Best Practices of Programme Management
Best Practices of Programme Management
Best Practices for 2014-2020 Programme Implementation

During a two-day seminar organised by INTERACT in December 2013, 28 representatives of 2007-2013 ETC CBC and transnational programmes, ENPI CBC and IPA CBC programmes and one Regional Operational Programme met in Riga, Latvia, to discuss best practices of programme management. The aim was to identify those best practices from the 2007-2013 programme implementation which could and should be transferred to the 2014-2020 programmes’ implementation.

The Best Practices identified during the meeting have now been compiled into this brochure. Sorted in chronological order of programme and project implementation, the various best practices are listed and shortly described in this publication. And where the Best Practice is something very special to a concrete programme, the name of the programme is mentioned so that the interested reader can get into contact and find out more details (contact details at the end of this publication).

This publication and the described Best Practices should serve as a source for inspiration for those involved in setting up and shaping 2014-2020 programme implementation structures and processes, but also later on during the implementation of the programmes.

The advantage of this paper is that it comes from the real practitioners! We hence hope that it is of very practical value for anyone involved in programme management. And in the best case, it also contributes to further exchange and potentially even harmonization between programme management (structures) and processes in different programmes.

The INTERACT programme has produced this publication in March 2014. INTERACT is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). It supports territorial cooperation between Regions of the EU. It promotes cooperation as a tool for growth and change through policy development and strategic orientation, within territorial cooperation and beyond. INTERACT is the hub for exchanging information and best practices among cooperation programmes. INTERACT also works to make project results more visible. Its services, seminars and advice help streamline the work of cooperation programmes, allowing them to devote more time and energy to their projects.
# Table of contents

1. Project development ................................................................. 4
2. Assessment and funding decisions ............................................. 7
3. Project implementation, support and monitoring ...................... 11
4. Information, communication and promotion of results .............. 14
5. Programme (and Project) closure ............................................. 15
6. Contact details ........................................................................ 17
1. Project development

To get it right from the very beginning, the Project Development is the first very essential phase of the project life-cycle. By paying attention to the key issues in the support to the project owners turning their ideas into project applications, the foundation is laid for the success or failure of a project (application). This covering not only technical project management aspects but due to the ‘result orientation’ in 2014-2020 also and especially content and qualitative aspects of the project application.

a. Ensure to have the relevant human resources in the JS

The precondition for qualitative project development support by the JS is to have the relevant human resources in the secretariat. There are three aspects to best describe the best-practice (competence) profile of JS staff dealing with project development: the relevant skills and ability to use the relevant methods, the right attitude and the necessary knowledge. And if they don’t have these skills yet, the management must be open to find and offer learning and skill development opportunities to its staff. In view of the quality focus and 2014-2020 result orientation learning should rather focus on quality instead of technical project management aspects.

- Skills (to know HOW): facilitation of discussions; communication skills including languages (English plus programme area languages); project management skills; cooperation and intercultural skills; creativity; analytical skills; IT skills.
- Attitude (to know WHY): user friendly approach; open minded; applicant friendly; creative; team member; diplomatic; patient; stress resistant; innovative; result oriented.
- Knowledge (to know WHAT): the programme itself, but also the overall EU (regulatory) framework; thematic knowledge (about the programme’s priorities); territorial knowledge (about the programme area and relevant regional and/or macro-regional strategies); languages spoken in the programme area; knowledge about other programmes with either geographical or thematic links to one’s own programme.

b. Involve JS staff more actively and hands-on in project generation

The change from the 2007-2013 period to the 2014-2020 period with its thematic concentration and result orientation needs to be reflected not only in the background of the human resources (education and work experience), but also how and to which extent JS staff is involved in project generation.

c. Combine top-down and bottom-up approach in project generation

Through a combination of different project generation activities conducted by the JS (general/targeted/thematic/call specific project idea fair; partner search forum e.g. supported by the relevant regional stakeholders; partner search online-tool; online project idea database; individual project consultations), top-down and bottom-up approaches can be combined and potential project partnerships be supported in getting the right partners on board as well as to define the right scope and content of the project. This and especially the top-down approach naturally demand beforehand a ‘gap analysis’ on the programme level, also taking into account the remaining financial resources in the programme’s priorities and the fulfilment of programme indicators. At the same time, political influence on project generation in the top-down approach should be avoided. [HU/RO and LV/LT for partner search forum; FR/UK/BE/NL for ‘bottom-up’ project idea fair; EE/LV and FR/UK/BE/NL for ‘bottom-up’ online project idea database].

