

**European project development
in the cultural and creative sectors:
A practical handbook**



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1. Introduction

European cooperation offers many opportunities to realise your own ideas and projects. Working together in a European context always means being inspired by others, exchanging ideas and knowledge and realising your own ideas and projects better or on a grander scale. In addition, European cooperation also offers the possibility of (extra) funding for your project. So there is every reason to investigate whether European cooperation is also feasible for your organisation or project.

This handbook offers practical information about setting up European projects in, for and by the cultural and creative sectors. The handbook is aimed at organisations and companies in these sectors that are confronted with European projects, are planning to establish them themselves or are interested in the opportunities Europe offers them.

What is the process of European project development like? Five phases.

1. *Formulate a need, ambition or wish*

First of all, there must be a certain wish, need or ambition within your organisation to which a project can contribute. Only then should you look for European (funding) opportunities. Try not to work the other way around, from a subsidy option to a project idea. Important question in this phase: What would you like to achieve?

2. *Development of a project*

Once you have a concrete idea, the plan can be further shaped and the development of the project can begin. If you know what the project should be like, you can begin the search for European opportunities.

3. *Apply for European funding for the project*

After you have explored the possibilities for European funding, you enter this third phase. You will write a concrete grant application on a call of a European programme.

4. *Execution of the project*

Once the application has been approved by the European programme, you can start implementing the project.

