

Business Interview Guide 2

Assessment - Emerging Clusters

Sample questions which could be used by cluster practitioners to assess emerging or underachieving industry clusters. These questions could be used while conducting a regular visit with a business and in conjunction with questions found in the other toolkit interview guides.

1. Who do you use as suppliers in this area?
2. Do you supply any other businesses?
3. What are your energy issues? *Who do you depend upon to give you answers to your questions in this area?*
4. Do you have any transportation or logistical needs? *Who do you use in these areas and where are they located?*
5. Do you work closely with any other businesses in this area? *If so, in what capacity?*
6. Are you a member of any local service groups? *If so, are there any other businesses in the group you talk to or depend upon?*
7. What needs to change, within and beyond your business, structurally, culturally, whatever, to achieve your most optimistic 3- 5 year business forecast of the future?
8. How available are local research centers to small firms?
9. Do educational institutions supply sufficient number of qualified technicians?
10. Is competition intense or mild?
11. Do firms in your industry and/or market area share knowledge?
12. Do firms already engage in cluster or network initiatives?

Market Access, Trends, and Governance

1. What do you see as your main needs/opportunities in accessing markets?
2. To whom do you sell your product or service (large firms, small firms, wholesalers, exporters, retailers, direct to consumers, etc.)? What percentage goes to each?



3. Describe the relationships you have with these buyers (who determines what to produce, product specifications, prices, and amount purchased?). How much input do you have?
4. How do you promote and market your products/services?
5. How strong is the market for your products/services right now? Next year? What trends do you see?
6. Are some customer groups better than others in terms of sales and revenue growth? Which ones?
7. Do you ever collaborate with other firms on promotion and/or marketing?
8. Who are your major competitors?
9. Do you have a means of communicating information about your firm to others? (Attach any brochures, list of products, etc.)

Standards and Certifications

1. What standards or certification requirements do your products need to conform to?
2. Who sets these standards and requirements?
3. Who helps you to conform to these standards and requirements?
4. Do you have any problems in this regard?
 1. Technology / Product Development
 1. What are your major needs/ opportunities in product design and manufacturing (or service delivery)?
 2. What other products do you produce/sell? What percentage does each product represent in terms of your gross revenue?
 3. What have you done recently to improve your products or services?
 4. Is your current equipment or machinery an impediment to growth? Explain. If so, what kind of equipment or machinery could improve your business?
 5. Is the current level of your workers training holding back growth? If so, what additional training do they need?



Management/Organization

1. In the area of organization and management, what are your major needs/opportunities?
2. Who does most of the work in the areas of: general management/supervision, product design, purchasing, production, shipping, accounting, marketing, repairs, etc. (owner, employees, or external)?
3. What functions do you subcontract/outsource?
4. Do you sometimes collaborate with other firms to produce and deliver customer orders?
5. Which aspects of your business do you intend to change in the next 2 years (machinery, equipment, computers, new products, marketing strategy, quality control, management system, worker skills, etc.)?
6. What management skills would you like to strengthen in order to grow your business?

Input Supply

1. What are your major needs/opportunities in the areas of input cost, quality, and availability?
2. Who are your most important suppliers and what do you buy from each?
3. Are there problems in obtaining some important inputs? Explain.
4. Have you ever purchased inputs jointly with other business? Explain

Finance

1. Where do you go when you need money for your business?
2. Do you get credit from input suppliers? What are the terms?
3. Do you get production financing from your buyers? What are the terms?
4. Do you have need for additional financing at the moment? If so, what would it be used for?
5. What sources (formal or informal) have you approached for loans, and what have been the key problems, if any?
6. Other (repayment rates in the sector, risk management insurance, etc.)



Policy/Regulation

1. What government policies/regulations benefit your business (registrations, inspections, subsidies, incentives, etc.)?
2. What government policies/regulations are obstacles to growing your business?
3. Infrastructure
4. What are the most important infrastructure constraints affecting your business' growth and profitability (road/transport conditions, telephone service, electric supply, crime/corruption, storage, etc.)?
5. What is your industry doing about these problems?

Business/Membership Organizations

1. Is your industry/trade sector represented by national or local business associations?
 1. If so, please name them.
 2. Are you a member? If not, why?
 3. What are the primary functions and benefits of these associations?
 4. What additional services should they provide?

Final Open Ended Questions

1. What are the major incentives you have for investing in / promoting change in the supply or value chain?
2. What risks or constraints do you face in making these investments?
3. What do you think are the strengths of your industry locally and/or internationally?
4. What are the main weaknesses of your industry?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge facing your industry today?
6. Can you name some business owners in your industry who are leaders –for example, in terms of technology, product design, quality, or marketing?

