FIRST STEPS

Know your project

The following advice may seem obvious, but our experience proved that it is often overlooked:

- Know your project inside-out - have a clear understanding of its activities, their sequence and timing!
- Make sure that all administrative tasks are assigned to the available and relevant person!
- Have a clear understanding of the objectives and focus on the results!
- Have a clear understanding of the ***indicators*** and their ***Sources of Verifications***
- Prepare a detailed monitoring plan and use it!

Know the documents helping you throughout project implementation

Joint Secretariat sent the Initial Info package to Lead Beneficiaries on 19 October 2020 by e-mail.

- **PIH (Project Implementation Handbook) -** http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/downloads-menu/updated-project-implementation-handbook-and-annexes/

- **Visual identity Manual -** http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/downloads-menu/visual-identity-manual-of-interreg-ipa-cbc-hungary-serbia-updated-version/

- **Guidelines for Implementation of Information & Publicity Measures for Projects** - http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/downloads-menu/husrb1903-guidelines-for-implementation-of-information-and-publicity-measures-for-projects/

- **InterregPlus** - User Management Tool for INTERREG+ IT System - http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/news/latest-news/interreg-the-new-information-and-monitoring-system/

- **Procurements (PraG) -** https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/prag/ (current version is in force from 1 August 2020)

- **Procurements (single tender procedure) -** http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/downloads-menu/%C2%A0single-tender-package-is-now-available-in-english-hungarian-and-serbian/

- **Infographics (visualization of implementation processes) -** http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/downloads-menu/infographics-about-project-implementation/

Help - Contacts/contact person

Joint Secretariat - During the project implementation, regular communication with the **JS Programme Manager** (http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/contact/) is a must. Effective communication largely depends on the selection of the project **Contact Person**. As the Lead Beneficiary of your project, make sure to assign this role to a team member who is proactive, very responsive and available, fully understands the project and is aware of the ongoing issues related to the project and has a good command of English.

INTERREG+ Support Team at the **iplussupport@szpi.hu** e-mail address**.**

Serbian beneficiaries - **JS Antenna** in Subotica http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/contact/

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Important documents

Project form (PF) is one of the most relevant documents to use during the project implementation. It is a document with final conditions of project for implementation, and in case your project requested changes, the PF would contain the finalized requested modifications of Information about changes. However, it is advisable to observe the Application Form (AF), as some parts of the AF which are not relevant for project reporting are not included in the PF.

The LB Principle

"The Lead Beneficiary Principle" is not only a requirement of the Programme and the IPA II Implementing Regulation, but a principle that ensures cooperation between project partners and smooth communication with the Joint Secretariat (JS). To make this requirement more practical, we would suggest to the Lead Beneficiary to:

- request weekly updates from the project partners;
- allocate time weekly to send updates to the project partners about information discussed with the JS.

Regular communication between project partners

Efficient communication between project partners is crucial.
We would advise you to invest time in having periodical meetings and gatherings, when possible. Between such meetings, practice regular email correspondence, and audio- and video- conferencing.
Communication within the project should be defined in the preparation phase:

- Project manager should coordinate tasks and update the project team about the further steps;
- Project partners executing similar tasks who have a similar role in the project should exchange information and good practice;
- Every contact person of the respective partnering organization should be aware at all times of the most important facts about the project and the latest updates;
- The Lead Beneficiary organization must have the overview of the entire project and keep the partnering organizations up-to-date about any project-related news.

Communication with the JS

To ensure effective and smooth communication with the Joint Secretariat and the JS Antenna, we advise you to apply the following steps:

- Have all written communication in English. Not only that it is a requirement, but it makes the information available to both the regular contacts and their substitutes, regardless of their spoken language;
- ***Always include your full name, your project name and ID number, your role within the project and your contact information;***
- Allow enough time for the feedback from the JS, as the Programme Managers work on multiple projects and may have occasional absences from the office.

Project management tools

For efficient project management, we would advise you to apply to your work commonly used project management tools, such as: ***Project schedule***; ***Milestone charts***; ***Organization chart***; ***Staffing management plan***; ***Responsibility***

matrix; ***Quality management plan***; ***Risk response plan***; ***Change request form***; and ***Project documentation directory***, to name a few.

Managing risks

Keep an eye on risks arising during the course of project implementation, such as the following situations:

- contracted staff leave the project before it is completed;
- contracted third-party does not deliver results according to the deadline;
- your financial capacity changes,

to be able to react immediately, adapt and prevent possible damage.

