Beginner's manual

Project proposal writing 101

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Serbia

RYCO
Regional Youth Cooperation Office

Beginner's manual

Project proposal writing 101

Created for beginner practitioners to:

➜ Understand the structure of grant proposals

➜ Develop standard project elements from A to Z

➜ Create participatory, inclusive #youth mobility projects

with

➜ Self-reflection and group exercises

➜ Practical examples

➜ Best practices resources

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Published by: The Regional Youth Cooperation Office and the OSCE Mission to Serbia

Proof-reading: Andrea Marinković

Design: Milica Dervišević

Print:

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Serbia

Regional Youth Cooperation Office

The printing of this publication was made possible with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. The views herein expressed are solely those of the author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the OSCE Mission to Serbia or the Regional Youth Cooperation Office.

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Project proposal writing 101

Belgrade, 2020

Contents

A BETTER REGION STARTS WITH YOU(TH)	**7**
TOWARD INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATORY YOUTH MOBILITY PROJECTS	**9**
WHAT IS A GRANT?	**11**
My project in a bigger picture	11
Grant-schemes and project preparation prejudices	16
WHAT IS A PARTICIPATORY PROJECT?	**23**
Beyond ticking the box…	23
Space, voice, audience and influence	26
Climbing the ladders	28
How youth actors want to participate?	30
Participation meets innovation	35
United in diversity	38
Going regional…	40
Reconciliation	40
Remembrance/dealing with the past	42
Intercultural learning and dialogue	44
Grid for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education activities	48
HOW TO WRITE A PROJECT?	**51**
Fasten your seat belts…	51
Why is your idea worth supporting?	59
Needs assesment	62
Problem tree	65
Stakeholders analysis	68
Target groups	71
Objective tree	74
Hierarchy of objectives, results and activities	79
Writing results and activities	81
Methodology	83
Online activities	85
Scheduling activities	88
Visibility and communication	89
Partnerships	93

Sustainability 95

Financial and budget planning 97

Some of the main terms you encounter when thinking about budget planning for a project 99

1 On 1 with some of the main elements of the budget form units: 102

Budget drafting 104

Games for financial planning and budget design process 110

Common Mistakes in the Budget Proposal 113

The general rule is “best value for money” 115

Benefits of risk management 117

Risks and risk assessment 118

Avoiding risks - smart or risky decision? 122

Monitoring, evaluation and learning 128

FINAL COUNTDOWN CHECKLIST 132

… AT THE END 133

A BETTER REGION STARTS WITH YOU(TH)

Preface

The Manual before you represents a joint effort of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), local branch in Serbia, and the OSCE Mission to Serbia toward offering a practical resource to all of you interested in developing and implementing quality youth mobility projects.

It stems from the need, mapped through continuous efforts, to create an enabling environment for secondary schools and civil society organizations in the Western Balkans, and to foster and nurture meaningful regional co-operation among young people.

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office was founded as an independently functioning institutional mechanism, by six governments in the Western Balkans, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and co-operation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programs. We do this by supporting great ideas and funding projects, which bring youth of the region together.

We hope that this Manual will support you in creating great ideas that strengthen the participation of youth, encourage inclusion and cherish intercultural values - be it for opportunities provided by RYCO or other grantors.

We do not see RYCO as a classical donor. We hope to rather be your partner on a journey for a better region.

It starts with you(th)!

Marija Bulat, RYCO Serbia

TOWARD INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATORY YOUTH MOBILITY PROJECTS

Foreword

Dear reader,

A Beginner's Manual for project proposal writing 101 is conceptualized to support you in advancing your project writing skills. It contains three thematic parts focused on:

- ➜ Unwrapping grant making logic and understanding processes behind grant life cycle
- ➜ Highlighting the importance of participation and diversity, and their operationalization in quality youth mobility projects
- ➜ Guiding through major project elements and technical aspects of writing a successful application