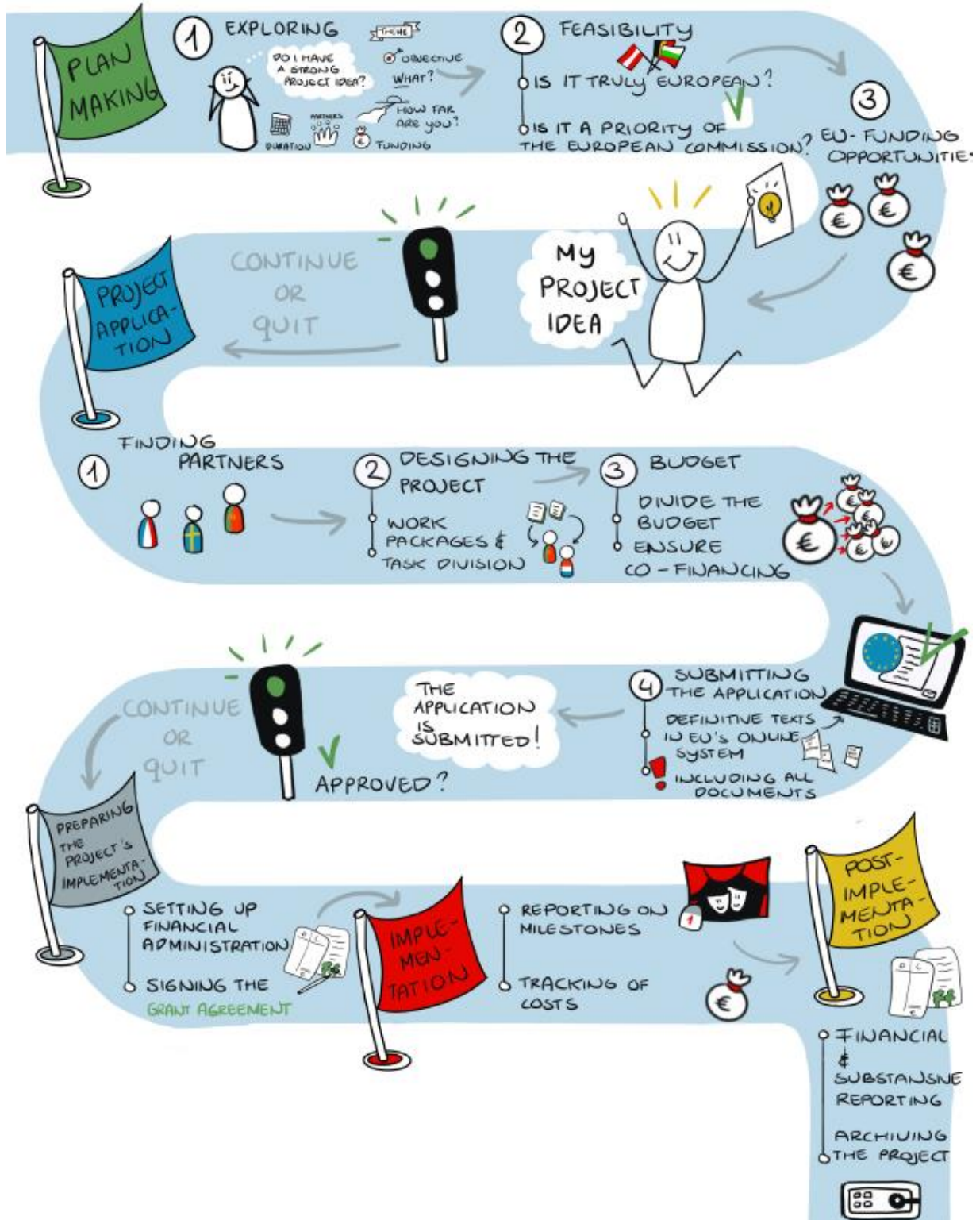
5. *Completion of the project*

Even after the project has been completed, there are a number of steps you must take, such as providing a financial and substantive report on the project.

This handbook will guide your organisation through steps two to five of working with and in European projects in a practical way. On the next page you will find a drawing of the European project process through which this handbook will take you – from the initial idea to a successful application and implementation.



DEVELOPING EU-PROJECTS



2. Planning

This phase of working with European projects consists of three steps: 1) elaborating on the original idea, 2) assessing the feasibility and 3) exploring concrete European possibilities for this specific project.

2.1 Developing the original concept

After you have formulated a first project concept that contributes to a concrete wish, need or ambition within your organisation, it is time to develop this concept further. Think of a description of the theme, goal, the required financing and (possibly) intended partners of the project.

Before you take the next step, fill in the schedule below as far and as much in detail as possible. This information is of great importance to be able to assess whether your project idea is feasible and whether Europe offers relevant opportunities for the development and implementation of the project. Moreover, this already lays the foundation for a possible project application, since you also need this information.

Are you not the initiator of a European project yourself, but have you been invited by another party to participate? Please use the form on the next page to determine whether participation is appropriate and realistic.

2.2 European feasibility of the project concept

If you possess (some) (co-)financing and sufficient capacity to develop, apply for and implement the project, so that your project is practically feasible, you must then assess the European feasibility. This concerns the following two questions.

1. *Is the project concept really European?*

Many programmes and calls impose requirements on the consortium applying for European funding. It is often required to develop and apply for the project with at least one or more European partners. Is that the case with your project?

2. *Does the project concept align with the priorities of the European Commission?*

An overlap of the project concept with European policy is of great importance because of the way the European Union works. Annually, the Commission launches calls for projects and the finally selected projects provide answers to the challenges the EU would like to address. As such, the EU achieves its policy objectives through (a selection of) submitted projects, while providing organizations like yours with funding to realise its ambitions.

- See the following website for the European Commission's general priorities: [The priorities of the European Commission](#).
- See the following website for the European Union's priorities in the field of culture, more on that later: [The Creative Europe programme | Culture and Creativity](#).

Project participation assessment

1. Theme

(For example, sustainable cultural tourism, cultural exchange, education, literature, festivals, etc.)

2. Project objective

(What should the project ultimately deliver for all parties involved?)

3. Description of project concepts

(What would you like to do? On what scale? Is it innovative?)

4. Does your project build upon other (European-funded) projects?

(Is your project still mainly a concept, or are you already in the development phase? Do you already have partners in mind?)

5. How much funding does your project need?

(What will the total size of the project be and what does the required European funding amount to? Does your organization have (some) (co-)financing for this project?)

6. Which partners does your project need?

(What knowledge and skills does your project require? Does this concern partners from home or abroad?)

7. What is the expected duration of your project?

(When does the project begin and end?)

8. Required commitment

(Does your organization have sufficient internal capacity for the development, application and implementation of the project? Do (external/new) people have to be hired for that?)

2.3 Exploring European opportunities

Now that you have established that your project concept is generally eligible for European funding, it is time to look for concrete opportunities.

1. Which European subsidy programme is most suitable for the project concept?

The programmes below may be relevant to your project concept.

