Application Form

European Entrepreneurial Region Award

2017

Lower Austria
Lower Austria has traditionally been a rural region around the Vienna metropolitan area. Starting in 1997 the region focused on entrepreneurial innovation and growth. Today, the RIS3 strategy together with the Europe 2020 goals are main factors to establish a new economic program. In order to exploit the dormant potential of the region the new “Economic Strategy Lower Austria 2020”, based on SBA principles, has been defined with the guideline: “Provide impetus and set priorities”. This way an important paradigm shift took place when it comes to supporting entrepreneurship in Lower Austria: Moving away from “passively offered services” and aiming at active identification and mobilization of entrepreneurial potential. As political commitment, all governmental organisations of the Lower Austrian Ministry of Economic Affairs as well as all relevant regional stakeholders are involved in order to implement this strategy and monitor it with indicators. This new process is outlined in our EER application. Lower Austria aims to put even more emphasis on its position as an entrepreneurial region in the heart of Europe. Getting the valuable EER Award by the CoR would mean that Lower Austrian endeavours to implement European strategies on regional level have been bearing fruit.
2. Political vision

Lower Austria has traditionally been a rural region around the metropolitan area of the capital Vienna. Before the big EU-enlargement Lower Austria appeared as a less developed region, with the big enlargement Lower Austria expanded its potential as European region whereas especially crossborder programmes such as INTERREG or ClusterIX motivated for doing so. Starting in 1997 the politics of Lower Austria focused on the development of a regional strategy for innovation and growth. Today, a broader strategic approach with implementing the regional innovation and smart specialization strategy (RI3) as well as the aim of Europe 2020 for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is a main factor while establishing a new economic program for our region in the heart of Europe between more developed and less developed regions.

In Lower Austria the economy has a broad and diversified basis reaching from innovative start-ups and deeply rooted regional small and medium-sized enterprises to bigger industrial companies operating on an international scale. We are sure that there is still an enormous dormant potential in the Lower Austrian economy. Therefore it is important to increase our endeavours to strengthen entrepreneurship, responding to the needs of businesses and providing even more targeted solutions for our entrepreneurs.

EER objectives have been embedded in the recent regional development strategy, based on a broad analysis: Monitoring and consultation of stakeholders, including emphasis on the needs and challenges of the economy and the businesses, focusing even more on the well established collaboration of regional economic and innovation support providers and coordination and monitoring by the regional Government Department of Economic Affairs. A special analysis-study (Helmenstein) has led to a detailed SWOT-Analysis:

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<th>STRENGTHS</th>
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<td>• The Lower Austrian economy possesses a broad spectrum of products, and large portions of the value chains can be covered by businesses in Lower Austria.</td>
<td>• Compared to Lower Austria’s share of the population, the percentage of inventors in the region has been disproportionately low in the last ten years.</td>
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<td>• In terms of their export activities, Lower Austrian businesses profit immesely from the opening of the east and the expansion of the EU.</td>
<td>• The geographic location as well as the structural changes in recent years continue to have varying regional impacts on infrastructural framework and accessibility, growth potential, and population development.</td>
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<td>• The Technopoles represent an important instrument for the establishment of new companies and the creation of new jobs.</td>
<td>• Demographic change and emigration are leading to challenging framework conditions on the regional level.</td>
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<td>• Finance instruments for every enterprise stage from founding (incl. VC) to M&amp;A.</td>
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<td>• As a business location, Lower Austria has a number of attractive factors such as the availability of land, transportation routes, and human resources in its favour.</td>
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<td>• The links with the greater metropolitan area of Vienna offer much development potential.</td>
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<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
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<td>• Identification of the areas with the greatest growth potential.</td>
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<td>• Development of new export markets in the scope of globalization and transfer of the strengths of the existing export structures to non-EU member states and focus on states with high potential for growth.</td>
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<td>• Goal-oriented development of R&amp;D sites in Lower Austria through focused measures, such as upgrading of technology skills and the establishment of R&amp;D sites.</td>
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<td>• Cooperation with national research institutions leading to spin-offs and European research institutions for cooperation.</td>
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<td>• Intensification of collaboration through the use of existing networks and innovation cooperation: Vienna, Upper Austria, Burgenland, Styria, as well as Upper Bavaria, Stuttgart, Tübingen, Düsseldorf, and Cologne, which are also regions that have a high regional network density with Lower Austria.</td>
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Current economic policies of the region of Lower Austria are following a political vision: “Entrepreneurial Territory Lower Austria. Proper growth. Better living.” Therefore core strategies, related on the SBA principles for „Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Access to markets and finance and Internationalisation” have been defined in the new Economic Strategy Lower Austria 2020, following a special basic principle, namely: „Provide impetus and set priorities“.