---

1. A small survey with the programmes participating in the seminar showed that on a scale from 1-10, in the 2007-2013 period the JTS involvement in project generation is seen on a level of ‘3,36’ whereas the need for 2014-2020 with its thematic concentration and result orientation is seen at ‘6,26’.
1. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

d. Focus your project development support on quality and results

With the 2014-2020 thematic concentration and result orientation in mind, avoid focusing your project development support on purely technical issues, but rather ensure a strong focus on content and quality. This could result in the need to focus your guidance to project developers on the thematic level with implications to the human resource set-up of the JS. Naturally, this result orientation should also be taken into account when supporting the partnership finding/search/set-up. In the application (form), ask the projects to clearly define and describe which results they want to achieve.

e. Attract new beneficiaries

Cooperation should not become a stable cooperation between constantly the same actors, but should always also strive to include so far not involved actors. Hence it is important to also attract new beneficiaries. This could be done by a strong involvement of the relevant stakeholders from your programme area serving as a facilitator in stimulating less active actors. At the same time, it should be avoided that mainly/only consultants get involved in the project development. As the so far unknown beneficiaries might be “hiding” in the regions, especially the national contact points can play an essential role here. [FR/UK/BE/NL regarding role of Contact Points and a study to identify key actors for each of the different themes chosen and to launch the project development for the new programme]

f. Let (National) Contact Points work with the applicants

National Contact Points can be used to facilitate especially the partnership development by national information events and activities providing programme specific information in local languages. Contact Points could even be involved in the commenting of draft applications. By such active involvement, also the Contact Points can support the projects to become more result oriented by ensuring a better quality of the application with a clear focus on results. One tool for this could be to establish a thematic database in which the Contact Points collect and enter relevant project ideas from their area. Another ‘advantage’ of the contact points is that they could provide relevant information in the respective national language, something which often and for good reasons can and is not done by the JS (especially in programmes with more than two participating countries). Naturally, this active involvement of the contact points requires a clear division of tasks between JS and contact points – and clear guidance from the JS to the contact points on relevant issues as e.g. what kind of investments are allowed, state aid or alike. Last but not least, Contact Points need to be fully on-board concerning the ‘result orientation’ focus and discussion, which in turn requires closer links and exchange between JS and Contact Points. [FR/UK/BE/NL]

g. Use a “pre-assessment” to ensure a better quality

Asking project developers to submit a ‘project concept note’ or a (simplified) draft project application/description to the JS for a pre-assessment can be used to support the project partnership to better define the project’s scope, to better focus and ensure a concentration on results. Besides hereby improving the quality of the application, also the administrative burden can be lowered as on the one hand partnerships don’t spend time in drafting applications with weak potential for approval and which might fail in the worse case already in the technical admissibility check. At the same time it prevents the JS later on spending significant human and time resources in the assessment of such (hopeless) applications. [EE/LV] In some cases, project developers on their own contact the programme’s contact points for an informal feedback. [FR/UK/BE/NL]

2. 'Contact points’ stands here for the vast variety of terms used for structures in the participating countries/regions which closely cooperate with the JS, but are not necessarily part of the latter. They could be called (national) contact points, territorial facilitators, information points etc.
h. Streamline processes and simplify procedures

Avoid complicated processes; diminish the paperwork and lower the administrative burden to apply for co-financing to the absolute minimum; avoid political influence in the project development.

i. Coordinate your project development activities with other programmes and funds

A good knowledge about and exchange with other programmes can help to avoid developing applications for your programme which should rather be financed by another funding source. Meaning, hereby potential beneficiaries have a better chance to be directed to other, more appropriate funding sources. Such knowledge about and exchange with other programmes can be ensured i.a. by close working contacts between JS. Such close exchange and cooperation can also create synergies for the respective programmes - Why not to offer joint project development events for programmes or at least include such information in project development events in case of overlapping geographies?

