# R E C O N F I R M

## [Regional Consortia for Internship Mobility]

Transfer of Innovation Project
2012-LDV-TOI-502

## H A N D B O O K

Lifelong
Learning
Programme

[re]confirm
traineeships

## Contents

## Introduction

Traineeship mobility has a positive impact on employability of young graduates. It responds to the European Youth Guarantee[1] put forward by the European Commission.
The Reconfirm Handbook provides guidelines and practical examples for those who might consider initiating or joining a consortium for traineeship[2] mobility.

Reconfirm (Regional Consortia for Internship Mobility) was set up for the management and monitoring of traineeship mobility(traineeships after graduation), the creation and development of regional offices in Europe with a centralised (European trainee grant) administration. The concept was developed within a Transfer of Innovation project (2012-LDV-TOI-502[3]) that led to the establishment of a Flemish Regional Office for Internship mobility. The partners in the TOI-project are: University of Antwerp, Ghent University, Flanders Knowledge Area, Eindhoven University of Technology, Nottingham Trent University, SOP, PSA Antwerp, City of Antwerp.

The project brought together the expertise of all partners in order to improve the management of traineeship mobility. Within the project online tools for communication and administration were developed, a traineeship portal built and new administrative work methods implemented. The crowning achievement was the launch of the Reconfirm consortium in Flanders. Reconfirm Flanders-BE reunites almost all Higher Education Institutions in Flanders; creating a Flemish central platform for international traineeship mobility; cooperating with Reconfirm The Netherlands TU/e, and the (future) Reconfirm Nottingham-UK. Main aim is to improve the quality and accessibility of traineeship mobility for all students and young graduates; to create structural dialogues with the world of labour and stakeholders; to report and make recommendations towards governing bodies.

In each region the project was advised by an Expert Steering Committee. In these committees higher educational institutions and employers' organisations were represented.

The target groups of the project were: (international) companies and enterprises, students and young alumni.

We are happy to share with you the knowledge gained through this journey and hope that it might compare with some of your experience and provide some useful help and support.

The Reconfirm TOI-project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This handbook reflects only the views of the project partners; the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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[1] http://www.youth-guarantee.eu/

[2] When launching the Erasmus+ Programme in 2014, the European Commission opted for systematically using the terminology of 'trainee' and 'traineeship' whereas others may prefer to use the term 'intern' to indicate a student or young graduate gaining professional experience in a professional context. The period of training, framed in a training agreement is by the European Commission being indicated as 'traineeship' instead of internship, or (work) placement. As a consequence, in the present text we equally use the terms 'trainee' and 'traineeship' conform the European context.

[3] 2012-2014

## About this Handbook

This handbook has been developed based on the Reconfirm project experience. It is meant to guide those who might consider to initiating or joining a consortium for internship mobility or become a consortium partner. It is meant to inspire and help them to get over thresholds by giving a clear view in the matter and handing over practical guidelines and useful pieces of advice. As there is no such thing as a magic formula, the handbook is based on the lessons learned from the Reconfirm experience. The handbook also gives general information on traineeship mobility consortia within the context of the Erasmus+ programme.

When establishing a consortium one could distinguish four stages, from the initial idea to the final realization and the up and running of the consortium. Although these stages have distinct features, a strict division turns out to be rather difficult as the stages may change over fluently from one into another, or may even overlap.

In the framework of this handbook it seems useful to distinguish these four phases to help the reader to get a clearer view on the consortium establishment process:

A. Preparation and exploration phase
B. Shaping / decisive phase
C. Formalisation phase
D. Operational phase

This handbook also contains some managerial tools and methodologies, easily accessible to all. Some of them were deliberately used in the Reconfirm experience, others were not identified as such during the process, but might give some guidance to future processes.
In the end the creation of your consortium will be an organic process where creativity and mutual trust will be more valuable than strict application of theoretical models.

# 1. Introduction to consortium working

## 1.1. Why is there an increasing interest in consortia?

The past few years have seen growing interest in consortia in Europe. There are a variety of reasons, not the least of which is recognition of Europe's competitive challenge and the need to be constantly innovative exploring new education areas and facilitating mutual learning and cooperation opportunities.

Another explanation can be found in the focus on policies or affirmative actions taken to build stronger links between the public and private sectors in education with the support of the business community. This includes the development of education networks and strengthening the link between education, research and business (the knowledge triangle).

In this context, consortia represent a formalised cooperation of an interest group and opens the way for new forms of multi-stakeholders partnerships that can make a significant contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes and support the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion. Consortia were e.g. acknowledged for boosting Erasmus Placement mobility numbers (+ 64% since 2007-2008).[4]
Consortia collaboration can bring mutual benefits to participants by mobilizing resources for longer-term goals, exploiting synergies and avoiding duplication of efforts and development among partners and reducing fragmentation of the European Education Area by increased coordination.

## 1.2. What is a consortium?

Generally speaking, a consortium is an association of two or more individuals, companies, organisations or governments (or any combination of these entities) with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources for achieving a common goal.

In an educational setting, and more specifically in the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme run by the European Commission, a consortium is defined as a group of vocational education (VET) or tertiary education institutions (HEI) and other organisations (companies, associations chambers of commerce, municipalities, foundations, museums, etc.) working together to facilitate the organisation of joint activities and to offer added value in terms of quality of activities compared to what individual institutions would be able to deliver alone.

Today for example, the rising levels of unemployment in Europe – particularly among young people – and the need to tackle this challenge by providing people with the skills required by the labour market and the economy, while allowing them to play an active role in society and achieve personal fulfilment drive organizations to join forces. Students'

[4] *Erasmus Consortia Directory 2013, p.1*).

mobility, and more specifically international traineeship mobility, is considered as a relevant action that can strengthen progress towards these goals, on the basis of a shared vision between stakeholders and cooperation across different fields and levels.

In this perspective, consortium may provide an ideal platform for organisations wishing to pool or share services related to the organisation of mobility and develop their internationalisation together through mutual cooperation and sharing of contacts. Joint activities typically include common strategic outlooks, joint selection and / or preparation and mentoring of participants, as well as, where relevant, a centralised point for finding enterprises and for matching enterprises and participants. The mobility consortium can also act as a facilitator for incoming trainees. This includes finding a receiving organisation in the region where the mobility consortium partners are located and providing assistance in case of need (e.g. settlement of entry formalities, insurance coverage, accommodation).

## 1.3. What are the advantages of working in a consortium?

There are a number of advantages to working as a consortium:

- The consortium will enable organisations to share relevant skills, experience and expertise in a way that complements one another in terms of the tender specification and later in relation to contract delivery. Your increased understanding of what works and shared experience should lead to a more effective service.
- It will give you the opportunity to gain experience or competencies that you might not otherwise have in terms of contract delivery and which you cannot afford to buy in just to secure the contract.
- The greater overall capacity of the consortium will enable you to improve outcomes for beneficiaries.
- Consortium members may deliver in other geographical areas to you. This will increase the scope of delivery whilst not over-stretching your own resources simply in order to be able to tender for the contract.
- Sharing your expertise and capabilities can be treated as a learning process which may help you to increase your chances of tendering success when you tender for contracts alone.
- The consortium approach may allow for shared development costs for example the pooling of “back office” costs. This might represent a significant reduction in overheads in relation to the contract.
- Whilst the liability for contract delivery by the consortium may be reduced for individual organisations as these are carried at the interface between the coordinator and funding body, risk and liability for contract delivery is likely to be spread across the member organisations.

## 1.4. What are the constraints related to consortium working?

There are also some constraints specific to consortium working:

- Management costs may be increased for all of the organisations involved during the development, tendering and contract delivery phases. Appraisal officers will

want to see that management of the consortium is consistent across the range of organisations involved.
- Consortium development may be time consuming for all sections of an organisation, including governance and staff.
- Setting up a consortium may involve more costs than when tendering for a contract as an individual organisation. For example it is essential that legal advice is obtained to ensure the structure of the consortium is fit for purpose and that the operational proposal does not contravene competition law.
- A failure in delivery or even breach of contract by another member of the consortium may seriously affect your organisation's future ability to tender either alone or with others through "guilt by association".
- If you are the coordinator then it is likely that you will be required to carry all of the risk and the liability.
- Consortium members may experience cash flow difficulties, particularly if the coordinator is being affected by delays in payment.
- Differing visions, values and cultures from other consortium members may cause friction.
- Although you may have an understanding of the processes of developing a consortium do not underestimate the potential issues that can arise due to the "people factor" and the differing work cultures of organisations that are embarking on working together in a consortium.