This way an important paradigm shift has taken place when it comes to “supporting entrepreneurship in Lower Austria”: moving away from “passively offered services” and aiming at “ACTIVE identification and mobilization of entrepreneurial potential”. As political commitment the approach of “active identification and mobilization of potentials” has been defined as a target applicable to all business areas of the Lower Austrian Ministry of Economic Affairs (Department of Economic Affairs, Tourism and Technology/Business Agency of Lower Austria/Start-up Agencies of Lower Austria / Business Financing Organisations of Lower Austria) and has led to special cooperation program with regional stakeholders. This means that a) instruments must be developed and b) activities aiming at “active identification and mobilization” should/must be launched in order to exploit developmental entrepreneurial potentials (see 4.Action Plan).

The indicative measures to be addressed in the various areas take account of the “life cycle of an enterprise” (business life cycle) and refer to the above mentioned SBA Principles:

- Active identification and mobilisation of founders with growth potential
- Active identification of innovative start-ups
- Active identification of spin-offs from universities, universities of applied sciences and enterprises
- Active identification of businesses that might be attracted
- Active identification of (unknown) innovation potential in businesses
- Active identification and mobilisation of technology projects
- Active identification and mobilisation of businesses in respect of digital transformation
- Active identification of businesses offering products having export potential

Lower Austria has been committed to European projects for many years and built up a strong network with other regions all over Europe, in particular also Central and Eastern Europe. We share longstanding partnerships with former EER Award regions, such as Malopolska, Lombardia, Valencia, Flanders, Southern Denmark or Trnava, amongst others. Lower Austria will make use of the partnerships with former EER regions but also with such other regions as the Czech Republic, Hungary or Romania within the framework of the EER year and intensify the mutual exchange of experiences.

If Lower Austria will be rewarded with an EER-Award, the region plans on actively participating in the Regions-Round-Table within the framework of the European Business Summit (EBS) 2017 if possible with support of the CoR and other EER winners. At a regional level Lower Austria plans special information- and networking events for example in relation to the “Start-up Europe Week”, as well as regular meetings for the monitoring of the implementation or deepening of targeted activities in various areas (as set out in the Action plan).

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<td>• Development of as complete as possible value chains by promoting upstream and downstream supply and service links.</td>
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<td>• Product portfolio in businesses too small, thus creating dependency on just one or only a few clients.</td>
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<td>• Finishing of commodities and raw materials outsourced to other regions (just supplying raw materials generates little value added).</td>
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3. Governance and partnership

Lower Austria has made efforts towards positioning and establishing itself as an entrepreneurial region for a long time. The outlined EER strategy focuses on active identification and mobilisation of entrepreneurial potentials in the whole region of Lower Austria. By doing so, a multi-level governance approach was established and all relevant partners in the region were involved.

To exploit the aim of identifying and activating developmental entrepreneurial potentials in Lower Austria, all relevant actors of the Lower Austrian Ministry of Economic Affairs are currently working on defining appropriate indicators and programs (see Action Plan). This includes the following governmental organisations:

- The Department of Economic Affairs, Tourism and Technology
- ecoplus, the Business Agency of Lower Austria
- RIZ, the Start-up Agency of Lower Austria;
- NÖBEG, the finance partner for SMEs covering all company stages
- tecnet equity, the finance partner for technology start-ups
- accent, the founding partner for technology-oriented, innovative entrepreneurs.

These operative areas of the Lower Austrian Ministry of Economic Affairs frequently exchange views with relevant institutions within Austria on the one hand and at a European level on the other hand in order to evaluate their programs and instruments or to cooperate with each other (see Action plan).

