COORDINATOR'S GUIDE TO

EU PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Templates, Tools, Tips and Examples – Focus: Horizon 2020

FOREWORD

Europa Media's experts have been managing and coordinating EU projects since 1999. To share our knowledge and experience with you, we have produced various publications, launched online platforms, and organised many conferences and training courses till now. During these years, we have also learnt a lot from the thousands of participants of our training courses and events. Our scope with this new publication is to support your work as a project manager and coordinator with more practical tools and tips.

We have collected the handiest templates, project management tools and practical tips, and supplemented them with examples for better clarification, so that you can directly use them in your projects. The idea is not to repeat all the rules and legal commitments of a project coordinator; these are all available in the official guidelines. Instead, we have focused on those practical issues, that can arise during project implementation, and which not all coordinators may be able to properly manage.

We value your opinion! Please let us know if you find this guide useful. We would also very much like to hear about your experiences and stories on managing and coordinating EU projects.

THE EUROPA MEDIA TEAM
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WHO WE ARE

Building on our direct experience with EU research projects, we have come to realise that there is a need for more harmonised information provision on EU funding opportunities and related procedures as well as a need for capacity building on developing competitive proposals and effectively managing projects under the EU's Research and Innovation programmes.

The EU funding system is complex and competition to get a project financed by the EU is tough. Specific knowledge, well-established networks and special skills are needed to successfully get involved in these competitive projects.
To respond to this need, Europa Media was established in 2003 with a mission to provide and present the dispersed and technical information on EU policies, funding opportunities and programmes in a streamlined and simplified way to relevant stakeholders in Europe and worldwide. With this mission, we have developed, launched and publicised a variety of information sources and tools including web platforms, publications, e-Learning courses, webinars and events. In parallel, we launched our first international training programmes on EU proposal development and project management starting in 2004.

Our aim is to become a bridge between the European Commission and the beneficiaries to facilitate the implementation of various R&I visions within the framework programmes of the EU and to strengthen our position as a leading organisation providing assistance in EU project development and management.

Over the past 10+ years, our team has developed a comprehensive portfolio of training programmes designed to facilitate access to EU funding and simplify EU project development and management, in particular under the EU's research and innovation programmes. To date, we have organised hundreds of training courses attended by over 7,000 participants from all over Europe and beyond. We have also supported many universities, research organisations and SMEs on an advisory/in-house capacity in their efforts to develop winning proposals and effectively implement projects.

Europa Media Trainings is the training arm of Geonardo and Europa Media Non-profit; joint efforts of the three shape EMG group, a group of SMEs active in EU research and innovation projects and in training and capacity building on EU project development and management.

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THE TASKS OF A COORDINATOR

Let's allocate a few minutes for the basics: What are the tasks of a coordinator?

Consider the Management and Coordination related work package in a project proposal, or already in the Description of Action (DoA). What tasks are listed there? Is everything mentioned? Do you know your tasks and responsibilities?
Below is a list of tasks that regularly appear in the Management/Coordination work packages depending on the complexity of the project.

- Scientific coordination and
- Administrative coordination
  - Setting up an overall management structure (acting persons, responsibilities and teams).
  - Preparation of all project meetings.
  - Kick-off activities of the project and kick-off meeting (re-align vision, mission and focus on project outputs and related deliverables).
  - Generating a project management plan. The plan will describe the indicators, the reporting procedures, schedule and the management of the project progress. Monitoring accordingly.
  - Developing a quality assurance plan and monitoring deliverables/processes accordingly.
  - Risk Management and Contingency Planning.
- Legal and IPR coordination.
  - IPR Management (managing and protecting IPR linked to the results developed in the project).
  - Drafting and signing a Consortium Agreement (CA), signed before the Grant Agreement (GA)
- Financial coordination
  - Managing financial aspects, including payments, financial reporting, reallocations, and other financial activities in the project.
- Sustainability and Exploitation (if not part of another WP)
  - Analysis and actions to make the project and its infrastructure sustainable (overview of the project's sustainability scenarios;
  - Attracting stakeholders and public and private funding for the expansion of the project).

- Communication
  - Internal communication within the consortium.
  - Communication with the EC.
- Gender issues, ethical issues, social impact (horizontal issues).
- Data Management.
- Cooperation with other EC projects.

All these tasks are described in a short paragraph in the proposal/DoA. Make sure that all necessary tasks are noted in your project (and in your mind).

Possible deliverables of the Management/Coordination work package:

- Management tools e.g. Guidelines, Gantt chart, Deliverables and Milestone tables, reporting templates
- Quality Assurance Plan
- Gender Action Plan
- Kick-off organisation (Attendance, logistics, minutes)
- Minutes of the meetings
- Online Platform Communication tool
- 6(or 9)-monthly Interim Reports
- Partner lists and updates
- Business Plan, Exploitation Plan, etc.

Additional documents, not part of the list of deliverables but related to Management and Coordination, are:

- Consortium Agreement (should in principle be signed before the GA is signed, therefore, not needed to be included as a deliverable)
- Official EC Periodic Reports and the Final Report (some EC Project Officers request to take these out as they have to be submitted anyway)

These are the basics. Let's see what tasks are in general listed specifically for the coordinator in the DoA and the Consortium Agreement.

MAIN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A COORDINATOR

- Act as a SINGLE legal representative of the Consortium towards the EC and handle all communication between the EC and the consortium.
- Keep the project on track – keeping the deadlines of the deliverables and submitting them and the official reports to the EC.
- Initiate changes in work content (in line with the GA).
- Handle the advance payments and interim instalments, initiate changes or reallocation in the budget (between categories and partners and in line with the GA and CA).
- Organise and chair the review meetings if needed (decided by the EC).
- Deal with the unexpected (see example at p. 8).

