” programme was implemented in Germany by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. Key “go-cluster” programme objectives were further development of the most efficient business-driven cluster initiatives in Germany into excellent cluster initiatives under the European Cluster Excellence Initiative as well as national and international networking. In addition, it is planned that the cluster management organisations will be professionalised by means of qualification offers and individual consultations. Another programme objective was also to promote the development and implementation of innovative, risky cluster services in order to provide impetus for new service offerings. Cluster policy and the most efficient cluster initiatives were presented as the “flagship of the German cluster scene” on an information portal jointly supported in co-operation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

Internationalisation and cross-clustering

The years 2015 to around 2020 were characterised both in Germany and in Europe by the increased integration of highly efficient and competitive cluster initiatives with their cluster management organisations into other innovation and economic policy measures and programmes. In addition, key overarching trends were internationalisation and cross-cluster activities, which were reflected in

corresponding cluster-related funding measures, but also increased co-operation between cluster initiatives and other regional intermediaries in order to promote cluster-based strategic regional development.

Cluster organisations in periods of crisis

Since the 2020s, it has become increasingly apparent that regions are facing major economic, social and societal challenges. Megatrends such as globalisation, neo-ecology, urbanisation, security and health will lead to continuous change or restructuring of global, national and regional value chains. This applies equally to challenges such as tackling climate change, the energy transition and the decarbonisation of industry. At the same time, drivers such as digitisation, artificial intelligence and social innovations will have an impact on social and economic development in the regions. In addition, development of the economy and of regions is affected in quicker succession by further locally, regionally and nationally acting factors – going as far as multinational crises and their shock effects (e.g. effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, consequences of the Ukraine war). In meeting these challenges, cluster initiatives take on an important role in terms of regional laboratories for the future, transformation agencies and active shapers of change. This is also reflected in various cluster-specific funding and support programmes.

An exciting “go-cluster” decade



We look back together!

10

successful years of “go-cluster” are a reason to celebrate. The BMWK’s funding programme has become indispensable in the cluster community! But what did the programme look like in its early days? What cluster policy and programme changes have taken place within the three programme phases? And how have the members of the programme and their role in regional politics and business evolved during this time? The following section gives an overview of the development of the programme, its themes and its members.

2012 – 2015

Transition from Competence Networks Germany to the “go-cluster” excellence programme

The first programme phase (2012 – 2015) was initiated by the transition of the “Competence Networks Germany” programme into the “go-cluster” excellence programme. Accordingly, it was initially characterised by the structure: in addition to the introduction of the programme logo as a seal of quality and the implementation of the first benchmarking and certification processes for the



silver label of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI), Cluster Platform Germany was also published during this time as an online-based, joint information portal of the federal ministries of Economic Affairs and of Education

and Research. Thematically, the introduction of the partner country concept was a special feature, which was implemented for the first time within the framework of the then annual spring conferences with Switzerland and France. During this

period, two funding announcements were also published to promote cross-cluster co-operation and innovative cluster services, with the aim of strengthening cluster management excellence among members. In 2015, the programme had more than 100 innovation clusters, most of which were taken over from “Competence Networks Germany” or were included in the initial years of the programme. They not only covered all the federal states, but also thematically the majority of the sectors and fields of technology that are important for Germany as an innovation centre. During this time, clusters played an important role in the innovation activities of Germany as a technology centre.



2015 – 2020

Quality and performance improvement of the cluster management organisations

In the second programme phase (2015 – 2020), the focus was primarily on greater professionalisation of the member clusters. The aim was, with an increasing level of quality in the central management areas, to gain access to new markets and value chains as well as to identify and exploit new co-operation potential. At the same time, it was important and necessary to make more effective use of the synergies between the various ongoing programmes of the BMWK – Central Innovation Programme for SMEs (ZIM), Collaborative Industrial Research and “go-cluster” – so the 2016 Cluster Conference was organised for this purpose. The 1st and 2nd Cluster Weeks held under the patronage of the BMWK and BMBF also took place in this period. The successful format was finally adopted by the EU in 2019 with the EU Cluster Weeks. At the same time, professionalisation went hand in

hand with internationalisation of the member clusters and was not only evident in the increased German participation in European committees and expert workshops; the famous 2020 EU Cluster Conference, which took place under German patronage, was also a highlight. The importance of the clusters changed over this period. Thus, clusters were for the first time perceived as a regional policy instrument, as the complexity, differentiation and performance of the economy can only be addressed functionally at regional level.



86 programme members from all 16 federal states were funded through “go-cluster”. They were characterised by demonstrable qualitative development in terms of cluster management excellence: thus, within the framework of a standardised benchmarking process at the end of the programme phase, 12 cluster initiatives were awarded the gold label and 51 cluster initiatives were awarded the silver label of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI), while further cluster initiatives were still undergoing the certification process.