j. Distribute best practices of project development

To enable future project developers to learn from experiences, from success and also failures of other project developers, best practices of project development (e.g. from the perspective of the project developers themselves) could be collected and made available, e.g. on the programme’s website. Naturally, physical meetings and exchanges with more experienced project actors are another option.
2. Assessment and funding decisions

The assessment and funding decision process involves both the Joint Secretariat and the Monitoring respectively Steering Committee. The Joint Secretariat with its assessment of the technical maturity and the quality of the project application provides the responsible committee with the basis for its decision on the strategic relevance of each application and on the projects to be co-financed. Hence there are aspects in this interaction between Joint Secretariat and Monitoring/Steering Committee to be taken into account.

2.1 TECHNICAL ADMISSIBILITY CHECK

a. Allow submission of application form only electronically and/or limit papers to be submitted to absolute minimum

The e-Cohesion initiative and INTERACT supporting ETC Programmes in fulfilling the requirements of e-Cohesion should be mentioned'. A question related to the electronic submission of the project application is the possibility of using an e-signature in the Member State(s) involved. [EE/LV for e-Application]

b. Provide clear guidance to project developers on technical admissibility check issues

This could be done through the (National) Contact Points or similar facilitators, or by a Q&A section on the programme’s website.

c. Have a clear definition of the technical admissibility check criteria and shorten the checklist by deleting the irrelevant criteria [HU/RO, HU/SRB]

d. Separate the checklists for the admissibility and the eligibility

e. Apply a 4-eye principle when doing the technical admissibility check [FR/UK/BE/NL, AT/HU, HU/SRB]

f. Include a ‘loose quality check’ in the technical admissibility check

The advantage of such ‘loose quality check’ already during the technical admissibility check is that obvious qualitative shortcomings can be identified and communicated immediately to the Lead Applicant. Such feedback helps the applicant to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the project and allows improving the application before the final submission. Naturally, a fair and equal treatment of all applicants/applications has to be ensured. [EE/LV]

g. Avoid a rejection only for “technical” mistakes

In view of the 2014-2020 result orientation and the aim to put more emphasis on the quality of projects than on technicalities, it should be avoided that qualitatively good projects are rejected only for technical reasons since hereby, good project ideas might get lost (as no quality assessment will be done). If not avoidable before submission (e.g. by sharing frequently made errors) and in line with the above mentioned ‘loose quality check’, projects with technical shortcomings should also undergo such ‘loose quality check’. The Lead Applicant is then given the opportunity to improve the technical shortcomings and at the same time, the Lead Applicant could also be given the opportunity to improve the qualitative shortcomings. This again would speed up the process as qualitative shortcomings would not be noticed only later on in the quality assessment resulting in an approval under conditions, but could be taken care of already at this point. [EE/LV]

1. For more information please visit http://www.interact-eu.net/e_cohesion/e_cohesion/512/12238
2. ASSESSMENT AND FUNDING DECISIONS

2.2 QUALITY ASSESSMENT

a. Anticipate quality assessment in a ‘loose quality check’ already during the technical admissibility check [EE/LV] (cf. above point 2.1.f and g)

b. Put emphasis on the quality, but also check that the project is properly planned and able to manage its implementation

c. Develop and use a standardized scoring for the quality assessment

A fair and equal quality assessment of all applications conducted by different JS staff members can be ensured if after the individual project assessments all involved JS staff members convene for a meeting to discuss a standardized scoring for the whole package of applications, (based on the outcome of the individual assessments). This way, individual differences of the assessors, in their approaches and individual judgements, can be levelled out. [FR/EN/NL/BE for an ‘internal consolidation group’]


d. Provide training to JS staff on the quality assessment

It is of utmost importance that all JS staff members participating in the quality assessment have the same understanding of what is meant with ‘quality’ and how the different selection criteria are to be understood and assessed.

e. Involve external experts where necessary content knowledge goes beyond JS resources and capacity