- 1) **Creative Europe** | Creative Europe is the European Union's subsidy programme that focuses on culture and creativity. It is, therefore, most likely that your project will align with this programme. Creative Europe supports and promotes international cooperation in the cultural, creative and audiovisual sector. See the Creative Europe programme link above (page 5) for more information.
- 2) **Horizon Europe** | This programme is on research, innovation and education. Horizon Europe is based on three pillars (excellent science, global challenges and European industrial competitiveness and innovative Europe). For more information: [Horizon Europe](#).
- 3) **Interreg Europe** | Interreg is a European umbrella programme that supports cross-border cooperation, with the aim of exchanging knowledge and learning from each other's practices and policy instruments. There are different Interreg levels. Within the Interreg Europe programme, it is possible to collaborate with partners from all over Europe. For more information: [Interreg Europe](#).
- 4) **Interreg North West Europe (NWE)** | Interreg NWE is focused on the north and west of Europe. Projects that fall under this programme can, therefore, only be submitted with partners from this region. For more information: [Interreg NWE](#).
- 5) **Interreg A Nederland-Deutschland** | If your project concept is specifically aimed at cooperation with German partners, for example, in the context of a joint exhibition, Interreg A is a suitable financing programme. Interreg A is also aimed at cross-border cooperation, especially in the Dutch-German border area. For more information: [INTERREG Deutschland-Nederland](#).
- 6) **Erasmus+** | Erasmus+ supports individuals with grants for their personal and professional development in education, sports and training. In addition, the programme helps to improve the quality of education and youth and youth work, in particular through collaborative projects. For more information: [Erasmus+](#).
- 7) **Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME)** | This programme is specifically aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises, in various sectors, including the cultural and creative sector. This programme can be especially interesting for tourism companies. For more information: [COSME](#).

2. Are relevant calls about my subject available at the moment?

If you have chosen a programme from the above list that (possibly) fits well with your project, the next step is to look for a concrete project call for this programme. This entails a call from the European Commission to come up with a project plan for a specific challenge and is aimed at achieving specific objectives. These calls are collected in annual call documents. You can find them on the website of the programme in question.

When assessing a call, a number of things are important. For example, the subsidy percentage is often stated in the call: ask yourself whether your organisation has sufficient resources to balance the project budget. In addition, some calls have conditions attached to the type of organisation (company, foundation, government or otherwise) that can submit an

application. Finally, it is important to look carefully at whether the application can be submitted without partners or whether a certain number of partners is mandatory.

European networks

In addition to European subsidy programmes, Europe also has many thematic networks. If you are looking for opportunities for knowledge sharing or looking for partners to build a consortium, these networks can come in handy. Some examples of these networks include, but are certainly not limited to: UNESCO Creative Cities Network, Eurocities (Culture Forum), and the European Festival Association.



3. Project applications

Now that you have a good idea of what your project should be like and which call from a European subsidy programme offers the best chance of securing project funding, it is time to prepare the project application. This is often a lengthy process that can take up to a year or more, depending on the size of the project. The process consists of four steps: 1) finding partners; 2) designing and elaborating the project; 3) drawing up a budget and 4) actually submitting the application.

Writing an application for a European project is a demanding and time-consuming process. It is, therefore, also possible to hire an external writing agency that will prepare the application together with you and your organisation. You can find these agencies on the internet.

3.1 Searching for partners

If this is required for the successful implementation of your project concept or made mandatory by the programme for which you would like to apply for funding, you should search for partners in Europe. You can initially do so on the basis of your own network and the existing network of your organisation. Have you been in contact with European colleagues before? Or do you know from other organisations that they are facing the same challenges and problems? Then contact them and find out if they would like to join the project you are developing.

Even if you are going to submit your project without partners or if you have already put together a consortium, it is important that you contact other parties in your own country and wider Europe about your project. To demonstrate the reliability of your organisation and the potential of your project concept, so-called letters of support are often added to project applications. These are letters signed by stakeholders, for example other cultural organisations, governments or private parties. You should prepare a template for this yourself, which only needs to be signed on letterhead. With such a letter of support, a stakeholder indicates that they see potential in the concept and are interested in the results and their replication. The European Commission attaches great importance to the replicability of European-funded projects, although this naturally also depends on the nature of the project.

3.2 Designing and developing the project application

Once you have shaped your consortium, it is time to work out the final project application. With some (often larger) projects you do not have to provide all the information about your proposal at once – these are so-called two-stage procedures. The project concept must first be approved, after which the complete proposal can be prepared. When reading the call on which you submit your application, pay attention to whether it is a one- or two-stage call.

For most European applications, you must complete a standardised document (for the subsidy programme). This document usually consists of (most of) the following parts.