The above-mentioned tasks shall not be subcontracted – only in very exceptional cases, e.g. spin-offs offices taking care of coordination activities for public bodies.

OTHER TASKS:

- Keeping the address list of members and other contact persons updated and available.
- Collecting, reviewing and submitting information on the progress of the project and reports and other deliverables (including financial statements and related certifications) to the EC.
- Initiating, preparing the meetings, proposing decisions and preparing the agenda of the meetings, chairing the meetings, preparing the minutes of the meetings and monitoring the implementation of decisions taken at the meetings.

The above require a good communication, quality assurance and monitoring system and procedures to be set up.

- Leading the negotiations and communication with the EC.
- Drafting a CA and handling all discussions around it.
- Dissemination, marketing of project results, lobbying, cooperation with external parties – as the main representative of the consortium towards the Commission, the public and the scientific community.

- Transmitting documents and information connected with the project, including all relevant communication from the EC towards the consortium.
- Administering the EU financial contribution and fulfilling the financial tasks.
- Providing, upon request, the partners with official or original copies of documents which are in the sole possession of the Coordinator when such copies or originals are necessary for the partners to present claims.

TACKLING UNEXPECTED EVENTS AND FORCE MAJEURE

A recently closed project of ours, in which we were the coordinator, involved field work for measuring and validating data. The field tasks were dependent on weather conditions and the consortium relied on a subcontractor to undertake this specific technical work. The implementation of the work was planned for the second year of the three-year project, as in the first year we would assess and calculate certain risks related to this task due to its nature. Despite the relatively wide "observation window" (i.e. optimal conditions for data recording throughout the whole spring and summer), we ended up having bad weather conditions at the planned time of the field work. Since our partner in implementation of the work was flexible enough to perform the task, we made another attempt shortly after the first one. Unfortunately, we had bad luck again with the weather, hence could not conduct the necessary work. Since we had no alternative for the task, the following year (last year of the project) the partners planned the work again. After weeks of discussions and careful investigation, we agreed on a solution to get the job done by the subcontractor. It was a scientifically and technically sound solution in line with the project's objectives, therefore an acceptable solution for the Commission. However, just a few weeks before the field work, the subcontractor reported that they would be unable to provide the technical solution for data acquisition. Half of the optimal "observation window" had been gone by that time and we still had to perform the task, which was instrumental to the success of the whole project. We came up with a Plan A and a Plan B, and we pursued them in parallel to ensure task completion. One consisted in submitting an amendment request to the PO referring to 'force majeure' and asking for a one-year prolongation of the project. Plan B involved continuing to try and find a technically and operationally feasible solution and re-programme the data processing, data analysis and reporting. Finally, our fourth attempt was successful, and we obtained the necessary data to finish the research task with satisfactory results. The weather conditions were optimal, and the technical solution was serving the project's overall needs for innovation. At the end, the prolongation was not granted for the project, so one of the plans did not work, but the new schedule for delivering the results helped us safeguard the project implementation. Lesson learned: It is always good to have alternative plans and measures in response to unexpected events and force majeure. Ideally, if you can estimate the probability of occurrence of such situations early in advance you could draft a sound risk management and response plan to minimise problems.

Is that all? Not nearly! Take a look at the everyday management items below.

EVERYDAY MANAGEMENT

- Establish effective communication (tools, channels, frequency to be decided and then regular communication maintained) e.g. Mailing lists for the project and work package teams; Skype/Online or phone conference calls for smaller discussions regularly; Face-to-face meetings to be organised cost-efficiently; Common platform for working on documents, etc.
- Manage work content changes (during the negotiation or the implementation).
- Monitor project performance - monitoring compliance by the partners with their obligations (e.g. Partner failure/work performance: inexperienced partners may act as the “weakest link”).
- Handle disagreements.
- Interpret the work content to partners if necessary.
- Control spending - budget running low or not spent (e.g. unforeseen expenditures or complaints from partners).
- Deal with extreme situations, and the unexpected e.g. Force Majeure (natural disaster, war, etc.).
- Be sensitive to cultural and gender differences.

What helps to remember all the tasks is to put them into perspective. Link the tasks with project phases; try to differentiate between pure administrative issues and major tasks, which a scientific and official coordinator of the project must perform. Here is a table showing the project lifecycle and the individual phases in this cycle to help you get started. All you need to do is to tailor it to your project.

PROJECT PHASE SPECIFIC TASKS	OFFICIAL COORDINATION TASKS, SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION	ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT TASKS	GENERAL
Grant Agreement Negotiation	Turning the proposal into DoA. Submitting all documents to the EC, signing the grant agreement (electronic). Drafting the CA, having it signed by all partners.	Preparing a tasks list on what should be done when by whom. Support in DoA and CA development. Support in filling in GAP parts, communicating with all partners.	Making sure all partners contribute to DoA development. Making sure all partners fill in the GPF, sign all documents (electronically).
Starting the project	Distributing advance payment according to CA. Organising the kick-off meeting. Sending out the minutes of the meeting. Explaining clearly the scientific scopes, technical tasks, implementation method to the partners.	Explaining the communication, quality assurance, reporting responsibilities and rules. Developing guidelines and templates to help manage the project.	Kick-off meeting: setting the date, drafting the agenda, organising the meeting itself, chairing the meeting. Preparing the minutes. Setting the date for the next project meeting.
Dissemination, Representation, lobbying	(Re)presenting the project at events, working on the continuation of the project, discussing options with the EC. Cooperating with other projects and organisations.	Supporting the coordinator.	Ensuring high awareness, wide representation in the scientific and/or policy-making community, lobbying towards the sustainability of the project results (and/or continuation).
Reporting 6-monthly internal reports suggested + official EC reports periodically (12/18 months)	Checking the submitted deliverables, activity and financial reports. Uploading all relevant information to the PP and submitting to the EC.	Sending warnings about reporting/delivery deadlines. Sending detailed instructions.	Making sure that all partners deliver in time and quality. Controlling budget spending (6-monthly) and adapting as needed.