The regional strategy “Active identification and mobilisation of entrepreneurial potentials in the region of Lower Austria” is furthermore devised and implemented in certain areas and with special instruments together with the relevant Lower Austrian stakeholders and strategic partners, who are integrated in the whole process of implementation of the outlined EER strategy for Lower Austria:

- The Chamber of Commerce of Lower Austria (Wirtschaftskammer Niederösterreich, WKNÖ), where cooperation starts in the area of supporting founders and start-ups (Lower Austrian start-up pyramid) and currently focuses on joint information events for entrepreneurs regarding Industry 4.0. Therefore, several meetings for planning and outlining the events had already taken place between the Chamber of Commerce of Lower Austria and the Department of Economic Affairs, Tourism and Technology of Lower Austria.
- The Joint Initiative Technology and Innovation Partners, TIP (see Action Plan point 5).
- The Lower Austrian regional group of the Federation of Austrian Industries (Industriellenvereinigung Niederösterreich, IVNÖ), with whom a special mentoring programm shall be established in order to identify potential founders with growth potential.
- Lower Austrian universities and colleges as well as research centres, e.g. Danube University Krems, Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST Austria), Austrian Institute of Technology in Seibersdorf. Activities will include special events as well as cooperation programs.

The Lower Austrian application for the EER Award is also supported by the Austrian Council, the independent Council for Research and Technology Development in Austria. The Council’s work covers the entire national innovation system and is based on the strong commitment of the Austrian Government to the goals defined by the European Union in Lisbon and Barcelona.

As mentioned already Lower Austria’s goal is to position and establish itself as an important and sustainable entrepreneurial region. Getting the valuable EER Award by the CoR would mean that Lower Austrians endeavours of implementation of European strategies on regional level have been bearing fruit and that Lower Austria is a good location. The EER Award would also be an important sign to support our commitment and activities to our cooperation with EER regions as well as non EER regions and support especially our cross-border activities as a participating partner region of the EU macro-region for the Danube Region.
4. Action plan

The Economic Strategy Lower Austria 2020 foresees sustainable actions from 2016 until the year 2020 and relates to the identification of the needs of companies. Lower Austria used different approaches in order to identify those needs: results of the discussions with business owners, results of the business needs survey in Lower Austria, a comparative analysis of competing regions, and of course reports of the European Commission, daily contact with start-ups and entrepreneurs, national and international surveys (e.g. GEM, OECD Entrepreneurship at a Glance report).

The outlined EER Strategy of Lower Austria follows the principles of the SBA in the areas of SBA principles for „Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Access to markets and finance and Internationalisation” as well as the pillars for „Entrepreneurial education and training” and „Role models” of the EAP Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan. Also relevant are the objectives numbers I.2 and I.3 of the Green Action Plan for SMEs. This strategy is open for all sectors and SMEs to support different approaches to entrepreneurship, including innovative aspects as well as social or environmental ones.

The strategy focuses on the life cycle of businesses: a) getting started, b) being and staying innovative, c) growing, implementing new technologies and d) going international:

1. Active identification and mobilisation of founders with growth potential
2. Active identification of innovative start-ups
3. Active identification of spin-offs from universities, universities of applied sciences and enterprises
4. Active identification of businesses that might be attracted
5. Active identification of (unknown) innovation potential in businesses
6. Active identification and mobilisation of technology projects
7. Active identification and mobilisation of businesses in respect of digital transformation
8. Active identification of businesses offering products having export potential

Programs and activities related to the areas 2 (innovative start-ups), 5 (innovation potential) and 8 (export potential) are partly implemented with EU-funds, areas 1 (founders with growth potential) and 6 (technology projects) are funded by regional public funds.

Starting already by the end of 2015, continuing within the EER year and up to the year 2020, special programs and instruments will be established in order to achieve the goal of actively identifying and encouraging entrepreneurial potential in the region of Lower Austria. In all relevant areas, the following indicators will monitor the process and success (list not complete): Number of events visited/organised; Number of client contacts; Number of transmissions to partner institutions; Number of businesses attracted and located on the territory, Number of companies supported (either with contacts, know how or financing); Amount of funds financed; Specific instruments which are created especially to reach the goal; Number of settlements of companies and start-ups at Technopole locations; Number of jobs created at Technopole locations.

