



# From funding dependence to financial sustainability: Rethinking business models for Europe's cluster organisations

Summary | EU Clusters Talk | 10 June 2026 | 08:30-09:45 CET



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This [summary](#) was developed by [Technopolis Group](#)

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## Introduction

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), on behalf of the European Commission, hosted the EU Clusters Talk “**From funding dependence to financial sustainability - Rethinking business models for Europe's cluster organisations**” on 10 June 2026, from 8:30 – 9:45 CEST. The session explored how cluster organisations across Europe design and adapt their business models, with a particular focus on financial sustainability and long-term resilience.

### Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Andrew Lansley

Time	Session
08:30-08:35	<b>Welcome and introduction</b> <i>Andrew Lansley, Moderator</i>
08:35-08:40	<b>News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform</b> <i>Santiago Donat, Team Member from the ECCP</i>
08:40-09:00	<b>Setting the scene: Financial sustainability of cluster organisations</b> Presentation by <b>Christian Rangen</b> , <i>Strategy advisor and CEO, Engage // Innovate, Strategy Tools</i>
09:00-09:35	<b>Panel discussion: Towards financial sustainability in practice</b> <i>Alexandre Yurchak, CEO, Ukrainian Cluster Alliance</i> <i>Ásta Kristín Sigurjónsdóttir, Managing Director, Iceland Tourism Cluster</i> <i>Claire Grosbois, European Project Development Manager, VEGEPOLYS VALLEY</i> <i>Marcos Suárez, Strategic Areas Director, BASQUENERGY Cluster</i> <i>Silvia Rossi, Cluster Manager, Clust-ER BUILD</i>
09:35-09:40	<b>Outlook on upcoming ECCP activities</b> <i>Laura Todaro, Team Member from the ECCP</i>
09:40-09:45	<b>Funding opportunities</b> <i>Santiago Donat, Team Member from the ECCP</i>

### Key messages

- **Financial sustainability goes beyond funding:** Sustainable cluster business models depend on the interaction between revenue streams, cost structures, and, above all, the value created for members and stakeholders. A clear and relevant value proposition is the foundation for long-term financial resilience.
- **Diversification is essential, but there is no one-size-fits-all model:** The clusters represented in the discussion demonstrated a range of approaches combining membership fees, public funding, project funding, services, partnerships, and sponsorships. The appropriate balance depends on the cluster’s maturity, sector, and regional context.

- **Public funding remains an important pillar for many cluster organisations:** While reducing dependency on a single funding source is important, public support is often an intentional part of the policy strategy in a given territory, enabling activities that generate wider benefits for regional development, innovation ecosystems, and industrial competitiveness that cannot easily be financed through private revenues alone.
- **Strong cluster management and member engagement are critical to long-term resilience:** Successful clusters continuously adapt their services to members' needs, build trusted relationships across their ecosystems, and develop the skills and organisational capacity required to identify opportunities, attract funding, and create value over time.

## 1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

### Santiago Donat, team member of the ECCP

The following items were presented:

1. Open Call for Evidence on the upcoming [Biotech Act II](#)
2. [ECCP needs assessment survey](#)
3. Save the date – [SME & Clusters Assembly 2026](#)
4. Announcement of a new ECCP initiative, EU Industry Talks, and promotion of the [first session on the EU Tech Sovereignty Package](#) (24 June 2026)

## 2. Set-the-scene presentation: Financial sustainability of cluster organisations

### Christian Rangen, Strategic advisor & CEO, Engage // Innovate, Strategy Tools

Christian Rangen's presentation highlighted the importance of financial sustainability and business model development for cluster organisations, a topic that has often received insufficient attention across the European cluster landscape. Drawing on his experience working with clusters across Europe and beyond, he noted that many cluster organisations have relied heavily on public funding, which can limit long-term strategic flexibility.

He introduced the concept of a cluster business model as the combination of three interconnected elements: revenue streams, cost structure, and value creation for stakeholders. While discussions often focus on funding sources, he stressed that a strong value proposition is the foundation for both sustainable revenue generation and effective resource allocation.

The presentation outlined different sources of financing, including public funding, private sector contributions, and project-based funding. Christian emphasised that there is significantly more diversity and optionality in cluster revenue models than is often assumed, and encouraged clusters to explore a broader range of funding approaches. He also noted that cluster business models typically evolve over time, moving from a stronger reliance on public funding towards more diversified combinations of private income, membership fees, partnerships, services, and projects.

While acknowledging that clusters have different starting points and operate in different contexts, he suggested that private sector funding should be part of the funding mix from an early stage to reduce dependency on public support. He also highlighted the importance of entrepreneurial cluster managers who continuously seek new ways to create value for members and diversify revenue streams.

In closing, Christian encouraged cluster organisations to adopt a long-term perspective when developing their business models, focusing on gradual evolution over ten-year horizons rather than short-term fixes.



### 3. Panel discussion: Towards financial sustainability in practice

The panel discussion opened with Marcos Suárez García, Strategic Areas Director at the BASQUENERGY Cluster, who described the organisation as a long-established cluster in the Basque Country with 30 years of activity in the energy sector. He explained that its financing model has gradually evolved into a diversified structure combining private membership fees and services, public support at regional and national level, and a share of European and other competitive project funding. This balance, he noted, was not achieved from the start but developed over several years, following a strong public-private foundation. Today, the cluster continues to grow steadily while maintaining this diversified approach.

