



**EU projects City Network
in the Western Balkans**

PRACTICE TALKING: EU PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

GUIDE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



Dos and Don'ts



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GUIDE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS





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1. INTRODUCTION

“Practice talking: EU project development guide for local governments – dos and don’ts”

is designed to support the EU projects City Network in the Western Balkans, with valuable experiences from practice in a short, understandable and useable way. The EU projects City Network was initiated by the City of Sarajevo, with the support of the German Cooperation (GIZ) and with technical assistance by NALAS, and also includes Podgorica, Bar, Niksic, Leskovac, Novi Pazar, Sveti Nikole, Elbasan, Mat, Mostar and Prishtina. Still, as such Guide can be very useful for all local governments through South-East Europe, NALAS will make sure that it reaches them all.

The advices and examples shown below are practical and based on the experiences of the local governments in the region.

Preparation and implementation of EU and other donor-funded projects are of great importance for local governments. Matching the needs with the opportunities, and the problems with the solutions in the most effective, efficient, and sustainable way with external financial support is how you make many great ideas alive.

But this is also a big responsibility. You must fulfil your commitments made in the application form and spend the funds according to the rules and procedures of the donor. Finally, you must report and prove your results to the donors. This can be quite a challenge.

In the end, you should be proud of yourself. After all, you have accomplished something that would not have been possible with internally available resources. You have brought about a positive change in your community that is worth the effort invested.

In addition, project preparation and implementation are unique experiences that give you insight into issues that might enrich your everyday work. Every implemented project is a chapter in a long book of success. You want to be part of it. Also, it gives you an opportunity to cooperate with new people and institutions, gain and share knowledge, and form new professional partnerships. Hopefully, long-lasting ones. Funding opportunities are a strong encouragement factor fostering thinking outside the box and being creative in solution-making. Every donor wants to see an innovative way of thinking, and novel approaches even in replicating existing practices.

Be brave, be creative, initiate, create solutions. Be aware of your importance in making new values, using available opportunities, and achieving some outstanding results. Good luck!



2. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

To have the chance of getting funding for your project idea, the first step is to continuously pursue all funding opportunities.

This process can go one of two ways: (1) you have a project idea and then try to find appropriate funds, or (2) you find funds and relate them to your citizens' needs and constraints.

Anyway, the golden rule is that in fundraising only one thing is 100% guaranteed - if you do not apply, you do not get funding.



- Make a list of EU programmes and other donors' programmes for which your city (territory) is eligible.

- Check the official websites of the programmes on an ongoing basis.
- Check for the announcements of the Calls for proposals schedule as they contain relevant information and give you more time to prepare.
- Read programme documents carefully and relate your needs and constraints to the programmes' priorities and objectives.



- Don't jump on every train (opportunity), just because you are eligible. It may lead you in the wrong direction.
- Don't think that programmes that are financing smaller projects have simpler procedures by default.

Note: EU Calls for Proposals are usually published on the website of the managing authority of the relevant EU Funding Programme and/or the EU Funding and Tenders portal.



3. PROJECT PREPARATION

The preparation of the project proposal is a time-consuming process that requires significant resources and effort by a project team. It requires reading numerous documents, cooperation with many stakeholders, knowledge, persistence, and patience. Also, keep in mind that— when you are drafting a project you see everything idealistically and assume perfect and smooth implementation. This never happens.



