



Interreg



SLOVENIA – HUNGARY

European Union | European Regional Development Fund

**IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL FOR
BENEFICIARIES**

PART 2 – PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Hungary
for the programme period 2014-2020

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PART 2: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Implementation Manual for Beneficiaries

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1. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

1.1 Partnership requirements

The participation in the programme is primarily open to Beneficiaries of the individual Investment Priority as specified in this chapter. Lead Partners must be located in the programme area; institutions located outside the programme area, but inside the European Union can only act as Project partners for which a justification must be provided in the Application form¹

The participation of a Lead Partner from outside of the programme area can be justified if the partner is legally appointed and only authorized for a professional task and it is provided that it has legally defined competences or field of functions for certain parts of the eligible area.

The minimum requirement is to have at least **one project partner from Slovenia and one from Hungary** or an EGTC registered in the participating country consisting from members from both Member States. The recommended upper number of Project Partners is 6.

All partners must have legal, financial and operational capacity to participate in the programme.

Types of beneficiaries eligible under each investment priority are listed below:

Types of beneficiaries to be supported under the priority 1

- ✓ Local, regional public and state public administrations/institutions, and their organizations, such as national/natural park administrations, forest authorities, cultural institutions, museums, local action groups, organizations competent in the field of transport, etc.
- ✓ State owned companies
- ✓ NGOs, non-profit organizations (including legal entities established by private law with non-profit status and purpose of operation), tourism associations, tourism destination management organizations
- ✓ In Hungary, church institutions/organizations
- ✓ Chambers and professional associations
- ✓ EGTCs.

Types of beneficiaries to be supported under the priority 2

- ✓ Local, regional and state level public administrations/institutions and their organizations
- ✓ NGOs
- ✓ Educational institutions, including rehabilitation centers
- ✓ Healthcare institutions, providers of social services
- ✓ Labor force offices, different forms of professional chambers
- ✓ Cultural institutions and organizations
- ✓ Stakeholders in the field of risk prevention and emergency management
- ✓ EGTCs.

¹ Organisations located outside the programme area but inside the European Union can become Project Partners only in duly justified cases. Please note that, in case of project approval, the effective participation of partners from EU regions outside the programme area is subject to the condition that the Member States where they are located accept of all implementing provisions in relation to management, control and audit

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Partners should bear in mind that the absence of advance payments and the time gap between incurring the expenditure and having it reimbursed may lead to cash-flow problems. This might be particularly relevant for private institutions and associations.

1.2 Lead Partner principle and requirements

The partners appoint a Lead Partner for each project among themselves who becomes the main beneficiary once the Subsidy Contract has been signed. The **Lead Partner** assumes the following responsibilities:

- ✓ It shall lay down the arrangements for its relations with the project partners participating in the operation in an agreement comprising, inter alia, provisions guaranteeing the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid.
- ✓ It shall be responsible for ensuring the implementation of the entire operation.
- ✓ It shall ensure that the expenditure presented by the project partners participating in the operation has been paid for the purpose of implementing the operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between those partners.
- ✓ It shall verify that the expenditure presented by the partners participating in the operation have been validated by the controllers.
- ✓ It shall be responsible for transferring the ERDF contribution to the Project Partners participating in the operation.

Beside these responsibilities, the Lead Partner is also responsible for:

- ✓ Collecting the information from the project partners, cross-checking the verified activities with the progress of the project and submitting the reports to the JS;
- ✓ Signing the Subsidy Contract;
- ✓ Harmonizing the project changes with the JS and other project partners.

1.3 Project size and project duration

The projects eligible for participation in the programme **have to apply for at least 50.000,00 EUR of ERDF funds for Priority Axis 1 and at least 20.000,00 EUR of ERDF for Priority Axis 2 and less than 2.000.000,00 EUR of ERDF for Priority Axis 1 and 350.000,00 EUR of ERDF for Priority Axis 2.**

The projects eligible for participation in the programme are those with the duration up to 36 months of project implementation. The earliest possible start of the project is the 1st January 2015. The project end date is the date defined in the Subsidy Contract, but not later than 31 December 2022.

1.4 Co-financing

Only eligible expenditure can be co-financed by the programme, whereas the co-financing from the ERDF can amount to a maximum of 85% of total eligible costs. At least 15% must be

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ensured from other sources. The maximum ceiling of project public co-funding must be observed if the project or part of its activities is subject to State aid rules.