He further underlined that public-private collaboration is at the core of the Basque cluster model, which was originally established as an industrial policy instrument bringing together government and companies. He noted that this cooperation continues to generate value both for companies, through their connection to public-sector initiatives, and for the wider region, particularly through activities that are not commercially self-sustaining but are important for sectoral and regional development. In this context, he stressed that **maintaining a certain level of public support remains essential, even in more mature cluster models.**

Claire Grosbois, European Project Development Manager at VEGEPOLYS VALLEY, followed by outlining a similar evolution in one of the largest French clusters working on plant innovation. She explained that the organisation initially relied on a relatively even split between public funding and member contributions, but has since moved towards a more diversified model adapting to their members' needs. Its current structure is based on around 40% private funding, 30% public funding, and 30% project-related resources. She highlighted that this shift has been driven by a deliberate effort to strengthen service development and respond more closely to member needs, moving beyond project participation towards a stronger focus on value creation, including the different needs by different type of members.

She also noted changes in the French public funding landscape, in particular the shift of funding responsibilities towards regional level, which has reduced the amount of available public funding and encouraged the cluster to broaden its regional anchoring. At the same time, she stressed that while project funding is an important pillar, it has become more volatile and cannot serve as the sole basis for financial stability. She underlined the **importance of keeping the different revenue streams interconnected, while also maintaining public funding as a key enabler of non-commercial cluster functions such as ecosystem coordination and stakeholder engagement.**

Alexandre Yurchak, Chief Executive Officer of the Ukrainian Cluster Alliance, brought in the perspective of a national cluster ecosystem representing more than 40 clusters. He described a recent shift across the community from a funding-centred approach towards a value-centred model focused on collaboration and ecosystem impact. Ukrainian clusters are increasingly combining international donor funding, membership fees, service revenues, private partnerships, and in some cases emerging investment mechanisms. He emphasised that the **key challenge is less about balancing specific revenue shares and more about strengthening organisational capacity and enabling clusters to function as ecosystem orchestrators in a fragmented funding environment.** He also noted that short-term and fragmented donor programmes are often insufficient to build sustainable cluster capacity, highlighting the need for longer-term, more structured support programmes that combine financial resources with training and organisational development. The Ukrainian Cluster Alliance offers their cluster community an operational framework to navigate this change of approach including the reality of the wartime they suffer.

Silvia Rossi, Cluster Manager at Clust-ER BUILD Emilia-Romagna, presented the experience of a regional cluster founded in 2017 with around 120 members. The cluster relies on a mix of public project funding, membership fees, and service activities linked to innovation support and internationalisation. However, she noted that despite efforts to diversify, around 60% of funding still comes from a regional public funding programme. She highlighted the ongoing challenge of developing new revenue streams while maintaining

strong relationships with members, particularly in situations where service development can create perceptions of competition with private sector actors.

She further reflected on the **role of cluster managers**, stressing the importance of soft skills in navigating complex stakeholder environments. In her view, cluster managers must act as intermediaries between SMEs, research organisations, and public administrations, translating between technical, industrial, and policy languages. She underlined that this **relational and interpretative role is essential for building trust and identifying opportunities for collaboration and value creation**.

Ásta Kristín Sigurjónsdóttir, Chief Executive Officer of the Iceland Tourism Cluster, presented a contrasting model of a cluster operating without public funding. She explained that the organisation is primarily financed through membership fees and project-based income, with a roughly even split between the two. She described how this structure evolved significantly over time, particularly during the COVID-19 period, when the cluster had to shift from a predominantly private funding model to a stronger reliance on European and Nordic projects. They select only projects that are aligned with their key areas, and that can provide clear added value to their members. This transition led to significant revenue growth but also increased exposure to project cycles and administrative demands.

She also highlighted the **importance of maintaining close engagement with members in a project-intensive model**. While project participation provides clear value to the members, it can also reduce day-to-day proximity to members due to administrative workload and external commitments. For this reason, she emphasised that continuous relationship-building and a clear articulation of value are essential to sustaining member trust and long-term involvement.

## 4. Outlook on upcoming ECCP activities

### Laura Todaro, team member of the ECCP

The following items were presented:

1. [ECCP matchmaking events](#) in Montreal (Canada) on 15-17 September 2026, New Delhi (India) on 21-23 October 2026, and South Africa on 17-19 November 2026
2. [Clusters Meet Regions](#) event in Attica (6-7 October 2026) and a follow-up regional event planned in Saxony (7-8 December 2026)
3. [EU Industry Talk on the EU Tech Sovereignty Package – What it means for the European industry](#) (24 June 2026)
4. [ECCP Website Content & Updates](#)

## 5. Funding opportunities

### Santiago Donat, team member of the ECCP

The following items were presented:

1. Two new calls under the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument: [Strand 1](#) and [Strand 2](#), with a deadline on 12 November 2026
2. Several Euroclusters Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) Opportunities for SMEs, with grants of up to €60,000 and funding rates between 75% and 100%. More information on the [ECCP website](#).