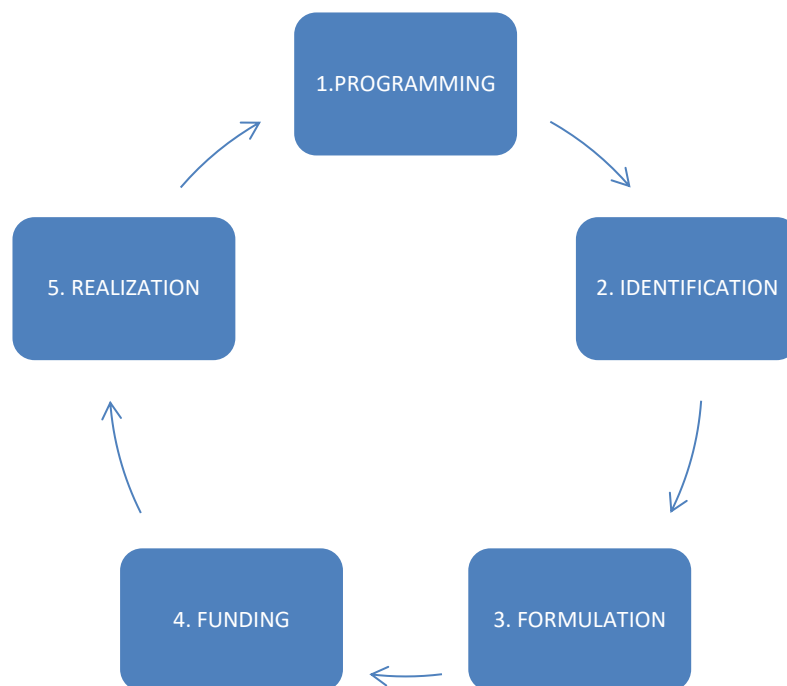# E-MANUAL

TOOLKIT – GUIDE TO PLANNING EU PROJECTS IN THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL HEALTH SECTOR

2.2 PROJECT METHDOLOGY AND PROJECT PHASES

The best-known and most widely used method of project drafting is the Project Cycle **Management-PCM** method.

The PCM breaks down the different phases of a project into a few key steps - **Project Stages**:

The Project Stages are progressive: in general, it is not possible to start a phase if the previous one is not completed, some kind of "validation" by the design team and the organization is needed to proceed from one stage to the next.

It is called a "**cycle**" because **the concluding evaluation transfers the experience of newly concluded interventions into the design of future interventions** (feedback, redesign, etc.). Often when planning, it is thought that "Unpacking a Project" is an unnecessary "effort," but envisaging the Project Stages allows you to define and focus key actions, necessary information, and responsibility at each level, ensuring a proper division of tasks and necessary actions. Moreover, **the great advantage of PCM, since it**

is a cyclical path, is that it allows continuous verification in the various Project Stages (well distinguished and defined) from its first formulation and to intervene in the project activity, making changes and/or improvements.

The PCM offers a structure that ensures that all stakeholders are actively involved in the project writing and implementation process. It then allows all the information that is needed for the project to be made available so that all ideas can be evaluated throughout the project cycle. In fact, it is a participatory methodology (to be employed with all project stakeholders) for decision making (what is to be done, for whom, and with whom) and activity design (how to do it, with what means and costs).

THE STAGES OF PCM

It should be emphasized that **the PCM** is not something that is rigid and divorced from context, but rather it is a **reference methodology for project management that is possible** (indeed, desirable) to **adapt to the needs of each context** in which it is applied.

As can be seen, **the methodology considers the Project Cycle from beginning to end** as a set of well-defined but at the same time strongly interrelated actions in a circular sequence. Thus, there is not only randomness between the various stages, but also interaction and interdependence.

PROGRAMMING

The **first phase** *of* the PCM *is to find out whether the project idea as a whole is consistent with what is stated in the call for proposals.*

The purpose of this stage is also to: (i) identify and agree on the *main purposes of the project*; (ii) provide an initial idea of what we *plan to accomplish*, the *priorities*, and the *people we plan to involve*. This is the stage when it is very important to document the guidelines and all past documentation, including past projects already funded on the topic by the European Commission.

IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT PARTNERS

Partners - and eligible countries - are always detailed within the call. Therefore, it is important to always read carefully all the information in the call, including with respect to the countries that may be involved in the project.

Do not forget the "type" (e.g., the characteristics of the entities/organizations that can participate), check the number of partners, etc. It is also necessary to make sure that all chosen partners share the set goals, have an identical understanding of them, and are synergistic in realizing the goals.

A partner's experience is very important, even more so if he or she is the proposing or "lead" partner. In addition, not only are the curriculum and experience of the proposing institution/organizations and partners important, but the figure of the overall coordinator (Project Manager - PM), whose resume should be attached, assumes great importance.

The PM, who tends to be indicated by the lead partner, should be someone with good experience in the subject matter in question and who already has experience in coordinating European projects.

Finding transnational partners is particularly complex if we do not already have European networks with which we collaborate and especially if we are new to the process. It is often the case that the partner search is done a few days before the deadline of the call. Let's not frustrate the project effort with the absence of partners. Let's not forget that the production of formal documentation may require implementation time that we cannot predict.

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the characteristics and number of partners are one of the most important elements in the approval of the project and its success; therefore, this stage must be addressed with appropriate timing and methods.

For the purposes of searching for partners, as a first step, it is necessary to prepare **a project summary sheet (abstract)**, obviously in English. The summary sheet should be brief and written in simple language. The following points should be highlighted:

1. the call name (and program) in which you want to participate

2. the expiration

3. the goals

4. fundable activities

5. the draft activity plan (including the methodology of implementation and expected outcomes)

6. the duration

7. the total cost (highlighting the total co-funding you intend to request from the committee and the total co-funding requested from partners, explaining whether this should be in cash, or in man-hours and rent and equipment, etc.).

8. the type of partners being sought

This must be combined with a **brief presentation of the entity/organization** we represent, again in English. Once the summary is prepared, it is necessary to select the parties with whom you want to activate the project consortium. First, you can start with the European networks to which you belong or turn to your own territorial networks and see if they have contacts with others in Europe.

The **websites of the DGs and Agencies, the Funding&Tenders Portal**, as well as the information bodies, greatly facilitate the search for partners. Indeed, these tools make it possible to get in touch with numerous actors. For example, one can check whether the DG, which issued the call, has set up a database that lists individuals who wish to apply or participate as partners.

It may also be useful to examine the records of projects funded in past years and see if partner data can be traced from them. An alternative is to conduct targeted searches, via the internet, that allow groups of associations to be selected according to specific themes.

One should not forget, of course, the **regional representation offices in Brussels**.

The next step will be to send the selected individuals the project summary, the curriculum of the institution/organization, and then contact them by phone.

Should the partner show interest, arrangements will be made:

- ask, in the overall planning of activities, where they feel they can contribute strongly by demonstrating prior experience and specific ability;
- submit a Word document that includes all information requested of partners in the project submission template (the document should be completed by each partner according to the directions given and sent to the project coordinator for the relevant completion of the partner portion of the template)
- send partners an Excel sheet indicating the types of expenditures under the project (according to the different actions), asking them to indicate the costs to be charged to the different expenditure items
- for some calls it will be necessary to transmit the facsimile of the membership letter, which must be returned to you completed and signed along with the curriculum of the "contact" person.

In order to meet the call timeline and deadline, it is important to set a schedule to share with partners so that all information can be retrieved in a timely manner.

When choosing partners, it is definitely an added advantage to already know the partners you intend to involve, as this aspect allows not only better project management in the implementation stage, but also in the proposal stage.

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

At this stage, first the **context** and **scenario** must be considered. This is because once problems (or needs) are identified, they are considered in relation to the potential and obstacles presented by the context.