- **Relevance and objectives**

- What is the background of the project? To which general objectives (e.g. ambitions of your organisation) and to which specific objectives do you hope to contribute with this project?
- How does the intended goal of the project match the objectives stated in the call, the objectives of the subsidy program to which the call belongs and the broader

ambitions of the European Commission? Please read carefully the websites of the subsidy programme and the European Commission, and, of course, the call document with specific information about the call to which you are responding.

- What is the concept that forms the basis of your project? How would you like to achieve the set objectives?
- Is the project based on the methodology or results of a previous (European-funded) project?

- **Impact and project outcome**

- What are the exact ambitions of your project? Make sure you can substantiate these, and quantify, if possible. Suppose you are developing a project to bring more people into contact with vernacular literature: how many people do you hope to reach during the duration of your project?
- How sustainable are the results of the project? Does the project only have an impact during its term or will it have a lasting impact? How is that guaranteed?
- What is the potential of the project to be replicated or scaled up?

- **Implementation**

- What does the project work plan look like? Hereby briefly indicate which so-called work packages (see below) consist of the implementation of your project.
- Which stakeholders are involved in initialising and executing the project? This explicitly does not concern consortium members, but, for example, signatories of a letter of support or local parties that are involved in the implementation. Give a brief explanation of the party in question and (the reasons for) its involvement in the project.
- Werk packages
 - The work packages form the framework of the project. Together with drawing up the budget, this will usually take up most of the application time. Please take the time to complete this.
 - With these work packages, the bigger picture of the project is broken down into smaller (still substantial) parts or tasks. Think, for example, of general tasks such as communication or project coordination, and, of course, all work necessary for the execution of your specific project.
 - Work packages usually consist of a number of components. The work package is based on a specific objective (a so-called expected outcome). You then indicate in the work package which activities will be undertaken to achieve this sub-goal. This is done on the basis of so-called milestones (control points that indicate the progress of your project) and deliverables (concrete (and significant) output that your project has produced, such as a manual, website or communication strategy).
 - You also indicate in the work packages which consortium member does what and how long you will be working on a particular work package. These can coexist, by the way: it is not the case that you first have to complete work package one before you can start with the second package.
- How does the implementation of the work packages of the project translate into a schedule (in the form of a timeline indicating the different activities within the work packages)?
- How do you ensure that the impact of the project is properly monitored and reported?

- How do you plan to communicate about the results of the project? And how is dissemination of project results guaranteed? The communication strategy – both to stakeholders and the wider public – must be clearly stated in the application.
- **Means**
 - What is the consortium like? How do the different partners bring together the necessary expertise (and resources) to successfully implement the project? What is the (general) division of roles? More detailed information about the consortium members and their project teams often has to be provided in an appendix of the application.
 - How is the management of the project designed? Who is the project leader? Is there a sound board or steering group that makes decisions and gives direction to the project?
 - What is your budget and which costs does it consist of? More information about drawing up and justifying a project budget can be found below.

3.3 Drawing up a budget

Since you are writing this application to secure European grants for your project, the budget is one of the most important parts of the application. In this, you substantiate what amount you need, and how it will be allocated. You do this, in particular, by making estimates of the number of hours that will be spent on the project per project employee – not just for the entire project, but for each activity. This forms the basis for a well-founded and realistic budget.

Do not only take into account the employees who work directly on the project, but also more indirectly involved parties such as (financial) administration and communication. In addition to the hours of employees of the consortium members involved, the budget must also include materials to be purchased and the hiring of external experts. Finally, it is very important that you also possess the co-financing for your project that you will contribute yourself.

3.4 Submitting the application

Once you have completed the entire application – and double-checked everything – the application can finally be submitted. This is done via the digital portal 'Funding & Tender Opportunities' of the European Union. Here you will also find all information about the various European subsidy programs and calls. You create an account in this portal and fill in the required fields and (often) send the completed application as an attachment. In addition, make sure not to forget other important attachments – such as the letters of support from stakeholders.

For the final submission of the application, a signature is often required under a so-called letter of intent, with which the signatory – for example the director of your organisation – indicates that he or she guarantees the co-financing and expresses his or her commitment.

4. Execution of the project

Your project has been approved. Congratulations! But what now? Once your project has been approved, you will again be faced with many questions and tasks. In this phase, you will sign an agreement with the subsidy provider and the partners in the project. You can then start implementing the project as you detailed it in the previous phase. This third and final phase of working with a European project consists of the following steps.