- ☑ Carefully read the documents of the Call for Proposals (Call announcement, Guidelines for Applicants, and others). These documents contain a lot of important and useful information that you will need in project preparation.
- ☑ Form a strong team. Combine proposal writing skills (filling out an application form, preparing a budget, log frame matrix) with content expertise in the selected topic.
- ☑ Make a list of priority project ideas. Sometimes one Call can cover many topics and you may find your needs in more than one objective.
- ☑ Always keep in mind the needs of the target groups. These are the ones for whom you are preparing the project. Consult them and involve them in the project preparation.
- ☑ Prepare the administrative documents well in advance. In many cases, this is set to be the last thing you do and then you realize you do not have time to prepare them.
- ☑ Ensure partnership at the initial stages of project preparation. It happens that partners withdraw from a project at the last moment. Also, make sure that you know the partners and their capacities, both for project preparation and project implementation.
- ☑ Distribute roles in project preparation. Some people do research, some provide technical input, and others handle the financial aspects.
- ☑ Make sure the text in the Application Form is coherent. There should always be a single person entering all information into the application form. This will ensure a consistent writing style throughout the form.
- ☑ Designate one person to be responsible for other administrative information/ documents.
- ☑ When writing the project proposal, always think about the implementation. The project does not only need to sound good, it has to be feasible for implementation, to all project partners.
- ☑ Before submission, have someone else read the project. If it is clear to them what the project wants to achieve, then it will be clear to the evaluators as well.



Don'ts

- ❌ Don't give yourself too many project ideas to formulate and too many projects to prepare. You run the risk of not meeting the submission deadlines.
- ❌ Don't pack too many good things you want to achieve or change into

one project. Projects have strict implementation periods and limited budgets. Significant changes and major achievements usually require a considerable number of projects.

- ❌ Don't put off submitting the proposal until the last minute. Remember that online platforms may crash, a computer may delete your files due to viruses, authorized individuals may not be available to sign and stamp the forms, partners might step out last minute, etc.
- ❌ Don't underestimate or overestimate costs. Any deviation may prove problematic during the implementation phase.

EXAMPLES OF FORMULATIONS IN PROJECT PROPOSAL WRITING

Weak formulation	Strong formulation
The unemployment rate in our region is high. We want to create a project that will reduce unemployment and improve the economic situation.	Unemployment among young adults aged 18–30 in our region is at 25%, which is significantly higher than the European average. This project aims to provide vocational training and job placement services to 500 young adults in the region, reducing the unemployment rate by 5% and improving their long-term employability.
Our project aims to improve transport and mobility based on new ICT solutions which is in line with the programme objectives.	The project addresses the specific programme objective of transition to more sustainable, low-carbon alternatives for transport and mobility by introducing and strengthening greener transport modes and systems, promoting alternative mobility behaviours, and introducing and improving ICT-based solutions related to reducing the need for physical mobility.
We have recognized a number of obvious problems in risk prevention and disaster management in our two municipalities, which we are going to solve jointly through this project.	<p>Considering the identified problems and needs in the field of risk prevention and disaster management, which are reflected in the lack of risk assessment in this cross-border area, disaster resilience approach, coordinated response to emergency situations based on harmonized development and coordinated use of integrated capacities, the lack of regional training infrastructures to improve the readiness of firefighters in the field of risk prevention and disaster management, and the insufficient territorial coverage, it is important to promote relevant specific tools that can provide an answer to the abovementioned problems.</p> <p>Our cross-border integrated approach requires the creation of strategies and action plans for risk prevention and mitigation and disaster management, the development and expansion of cross-border infrastructure in the area of preparedness for emergency situations, the development of joint training programs, and the creation of joint protocols for specific interventions.</p>



