

Quick guide for schools #2

During: running a project

A practical guide
for school leaders

Running a project

You and your partners will really benefit if you think beyond implementing the planned content. The most successful projects allocate considerable time and resources to building relationships among the partners as the basis for future cooperation. This section shows how to manage some of the administrative, academic, and cultural aspects of implementing Erasmus+ activities.

The information and advice presented mostly concerns transnational collaborative projects involving multiple partners. While not all of it will be equally relevant to, for example, a small mobility project, much of it can (in a simplified form) be applied to such projects as well.

Project start-up

A significant amount of time will have passed between the submission of the application and the award of your grant. You should re-read your project proposal to familiarise yourself with the project objectives, the planned activities and any agreements you made with your project partners, and re-establish communication with all the participants. You should remind them of the project objectives and determine, with them, the next steps in getting started. The focus will depend on what you have planned and agreed in your application. You should also ask every project participant to let you know if there have been any changes in circumstances (personnel changes, address changes, etc.). It is important to confirm the contact points in case it is necessary to adjust the partnership or project activities. In the start-up phase it is also critical that you are clear about financial arrangements and reporting, as well as the payment process; for Strategic Partnerships in particular the lead organisation will be responsible for project funds.

Involving all partners from the very beginning will help you foster:

- A group identity;
- Shared aims and values;
- Clear lines of communication;
- Complementary expertise and pedagogical approaches;
- Fair and proportionate distribution of roles and responsibilities.

Prior to the first project activity, meeting, or training, it pays to exchange information that will help partners prepare. For example, if you are participating in a Strategic Partnership (Key Action 2) each partner could circulate their aims and objectives.

Typically, projects will organise a ‘kick off’ meeting, either physically or through a telephone or video conference.

In addition, it is worthwhile to set up a collaboration space online. You could create a ‘Twinspace’ on eTwinning, where partners can meet regularly to plan and collaborate on activities. A TwinSpace is easy to set up and use, has many useful functions and can be made private or public depending on your preference.

At the beginning, it is worthwhile to agree in writing how the partnership will communicate during your project or activity.



Practical example

Communicating with partners

A school in the Czech Republic ran a project involving 10 countries. At the first project meeting, the following communication methods were agreed:

eTwinning was used to maintain everyday communication between teachers.

A **Facebook group** was set up for students to enable them to exchange comments and post photographs.

Video conferencing (Skype) was used for meetings, and all partners received instructions about how to use screen sharing features in order to present and collaborate on documents during meetings.

A **cloud storage account** (Google Drive) was created as a repository for project documents (word processing, spreadsheets, presentations). This had the advantage of permitting all participants to edit documents simultaneously and prevented the confusion that can arise when multiple versions of the same file are shared as email attachments.

Some initial communication exchanges can help partners prepare, and get to know one another. You could, for example, share the following on your TwinSpace or other communication platforms:

- The contexts and characteristics of each school or organisation;
- Each organisation's European Development Plan;
- The objectives and project learning outcomes/products;
- The content of your project (project activities, meetings);
- Roles and responsibilities;
- The linguistic support to be provided to participants;
- The administrative arrangements;
- The necessary monitoring, evaluation and dissemination measures required at each project phase.



In focus

Sharing reporting responsibilities

All projects need to report on activities, outcomes and finances. Reporting is very important because failure to submit a report may mean your school is required to partially or fully reimburse the EU grant.

From the very beginning, partners should be tasked with providing your project coordinator with all information required for reporting. This ensures the project coordinator will have the necessary information to draft the reports and share them for comment at partnership meetings.

It is wise to put more than one person in charge of reporting. Sharing this task ensures that when staff leave or fall ill, other colleagues are in a position to complete the report. The dates for report monitoring and submission should be included in your school's calendar, as well as the personal calendars of your school's leadership and other project participants.