From 2020

From professionalisation to active shaping of transformation through innovation clusters

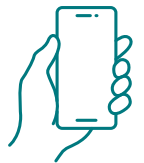
Digitisation and Decarbonisation



The third phase of the programme was

marked by times of crisis such as the Covid pandemic, the Ukraine war and the resulting energy crisis. Accordingly, resilience, Covid and the dual transformation of digitisation and decarbonisation

formed the focus of the content of the training courses (e.g. the workshop on press and public relations work focusing on social media) and networking events, which were often organised in co-operation with other organisations: such as in 2020 with the World Economic Forum on the role of industrial clusters in decarbonisation or with the Council for Sustainable Development in the framework of the 2021 Virtual Cluster Meeting. Ongoing professionalisation and internationalisation of the membership took place at all levels. Thus, “go-cluster” has represented the interests of its members through participation in European bodies such as the Sounding Board of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, the European Clusters Alliance or European Cluster Labelling Excellence Structure and the European Cluster Policy Group. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, new European committee workshops as well as individual consultations increasingly took place digitally. The last three annual conferences of “go-cluster” were virtual cluster meetings of the German cluster community with an official welcome by the BMWK and an artistic highlight at the end. It was precisely in this phase that the leading-edge clusters proved their adaptability and their formative role in overcoming crisis phenomena, not least because of their structures and of the excellent regional network. As a result, they have established themselves as central actors in regional transformation processes.



In October 2022, 81 cluster organisations are members of the “go-cluster” programme, 60 of which bear a valid label pursuant to the ECEI criteria. 14 were awarded the gold label, 42 the silver label and 4 the bronze label. In addition, one cluster has ISO:9001 certification.

81

Highlight of the “go-cluster” programme over the course of time

2012

Hour of birth of the “go-cluster” programme

In July 2012, the “Competence Networks Germany” programme became the new “go-cluster” programme. It is the cluster policy excellence measure of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action that brings together Germany’s best performing innovation clusters.

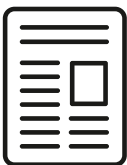


2013/2014



Launch of the cluster platform and newsletter

In 2013, Cluster Platform Germany was launched as an online-based, joint information portal of the federal ministries of Economic Affairs and of Education and Research. One year later, the “go-cluster” newsletter was sent out for the first time in its current form and appears every other week.



2014

Partner country concept

In 2014, the partner country concept was established for the first time in the “go-cluster” programme, which focuses on the different cluster policy approaches and aims to intensify co-operation relationships. Within this framework, in-depth networking activities took place with various countries, such as Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, Sweden and France.



2014

Cluster Monitor Germany

Clusters and regional networks continue to attract a great deal of national and international attention from the political community and business. Due to this demand for information on the effects of clusters and networks, “Cluster Monitor Germany” was developed on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action and the results were published for the first time in 2014.

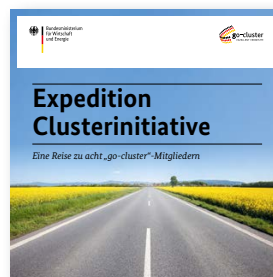
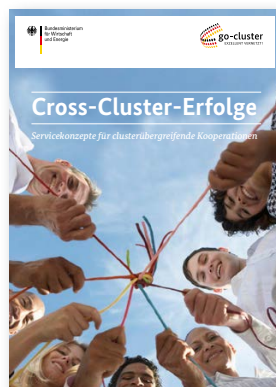


2012 | 2014 2017 | 2021

Funding announcements

Since the first programme phase (2012-2015), funding announcements have also been part of the “go-cluster” programme. They are oriented towards the current needs of the cluster organisations with the aim of strengthening the cluster management excellence of the members. The topics are diverse and range, for example, from cross-cluster co-operation and innovative cluster services to the funding of model projects for the development of pioneering cluster concepts and novel business models.

Publications



An important cornerstone of the “go-cluster” programme is increasing the visibility of the member clusters. In addition to Cluster Platform Germany, publications are a suitable format for presenting the programme and, above all, the achievements and successes of the programme members, and for increasing its reach.

2014

Europe: Innovation Express Cluster Conference

The Innovation Express Cluster Conference was then a recognised European conference for networking cluster management organisations from Europe. In co-operation with other renowned institutions in the cluster context, such as VINNOVA, TEKES and the Nordic Innovation Council, preparations were made for the conference by the “go-cluster” programme and it was held at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action on 18/19 September 2014.

2016

Cluster Conference: “Connecting Innovative Networks”

Networking is not only important among the cluster organisations, but also between the various programmes of the BMWK. For this purpose, under the banner “Connecting Innovative Networks” a cluster conference with over 100 participants was held at the BMWK in 2016. The aim was to make even greater use of the synergies between the BMWK funding programmes “go-cluster”, Central Innovation Programme for SMEs (ZIM) and Collaborative Industrial Research (IGF).



2016

BMWK roadshow

In 2016, “go-cluster” participated in the BMWK roadshow under the banner “From idea to market success. Innovation programmes for SMEs”. The roadshow toured five cities in Germany (Stuttgart, Munich, Chemnitz, Hamburg and Hanover) and presented the various programmes of the BMWK.



