Vanguard Initiative: Network Annual Plan 2021

Introduction

This annual plan sets out the programme of work that Vanguard Initiative will seek to accomplish during 2021 and is informed by discussions in the Annual Political Meeting 2020, within the Board and with Task Group Leaders, in the context of the Milan Declaration.

Our annual plan identifies the priorities that the Vanguard Initiative will need to focus on: why we're doing it, how we'll do it, and who will take the lead.

Our active and involved membership is one of the things that makes Vanguard Initiative unique: The Board and nominated leads will steer and govern this work programme, with co-ordination and oversight from the Secretariat, but we all have a role to play in delivering it. Vanguard Initiative's success depends on active member participation in our pilots, task groups, and network meetings, and engagement with our regional stakeholders, directors and political leaders.

VI is proud to consist of 39 member regions in 2021 and to present two new pilots:
- Artificial Intelligence and Human Machine Interface
- Smart Health

What will the Vanguard Initiative do in 2021?

The VI will remain at the forefront of Stimulating interregional innovation' for an overhaul of the EU's industrial innovation framework with all levels of the multi-level governance system working together to achieve this, and with S3 at the core of the effort.

The focus in 2021 will be on the stimulation of innovation in order for regional innovation ecosystems, comprised of SMEs, enterprises, research institutes, government and societal organisations to recover from the effects of Covid 19 and to Create a resilient green and digital ecosystem

In 2021 the network will make the next steps in development by:
- Continue to be a trusted partner for the European institutions; by engaging with them on Industry policy from a regional perspective, and providing them with timely input on VI themes, as well as investing in long term relations on all levels with these institutions. Thus strengthening the position of the VI network.
- Positioning itself in the context of 2030; To lay down a roadmap, and spark a debate, towards the long-term vision for the Vanguard Initiative as the region based and driven network in Europe to contribute to the realisation of the Twin transition.
- Creating and acting on synergies for innovation funding; To have explored the possibility of using regional European funds interregional to help our SMEs work, pioneer and develop across borders. Explore the different opportunities within the new programming period and positioning within new programmes including Horizon Europa, and Digital Europe

- Participation in the new Interregional Innovation Investment Initiative (I3); enabling the development of the pilots through usage of the I3 programme in order to create scale and promote the step from demonstration to commercialisation of innovations.
- Stay at the forefront in S3 innovation; launching the two new pilots, initiating further new pilots and developing pilot management.
- Position itself in digitalisation by the creation of an European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) network within the VI context.
- Enable all member regions to actively contribute to VI and give an impulse to their innovation strengths (S3) by participating in the different pilots and the network as a whole. Strengthening relationships with stakeholders from industry, academia and government and investing in communication.
- Strengthening the network; investing in the development of VI ASBL, and participating in relevant European projects.

How we will achieve our goals & who is in the lead

Influencing EU Policy

Objective: Seek to influence development and change of relevant EU policies and instruments to take account of Vanguard Initiative aims, and reflect regional dimension.

How & what: (See Policy Influencing Task Group action plan for more detail)
1) Preparing position papers and proposals about relevant instruments and policies, drafting amendments, responding to consultations. Relevant areas include: I3, the New Industrial Policy, Digital Europe, Horizon Europe, State Aid and cross border cooperation and funding.
2) Preparing the meetings of the Industrial forum by providing input from our member regions.
3) Pursue and update contacts with the EU institutions, notably with the Commissioner Cabinets and MEPs.
4) Identifying new policy opportunities from the 2021-2027 programming period and informing the Board an Pilots about the identified opportunities.
5) Reinforce the position of Vanguard Initiative as a strong stakeholder in the EU landscape.
6) Continue to grow relationships and alliances with like-minded networks, building on our existing relationships with EARTO, AER, CPMR, ERRIN and others.

Who: Policy Influencing Task Group & Board.

Defining and Communicating our Funding Needs

Objective: Building an evidence base for funding which supports Vanguard Initiative's aims, helping to make the case for new and adapted investment instruments at EU, national and regional level.

How & what:
1) Further explore and develop examples of regional co-investment in Vanguard Initiative activities through a mapping exercise amongst Vanguard Member regions, and sharing the lessons learned with our membership.
2) Starting talks between regions and with the European Commission to explore the possibility for Vanguard to lead by example in a new way of using European regional funds in interregional cooperation. In the second semester of the year the membership will be updated about our activities by means of a webinar.

Who: Co-financing Task Group, Vanguard Pilot Monitoring, Policy Influencing Task Group, Board

Pilot Activities

Objective: Strengthen collaborations between regions with similar priorities and strengths, in order to build enhanced value chains and deliver results for SMEs.

How & what:

1) Delivery of pilot action plans (ADMA Energy, 3D Printing, Efficient and Sustainable Manufacturing, Bio-economy, Nano-Technology).
2) Strengthen mutual learning between pilots and regions. By finding unity in diversity, sharing tools, best practices and methodologies.
3) Stimulate pilots and regions to make us of the new I3 instrument.
4) To foster and grow the two new pilots, Artificial Intelligence and Smart Health, in their first year as part of the Vanguard Initiative.

Who: Pilot project leads; Vanguard Pilot Monitoring, Board.

Communication and positioning

Objective: Ensure that the work and aims of the Vanguard Initiative are communicated to - and understood by - a range of actors at EU, national and regional level.

How and what:
1) Develop a new website, to be launched by April 2021
2) Design and implement a new strategic communication plan for the Vanguard Initiative. This will consider both internal and external aspects. And addresses the multiple levels of the Vanguard Initiative. Also to Introduce professional stakeholder management

Who: Communications Task Group, Board and Secretariat

Improving Regional Engagement

Objective: To bridge the gap in knowledge and understanding between Brussels-based policy representatives and Vanguard Initiative actors based in member regions

How and what:
1) Vanguard Initiative Regional Conferences to take place in March, September and November 2021.
2) Develop the Vanguard Academy to provide enhanced VI knowledge and learning & development opportunities to regions.

Who: Board, Regions, and multiple Task Groups

Organising ourselves to deliver our goal

Governance

Objective: Create a performance and governance framework, which ensures that Vanguard Initiative adapts to future opportunities and trends.

How and what:
1) To integrate the two new pilots from a operational and financial perspective within the Vanguard Initiative.
2) Develop a roadmap for the network to discuss the long-term strategic vision and goals for the Vanguard Initiative.
3) Take action upon the input provided by the Policy influencing task group and plan ahead for where Vanguard Initiative will seek to take an active role as a network.

Who: Future of Vanguard Task Group, Policy influencing task group, Vanguard Pilot Monitoring Task Group, Treasurer

Internal Communications and Resourcing goals for the board

Objective: To reinforce the involvement of the whole Vanguard Initiative community in achieving our aims.

How and what:
1) Strengthen connections between Board, Pilots, Task Groups and Network, through structured as well as spontaneous communication.
2) Investigate options to encourage more active membership from Network representatives, Regional Directors and Political Representatives.

Who: Board, Network Manager, Future of Vanguard Task Group