# 2. Preparation and exploration phase

## 2.1. Key questions to ask yourself before forming or joining a consortium

Forming or joining a consortium is in many respects like developing any other collaborative relationship. If the relationship is to be satisfactory for all parties, it requires:

- Defined, common need(s)
- A shared vision;
- Good communication;
- Clearly defined goals;
- Sound policies and procedures;
- Effective financial, risk and environmental management systems;
- A clear understanding of the practical details including potential risks;
- Access to regularly updated relevant legislation; and
- Mutual trust and respect

Before taking any steps in the development of a consortium the current situation of your organisation/institution should be defined (e.g. existing objectives, partnerships, available policy support). There are some key questions about your own organisation on which you should be clear:

- What are your strategic medium- and long-term goals and short-term objectives?
- What are your strengths and limitations (e.g. resources and capabilities)

- What do you expect from a co-operation with other organisations?
- What do you want your partners to bring you?
- What do you have to offer?

*Reconfirm experience:*
*In Flanders there were a number of reasons for developing a consortium. The following needs were identified:*

- *central information platform for traineeship mobility for different target groups (companies, potential trainees, governing bodies, other stakeholders);*
- *centralised expertise;*
- *financial support for all graduates irrespective of their home institution;*
- *efficient administrative tools (amongst others for European grant mobility);*
- *traineeship database;*
- *optimisation of use of available resources.*

## 2.2. Why should you want to become partner of a consortium?

A key reason to become a partner of a consortium may be that it provides your organisation with new opportunities to secure a contract and grant funding which would not otherwise be available to you. This is, however, just one of a number of options. You may, for example, want to:

- Extend your current activities to include new ones for different target groups;
- Deliver your services in another geographical area;
- Tender for a contract where the specification includes areas of activity you are unable to deliver;
- Respond to another organisation which has approached you with a view to joining a consortium;
- To ensure your organisation continues to provide high-quality services and resources to your particular target group; or
- To be able to derive from consortia results policy lines for your organisation and to enter into dialogue with relevant actors on the basis of these results.

*In Flanders there was a clear win for Higher Education Institutions in joining a consortium for internship mobility:*

- *Online access for all graduating students to Erasmus+ Traineeship grants;*
- *Significant reduction of the own administrative workload, as the grant administration and the traineeship monitoring are handled now centrally in an computerized, transparent and efficient way; with accessible centralized data storage;*
- *A pooled mobility budget application with a potentially higher success rate because of gathered expertise; a more efficient use of resources through a possible reallocation of means;*
- *Development of specific communication campaigns by the consortium towards target groups; availability of communication tools for a complementary use in own institution;*
- *Learning possibilities: sharing of good practices, exchange of experiences; a structural forum for specific issues related to internship mobility;*

- *Upgrade of the services for graduating students; a public traineeship portal, a central contact point for internship mobility matters;*
- *Extension of company network and stakeholder network.*

*For the NA the consortium meant more Higher Education Institutions (HEI) involved in traineeship mobility, transparent and standardized traineeship administration. The consortium is a preferable interlocutor, allowing actions and feedback on larger scale.*

As you understand, there is not a single route into consortium development but you need to be clear about why being in a collaborative relationship with others will help you to better achieve what you want for your organisation.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that being involved in an effective consortium should not dilute your organisation's existing ethos or culture and importantly, this should not affect the quality of the services that you provide. Rather it will provide another vehicle for you to take your services to market.

### 2.3. Analysing and addressing your organisation's need

When you are developing a consortium, you cannot build your team, set goals and define activities unless your organisation's need is clear. Whatever challenges your organisation faces, that is the source of the need, and your task is to figure out how to alleviate the suffering.

Define what the actual situation is and describe what you think the 'ideal' situation would be. Identify the obstacles that stand in between and what you would need / which steps should be taken to achieve the ideal situation.

It is also important to realise that some projects are driven by opportunities, not problems. For example, you might save on operational costs by taking advantage of a network of partners, or benefit from new ideas and resources to ensure your activity is a success.

Regardless of whether your project is driven by a problem or an opportunity, there are four specific steps you can take to identify the need:

- **Step 1: Ask**
  Ask the people involved in the process what they think is going on, and listen to their answers. Ask open-ended questions; they may not know the underlying reason for the problem, but you can help discover the cause and identify a solution. At this point, you can also gather relevant data. For example, find out how much time departments are spending on finding traineeship opportunities. This will help you later as you analyse the results jointly achieved by the consortium and discuss future perspectives.

- **Step 2: Analyse**
  Describe objectively the process to figure out where bottlenecks are, what steps can be simplified or eliminated and what obstacles exist.

- **Step 3: Agree**

Go back to your stakeholders and make sure your assumptions match theirs. Should you be concerned about a particular problem? Maybe there is already a related initiative, meaning that you could exploit potential synergies.

- **Step 4: Archive**
  Record everything you learn keeping a kind of logbook – where the pain comes from, who is experiencing it and what the solution needs to accomplish. This will save you a lot of time later as you prepare your presentation to stakeholders, because you will know what you are basing your recommendations on and who to go back to if you need additional information.

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*Reconfirm experience:*
*in the years before the project, Antwerp University initiated dialogues with institutions involved with internship mobility after graduation. Antwerp University also lent its ear to institutions that did not participate in this kind of internship mobility, trying to identify the remaining obstacles (steps 1 + 2). Subsequently meetings were held with all Flemish Higher Education Institutions, discussing needs and wishes, exploring cooperation (step 3). The meetings helped to develop a final needs analysis, in the view of the project design (step 4) enhanced at the same time the awareness of the added value of being part of a consortium.*

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## 2.4. Searching for potential partners

After identification of the problem or opportunity, it is time to start building your case for document management. You won't have to look far to find relevant people to work with – colleagues in your own department, those in other areas of your institution, partners with whom you have already worked in the past, etc. However before you get started it is important – as explained also in 2.6. - to think through why you want to work in partnership – and why your partners might want to work with you

Be clear and honest from the start about what you want to get from a partnership and who you want to involve. Some partners will help you generate ideas, or develop content; others will help you to design your activity; some will be able to share their skills and knowledge to ensure your activity is a success and others may be prepared to put resources into the activity. Partners can also help you develop relationships with different audiences.

Keep in mind that the best partnerships build on each partner bringing their strengths to the table. If you think you could do everything better than your partners, then why are you partnering with them? Equally, if they are better placed to deliver the whole project, why are they partnering with you?

Consortium management begins long before the project gets off the ground. Here are some useful tips to build solid foundations and avoid potential problems later:

- **Understand who your stakeholders are, their interests, and how to engage them.** Stakeholders are persons, groups or institutions who may be affected by or have an effect on your project. They may also include those who have a strong interest in the effort for academic, political, or other reasons even though they are not directly affected by it. Some possible stakeholders include the beneficiaries or targets of the effort, those directly involved with or responsible for beneficiaries or targets of the effort, the media, funders, or the community at large. The more they stand to benefit or lose by the project, the stronger their interest is likely to be. The more heavily involved they are in the effort or organisation, the stronger their interest as well.

- **Identify and assess potential partners.** While a stakeholder analysis serves to identify relevant stakeholder groups, the identification of specific partners requires, in many cases, the definition of specific selection criteria. These might relate to: representativeness, organisational mandate, specific competences, experience or resources, or compliance with specific principles or values. You may not have to start from scratch with new partnerships. If you have partners with whom you have worked well in the past and who may be interested in your initiative, try to build on it. Do your partners complement each other and strengthen the consortium's goals? Are they bringing different perspectives?
- **Invite involvement at the start,** when you are developing your ideas. Partners may be able to advise you on potential difficulties, the logistics of certain aspects of your activity and may have ideas that you might never have thought of. Getting partners involved at the start ensures that their needs and expectations are taken into account in any activity you plan.
- **What's in it for me?** Ensure you have an open dialogue with your potential partners about their and your expectations before you get started. Misunderstandings can lead to problems later down the track.
- **Don't choose partners whose interests' conflict with your own (or with the interests of other partners).** Ensure that you are partnered with the right person or organisation. Do they have the right kind of expertise? Are they in a position to agree to what you want them to deliver?
- **Establish a clear joint vision at the start** – and try to make it manageable. It can be a good idea to start small, and deliver something really good – than try to do something amazing and fall at the first hurdle.
- **Establish leadership, roles and responsibilities early on.** Ensure that the purpose and expected results of the consortium as well as the respective roles and responsibilities of each partner are clearly defined and commonly agreed. Though this may seem obvious it is a classic example of "more easily said than done" and, in reality, many consortia fail to explicitly specify goals, expectations and clear roles.
- **Define a common purpose.** Experience suggests that it is useful to explicitly identify both the individual aims of each partner and the common purpose that has brought them together. It has been said that successful consortium must be based on mutual dependency – the realisation that no one partner can achieve the identified goals on their own. Partners should be encouraged to openly discuss their respective motivations and aims and to collectively explore how the consortium can be designed to simultaneously (and synergistically) achieve its collective purpose and the aims of individual partners.
- **Establish acceptable parameters of divergence.** Every consortium must strike a balance between establishing enough common ground to hold the consortium together and ensuring enough diversity to allow for complementarity of roles. In addition to defining shared purpose, partners should also therefore be encouraged to explore their divergences, discuss to what extent it may be necessary to "agree to disagree" and explore in what ways differences (even conflicts) between them

can contribute to achieving their common goals. Views vary as to how much commonality of values, interests and ultimate aims (beyond the defined purpose of the consortium) is necessary/desirable for genuine partnership.