2017

1st German Cluster Week

“German Cluster Week” was launched to further highlight the work of the German cluster initiatives and their impact on the regions. The BMWK, BMBF and the federal states thus support a forum that promotes exchange between science and industry and highlights the innovation potential of cluster initiatives. In 2017, between 20 and 28 April, the first pan-German Cluster Week took place under the patronage of the BMWK and BMBF with a total of 173 events. It was opened at the annual conference of the “go-cluster” programme at the BMWK.



For example, as an exchange of experiences in the context of the 9th Americas Competitiveness Exchange in 2018 or as cluster matchmaking in the framework of the Franco-German Digital Summit in 2016.

2018

Internationalisation of clusters

“go-cluster” promotes the international visibility and initiation of international contacts of its programme participants through various digital and face-to-face exchange formats as well as networking events, even beyond the partner country concept of the annual conferences.



2019

2nd German Cluster Week

From block events for cheese and spice sommeliers in Kulmbach and Veitshöchheim

to a seminar on bonding plastics in Lüdenscheid and the 1st East Brandenburg Concrete Round Table in Rüdersdorf near Berlin – the 2nd Cluster Week has shown once again: Germany's clusters are cre-



ative, diverse and innovative. From 2 to 11 April 2019, cluster initiatives from all 16 federal states participated in German Cluster Week with almost 200 events as well as trade fair participations, including many activities with international partners such as Sweden, Israel, Canada, Portugal, the Netherlands, France and the UK.

10:30 Uhr

Eröffnung der Clusterwoche Deutschland 2019

Dr. Ole Janssen, Leiter der Unterabteilung „Innovations- und Technologiepolitik“ im Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie
Jürgen Wengel, Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung



2019

ZIM meets „go-cluster“

Under the banner 'ZIM meets "go-cluster"', network managers from both programmes of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action met at the VKU Forum in Berlin on 10 April 2019 as part of the Second German Cluster Week. The aim was to exchange information on topics and experiences between the programmes and to identify potential for connection for the participants.



Hanover Trade Fair

Hanover Trade Fair is a traditional component of “go-cluster” activities. Every year, the team can be found on the BMWK stand or stage providing information about the programme’s offerings and activities. In addition to cluster-related trade fair tours, cluster matchmaking events were also held with the current partner country. The focus is on exchange of information on co-operation opportunities as well as the framework conditions and prerequisites for successful internationalisation of clusters.

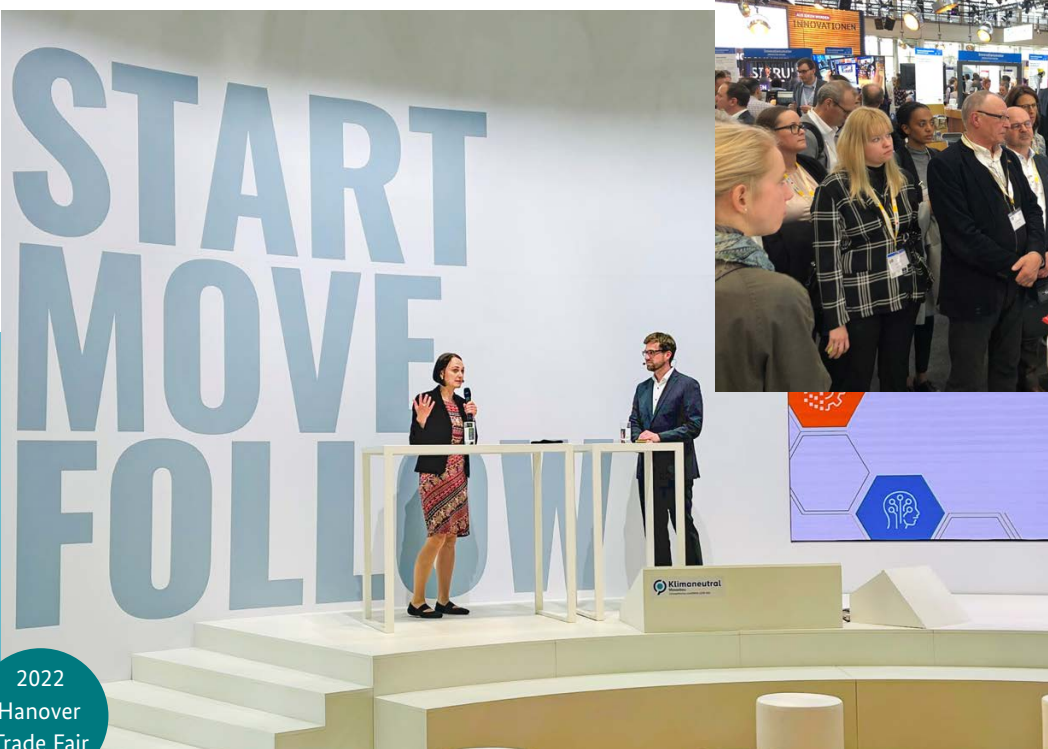


2017
Hanover
Trade Fair

2019
Hanover
Trade Fair



2019
Hanover
Trade Fair



2022
Hanover
Trade Fair



2020

“go-cluster” at European level

In addition to the European Cluster Conference, “go-cluster” participates in numerous European bodies and represents the interests of programme members in the EU context. With the 2020 “go-cluster” programme Germany became the 14th nation to join the European Clusters Alliance as an associate member and in the same year it became a full member of the European Cluster Labelling Excellence Structure (EUCLES). Other important bodies are the Sounding Board of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) and the European Cluster Policy Group (ECPG).



