

REGIONAL NETWORKING ON SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

**Key Questions to Ask
yourself..**



**..On the road to creating
a Regional Network!**

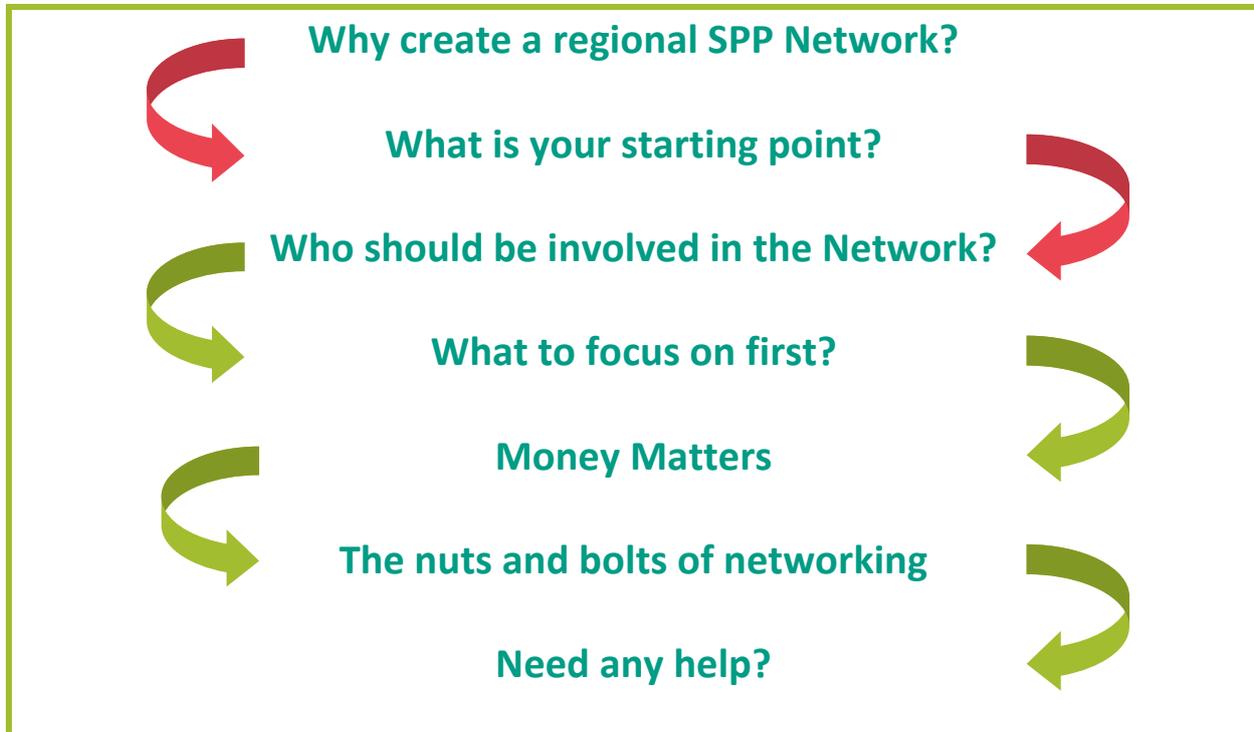


About SPP Regions: SPP Regions promotes the creation and expansion of 7 European regional networks of municipalities working together on sustainable public procurement (SPP) and public procurement of innovation (PPI). The regional networks are collaborating directly on tendering for eco-innovative solutions, whilst building capacities and transferring skills and knowledge through their SPP and PPI activities. The 42 tenders within the project will achieve 54.3 GWh/year primary energy savings and trigger 45 GWh/year renewable energy. More information: www.sppregions.eu Email: info@sppregions.eu

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Disclaimer: This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649718. The sole responsibility for any error or omissions lies with the editor. The content does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission. The European Commission is also not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.





This guide is not intended to sit gathering dust on a shelf. Instead, we hope to have created a practical and living document which you can use to organise your thoughts, visions and fears into a coherent plan for setting up your own regional sustainable procurement network.