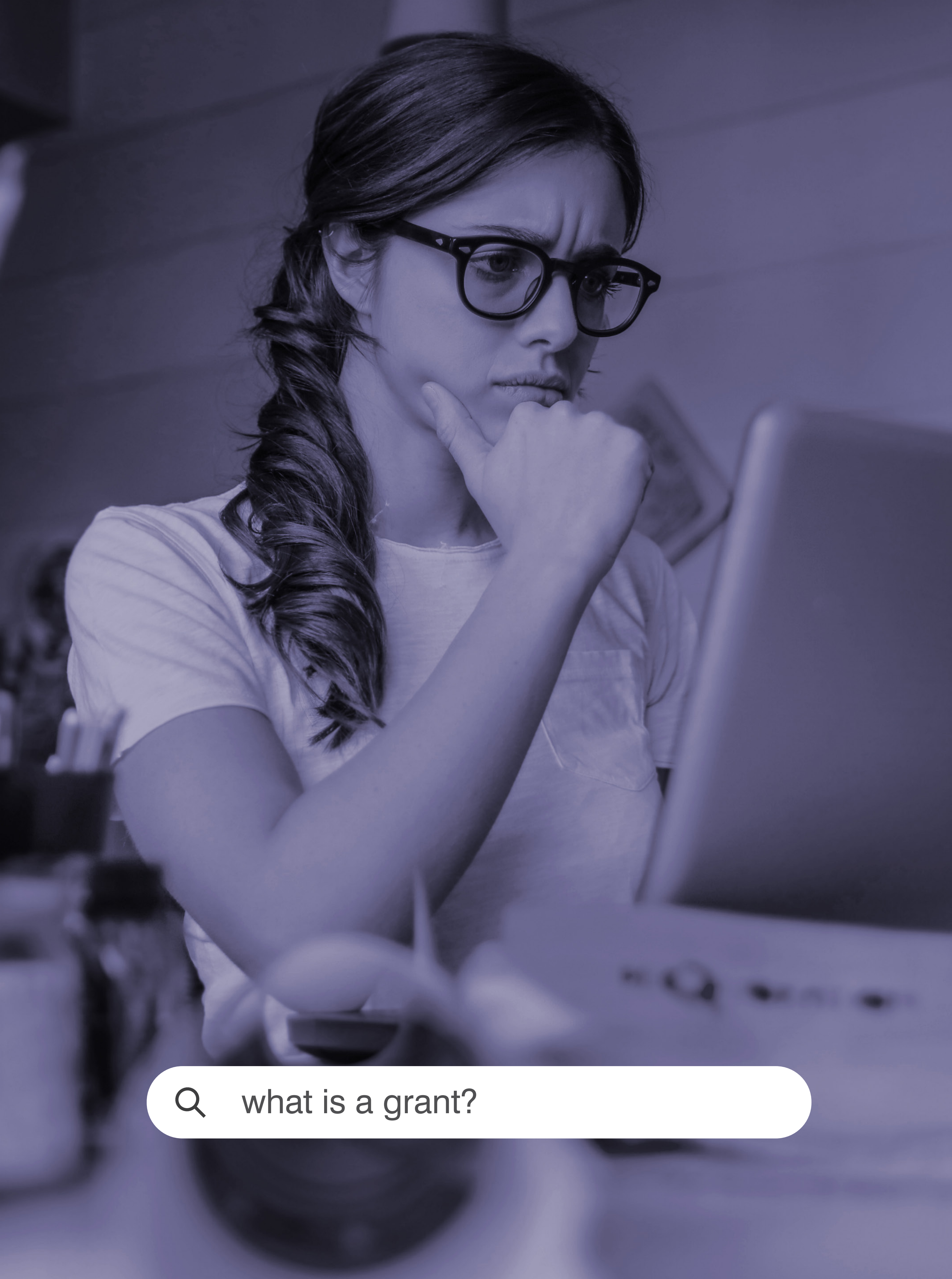
Throughout the Manual you will encounter exercises, self-reflection invitations, and tools directly linked to the topic at hand. We encourage you to try them out, practice and devote time to it beyond just reading the text.

The Manual contains practical examples of various approaches to different parts of project application and intervention logic. It also incorporates links to other resources that you can use to further explore and deepen your knowledge.

This Manual is based not only on the rich experience of its authors, through their challenges and successes, but it also draws on lessons from a number of trainings for projects preparation organized by RYCO and OSCE field operations in the Western Balkans, insights of people like you, internal working materials and recommendations, as well as direct experience of RYCO staff in conducting grant schemes and challenges that beneficiaries were facing.

You can read it in the given order or by topic that you need support with the most. We hope this Manual becomes a resource you always turn to when developing amazing projects.

In this publication, authors make use of words "youth" and "young people" to describe young women, men and other gender identities.


what is a grant?

WHAT IS A GRANT?