Time Management

You can always improve your time management. To avoid project delays, we would advise you to set realistic expectations and deadlines, take into account public holidays when planning and have a back-up plan ready, just in case. When it comes to meetings, it’s better to keep them as short as possible, and focus on brainstorming and discussing issues, risks and opportunities rather than having a status report round.
For successful project time management, we advise you to:

- Break project activities down into sub-activities and tasks;
- Determine the sequence of activities, taking into account that one activity may depend on another;
- Define the time and resources required for identified tasks;
- Create a timeline and ensure that all project team members understand what tasks they are responsible for.

Online and print copies of project documentation

In line with the European Commission’s e-cohesion policies, electronic documentation is preferred to hard copies within the Programme. Nevertheless, we advise you to keep hard copies of the original documentation. This may come in handy in case you need to present them to the First Level Control or the Joint Secretariat.

Monitoring the achievement of the project performance indicators

Completing a project on time and on budget does not necessarily mean that the project achieved high quality results. Therefore, we advise you to closely monitor the progress in the achievement of the project performance indicators. It is advisable to define milestones for each indicator and mark them within the project timeline.

Importance of internal monitoring and evaluation

Implementing a project is a learning process, as well. We would advise you to invest time in your project assessment from its early stages in order to improve your activities as the project. Periodical evaluation of various project components, monitoring the quality and performance and comparing the stats from different periods of the project would help you boost your results.

Record-keeping

For effective record-keeping of project documents, we suggest the following:

- ensure that every document or file is properly worded, designed, and formatted;
- establish and keep clear, accurate and systematic records and accounts from the very beginning of the project;
- come up with a referencing and numbering system that anybody from your project team can follow, so that the documents can be found easily.

Image of the project

Putting the focus on the cross-border cooperation and the partnership matters for building a good image of your project. Some of the ways achieving that may be the following:

- Regular communication and meetings of the project partners (ie. weekly);
- Project partners attending one another's events within the project;
- Mutual respect;
- Resolving internal matters internally, as a team;
- When communicating externally about the project's initiatives and achievements, referring to the partnership and cooperation, rather than the individual organizations.

MODIFICATIONS

Modifications – the LB role

The Programme allows projects to submit one Request for Modifications per reporting period. Since the Lead Beneficiary (LB) submits the Request for Modifications to the Joint Secretariat (JS), it has an important role of collecting requests from the Beneficiaries. To make this process efficient and timely, it is advisable that Beneficiaries consult with the LB while preparing their requests for modifications.

Expectations of a Request for modification

As obvious as it may seem, the experience has proved that it is not always clear what the expectation is:
Requests for Modification at any stage are required to include explanation, justification and the related supporting documents. Request for Modification has to be requested in a set fomat / template. Explanation should include the information on what the requested changes are. Justification should include the reasons for initiating the change and the supporting documents need to back up the justification. Each and every change have to be justified.

Consult with the Programme Manager before sending the Request for Modification

It can easily happen that modifications become necessary during your project implementation. The Joint Secretariat (JS) approves the Request for Modification if it is justified, or forwards the requests to the Managing Authority (MA). In case the modification requires Addendum to the Subsidy Contract the request has to be submitted to MA. Therefore, we advise you to consult with the respective Programme Manager from the JS before finalizing the Request for Modifications.

PROCUREMENT

Preparation activities – eligibility rules

The rules of eligibility are also applicable for expenditures related to preparation activities, even if these activities are performed before the Subsidy Contract is signed. We advise you to take this into account in order to have the expenditures reimbursed

Timing

Procurement procedures are time-consuming, it cannot be started too early. **Start it as soon as possible**!

REPORTING / USAGE OF MONITORING SYSTEM

Reporting

We know it's not a fun activity, but it doesn't have to be difficult. Here are a few suggestions to incorporate into your reporting routine:

- Check the reporting deadlines and plan accordingly;
- Before writing, check the report format and type, and follow the instructions;
- *Be concise* – use short sentences, and avoid using unnecessary words *but explain everything* the way anyone can understand the circumstances without being involved deeply in the project;

How to avoid request for the completion of the PR&AfR

- Review the content before submitting the report, check if the PR proves the progress of the Project
- Do not only copy-paste from the application form or BRs, describe and explain
- If some activities were planned but not performed in the reporting period, explain reasons for delays
- Use the same wording like in the AF
- Explain how the reported value of indicators was calculated
- Prove reported progress and achievements, provide valid Source of Verification
- Give English titles to all documents for clear identification, which can result faster report approval
- Upload SoVs into corresponding folders
- Don't forget to upload the bank statement proving the transfer to partner(s)
- Coordinate with your partners
- Archive project documentation

Reporting on indicators having "%" as its unit (ie. PA 4.2 Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions)

Reporting on such indicator is possible only after all supported action completed, ie in the final report. Otherwise the system adds up the reached percentages of the different reporting periods resulting false value.