	Distributing the instalments once received from EC.	Cross-checking the submitted reports, noting errors, etc.	
Project meetings	Initiating the meetings, Sending out the agenda, and then the minutes of the meeting. Making sure that all results and progress is known by all. Explaining clearly the upcoming tasks (e.g. for 6-12 months).	Drafting the agenda, chairing the meeting together with the organiser and the coordinator.	Making the partners active during the meeting. Setting the date for the next meeting. Preparing the minutes.
IPR, Gender, Ethical issues	All horizontal issues must be considered. IPR is handled in the CA; still, additional tasks are needed to be handled if IPR-linked results are developed in the project. Gender issues must be reported if relevant they are considered relevant by the EC in most projects. Ethical issues might not come up, but if they do, the Coordinator has to make sure that they are duly managed.		

Review (EC monitoring) Mostly technical/ scientific, but could be financially focused on the whole project	Organising pre-review meeting for the partners. Sending all the due deliverables and the draft report to reviewers. Introducing the project at the review.	Providing support to partners (what are the rules, how to get prepared, etc.).	Preparing the consortium for scheduled or random reviews, Developing the draft report.
Managing partners Management system	Supporting less experienced partners; answering questions; handling non-performance; Making sure that the management system is set up – all decision-making bodies have appointed representatives; Initiating decision-making processes when needed by the relevant boards.		
Closure of the project	Organising the final meeting focusing on project closure and continuation of collaboration. Communicating with the partners – proper farewell. Distributing the final payment. Submitting the report on the distribution of EU contribution.	Final administrative steps, informing all partners about their final duties.	Making sure that all public results are available, Website maintenance is ensured for 5 extra years. All is archived, administered.
EVERYDAY MANAGEMENT	OFFICIAL COORDINATION TASKS, SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION	ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT TASKS	GENERAL
Communication	Setting up a communication system.	Suggesting the communication channels, tools, their appropriate use, etc. Reminding about the deadlines.	Regular communication – scientific, administrative, financial.
Monitoring of progress, quality			

	Setting up a monitoring and quality control system – both Scientific and Financial	Suggesting steps and methods in monitoring and quality control and administering the activities.	Making sure that monitoring is done – both scientific and financial.
Administration, archiving	Ensuring internal archiving.	Administering what should be saved and archived, and what took place when in the project.	Saving all documents, results, deliverables, saving all communication with the partners and the EC printed or electronically.
Managing unexpected events	Communicating with the EC and the partners. Safeguarding the interest of the project.	Supporting the coordinator (rules, options, etc.).	Dealing with problems: withdrawal of a partner, a new scientific trend or legal change to adapt to, force majeure, etc.
Working with the EC project officer	Keeping the deadlines, answering his/her e-mails. Communicating the messages of the consortium. Discussing changes and modifications.	Checking deadlines. Ensuring regular communication.	Getting to know the officer, his/her interests and demands regarding the project.
Managing disputes	Mediation, finding a compromise – safeguarding the interest of the project.	Explaining the rules, options and mediation.	Acting according to CA, mediating between the partners.
Grant Agreement modification	Initiating work content changes and discussing this with the EC.	Explaining the process, providing relevant templates.	Coordinating with partners the modifications, developing the new DoA if relevant.

SKILLS OF A COORDINATOR

What skills does a coordinator need to have to be able to successfully coordinate a project?

- **Scientific/technical skills** – to be able to understand the project objectives, potential for innovation and technical risks.
- **Administrative/financial skills** – a general knowledge on the administrative and financial (legal) rules of the funding programme.
- **Social skills** – excellent ability to control and motivate the partners, including self-confidence and power: The Coordinator is always "More equal than the others"
- **Leadership skills** - project coordination is not a democracy, but also not a dictatorship!

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN PROJECT COORDINATION

In an ongoing project of ours, there were some changes in personnel at one of the key partners. The newly appointed project manager had good knowledge on how to handle things at a local level but lacked the same know-how in a European context, which he tried to compensate by addressing us with frequent phone calls sometimes lasting up to 30 minutes. Much patience had been mobilised during these calls, while our input made him realise slowly but steadily the main principles along which he needed to act. Cutting corners early on by not giving him enough time to explain himself, his needs and ways of doing things might have proved counterproductive in the long run, because of the distrust this may have developed for him towards us, the coordinator. Now being confident of what was expected from him and seeing his role within the whole of the project, he started to realise how his immediate co-workers at the project partner institution "suffered" from the same way of thinking he used to abuse us with for a while. Our great deal of patience and efforts to understand his ways invested in him eventually paid off, and now we have a very efficiently operating local manager fully capable of handling most of his tasks on his own and requiring our assistance only once in a while. Remember; patience is of key importance when it comes to dealing with your partners! And patiently supporting your partners and "training" them pays off in the medium-/long-term.

If you do not have all these skills, set up a team, which would collectively have these skills. You may find the right people within your organisation or within the core project team (most crucial partners).

What are the tools you have in hand?

- ALWAYS use your **charm**!
- Be pragmatic!
- Sense of **politics** – Diplomatic skills may come very handy.
- Use your **legal power**: Management Bodies – Consortium Agreement

Start with your charm and use legal powers only when absolutely necessary!

PROJECT TOOLBOX – SETTING UP A SYSTEM

We call it a toolbox, you may call it differently. Here, we mean a folder of project management tools, which you, as a coordinator, prepare for your partners to support their everyday administration of work progress, financial and technical reporting, archiving, etc.
Such a system allows the coordinator and all the partners to follow up the project progress, eases the burden of administration, and enables the coordinator to accurately react to the inquiries by the Commission about the project at any time.