Furthermore, it is useful to consult the interim and final reporting templates so you know, in advance, what information you will need to collect in order to report on your activities. Make sure that you complete your report as you go along, and not just before the submission deadline.

Partnership team-building ideas

Take some time to establish a positive working environment among the partners, particularly if it is the first time you have worked together.

 Every group member has different ideas, temperaments and schedules. But that is the advantage of these projects.'

Christiane Meisenburg, Teacher, Germany

If you or your staff are participating in mobility activities at a host institution (teaching assignments or job shadowing), it is highly recommended that you establish a mobility agreement before the activity takes place. This agreement should be made between the sending school, the receiving organisation and the participant. It should set out the programme and content of the activity, the learning outcomes to be achieved, the tasks of the different parties, the type of certificate that will be issued to the participant, etc. A template for a mobility agreement is available – ask your National Agency.

It can also be helpful to exchange other information, for example about the experience of the member of staff who is participating in the mobility activity, teaching assignment

or job shadowing. With this information, the receiving organisation can further tailor the activity to specific needs and interests. A pre-mobility questionnaire can be used to collect this information.

If pupils will be undertaking study mobility during your project, careful planning and close communication between sending and receiving schools is especially important. This will help safeguard the pupil's welfare and learning outcomes. A comprehensive guide is available to help you with this process, and following it carefully is highly recommended. Please ask your National Agency for this guide.



Suggestion

What could be included in a pre-mobility questionnaire for participants?

- Name;
- School;
- Current role and responsibilities in school;
- Stage of teaching (pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational);
- Main reasons for participating in a European project;
- Specific learning goals;
- Experience in the areas that are the focus of your project;
- Language expertise – which languages (understanding, speaking to what level);
- Particular interests;
- Dietary needs/food allergies;
- Access requirements (for people with disabilities).

You could circulate links to websites of national or local education authorities to give an insight into national or local systems. It is useful to include fact sheets about the education or training system in the country too – just be careful not to overwhelm your partners!



In focus

Making a good impression – your first activity, training session or meeting with partners

‘I believe the success of the project was based on the agreements made at the initial meeting.’

Robert O’Leary, Principal, Ireland

It is really important to lay a good foundation during your first activity, training session or meeting, whether it takes place online, by teleconference or in person.

An important objective is for all partners to leave the first meeting feeling assured about the quality of leadership and the level of resources available. They should be confident that adequate planning has been undertaken and high-quality activities have been developed. Careful preparation on all sides is vital to ensuring this.

Prior to the activity, training session or meeting, a detailed agenda or schedule should be sent to everyone. The schedule should not only make clear what the activity, training session or meeting will be about and who will attend, but also how the participants should prepare. Such simple steps not only set the tone for the whole project, but will also put participants at ease, particularly if they have not engaged in an international project before.

Some schools use the first meeting to specify meeting ‘etiquette’ such as switching off mobile phones, ensuring everyone has a chance to speak and are listened to, adhering to start times for activities and meetings, and meeting deadlines.

If you, as a school leader, are not participating directly in project activities or meetings, you should set aside time to encourage your own staff in their work. If the first project activity is in your own school, you could attend part of the activity to send a clear message about the importance of the project. If the first activity involves receiving international visitors, they will really appreciate it if you are present to welcome them at the start of the meeting or activity.

Preparing for Erasmus+ activities

The following considerations will help you prepare for any mobility activities (i.e. involving travel abroad). As you have seen, such activities can form part of both Staff Mobility (Key Action 1) and Strategic Partnerships (Key Action 2) projects.

Travel arrangements

Before participants leave home, it is essential that they have a clear travel itinerary and directions to their final destination(s), including hotels and the venue or school. If participants need to travel to an area that is difficult to reach, consider arranging to collect them from the airport, train station or a central location. If several visitors are expected, it might be more economical to hire a mini-bus or large taxi than for participants to arrange their own travel. All participants should have a contact number in case of emergency.