The whole implementation of the EER Strategy will be coordinated and monitored by the Regional Government Department of Economics, Tourism, and Technology. An evaluation process where the work of the governmental organisations involved is monitored with the Balanced Score Card instrument and the necessary adaptations are made has already been launched. Additionally the representatives of the program owner and the implementing body will meet at least twice a year in order to (re)set the annual action plan and to present and discuss outputs, results and achievements (“review meetings”). A special steering committee was formed to give advise on the FTI strategy.
1. Active identification and mobilisation of founders with growth potential

Since Lower Austria considers sustainable, successful start-ups to be a strong engine for growth and the creation of jobs (as does the European Commission in its “Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan”) the region implemented a specific “Start-up Pyramid” which focuses exclusively on “start-ups”. This way the region is striving to provide support and services for start-ups all over Lower Austria. In order to identify start-ups with growth potential it seems important to support all start-ups from the beginning so that experts can support those who want to grow or encourage those who do not see their growth potential yet.

Therefore the following three pillars of the “Start-up Pyramid” work together:

1) The Lower Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKNO) is the legal body representing the interests of its members, as well as part of the Austrian social partners, cooperating with the organisations representing management and labour. The Chamber offers a broad range of services to its members, including services for start-ups, and also focuses on supporting growth.

2) RIZ: Start-up Agency of Lower Austria: RIZ is an agency specialized in full support services for start-ups and entrepreneurs. Services include individual consulting, seminars, events and start-up centres. RIZ is a subsidiary company of ecoplus, the business agency of Lower Austria.

3) a) accent Gründer service GmbH: accent is a high-tech incubator for technology and innovation driven start-ups. accent offers individual support and counselling as well as grants and funding.

b) tecnet equity: tecnet equity is an Austrian venture capital fund investing in innovative, high-tech start-up companies with potential for significant growth.

c) NÖBEG: NÖBEG provides a solid basis for dynamic corporate development of SMEs with tailor made financing solutions.

According to the EER strategy the governmental organizations of the pyramid (2, 3a, 3b, 3c) need to implement the focus on “active identification and support” in their current BSCs. A special indicator will be to define “growth potential” in order to bring it then to measurable targets, such as number of clients involved, amount of growth etc. Therefore the new BSCs will include a “defining and finding” process as well as special instruments, which will be newly established.

Actions and indicators in this field include a special call as well as a special mentoring project: RIZ, the Start-up Agency of Lower Austria wants to establish one “call for start-ups with growth potential”, where enterprises and start-ups which tend to have a higher growth potential than others will get a special coaching process. The pilot program should start within the EER year.

A special mentoring program launched by RIZ in cooperation with the strategic partner, the Lower Austrian regional group of the Federation of Austrian Industries (Industriellenvereinigung Niederösterreich, IVNÖ) is supposed to enable emerging businesses in the industrial environment to get into contact with board members of the IVNÖ. A pilot phase (action) of this mentoring program is due to start in 2016 and will be finalized and communicated in the EER year. As indicator 6 entrepreneurs should be part of the first mentoring process.
2. Active identification of innovative start-ups

Innovative start-ups are important for the competitiveness of Lower Austria. Within the framework of the EER-strategy for Lower Austria innovative business ideas will be looked for even more actively. This can and should be achieved, amongst other things, by the consolidation and expansion of existing networks and is based on the start-up pyramid mentioned above.

RIZ, the start-up agency of Lower Austria established the RIZ GENIUS Idea and Founder Award, which is an annual competition seeking and awarding the most innovative and creative business ideas in Lower Austria. The competition is open to all fields and disciplines and the opportunities for commercial implementation of the projects are manifold: company start-up, development of new business fields, licensing or cooperation with other enterprises. Sponsors of the RIZ GENIUS are both regional stakeholders, such as the Chamber of Commerce of Lower Austria (WKNÖ) or the Lower Austrian regional group of the Federation of Austrian Industries (IVNÖ), and such renowned large-scale regional companies as novomatic, Airport Vienna (Flughafen Wien) and EVN, the leading international energy and environment company with headquarter in Lower Austria. Actions within the EER year and beyond will include the search for projects with innovation that enables entrepreneurial growth, indicators of the relevance of the RIZ GENIUS might include the raising numbers of applications.

accent Gründerservice GmbH is the high-tech incubator for technology and innovation driven start-ups in Lower Austria. The excellence network of accent consists in particular of a close cooperation with AAIA (Lower Austrian partner together with tecnet) and provides access to business angels, an important alternative financing option. Further cooperation has been established with the “Senate of the Economy” (“Senat der Wirtschaft”) as an interface with trade and industry providing access to the regional and supra-regional scientific institutions for the support of R&D projects.

