

Factsheet:

Working with partners

This factsheet is designed to give practical advice as well as hints and tips on working with European partners to manage and deliver Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership projects.

It is specifically aimed at those running current Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership projects, however it contains useful ideas for anyone working collaboratively with partners in an international context. There are different kinds of partnership and similar project management techniques that can be used whatever type of European project you're involved in.

Managing your partnership

We highly recommend at the start of your project, you and your partners sign-up to some mutually agreed guidelines on how the project should run and how you will work together. This is known as a **'partnership agreement'** and it's something different from the partner mandates you and your partners signed when you submitted your application. This is a tool to ensure your partners do what is required of them and roles and responsibilities are agreed at the outset, to deliver a high quality project. Although you may feel you have a strong relationship at the beginning of a project, 2-3 years can be a long time! The organisation may also change, so it's vital to have agreements in place. There is no set template for a partnership agreement and you can design your own based on the needs of your project. However you may wish to reference the key requirements outlined in the Grant Agreement you have signed with the National Agency.

Set-up monitoring

Developing a good internal monitoring system is also something you should consider. What is the best way for you to monitor the progress of your project activities amongst your partners? How will you know when activities are delayed and any knock on effect? You could request monthly email updates from partners or have regular Skype updates. However you choose to monitor your project internally it should always give you an accurate picture of how the project is progressing.

Managing participants

As part of the recruitment process, if your project involves participant mobility, think about whether or not participants have passports. If not, how will you resolve this as passport costs are not covered by the funding?

This factsheet contains the following top tips:

1. Think about how to select your partners
2. Know the rules
3. Agree and clearly define roles and responsibilities
4. Ensure regular communication
5. Keep a record of your achievements
6. Speak to your National Agency project officer

It is also good to consider participant withdrawals at an early stage in the project. Will you require a deposit from participants, or hold a small amount of the subsistence funding back to cover any costs incurred as a result of their withdrawal?

Don't forget finances

Throughout your project you will need to provide evidence at key stages to show the activities you listed in your application form have taken place. This includes financial monitoring. It's a good idea to keep important financial information to use as this evidence and log any costs. This is an area some projects can fall down on so please speak to us if you have any questions or concerns about what you need to record.

How should you communicate across the partnership?

The idea of keeping-in-touch with several European partners may seem daunting, but thanks to new web-based apps phone bills and overseas travel should not be a barrier! Here are a few suggestions you might like to consider for different times during the project.

Internet calling

Viber: With over 200 million users, you are able to call others with the app for free. Unlike Skype it uses your actual phone number, so no separate account is necessary. It also integrates with your contacts list.

Skype: You may already be familiar with Skype, but group messaging is also supported, as well as the sending of media files and video messages.

Sharing documents

Dropbox: You can use the Dropbox web interface to set up folders, upload and download files and share links and folders with other people. When you share a folder invitation, they can also upload and modify files to that folder.

Basecamp: Popular with projects, this is a web-based project management tool. You can invite users to your project, upload documents, set milestones and create to-do lists. It's also available across different platforms including iOS and Android.

Instant messaging

WhatsApp: Easily send messages without incurring any costs. WhatsApp uses internet connection – as opposed to standard text messaging – so your messages are sent for free. It's free to use for the first year. After that, it's \$0.99 for renewal after every year.

All of the above? Many online platforms offer an instant messaging service. Viber and Skype also have very popular instant messaging services, so if you like using them for calls, you can think about using them for instant messaging too.

Project top tip! "Keep it simple – some partners may not be as advanced as you when using IT. Remember to use a mix of face-to-face and virtual methods and use team meetings for bonding." Irena Papadopoulou, Key Action 2 project lead, Middlesex University.

Managing partnership meetings

A successful first meeting sets the tone for a good partnership. It's a good idea to host the first meeting to be in charge of logistics, establish your organisation as leading the project and set expectations for following meetings. Here are a couple of things you might want to bear in mind for a successful meeting:

- Find a good venue, if your own organisation doesn't have many comfortable meeting rooms, consider going off-site
- Be prepared to 'go the extra mile' to look after your partners, booking hotel rooms and thinking about how they will get to and from the airport
- Social events can help form good team working, think about activities which can give a flavour of your location and doesn't make the day longer than it needs to be
- Be aware most of your partners will be speaking English as a second (or third) language. So try not to make the agenda too complex, and leave time for coffee and comfort breaks.

Programme team hint! "Be aware of national holidays or any annual leave that any of your partners are planning to take, particularly if it's at a crucial point in your project!"

And finally... Do not think you are the only project manager who has questions. Get in touch with your National Agency project officer who will be happy to help. We'd also recommend you join our Start-up events which are dedicated to helping you through your Erasmus+ project.