Meals, accommodation and venues

Many European projects involve partner meetings, training and activities that require logistical preparation.

Try to find venues that are easy to reach by public transport (particularly if visitors need to catch a train/flight after the meeting or conference). Otherwise, you may find many participants will want to leave early and this can cause disruption on the final day.

Some participants may be unable to eat certain foods for medical or religious reasons, so it is important to request this information from participants and to take specific requirements into account when booking meals.

Remember to ask participants if they have any access requirements. This way you can ensure your school, the venue and the hotel are prepared to accommodate their needs upon arrival (hearing loops, disability assistance, sign language, etc.).

Participant orientation

At the beginning of a project activity it is a good idea to run through the activity programme with the participants. Whenever someone is undertaking a teaching assignment, job shadowing visit or engaging in a partnership, there may be different interpretations about what will take place. These different expectations can be constructed from what has been written and agreed upon before your project, simply because of different definitions and translations of words and phrases.

A brief orientation session is a simple way to avoid misunderstandings at the start of the activity. The session could involve:

- reiterating the aims, content and information of the activity, and any cultural or social events planned for visitors;
- informing participants about Wi-Fi passwords, hot-desking and other resources available during their stay;
- a tour of facilities (cloakroom, toilets, dining hall, etc.);
- answering questions and responding to specific requirements.

Overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers

Creating an environment and atmosphere that enables openness and reflection on expectations is the key to developing trusting and respectful partnerships.

It is worth considering the potential implications arising when participants from 'direct' and 'indirect' communication cultures work together:

- **Direct communication cultures:** meaning and requests are conveyed explicitly to the people involved (why did you do it like that?).
- **Indirect communication cultures:** meaning is conveyed by suggestion, implication, non-verbal behaviour, and contextual signals. This style limits confrontation or the potential for disagreement (e.g. I'm curious to find out more about that approach - can you tell me about it?).

Those accustomed to indirect communication may feel their expertise is being challenged by a direct question. Alternatively, people who are more used to direct questions can find it hard to understand or interpret an indirect style. Acknowledging these differences can be the theme of a fun and informative 'ice-breaker' exercise or group discussion.

Cultural differences should not be underestimated either. It is helpful to establish matters of school etiquette. For example, school dress codes vary considerably across Europe. In some countries teachers dress informally and wearing jeans is the norm, whereas in other countries it would be considered inappropriate for a teacher to wear jeans to school.

It is good practice to provide participants with a concise information pack before they travel, to help prevent inadequate preparation or embarrassment!



Suggestions

Allow time for networking

Networking is one of the things Erasmus+ participants say they value about European projects. It is also one of the best ways to support linguistic development and intercultural understanding.

Try to allocate time for informal discussions and social activities. Informal settings are particularly helpful for participants to practise their language skills in if they don't feel confident to speak in formal settings.

Help visitors prepare for mobility

Prepare an information pack containing for example:

- the activity programme;
- travel advice and directions;
- dress code;
- access arrangements for people with disabilities;
- school etiquette (e.g. how to address pupils/teachers);
- What to bring for special events or field trips (e.g. if visiting a farm, participants may need walking boots);
- information about the weather and how to prepare for it (e.g. jumpers essential!).

Planned reflection by participants during Erasmus+ activities

Planned reflection can really help participants and organisers monitor and evaluate progress, and adapt activities to changing needs or unforeseen circumstances. A simple structure for planned reflection helps to support dialogue, recognise learning identify gaps in learning. For example:

- What did I learn in relation to the planned learning outcomes?
- Which learning outcomes still need to be addressed?
- Did I learn anything unanticipated?
- What was particularly challenging?
- How can I apply what I have learned in my school, community or elsewhere?
- Who else might benefit from what I've learned and how can I share it with them?

These questions can be used for individual, group or peer learning, or mentoring conversations. Amendments to planned activities may be necessary to provide for any identified gaps in the process of achieving the planned learning outcomes. In some cases, reflection may also lead to slight changes in the initial learning outcomes once participants have a better understanding of the selected project topic.

