
E-MANUAL

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

3.5 ORGANIZATION OF PROJECT MEETINGS

Here are some organizational aspects regarding Project Meetings, which should be carefully planned to ensure the excellent development of a project.

PURPOSES OF PROJECT MEETINGS

Project meetings are periodic and serve to:

- ensure the smooth progress of the project and the realization of the goals;
- promote good operational relationships among partners;
- provide an opportunity for personal contact, which facilitates discussion of work plans and assignment of responsibilities. Key meetings during the course of the project.

The goals of each meeting vary according to their stage: the kick-off meeting and the final project meeting are key moments, focusing on a set of specific goals, while the intermediate meetings pursue more general goals.

Kick-off meeting

- **Group formation**
- **Agreement on work plans**
- **Assignment of roles**
- **Setting goals and deadlines**
- **Formulation of an evaluation strategy**
- **Definition of financial aspects**
- **Confirmation of contractual arrangements between coordinator and partner**

Intermediate meetings

- **Monitoring the development of the project**
- **Checking progress toward milestones**
- **Monitoring of financial and budgetary procedures**
- **Verification and revision of work plans**
- **Implementation of the evaluation strategy**
- **Consolidation of group work**

Final meeting

- **Verification and final review of work plans**
- **Concluding evaluation**
- **Recognition of the commitment and contributions made to the project**
- **Celebration of achievements**

- Discussion on follow-up actions and concluding strategy
- Collection of contributions to the final report

PLANNING MEETINGS

Frequency and timing

The organization of regular meetings must be discussed and budgeted for in the original application for financial support. It is recommended to set an average of two meetings per year to ensure efficient project management (two meetings in person or one in person and one online). It is advisable to agree well in advance on the dates of the year's meetings to be sure of the availability of all partners.

Location

It would be appropriate to hold the first meeting in the coordinator's home country so that they can check the various organizational aspects and establish a model for the future. Subsequent meetings will be held in the partners' home countries to emphasize shared responsibility and ownership of the project. Direct access to the culture and language of other project members will serve to enrich participants' experience, as well as enhance transnational relations, allowing them to learn more about the partner institution and its style of operation, and to delve into potential problems.

Assignment of roles

The role of the project manager is critical in creating a harmonious and productive work environment that promotes effective meetings. The project manager must: (i) encourage open and clear communication; (ii) encourage all present to contribute to the discussion; support the less experienced individuals and make everyone feel valued; (iii) prevent strong personalities from dominating the discussion; and (iv) ensure that the goals of the meeting are achieved.

The other major roles in the project should be given at the kick-off meeting and then assigned on a rotating basis at subsequent meetings to spread the workload and involve all team members. It is important to agree on who will take the minutes of the meeting and, if appropriate, highlight the essential points on a flip chart.

Language

It is essential to establish good communication between partners so as to result in more effective interaction. The first step in this is to agree on the working language (English). Invariably partners will have varying levels of fluency in speaking English, so it is up to the coordinator and/or chairperson to make sure that this does not give rise to discrimination against group members. No one should feel inhibited or hesitant to put forward their ideas and contribute to the discussion. Conversely, native speakers or partners with good language skills should not dominate the discussion. This can be done by (i) frequently checking that everyone has understood the agreed upon points; (ii) avoiding the use of complex language; (iii) clarifying ambiguously or unclearly expressed points; (iv) preparing a checklist at the end of each day; (v) making frequent use of visual aids (such as flip charts to list key points); and (vi) distributing a clear and concise summary of each meeting.

The use of interpreters can certainly solve any language problems within the group. However, the cost of professional interpreters is high, and translation can slow down the pace of discussion and make the meeting more formal.

Structure of the meeting

Meetings can last an average of one or two days, preferably at the same time as other project events so as to keep costs down. The length of the meeting is inevitably a compromise between the time availability of group members and the tasks to be completed. In addition, planning meeting dates (scheduling) in advance helps keep travel costs down. To help the group work effectively, it is necessary to structure the meeting as follows: (i) study a balanced schedule; provide for free time; (ii) provide for social activities; (iii) include regular breaks for tea/coffee; avoid evening meetings. In addition, it is useful to vary the form of the meeting, alternating plenary discussions with group or pair work. Prolonged, uninterrupted plenary discussion can be tiring, and some may struggle to maintain the concentration needed to follow the discussion in an unfamiliar language. In planning the meeting, it is important to think about a social programme beyond lunches and dinners, perhaps incorporating a city tour or cultural event. So as not to underestimate the value of informal networks, social activities should provide some relaxation, encourage the contribution of less experienced partners in a less formal situation, and create an informal environment and stimulate new ideas.

Agenda.

A clear and well-structured agenda is a crucial element in organizing a successful meeting. All members of the group should participate in preparing the agenda so that everyone feels equally involved. Before the meeting, partners should be consulted by circulating a draft agenda for comments. All group members should feel that they have contributed to an agenda that also represents their views. An agenda imposed from above would cause resentment and hinder the development of positive interaction. It is important to avoid an overly dense agenda and to set realistic and achievable goals.

The project manager must ensure that the group sticks to the programme and does not deviate from the agenda; in any case, the whole group is responsible for the disciplined conduct of the meeting. At the end of each day, the agenda should be checked and any changes agreed upon by the partners should be included. A summary of the points covered can be helpful to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that there is effective consensus on the actions agreed upon.

Accommodation

Placing the whole group in the same hotel helps group dynamics and encourages informal networking. The choice of hotel is constrained by the budget available to the project, but a reasonable level of comfort and amenities is important for morale. A centrally located facility with easy access by public transportation is recommended (participants who come from afar and know little of the local language will not appreciate a complicated trip from the airport).

Meeting location

The meeting should be held in a setting that has access to essential office equipment, such as telephones, computers, photocopiers, internet. The room designated for the meeting should provide adequate space and a comfortable temperature; small rooms for working in groups or pairs may also be needed. The meeting place must be easily accessible from the hotel (or even be at the same hotel, provided adequate facilities are available within the project budget allocation).

Meals

Meals are important to the success of the meeting, as they provide an opportunity for relaxation and an informal exchange of ideas and points of view. restaurants should be booked in advance so as not to waste time or change plans, and any special dietary requirements should also be checked. On a short workday, a buffet/sandwich at the meeting venue will

save time. On a busy workday, lunch at a different location will provide a moment of relaxation and a welcome break from formal discussion. Tea/coffee breaks are also essential and provide an opportunity to get up from the meeting table.

Transportation

It is advisable to try to minimize the use of public transportation to avoid wasted time in commuting. In addition, precise directions on how to get to the hotel and meeting place should be provided in advance. It is useful to provide Google Maps links of major places and, in the case of large cities, an outline of the public transportation system. If possible, the host partner should meet the group at the hotel and accompany them to the first meeting. All logistical choices (hotels, meals, transportation, etc.) must reflect the budget available.

Resources and documentation

Before the meeting, it is important to check: the agenda, detailed coordinates for all participants, maps, instructions on practical aspects, availability of visual aids (flip charts, overhead projector, etc.), access to a photocopier, access to computers and printers, summary of each day, checklists/action plans. A small summary of what was agreed upon and the related action plan will be circulated after the meeting.