A project toolbox normally includes:

- Official documentation: GA, CA, DoA
- Official guidelines: Reporting, financial and other guidelines prepared by the EC
- Task list and schedule for 6-12 months – Gantt chart, a list of results to be achieved, documents to be submitted, including responsible partner(s)/person(s), deadlines, review stages – In one document! – Regularly updated (min. quarterly)
- Internal Reporting Template (Technical) – a Word template and maybe an online tool to upload documents, data, records, images, etc.

Internal Report Template (for all partners)

Task Monitoring Table

- Internal Financial Reporting tool (online platform or Excel sheet)

Cost Monitoring Table (to monitor the budget spending)

Cost Justification Template (to have justification for all major cost items)

Person-months status (to monitor the staff effort allocated)

- Dissemination Reporting Form (Excel or Word or Online programmed)

Dissemination and Exploitation Report Form

- Excel pre-programmed is a good solution

Quality Assurance Plan

- Quality check process description – The Quality Assurance Plan or the CA will define this process (see more later)

Minutes of the meeting

- Minutes of all meetings (at the end of the minutes there is the list of common decisions, task schedule that partners should be able to check anytime)

Contact list

- Contact list – emails/phones

Other:

- Communication Plan (normally the CA or the Quality Assurance Plan includes it)
- Archiving, administration procedures (normally the CA or the Quality Assurance Plan includes it)

Make sure that all the templates and guides you prepare contain detailed instructions, explanations and REAL examples which the partners can build on.
In case you have inexperienced partners in your consortium, you may extend the content of the toolbox:

- Guide to the Participant Portal with screenshots.
- Training material or links to online training on EU project management

COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

Tailored to Horizon 2020

The idea of having a collaborative platform for the consortium partners in implementing EU projects is interesting. Before getting into it, we must admit that we use online management platforms tailored to EU projects only if the coordinator insists on using them. If we are the coordinating partner, we mainly use Excel sheets and Word templates, without implementing online internal reporting, but only the one to the European Union. Nevertheless, tailored online reporting platforms might be useful if well used and used by all partners.

A collaborative platform offers certain benefits:

- The coordinator does not have to copy-paste the received information from different sheets, but they automatically appear in the online system.
- Comparisons or other calculations are made automatically, and maybe even graphs, etc. are automatically generated.
- The system warns you automatically when a deadline is not met/kept.
- E-mail notifications on admin tasks can be programmed and sent automatically.

A collaborative platform also has certain disadvantages:

- It might be expensive and does not really save time for the partners, only for the coordinator mostly.
- There are many different solutions available on the market, partners do not want to use a ‘new’ one.
- Many partners take it as an extra administrative burden.
- A well-prepared Excel sheet provides almost the same functions and effectiveness.
- The coordinator and WP leaders have to carefully check all data, and bugs and mistakes can also happen.
- It works only if all partners fill in.

Project management platforms used in H2020 projects include EMDESK e.g.

ARCHIVING

The following documents must be saved, archived and made available for all partners:

- GA;
- DoA;
- CA;
- Deliverables, other major research results/documents;
- IPR agreements;
- Any other agreement;
- Copies of key correspondence with the EC (scanned letters, e-mails -if you do not use the Participant Portal Communication section);
- Reports (internal, EC);
- Financial summaries (updated, filled cost templates);
- Updated project planning document;
- Contact list(s);
- Amendment files (if relevant);
- Meeting minutes and presentations;
- Data Management Plan;
- Media files or other material (project logo, project PPT template, project dissemination materials, press releases, etc.).

Different versions might be available, so make sure that proper identification and naming procedures are set. See below the Quality Assurance Plan section for details. Archive electronic and paper versions as well.

The following must be archived at an organisational level by all partners:

- Timesheets;
- Payslips;
- Invoices;
- Contracts;
- Reports, data sent to the Coordinator;
- Procurement documents (offers or full procurement documentation);
- Official letters;
- Proof on dissemination;
- Proof on event attendance.

QUALITY ASSURANCE PLAN

The purpose of a QA plan is normally to define a consistent set of working procedures, quality check processes, common standards and guidelines to ensure certain quality of the project outcomes.

The main objectives are to:

- Manage the interaction between the beneficiaries during the execution of work;
- Define the procedures for monitoring progress on a regular basis;
- Detail how and when the documentation and reporting have to be done/exchanged by the beneficiaries and with the EC;
- Set editorial/quality standards for project deliverables and document;
- Develop dissemination guidelines if a dissemination plan is not available;
- Provide supporting templates.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Typical steps of risk management:

- Identify the risk;
- Evaluate the risk;
- Identify the suitable responses to the risk;
- Select the response measures;
- Plan and evaluate;
- Monitor and report (return to step 2).

The easiest way is to create and maintain a good Risk Register. This may include initial risk estimates. The register should be updated quarterly or six-monthly based on the input from the internal reports.

PREPARE THE PROJECT FOR EXPLOITATION – IPR ISSUES

Definition of an exploitable result:

> *"Achieved and expected results of the project which have commercial/social significance and can be exploited as a stand-alone product, process, service, etc."*

The Commission recommends doing the following exercise (before Grant Agreement signature). It is not an easy process but may well prepare all your partners and the project itself for a successful exploitation.

STEP1

Create and fill in a table of exploitable results (Task of the coordinator – partners may help).

EXPLOITABLE RESULT	RESULT MANAGER	PARTNERS INVOLVED	RELEVANT WPS	RELEVANT DELIVERABLES	DATE OF ACHIEVEMENT
Result No1					
Result No2					
...					