 Using questionnaires at several points during the project helped us to evaluate the work done and propose activities for monitoring the process.'

Annemie Lauryssens, School International Relations Coordinator, Belgium

Whether you and your staff are involved in a Staff Mobility (Key Action 1) project or a Strategic Partnership (Key Action 2), time should be set aside at regular intervals to review what has been learned. Some time should be allocated to allow participants to formulate personal action plans, as well as contribute to project planning if future meetings or activities have been scheduled. While this may seem like a lot of work, it will actually save time since the experiences documented as part of planned reflection will be useful when completing your project evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation during implementation

The methods, roles and responsibilities for fulfilling this requirement need to be agreed upon before your project. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation during implementation is normally relatively straightforward.

Some projects are required to report on monitoring and evaluation halfway through implementation (with the interim report), while shorter projects are only required to submit a final report.



Practical example

The evaluation of a European Partnership

A UK school led a European partnership with a school in Poland, in order to create a Model United Nations (MUN) exchange. The main activities were one-day United Nations style meetings for 200 pupils and staff from the partner schools. There were two such activities per year (over two years). Each year one meeting was held in the UK and one in Poland. Mobilities were funded within the partnership grant to enable pupils and staff to attend the meeting at the host school. Mobilities were also arranged to allow Polish and UK teaching staff to attend training on organising and running MUN activities and on teaching citizenship skills.

The partnership had four objectives:

Objective 1: To build the capacity of each partner to create Model United Nations (MUN) programmes.

Objective 2: To enable partners to better understand the causes and solutions of intercultural conflicts.

Objective 3: To equip teachers to support pupils with citizenship skills.

Objective 4: To enable pupils to understand the connections between local and global development issues and problem solving.

Each objective was assessed on four or five indicators. These were concrete outcomes linked to the criteria. In the case of Objective 1, the indicators selected included tangible quality measures such as the extent to which staff demonstrated knowledge of the aims of the MUN programme; the extent to which staff felt confident enough to recreate MUN events in the future; and the number of participants who completed capacity building training sessions.

The evaluation was led by an educational researcher, specialised in MUN programmes who conducted structured observations, participant interviews, and participant case studies. Questionnaires were used to measure opinions regarding the project's success in realising the evaluation goals.

The outcomes were shared at project meetings after each activity, which provided an opportunity to incorporate any lessons learned into subsequent activities. The outcomes were also published as a report at the end of the project and were included in the partnership's final report.

Whatever the requirement, it is important to keep in mind the following to ensure that your monitoring and evaluation is completed to a high standard and on schedule:

- **Make sure you receive the necessary contributions from the partners on time**

Partners should be made aware of the importance, requirements and deadlines for reporting. It is a good idea for your project coordinator to send reminders well in advance of these deadlines.

- **Ensure the monitoring and evaluation data is comprehensive**

If some activities have not been completed or have only been partially completed, it is essential to find out why this was the case and what, if any, alterations/alternative activities were undertaken to compensate for this. This information will be important when reporting to the National Agency.

- **Be proactive if the project is not going to plan**

If there are serious issues, which suggest it is likely or possible that some of the requirements of the grant agreement cannot be met, it is important to be pro-active and communicate this to your National Agency at an early stage. They will do their best to assist you and agree a solution. In some cases they may be able to amend the contract, for example.

- **Don't be afraid to make adjustments**

If your project includes multiple activities, take the opportunity to use monitoring and evaluation data from your activities to make improvements to subsequent activities. For example, if one group of mobility participants found that not enough time was allocated to asking questions during a learning event, it should be straightforward to adjust the programme to ensure subsequent participants do not make the same complaint. Online partner meetings are a good opportunity to raise such suggestions and agree modifications.