1.5 Cross-border cooperation criteria

All Project Partners must work together actively for producing the project outputs and results and achieving their planned use.

Beneficiaries shall cooperate in the development and implementation of operations. In addition, they shall cooperate in the staffing or the financing of operations, or in both. **At least three (Joint development and implementation are obligatory) of the following cross-border criteria must be fulfilled to have the project eligible for funding.**

Joint development

- ✓ All partners should contribute to the development of the project.
- ✓ Partners define how the project will operate. Joint development of objectives and outcomes, budget, timing, responsibilities and division of tasks to achieve the objectives.
- ✓ Identifying knowledge and experience that each partner brings to the project and what each partner expects to get from the project.

Joint implementation

- ✓ The Lead Partner bears the responsibility for the overall project implementation; all partners take responsibilities for different parts of the implementation.
- ✓ Each project partner is responsible for the tasks foreseen for achievement of the objectives, and has to ensure that needed activities are carried out, milestones are met and unexpected challenges to implementation are dealt with.

Joint staffing

- ✓ All project partners have a defined role and allocate staff to fulfil this role.
- ✓ Staff members coordinate their activities with others involved in the activities and exchange information regularly.
- ✓ There should be no unnecessary duplication of functions in different partner organizations.

Joint financing

- ✓ The project has a joint budget with funding allocated to partners according to the activities they are carrying out.
- ✓ The budget includes annual spending targets.

1.6 State aid

A Public grant is regarded as incompatible with the Common Market if it distorts, or has the potential to distort, competition within the European Union. Community rules on State aid limit and give exemptions to the support, which may be provided from public funding.

State aid is **defined** as any aid granted by a Member State or through State resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods insofar as it affects trade between Member

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States, which is incompatible with the internal market². It is important to mention that the concept of an undertaking covers any entity engaged in an economic activity, regardless of its legal status and the way in which it is financed. Therefore, the nature of activities of the undertaking in question is relevant to define if State aid rules will be applied.

Besides EU rules and rules of the Cooperation programme, national rules have to be respected.

In Slovenia the usage of the relevant State Aid schemes will be described in the internal GODC guidelines on granting state aid/*de minimis* for ETC programmes in the period 2014-2020.

In Hungary the usage of the relevant State Aid schemes will be specified in the Governmental Decrees.

This ceiling applies not only to EU funds but also to all public grants (including national, regional and local levels).

The following criteria define whether the support received is State aid. State aid rules apply only to measures that satisfy all of the criteria listed in Article 107(1) of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union:

Undertaking

The recipient of the aid is an “undertaking”, which is carrying out an economic activity in the context of the operation.

An undertaking is any entity which exercises an activity of a tradable nature and which offers goods and services on the market, regardless the legal form and the way of financing of this entity. Also if an entity is not profit-oriented, State aid rules will apply as long as it competes with companies that are profit- oriented.

State aid rules apply only if an entity acts as an undertaking. Undertakings are entities engaged in an economic activity, regardless of their legal status and regardless of whether they aim to make a profit or not. The only relevant criterion to decide is whether or not the entity carries out an economic activity in the context of the operation.

Transfer of State resources

State aid rules cover only measures involving a transfer of State resources (including national, regional or local authorities, public banks and foundations, etc.).

Furthermore, the aid does not necessarily need to be granted by the State itself. It may also be granted by a private or public intermediate body appointed by the State. The latter could apply in cases where a private bank is given the responsibility to manage a State funded SME aid scheme.

Financial transfers that constitute aid can take many forms: not just grants or interest rate rebates, but also loan, accelerated depreciation allowances, capital injections, price discounts, etc.

² Article 107(1) of TFEU (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union)

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Economic advantage

The aid should constitute an economic advantage that the undertaking would not have received in the normal course of business. Some examples are listed below:

- ✓ A firm buys/rents publicly owned land at less than the market price;
- ✓ A company sells land to the State at higher than market price;
- ✓ A company enjoys privileged access to infrastructure without paying a fee;
- ✓ An enterprise obtains risk capital from the State on terms, which are more favourable than it would obtain from a private investor.