- **Communication.** Make sure that all relevant information about consortium processes, decisions and activities is made available in a timely, comprehensible and accessible manner.
- **Be flexible.** Try to stick to your initial vision, purpose and aims but remember to be flexible. As the world evolves, organisations' needs change and grow, creating new demand for new types of products and services so be prepared and prepare your partners to roll with the changes.

*Reconfirm experience:*
*The primary goal was to unlock the European grants for all Flemish graduates, to give them equal application chances. As a consequence it was obvious that all Flemish Higher Education Institutions (HEI) were equally offered the possibility of joining the consortium., managed centrally.*
*All HEI were informed about the advantages and possibilities of organising traineeship mobility through a centrally managed consortium. At each stage of the consortium development the HEI were consulted and/or informed, to create and secure the necessary support.*

*The Flemish umbrella organisation Flanders Knowledge Area was found ready to take up the role as consortium coordinator; being in line with their supporting role in the international-isation of Flemish HEIs.*

### 2.5. Defining roles

In order to effectively manage your future consortium, it is important to provide each partner with a clear definition and understanding of their role and responsibilities. When defining roles and responsibilities, you may need to create a list of all your potential partners and a list of all of the tasks and roles within the project. You can then assign the roles to each partner or group of partners. It is important to remain flexible and be prepared to modify your plan in consultation with your partners.

Example of roles:

- **The coordinating institution** carries out the administrative, managerial, representational, and other roles essential to the effective functioning of the consortium. The coordinator has a wide range of responsibilities like providing overall leadership to the consortium in consultation with the Steering Committee (SC), establishing consortium meeting dates, venues, and agenda and conducting follow up, implementing a strategic communication plan, in consultation with SC raising and managing funds, including liaising with funding bodies, writing proposals, tracking and ensuring completion of grant deliverables in a timely manner;
- **The consortium members** participate in consortium meetings and use their expertise in the general interest of the consortium. They assist with implementation of consortium work plan in their organisations and local communities. They promote the consortium mission and activities through the

dissemination of materials and information, and, if required, seek to leverage consortium funds by identifying potential cash or in-kind matching funds in their organisations or communities;

- **The Steering Committee** consists of representatives from each (founding) organisation. It sets strategic goals, approves consortium work plan and budget, furthers the consortium agenda, and provides guidance to the coordinator.

With the role of each partner defined, you can also create an organisation chart. This chart is a tool that helps to define the inter-relationships between partners.

Failing to define roles and responsibilities can create tension, miscommunication and inefficiency within the consortium. People may be unsure as to what tasks are their own and who they are required to report to. Mistakes and omissions can also occur when people are unsure of what is required of them.

*In the Reconfirm experience it was quite clear that in an optimal scenario the coordinating role would be taken up by a relevant umbrella organisation. Nevertheless this should not be taken for granted; a potential coordinating organisation may need time to consider available resources and how the coordinating role fits in the organisation's mission and vision for the coming years. Internal sufficient support is necessary; coordinating a dynamic consortium should be part of a long term vision.*

## 2.6. Determining target groups

Once you are clear about each partner role and responsibility, identify whom your consortium will be helping. Are you targeting students? Young graduates? People in the labour market? Make sure there is an identifiable population of individuals who will benefit from your efforts. Try also to understand the characteristics (demographics, interest, day-to-day concerns, behaviours, etc.) of the people who will be most likely to appreciate and value the outcomes of your project in order to identify their needs and more effectively communicate the ways they can benefit from what you have to offer. Equipped with this knowledge, you will find it easier to develop later creative marketing strategies that reach and motivate your target, making the most of your always too-scarce promotional resources.

*In the Reconfirm experience primary goal was making the added value of internationalisation in the view of employability, - valuable learning opportunities in an international professional context in particular – equally accessible for all graduates to enhance their employability, thus facilitating their entrance in the labour market in a vulnerable but decisive career period. Collective, structural information and adapted communication to this target group would contribute to the promotion of grant possibilities and the fore-mentioned added values. Structural dialogue and building bridges with the world of labour was needed to promote collectively the added value of international trainees in the world of companies, lowering thresholds to engage international trainees.*

*A central information point and specific communication tools for the target groups - graduating students, alumni and companies- would make it easier for HEI to reach out on them; whereas the creation of a traineeship portal would create extra, and easily accessible opportunities for potential trainees and companies to connect directly.*

## 2.7. Setting goals

Setting goals is a fundamental component to long-term consortium success. The basic reason for this is that you and your partners can't get where you are trying to go until you clearly define where that is. Research studies show a direct link between goals and enhanced performance. Goals help you focus and allocate your time and resources efficiently, and they can keep you motivated when you feel like giving up.

S.M.A.R.T. Goals can be used to help ensure that effective goals are set for the consortium:

- **Specific –** A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. To set a specific goal you must answer the six "W" questions: Who (who is involved?), What (what do you want to accomplish?), Where (identify a location or geographical area), When (establish a time frame), Which (identify requirements and constraints), Why (specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal);
- **Measurable –** Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the satisfaction of achievement that spurs you on to continue the effort required to reach your goal. To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as: How much? How many? How will we know when it is accomplished?
- **Attainable –** Make sure you have the resources and capabilities to achieve your goal. Begin seeing previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals;
- **Realistic –** To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective towards which you are both *willing* and *able* to work. A goal can be both high and realistic. Determine with your partners how high your goal should be;
- **Timely –** A goal should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it there is no sense of urgency.

Other important elements should be considered when setting goals:

- **Make sure your goals are tied in together.** For example, it would not be realistic as consortium members to strive for a new project if it is not embedded in the general strategy of their organisations. Pay attention to how each goal ties in with the others and make sure they are not mutually exclusive.
- **Don't go overboard.** It is possible to set several goals if you honestly think you can achieve them, but planning far too much can overwhelm you and make your partners give up altogether. Know your own strengths and limitations and plan honestly so you don't let your team down.

- **Be flexible.** Assess your progress periodically, provide honest feedback and adjust as you go along. If you encounter roadblocks on your path to achieving your goals, don't give up. Instead, be willing to alter them to meet your new needs. Don't become rigid in accomplishing something that is no longer relevant. Keep also an eye on the latest changes in your environment and be ready to adapt your goals if necessary.
- **Set goals for the long-term and short-term.** Ideally, you should set goals for the long-term, and then mini goals that are short-term and ultimately tie in with the bigger picture. Long-term goals can take approximately three to five years to achieve, while short-term goals could take anywhere from a couple of months to a year or two. Differentiating between the two will stop you from becoming overwhelmed or discouraged, and will also assist in always keeping the long-term perspective in mind when the day to day threatens to make you lose sight of it.
- **Make sure you really want it.** A goal should be emotionally satisfying. Making sure that you really want to accomplish the goals that you set will make you strive harder when the road gets tough.
- **Write it down.** A written goal represents a real commitment. Commitment is what separates our dreams from our goals. Keep a copy of your goal plan in sight and refer to it often.
- **Set goals together with your key stakeholders.** In order to increase support and engagement, key stakeholders need to be involved in the goal-setting process. This will show stakeholders your interest and consideration. They will give you lots of credit for that.

## 2.8. Estimating the resources needed to achieve your goals

Goal achievement requires the deployment of resources. These resources include time, money, people, equipment, and effort. Let's begin with the most important resource – people. You will need to determine the skills required for achieving the consortium's goals and the effort that will be required. Talk openly about your need to the people concerned and check their availability by taking into account their vacations, travels, and the other projects that they are already working on. You may also need to factor the availability of other resources such as supplies, equipment and facilities. This first estimation will give you an idea of the resources required and the type of financial arrangements and funding options to be considered.

## 2.9. Exploring funding opportunities

Financial support may come from your organisation and/or contributions given by the consortium partners. There is also a wide range of funding mechanisms available. They vary according to purpose and target audience. In an ideal world, you would draw up your funding request, identify the appropriate funding body, complete the application form, obtain your funding and start work on your project. Unfortunately, the reality is that the demand for funding is high and competition is fierce. Even if you have found the right source of support, there is no guarantee that you will successfully secure the funding you require. So carefully prepare your funding request.