STEP 2

You can characterise the results by replying to the following questions:

- Please describe the need(s) to be satisfied by this result.
- What benefits will it bring to the customers/end-users?
- What is the expected date of achievement / time to market?
- What costs need to be covered before exploitation?
- Who will be the customers/end-users of this result?
- What is the approximate price range of this result / price of licenses?
- What is the market size in M€ for this result and relevant trend?
- How will this result rank against competing products in terms of price / performance?
- Who are the competitors of this result in the market?
- How fast and in what ways will the competition respond to this result?
- Which are the project partners from industry involved in the implementation and exploitation of this result?
- What is the relation of the result to the industrial partners' products?

- Have you protected, or will you protect this result? How and when?

STEP 3

Collect the IPR information related to the exploitable results.

IPR ON BACKGROUND INFORMATION (B)

Information, excluding foreground information, brought to the project from existing knowledge, owned or controlled by project partners in the same or related fields of the work carried out in the research project.

IPR ON FOREGROUND INFORMATION (F)

Information including all kinds of exploitable results generated by the project partners or third parties working for them in the implementation of the research project.

EXPLOITATION CLAIMS (M, U, L, O)

The intention of the partners to exploit the results by:

- Making them and selling them (M)
- Using them internally to make something else for sale (U)
- Licensing them to third parties (L)
- Providing services such as consultancy (O)

Create a simple table, which is to be filled in by all partners.

RESULTS/PARTNER	RESULT 1	RESULT 2	RESULT 3	...
Partner 1				
Partner 2				
Partner 3				

The partners need to fill in to which result they contribute by bringing in their background and if they will be a co-developer of the results, hence, will be involved in generating Foreground.
They should also tell what exploitation route(s) they plan to choose– no matter if they generate Foreground or not.

At the end, you will have a table that looks like this:

RESULTS/PARTNER	RESULT 1	RESULT 2	RESULT 3	...
Partner 1	U	F M U L O	F M	B F U
Partner 2	B F M U	U L O	U L O	
Partner 3	B F M U L O			B F M
...		F M U L O	B F M U L O	

This is a complex situation as you see. Commercialisation matters have to be discussed as well as other issues such as a partner who wants rights to licence but does not have any B/F linked to the results, which can cause problems.

STEP 4

Discuss all problematic issues in advance and include suggestive conclusions in the Consortium Agreement. Encourage signing bilateral or multilateral co-ownership agreements between partners.

GENDER ACTION PLAN

By integrating the concept of gender mainstreaming into EU projects, the EC aims to ensure that gender aspects are taken into consideration during the whole research project, from its inception to delivery, and to ensure that the scientific research is gender-aware, addresses gender-related needs, and contributes to eliminating gender discrimination. To monitor the career progress of female scientists' participation in Framework Programmes, the EC collects statistics on gender distribution, showing whether the situation is improving, and how it differs across scientific disciplines and countries. Further information with respect to EC's activities and policies to promote gender equality in science can be found at the following link:
EC website on Science with and for Society (Swafs)

The Gender Action Plan, which an increasing number of projects have in place nowadays, is not primarily about how many female researchers work in the consortium. You may provide sex-disaggregated data on the workforce involved in the research proposal, but that is only the beginning.

If possible, when recruiting researchers, the project partners can try offering gender sensitive working conditions and culture; but that also requires a gender strategy at the participating organisations. Horizon 2020 should support organisational changes in research institutions and in the content and design of research activities. More importantly, the project should address gender dimension of the research activities within the project considering target groups, using different channels or tools to address female/male researchers, etc.

To increase female participation, you may consider:

- Collecting gender statistics on the workforce employed by the consortium and monitor the progress made in terms of gender balance;
- Establishing a Gender Awareness Group or equivalent structure to encourage networking and mentoring amongst women researchers;
- Organising outreach activities such as girls' days;
- Organising incentives (fellowships and training awards) that really fit the needs of women beneficiaries.

Regarding the gender aspects of a specific research field, we suggest using the following document for guidance:

- This report published by the European Commission provides scientists and engineers with practical tools for gender analysis which help them rethink concepts, formulate relevant questions and develop appropriate methods.

  The report also offers recommendations to research funding agencies, research institutions, heads of higher education establishments, industries, journal editors and other interested parties

Gendered innovations (2013)

Gender Equality Strategy (2020)

- FP7 supported the promotion of gender equality in scientific research through several projects. The Gender Toolkit is a practical tool for integrating gender aspects into research projects, including equal opportunities for women and men and the gender dimension of research, thereby contributing to excellence in research. The project finished in 2012. Check the toolkit's downloadable sections in your research field:

https://www.yellowwindow.com/genderinresearch

TAKING GENDER ASPECTS INTO ACCOUNT

Gender equality is a tough issue not just only in project development but also during project implementation. Gender issues may arise unexpectedly and you have to know how to deal with them. At the beginning of an earlier FP7 Science and Society project of ours, the consortium prepared a Gender Action Plan with meticulous care where we had committed ourselves to pay special attention to the involvement of female researchers in the project activities, and to monitor their contribution. The overall aim of the project was to identify new approaches to engage the public in science, thereby building a scientific culture and raising awareness to scientific careers. A few months after the project started and the consortium became a good team - thanks to the successfully completed tasks and deliverables - we had a project meeting to monitor progress in the implementation of the project's activities. At the end of the meeting one of our Advisory Board members wanted to take a look at the monitoring data on the women researcher's contribution in the activities. Somehow, the partners and the coordinator overlooked this aspect of the completed tasks and a proper assessment was not done. After we discovered that the measurement was missing, the partners had to review the forthcoming activities and find a way to involve female researchers and measure their contribution – certainly without any major modification of the original tasks. We were lucky that we were really at the beginning and the forthcoming activities were flexible enough to ensure the involvement of female researchers although some partners had to change their original implementation plan in order to fulfil their shared commitment. Lesson learned: Gender Action Plan is not just a document that you complete and then put into the drawer; completed tasks must also respond to the requirements/measurements established in the Action Plan. Although the partners have joint responsibility, in this case the coordinator should be the one to remind partners to ensure their compliance with the objectives set out in the Gender Action Plan.