For this purpose, it is advisable to create from the beginning of the programme a pool of relevant external experts in the thematic fields of the programme’s priorities. Another option would be that one Monitoring Committee member per participating Member State agrees to serve as the link between the JS and the line ministries in case the latter could provide the necessary thematic expertise. This could be a way to save financial resources in case otherwise only externally hired experts would be available. However, the use of external experts should also not be overstretched as the primary assessment duty lies with the JS and the JS should be staffed accordingly.

f. Use the Contact Points to provide you with the necessary knowledge about relevant regional policies, the partnerships etc. [AT/HU]

g. Apply a four-eye principle when conducting the quality assessment [EE/LV]
2. ASSESSMENT AND FUNDING DECISIONS

2.3 ASSESSMENT OF STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

a. Leave the assessment of the strategic relevance of the project (application) to the Monitoring respectively Steering Committee

If to be done by the national delegations separately before the committee meeting is disputable as on the one hand it might speed up the selection of operations in the meeting. But on the other hand, this might counteract the idea behind ETC as it would strongly emphasize the national viewpoint. [IT/CH]

b. Member States should inform the JS about the outcome of their national pre-assessments of the applications

As Member States normally pre-assess the applications nationally before the committee meeting where the operations will be selected for funding, it would speed up the decision process if Member States would inform the JS beforehand about the outcome of their pre-assessment. On the basis of the information received from all national delegations, the JS can sort all applications into three categories: all MS agree to approve; all MS agree to reject; need for further discussion. This way, the real selection process can be made more effective as it is from the beginning clear which applications need further discussion and which ones could be approved or rejected without further discussion. This would then give the committee more time to discuss the applications under question. However, pre-assessment on the national level beforehand should not mean that this would in any case be the final standpoint of the national delegations already anticipating the final joint committee decision.

c. Include the assessment of the strategic relevance by the Monitoring/Steering Committee into the evaluation grid/report/overview provided by the JS to the committee

This would naturally require that the national delegations beforehand inform the JS about the outcome of their individual assessments. [FR/UK/BE/NL]

d. Use external experts to assess the strategic relevance

Another option would be that it is not the Monitoring or Steering Committee, hence Member States, which assess the strategic relevance, but that external experts in the relevant thematic field are the ones to assess the compliance of the project application with the relevant national documents.

e. Use the assessment of strategic relevance to discuss the alignment of funding

If discussed at the Monitoring respectively Steering Committee itself, the alignment of funding as part of e.g. macro-regional strategies is a relevant aspect when discussing the strategic relevance of the project applications. Under the ‘alignment of funding’ the committee would need to consider not only the single application and its strategic relevance for the programme. But part of the assessment of the strategic relevance would also be to discuss and decide if the programme funding should be used exactly for this project or if funding should not rather be sought from or in combination with another, better suitable funding source.
2. ASSESSMENT AND FUNDING DECISIONS

2.4 SELECTION OF OPERATIONS

a. Member States should inform the JS about the outcome of their national pre-assessments of the applications

As Member States normally pre-assess the applications nationally before the committee meeting where the operations will be selected for funding, it would speed up the decision process if Member States would inform the JS beforehand about the outcome of their pre-assessment. On the basis of the information received from all national delegations, the JS can sort all applications into three categories: all MS agree to approve; all MS agree to reject; need for further discussion. This way, the real selection process can be made more effective as it is from the beginning clear which applications need further discussion and which ones could be approved or rejected without further discussion. This would then give the committee more time to discuss the applications under question. However, pre-assessment on the national level beforehand should not mean that this would in any case be the final standpoint of the national delegations already anticipating the final joint committee decision. [FR/UK/BE/NL, HU/SRB]

b. Arrange (informal) pre-meetings for decision makers

The idea is that in such (informal) pre-meeting the decision makers before the real committee meeting would categorize the applications on the table (“traffic light system”) to structure and speed up the committee meeting and selection of operations as such. “Green” ones can be approved at the meeting without discussion, “red” ones rejected without discussion and “orange” ones need to be further discussed. Such (informal) pre-meeting could also be used to clarify open questions and/or to solve technical questions regarding the applications. [FR/UK/BE/NL, DE/PL, AT/HU]

c. Funding decisions should be taken only by consensus

2.5 COMMUNICATION OF DECISION AND FOLLOW-UP OF CONDITIONS SET BY MC/SC

a. In case of an approval under conditions, the JS should informally pre-inform the Lead Applicant