EUCLES

European Clusters Excellence
Labelling Structure



European
Commission



EUROPEAN
CLUSTER COLLABORATION
PLATFORM



Bundesministerium
für Wirtschaft
und Energie

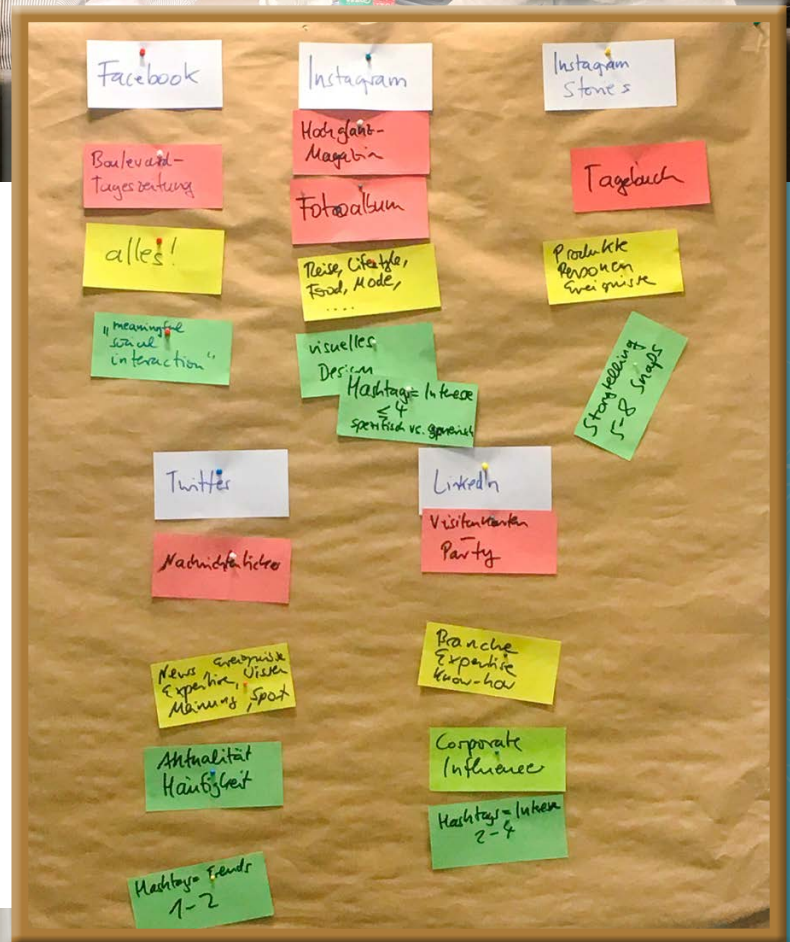
[@Clusters_EU](https://twitter.com/Clusters_EU)

#EUClusterConference



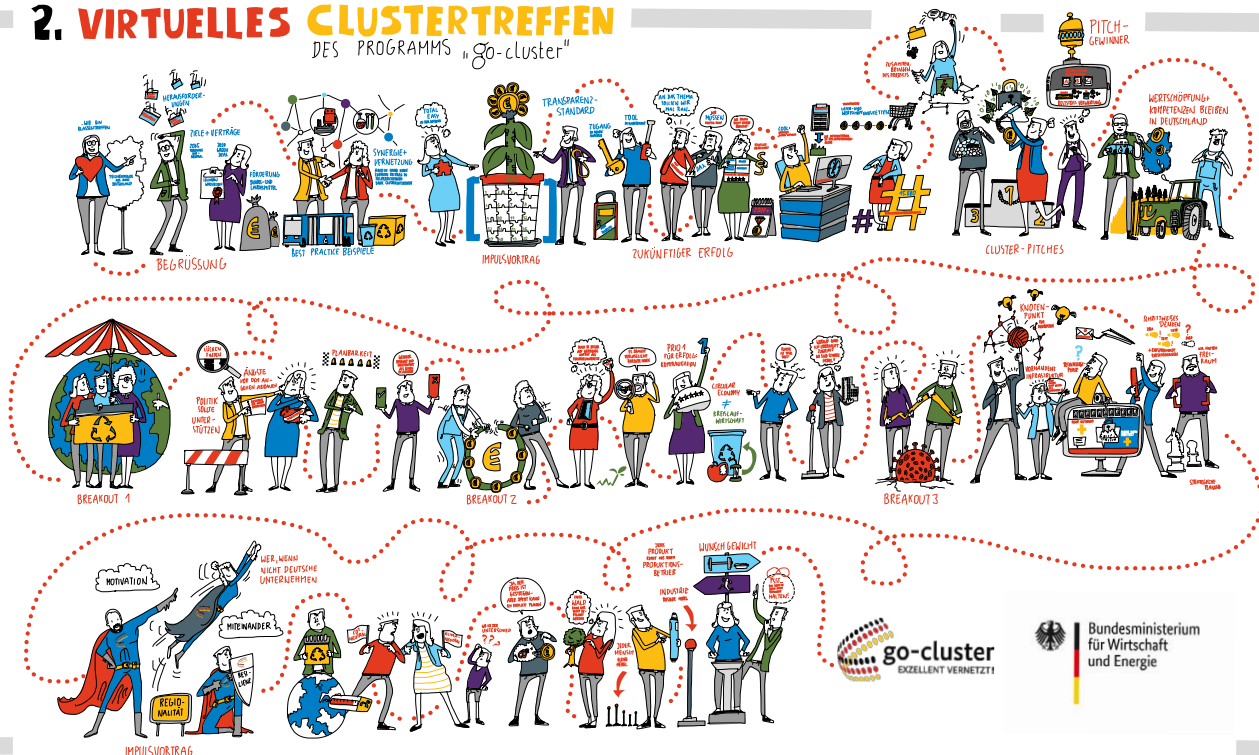
Professionalisation seminars and webinars