Selectivity

State aid must be selective and thus affect the balance between certain firms and their competitors. “Selectivity” is what differentiates State aid from so-called “general measures” (namely measures which apply without distinction across the board to all firms in all economic sectors in a Member State (e.g. most nation-wide fiscal measures)).

A scheme is considered “selective”, if the authorities administering the scheme enjoy a degree of discretionary power. The selectivity criterion is also satisfied if the scheme applies to only part of the territory of a Member State (this is the case for all regional and sectoral aid schemes).

Effect on competition and trade

Aid must have a potential effect on competition and trade between Member States. It is sufficient if it can be shown that the beneficiary is involved in an economic activity and that he operates in a market in which there is trade between Member States. The nature of the beneficiary is not relevant in this context (even a non-profit organization can engage in economic activities).

The Commission has taken the view that small amounts of aid (*de minimis* aid of less than 200 000 € of total public advantages every 3 budgetary years per beneficiary) do not have a potential effect on competition and trade between Member States. It therefore considers that such aid falls outside the scope of Article 107(1) of TFEU.

All that means that the concrete public funds, considered as State aid can only be granted with the respect of a Community rule allowing such a level of grant. This will be done on an operation by operation basis. To clarify whether the support to operation or its parts could mean State aid, information will be provided by NAs and included in specific guidelines. Most relevant aids for cross-border operations are De minimis aid and State aid schemes: regional aids and aids included in the General Block Exemptions Regulation – GBER (Council regulation (EU) no. 733/2013 and Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014) in which different thresholds of aid intensity according to related activities and aid categories are defined.

1.7 Revenues

As a general principle eligible expenditure of a project (and consequently the ERDF contribution to it) shall be reduced according to the net revenue generated by the operation both during its implementation as well as until three years after its completion or by the deadline for the submission of documents for programme closure, whichever is the earlier. (detailed explanation on revenues generated projects is provided in part 4).

Rules governing revenues do not apply to projects subject to state aid rules and “de minimis”.

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1.8 Project modifications

During the project implementation, a project might face the need to modify the Application form in order to adapt it to the actual needs, complete the project successfully and achieve the set objectives.

Depending on the focus the following types of project modifications may occur:

- ✓ Change of the project partnership,
- ✓ Budget changes,
- ✓ Change of the work plan,
- ✓ Extension of the project duration.

The LPs should always inform the JS as soon as they become aware that a change of the project might be needed. In any case the change must not affect the achievement of the result indicators.

Depending on the impact on the project, it can also be distinguished between **minor and major project modifications**. All project changes must be justified and agreed between the Project Partners before they are communicated to the JS. Changes have to be approved by the programme bodies.

Minor modifications:

Minor changes are adjustments of the project, which do not have a significant impact on the project objectives and/or implementation. They may concern administrative/management issues as well as work plan and budget within the limits allowed by the programme. Minor modifications can be approved by the JS and involved co-funding bodies. They may agree to put the decision on the level of the MC.

Examples of minor modifications:

- ✓ changes of administrative elements (change of contact data, bank account, legal representatives etc.);
- ✓ minor adaptations of the work plan (modifications which do not change the nature, and use of the planned outputs and investments, minor modifications of deliverables or outputs e.g. change of the output values not exceeding 20% of the initially approved ones, etc.);
- ✓ reallocation of the funds between budget lines not exceeding the sum of 20% of total eligible costs;
- ✓ extension of the project duration for less than 12 months from the end date defined in the Subsidy Contract.

Major modifications:

The major change is any deviation from the latest version of the approved application form going beyond the flexibility limits applicable to minor changes. The major changes are to be considered as exceptional and may be approved only in duly justified cases. The major modifications shall be approved by the MC.

Examples of major modifications which have to be approved by the MC:

- ✓ extension of the project duration for more than 12 months from the end date defined in the Subsidy Contract;

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- ✓ changes in project partnership (replacement of a partner, withdrawal of a partner, additional partner);
- ✓ modification of the financing plan (ERDF) (influencing the amount of the approved ERDF);
- ✓ reallocation of the funds between budget lines exceeding the sum of 20% of total eligible costs;
- ✓ changes of output values exceeding 20% of the initially approved ones.

The project modifications can be approved only if the project is still reaching the main project or/and programme indicators and results.