A grant may be the best source of funding available for the development of a consortium. There is no interest to be paid and funds are generally non-returnable (except in exceptional circumstances, where grant terms and conditions are not met).

Grants are provided by number of sources, and may come from regional and local government, the European Commission, or various other national and local bodies such as Regional Development Agencies, charities and community foundations. It is important to find the right grant before starting work on your application, otherwise you may waste considerable time and get discouraged. As such, it is essential to keep informed about the grants that are available to you.

As an example, the Internet site "Introduction to EU funding[5]" presents a list of European policies in favour of which grants are awarded; you will find additional information on the specific grant programmes and on the application process by clicking on the field which interests you.

## 2.10. Understanding the project approach

The EU distributes its external funding in a number of ways: through specific projects, via a sector approach or by budget support to recipient governments. The "Project approach" is particularly used to support initiatives. Thus, it is essential for consortia to understand the concept of "the project" and to have the capacity to design and implement projects.

There are a variety of definitions of what a project is, but a useful starting point is the definition used in the EU's own Project Cycle Management Guidelines:

A project is "a series of activities aimed at bringing about clearly specified objectives within a defined time-period and with a defined budget".

A project should also have:

- Clearly identified stakeholders, including the primary target group and the final beneficiaries;
- Clearly defined coordination, management and financial arrangements;
- A monitoring and evaluation system (to support performance management); and
- An appropriate level of financial and economic analysis, which indicates that the project's benefits will exceed its costs.

Projects can vary significantly in their objectives, scope and scale. Smaller projects might involve modest financial resources and last only a few months, whereas a large project might involve many millions of Euro and last for many years.

A well-formulated project should make sure that it meets the objectives of the funder too; fitting in the vision of the latter.

Think about what you want to achieve, brainstorm with your partners, come up with ideas and use some of your ideas as a starting point for a future project.

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/grants/introduction_en.htm

### 2.11. Staying in touch with partners

Throughout the preparation and exploration phase, it is important to keep in touch with your envisaged partners and inform them regularly of the main progress realised. Lack of communication is the most common reason for consortium falter. Effective communication is necessary to build and maintain relationships, keep things working well and make people feel included.

- **Maintain regular contact with each of your partners**. If things change, communicate these changes;
- **Schedule regular opportunities to check in.** This way, you will monitor progress while at the same time making your partners feel included and supported**;**
- **Don't just circulate information to the person in charge** – copy in all those involved;
- **Schedule regular planning meetings**, identifying a project board with key representatives, or using structured feedback mechanisms**;**
- **Find out your partners' preferred methods of communication** – do they prefer face-to-face meetings, skype calls, emails or maybe other?;
- **What are their time constraints?** Some partners may be out of contact at certain times, and may have capacity issues that you should be sensitive to**;**
- **Reflect** – monitor your progress continually and adjust where necessary. Work out what is working well, what is not working well and whether milestones will be achieved. This is essential in managing your project and meeting your deadlines but will also inform you on the best way to manage the consortium in the future.

## 3. Shaping / decisive phase

### 3.1. Putting names on roles

Within a consortium, assigned roles and responsibilities define the physical relationships between the consortium members and the contribution they bring to achieve the common goal. Work is most often multi-dimensional, requiring a combination of skills and activities for planning, execution and completion. In order to ensure that individual tasks and deliverables are completed as needed, it is wise to clearly define every key consortium activity in terms of roles and responsibilities and put a name on each role.

This can be realised through the following steps and planning questions:

- Ask each partner organisation to designate a contact person who will be part of the core team
- Assemble and organise the core team
- Define key tasks and deliverables as needed from the following perspectives:
    - Who will **define** this task or deliverable?
    - Who will **execute** this task or deliverable?
    - Who will **participate** in the completion of this task or deliverable?
    - Who will **review** this task or deliverable?
    - Who will have **input** into this task or deliverable?
    - Who will **approve** this task or deliverable?

- Who will **accept** this task or deliverable as part of operational transition?

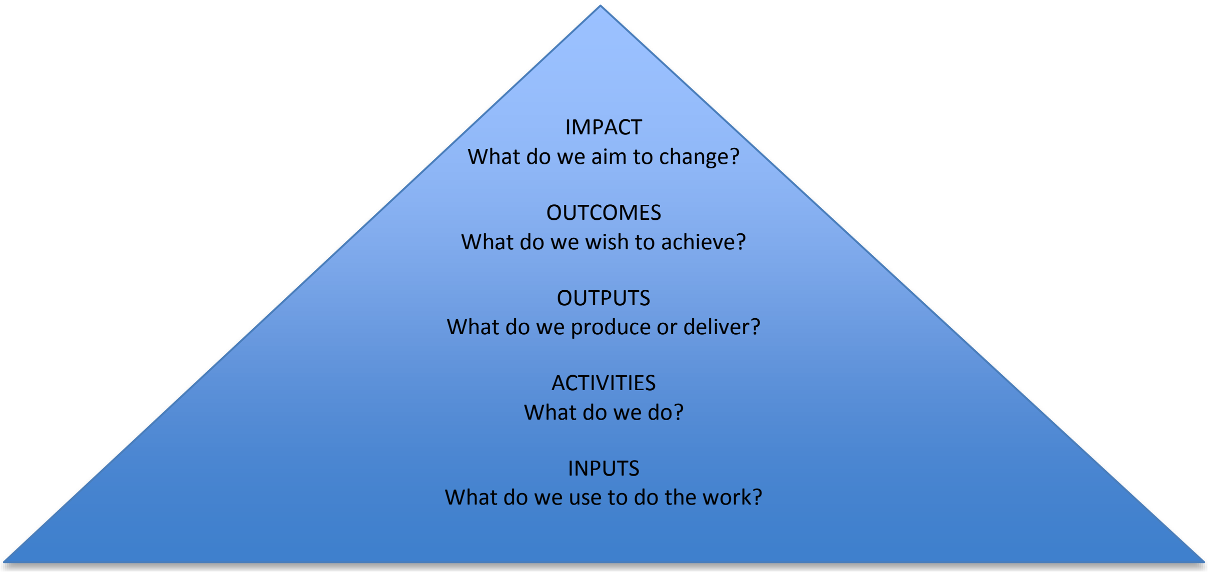
- Allocate roles and responsibilities to each task and deliverable
- Distribute the roles and responsibilities to the core team

## 3.2. Taking an outcomes approach

The outcomes approach is designed to ensure that you and your partners are focused on the outcomes and community benefits that will happen as a result of the activities, projects or services you are planning to provide. It clarifies what you expect to achieve, how you expect to achieve it and how you will know whether you are achieving it. It will help you to ensure that results improve the life or situation of your target beneficiaries rather than just carrying out your functions. It will help you track the progress you are making in achieving results and it will help you collect evidence about what worked and what did not, to help you improve your planning and implementation.

The outcomes approach requires you to go beyond the work that you do and interrogate the impact that it has. This approach involves management using a logic model which links inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

The following illustration shows these links more clearly:




**Inputs** are everything you need to accomplish a task. This could be in terms of finance, human resources, infrastructure, etc.

**Activities** describe a collection of functions (actions, jobs, tasks) that consume inputs and which deliver benefits and impacts. A description of an activity should always contain a verb. For example, provide advice, contact for services, respond to enquiries, etc.

**Outputs** can be immediate and intermediate, and the description of an output always contains nouns. These are the direct products and services that result from a project; they may also include changes resulting from the project that are relevant to the achievement of its outcomes. For example, “advice and direction”, “service providers obtained” and “work initiated”.

**Outcomes** refer to a changed state of being and are stated in the present tense. They describe the effects, benefits or consequences that occur due to the outputs of programs, processes or activities. The realisation of the outcomes has a time factor and can be in either the medium or long-term.

**Impacts** refer to the long-term developmental results at a societal level that is the logical consequence of achieving specific outcomes.

Systematic assessment of what impacts and outcomes were achieved will enable you to identify what works and what does not. It will enable you to learn and continually develop your capacity to use scarce resources more efficiently and effectively to achieve the greatest benefit for your target groups. Clear statements of the outcomes expected and clear indicators, baselines and targets to measure change will ensure you have reliable information you can use to monitor progress, evaluate how successful you were and plan to improve.