On average, “go-cluster” offers programme members five continuing training courses per year in various subject areas (e.g. press and public relations, cluster service start-up funding, training and further education, etc.), which the project sponsor conducts itself or partly with the support of external speakers. The webinars in co-operation with other organisations, such as the World Economic Forum and Accenture or the German Council for Sustainable Development, are especially popular.



2020

2. VIRTUELLES CLUSTERTREFFEN DES PROGRAMMS „go-cluster“



Annual conference as a virtual cluster meeting

Due to the pandemic conditions, the traditional annual meeting was held as a virtual cluster meeting in the years 2020 to 2022. It is the annual highlight for the German cluster community. The subject areas are always based on current cluster policy developments and challenges – for example, “Sustainability and Climate Action” was the focus of the event in 2021 and “Industry Transformation” in 2022.



2021

“go-cluster” in social media communication

The basic goals of the “go-cluster” programme include networking and professionalisation, which includes digitisation and thus also speed of reporting. In 2021, a Twitter channel was launched for the first time in order to expand target group-specific communication with the member clusters and, at the same time, to smoothly integrate reporting on cluster successes and announcements into “go-cluster” communication.



2022



1st Networking Day in Nuremberg

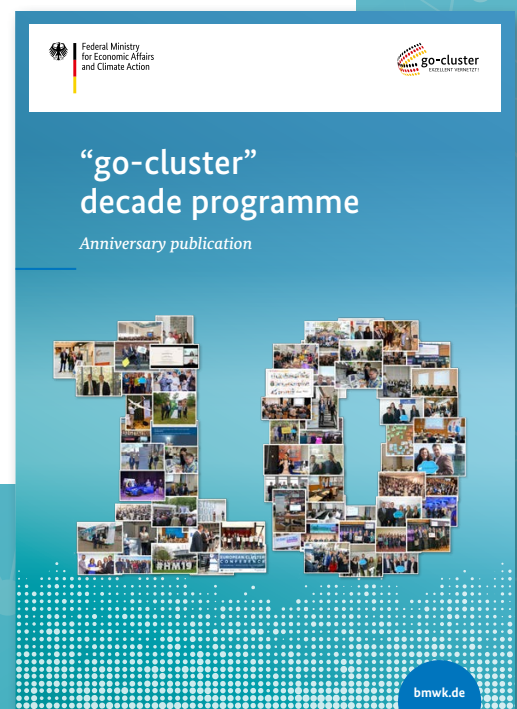
The Networking Day of the “go-cluster” programme focuses on exchange of ideas between the programme members. As local hosts, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK), the “go-cluster” team as well as CNA e. V., responsible for Cluster BahnTechnik Bayern, established the framework for the 1st Networking Day with about 30 participants on the role of cluster management organisations in coping with the regional transformation.



2022

A decade of “go-cluster”

This year, the successful programme celebrates its tenth anniversary. The anniversary publication illustrates the different perspectives, impressions and experiences from the “go-cluster” programme and highlights the relevance of the programme for the German cluster community and cluster policy.




Exclusive “go-cluster”-Insights







The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action promotes the most efficient clusters in the country with the “go-cluster” programme. Unlike other support programmes, the focus is not on financial support, but on advisory and service offers. On the occasion of the anniversary publication, various members and participants in the “go-cluster” programme will have their say in the following section. In the four exclusive interviews, different perspectives, impressions and experiences are reported: new programme members and clusters that have been with the programme from the very beginning, voices from the programme advisory board and, last but not least, the programme managers from the BMWK and the project sponsor.