The request process for project modifications.

Once the project partnership agrees on the project modification, the Lead Partner should inform the JS about the upcoming project modifications.

In principle only two major modifications initiated by the Lead Partner are allowed.

The Lead Partner needs to fill in a **“modification request”** and submit it through the eMS. The requested project change needs to be clearly described and justified, including also the cause and effects of the proposed project modifications. The JS will support and guide the Lead Partner through the project change process.

Once the project modification is submitted by the Lead Partner, the JS screens the provided request and depending on the type of the project change performs the decision procedures. In case of minor changes the decision can be taken by the JS, for major changes, the materials for the MC decision will be prepared and the final decision taken by the MC members.

Obligations deriving from the Subsidy Contract and the Partnership Agreement in terms of audits, retention of supporting documents and durability of outputs remain applicable after any type of the project modification.

If the outcome of the proceedings is positive, the JS grants the possibility to the Lead Partner to revise the Application Form in the eMS. The Lead Partner then updates the relevant parts of the Application Form (partnership, work plan or budget) in line with the approved project change request. In case the requested project change require additional supporting documents (e.g. partner declaration, withdrawal letters etc.), they have to be uploaded in the eMS as annexes of the revised Application Form.

The JS examines the revisions done in the Application Form. The LP can be asked to provide further clarifications and/or amendments of the Application Form, in case the changes done in the eMS and related explanatory information is not sufficient.

Based on the final submission of the revised Application Form in the eMS, the JS informs the Lead Partner on the final decision on the requested project change.

1.9 Audit trail and durability of ownership

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The Project Partners need to be aware that the ownership of outputs having the character of investments in infrastructure or productive investments realised within the project must remain with the concerned Project Partner for at least five years following the final payment to the beneficiary, or where applicable, within the period set out in state aid rules. Examples where a violation of rules³ concerning durability would occur:

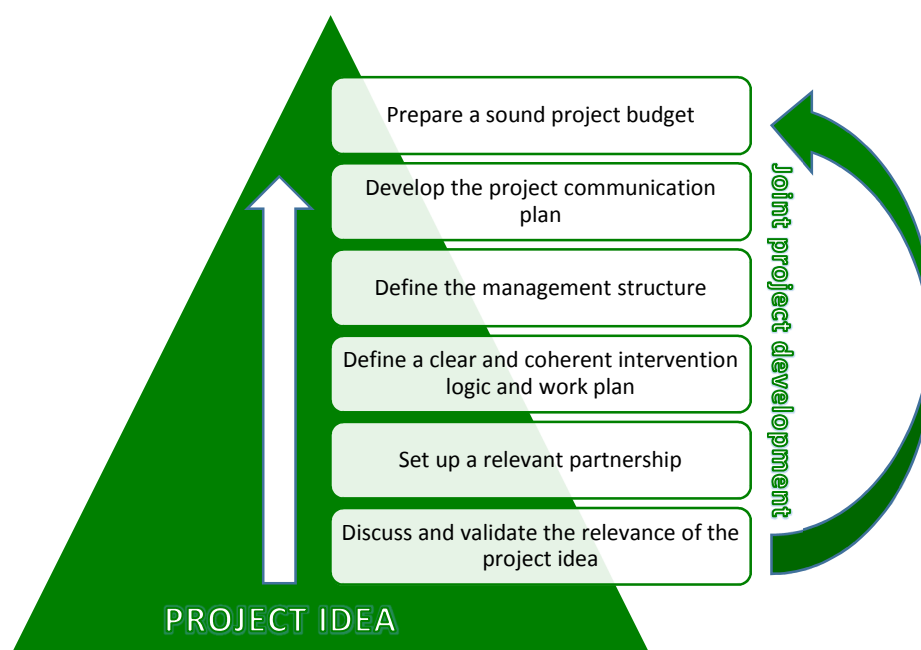
- ✓ relocation of a productive activity to outside the programme area⁴,
- ✓ substantial changes affecting the nature, objectives or implementation conditions of the investment,
- ✓ change of the ownership of an infrastructure item which gives a firm or a public body an undue advantage.