... and work together with the Lead Applicant on the fulfilment of conditions set by the Monitoring/Steering Committee. Hereby, the contracting procedure can be speeded up as the Lead Beneficiary can start working on the conditions already before it gets the official notification about the funding decision once the minutes from the Monitoring/Steering Committee meeting have been formally approved. This way, unnecessary delays in the project start and later on problems with the decommitment risk can be avoided. [HU/SRB]

b. Involve the FLC in the condition fulfilment and contracting procedure in case of conditions set related to eligibility issues [HU/SK]

c. Provide the Lead Beneficiary with consultancy about the rules to be applied (Subsidy Contract) [HU/SRB]
3. Project implementation, support and monitoring

Once an application has been approved, the Joint Secretariat will support and monitor the project owners in the implementation of their project. As the success of the Programme very much depends on the success of its projects, the progress of each project towards its aims and objectives is of equal interest for both project and programme. A good relation and supportive communication between the Joint Secretariat’s contact person and the project’s Lead Partner are therefore of high importance.

a. Focus your support to (and monitoring of) projects on their results and quality

Some relevant aspects in this regard are: Don’t get lost in details; ask the projects in the progress report to describe the progress towards achieving objectives and results rather in an analytical than descriptive way (e.g. “How do you evaluate your progress?”); and pay extra-attention to this self-evaluation by the projects; involve external experts where the necessary thematic knowledge is not available in the JS.

b. Define and promote what is understood by your programme as ‘quality’

With the 2014-2020 thematic concentration and result orientation in mind, to ensure a fair and equal project support and monitoring a joint understanding of all JS staff involved in this process of what is meant with ‘quality’, hence what is expected from the projects beyond the purely practical-administrative project implementation (‘money flow without corrective measures’) is absolutely essential. ‘Quality’ could be described as ‘concreteness of results’ or ‘capacity of reaching targets’.

c. Rather support than control projects

The work of the JS with regard to project implementation and monitoring consists of two components which only in combination ensure success - support and control. In view of the 2014-2020 thematic concentration and result orientation and the aim to focus more on qualitative than technical aspects of project implementation, one can understand ‘support’ as the qualitative and ‘control’ as the technical side. Meaning, the support should aim at helping the projects to achieve its objectives and results. Whereas ‘control’ would focus on practical implementation aspects as reporting, spending rate or alike. [FR/UK/BE/NL for testing this approach in a Thematic Cluster monitoring]

d. Train the JS staff if it does not have the necessary skills to ensure a quality focus of project support and monitoring

In view of the 2014-2020 thematic concentration and result orientation, the JS staff supporting and monitoring project implementation need to have the relevant skills to ensure a quality and result focus. Relevant skills are i.a. thematic knowledge regarding the programme’s priorities, capitalization skills as the ability to broaden issues beyond the project/programme perspective, project management skills; and on a more general note basic knowledge of procurement law and financial rules; flexibility and problem solving oriented (creativity to come up with solutions); team spirit; communication, management and coordination skills.

e. Use external experts where very specific thematic or other knowledge is required and such competence lacking in the JS (e.g. regarding infrastructure investments and/or procurement law). [HU/SRB]
f. Simplify procedures especially with regard to reporting and payments

Besides flat rates, pre-payments could be a good way to ensure cash flow especially for smaller project actors. One model is a 50% pre-payment upon receipt of the partner reports by the FLC bodies [EE/LV] or upon receipt of the progress report, naturally not for the very first and not the very last report. [HU/SRB]

g. Stick to the Lead Beneficiary principle, with a “soft approach” where necessary