This guide condenses the main lessons we have learned so far within the SPP Regions project into 9 short pages. One of our first observations is the importance of context. No two networks are the same – a group’s aims, activities and priorities are dependent on a variety of factors including who the members are, what their priorities are, the strengths and weaknesses of the network’s participants and local political priorities. Therefore, a straightforward “how-to” guide probably wouldn’t be of much help to anyone! Instead, we have tried to draw together the key considerations we all had to think about when setting up our Networks, as well as providing some insights into how we approached them.

In each section, we have laid out some of the key questions you will need to ask yourself when setting up your Network. In order to help you answer these questions, we have shared examples from our own experiences as well as some resources which might be useful for you.

This booklet is therefore more like a primer to help you through the first stages of the journey.

If you’d like any further information or assistance please get in touch: procurement@iclei.org

WHY CREATE A REGIONAL SPP NETWORK?



Sustainable procurement can bring many advantages to an organisation. Considering the broader impacts of public procurement and opting for products and services with environmental and social benefits enables public authorities to invest in the future of their cities and can actively encourage local innovation and entrepreneurship.

Actually getting started can be daunting, however. What if it costs more? What happens if a decision gets challenged? How do you even begin with the complex business of life cycle costing and/or market engagement?

Cooperation between public authorities has a crucial role to play here. In the current economic climate, networks are a useful tool to increase the regional value chain and to help meet the challenges of spending cuts through activities such as joint procurement. Networks of procurers can share positive and negative experiences with their peers as well as gaining insights and receiving targeted advice on how best to approach specific issues faced by public authorities.

Regional networks are vital to a successful sustainable procurement strategy as they give you the ability to:

- **Demonstrate your commitment to sustainability**
- **Learn from the experiences of other regional networks**
- **Develop your regional supply base**
- **Increase your influence through joint market engagement activities**
- **Use joint procurement to benefit from economies of scale**

WHAT IS YOUR STARTING POINT?

When starting a new initiative, it is always important to make a thorough assessment of your current situation.

Look to see what is already available in terms of structures, strategy and political support. If there is already a policy or strategy document from your national government or at the local or regional level signalling the importance of SPP or setting obligations for public authorities, this could provide a vital justification for your new network and help with recruiting new members.



Perhaps you might not have to start entirely from scratch – it could be that there are pre-existing networks focusing on procurement or sustainability which you could join forces with to start looking at sustainable procurement. Most importantly: if you are establishing a new network, make sure there is a specific added value which it provides to network members, which is not available through other networks or initiatives.

Finally, there's no need to reinvent the wheel! Networking is all about learning from each other. See if you can find other networks who are already working on SPP (such as those in the SPP Regions project). They might be able to provide informal or formal mentoring to help you avoid any potential pitfalls and point you in the right direction.

Key Questions:

- 1. Who is trying to establish the network's activities? Is it a local public authority, a supramunicipal entity or another type of organisation (NGO, etc.)?
- 1. Are there any existing networks focusing on sustainability or procurement at the regional level which you can build on?
- 2. Are there any guiding documents or policies within your administration or at national level which can help support your new network?
- 3. Are there any organisations in other regions which are already doing what you would like to do that you can learn from?

What did the PIPEN Network do?

In the South of East of England the [PIPEN Network \(Partners in Procurement Energy Network\)](#) was set up as a sub-group of the existing Partners in Procurement Network, to cooperate specifically on sustainability in procurement. This helped them to save time and effort from setting up a whole new network and allowed the members of the existing network to look at sustainability as they might not have considered before.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE NETWORK?

Now you've thought about the basics, it's time to turn your attention to recruitment. Who are your members going to be? This will depend on a variety of factors, including who you know could be interested and what the goals of your organisation are.

The core strength of any network is the enthusiasm and commitment of its members, so be sure to take some time to identify who you would like to recruit, where you will find them and what you will offer them and what you expect from them in return.



Key Questions:

- 1. What types of organisations would you like to involve in your network? Will the network be aimed solely at public authorities or are you interested in opening membership up to other sectors, such as NGOs or private companies?
- 2. What type of people are you looking to recruit within these organisations? Is your network focusing more on practitioners, policy makers or a combination of both? A lot of this will depend on the aims of your network (see next section: What to Focus on First)
- 3. Where will you find new members? Is there a website with local authorities listed? Have you met anyone at an event or seminar who might be interested in joining?

What did RGO Network do?