EXAMPLES OF FORMULATIONS IN PROJECT PROPOSAL WRITING

Weak formulation	Strong formulation
<p>Our project has two target groups; one is children in our Municipality which will be affected positively. The project will create conditions for developing their potentials. The other is the Municipality as local government unit, that will provide new space for children.</p>	<p>The target groups of the project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 500 children and their families need a space for out-of school activities for keeping children actively involved and develop their talents and well-being. The design of the proposal was done based on their contribution and ideas for choosing the best priority among several discussed in the consultation meeting. The Action will address these needs by rehabilitation of the Youth Centre and increasing the number of Youth Centre's services for children. ○ Municipality – responsible for creating a local environment and mobilizing local resources to enhance service provision to all categories of the population. The municipality is also in charge of the functioning and maintenance of the Youth Centre. The Action will contribute to the improvement of the municipal functions and competencies in relation to (i) infrastructure and public services and (ii) culture, sports, and recreational services.
<p>The country is facing unemployment as critical issue. This is stated in numerous relevant documents. By some data collected, unemployment rate has been increasing in the last years both on national and on the level of the Municipality, and it is trend that last till now.</p>	<p>Numerous analyses and studies carried out in recent years show that our country faces various problems in the field of employment and that the labour market has significant unfavourable characteristics, among which long-term unemployment is particularly prominent.</p> <p>In the Multiannual Action Programme for Employment, Education and Social Policy 2015–2017, “Improving the labour market and increasing employability” was recognised as one of the three main actions to be supported in order to address the identified needs in this area, and under the Action, a specific objective 1.3. Promote local employment initiatives by ensuring the involvement of all relevant local labour market actors.</p> <p>According to the semi-annual report of the Employment Agency for the period January - June 2020, the total number of unemployed is 341,890 and the unemployment rate (as the number of unemployed in relation to the total number of active citizens) is 18.06%. The number of unemployed in the municipality is 13,124, of which 5506 are long-term unemployed who have been out of work for more than 12 months, which is 42% of the total unemployed. The additional problem the municipality faces is the increase in the number of unemployed in recent years, as the analysis of local labour markets shows that the number of unemployed in the municipality increased by 25% in the period from 2011 to 2018.</p>
<p>The project faces some risks, such as lack of participation, technical difficulties, and changes in the regulatory framework.</p>	<p>The project faces the following risks, their likelihood, impact, and mitigation strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Risk 1: Lack of participation. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Moderate. Mitigation strategy: Increase the outreach and motivation efforts, and establish partnerships and collaborations with relevant stakeholders to enhance the visibility and credibility of the project. ○ Risk 2: Technical difficulties. Likelihood: Medium. Impact: High. Mitigation strategy: Ensure the availability and reliability of the equipment and tools, provide sufficient training and support for the project staff and participants, and establish a contingency plan and a troubleshooting mechanism to deal with unforeseen technical issues. ○ Risk 3: Changes in the regulatory framework. Likelihood: Low. Impact: High. Mitigation strategy: Monitor and analyse the regulatory environment, engage with relevant policy makers and authorities, and adapt the project activities and outcomes accordingly to comply with the new regulations and standards.



EXAMPLES OF FORMULATIONS IN PROJECT PROPOSAL WRITING	
Weak formulation	Strong formulation
<p>The project will be monitored and evaluated through regular reports and feedback from the project staff and participants.</p>	<p>The project will be monitored and evaluated through a comprehensive and participatory approach that includes the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Performance indicators: A set of SMART indicators, such as participation rates, satisfaction rates, behaviour change, and community impact, that will be defined and tracked throughout the project lifecycle. ○ Data collection methods: A variety of methods, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, that will be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from the project staff and participants, as well as external stakeholders and beneficiaries. ○ Evaluation tools: A range of tools, such as logic models, impact maps, and cost-benefit analysis, that will be used to analyse and interpret the data, and to assess the project outcomes and impacts against the project objectives and the EU policies and priorities. ○ Feedback mechanisms: A regular and transparent feedback mechanism, such as a monitoring committee, an online platform, or a feedback form, that will enable the project staff and participants to provide feedback, suggestions, and recommendations for the project improvement and sustainability.
<p>The objectives of the project are to raise awareness, promote sustainable practices, and contribute to the fight against climate change.</p>	<p>The objective of the project is to increase the knowledge and awareness of 10,000 young people in 50 rural communities about the causes, consequences, and solutions of climate change. By the end of the project, we aim to reduce the carbon footprint of the target audience by 5%, and to establish 5 local initiatives for sustainable practices, such as organic farming, renewable energy, and waste management.</p>
<p>The project impact will be significant, sustainable, and scalable, and will contribute to the achievement of the EU2020 strategy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.</p>	<p>The project impact will be assessed and evaluated based on the following indicators, which reflect the expected outcomes and benefits of the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased agricultural productivity and income of 100 small-scale farmers by 30% within two years. ○ Improved access and quality of education and health services for 500 children and women in the target communities within three years. ○ Enhanced social cohesion and resilience of the target communities through the establishment of a participatory and inclusive rural development model that can be replicated and scaled up in other regions and countries within five years.
<p>The project consortium consists of 4 partners, the City, one NGO, one University, and one SME. Each partner will contribute their expertise and resources on sustainable agriculture and rural development to the project implementation.</p>	<p>The project consortium consists of 4 partners, who have been selected based on their complementarity, expertise, and commitment to the project objectives and outcomes. The partners are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The city: Local self-government unit with competences in the project area by being policy and decision maker as well as implementor of public services. ○ NGO: A community-based organization with extensive experience in promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development in the target region. ○ University: A leading research institution with expertise in participatory methods, rural development, and evaluation. ○ SME: A technology company with expertise in mobile and web-based applications, and a strong track record of social entrepreneurship and innovation.