1. Preparation of the execution

- Signing the *grant agreement*
- Putting together a project team
- Formal project documentation
- Communication
- The project's finances

2. Execution of the project

- As a partner
- As a lead partner

3. Completion of the project

- Completing
- Archiving
- Evaluating

These steps are not necessarily consecutive. After all, during the implementation of the project, you are also involved in communication and interim evaluation.

It is also possible that your project has been rejected. Unfortunate! In that case, as lead partner, you must inform your consortium. Discuss possible next steps with your partners. For example, is there a repair option for the application (whereby you can adjust or improve some parts)? If not, evaluate what the points for improvement are and whether it is possible and desirable to submit your application again in the future – on the same or a completely different call or subsidy programme.

4.1 Preparation of the project's execution

Signing the grant agreement

Before you can start implementing your project, you and your partners must first sign the so-called grant agreement. You can see this document as the official confirmation of your application. It is a contract between, on the one hand, the European programme that will be providing the subsidy and, on the other hand, your organisation and (possible) partners. The document lays down how, for what purpose, when and under what conditions the European subsidy will be provided. In addition, the document contains an overview of your project: what is the core of the project, what the various work packages (and associated milestones will be like) and what the staffing per partner per work package will be like.

The grant agreement, therefore, forms the basis for your obligations towards the European programme and is leading in the assessment and monitoring of the programme. Therefore, you cannot simply deviate from the agreements laid down therein after you have signed the agreement. This should be accountable.

Putting together the project team

The composition of your project team is, of course, largely dependent on what substantive expertise you need to successfully execute your project. Nevertheless, you often need a number of fixed roles, which can sometimes overlap. For example, communication can be handled by the project manager, if this fits within the programme, instead of asking the communication department or hiring externally. It is, therefore, mainly a question of guaranteeing sufficient staffing for each role before the start of the project.

Below is a checklist of functions and roles that (usually) must be filled in for each European project:

Functie	Checklist
AS (Authorised Signatory) of LEAR (Legal Entity Appointed Representative) Signatory within the organization	
Project manager Responsible for day-to-day management, project management and associated EU obligations	
Responsible for content Responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the project	
Financial Supporter Responsible for financial administration and reporting in collaboration with the project manager	
Communication employee Responsible for carrying out the communication obligations from the EU project	
FLC (First Level Control) or auditor Depending on the specific rules of the programme, providing the grant. In principle, this is an external controller or accountant	

Formal project documentation

European projects often require a lot of records. You must report on the progress of the implementation of the various work packages, and the achievement of the milestones and deliverables drawn up by you and your partners. It is, therefore, important to establish clearly who will be keeping track of what at the beginning of the project. This way you can avoid any frustration and difficulties with the records during and after the project. The exact requirements regarding project documentation and records differ per European subsidy programme.

Communication

The requirements regarding communication (and dissemination) about a European project also differ per subsidy programme. Therefore, check which conditions are attached to your call in this area. It usually involves one or more of the following elements:

- Hanging posters with the project logo in your office or locations of your organisation
- Ensuring visibility of the project logo and project description on a website, within the website of your organisation or on a separate website. You often also have to make the European Union or the programme that is providing your subsidy visible
- Sending press releases at the start or completion of a project, or when an important result has been achieved

Finances

Although the exact requirements again depend on the stipulations of your call and programme, there are a number of aspects that are important in almost all projects.

- Make sure your project team has a financial professional who manages the project's finances and sets up cost centres. Keep in mind that you must enter (possible) income as well as expenses, and that you must be able to account for them at all times.
- Take a good look at the tender rules and eligibility conditions (what kind of costs can be claimed), exchange rate (if you travel outside the Eurozone), VAT, etc. Guidelines or fact

sheets are often available in this regard. If you do not set up the tender properly, you will generally not be able to claim costs via the project.

- Look at the regulations regarding the time registration of employees. Sometimes you have to write time, but in certain programmes you can write a % letter. This is an annual letter, signed by your manager, in which you indicate for what percentage of your appointment you are working for the project.
- Arrange a credit or debit card for your project. This makes booking travel and accommodation considerably easier and faster.

4.2 Execution of the project

Now that you have prepared everything, it is time to finally get started on the project. The actual implementation of the project usually takes up most of the whole process. Its exact form will, of course, depend on your project goals.