You may also want to make changes if it seems likely you will meet your objectives ahead of time. Monitoring and evaluating your progress provides a chance to decide how you could go beyond the original plan within the scope of your grant.

- **Timing is everything**

Remember that even the most advanced evaluation methods in the world will count for little if the evaluation is administered at the wrong time. For example, if participants are asked about some areas of your project or their own learning too soon, they may be unable to provide an answer. Alternatively, if opinions are only solicited at the end, participants may be annoyed that their ideas and suggestions will not benefit them.

Take care to ensure that evaluation activities are implemented at a time when meaningful feedback can be obtained and bear in mind that evaluation can help you make improvements during as well as after your project or activity.



Suggestion

Some widely used evaluation techniques for Erasmus+ activities:

Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be conducted online/by email or in person at an event or activity to obtain information quickly from a wide variety of people. This is an inexpensive method and the data can be easily analysed. Furthermore, questionnaires can be useful if you want to obtain anonymous feedback.

Structured interviews

To obtain a deeper insight into participants' experiences of Erasmus+ activities you could conduct some structured interviews, either in person or by phone/internet call. Interviewees must be asked the same questions. This approach may be useful if you want to compare more qualitative aspects of your participants' experiences. For example, you may want to see how the visiting participants' experiences compare with that of the host participants.

Semi-structured interviews

In semi-structured interviews, some questions are pre-determined and others are spontaneous, and based on the issues arising from the discussion. Questions are mainly open, allowing participants to express their opinions. Semi-structured interviews are used to understand participants' personal experiences and impressions. This method is normally conducted by phone or in person.

Evaluation stories

Evaluation stories are a longer-term evaluation method. This involves documenting instances in which an Erasmus+ activity has made a tangible difference. Examples include changes to the curriculum or the implementation of a school policy.

Example question before your project: *What is the situation at the moment? How could the activity/project improve it?*

Example question after your project: *What was the situation like before the activity/project? How has it changed now?*

Photographic or video legacies

A photographic or audiovisual record can contribute to conveying the visual quality of the activity, and the mood or excitement of participants. This is also useful to illustrate your evaluation and communication materials (articles, blog posts, online photo albums, etc.).

Share the outcomes of your project

In the context of European projects, awareness-raising is normally referred to as 'dissemination'. Your dissemination plans will have been developed before the project; however, new ideas will inevitably arise during implementation.

In fact, many participants like to make 'dissemination opportunities' a regular topic in discussions and meetings between partners.

Getting the word out was essential. We spread the word in lessons, at meetings with the teachers and parents, on the school's website...The same was done on Facebook. Articles were published in the local newspaper, Sõnumitooja... the information boards at school informed the student body about the tasks, achievements, upcoming activities and competitions.'

Krista Kuusk, Project Coordinator, Estonia



Practical example

A project coordinator shares how he developed and implemented a dissemination strategy

Jean-Pierre Marcadier, a modern languages teacher at a French school, was responsible for coordinating a partnership across eight countries. He developed a valorisation plan to share the outcomes of his project inside and outside his school.

We had a robust strategy to disseminate the project through local associations, museums, and local authorities... In my school's case, a prominent museum in our city is working alongside us for European exhibitions... Such partnerships with businesses have been vital, given our vocational curriculum.

We also actively targeted various dissemination channels including specialist publications, social networks and the press. Local and regional dissemination is typically facilitated by the press, which is why we have built close relationships with regional newspapers. One focus of our project was defined through writing activities in a high school newspaper, "The Wall." In addition, we created a special partnership between our project and a related professional journal where we contributed a monthly column in connection with our educational and European activities.

Our website was used to reach all project members and partners, including parents, businesses, and alumni... Social networks were useful for maintaining relations with parents and alumni.

The strong emphasis on dissemination gave our achievements widespread visibility. Implications in terms of image of the institution, the recruitment of future students, and relationships with institutions will be important in the future.'