In 2015 accent was able to sign a cooperation agreement with CERN. accent is thus one of eight selected CERN-incubators in Europe and provides access for start-ups to the know-how of one of the most renowned research institutions of the world. accent being the Austrian CERN BIC (Business Incubation Centre), the former is an interface with all Austrian high-tec start-ups that is also beneficial for all other founders of the Austrian AplusB Centres even on a supra-regional level. The identification of innovative start-ups is therefore particularly important for this program. In the EER year the award is supposed to be communicated on a European level in the CERN network.

accent closely cooperates with neighbouring regions, such as the Styrian AplusB Centre “Science Park Graz”, together with which accent has applied for an ESA Business Incubation Centre. This joint application was submitted to ESA in autumn 2015, the negotiations were finalized in December 2015 and the project will presumably be implemented in 2016. Special actions with the first projects might therefore start already in the EER year.

In order to actively support SMEs in Lower Austria dedicated teams and specialised networks are necessary. To achieve this tecnet equity has brought together experts and a network of selected experienced players. With this expertise tecnet equity offers comprehensive support to research centres and universities in the analysis, development and marketing of research results as well as patent protection. Inventions that are of value to society are offered to companies for implementation in new products generating additional business opportunities.

Since funding and financially supporting an entrepreneurial idea is extremely important, the region of Lower Austria therefore facilitates financings for entrepreneurs particularly of SMEs from foundation through growth phases till M&A processes and SMEs can expect financial support in all phases of their development regardless of their age. Particular emphasis is placed on innovative
entrepreneurs and their start.

The diagram on the right shows the funding instruments used in coherence with the following (and already above mentioned) measures:

In the founding phase the Lower Austrian AplusB Centre, accent, provides founders with tailor-made individual support and initial financing.

Fast growing technology-based start-ups can be financed by the venture capital fund (public funding) of tecnet equity. As a bridge between research and market, tecnet equity helps to develop promising inventions into real world products. Active in many areas of technology, tecnet equity provides venture capital during seed and early stages. tecnet equity furthermore supports the management teams of its portfolio companies in developing businesses that are fit for high and sustainable growth.

NÖBEG, a funding expert and primary point of contact for the region of Lower Austria, is performing the following tasks: expertise for funding issues; organization of information events concerning alternative funding opportunities.

Within the framework of the EER strategy the Lower Austrian agencies ecoplus and NÖBEG have been requested to actively observe and in some cases also to support in particular SME-oriented alternative funding solutions (such as crowd financing, equity capital etc.). They are supposed to be available as consultants and contact partners for the Lower Austrian economy when it comes to the creation of standards or products for crowd financing or other alternative funding solutions for SMEs. Actions also include clustering of enterprises facing the same tasks and to provide mainly organisational assistance or support through a cooperation project and to communicate the results or findings preferably to the members.

Since business angels are an increasingly important player in Austria in general, tecnet equity will develop an instrument directed at cooperating with this group of investors in Lower Austria. Indicators for the area within the EER strategy have yet to be established.

3. Active identification of spin-offs from universities, universities of applied sciences and enterprises

The Lower Austrian EER strategy includes an own spin-off offensive. In recent years Lower Austria has invested considerably in the research and science infrastructure at Lower Austrian Technopoles (also see Area Number 5). It is intended to secure these investments in the long term by means of business-related activities, and an enhanced cross-fertilisation between research and economy is meant to be a dynamic impetus for further development. Existing projects will be evaluated within the framework of the spin-off strategy and new initiatives will be added, if necessary.

As mentioned before, innovations and business ideas at a regional level are being actively looked for and awarded with the RIZ GENIUS Idea and Founder Award within the framework of an annual contest. The special category “Research and Development” addressing scientists and researchers is intended to encourage the latter to understand their research results in an economic context. We intend to step up our efforts to address research institutions personally during the EER year in order to increase the number of applications.
The founder service *accent* connects with potential founders at an early stage; they are already addressed and selected in specialized courses at the level of universities of applied sciences. These groups of students get prepared for possible self-employment by means of an intensive, individually tailored coaching by selected experts from the industry. The Creative Pre Incubator at the St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences is one example.