Discussion with the Fibre-Based Materials Alliance





Ulrike Möller





Who are you and what is your role in the go-cluster programme?







Hi! I am Ulrike Möller, network manager of Allianz Faserbasierte Werkstoffe e.V. We are an enthusiastic member of the “go-cluster” programme.







We’re glad to hear that! What makes you or your organisation stand out? And what makes you a “go-cluster” member?






We are business-oriented and focus on the needs and interests of our members. We have been awarded the European gold cluster label and the Baden-Württemberg excellence label. 🏆





How do you benefit from the “go-cluster” programme? How has your cluster developed through membership? Which offers and services have contributed to this?





We have benefited at various levels: the membership evidences high quality and performance, which helps us with our external image and in recruiting members. 👍



Our visibility is increased, too, thanks to our involvement in federal economic policy initiatives. This is also important for the interests of our members.

We particularly appreciate the individual consulting services for cluster management, e.g. in strategy development. 🙌



Not to be forgotten, of course, is the special funding for network topics. These help the AFBW to orient itself towards the future and to offer even more “added value through networking” for its members. Because even networks have to network!

Certification also creates beneficial pressure to keep optimising internal business processes. 😂

That’s quite a lot! What have your personal highlights over the past few years been with “go-cluster”?



At a Design Thinking event of the AFBW, the “go-cluster” programme team supported us by moderating and leading the workshop. They skilfully guided us through the event and provided valuable input in the discussion process. TOP!

Looking to the future: what developments would you like to see for your cluster in the next ten years?



In general, we would like to continue to see as much creative and competent input, ground-breaking funding programmes and forward-looking support. As a link to the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI) we would like to see a more practical orientation for future label processes. It would be wonderful if the “go-cluster” programme could have a corresponding impact!

And apart from that, we say: thank you and keep up the good work!!!! 🤝
We look forward to the next ten years!!

Discussion with the innovation network smart³



Holger Kunze



Who are you and what is your role in the go-cluster programme?



Hi, I am Holger Kunze, head the Symbiotic Mechatronics business area at the Fraunhofer IWU in Dresden. Ten years ago, I initiated what is now Innovationnetzwerk smart³ e.V., which has been a member of the “go-cluster” programme since 2017. Since last year, I have also been a member of the programme advisory board and chairman of the board of smart³ e.V.

So you are a relatively “young” programme member! What sets your organisation apart? And what makes you a “go-cluster” member?



We have had a strong interdisciplinary approach since the network was founded. Over the period 2013 to 2017 we grew rapidly and developed into Europe’s largest network for smart materials. This is also reflected in our label certifications: in 2017/18 we achieved bronze and in 2021 silver! 🍾

How do you benefit from the “go-cluster” programme? How has your cluster developed through membership? Which offers and services have contributed to this?



We actually benefit a lot! In addition to the opportunity for cross-cluster exchange, we have made use of individual strategy consulting for our board and office three times over the past few years and have learned a lot as a result. 🦊



In particular, the bronze and silver label awards have great added value for us, as they allow us to make the quality of our network visible to the outside world, too. In addition, with the help of competent funding advice from VDI/VDE-IT, we managed to submit a successful application and thus receive funding from the BMWK for the development of new services and the initiation of new co-operation ventures in the network. 🖋️

What have been your personal highlights with the programme since its launch in 2017?



There have certainly been a few! Let me list them:

- 1) Approval of BMWK funding for our “INNO Battle” application
- 2) Achievement of the silver label
- 3) Strategy consulting by the VDI/VDE-IT team
- 4) Sharing of ideas within the programme with other cluster managers

How should things ideally continue in future? What do you want for your cluster in the next ten years?



In any case, we are striving to be awarded the gold label. 🏅

To this end, we would like to see not only more exchange of ideas among cluster managers in order to learn from each other, but also stronger international orientation of our cluster. 🌐

Through consolidation of the networking agency strategy and a good balance between regional and supraregional co-operation ventures, we as the smart3 innovation network want to make a significant social and economic contribution to the transformation in Germany. 🇩🇪

Technology fields of the current “go-cluster” members

Logistics Measurement Technologies Sensor Technologies
Industry 4.0 Construction Industry
Automotive Textile and Apparel Industry
Security Technologies ICT Resource Efficiency
Food Industry Production Technologies
Medical Technologies Plant Research
Aviation Technologies Space Technologies
Creative Industries Plastics Technologies
Electrical Engineering Biotechnology
Nanotechnologies Financial Sector
Services Microsystems Technologies
Satellite Technologies Energy Technologies
Packaging Technologies Forest- and Wood-based Industries
Chemical Industry Health Industries
Metal Processing Transport Technologies
Music Industry Environmental Technologies
Optical Technologies and Photonics Digitisation
Materials Technologies

Discussion with representatives from the programme advisory board



Programme advisory board veterans



Hello gentlemen! Shall we begin with a short round of introductions?