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*In the Reconfirm experience the expected outcomes were: increase of mobility budget, equally available for all graduating students of the consortium members; transparent and more efficient central traineeship grant administration; concerted cooperation focussing on targeted results reached by joining forces and sharing of expertise; extension of expertise. Last but not least: increase of internship mobility participation.*

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### 3.3. Developing a strategic plan

Once you are clear about the impacts and outcomes you want to achieve, you can create your strategic plan. A simple and effective way to do it is to place all the parts of your plan into three areas, so you can clearly see how the pieces fit together[6].

The three pieces of the puzzle are:

- Where are you now?
- Where are you going?
- How will you get there?

Each part has certain elements to show you how and where things fit it.

**Where are you now?**

As you think about where you and your partners are now, you want to look at your foundational elements (mission and values) to make sure they reflect the spirit and resources of all consortium members. It is important that these elements are consistently described and understood by all members but especially by the coordinator of the consortium. Then you want to look at your current position or your strategic position. This

[6] Strategic planning process based on the model designed by Erica Olsen, co-founder of M3 Planning and author of Strategic Planning Kit for Dummies.

is where you look at what is happening internally and externally to determine how you need to shift and change. You should review your strategic position regularly through the use of a SWOT.

These elements are as follows:

- **Mission statement –** The mission describes your consortium's purpose – the purpose for which it was founded and why it exists;
- **Values and/or guiding principles –** This clarifies what you stand for and believe in. Values guide the consortium in its daily business. What are the core values and beliefs of your consortium? What values and beliefs guide your daily interactions? What are you and your partners really committed to?
- **SWOT –** SWOT is an acronym that stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These elements are crucial in assessing your strategic position with your consortium. They offer a well-rounded, holistic picture by revealing both internal and external issues. You want to build on your consortium's strengths (e.g. reputation of members, expertise); shore up the weaknesses (e.g. underfunding in some departments and programmes, understaffing at some key levels); capitalize on the opportunities (e.g. demonstrated need for a traineeship mobility service within partner institutions); and recognize the threats (e.g. growing competition from private institutions billing their service).

**Where are you going?**

The elements of the question "Where are you going?" help you answer other questions such as "What will your consortium look like in the future?" "Where is the consortium heading for?" "What is the future you want to create for your consortium?" "What kind of role can it play?" Because the future is hard to predict, you can have fun imagining what it may look like. The following elements help you define the future for your activity:

- **Sustainable competitive advantage –** Sustainable competitive advantage explains what you are best at compared to your competitors. Each network strives to create an advantage that continues to be competitive over the time. What can you be best at? What is your uniqueness? What can your consortium potentially do better than any other organisation or network?
- **Vision statement –** Your vision is formulating a picture of what your consortium's future makeup will be and where the network is headed. What will your consortium look like in five to ten years from now?

**How will you get there?**

Knowing how you will reach your vision is the heart of your strategic plan, but it is also the most time consuming. The reason it takes so much time to develop is because there are many routes from your current position to your vision. Picking the right one determines how quickly or slowly you get to your final destination.

Here are the parts of your plan that layout your roadmap:

- **Strategic objectives –** Strategic objectives are long-term, continuous strategic areas that help you connect your mission to your vision. Holistic objectives encompass four areas: financial, customer/beneficiary, operational, and people. What are the key activities that you need to perform in order to achieve your vision?

- **Strategy –** Strategy establishes a way to match your consortium's strengths with environment (internal/external) opportunities so that your network comes to mind when your target groups have a need. Explain how you intend to travel to your final destination. Does your strategy match your strengths in a way that provides value to your target groups and beneficiaries? Does it build an organisational reputation and recognisable position? Include your strategies for raising funds, any specific grants you believe your consortium can receive, etc.
- **Short-term priorities –** Short-term priorities convert your strategic objectives into specific performance targets. Effective priorities clearly state what you want to accomplish, when you want to accomplish it, how you are going to do it, and who is going to be responsible. Each priority should be specific and measurable. What are the one- to three-year-priorities you want to set to reach your vision? What are your specific, measurable, and realistic targets of accomplishment?
- **Action items –** Action items are plans that set specific actions that lead to implementing your goals. They include start and end dates and appointing a person responsible. Are your action items comprehensive enough to achieve your goals?
- **Scorecard –** A scorecard measures and manages your strategic plan. What are the lead performance drivers or indicators that are meaningful to you and your partners and that you need to track and monitor whether you are achieving your mission, priorities and strategic objectives? Pick five to ten goal related measures you can use to track the progress of your plan and plug them into your scorecard. Here are some examples of qualitative and quantitative indicators you may use: financial statement ratios (revenue, costs, ROI), compliance with stakeholders requirements, resource utilisation, productivity/work measurement, project completion, workload drivers, self-improvement through experiential learning and communication, teamwork.
- **Execution –** In executing the plan, identify issues that surround who manages and monitors the plan and how the plan is communicated and supported. How committed are you to implementing the plan to move your consortium forward? Will you commit money, resources, and time to support the plan?

## 3.4. Choosing the best strategic option

Sometimes deciding between strategic options can be really tough. It can help to set some criteria against which to assess and compare potential alternative options.

Here is an example for decision-making criteria you might use:

- Fit with Mission, Vision, Values
- Impact on beneficiaries
- Appropriateness to the culture of consortium members' organisations
- Impact of change agenda on partner organisations (structure, etc.)
- Your capacity to pursue (consider investment, other effort, etc.)
- Level of support for the option (internal and external)

- Break-even point (the time it take for your new activity or service to become financially viable)
- Sustainability (your capacity to maintain or support the activity over the long term)

## 3.5. Building support for your strategy

Strategic planning is not an end in itself; the exercise would be less valuable without implementation in practice. The purpose of strategic planning is to provide a practical and operational plan which makes a difference for the stakeholders when it is implemented.

It is thus essential to ensure that there is a seamless transition from the planning process to implementation. Development of new activities or services cannot happen until political approvals have been given, the necessary operating budgets have been allocated and all parties have agreed to the necessary organisational and institutional adjustments. While the consortium members may wish that such approvals could be obtained at short notice, the practical reality of decision-making is that the process can be somewhat open-ended. Therefore, driving this process forward should be seen as one of the necessary, parallel activities to begin implementation of the strategic plan.

In parallel to the various approval building processes, it is likely that ongoing public awareness will need to be carried out, both to communicate the strategic plan to the key stakeholders and mobilise their support and cooperation.

### Finding a Strategy Champion

Every consortium needs people who are far-sighted in their support of their ideas. All strategic plans need to be championed by someone who has a conviction that goes beyond promotion of planning. Strategy champions connect with the concept that today's efforts can collectively be harnessed to position involved organisations toward a more confident position in the future. Strategy champions are leaders who guide the strategic plan through both the approval process and the initial years of implementation. In practice, this champion is likely to have been involved throughout the shaping and planning process and may well be the consortium coordinator or a key member of the Steering Committee.

One of the functions of this champion, as well as driving the process forward, is that of ensuring good communication and coordination between all players involved in implementation. These players will include all of the partners involved, the coordinating institution, funding bodies where applicable and any stakeholders who may be involved.

Therefore you should ensure your strategy champion has executive-level influence, such as a president or director. It is critical to ensure that the person at the helm gives the full endorsement to the need and function of the strategic plan from assessment to execution. Strategic plans by design acknowledge change, and for some who might resist – and there are always people that resist – a clear directive from the top will help pull the plan through the rough spots in strategic execution.

## 3.6. Securing the necessary partnership

A partnership creates new capacity and outcomes that are not attainable by either of the organisations individually. When developing your strategic plan, make sure that there is a real commitment to working collaboratively, not just support for your work alone. Engage in an honest discussion with your partners about the value of the partnership for the strategy you want to achieve. Does the partnership enhance your capacity to conduct this strategy? Is there true commitment to collaborative working on all sides of the partnership? Are there geographic, time or other restrictions that will create challenges for the partnership? If so, how do you plan to overcome the barriers and is it worth your effort to do so?

Once your partners confirm their intention to collaborate in the completion of consortium activities, for a defined period and within a defined framework, it is recommended that you put this commitment in writing, either in the form of a letter of commitment or being acknowledged in meeting minutes.

Keep in mind that signing such a commitment at an early stage, rather than waiting for the definitive agreement, can provide a trusted partnership framework to facilitate tasks achievement and cooperation in the long run. It signifies a serious commitment not only at individual level but also at institutional level.

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## 3.8. Embedding strategy into organisations

There are many ways for embedding strategy into an organization. The way described below may again sound quite theoretical but may prove to be helpful. However, keep in mind that theoretical approaches will always be subjected to a sort of ‘reality test’. Flexibility while keeping sight on the final objectives remain key in the process.

Often consortium members tend to focus their attention on the development and implementation of their initiative and give less attention to the embedment process of their strategy into their organisations.