2. HOW TO DEVELOP A GOOD PROJECT?

The preparation of a project application is a challenging process, especially in the cooperation context. It usually starts with a first project idea which is then further developed through the inputs of the future project partners and according to the programme guidance. It is therefore recommended to follow the structure of the application form in order to see which information is expected and not to miss out on any relevant topics.

The following chapters aim at helping you in preparing your Application Form. There are practical hints for advancing from the initial project idea to a successful application. The subsequent chapters guide you through the workflow from the project idea to the application ready for submission (as illustrated in figure 4).

Figure 1 – Project development: from a project idea to the application



³ According to EC Regulation 1303/2013, Article 71(4) this shall not apply for operation, which undergoes cessation of a productive activity due to a non-fraudulent bankruptcy.

⁴ This requirement is to be observed for 10 years following the final payment to the beneficiary (unless the beneficiary is a SME) or for the applicable timeframe according to state aid rules in case of grant released under state aid conditions.

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2.1 Support provided by the programme

The following information and support related to project development and preparing of applications will be provided by the Joint Secretariat:

- ✓ information about the programme and the Open Call;
- ✓ information concerning preparation and submission of applications;
- ✓ organisation of informative workshops (see website for planned dates and agenda);
- ✓ publication of frequently asked questions and answers;
- ✓ publication of information on approved projects on the programme website.

Support concerning specific project content related topics, including information on State aid and information on national co-financing will be provided by the representatives of both Member states (National Authorities).

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To take part in project co-financed within the cooperation program Interreg V-A Slovenia-Hungary every Project Partner is advised to get in contact with the competent National Authority before the project application, to obtain the necessary information on the content, State Aid etc. Experiences has shown that with this approach, a successful project preparation is possible and in the case of an approval unexpected EU funds losses or repayments can be counteracted/avoided.

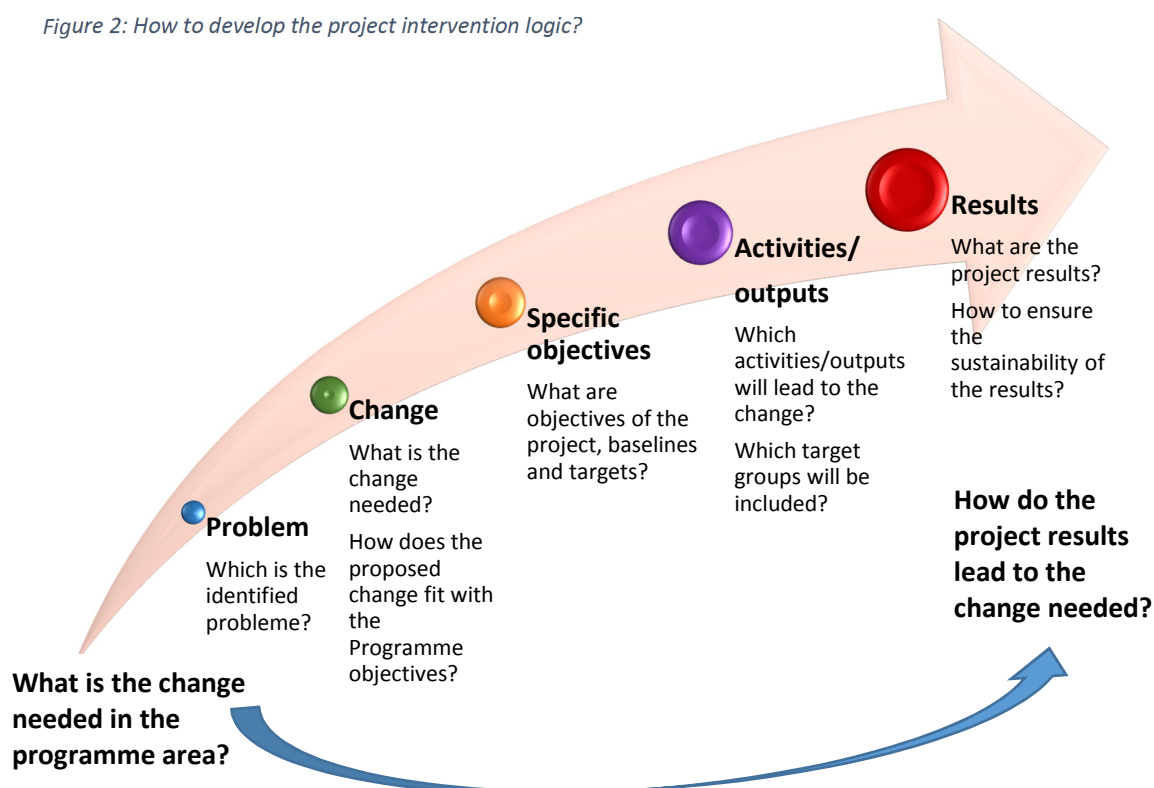
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2.2 Developing the project intervention logic