4. IMPLEMENTATION



- ✓ Be prepared to implement the project as soon as you receive the acceptance of the proposal. Be aware that once a contract is signed, deadlines are approaching, sooner than you think.
 - ✓ Establish the implementation team with clear roles and responsibilities.
 - ✓ Make a procurement plan. Prepare tender procedures well in advance. Market research and preparation of tender documents can take more time than anticipated.
- ✓ Monitor the implementation of your project. Create a plan to regularly review project progress.
 - ✓ Monitor budget expenditures continuously. Underruns or overruns may result in the need for official approval to adjust budget lines.
 - ✓ Define and use communication and visibility channels. All donors want to see confirmation that their funds have been properly invested. In addition, this can be valuable evidence of your successful implementation.
 - ✓ Communicate regularly with partners and constantly update each other on the implementation. Communication is essential to ensure partners' commitment to the project. Almost all problems can be solved if detected on time.



- ✗ Don't push the problems under the table. If they cannot be resolved internally, communicate them with the donor and propose solutions.



5. REPORTING



- Familiarise yourself with the reporting requirements and forms from the beginning of the project implementation, especially regarding additional documents/evidence you need to provide.
- Use the EU project reporting template to prepare the narrative project mid-term report, as well as the final narrative and financial report.

- Scan each document. Some programmes require online reporting, others do not. It is always useful to have electronic versions/scans of the documents.
- Complete time-sheets for engagement of project staff on regular basis.
- Be careful with the financial reporting documents (contracts, goods acceptance certificates, invoices, bank statements, etc.). If anything is missing, costs may not be eligible.
- Let project partners know in advance if their contribution to the report is required.
- Expect additional requests from the donor during reporting.



- Don't be late with the submission of the reports.
- Don't send incomplete reports.



6. KEY TAKEAWAYS

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail-
Benjamin Franklin

The foundation of a successful project application and project implementation is based on careful project planning. In practice, the project preparation phase is very often overlooked by those preparing projects. Most applicants go straight to the application form before conducting any analysis. Do not forget that the preparation phase is of utmost importance for the successful implementation of a project.

You should first define the project idea through the **analysis** phases of project cycle management, including context analysis, stakeholders' analysis, problem analysis, analysis of objectives, analysis of strategies, and then through the **planning** stage, with the preparation of the logical framework matrix.



Do not start filling out the application form before creating the **logical framework matrix**. Take the programme indicators and evaluation criteria into account. While preparing the proposal, double check that you meet all the evaluation criteria given in the relevant Guidelines for Applicants, Application Manuals, or other documents that are published with the Call for Proposals.

Build and engage your own capacities and resources

It might be compelling to engage outside assistance for project preparation or to leave it to other partners to prepare a project proposal without getting too involved. In some cases, it also increases your chances of success. But remember, you know the you're your organisation' capacities, weaknesses and needs for donor funding. Also, external project writers' goal is to get the best-scored project, not necessarily the best for your local community. As a result, they sometimes try to inflate the project activities and outcomes to get better scores. However, in the end, you are responsible for delivering on these "promises".