The “*tecnet pitching days*” at regional colleges and research institutions are events organised by *tecnet equity* in order to give potential founders the opportunity to pitch to several financing partners. This event started last year and will be held at 3 locations in 2016, during the EER year it should take place at least at 4 research and college locations in Lower Austria.

The “*Poster Award*” and the “*Innovation Award*” are competitions established by *tecnet equity* in cooperation with *accent* for students at the research facility of the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT) as well as the University of Natural Resources and Life Science (*BOKU*). The goal is that the students’ posters explain commercialisation strategies for research they are working on. This concept will be expanded to other universities (action) in the area, starting during the EER year.

A possible indicator of actively supporting spin-offs is a newly developed and built technology park at the ISTA-premises at Maria Gugging by the year 2020 or earlier. Space can be rented out to technology-related enterprises seeking to be close to the ISTA and also to future spin-offs developing from the ISTA.

4. **Active identification of businesses that might be attracted:**

This core area of the EER strategy focuses on actions of identifying and actively addressing enterprises which...

a) produce goods in Lower Austria with a *high share of intermediate consumption in sectors with high outflow of generated value*;

b) *operate abroad and match existing entrepreneurial structures* („strength fields“) extremely well due to their specific activities/technologies, without becoming competitors of Lower Austrian enterprises;

c) *grow particularly fast in Lower Austria* (definition according to the Austrian Statistical Office *Statistik Austria*: over a period of 3 years at least 10% average annual growth of employees and at least 10 employees at the beginning of the observation period) and can thus be the hidden champions of today and flagship enterprises of tomorrow.

During the EER year it is intended to *identify and address the first enterprises (at least 2 projects per area)* and these projects must then be evaluated in order to implement further steps.

5. **Active identification of (unknown) innovation potential in businesses**

Lower Austria considers the European approach to smart specialisation to be a strategic approach to regional and economic development through research, development and innovation. The EER actions propose a *further development of the existing, highly developed smart specialization strategy of the region*. The Lower Austrian support „pyramid“ for technology and innovation, the innovation pyramid, shows by means of services how the three programs - *Technopoles, Clusters and TIP* - interact.

All 3 program are supported by regional funds and funds from the European Union (*ERDF Investment in Growth and Jobs*) and have the goal to build up and accelerate the catching-up process. In this phase project developers should take part on calls for national and european funds.
The Lower Austrian “pyramid” of technology and innovation support:

The innovation pyramid uses services to demonstrate how the various programs (Techno-poles, Clusters and TIP) interact.

The TIP-Program provides the broad basis and identifies and mobilises innovative potential with businesses – independent of sector, size and location. It facilitates access of enterprises to research and development and new technologies and supports and coaches them when they – often for the first time – implement innovation programs. This is a joint initiative (launched in 1979) with the Chamber of Commerce (WKO).

The aim of the Lower Austrian cluster initiatives is to foster innovation through collaboration, i.e. to mobilize companies for new topics, keep them informed and trigger collaborative (precompetitive) innovation projects. The cluster initiatives contribute to the region’s specialization not only by carefully selecting sectors/economic fields of strength for cluster support but they are also required to foster further specialization on focus topics with regional added value within established cluster initiatives. Currently there are 4 cluster initiatives in the region: Green Building, Food, Plastics and Mechatronics. The umbrella cluster management organisation ecoplus has been awarded with the European Gold Label for Cluster Management Excellence for all four of them.

The Technopole program is at the top of the pyramid due to the regionally and thematically focussed support and expansion of various locations. Technology niches are identified here that are not as distinct in other areas (other regions, above all Vienna) and where there are already approaches for research and development and higher educational institutions in Lower Austria that have the potential for international excellence. A decisive factor is also the possibility for implementation and thus the creation of value in Lower Austria.