My project in a bigger picture

You want to advance your community and the environment you live and work in by applying for a grant? Great! You have a good project idea, too? Even better! You are not sure how this whole project proposal writing thing works? **Good news – it's learnable!**

Before diving into your project, it is useful to understand where it places in the bigger picture. In order to do so, let's familiarize ourselves with some commonly used terms:

What is a GRANT?

> A grant is an amount of money that a government or other institution gives to an individual or to an organization for a particular purpose.
> **Collins English Dictionary**

> The EU awards grants to organizations and, occasionally, individuals, to help them carry out projects that further its policies in many different fields, from research to education to humanitarian aid. Grants are a form of complementary financing, and the beneficiary organisation will also put up a percentage of the funding for their project.
> **European Commission**

> Grants are non-repayable funds or products disbursed or given by one party (grant makers), often a government department, corporation, foundation or trust, to a recipient, often (but not always) a non-profit entity, educational institution, business or an individual.
> **Wikipedia**

Main grant take-aways:

- Most often money
- By an entity to advance their agenda
- For a beneficiary to use (and justify) for a particular purpose.

The grant that may support your project is a part of a **grant-scheme** through which a number of projects is financed. The scheme may be a part of a **grant-makers'** project or programme, aimed at achieving certain goals. Sometimes, these schemes are also called **instruments.**

For example:

Illustration of RYCO's 3rd Call for project proposals

In this case, we can see how a concrete project fits into a sample grant-scheme: how its worth compares to the overall financial envelope, and how it falls under one of the specific goals of the Call for proposals, under one out of two priority areas, in line with overall RYCO strategy and agenda. We may notice how this particular project is funded from one of the streams of funding, i.e. what is its place in overall programming of a grant-giving entity. With the number of projects like "yours", oriented toward same objective, grant-maker is contributing to a bigger change.

Understanding the bigger picture may help you in better targeting contribution to be provided through your project, and at the same time it gives you clarity to which agendas and objectives your efforts are feeding in.

Life cycle of a grant

The grants lifecycle refers to the entire process of a grant — from planning, opportunity, implementation, to closeout.

From the perspective of a grant-giver, this parallel process may look a bit differently.

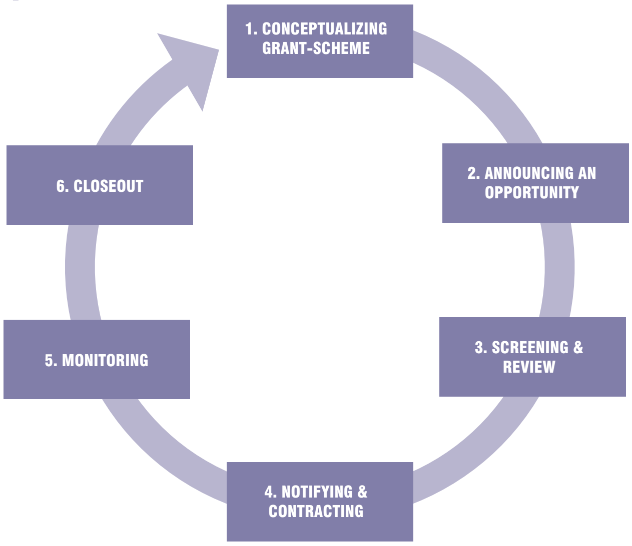
Sometimes three general phases are mentioned in this process: pre-award, award and post-award phase.

203 unique donors can be identified in the Western Balkans region (active in the period 2016 to 2019). Study finds the largest number of donors in Serbia (138), followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (103) and Kosovo* (82). The number of donors found in North Macedonia and Albania were similar: 73 and 71 respectively, while Montenegro shows the lowest number of donors (63).

Open Society Foundations/OSIFE - Office of the Western Balkans' study (2019)

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Grantor's perspective



Grant life cycle from grantor's perspective

Pre-award phase

1. **Conceptualizing the grant-scheme:** planning and development of the programme which will fund projects, based on grantor's vision, mission, strategy or other specific goals and mandate.
2. **Announcing an opportunity:** opening a call for proposals, dissemination and outreach efforts, conducting info sessions or similar. During this period, potential beneficiaries may be motivated to apply for a grant and may address questions in relation to the scheme's framework.
3. **Screening and review:** after the deadline for proposal submission, projects are screened for administrative/eligibility check and then evaluated against the criteria defined by the grant-scheme. Depending on the complexity of the funding programme, this step may take time and may consist out of multiple review stages.