Gladly! I am Prof. Dr. Thomas Heimer, co-chair of the “go-cluster” programme advisory board at the BMWK.



And I am Axel Bauer, graduate physicist, Head of Marketing and Communication at the Fraunhofer Institute for Laser Technology ILT in Aachen, and also a member of the PBK.

We’ve known you both for a while – help us out here... how long have you been a member of the PBK now?



I have actually been with the programme since it started in 2012! 🚀



Me too. 🙋 It’s been ten years already!

What is your job exactly?



Our task is to advise and support the BMWK in its implementation of the programme.

What does that look like in practice?



Specifically, we review applications for admission, advise the ministry on further development of the initiative by way of a think tank, pick up on new trends and topics in the cluster landscape and thus propose new approaches and methods for the programme.

The programme has now been running for 10 years. How has “go-cluster” developed in recent years from your perspective?



The programme is one of the relevant instruments of an innovation-oriented economic policy. The networking of business, science and local multipliers around a high-potential innovation topic creates added value that is reflected in jobs, spin-offs, training courses and national and international contacts. The greatest success of the programme lies in the quality assurance of the award-winning clusters. 🏆 🥇



Exactly! Without “go-cluster”, cluster policy as a successful, innovation-oriented and economic policy instrument would not have matured to the extent that it has today!

You certainly experience a lot in ten years – we found some photos of you ... take a look!



Sends photos:




What do you remember in particular?



Time and again, the variety of ideas for revitalising and further developing an effective cluster are fascinating to me.



That's right. I also really like it when clusters follow a successful path, especially when they are from regions that are not among the strongest economically.

Looking to the future – what do you want for the coming ten years? 



Cluster policy today is at a crossroads! New challenges, especially in regional policy for economically weaker regions, can benefit from a relaunched cluster policy. Here, the connection between sustainable and digital renewal of the new cluster policy is particularly relevant.



Yes, no one person alone can master the above challenges of climate action, digitisation, sustainable mobility, as well as youth development. These tasks can only be solved in close co-operation between business, science and the political community.



This is precisely why, in addition to national strategies that provide a certain degree of planning security, tactical implementation on the ground is ultimately decisive for success: here, locally anchored clusters give every committed actor some orientation. In addition, local networking reduces the start-up risks and times for targeted measures.



In my view, national cluster policy in the next ten years should concentrate on locally focused real-world laboratories that are operated and further developed by functioning clusters on the ground – for the benefit of society and industry.

We still have a lot to look forward to! We are pleased to be tackling these tasks together with you!



Facts and figures on “go-cluster”



In discussion with the BMWK and the programme organisation



Team “go-cluster”



Hi everyone! Who is here today?



Welcome! My name is Sabine Maass and I have been active in various positions in the Federal Ministry of Economics since 1996. In 2019, I took over Department VIC4 – Industrial Research for Companies, Innovation Consulting and thus also the economic policy support for the “go-cluster” programme.



Hi! 🙋 My name is Theresa Gerdes and I have been head of the “go-cluster” programme since 2021. As VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH, we have been contracted to implement the programme.



Hello everyone from the “go-cluster” veteran! 😊 I am Claudia Buhl and I managed the “go-cluster” programme from 2012 to 2020. In the meantime, I became deputy head of department at VDI/VDE-IT and have therefore placed the programme management in Theresa’s trustworthy hands. But I still love being a member of the programme team. 😊

How long have you been looking after cluster organisations in the “go-cluster” programme and what do you particularly like about it?



Even before “go-cluster”, so since about 2006, I have been involved with clusters and cluster organisations. Being able to help shape “go-cluster” with its diverse national and international activities, the cluster organisations involved with their many committed employees and the implementation and further development of “go-cluster” is an exciting package.



I have been involved in the programme since February 2017 and I work on a wide range of tasks.

Difficult to say ... 🤔 for sure, the people I deal with, but above all the variety of tasks I am allowed to carry out.



I have the least professional experience of all of us in the group and have been actively involved with cluster organisations on a daily basis since 2019.

What excited me from the beginning was the palpable desire for networking and continuous improvement of the cluster organisations.

With so much programme experience – what sets the “go-cluster” programme apart from other funding programmes?



I’ve never seen a membership structure like this in other funding programmes...we’ve had the privilege of accompanying a large number of cluster organisations over the years and witnessing their development...it’s already a small community. 🌟😊



Absolutely. 👍



The membership structure is a super keyword. In my almost 30 years at the BMWK, I have seen many funding programmes come and go. But “go-cluster” is unique. Normally, funding programmes help the “weakest”. But at “go-cluster” we use the strengths of positive leading lights in the economy and help the best-performing clusters in Germany so that they become even better!



“go-cluster” is not a classical funding programme, but rather a knowledge, strategy, networking, support, consulting and qualification measure. In this complexity, “go-cluster” is already unique in Europe.

We are now curious to hear about your personal highlights with the programme in recent years or the past decade.





When I started in 2017, my colleagues were in the midst of preparations for the 1st German Cluster Week – so I was able to jump right in and experience how active and bustling the German cluster landscape is.