The process of embedding a strategy into organisations implies the diffusion, dissemination, implementation, and sustainability of the strategy. “Diffusion” tends to imply the passive spread of the strategy, whereas “dissemination” implies active and planned efforts to convince target groups to adopt the strategy. “Implementation” includes active and planned efforts to incorporate the strategy within an organisation. A strategy is “sustained” if it is institutionalised and subsequently routinely used within an organisation. “Embedment” implies a strategy that is strongly contextualised, integrated with other contextualised practices in the organisation, and where there is a sense of ownership facilitated by staff involvement at all levels.

Here are some factors that might have greatest impact on embedding a strategy into organisations:

- **Strategy attributes**
    - Compatibility with the values, norms, and perceived needs of intended adopters
    - Simple rather than complex to deploy
    - Trialability (i.e. the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis) – a strategy or action plan that can be experimented by intended adopters on a limited basis will be more easily embedded
    - Visibility of benefits.

- **Attributes of the adopter and adoption process**
    - Motivation – adopters need to be convinced that the strategy will help them to meet their objectives in a cost effective manner, both directly and indirectly through enhanced organisational performance
    - Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use
    - Gender and age differences.

- **Communication and influence**
    - Interpersonal channels – in communication, mass media is important for creating awareness, but interpersonal channels are vastly more influential. The embedment of strategy by individuals is powerfully influenced by the structure and quality of their social network.
    - Presence of influencers – the existence of influencers or champions who can encourage the take up and embedment of the strategy.
    - Early adopter involvement in the implementation process
    - Feedback on strategy impact and related improvement options.

- **Inner context**
    - Structure and resources to support the strategy
    - Absorptive capacity to develop or gain, combine, spread or share, and adopt a new strategy
    - Receptive context – an organisation that has strong leadership, a clear strategic vision, a climate supportive of risk-taking and the ability to capture data is better able to adopt a new strategy

- Institutional readiness – dedicated time and resources are necessary for successful adoption of a new strategy.

- **Outer context**
    - Inter-organisational network and collaboration
    - Socio-political climate – timing a strategy to relate a policy “window” can influence its success
    - External incentives and mandates
    - Prevailing norms – mass media may create awareness of the need for the strategy and contribute to success. Public opinion can provide support for it.

# 4. Formalisation phase

In this phase matters that have been discussed and agreed on are officially formalised by formal agreements. By this phase it should be clear that the consortium’s strategic plan fits well with the partners’ respective strategic plans. If not, the operational processes of the consortium and final outcomes may be seriously affected or even compromised.

## 4.1. Agreeing on the scope of work

The Scope of Work (or Statement of Work) is the formal document where the work to be performed is described. It is the foundation of any project the consortium may want to set up. It explains the boundaries of the work, establishes responsibilities for each consortium member and sets up procedures for how completed work will be verified and approved. During the implementation phase, this documentation will help the consortium remain focused and on task. The SOW also provides the consortium with guidelines for making decisions about change requests during the project lifecycle.

It is natural for a project to change along the way, so the better the project has been “scoped” at the beginning, the better the consortium will be able to manage change. When documenting a scope of work, you should be as specific as possible in order to avoid scope creep, a situation in which the project ends up requiring more work, time or resources because of poor planning or miscommunication.

Effective scope management requires good communication to ensure that every member of the consortium understands the scope of the work and agrees upon exactly how the consortium’s goals will be met. As part of scope management, the consortium should solicit approvals and sign-offs from the various stakeholders as the work proceeds, ensuring that the finished work, as proposed, meets everyone’s needs.

The SOW should include:

- Project justification – the need to be addressed
- Project objectives – SMART objectives are more likely to succeed because they are specific (clear to anyone and well defined), measurable (evidence-based), agreed upon, realistic (taking into account available resources) and time-bound
- Project product and deliverables.

## 4.2. Agreeing on ways of working together

Relationships are the foundation of any consortium. Successful consortia are managed by people who recognise the importance and benefit of cultivating healthy working relationships. This is why it is essential to establish parameters and guidelines on how consortium members will work together.

Creating and following consortium standards & norms is an effective way to maintain healthy working relationships. Consortium norms are a set of shared values that act as informal guidelines on how consortium members will behave and interact with one another.

Creating consortium standards requires that you take the time to consider each partner's past experience, work style, cultural values, expectations, and interest. In a collaborative environment, all these factors will surface and impact the ability of the consortium to effectively work together.

A consortium kick off meeting is a good time to engage partners in dialogue about establishing norms, often referred to as "ground rules". Discuss and identify the areas in which norms will be necessary. Suggested areas include communication, knowledge management, resource management, decision-making, conflict resolution, and meetings.

## 4.3. Breaking down work into manageable tasks

Scope definition also involves subdividing the major deliverables into smaller, more manageable components in order to:

- Improve the accuracy of cost, time, and resource estimates for the project
- Define a baseline for performance measurement and control
- Facilitate clear responsibility assignments

Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) is a tool project managers use to break projects down into manageable packages. Creating a WBS helps you be both comprehensive and specific when managing a project. Thinking in detail is critical when planning a project, but you also need to consider the big picture. If you fail to identify a major part of your project's work, you won't have the chance to detail it. A WBS is key.

To get started, determine the major deliverables or products to be produced to achieve the project's objectives. Then divided each of these major deliverables into its component deliverables in the same way. You can continue to subdivide all the components in the same manner until you reach a point at which you think the components you defined are sufficiently detailed for planning and management purposes.

## 4.4. Building a solid schedule

The next step is to transfer your WBS output into a project schedule, typically a Gantt chart. Expand the work packages with the activities and tasks needed to complete them. Once you have all the activities defined, the next step is to sequence the activities taking into account dependency relationships. Are there activities which have to come before others? Are there activities which can be happening at the same time? This will help you manage busy or quiet times.

Then identify the resources and their availability to your project. Remember that not all resources will be 100% available to your project as some will be used for other projects. In this step, you will also assign resources to each of the tasks.

With resources assigned, the next step is to estimate each task's duration. The activity's duration is the number of working periods required to complete the task. This can be defined in days, weeks, and even months. Selecting the correct duration type impacts the resource availability and the forecasted task end date.

Finally, analyse the project schedule and examine the sequences, durations, resources and inevitable scheduling constraints to validate the resource allocations are correct.

Once you have completed the schedule development, you will be ready to assign to each partner tasks and responsibilities.

### 4.5. Roles and names become tasks and responsibilities; written consent

Now it is time for all partners to confirm that they will commit to working collaboratively to achieve the project's outcomes. Roles and names become tasks and responsibilities and should be put in writing in a joint working agreement. Even if you have a pre-existing relationship and trust on which to build, a written agreement can help you avoid misunderstandings.

Securing organisational commitment to the collaboration should also lessen the impact of staff moving on and ensure that your own organisation supports this way of working with resources and understands the investment needed to make collaboration work.

### 4.6. Signing of agreements/contracts

It is highly recommended (if not mandatory) that partners sign between them a Consortium Agreement aimed to establish in detail the rules of the internal management of their consortium.

When you apply for EU funding it is not necessary to have a Consortium Agreement already signed between all partners. Generally, you will only have to conclude the agreement before signing the Grant Agreement with the European Commission (on behalf of the EU).

The Grant Agreement establishes the main rights and obligations of partners towards the European Commission and is, generally, based on models prepared to be applied in all projects. This agreement does not have, therefore, detailed provisions on the specific project and consortium.

Several Consortium Agreement model versions have been designed serving as a basis for negotiations. As these models respond to different areas, they may vary in content and in particular with regard to the provisions relating to intellectual property rights. All parties should fully read and understand the model that they are going to use, confirm that it serves their interests, and adapt it to specific needs if required.

A Consortium Agreement refers to the internal organisation of the consortium. Depending on the area or sector of each project and of the levels technical complexity that are involved, the Consortium Agreement might contain the following:

- Provisions on the governance structure of the consortium;
- Technical provisions (e.g. the tasks of each party and the project schedule);
- Managerial provisions (e.g. coordination and management);
- Financial provisions (e.g. the distribution of the Community financial contribution, the financial plan, etc.);
- Provisions regarding IPR and related issues such as dissemination, use and accessibility of the results, confidentiality provisions, as well as arrangements on the settlement of disputes and liability and confidentiality.

### 4.7. Choosing a name for the consortium

Now that your consortium exists, it needs a strong name. It is your identity, a powerful statement about who you are and who you serve. It is front and centre on your communications, your social media channels, your fundraising events, and your daily conversations. It evokes values/feelings, stirs responsibility, makes a connection, and communicates personality. It should also fit in more than one language.

Be careful with the use of abbreviations and acronyms that might dilute your identity.

Choosing a name takes time, creativity balanced with analysis and consensus building. Take care to get the name right. It will be with you a long while.