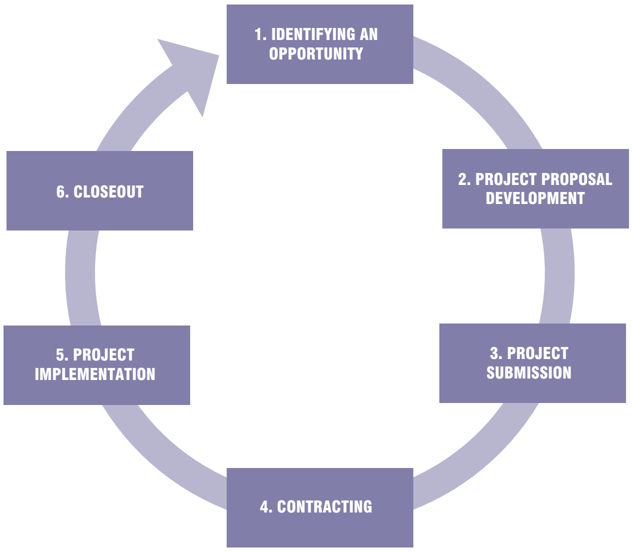
Award phase

4. **Notifying and contracting:** a preliminary list of awarded grantees is usually announced; upon fulfilment of technical/legal requirements, grantees are contracted, therefore creating legal ground for funds management and overall implementation rules.

Post-award phase

5. **Monitoring:** during the project duration (period of time envisioned by the contract), the contracting entity will usually perform monitoring. This can translate into on-site visits, audit and/or regular check-ins with the grantee. Some grantors will also offer specific types of support to the beneficiary in implementation.
6. **Closeout:** Upon submission of financial and narrative reports and any accompanying documents foreseen, the grant is closed.

Grantee's perspective



Grant life cycle from grantee's perspective

Pre-award phase

1. **Identifying an opportunity:** based on priorities and overall thematic focus, in this phase potential sources of funding are identified. Number of organizations nowadays maintains databases of different donors and opportunities.
2. **Project proposal development:** writing the project proposal, including developing the project idea through a template typically foreseen by the donor; preparing accompanying documentation; looking for partners and developing the project framework jointly; and planning the budget.
3. **Project submission:** formally submitting the project application through a dedicated online system or postal service by the deadline indicated by specific Call for proposals.

Award phase

4. **Contracting:** grantees are contracted, meaning a legal ground is created for funds management and overall implementation rules. Prior to contracting, the grantor may request additional clarifications, documents or modifications to the application.

Post-award phase

5. **Project implementation:** Once the contract is signed, the grantee implements the project within the agreed timeframe, financial construction and as described in the project documentation. The grantee also collects means to verify implementation, as well as conscientious financial management, as per specific donor's rules.
6. **Closeout:** Upon submission of financial and narrative reports, and any accompanying documents foreseen, the grant closes. The last tranche of the budget (grant payment from the donor) is only transferred to the grantee when the grantor assesses that the submitted documentation is in order, i.e. that project was implemented as contracted. In cases of complex and multiyear projects, such practice is usually conducted for a number of milestones, work packages or different project implementation phases.

As we can see by now, getting a grant for your project entails predictable steps. This process is entails more than simply writing your idea into a given template – it involves smart research, rational planning, sufficient human power and responsible management.

Not all grant opportunities fit all needs, so it is vital to understand the bigger picture alongside your own capacities and interests before deciding to apply. On a positive note, the predictability of the grant-making process makes it accessible; by practicing and developing good judgement to make the decision, the process becomes less intimidating and more fun.

This Manual focuses on the project proposal development phase within the life cycle of a grant, and specifically on standard elements of a project application, oriented towards youth-targeted mobility interventions.

Grant-schemes and project preparation prejudices

Prejudices are often described as preconceived opinions that are not based on reason or actual experience. In the world of grant-schemes and project preparation, when you begin developing ideas and applying for support, it is quite easy to jump to false conclusions about the process and behaviours which will bring you closer to success.

Take a look at the list of some possible thoughts and attitudes about project and grant handling. Some of them are prejudices and some are not. Mark in the right column what do you think about each statement – is it right or false?

True or false?	
1. A good idea is most important for a successful project.	
2. Getting a grant is a matter of luck, even if we prepared an excellent project proposal.	
3. Preparing a project proposal takes a lot of time and effort.	
4. We should align our approach to perfectly fit the donor agenda or a particular call.	
5. There is no harm in making things in a project a bit nicer than they really are.	
6. Once our project is approved, we can celebrate and freely spend our budget as we deem appropriate.	
7. We have better chances of getting a grant if our human resources work for free.	
8. If I plan it all perfectly and extensively, nothing will go wrong.	
9. Do you know some more?	
10. Do you know some more?	