ETHICAL ISSUES

As H2020 Manual states: „*There is clear need to make a thorough ethical evaluation from the conceptual stage of the proposal not only to respect the legal framework but also to enhance the quality of the research.*"

Ethical issues are getting tough. Do not forget to tackle ethical issues when relevant. Make sure that you monitor ethical issues throughout the whole project duration.

From the PP Online Manual: "All proposals above threshold and considered for funding will undergo an Ethics Review carried out by independent ethics experts and/or qualified staff working in a panel. The Review starts with an Ethics Screening and if appropriate a further analysis called the Ethics Assessment is conducted. The Ethics Review can lead to ethics requirements that become contractual obligations."

Some typical issues you consider for sure as Ethical issues in Section 5 of the proposal:

1. Research with Humans – do you do a survey? interviews? field work? – informed consent procedure should be described,
2. Protection of Personal Data – data processing, data security, data use principles need to be defined,
3. Research in Third Countries – anyone outside EU? include their ethical principles, regulations to keep. etc
4. Other Ethics Issues – misuse of research data is normally handled in this section

In any of these apply, also decide on management procedures for handling ethical issues in the project.

A few useful readings may help:

GDPR regulation – handling personal data

Ethics in H2020 (Online Manual)

Ethics Self-Assessment – EC publication

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Where does it all start? – At the budget development phase of proposal preparation. If you prepare a good budget – a well-planned one - you will have an easy job during the implementation of your project.

Personnel costs calculation – the basis for the budget

1. Ask your partners to calculate with different staff categories. For instance, 40% of the time of a PhD student, 20% of a senior researcher, 30% of a research manager, 10% of a financial manager (minimum of two categories should be considered). Take into account their average monthly salaries, multiply with the % of their time estimated to be allocated for the project and base your one average person month calculation on this.

AN EXAMPLE:

A project with 8 work packages

A university partner in Germany

A key partner in WP3 and WP4

36 months project period

Person 1: One senior researcher will be the main contact person and overview all activities, 20% of his time is dedicated to the project in a year. She/ He will be mainly working in WP3 and WP4, but his/her time is also dedicated to WP1 and WP8
2,4 PMs/year; Salary: 8000 EUR

Person 2 and 3: Two PhD students will work on the every-day scientific tasks, 80% of their time is allocated to the project in WP3 and WP4
19,2 PMs/year; Salary: 4500 EUR

Person 4: One manager will be overlooking dissemination, administrative and management issues, involved in WP1 and WP8.
3PMs in three years; Salary: 5000 EUR

CALCULATION

Person 1:	3 x 2.4 PMs x 8,000 = 19,200
Person 2 and 3:	2 x 3 x 9.6 x 4,500 = 259,200
Person 4:	3 x 5,000 = 15,000
Total =	**293,400 EUR**
Average PM rate:	**293,400 / 67.8 = 4,327 EUR**

2. A 2. How to calculate one person-month? Well, no recipes here. One person-month can mean 135-170 hours in one month. If you calculate with the average monthly productive hours of the previous year, you will be fine. The budget is only an estimate.
3. Overestimating your budget by 10-15% is still better than underestimating it. Your person months calculated should be sufficient to allow your organisation to finalise the tasks foreseen.

Other costs

- One of the basic and most common mistakes is forgetting to budget a task. During implementation you should not end up realising that you do not have enough budget for a travel, an event, a software purchase, etc.
- To be able to be flexible and make reallocations when needed, make sure to allocate budget in each cost category.
- We all know that the EC does not like subcontracting; but having such strict rules on translations, printing and other things that the auditors do not like, we advise to plan with minor subcontracting as well.

Budget Planning

Prepare a simple template or use ours from our website.
Horizon 2020 Budget Template

Budget monitoring

Prepare a simple template or use ours from our website.
It compares the planned budget with the actual, but also considers adjustments such as costs accepted/rejected after a review, etc.
Cost monitoring table

You should also monitor the status of the person months spent on a work package by work package, or even task by task basis.
Person months Status

Eligibility

Let's continue with a very basic list of eligibility rules. You think that you know these already by heart, right?
OK; think about the exceptions then.

Eligible costs must be:

- Actual, except…
- Incurred during the project duration, except…
- Incurred at/by the beneficiary, except…
- In accordance with the beneficiary's usual accounting and management principles, except…
- Recorded in the accounts of the beneficiary, except…
- Used for the sole purpose of achieving the objectives of the project –
  NO EXCEPTION!

All known? Check:

Eligible costs must be:

- Actual, except…
  - Average personnel costs – check the conditions!
- Incurred during the project, except…
  - Ticket to kick-off meeting bought before the start of the project (date of completion of the mission counts)
  - Equipment purchased before the project start but the depreciation period and eligibility period overlap
  - After the project closure and within 60 days for reporting and reporting only!
- Incurred at/by the Beneficiary, except….
  - Incurred at a third party
- In accordance with the beneficiary's usual accounting and management principles, except…
  - Your 'jolly joker' sentence. Do not change your principles just because you joined an EU project.
- Recorded in the accounts of the beneficiary, except…
  - Recorded in the accounts of a third party
- Used for the sole purpose of achieving the objectives of the project – NO EXCEPTION!

What cost categories are applicable?

✓ Direct Costs (that can be attributed directly to the project)

- Personnel costs (can also include "in-house consultants")
- Sub-contracting/Third Party Assistance
  - e.g.: Costs for Financial Certificates
- Other Direct Costs
  - Travel costs for personnel working on the project
  - Costs for consumables
  - Other costs
  - Purchase costs/renting costs of durable equipment (depreciation)

✓ Indirect costs

All those costs which cannot be identified as attributed directly to the project (the "running" costs: electricity, heating, telephone, internet etc. – also called "overheads").