The following are some popular ways to disseminate Erasmus+ projects:

Radio, TV and newspapers

Local and national media outlets often pick up press releases by EU funded projects, particularly if you can demonstrate the inspiring personal achievements of pupils or teachers. Try to find the ‘human interest’ of your project and be sure to include high-quality photos if you want to secure media coverage. You will find this process becomes easier if you can develop an ongoing relationship with reporters by providing them with a steady stream of high-quality stories.

School events

Give your European projects a platform at events organised or attended by your school, whether it is a teacher conference, school assembly, parents evening or open day. A simple display area or presentation slot for pupils and staff involved in your project is all it takes.

eTwinning

TwinSpace allows you to create websites, blogs, photo galleries, etc. which can be published. Don't forget to update your project summary, which is visible to anyone browsing or searching for projects on the eTwinning portal.

Websites and social media

Many schools dedicate a section of their website to Erasmus+ projects and post regular updates on social media to publicise outcomes. A multi-author blog is a particularly effective way to diarise participants' experiences while abroad.

Parents' networks

You may be surprised to learn how many parents belong to an organisation that can help disseminate the outcomes of your project. Be sure to encourage parents to spread the word at their workplace and through their personal networks.

Stakeholder networks

Local bodies such as libraries, museums, youth organisations and universities may be able to help you access their own dissemination channels.

Your National Agency and eTwinning National Support Service

Find out if the Erasmus+ National Agency in your country or the National Support Service for eTwinning can publicise the outcomes of your project. They may be able to publish an article about you in their forthcoming news bulletin or showcase your project on their website.

Participation enhances the reputation of the school as you have many opportunities to inform the public about ongoing work and the project meetings. In our case, the local media published many articles and video clips, which lead to recognition and awareness by parents and the city council.'

Gisela Gutjahr, Teacher, Austria

Obtaining high-quality photos and videos for dissemination

It is important to ask participants involved in Erasmus+ activities to record their experiences to ensure you have high-quality photos and videos to showcase what your school has achieved. Projects are doing this by:

- lending participants cameras so they can document their experiences as a photo or video diary. If loaning equipment is not feasible, you may find that participants are happy to use their own or to take some shots using their mobile phones;
- asking participants to take plenty of 'work-related' pictures and videos to ensure you have plenty of evidence of project activities;
- asking participants to think carefully about what they film and for how long. Hours of film can take a very long time to edit;
- making sure participants are aware of the national and international laws governing copyright, privacy and consent. Signed consent should be obtained from each individual photographed. Do ensure you have parents' consent before photographing or filming children too. This can be done with a form for parents to sign at the start of your project.

‘Exploitation’ means using the European project to benefit your school and your community, or to improve education or training at local level or even beyond. The underlying aim of exploitation measures is to ensure that your school’s new knowledge, skills and working methods continue to be adopted and shared long after your project has ended.

For example:

- participants could give feedback to school colleagues on the approaches used by others, in order to instigate new ways of working;
- your school could introduce the methods learned during the activity into teaching or management practice;
- your school could promote the foreign language learning in school and among colleagues, students, family and friends;
- your school could grant further students and colleagues the opportunity to participate in similar activities or future projects;
- your project or activity could be used as a starting point for involvement in other European projects.

Concluding steps: how to end your project or activity on a high!

As activities are drawing to a close it is important to signal that the European project does not end at this point. This is the perfect time to encourage participants to share, in writing, how they intend to apply their new learning within school or as part of their professional or academic development.

Furthermore, it is worthwhile keeping lines of communication open with your partners by arranging follow-up meetings or phone conversations, in order to plan a follow-up Erasmus+ project. eTwinning is a natural space to maintain dialogue too.

Sustaining the learning outcomes is a key part of any European project and will be dealt with in the ‘After’ stage of this Guide.

“Erasmus+ makes our school work richer and [more] colourful, and we have changed into a European school forever.”

Ricarda Geidelt, Teacher, Germany