## 5. Operational phase

This is the phase were your consortium comes into practice; internally working out and implementing the planned strategy and externally being legitimated to speak with one voice on behalf of the partners.

### 5.1. Starting the implementation process

The implementation of a strategy is a complex mission. It is the phase where visions and plans become reality. It requires the coordination of a wide range of activities, the support and overseeing of a partnership, the management of resources, diverse institutional arrangements, and different time frames.

It is important to take into account that independently of the nature of the project, implementation takes time, usually more than it is planned, and that many external constraints can appear (e.g. change in staffing arrangements), which should be considered when initiating the implementation step.

The basic requirement for starting the implementation process is to have the work plan ready and understood by all the partners involved. Another requirement is that the financial, material and human resources are fully available for the implementation, so the consortium has the budget to initiate the activities and cover their own expenses.

## 5.2. Importance of communication

Communicating is often an underestimated success factor; internal communication among consortium partners as well as external communication towards stakeholders. It is important to give this ample attention by not only installing smooth communication lines but also by communicating regularly. Communication is also important in the framework of the dissemination of the results.

Using the information you have gathered in the previous steps, think of all the people who may be affected by or have an effect on your effort and characterize the way you want to communicate to them and report on project progress and interim results:

- **Who** are the key stakeholders involved?
- **What** details must be communicated to each group? Depending on stakeholders' level of involvement, they may require different kinds of details and interactivity.
- **When** must the consortium communicate to each group of stakeholders? Some stakeholders require daily attention, while others may only need passive communication every few months.
- **Where** will stakeholders receive their communication? Although it may seem easy to push information through a single channel, such as e-mail, stakeholders often require communication in a variety of media.
- **How** will consortium members communicate with stakeholders? Some consortia choose to answer this question with another "who", by focusing on the consortium members tasked with keeping communication flowing. For instance, the consortium coordinator may gain the responsibility of moving key information across all channels. In other cases, the consortium coordinator may retain the oversight of communication through multiple consortium members.

Here are some suggestions for communications plans:

- In some situations, flyers and publicity material are created to capture the main objectives and targets in simple terms. These are then circulated to stakeholders;
- In other cases, there is an ongoing communication programme (radio, newspapers, newsletters, etc.) on the main goal and targets. This is used to keep the plan and its objectives constantly in the minds of stakeholders, maintaining commitment and ensuring clarity on the common goals;
- In many organisations, meetings are held with slides showing the targets and progress against them.

Whatever your strategy is, try to address stakeholders' communication needs through various channels such as:

- Audio/visual: podcasts, video, webinars, video conferencing, teleconferencing
- Face-to-face: project meetings/briefings, presentations to wide audience, targeted presentations to particular groups
- Online: blogs (e.g. Blogger, Wordpress), intranet/internet, email, forums, communities and online groups (e.g. Google groups or LinkedIn groups), social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google+)
- Printed materials: magazines, newsletters, leaflets, memos, letters, display boards

The examples mentioned above do not suggest that you have to make use of all these communication means. It is a matter of strategically choosing the right communication channel for your target. audience; don't be afraid to use well-chosen complementary channels at the same time. What do you want to communicate, to whom, when and which goals are you aiming at? Evaluation of communication actions may be useful to check whether goals have been reached and to which extent.

### 5.3. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are important parts of strategy implementation serving several purposes. In the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation, it would be difficult to know whether the intended results are being achieved as planned, what corrective action may be needed to ensure delivery of the intended results, and whether initiatives are making positive contributions towards beneficiaries development. Monitoring and evaluation always relates to pre-identified results in the work plan. They are driven by the need to account for the achievement of intended results and provide a fact base to inform corrective decision-making. They are an essential management tool to support the consortium's commitment to accountability for results, resources entrusted to it, and organisational learning.

Monitoring, as well as evaluation, provides opportunities at regular predetermined points to validate the logic of strategy implementation and to make adjustments as needed. Good planning and design alone do not ensure results. Progress towards achieving results needs to be monitored. Equally, no amount of good monitoring alone will correct poor strategy and results. Information from monitoring should be used to encourage improvements or reinforce plans.

**Monitoring** aims to identify progress towards results, precipitate decisions that would increase the likelihood of achieving results, enhance accountability and learning. All monitoring efforts should, at a minimum, address the following:

- **Progress towards outcomes** – This entails periodically analysing the extent to which intended outcomes have actually been achieved or are being achieved.
- **Factors contributing to or impeding achievement of the outcomes** – This necessitates monitoring the national context and the economic, sociological, political and other developments simultaneously taking place and is closely linked to risk management.
- **Individual partner contributions to the outcomes through outputs** – These outputs may be generated by projects, policy advice, advocacy and other activities. Their monitoring and evaluation entails analysing whether or not outputs are in the process of being delivered as planned and whether or not the outputs are contributing to the outcome.
- **Partnership strategy** – This requires the review of current partnership strategies and their functioning as well as formation of new partnership as needed. This helps to ensure that partners who are concerned with an outcome have a common appreciation of problems and needs, and that they share a synchronised strategy.
- **Lessons being learned and creation of knowledge products for wider sharing.**

Partners may add additional elements where needed for management or analysis, while keeping a realistic scope in view of available capacities.

Monitoring is a matter of keeping the finger on the pulse. A sound basis of trust, engagement, transparency and clarity, keeping in touch with the bigger framework and the objectives, can confine strict and formal monitoring. Regular meetings and open dialogue contribute considerably. Visualization or mapping of obtained results may be helpful in motivating partners too. However it may remain a good idea to reserve some formal monitoring instruments in case of staggering of (some of the) commitments.

Like monitoring, **evaluation** is an integral part of project management and a critical management tool. Evaluation complements monitoring by providing an (independent and) in-depth assessment of what worked and what did not work, and why this was the case. After implementing and monitoring an initiative for some time, it is an important management discipline to take stock of the situation through (internal or external) evaluation in order to check whether goals are being reached.

To ensure effective and quality monitoring and evaluation, it is critical to set aside adequate financial and human resources at the planning stage. The required financial and human resources for monitoring and evaluation should be considered within the overall costs of delivering the agreed results and not as additional costs.

Here are some key issues to be considered in costing an evaluation:

- Evaluators and external advisers, and expenses related to their duties;
- Requirements for consultation with stakeholders
- Data collection and analysis tools and methods
- Communication costs
- Publication and dissemination of evaluation reports and other products, including translation costs, if needed.

A distinction is to be made in internal and external evaluation (e.g. financial evaluation).

### 5.4. Involving stakeholders in evaluation

Stakeholders play an important role in carrying out a quality evaluation. The evaluation process should involve key stakeholders, as well as beneficiaries of the effort and “informants” who may not necessarily have a direct stake in the subject of an evaluation. Such broad-based involvement of stakeholders will enhance not only ownership of and mutual accountability for results, but also the credibility and transparency of the evaluation exercise.

All parties concerned should be consulted and take part in decision-making at every critical step of the process. Stakeholders of the evaluation should be consulted and engaged, when appropriate, in developing an evaluation plan, drafting the evaluation terms of reference (scope, requirements and expectations), appraising the selection of evaluators, providing the evaluators with information and guidance, reviewing the evaluation draft, preparing and implementing the management response, and disseminating and internalising knowledge generated from the evaluation.

Evaluation should focus on both the project and outcomes.

**Project evaluation:**

- Focuses on inputs, activities and outputs (if and how project outputs were delivered within a sector or geographic area and if direct results occurred and can be attributed to the project);
- Scope is specific to project objectives, inputs, outputs and activities;
- Purpose is project based to improve implementation, to re-direct future projects in the same area, or to allow for upscaling of project.

**Outcomes evaluation:**

- Focuses on outcomes (whether, why and how the outcomes have been achieved), and the contribution of partners to change in a given situation;
- Scope is broad, encompassing outcomes and the extent to which the project, partners' initiatives and synergies among partners contributed to its achievement;
- Purpose is to enhance implementation effectiveness, to assist decision-making, to assist policy making, to systematise innovative approaches to sustainable project development

To ensure the relevance and effective use of evaluation information, evaluations should be made available in a timely manner so that decision makers can make decisions informed by evaluative evidence.

**Evaluation criteria** help focus evaluation objectives by defining the standards against which the project will be assessed.