Evidence for the positive effects of the Lower Austrian economic policy has recently shown in an economic impact analysis. The regional gross value added effect produced by companies located at the 4 Technopole locations by 2014 is equal to € 684.9 million. Regarding the employment effect, the Technopoles secure 9 066 jobs(7 817 FTE). Since 2008 more than 4 000 jobs emerged in the area of technology and knowledge intensive services, which proves the positive effects of the Technopole program on the structural change in the region.

During the EER year it will be important to strengthen collaboration (action) even more in joint horizontal initiatives, such as the “Industry 4.0” initiative, a joint effort of all related intermediaries to create awareness on the potential of digitalization, providing information and education on digitalization and creating favourable framework conditions for the introduction of new technologies.
Cross-sector and interdisciplinary collaboration have become increasingly important for innovation and new markets for companies in recent years.

The clusters and Technopoles in Lower Austria have introduced a tool called “Competence Mapping” helping companies and research institutions to identify and clearly communicate their core competencies and how they could be used in different new applications and markets, as well as what kind of competencies they lack in order to reach innovations and new markets they aim for.

The need for this tool arose from the experience that many companies define and present themselves in a very product-oriented way instead of being aware of and showing the skills and resources, in other words solutions, they offer. The aim of the tool is to analyse companies and R&D facilities in order to detect and describe their competencies in a structured way that is easy to understand also for potential customers in other sectors and disciplines. By doing so, it identifies also missing competencies that are required to tap into new markets and to find potential partners with whom the company can team up in order to compensate these competency gaps. Furthermore, by means of patent research it supports the identification of new growth areas for the companies.

So far this tool has been tested and further developed in 20 companies and 15 research institutions. The tool is also being tested in Sweden, Italy and Romania in the framework of the INTERREG 4C project ClusterIX and shall be used for cross-regional match-making in the future. The development of a web-based tool is planned for the future.

6. Active identification of (unknown) innovation potential in businesses

In the framework of the EER and FTI-strategy the region of Lower Austria plans two different actions: First, providing special funding for ideas concerning specific technological research fields. Indicators in this area therefore include the establishment of up to two calls for those specific ideas. Second, one supplementary call in the field of fundamental research in the EER year shall be realized.

7. Active identification and mobilisation of businesses in respect of digital transformation

The term “Industry 4.0” seems to gain a foothold and to mature only slowly at an entrepreneurial level – in spite of partially strong positioning in the media. This might be due to the fact that people only associate big businesses with the term „industry“, which is, however, too simplistic given the interconnectedness between big enterprises and SMEs. From a current perspective Industry 4.0 concerns almost all manufacturing sectors and their value chains – nationally and globally – and the related service sectors. First huge impacts can now be seen in the field of logistics and on the automotive and aviation supply sectors.

In order to make Lower Austrian SMEs aware of the challenges and changes and potentials in connection with digital networking and to provide support for new processes and networks and the development of new business processes a comprehensive package of measures is being developed.
that consists of a series of events, sensitisation workshops, consultancy services and cooperation projects concerning thematically targeted training and advanced training measures.

Because of the high diversification of enterprises in Lower Austria a technical study together with the relevant partners IVNÖ and WKNÖ is being launched in order to identify the chances for Lower Austria. On the basis of these results the further tools and indicators will be drawn up and a series of events concerning that topic will be started. This series of events is supposed to be continued in all micro-regions of Lower Austria in the EER year as well.

Further action-instruments include workshops concerning new innovation methods, the establishment of cross-industry peer groups concerning specific topics such as 3D print and specific degree programs at universities of applied sciences. The EER strategy proposes further coordination with the relevant stakeholders in the region and an information campaign for entrepreneurs in Lower Austria.

8. Active identification of businesses offering products having export potential

For this area of active identification it is important to newly develop own special support measures. The target group includes Lower Austrian businesses with a high export potential or niche players with a clear USP, in particular SMEs with up to 100 employees.

Presently the main focus is on three indicative measures:

1. Active identification of enterprises with a high export potential or niche players (with clear USP) with the goal to make 20 businesses “export champions” in 6 years (e.g.: export quota of at least 50%, 3 new additional markets, one of them a distant market).

The core activity is the development of a special support program with focussed support and promotion of selected Lower Austrian enterprises. The program will be based on the definition of participation criteria, then enterprises will be selected and finally specific support and promotion actions (qualitatively and financially) will be defined. Furthermore cooperation partners will be selected and the documentation as well as marketing and/or PR-measures will be developed.