Typically, at the project identification stage, **the Logical Framework is developed**, which is the logical structure of the project: a matrix that displays all the essential elements of the project, highlighting their relationships. The Logical Framework (QL) allows for a rigorous identification of the process that leads from the problems (few in number and

specific in scope) to be solved, to the identification of goals and outcomes, (again few and specific), and, if well applied, it represents a tool that allows the various actors to participate in the definition of a transparent, as well as logical, itinerary using common concepts and languages. The processing and application are based on the following binomials:

i.	**Cause-and-effect:** it starts with an *analysis of the context, the negative situation that is intended to be addressed and to help improve and change*. The first stage is the **identification of problems** (generally those that will be expressed as needs that justify the design and implementation of the project), to move on to the next stage consisting of the selection of the problems. The process is facilitated by the use of a graphical representation in the form of a *diagram or "tree" of problems* (we will see this later), where an underlying cause (logically and hierarchically in the diagram) corresponds to a problem (effect).
ii.	**Negative situation-positive situation:** goal identification is the positive transposition of the negative situation identified at the beginning of the previously described cause-and-effect process related to problems. Once the problems have been selected, the main problem, the purpose of the project (which will correspond to the main problem), and the outcomes that will relate to the other selected problems can be identified.
iii.	**Means-ends (vertical logic):** this is the path that begins with the *identification of means in the direction of achieving goals*. The components of concatenation are: the means to be allocated, the activities to be carried out, the expected outcomes, and the goals to be pursued.
iv.	**Vertical logic-horizontal logic:** is the interweaving of a concatenation represented by indicators, sources of verification, hypotheses, preconditions (horizontal logic) and the various elements of vertical logic (activities, outcomes, goals). It is this interweaving that is presented in the form of a matrix.
v.	**Activities-responsibilities and activities-times:** from the selection of activities to the assignment of responsibilities and the timetable for execution. The activities, identified through the construction of the QL can be listed again in various tables, where they are the reference for assigning responsibilities to the various individuals called upon to perform the different roles and, moreover, for estimating the time required for their implementation.
vi.	**Elements of the QL-criteria for monitoring and evaluation:** once the project is formulated, the elements of the QL can be related to each other to facilitate monitoring and evaluation exercises, and in particular, the following criteria are considered: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability.

The QL is in the form of a matrix:

	LOGIC OF INTERVENTION	INDICATORS	VERIFICATION TOOLS	EXTERNAL CONDITIONS
GENERAL TARGETS				
SPECIFIC TARGETS				
RESULTS				
ACTIVITIES		TOOLS	COSTS	
				PRECONDITIONS

VERTICAL LOGIC	The four components (boxes) in the first column represent the so-called "vertical logic," first defined in the list of logical and operational binomials as the means/ends binomial.

HORIZONTAL LOGIC	The boxes in the first horizontal row represent the so-called "horizontal logic" and primarily provide the information (in the form of indicators) to measure the implementation and outcomes of the project, how to verify the same indicators and the "framework of uncertainties," expressed in the form of hypotheses (last box).

The significance of the components of the QL can be presented as follows:

General goals: constitute the third and final level of activity products. **There can be several overall (or development) goals**, they constitute the furthest product of the project in time and relate to an overall development perspective of the area of intervention, justifying the very existence of the project. They must be **consistent with the "policy" and priorities of the relevant programme**. The project alone cannot achieve the overall goals, which instead requires a set of related projects and programmes. Consequently, the overall goals relate to a perspective that exceeds the project life cycle, and project managers partially contribute to their achievement.

Specific goals: specific goals indicate the positive situation (in contrast to the negative situation, the initial state of the intervention) characterized by the sustainable goals for the beneficiary group. It is the direct consequence of the realization and utilization by the beneficiaries of the expected outcomes of the project. Project managers are responsible for its full achievement.

Outcomes: constitute the first level of activity products. **Each purpose of a project must be supported by at least one outcome**. The works and services that constitute the outcomes, if implemented, will lead to the achievement of the project purpose.

Activities: these are **the actions required to transform means into outcomes**. The means consist of human, physical and financial resources.

Indicators: the **"objectively verifiable" indicators** present, with respect to the group of beneficiaries, the changes in the parameters. Progress will be measured in relation to time and to place, and will always refer to the starting situation and the various milestones (annual and final). Indicators should be limited in number and complexity, related to each level of the vertical logic, clear, developed in a participatory manner with direct stakeholders/beneficiaries.

Sources of verification: project reports, statistics, specific surveys may be the known sources of verification of indicator information.