Therefore, it is very important that you build your own capacity and use your own resources and knowledge, as you know the best what the needs of your community are. In any case, if someone else is preparing the project on your behalf, be sure to review the project proposal carefully before submitting it, so that you understand it fully and confirm that you can deliver on the promises made in the proposal.



Acknowledge EU, national, and local priorities and strategies

In order to receive funding, the project must be consistent with the existing strategic documents at EU, national, and local levels, and this connection should be clearly described in the application. References to specific national, regional, local strategies, EU strategies such as EUSAIR, EUSDR, or EC Country Reports must exist and be clear and precise. It is not sufficient to say that the project is in line with a specific strategic document, but it should be stated which strategic priority and measure it is in line with, and whenever possible, a relevant quote from the strategic document should be provided.

Each donor has its own strategic commitments. Therefore, it is necessary to read and understand exactly what donor's objectives are, why they want to support our institutions, in what areas, what they want to achieve with the support, etc. This step is extremely important, bearing in mind that every project submitted to a donor must be in line with their priorities as well.

Always remember that EU uses the financial support primarily to anchor EU values and align state-of-the-art in the EU accession and member countries, with its policies and objectives, so that EU standards can be achieved more quickly in all areas.



Acknowledge the needs and involve main target groups in project preparation

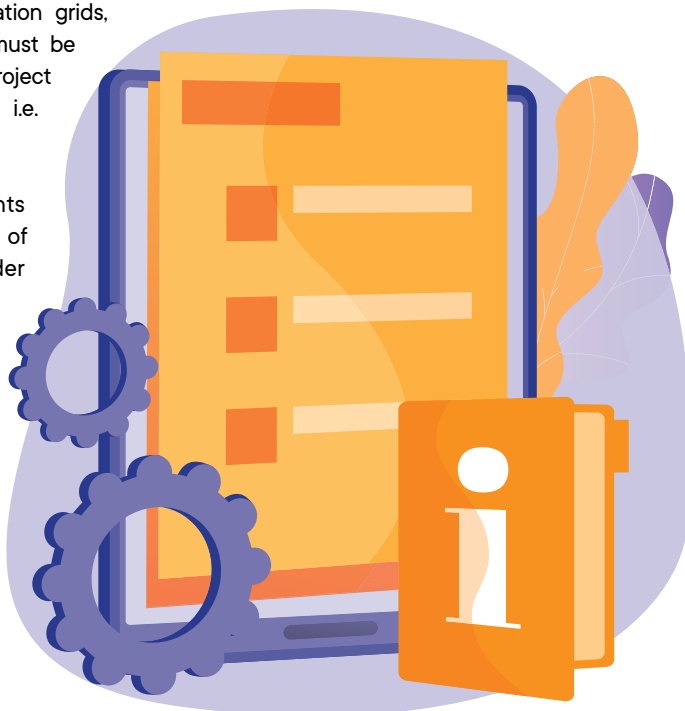
Always have in mind that you are preparing a project in order to meet the needs and solve the problem of specific target groups. In order to better understand these needs it is always good to try to involve the key target groups in the preparation of a project and get their perspective. The better you understand the core problem you want to solve, the easier the rest of the project planning and implementation will be, and your project will be more efficient and provide sustainable solutions.



Guidelines for applicants are a crucial document for the preparation of a project proposal

Consider the Guidelines for Applicants as your ally, as it contains all the relevant information for preparing a concrete project proposal, i.e. for filling in the application forms. It also contains information on the objectives of the Call for Projects, activities that can be financed, conditions that must be met by applicants and partners, the amounts of grants, the time foreseen for the project implementation, the deadlines, the method for submitting the project proposal, the evaluation grids, and other conditions that must be fulfilled in order for your project proposal to be considered, i.e. evaluated.