T. G. sends photo:



I also remember many good conversations and telephone calls – at events, on site at the clusters and in the course of the funding rounds that I supervise.



I also have very positive memories of my start in the unit just in time for Cluster Week 2019. I was thrown straight in at the deep end. Since then, there have been many other great highlights. Particularly the European Cluster Conference, which we had the pleasure of co-organising in Germany in 2020. And the incredible willingness to help that the clusters showed during the Covid crisis. The number and variety of ideas and offers was very impressive.



@Sabine @Theresa: I would also have mentioned the Cluster Week and the European Cluster Conference first. But also our annual conferences, the “class reunions of the German cluster community” so to speak, the international activities with France, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria and the USA, our participation in the Hanover trade fairs and the many personal encounters were real highlights. 🌟

And what about the future? What developments in cluster policy would you like to see in the next ten years?



If we want to reach SMEs, in particular, with information and funding measures, then this works very well via clusters. I hope that the value of cluster initiatives will be shouted from the rooftops – it becomes clear again and again in the most diverse programmes and measures how important co-operation is, but it only works if there is trust and reliability. In clusters, this works. 🙌



@Claudia @Sabine: Do you remember the European Commission's call for 3D printing capacity in the context of the Covid crisis, which went more or less viral? My work ground to a halt, because within a few days I received several thousand e-mails and hundreds of phone calls 🤖 ... but it also made it abundantly clear how many people and organisations our members reach.



@Theresa: That's just what I meant about the offers of help in the Covid crisis. I was also copied on lots of offers and e-mails. I would never have expected that. In this way, we at the BMWK were also able to make significant proposals to the crisis team at the BMG (Federal Ministry of Health).

But the question was about the future. I would like to see us further increase the number of cluster actors, especially SMEs. The clusters are a huge lever to support companies in their transformation, e.g. through best practices and qualifications.



Exactly! We will therefore also need cluster programmes such as “go-cluster” in the coming decade, allowing us to react just as quickly to changing framework conditions and challenges with new or adapted support offers for the cluster organisations as they in turn do for their cluster actors. At the same time, we also need stronger links between cluster policy and industrial policy as well as with regional economic and structural policy.

We must not forget the great potential of social economy enterprises and the possibility of entirely new business models.

The cluster world is simply very dynamic and that is why I would like to still see a large cluster community in 2032, and collaboration between cluster policy, cluster organisations, business, science and society, with these together overcoming the challenges and making use of the (economic) opportunity for Germany.

Thank you very much for these insights from behind the scenes in the “go-cluster” programme and your personal viewpoints!



The “go-cluster” programme



Cluster policy excellence programme: “go-cluster”

“go-cluster” is the cluster policy excellence measure of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK), bringing together the best-performing national innovation clusters. They have excellent structures and support the cluster actors involved in various areas of action according to requirements. The innovation clusters participating in the “go-cluster” programme are innovation pioneers and reflect Germany’s high level of competence in numerous fields of industry and technology.

The “go-cluster” programme supports the innovation clusters in their further development into internationally excellent organisations through consulting and services, promotes innovative cluster services such as “cross-cluster” concepts and strengthens the pan-European and international networking of the innovation clusters.

Admission criteria

The programme is essentially aimed at all high-performance innovation clusters from Germany. Admission is linked to the fulfilment of excellence criteria in the areas of “structure and composition”, “cluster management and structure”, “activities and co-operation ventures” and “visibility and impacts”. It is carried out by means of an applica-

tion process. The admission documents are available on the website www.go-cluster.de.

Services and advice

Whether we’re talking about cluster managers, cluster actors or representatives from politics, science and business: “go-cluster” offers needs-oriented services for every target group. For example, the following free services and advice are available to innovation clusters participating in the programme:

- certification of the quality and performance of the innovation clusters by means of uniform evaluation criteria based on European quality standards;
- use of the registered tradename/symbol “go-cluster” as a seal of quality;
- acceptance of the costs of the European benchmarking and certification process for the bronze and silver labels of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI);
- presentation of the innovation clusters on the central federal policy internet portal “Cluster Platform Germany”; individual advice on topics such as strategy development, financing, further development of services, sustainability and stability of cluster structures;
- seminars on current cluster management topics and cluster instruments; presentation of cluster work and selected innovation successes to the public (events, newsletters, internet portals);
- integration and increased visibility in economic policy initiatives of the federal government as well as
- networking activities with the most efficient innovation clusters from Germany and Europe.

Cluster Platform Germany

Cluster Platform Germany is the joint information portal of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

At www.clusterplattform.de you will find a clear and compact overview of cluster-related activities at federal, state and EU level. In addition, Germany's cluster diversity is portrayed by means of a research tool with various search categories.

Are you interested in the “go-cluster” programme or do you have any questions?

Information, advice and services:

“go-cluster” programme

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Are you interested in news from the “go-cluster” programme and the cluster world? → [Newsletter](#)