2. The development of a mentoring program providing mentors (top exporters / leading enterprises as coaches) to participating enterprises from the first indicative measure (1.) in the sense of coaching/knowledge and experience transfer/network creation/learning from the best. Relevant tasks include in particular the identification of suitable mentors and the development of a program.

3. Acceleration of inter-company export cooperation according to target groups/along the value chain with the objective of initiating and supporting two international (entrepreneurial) cooperation projects per year (at least 3 participants, at least one of them a Lower Austrian enterprise). The main task will be the selection of enterprises, e.g. according to target groups, branches, logical countries, and the formulation of specific support measures (qualitatively and financially).

As mentioned before, Lower Austria disposes of a strong network with other regions all over Europe, in particular also Central and Eastern Europe. Lower Austria wishes to use the existing partnerships and networks to offer targeted support to identified Lower Austrian enterprises going international. Winning the EER-award could of course be supportive of these efforts in dealing with other EER Award winning regions.
5. Communication plan

The EER strategy of Lower Austria focuses on a very new approach for the region: ACTIVE identification of entrepreneurial potential! As outlined in this application, this strategy means that special instruments for implementing the goal have to be discussed, found and established. Some organizations have already started to organize their new processes including specific actions and indicators. Several regional as well as european activities are foreseen within the EER year, including the participation at the European Business Summit 2017 as top level activity.

In case of the EER for Lower Austria the EER label will be integrated in all communication activities related to the EER strategy. All communication actions shall be backed by media coverage (advertisements and advertorials) throughout the whole region. This serves for a strong visibility of Europe, especially of the Committee of the Regions.

Regional Communication Activities:

The key target groups within entrepreneurs in Lower Austria are (future) founders and SMEs. In order to reach this key group it seems important to consequently hold on to already existing support activities within Lower Austria and organize further actions based on their services.

Special focus shall be put on the goal to identify entrepreneurial and especially growth potential. Therefore the region plans to host 8 special events called “RIZ Gründerabende” throughout the region within the EER year, especially communicating the newly established measures of special support for business ideas with growth potential. The events will take place in cooperation with the local governmental authorities.

The “tecnet pitching days” at regional colleges and research institutions are events organised by tecnet equity in order to give potential founders the opportunity to pitch to several financing partners. During the EER year the event will take place at least at 4 research and college locations in Lower Austria.

On top of that, RIZ, the start-up agency of Lower Austria plans for 4 specific events throughout the whole region during the “Start-Up Europe Week” (SEW) 2017, in order to meet and discuss issues with local authorities (local bank branch leaders, local government leaders, local representatives of the Chamber of Commerce) as well as with specialists in start-up consulting and established entrepreneurs.

The now existing “Poster Award” and the “Innovation Award” by tecnet equity in cooperation with accent for students at two universities in Lower Austria shall be expanded to other universities in the area, starting during the EER year.

In the notice of competition for the annual Lower Austrian “RIZ GENIUS Idea and Founder Award” reference will be made to the EER-award and the importance of European cooperation projects, thus seeking to identify such projects.

Special funding activities within the EER year will include 2 calls for ideas concerning specific technological research fields and one supplementary call in the field of fundamental research.
Activities at European Union level:

Lower Austria is planning an active participation in the Regions-Round-Table within the framework of the European Business Summit 2017 as top level action in Brussels during the EER year, if possible with the support of the CoR and the other EER winners. The aim would be to appear jointly at the EBS and exchange best practices and further ideas.

Based on the recently established cooperation agreement of accent (the high-tech incubator for technology and innovation driven start-ups in Lower Austria) with CERN (see Action Plan), the EER Award will be communicated by accent on an european level in the CERN network.

Lower Austria has been committed to European projects for many years and built up a strong network with other regions all over Europe, in particular also Central and Eastern Europe. The region shares longstanding partnerships with former EER-Award regions, such as Malopolska, Lombardia, Valencia, Flanders, Southern Denmark or Trnava, amongst others. Lower Austria will make use of the partnerships with former EER regions but also with such other regions as the Czech Republic, Hungary or Romania within the framework of the EER year and intensify the mutual exchange of experiences.