Typical mistakes in financial reporting (provided by the EC)

Typical mistakes in personnel cost calculation:

- Costs claimed for people not directly employed nor paid by the beneficiary.
- Personnel costs claimed based on budgeted, standard, estimated rates.
- Average hourly rates used which differ significantly from actual ones.
- Billable hours are used instead of number of workable hours.
- For the calculation of the number of productive hours on the project, including time spent related to maintaining general expertise, administration and/or sales.
- Absence of timesheets.
- Timesheets not approved by a project leader.
- For the calculation of the hourly personnel rate, by dividing the payroll costs by the number of productive hours on the project (only) instead of by the total number of productive hours.
- Personnel costs claimed include overtime hours for which staff have not been paid.
- Personnel costs claimed include the remuneration of an in-house consultant hired through a contract with a consultancy firm (no labour contract, no direct instructions, not 100% on the premises, commercial rate, etc).
- Overhead costs included in the personnel cost calculation.

Other mistakes:

- Incorrect conversion in EUR.
- Costs claimed include elements not incurred and recorded during eligibility period.
- Costs include excessive costs and uneconomical expenditure (travel).
- Costs not relevant to the project (hospitality costs, entertainment costs).
- Costs cannot be substantiated by proper audit trail and full supporting documentation (Invoices, tickets, timesheets).

So how do you make sure that your partners do not make these mistakes? Well, you cannot really. Each partner is individually responsible for their spending and reporting. You may only check their financial reports and warn them if you notice a discrepancy. The cost justification table – if it is detailed enough - will give you a very good basis to discover any discrepancy. Another way to discover discrepancies is to carefully cross-check the activity and cost reporting.

UNWANTED PROCEDURES

Actions against non-performance

Let's assume you have an excellent communication strategy in place that works well, and your monitoring procedures are also good; still, you may face the problem of a non-performing party.
The first thing you need to understand is "why". What happened? To get a full, satisfactory justification for any action you may initiate, you need to know exactly the reasons behind. If e-mail and phone do not work, travel to the premises of the non-performing partner and communicate with the decision-makers. Do not allow the partner to come up with half answers; you need to protect the whole project and the consortium's interests as a coordinator.

NON-PERFORMING PARTNERS

In a closed project of ours, in which we were a partner supporting the coordinator and leading the dissemination activities, there was a common task, namely the establishment of an online stakeholder platform, to be implemented with all the partners' contribution. Such tasks which require the joint efforts of ALL the partners are tricky – especially in case of larger consortia with more than 10 partners. In the case of our project, this online platform task was not taken seriously by some of the partners who were focussed more on research activities and kept on postponing providing their input for the platform. We should emphasise here that the EC pays as much attention to such horizontal activities (dissemination, promotion, communication, etc.) as it does to research activities in such research and innovation projects. For the EC and the EU in general, it is important that the project activities and their results are successfully delivered, but it is equally important that they are appropriately communicated and conveyed to all relevant audiences. Therefore, when the stakeholder platform development was delayed in our project, our Project Officer was not happy. When the delay became longer (and although the other activities of the project were all going well), official warnings started to arrive from the EC and we had to take corrective action within the consortium, urging partners and making them aware of our joint responsibility arising from the GA and of the possible negative consequences including a suspension or even an eventual GA termination by the EC. Fortunately, these internal warnings have worked out and soon the platform was launched and populated by the partners' input. Of course, from then on the Project Officer kept a much closer eye on the project as the project already received a red flag. Obviously, this is an undesired situation and the best solution would be to avoid this from the beginning by possibly making the partners aware of the importance of the common tasks, setting an internal deadline within the consortium to produce a draft/test version of the deliverable or similar. Lesson learned!

When the reasons are clear, you may initiate/suggest changes, such as:

- Partner should employ an assistant, hire new workforce;
- Partner should change the appointed manager for the project;
- Partner might reallocate some budget to subcontracting to perform adequately a task (if possible);
- Other partners might offer help in finalising specific tasks;
- You may ask the help of the EC to sort out legal/financial matters more quickly;
- You may initiate a full project meeting and take a decision on the next steps;
- Your last chance is to give an official written notice (also to be reported to the EC) to the partner and follow the procedures defined in the CA.

As the Consortium Agreements normally define:
Defaulting Party means a Party which the Steering Committee has identified to be in breach of the Consortium Agreement and/or the Grant Agreement as specified in Article x.x of the Consortium Agreement.

"In the event a responsible Management Body identifies a breach by a Party of its obligations under this CA or the GA (e.g. a partner producing poor quality work), the Coordinator or the party appointed by the responsible Management Body if the Coordinator is in breach of its obligations under this CA or the GA will give written notice to such Party requiring that such breach be remedied within 30 calendar days. If such breach is substantial and is not remedied within that period or is not capable of remedy, the responsible Management Body may decide to declare the Party to be a Defaulting Party and to decide on the consequences thereof".

In the event the responsible Management Body declares a party to be

a Defaulting Party, the consequences may include:

- Termination of the participation of the Defaulting Party
- The Coordinator may require fulfilling new reporting tasks or work plan related requirements from the Defaulting Party and withhold any interim payment from the Defaulting Party until the requirements are met."

But again, good communication and monitoring procedures are needed, and they need to be followed by all partners, so that such cases are noticed in time and solutions can be quickly recommended and implemented.

GA suspension (Beneficiaries)

The beneficiaries may suspend the action (in full or in part), on the ground set out in Article 49 of the GA. GA suspension may be used exceptionally if it is necessary to stop the action implementation, to fix specific problems. It should NOT be used in situations that cannot be resolved through a temporary interruption; in these cases, it may be better to terminate the GA (see Article 50).