The links and synergies between the programmes co-financed by the European Union and the projects supported are in the period 2014-2020 even more important as in previous programme periods. The projects therefore need to be structured according to a particular intervention logic, taking into account the attempted change as the basis for result-orientation. The project intervention logic needs to show how a desired change will be achieved. It should due reflect the current situation (e.g. the problem), its underlying causes and the change which the project seeks to achieve by implementing the planned activities. It also needs to indicate the activities needed to result in the change.

The following figure illustrates different components of the project development and basic questions to be addressed during the development of the project.

Figure 2: How to develop the project intervention logic?



Each project needs to clearly indicate **why** it is needed, **what** cross-border common issues or challenges it will address and what change (project results) will result out of the project activities. These envisaged results have to reflect in the desired change and need to be translated into specific project objective.

After the intervention logic is set in place (starting from the initial situation and ending with the envisaged change), preconditions, activities and outputs necessary to reach the objectives and results need to be defined.

The project intervention logic must be coherent with the targeted specific objectives of the Interreg SI-HU programme.

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2.3 Setting up a relevant project partnership

The quality of a project depends largely on an integrated composition of its partnership. A good partnership should pool all skills and competences of relevant institutions necessary to address the issues tackled by the project in order to achieve the set objectives.

When building a partnership, the following general aspects should be taken into account:

- ✓ Focus your partnership on institutions relevant for reaching the project results (e.g. thematically, geographically, level of governance).
- ✓ Involve as project partners only institutions whose interests are closely linked to the project objectives and planned interventions. They should also have the capacity to create strong links to target groups addressed by the project.
- ✓ Apply a result-oriented approach by involving institutions who are supposed to realise and subsequently implement the project outputs and results. Ensure that they have fitting competences (e.g. involve environmental authorities if you work on the development of environmental policies).
- ✓ Ensure a balanced partnership in terms of number of institutions involved per country. Distribution of project activities and responsibilities as well as related budgets should be also adequately balanced.
- ✓ Ensure that decision makers (e.g. ministries) are either directly included in the partnership or can be effectively reached by the project partners.
- ✓ Where necessary, involve expert organisations (e.g. universities, research institutions) as a source of knowledge.
- ✓ Keep the partnership size manageable (recommended maximum of 6 partners). Having a broad partnership should not be the goal when preparing a project.
- ✓ Ensure the commitment of all partners from the very beginning.
- ✓ Institutions from outside the programme area should only be involved in exceptional and well justified cases. Their involvement should bring a clear benefit to the programme area and add value to the partnership.

A partner should not be confused with any “supplier” or associated partner.

The Lead Partner takes over the role of the “engine” of the partnership, coordinating the work of the partners and being also the link between the project and the programme (MA/JS).

2.4 Developing a sound project management structure

The sound project management is secured by adopting quality management tools. The partnership is governed by the **Lead Partner principle**. This means that among the partners implementing the project, one institution is appointed as Lead Partner acting as project interface with the programme (MA and JS) and is responsible for the successful implementation of the entire project. The Lead Partner is also responsible to ensure the sound project management (including internal communication among the Project Partners).