Let's look at how you did now ☺

1. Good idea is most important for a successful project: False

A good idea based on needs is indeed very important. But what makes an idea good for a youth project?

- ➜ It is a result of evidence-based needs of a target community;
- ➜ It stems from young people themselves or is crafted in close consultations with them;
- ➜ It is aligned with donor's overall mission and grant-scheme guidelines;
- ➜ It is translated into careful and realistic planning, which indicates the project's feasibility and measurable results;
- ➜ Preferably, it is beyond one-off events, and has some sustainability aspects.

Good, creative, innovative, out-of-the-box ideas may catch attention and, depending on the donor's assessment criteria and overall organizational culture, may compensate for other under-developed aspects. Nevertheless, a good idea per se is not enough. **One needs to put a well-thought effort into demonstrating that such an idea can be implemented without setbacks, while contributing to the bigger picture.** That's why project proposals exist – to help translate your idea in reality through detailed planning.

TRY THIS OUT: If I was a donor….

Imagine you are a representative of a foundation or that you approve project finances. Put yourself in the shoes of a responsible entity. Which criteria would you use? What kind of projects would you prefer? How would you ensure responsible spending?

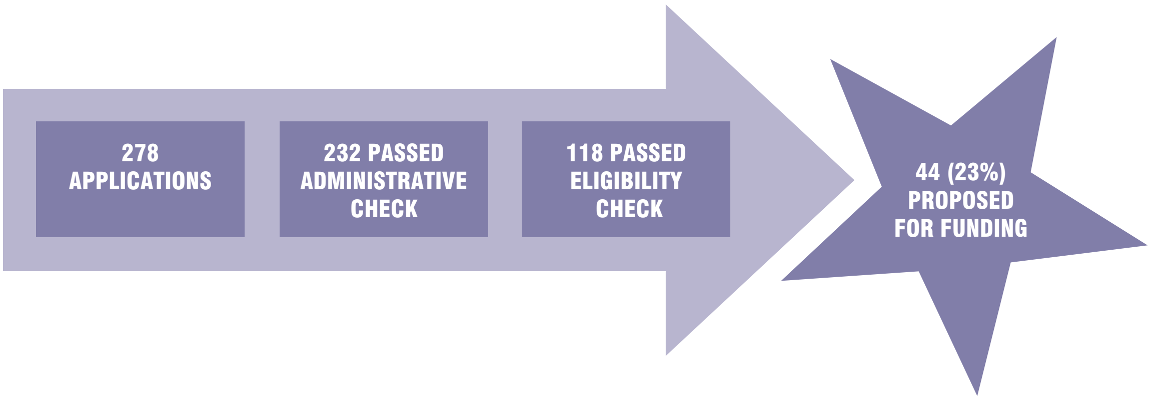
Looking through the donor's eyes can help you reason the paperwork and particular requests that you may find burdening at times. It can also help you structure your ideas in a way that the donor seas as suitable. However, beware of sliding into prejudice no.4!

2. Getting a grant is a matter of luck, even if we prepared an excellent project proposal: False

You've read the donor's guidelines, you've used the input of youth as a basis for your project, you've planned for a realistic budget, you've researched what kind of projects have been approved before… and you still didn't get the grant? You must have been out of luck this time? This is a rare reflection for those who try hard, but do not get support for their ideas. Yet, luck most probably had nothing to with it. More likely causes are: high-quality competition; your subjective interpretation of ticking all the boxes successfully; and, sometimes, evaluation criteria that was not concrete or public. There are factors beyond your control, but the majority is usually within your realm and rejection shouldn't discourage you.

Ultimately, a number of grant-schemes support only 10 to 30% of all submitted projects.

For instance, let's take a closer look at the second RYCO (2018) call for proposals analysis[1]:



These projects were assessed in multiple steps: administrative check, eligibility check, assessment process.

What else can you do to join the winning statistics?