The following criteria are generally applied:

- **Relevance** – This concerns the extent to which the objectives of a project and its intended outputs or outcomes are consistent with the priorities or policies of major stakeholders and the needs of intended beneficiaries. Relevance concerns the congruency between the perception of what is needed as envisioned by the project planners and the reality of what is needed from the perspective of intended beneficiaries;
- **Appropriateness** – This concerns the cultural acceptance as well as feasibility of the activities or method of delivery of the project. While relevance examines the importance of the project relative to the needs and priorities of intended beneficiaries, appropriateness examines whether the project as it is operationalized is acceptable and is feasible within the local context.
- **Effectiveness** – This is a measure of the extent to which the project's intended results (outputs or outcomes) have been achieved or the extent to which progress toward outputs or outcomes has been achieved;
- **Efficiency** – this criterium measures how economically resources or inputs (such as funds, expertise and time) are converted to results. A project is efficient when it uses resources appropriately and economically to produce the desired outputs;
- **Sustainability** – This measures the extent to which benefits of the project continue after the project has come to an end. Assessing sustainability involves evaluating the extent to which relevant social, economic, political, institutional and other

conditions are present and, based on that assessment, making projections about the capacity to maintain, manage and ensure the project's results in the future;

- **Impact** – Impact measures changes that are brought about by the project, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

In general, applying these criteria in combination will help to ensure that the evaluation covers the most critical areas of the project.

## 5.5. Using information from monitoring and evaluation

The benefits of using information from monitoring and evaluation are multiple. When carried out and used correctly they strengthen the basis for managing results, foster learning and knowledge generation in the consortium as well as in the broader stakeholder community, offering the basis for the public accountability of the consortium.

This process implies first to interpret findings in order to figure out what the evaluation findings derived from facts, statements, opinions, and documents mean – making sense of the evidence gathered in an evaluation and its practical applications towards project effectiveness.

Then evidence-based conclusions can be drawn and recommendations formulated. Developing recommendations involves weighing effective alternatives, policy, funding priorities and so forth within a broader context. It requires in-depth contextual knowledge, particularly about the organisational context within which the project decisions are made and the political, social and economic context in which the project operates. Each recommendation should clearly identify its target group and stipulate the recommended action and rationale.

Lessons learned from an evaluation should also be collected and documented. They comprise the new knowledge gained from the particular circumstance (project, context outcomes and even evaluation methods) that is applicable to and useful to improve project processes and prevent the repeated occurrence of similar mistakes. This will ultimately lead to more successful projects and the consequent financial advantage for relatively little effort.

## 5.6. Knowledge sharing and dissemination

Dissemination is related to making the results/products of your project visible to others, especially your beneficiaries, key stakeholders and other target groups that can implement its use. As a consortium you have, as a core objective, the need to disseminate the outcomes of your project to a particular community or communities. This will only be achievable and successful if, from the outset, every member of your consortium has a shared vision and common understanding of exactly what it is you want to disseminate and why.

It is helpful to think about dissemination in five different ways:

- **Dissemination for awareness** - It can be assumed that, at the very least, you wish people to be aware of the work of your project. This may be useful for those target audiences that do not require a detailed knowledge of your work but it is helpful for them to be aware of your activities and outcomes. Creating such an awareness of your project's work will help the "word of mouth" type dissemination and help you build an identify and profile within your community;
- **Dissemination for understanding** – There will be a number of groups/audiences that you will need to target directly with your dissemination. This will be because you believe that they can benefit from what your project has to offer. It will be important,

therefore, that these groups/audiences have a deeper understanding of your project's work;

- **Dissemination for support and favourability** – These groups/audiences will be those people that are directly affected by the project and whose positive opinion and support is essential to make it successful. They need to see the benefits they can get from it;
- **Dissemination for involvement** – These groups/audiences are key stakeholders who need to be convinced that the cause you defend is worth their time and attention;
- **Dissemination for commitment and action** – "Action" refers to a change of practice resulting from the adoption of products, material or approaches offered by your project. These groups/audiences will be those people that are in a position to "influence" and "bring about change" within their organisations. These are the groups/audiences that will need to be equipped with the right skills, knowledge and understanding of your work in order to achieve real change.

A project that undertakes all these levels of dissemination will most likely pass through each of the stages in turn. As firstly a project requires it potential audience to be aware of its aims and objectives, they will then become interested enough to wish a more detailed understanding. Involvement in both of these two stages will provide the basis for dissemination for support, involvement and action.

The DiVa consortium has identified some key factors that should be considered for achieving success in dissemination your project[7]:

- Creating a **consortium** with realistic capabilities to exploit the project results that can easily reach the target audience; a good written plan should encompass a well-planned strategy, clear vision of purpose, goals in numbers, indicators, sharing responsibilities and assuring all partners' participation. The **tools and channels** selected should take into consideration the target groups, their characteristics; a **mailing list** for the project must be created and a **template** for all partners to follow: e.g. dates, deadlines, responsible person.
- The **communication** type must be appropriate to the target groups. A glossary also helps to clarify internal and external communication.
- The **promotional material** should have a clear conception and consistency. Is highly desirable a **professional design** and marketing approach. The project branding should be specialised, including cultural dimension and quality indicators. This implies a very **clear definition of the target groups**. It is indispensable to know how to reach and provide material understandable and wanted by the target groups. In fact, successful dissemination should start from the needs of the target groups. First, knowing the needs and then develop a strategy accordingly!
- **Target groups involvement**. Whatever you do it should be done with the target groups in mind. Each dissemination material should be developed depending on the target group. For achieving this, project members should know very well their target group. The best strategy would be to involve the target groups' representatives in developing dissemination materials. They should be able to give hints about what would best catch the attention of the people for whom the respective project is developed;

[7] DiVa, *Handbook for Dissemination, Exploitation and Sustainability of Educational Projects*, 2011, p.7-9.

- Successful dissemination also frequently includes **massive media diffusion** – let the people know that your project is out there!
- And do not forget that actions for dissemination have to create a **close relationship with the local context** and to keep it strong by the involvement of decision makers, social organisations and political institutions.
- Dissemination should start as soon as possible, although the starting point can be different and depending on the nature and the desired results of the projects.
- To reach a wider audience is essential to **build up a community** around a topic. Try to make links to other projects, networks, communities. This can be called an *expertise niche*: communicate your project to similar organisations with similar specialities. Moreover, the dissemination activity can reach good results if the partners are able to give a European value to the project, using their networks and contacts that could make the "voice of the project" grow up.
- Finally, be **original and creative**, rather than sticking only to leaflets and posters. Doing something unique will not only make your project stand out but will also get the attention of people.

Think about disseminating in a variety of ways to suit the needs of your target audiences:

- Networking;
- Social media and general media;
- Newsletters and flyers;
- Face to face;
- Presentations at meetings and conferences;
- Roadshows;
- Press conferences and paper media;
- Promotional material and products;
- Presentations at exhibitions, fairs, etc.;
- Project website;
- European databases;
- Dedicated workshop/conference.

### 5.7. Cooperation with other consortia

Last but not least: think of creating ties with other consortia in the view of sharing good practices; learning from each other; develop complementary activities or synergies. Consortia directories list necessary coordinates and main activities. Also useful is to keep track of international forum concerning internship mobility; opportunities for meeting other consortia, share visions and to keep in touch with a broader context and scope. In the framework of all this, do not forget to consider that after all, consortia are meant to play an important role in regional cooperation and mutual understanding. Gathering forces and developing a substantial network are crucial in playing that role.

## 5.8.More information

Within the Erasmus Programme, a large number of consortia have been established to manage student mobility. Many of them have proven to be very successful[8].

In order to illustrate and promote the work of the European consortia for Erasmus placements, a directory was prepared by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) as a follow-up to the first “European Conference of Placement Consortia within the Erasmus Programme” in 2010.

A more recent Directory of Erasmus Consortia has been compiled by the Agência Nacional para a Gestão od Programa Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida (LLP PT NA).

The directory is intended to help placement consortia build networks amongst themselves and effectively create ties with other European (placement) networks. It also gives companies, NGOs and other institutions and enterprises, the opportunity to get in touch with a consortium to advertise their work placements/traineeships to a specific target group.

**Useful links:**

Directory of Erasmus Consortia
compiled by the Agência Nacional para a Gestão od Programa Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida (LLP PT NA) (2013).
http://www.proalv.pt/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/ECD2013.pdf

DiVa, *Handbook for Dissemination, Exploitation and Sustainability of Educational Projects*, 2011:
http://www.aidlearn.com/eng//uploads//DiVa%20Handbook%20_%20FINAL.pdf

Study on a comprehensive overview on traineeship arrangements in Member States Final Synthesis Report (2012):
http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=6717&visible=1

National Agencies for Erasmus+:
http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/national-agencies_en.htm

[8] In the academic year 2011-2012, a total of 89 Erasmus placement consortia existed and organised 7348 placements in 12 countries, representing 14% of all placements organised within the Erasmus Programme.

**Reconfirm Flanders-BE**
www.reconfirm.eu/en

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