At project level the **management is under the responsibility of the Lead Partner**. If the Lead Partner has no sufficient internal competences or capacities for project, financial or communication management, these can be partly taken over by other partners or

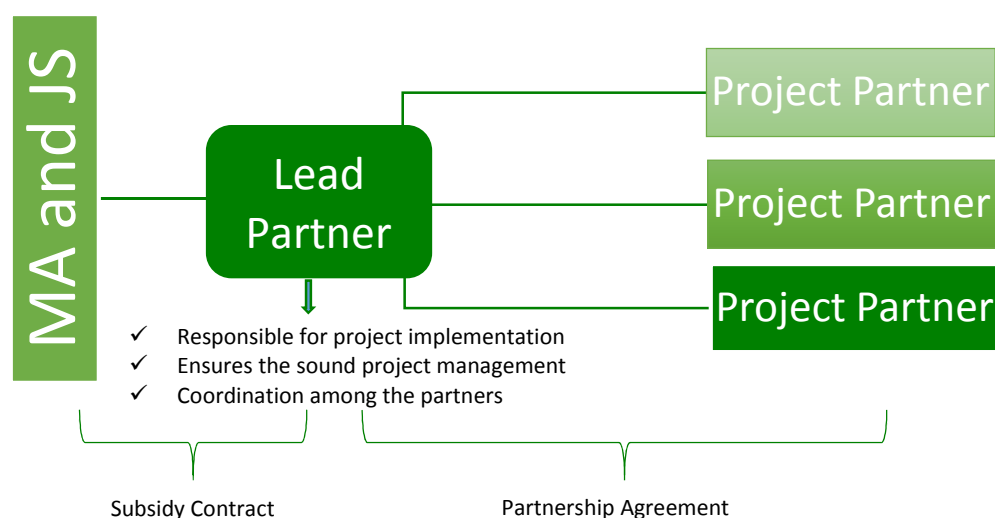
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subcontracted to external experts. However, the legal responsibility remains with the Lead Partner.

On the level of the Lead Partner, as well as on the Project Partner level, it is recommended to establish the project management team comprised of the project manager, financial manager and communication manager in order to enable a good information flow and coordination.

The following figure illustrates the relations between the Programme, Lead Partner and the Project Partners.

Figure 3: Project management structure



2.5 Setting up relevant project communication

Communication plays an important role in the project implementation and requires careful planning as well as the adequate resources (human and financial). The communication activities help projects to achieve the aimed change and the planned project results.

Communication objectives for projects needs to be linked to:

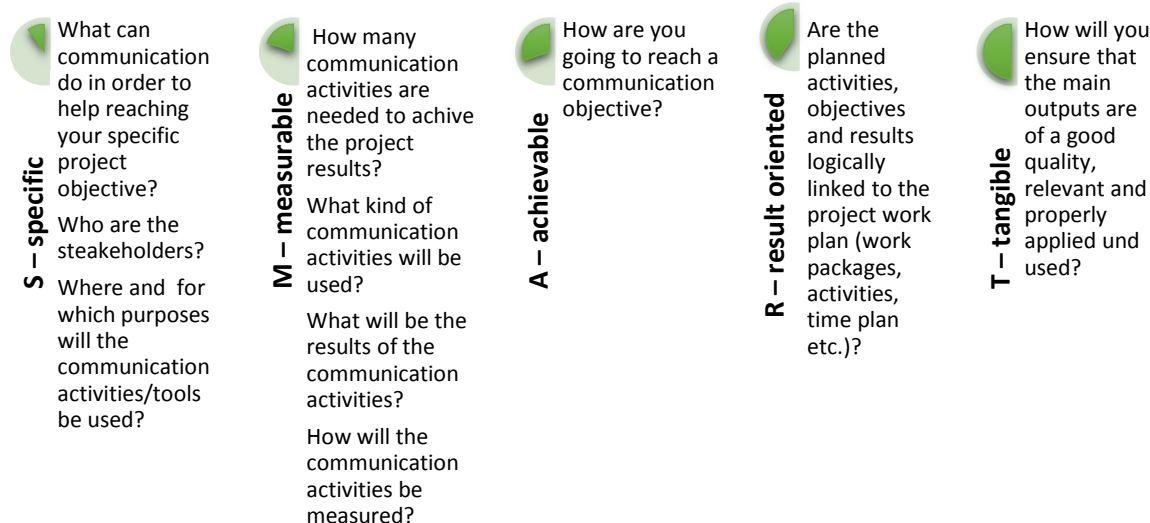
- ✓ raising awareness
- ✓ changing behaviour or mind-set
- ✓ changing attitude
- ✓ spreading knowledge.

All projects should define a communication plan. There are many ways to do that, but it is useful to consider the following:

- ✓ planning (setting goals, defining the target groups, defining the objectives)
- ✓ taking action (establishing the strategy/approach the project is going to take in order to achieve the goal)
- ✓ evaluating (regularly checking whether and to what extend the activities are efficient.