As partly mentioned already above, it might be useful to somewhat implement the Lead Beneficiary principle in a more flexible way. Of course, the JS could insist on the Lead Beneficiary principle and communicate only with/through the Lead Beneficiary. However, if it is obvious that relevant information and guidance does not reach the whole partnership, it might be useful to consider other ways to inform and reach all project partners. Besides organising relevant seminars for all project partners, this could already be achieved by sending relevant communication to the Lead Beneficiary always cc: to the whole partnership. E.g. when sending questions about the submitted progress report or when informing the Lead Beneficiary about upcoming payments so that project partners are aware when to expect payments from the Lead Beneficiary to them and can act in case the Lead Beneficiary does not pay in due time. It might also be useful to send certain questions and correspondence in national languages to the project partners.

h. Explain to all project partners the responsibility and duty of the Lead Beneficiary

Sometimes Lead Beneficiaries face problems with their project partners not submitting documents or not reporting in time. The reason for this might lie in the fact that project partners don’t have a clear understanding of the Lead Beneficiary’s responsibilities and why the Lead Beneficiary requires the one or the other information, report etc. By increasing the understanding of ‘why’ the project partner is asked by the Lead Beneficiary for the one or the other, also the willingness and speed of response might increase. This could be done e.g. by a seminar for all project partners of one call about the “Lead Beneficiary responsibility” or by regular (once per year/milestone) or one-time meeting of the JS with project partners from one project, or upon request by a partnership.

i. Open the traditional Lead Beneficiary seminars to all project partners

Project partners sometimes complain that information or guidance provided by the JS to the Lead Beneficiary does not reach them. For this reason, it might be useful, especially at the very beginning of the project implementation, to open the traditional Lead Beneficiary seminars to participation by the whole project partnership. [EE/LV]

j. Organise national/regional seminars with participation of the FLC in local language

Such seminars could be organised either by the JS or the national ministry responsible for the FLC system or in cooperation - and especially used to focus on national FLC issues. Worthwhile to consider is also participation by the Certifying Authority. [HU/SRB]

k. Describe and stick to a clear division of responsibilities between FLC, JS, MA & CA

This can be eased by drafting and providing to all involved actors clear and detailed guidelines on the different tasks focusing on the project support and monitoring process. Generally speaking about project monitoring, the FLC should do the eligibility check, the JS the quality check and the MA and CA should trust and rely on the work done by the JS, not repeating checks by the JS. As JS, MA and CA normally work very closely together, such detailed guidelines might be especially useful for the FLCs and here especially in decentralised FLC systems. [HU/SRB]
3. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION, SUPPORT AND MONITORING

I. Watch out for overlaps between FLC-JS-MA-CA

There are various potential situations in the project progress monitoring when it can come to an overlap between activities by the FLC, JS, MA and CA - if not sorted out from the very beginning. In the assessment of the project’s Progress Report, it has to be avoided that the JS is repeating the work of the FLC even if some kind of ‘double check’ might help to avoid repayments afterwards. Still the FLC should focus on the individual project partner level whereas the JS is focusing on the project level (and not checking eligibility of expenditure). As long as the MA trusts the JS in the progress monitoring delegated to the latter, there should be no overlaps between JS and MA. An overlap might also be between the work of the individual project partner’s FLCs and the FLC of the Lead Beneficiary where it should be avoided that the Lead Beneficiary’s FLC is repeating the check on the individual project partner level. In case of irregularities detected, overlaps can be avoided if from the very beginning (in the Description of the Management and Control System) are clearly described the responsibilities with regard to irregularities. Merging the CA into the MA for the 2014-2020 programming period might also help in this respect. But most important besides a clear division of responsibilities and tasks is that all bodies involved trust each other and in each other’s work. If still overlaps and challenges are detected, human and time resources should rather be used to sort out these overlaps instead of duplicating work.

m. Ensure a regular and trustful communication between the FLCs, JS, MA and CA

Have regular informal meetings and/or anticipative/preventive communication between the FLC, JS, MA and CA to avoid any overlap of monitoring activities and to anticipate possible bottlenecks in the handling of progress reports and payment claims (e.g. by CA not being aware of delayed incoming reports causing a peak of workload and resulting in delayed certification/payment to projects). This could be facilitated by an online monitoring system used by all mentioned authorities and bodies, but also by regular/annual meetings of FLCs, JS, MA and CA (and possibly AA). Such regular exchange and communication might also prevent situations in which the one body suffers from the (s)low quality of the work by another body.