Also, programme documents and territorial analysis of the various EU cross-border and territorial cooperation programs contain a great deal of information that can be used in project preparation. For each priority area they cover, there is relevant statistical data for each country that is part of the programme, relevant national strategies and plans, activities and projects implemented in that area, indicators, etc.



Follow the instructions of the Guidelines for Applicants and doublecheck checklists and evaluation grids

Do not skip the instructions, address them all, at least in one sentence. Some parts and instructions may repeat but still you should provide the information needed. Take the time to carefully read and understand the evaluation criteria for the specific Call you would like to apply for. This can help you to identify potential weaknesses in your proposal and to address them before submission.



Simpler is better. Don't "overwrite" and "oversell" your idea.

When preparing a project proposal, you must also remember who is evaluating your projects. Usually, these are independent evaluators, people who are hired for the needs of project evaluation and who are experts in certain fields. However, this does not mean that one expert who evaluates the project proposal has all the necessary knowledge on the topic/problem that is addressed by the project proposal. For this reason, when writing a project proposal, it is important to use simple and understandable wording and avoid complex terminology and technical terms that are known only to a narrow group of experts. Always explain abbreviations.

Avoid using a lot of words and write as concisely and as precisely as possible. You will not receive extra points if you use more words. If the evaluators have to read the proposal more than once to understand what you are trying to say, you have lost an opportunity.

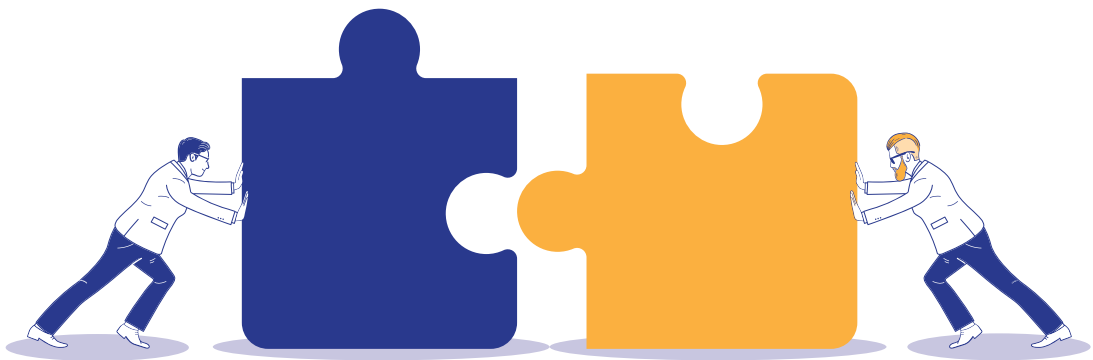
Build strong partnerships

Everything is done together with your partners, not alone. Partner involvement is critical both in the identification and especially in the formulation of the project.

Use partner search tools and networks to find the right project partners.

Build targeted project partnerships that add value to the project. Look for a strong partner with knowledge and experience in the topic, or specific types of organisations such as NGOs, universities, etc. Leverage your existing networks and trusted partners from other activities.

Be active! Contact people, share your ideas, and find common interests. Be prepared! Have a clear objective when attending networking events. Be visible! In some EU programmes, like IPA ADRION, LinkedIn groups are formed per each priority to search for a partner and share your ideas and experiences.





Follow the official Call for Proposal website, attend Info Days, and don't hesitate to ask questions

Donors may change something during the Call for Proposals such as the deadline, forms, etc. Therefore, regularly check the official website of the Call to be updated on all the changes. Moreover, there you can also find answers to the questions of potential applicants that may cover topics of interest to you.

You will receive more detailed information about the Call during the Info days. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions and receive further clarification and details relevant to your project ideas. Also, you can use this opportunity to learn about your “competition” and look for potential partners.



In the end, we all learn the best by doing. Think, innovate, develop, write, implement, learn and repeat. Wishing you hundreds of successful project applications and implemented projects for building prosperous cities and satisfied citizens.