Within [RGO \(Réseau Grand Ouest\) Network](#) each member is represented by both a political representative and a technical expert responsible for procurement. This dual representation ensures the municipalities' political or high-level commitment as well as implementation on an operational or technical level.

WHAT TO FOCUS ON FIRST?

With everyone on board, it's time to look at what you want to do. Now is a good time to do a quick analysis of your members, exploring in a bit more detail what they are hoping to achieve in terms of sustainable procurement, what their needs are and any key strengths. If a number of your members are in need of capacity building and one of the organisations has some experience in providing training, for example, this could be a good area to focus on!



Also, try to focus your initial efforts on topics or sectors of current relevance to public authorities in the region. Is air quality a key concern? Why not look at vehicle procurement. Is there high unemployment? Explore options for promoting job creation through procurement.

Key Questions:

- 1. What are the key strengths of the organisations involved? List what each member can bring to the Network
- 2. What are the key needs of the organisations involved? What are they looking E.g. capacity building, publicity, internal convincing
- 3. What are the key local priorities for the public sector?
- 4. Considering the strengths, needs and priorities you have identified, what are your key aims as a Network? Are you interested, for example in building up your skills, in building awareness of GPP within your organisations, in developing joint criteria, or in working on a joint procurement?

Resources Available

SPP Regions has developed a series of resources useful for the establishment of SPPI Networks:

- Maturity matrix
- Template for identification of priorities, topics and capacity building needs for networking participants
- Best case studies on existing SPP Networks – for input and inspiration from the networks' scope and potential organisational structure and activities

You can find the resources on [SPP Regions website](http://www.sppregions.eu) or contact us at the email address procurement@iclei.org

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF NETWORKING

Now you have looked at who will be part of the Network, what your key aims and activities will be and how it will be paid for, it's time to consider some details.

How will the Network be structured? There is no real right or wrong answer to this question – it could be that one organisation will play a strong leadership role or that responsibility for organising the Network will be shared between its members.

It's a good idea to get a grasp of these practical details so you can agree them in your first meeting. Some key questions to consider are outlined below:



Key Questions:

- 1. How will your network be organised (general assembly, working groups, chairs, secretariat, annual work programme, etc.)? Who will be responsible for administrative support?
- 2. How many members are you hoping to recruit and what will their responsibilities be?
- 3. How will the organisation be managed?
- 4. Would your Network be rather centralised or decentralised?
- 5. When will you have your first meeting and what will you discuss?
- 6. How much time will it take up for participants? What is expected of them in terms of meetings, participation, telephone calls etc? It is useful to have thought this through before you approach new people.

Decentralised vs Centralised approach

Decentralised example: In a decentralised case, such as the Bulgarian SPPI Network, the network is often initiated by a single public authority, in this case, the municipality of Gabrovo, which usually also leads on the main network's activities.

Centralised approach: In a centralised approach, the network's core organization is autonomous and is not represented by a single public authority. RGO Network, for instance, was officially founded as an independent association which counts today about 100 public authorities.

MONEY MATTERS

The trickiest question when it comes to creating something new is always that of funding. Working out how much money is needed to run your network and identifying appropriate sources of funding are going to be key when it comes to getting things off the ground.

Unfortunately there is no simple answer to this! However, working your way through the questions below might help you arrive at some solutions of your own.



Key Questions:

- 1. What are your key activities and what funding will they need?
 - a. This could be admin, events, travel
- 2. Are you going to charge a membership fee? Or for specific services to network members?
- 3. Is there any seed funding available within your organisation?
- 4. Can you identify any external sources of funding (nationally or at the European level)
- 5. Are there any national schemes available which you could join for funding?
- 6. Have you considered getting sponsorship? Who might you approach and what would you offer?

What does the Association of Municipalities of Catalonia do?

Municipalities, members of Xarxa, make complementary contributions through working and collaboration on activities, materials, etc. carried out by the network. The network charges, for instance, for specific services such as joint purchasing or individual technical assistance which helps the network financing its activities.

European project financing have also helped to strengthen some of the SPPI initiatives carried out within the Network.



NEED ANY HELP?

SPP Regions can offer:

- 1. Support with developing your network
- 2. Assistance with sustainable tendering
- 3. Access to specialist workshops, resources
- 4. Mentoring from existing SPP Networks

For more information, visit our website:

www.sppregions.eu

Or email us: info@sppregions.eu