n. Adapt number of reporting periods and deadlines to individual needs of projects

Instead of having fixed reporting periods like January-June/July-December, reporting periods could start individually on the first day of project implementation. Instead of having only one “set” of milestones (e.g. 2 per year), projects could be offered the opportunity to choose between 2 and 4 reporting periods per year (the project can choose the frequency of reporting, every 3 months or every 6 months; all project partners have to follow the same reporting frequency). [EE/LV]

o. Participate in project meetings

(Regular) Participation of the JS (and contact points) in project meetings, and not only project’s Steering Group meetings, provide a good opportunity to follow the development of the project implementation and to have a more quality insight than just from reading the progress reports. Naturally, this opportunity is limited by human, financial and time resources.

p. Offer answers to repeating questions at a FAQ section on the programme’s website
4. INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND PROMOTION OF RESULTS

4. Information, communication and promotion of results

The variety and number of EU funding programmes and co-financed projects is a challenge for getting the attention to individual programmes and project results. However, there are ways how synergies can be created between Programmes to overcome this challenge.

a. Create synergies between programmes by having a joint ETC Programme Office

There are many advantages in having a joint ETC Programme Office: the joint management coordination, efficient use of resources (cost of premises, cleaning etc.), the possibility to coordinate activities (common trainings, courses etc.), the exchange of information and good practices, the “one-stop-agency” for potential beneficiaries, the intercultural effect and a common location (impact) and sense of collective. However, there are also challenges in having such joint office which are a possibly complicated management structure, many exceptions, fragmentation (e.g. one invoice paid by four programmes), different approaches and requirements set by each programme (e.g. reporting times per year) and language (challenge in work with the hosting institution, translation of documents etc.). [LV-LT]

b. Join forces and resources in promoting programme results by a joint activity on the European Cooperation Day

Although or rather because on the EC Day a huge number of ETC Programmes are conducting local activities, there are numerous advantages if neighbouring/overlapping programmes join locally concentrated forces on the EC Day: brainstorming possibilities, common location (easier coordination of the event), shared costs, shared responsibilities, a stronger visibility and synergies - and at the end avoiding competition for attention and participants. [LV-LT]
5. Programme (and project) closure

Closing a programme properly is the last step in the programme life cycle and often competing with the more attractive starting up of the new programme in the following programming period. The below listed best practices will help to ensure a proper programme closure besides getting ready for the next programming period.

a. Coordinate actions between programme authorities and other involved bodies

- First and foremost to decide who is leading and coordinating the closure process (in many cases this is quite naturally seen as one of the MA’s tasks).
- Draft a division of responsibilities between the involved programme authorities and other actors to ensure coordinated actions (to be combined with the programme’s closure schedule). [EE/LV]
- Establish a Closure Task Force/Group consisting of the involved programme bodies (MA/JS, CA, AA) having regular meetings on the set-up and closure process.

b. Time properly your closure activities

Prepare a time schedule with all relevant steps and deadlines for programme closure (e.g. last day of eligibility, submission of closure package etc.). In this context it is important to keep in mind that programme closure does start already before the last day of eligibility of expenditure and is not finalized with the submission of the closure package to the European Commission. [EE/LV]

c. Inform and involve the projects

- Include a notion on responsibilities of the projects with regard to project and programme closure into the Subsidy Contract (e.g. the obligation to keep all documentation available until the respective date). Make it clear to projects that their responsibilities do not end with the project closure.
- Provide trainings to Lead Beneficiaries on project and programme closure.
- Participate in project meetings, meetings of the project’s steering committee or alike to inform the partnership about the closure process and the project’s duties (especially towards the end of a project).
- Prepare closure guidelines/manuals for the projects.
- Ensure that the relevant knowledge reaches also the project partners beyond the Lead Beneficiary, e.g. by making the closure guidelines/manual available via the programme’s website or by inviting project partners to closure trainings.