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At the same time, it is not sufficient for a project to define its objectives as “to raise awareness” or “to communicate the activities and results”. Communication objectives need to be **SMART, that means** clearly defined, detailed, achievable and measurable.



Once the project communication objectives and target groups are clearly defined, it becomes important to think about how a project will achieve its objectives (“Which approach?”) and through what measures (“Which activities?”). Communication objectives related to awareness and knowledge are tactically most often related to the approach of passing on information and messages (or often described as „dissemination“) through storytelling. However, there are a lot of different communication approaches/tools which can be used.

In view of communication objectives related to attitude and behaviour, communication is most often about involving and influencing stakeholders (open and transparent dialogue, building on previous dissemination, which has ideally built awareness and knowledge).

“Communications” must be understood as a strategic project tool, which contributes to achieving the project objectives. It cannot simply be an 'add-on' at the end of the

The communication activities and planned budget should be described in the Work Package “Communication”.

More information on communication requirements concerning the information and communication rules is provided in Part 6 of this Manual.

2.6 Designing a sound project budget

The budget of the project must be drafted following the real cost principle⁵, fulfilling the principles of adequacy of costs and sound financial management (i.e. economy, efficiency and effectiveness). Accordingly, the project budget shall reflect the work plan, i.e. activities,

⁵ Except when simplified cost options are used for calculating costs under staff and office and administration budget lines. For further information please refer to Part 4.

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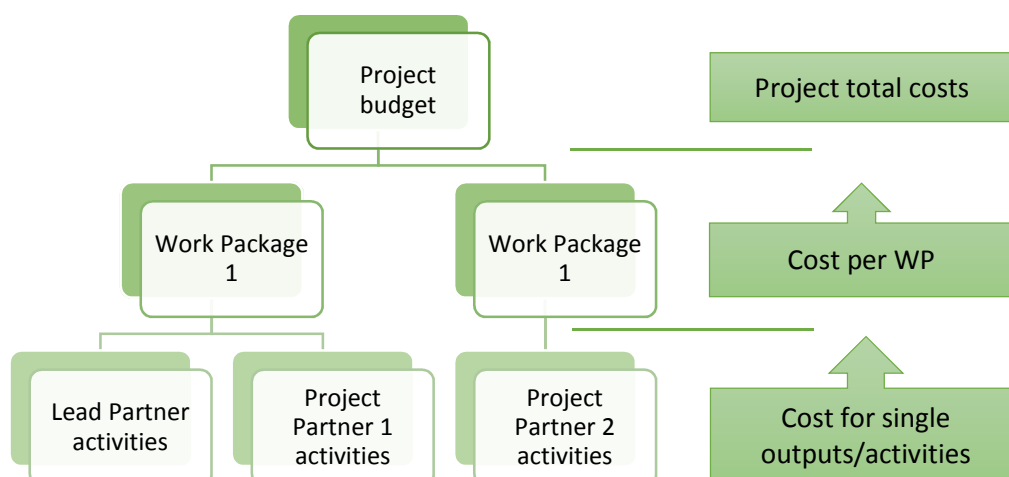
deliverables and outputs planned by each Project Partner in order to achieve the intended results.

When designing the project budget it is important to plan, at the level of each partner, the budget needs to be allocated to budget lines, work packages, reporting periods.

Concerning the allocation of budget to reporting periods, the following elements are to be taken into consideration:

- ✓ The reporting periods run as a general rule on a six-month basis as from the project start date.
- ✓ The budget allocated to each reporting period should be an estimation of the actual payments to be done in the respective reporting period. Therefore, the budget only partly reflects the activities taking place in a certain period. Indeed, if an activity is carried out close to the end of a reporting period, the related payment may take place in the following period and the costs should therefore be budgeted only in the following reporting period. The budget shall be planned realistically and not inflated.

Figure 4: Project budget planning



2.6 From project idea to project results

The development of a project idea and the final decision on the project provided by the Monitoring Committee of the Cooperation programme is a process with several steps which need to be considered as well on the level of the Project Partnership as on the level of the Programme Authorities. Some of the main steps are demonstrated in Figure 8.

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Figure 5: From project idea to project results