Risks: managing uncertainty and thinking about the probability of occurrence of events are crucial for project preparation and management. **The risks to be identified describe the external conditions (factors) that are important to the success of the intervention, but which are not controllable by the intervention itself (through mitigation measures).** They apply at the activity, outcome and specific goal level. During the preparation stage, the probability of realization of these factors should be examined and the design abandoned or reformulated if crucial but difficult to realize conditions, called killer assumptions, have been identified.

Preconditions: these **are external factors that must occur/be present prior to the start of the project** and condition its initiation.

PROJECT FORMULATION

The stage following identification is project formulation, which is **the development and drafting of the final text in which all elements of the project are developed in detail.** The final document will be the official text of the project, that is, the one that will be submitted to the European Commission (or the respective funding body).

The final draft text generally consists of:

(i)   *A brief summary of the intervention;*
(ii)   *The detailed description of the project.*

Each Programme or call requires specific modalities, information, and documentation for the composition of the dossier, elements that are essential for the project to be considered. Therefore, the final text of the project should always be drafted with the procedures required by the funding agency in mind, knowing that failure to implement all bureaucratic procedures could block the evaluation of the project content.

At this stage, it is also good to think in terms of:

- **Feasibility:** that is, *verifying that the project, as identified, is doable*. Specifically, all internal conditions (consistent with the mission of the proposing organization, time resources, people, funding) and external conditions are analyzed, i.e., all those conditions that, while seemingly unrelated to the project, may in some way impede its proper implementation or make it difficult to achieve the identified goals.
- **Ex ante evaluation**: the evaluation carried out at this point in the project cycle aims *to preliminarily evaluate, and with strong effort at abstraction, the project as formulated*. In this way, it is possible already at the formulation stage to correct those aspects that are most likely to jeopardize the implementation of the project itself (e.g., the goals are well specified and consistent with the scenario analysis, the planned actions are linked to the goals, etc.).

FUNDING

Once ready, the project text is submitted to the European Commission/funding body to apply for a grant for implementation. The project is then analyzed and, finally, the funding agency will make a decision on the approval or rejection of the funding proposal. The duration of this stage is variable and depends on the selection procedures adopted by the different programmes/calls, which in some cases may require the proposing institution to make changes to the submitted project (and/or budget). **If the selection stage is successful, the negotiation stage begins at the conclusion of which the**

funding body and the proposing body sign a contract that will bind the parties for the duration of the project.

REALIZATION

The implementation stage is when, once funding is obtained, the project is actually implemented. At this stage, all resources necessary for the implementation of activities are mobilized. The project team (local and international) is also formalized, and the planned activities are validated and scheduled.

Two elements are important in the project implementation phase:

- Project **management** (financial, personnel, materials, etc.).
- **Monitoring**, i.e., the constant work of comparison on the progress of the activities carried out (the collection of documentation that allow the identification of possible "distortions" of the project and, therefore, possible solutions so as not to compromise its implementation.

Thus, it is an intermediate project evaluation stage that makes use of objective measurable indicators defined in the design stage.

EVALUATION

Like monitoring, **evaluation can also be defined as a process of measuring, collecting and documenting project progress**. However, the purpose of the evaluation carried out following the end of the project is *to verify that the planned goals have been achieved*.

Evaluation is part and parcel of the project cycle, but it should be emphasized that there are multiple moments in the PCM when it is possible and appropriate to implement an evaluation activity. Indeed, as mentioned, in the identification phase the ex-ante evaluation is carried out, while during project implementation, monitoring is carried out

as an interim evaluation. These are followed by the final evaluation and ex-post evaluation.

Final evaluation: the final evaluation occurs when the project has just finished or has been finished for a short time. In this case, the **goal of the evaluation is the specific goal of the project and, in particular, the degree to which the expected outcomes** have been achieved, in light of the manner in which the planned activities have been completed.

Ex-post evaluation: Ex-post evaluation is conducted after a certain amount of time after the end of the project, a year or a longer time depending on the complexity of the project. This is referred to as **impact evaluation**, and *this is the type of evaluation that allows a judgment to be made about the degree to which the overall goal has been achieved*.