When executing the project, it is important to achieve the intended results identified in the project proposal, and not to deviate too much from them. To achieve this, it is, of course, important to work well with your partners, to communicate effectively about the project, to keep accurate project records and to have the financial and substantive accountability in order. Below is an overview of aspects that are important in the implementation of all European projects, regardless of their content:

As a partner

- Provide a clear administrative structure of your project (project folders, for example) that all project employees can work with.
- Thorough and rigorous project administration – so that evidence, results and targets can be delivered quickly at the time of project reporting.
- Create a schedule that is linked to the claim periods in your project and the requested activities, project performance and results. Ensure that the required commitment and availability of employees is guaranteed.
- Ensure clear communication within the project team.

As a lead-partner

- Ensure a clear administrative structure of your project.
- Ensure regular and clear communication with the partners. Schedule periodic live meetings and also online meetings to keep the communication flow going. Preferably also provide a joint online workspace, for example via Microsoft Teams. Keep an eye out for 'weak' partners - so that they deliver requested results on time and do not cause delays.
- Provide clear instructions to partners about reports, financial rules and agreements, deadlines, the nature of the meetings, external profiling, the results to be achieved and dissemination of results. Make sure that there is clarity about this from the start of the project and that good arrangements have been made about this.
- Thorough and rigorous project administration – so evidence, results and objectives can be delivered quickly at the time of project reporting. This is also very important to be able to monitor the progress of the project in its entirety as a lead partner. It is usually recommended to keep track of the progress, also of partners, in a spreadsheet.

- Create a schedule that is linked to the claim periods in your project and the requested activities, project performance and results. Ensure that the required commitment and availability of employees is guaranteed.
- Communication in your own organisation: ensure that there is regular communication through news items and/or activities related to the project. Involve the political and/or official leaders in this.
- Make sure you establish good contacts with the secretariat of the European subsidy programme. Warm contacts save a lot of time and hassle regarding questions or problems.

Project Execution	Checklist
Setting up project administration	
Putting together a team with a clear division of roles	
Setting up communication structure	
Setting up a financing structure	
Setting up a consultation structure (internally)	
Setting up a consultation structure (externally)	
Monitoring project (results)	

5. Completion of the project

Your project is done! Hopefully you and your partners have achieved the set goals and the project has been successful.

Completing

- Follow the instructions of the European programme and the lead partner regarding the completion of the project.
- Take note: the end of the project period and the end of the reporting period are not always the same dates. After the end of the project period, there is usually time to submit the final report and make the final financial claim.

Archiving

- Follow the instructions of the European programme regarding the archiving of the project. Archiving is of great importance because there is a (theoretical) possibility of a Second Level Control. This is a further external check of the way in which the project has been carried out and means that the actual administration is checked. Any errors may lead to forced refund of grant to the program.
- Realise that the documents you have used and the administration you have kept must be properly saved.

Evaluating

- Evaluate the project internally with your team: what went well, what could be improved, are there still opportunities in the future to expand the project further? Which European programmes are of interest?
- For example, consider the themes and questions below:
 1. Project progress in outline | What was the added value of the project?
 2. Partnership – Looking back at the collaboration in the project | Which partners are interesting for a possible next project?
 3. Theme | Are there any other options around the theme you have worked under?
 4. European programme | Did the European work create a lot of extra effort? Was it smooth or rigid?
 5. Bottlenecks | Around management, communication, project progress, etc. | What could have been better?
 6. Capacity building | This project may lead to new European project opportunities because you now have experience with European working and a specific European programme.

COLOFON

This handbook has been produced within the framework of the European project ECoC-SME.



ECoC-SME is an interregional cooperative project that focuses on the untapped opportunity for cities and regions to develop existing and potential SMEs through their early involvement in events such as European Capital of Culture (LF2018). The project focuses on the mega-event's potential to activate, empower and diversify local entrepreneurship by encouraging their creative, 'unconventional' cross-sector cooperations, clustering and networking, as well as their internationalization.

In the project, the partners, comprising cultural capitals of the past, present and future, explore and share their experiences and practice through a process of co-creation to empower local SMEs. This exchange in Local Learning Labs and international project meetings results in new tailor-made projects and initiatives in the five different cities. Action plans will be drawn up to enrich these tools and in the third year of the project, selected measures will be implemented in these cities and regions.

Project partners

- Gemeente Leeuwarden (Municipality of Leeuwarden)
- Inqubator Leeuwarden
- Savonlinna: University of Eastern Finland
- Matera: Materahub, Italy
- Rijeka: Municipality of Rijeka, Croatia
- Timisoara: Municipality of Timisoara, Romania
- Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University Centre for Enterprise Practices, Lithuania