d. Ensure human and financial resources

- Human resources: Keep in mind that programme closure is not over with the last day of eligibility (=eligibility of technical assistance under the closing programme), nor at the submission of the closure package, but that the closure process continues far into the following programme. In case a programme will be continued in the next programming period, some tasks regarding the old programme normally will be taken over into the new programme (staff), hence have to be taken into account when setting up the new implementation structure. The question of human resources is crucial in cases where there is no continuation for the programme or where the implementation structures (e.g. MA/JTS) fundamentally change.
- Financial resources for the programme closure could come from national funding, from the programme’s own technical assistance or the generated interest.
5. PROGRAMME (AND PROJECT) CLOSURE

e. Ensure commitment of the programme’s Monitoring Committee

- It is the programme’s Monitoring Committee which needs to approve the programme’s Final Report before submission to the European Commission. However, as the deadline for submission is far beyond the last day of eligibility, it is very important to raise the Monitoring Committee/Member States understanding that their tasks regarding the programme closure actually do not cede with the Monitoring Committee stopping to work.

- It is advisable to make the Monitoring Committee members aware of the general principles (e.g. deadlines) and requirements regarding closure and to keep them informed from an early stage on the programme closure process. It might be good to remind them about the consequences if the closure package is not delivered in time to the European Commission.

- To ensure the approval of the Final Report and closure package by the “old” Monitoring Committee could be ensured by combining meetings of the “old” and the “new” Monitoring Committee as in many cases it will consist of the same members. The real challenge is to ensure the interest of the Monitoring Committee if a programme does not continue in the next programming period.

f. Conduct and regularly update a Risk Analysis

To anticipate challenges in the programme closure process, a risk analysis should be compiled and updated along the way to identify potential “gaps” and measures to both avoid and to tackle possible consequences.

g. Don’t forget about the audit trail and potential later financial corrections

Bear in mind that the audit trail and proper documentation does not refer to the costs only, but eventually you also need to evidence for example that the publicity requirements have been followed. In this respect e.g. photos might be very useful.
6. Contact details for more information

For some of the best practices, individual programmes have been mentioned in brackets ( [...] ). This indicates that these programmes have concrete experiences with that best practice and are ready to share it with you. If you are interested to learn more about this best practice, please contact the respective programme directly. Below, you can find the contact details of the different programmes:

- **AT/HU** - Austria-Hungary (ETC CBC) - www.at-hu.net/at-hu/en/index.php
- **DE/PL** - Saxony-Poland (ETC CBC) - www.sn-pl.eu/de/index.html
- **EE/LV** - Estonia-Latvia (ETC CBC) - www.estlat.eu/
- **HU/RO** - Hungary-Romania (ETC CBC) - www.huro-cbc.eu/
- **HU/SK** - Hungary-Slovak Republic (ETC CBC) - www.husk-cbc.eu/
- **HU/SRB** - Hungary-Serbia (IPA CBC) - www.hu-srb-ipa.com
- **IT/CH** - Italy-Switzerland (ETC CBC) - www.interreg-italiasvizzera.it/programme
- **LV/LT** - Latvia-Lithuania (ETC CBC) - www.latlit.eu/

Additionally, contact details of the responsible people for producing this publication can be found below:

Philipp Schwartz - philipp.schwartz@interact-eu.net
Satu Hietanen - satu.hietanen@interact-eu.net
More than 30 professionals with expertise in Territorial Cooperation working together in five offices across Europe

INTERACT Programme Secretariat
Bratislava Self Governing Region
Sabinovská 16 | P.O.Box 106
820 05 Bratislava 25 | Slovakia
t +421 2 48 264 310
interact@interact-eu.net

INTERACT Point Turku
P.O.Box 236 | ELY Centre
Itsenäisyydenaukio 2
20101 Turku | Finland
t +358 10 602 2580
ip.turku@interact-eu.net

INTERACT Point Valencia
C/ Cronista Carreres
46003 Valencia
Spain
t +34 96 315 33 40
ip.valencia@interact-eu.net

INTERACT Point Viborg
Jernbanegade 22
8800 Viborg
Denmark
t +45 87 28 80 52
ip.viborg@interact-eu.net

INTERACT Point Vienna
Kirchberggasse 33-35/9
1070 Vienna
Austria
t +43 1 4000 27 084
ip.vienna@interact-eu.net