Ground for GA suspension (beneficiaries):

Action can no longer be implemented (or becomes excessively difficult)

Example: *A fire devastates a beneficiary's laboratory, with most of the technical equipment and computers used for the action and containing the research results. The beneficiaries therefore request that the part of the action that is affected by this is suspended until the laboratory is restored.*

Suspension starts on the day the Commission/Agency receives the notification (and ends on the resumption date specified in the amendment after resumption).

Information obligation — Depending on the reasons for suspension, the beneficiaries may also have to take other measures under the GA (e.g. inform the Commission/Agency under Article 17.2; notify a situation of force majeure under Article 51)

Procedure

The coordinator must immediately formally notify the Commission/Agency (via the Participant Portal)

GA suspension (Commission/Agency)

The Commission/Agency may suspend the action (in full or in part), on the grounds listed in this Article.

Grounds for GA suspension (Commission/Agency):

- Substantial errors, irregularities or fraud OR serious breach of obligations (in this grant)
  The Commission/Agency may suspend the action, if a beneficiary has committed or is suspected of having committed substantial errors, irregularities or fraud or serious breach of obligations— either during the award procedure or under the GA
  Example: *false declarations in the proposal form, in order to obtain EU funding*

- Substantial errors, irregularities or fraud OR serious breach of obligations (in other grants)

The Commission/Agency may also suspend the action, if such substantial errors, irregularities or fraud or serious breach of obligations were found in other grants, if

- the other grants were awarded under similar conditions and
- the substantial errors, irregularities or fraud or serious breach of obligations:
  - are systemic or recurrent and
  - have a material impact on this grant.

Example: *During an audit of other grants, the Commission detected systematic irregularities in the calculation of personnel costs that also affect all other GAs signed by the audited beneficiary. The Commission may suspend the audited beneficiary's part of the action until the issue is resolved.*

- Loss of scientific or technological relevance
  The Commission/Agency may suspend the action, if it needs time to assess whether the action has lost scientific or technological relevance.
  This may in particular be the case:

  - if a complete revision of Annex 1 is necessary to assess the impact of a request for amendment
  - if work has significantly deviated from the original work plan
  - if a key beneficiary leaves the action and the consortium needs time to find a replacement
  - after a check, audit or review of the action.

Example: *There are technical problems with implementing the work under an action as described in Annex 1, so the consortium proposes changes to the work to be carried out. This may jeopardise its technological relevance and the Commission decides to suspend its implementation and to carry out a review.*

Suspension starts 5 days after it is notified to the coordinator (or on a later date specified in the notification) and ends on the resumption date specified in the amendment signed by the Commission/Agency).

Procedure

Before suspending the GA, the Commission/Agency will follow a contradictory procedure (for the basic contradictory procedure, see Article 42) with the:

- coordinator or
- beneficiary concerned (e.g. for confidentiality reasons or simultaneous suspension of several grants).

If it is directed at the coordinator, the coordinator must inform the other beneficiaries offline, via its usual communication channels (e.g. e-mail, registered letters with proof of delivery, etc.) and ask for their comments.

If it is directed at the beneficiary concerned, the Commission/Agency will inform coordinator separately (in a way that preserves confidentiality).
Information obligation — Beneficiaries normally do not have to inform their coordinators or ask them to submit comments. However, they should inform them, if there is the risk of a significant impact on the action (see Article 17.2)."

(Annotated Model Grant Agreement)

Suspension of a project is normally initiated by the EC and rarely by the consortium. As a Coordinator, you have a crucial role to survive the process and ensure a positive outcome.

You need to develop a "small new project" for the duration of the suspension. The time and efforts are not co-financed, yet, the tasks have to be performed and you need to make sure that they are done in excellent quality. So, as in a traditional project management scenario, set your goals, define the results to be developed and create a detailed implementation plan. Identify the responsible people for each task, set strict deadlines, and monitor the activities on a daily/weekly basis. Remain a strict coordinator as long as needed. You may use the same templates as previously, but they need to be more detailed.

What you need to clearly explain to the partners:

- Extra efforts and work are needed that are not paid by the project, it is their own investment;
- Tight deadlines will need to be kept, the project should be lifted on their priority list;
- Close monitoring will be implemented by you and all partners need to comply with the stricter reporting rules.

Termination of the participation of a partner

You need to follow the rules and guidelines of the programme. A few extra things to consider:

- Personal, face-to-face discussion of the situation with the project officer might be advisable. Discuss also the actions you have planned in order to avoid any problems in the project. (introduce already a new partner, show the re-organised tasks, etc.);
- The terminated partner's exit report and financial statement needs to be carefully checked. You may consider asking for the timesheets and invoice copies;
- Consider the initiation of a suspension if the termination of the partner creates risks in implementation. Suspension might give you enough time to re-organise the project;
- Be aware of the bad scenarios that may come true (partner does not send the reports, partner does not transfer the balance needed from the advance payment, EC initiates sanctions because of non-accepted reports/deliverables from this partner, etc.) and make sure that you have a Plan B.

Problems with the transfer of the Foreground

IPR issues may lead to sensitive legal conflicts and may jeopardise the exploitation of the project's results. In case you have implemented the four simple steps described earlier (before or after GA signature), you should be able to see clearly if and when a transfer of Foreground will happen.

Your role will be:

- To make sure that all beneficiaries are notified (and the EC if the Foreground is transferred to a third country not associated to Horizon 2020);
- To check that the access rights of the other beneficiaries are protected and remain so after the transfer, so that the transfer does not create a security risk or breach of EU market conditions (e.g. creating a competitive disadvantage for the EU, unavailability on the EU market, etc.)
- To make sure that the transfer does not breach any ethical rules and principles.

If your management structure contains an IPR committee, these tasks would fall under its responsibility.

Do you need any other template? Is there any case which is missing here, and you would like to discuss it? Contact us:

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Website: www.europamediatrainings.com