InterregPlus (I+) monitoring system

All Beneficiaries within a project are required to send their reports via I+ Monitoring System.
InterregPlus - User Management Tool for INTERREG+ IT system - **http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/news/latest-news/interreg-the-new-information-and-monitoring-system/**

INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

Event – planning

Audience is by all means the most important element of any event.
When planning an event, it is advisable to start communication with your guests during the event preparation phase:

- Send out a 'save the date' note to your guests well ahead of the date of the event, including the dates and the basic information about your event;
- When you finalize the agenda and other details, you should send out the invitations;

- If you plan to invite media to your event, make sure also to follow up with the journalists 1-2 days prior to the event, as their schedules are prone to changes.

Recorded events

Photos and video clips from your project events must have consent of persons they include. However, sometimes obtaining individual consents for photos may not be possible or practical, e.g. at big-scale or public events. Therefore, it is advisable to include a note on the event's agenda, invitation or announcement that the event would be photographed and/or video recorded and that the content would be made public.

Media coverage via events

Your project's public events are excellent occasions for gaining media exposure. Here are a few steps to take for gaining effective media coverage:

- for events that are not only intended for media, make sure to organize a brief segment for the media during which your spokespersons will issue statements, and respond to journalists' questions;
- it is advisable for spokespersons to stand/sit next to the project's promotional tools (e.g. roll-up banner);
- issued statements should consist of concise, easy-to-understand sentences with the key messages of your project, in case journalists decide to use only an excerpt of your interview.

Photography

Good-quality photography is one of the requirements for the projects. We advise you to rely on professional photographers for depicting your projects and documenting your events.
How to be sure that the photography you use to inform about and promote your project is effective?

- A useful rule of thumb would be planning and taking the kind of photography that would appear in a media article describing the project, or in a Programme brochure.
- Generic photos depicting your project would ideally "tell a story", show your project in action, or present the location where the works are implemented;
- Event photos should include obligatory communication elements, speakers, audience, and/or people interacting, in case of workshops.

As for your project's website, blog or social media pages, purchased stock photography is a good choice. Alternatively, you may explore online sources, keeping in mind the following:

- It is not allowed to use just any photo from the Internet – you must own the copyright;
- Some images free of charge and of copyright may require crediting the author;
- At the moment, Creative Commons CC0 images do not require payment, license and crediting the author;
- In any case, before using photos make sure you understand their terms of usage.

Media coverage via press releases

Achieving media coverage about your project is not only a requirement, but also one of the best ways of promoting your project. For strong media coverage, before distributing your press release, it is advisable to:

- tailor the media list, including only contacts who will find the information useful;
- include several photos depicting your project, or your event or spokespersons;
- include a link to a related video clip of your project for online portals and TV stations.

How to turn your press release into a published news article? - Write it in the manner that's useful to journalists.
Tips for effective press releases:

- Use the template the Programme provided for your project!
- Avoid embellishing and report objectively!

- The lead paragraph should be 1-2 sentences, answering the questions:
- Who? What? When? How? Why?
- List the information by relevance, starting with the most important one!
- Create a catchy yet factual headline that indicates the topic of your press release!

After distributing the press release, you may go an extra mile for better results, and follow up with journalists via phone to check if they received the release and whether they would need any other information.

Media interviews

Hints for establishing good relations with media and delivering effective media interviews:
- Journalists have busy and changing schedules - be flexible!
- Ask for interview questions in advance, if possible!
- Answer the question first, and then provide some examples!
- Give verified, accurate information only!
- Appreciate the given opportunity – follow up the journalist

Graphic design tools

Graphic design tools could help you improve quality of your posts on your project's social media pages:
We advise you to use professional graphic design services when producing your promotional material and editing the templates of the Programme provided for projects.

However, graphics accompanying posts on your social media pages may be an exception. At the moment, there are quite a few free-of-charge graphic tools intended for non-graphic designers that may be found online. With a bit of effort and time, you may create visually appealing and catchy posts.

Social media

Struggling to produce social media content? Tips for your project's social media page:
- Share your project's announcements, photos and video clips!
- Share relevant media news related to your project and the Priority Axis!
- If dealing with complex terminology – post simplified definitions, adding some visuals!
- Connect with the Programme's social media page and share its content with your followers!

Presenting your project

Project events, media interviews, as well as informal conversations about your project call for a brief summary of your project – the one that could tell within 1-2 minutes. The same summary "About the project" fits well into press releases, allowing journalists to use it as such in media articles without having to search for information at various sources.

It is advisable for your "About the project" summary to include the following information:
- Name of the project and the Priority it covers while being implemented within the Interreg-IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia Programme;
- The amount of the EU (IPA) contribution;
- The goals – the problems it will help resolve or improvements it will make in the border
- region;
- Duration of the project and main activities for achieving the set goals;
- Partnering organizations and the source of more detailed information about the project.