- **Analyse former calls, when available, to assess the potential gaps to close with your project proposal**, i.e. what needs have not been fully addressed, or what ways of approaching the problem are less competitive.
- Partner with an applicant with more experience or specific capacities, as it provides a learning opportunity to obtain grants as a lead in the future.
- Ask for feedback. While limitations of human resources and time will often prevent donors from providing feedback, it's always useful to seek advice.
- Attend trainings, read material like this Manual and write proposals for more than one grant. Experience is built on correcting mistakes, obtaining more information and teaming up with others to increasing your chances.

1 See complete Analysis of the 2nd Open Call, co-funded by UNPBF (RYCO) at mptf.undp.org

3. Preparing a project proposal takes a lot of time and effort: True

Absolutely! Sometimes it may seem that the project proposal template or overall documentation preparation is not demanding –and this indeed may differ between grant-schemes. Nevertheless, what you put on paper is (hopefully) a result of thorough research, consultations, reflection and planning. And this takes time. How long, you ask?

Usually calls for proposals are active for no less than a month, although there are examples when you can submit proposals at any time of the budget year. If the call is recurring, as RYCO calls are, then you know when to approximately expect the call and can even start planning beforehand.

To assess how much time you'll need to prepare ell and stress-free, avoiding panic, administrative and other banal mistakes, please consider:

- ➜ Do I already have partners or should I find them? How long should I invest in building relationship?
- ➜ How many people will take active part in preparation of the project?
- ➜ Can I already do something to make the assessment of youth needs easier for a project I'm contemplating? Can I make it a practice to consult young people on their opinions, initiatives and problems?
- ➜ How long it would take us to collect all the paperwork?

4. We should align our approach to perfectly fit the donor agenda or a particular call: False

In principle, it is best to apply to those calls that are already in line with your overall mission, values or aspirations. Adjusting your ideas to a particular grant-scheme is fine and the proposal that any entity would fund is supposed to contribute to the concrete donor agenda. However, the order of actions matters: area of work, ideas and goals should come first, and identifying suitable donors to support it can be selected later.

5. There is no harm in making things in a project a bit nicer than they really are: False

Do not make things up. As simple as that. This also goes for communication with partners. Exaggerations in terms of capacity, knowledge, experience, or any other aspect, may seem like a good selling point to improve your chances for a grant approval. The shortcomings almost always come to the surface, leading to jeopardizing your reputation in the long run, if your claims are proven false. In extreme situations, this may also have consequences of financial or legal nature.

Stakeholders like RYCO provide their grantees support and opportunities to learn and grow through the projects and their implementation. If you have concerns in terms of your capacity to carry out any segment of the project as envisioned, honesty is the best policy.

6. Once our project is approved, we can celebrate and freely spend our budget, as we deem appropriate: False

Absolutely not. The budget represents the financial display of your project proposal. It needs to be realistic and based on adequate costs, as specified by the donor. It is a result of the project design and the planned activities which need to be implemented. When planned appropriately, the budget will facilitate the quality implementation of project activities and contribute to the overall success of the project. If it is poorly planned, it may prevent the organisation from implementing the agreed activities properly.

7. We have better chances of getting a grant if our human resources work for free: False

Your efforts, contribution and expertise require financial compensation. When planning your project proposal and accompanying budget, it is advisable to plan the necessary human resources, including staff costs following the donor rules and procedures for fees and salaries, for a successful implementation of the project. When people (un)voluntarily work pro bono they may feel less motivated, and can take the ***laissez-faire*** approach - not use their real capacities for the benefit of the project. Thus, **not budgeting for human resources can ultimately cost you more.** Grant-makers know this, too.

8. If I plan it all perfectly and long enough nothing will go wrong: False

Instead of perfection, it is always better to strive for excellence. Yes, preparing a quality project, especially a multi-year or complex scheme, can take a lot of time and effort. You may have excellent partner relationships, you may have a great and experienced team, you can reach to the most motivated participants – and something can still go downhill. It happens. That's why it is important to reflect on the quality risk analysis in preparation for the project. Even then, unexpected circumstances may occur. For such reasons, the so-called contingency budget lines are often available for you to mitigate unexpected situations. If the situation can't be resolved budget-wise, it is only human (and responsible!) not to fulfil 100% of the planned programme, to avoid blocking the timeline, or lose the focus from the bigger picture. Some donors welcome openness and transparency about potential pitfalls and dilemmas you may have. Modify, restart, find another mean or angle.

SELF-REFLECTION:

How did you do? Any prejudices on sight? Would you add some more ideas that you encountered in this regard and what kind of counterarguments you would offer?

Did you change your thinking in some way or learn something new?

what is a participatory project?

WHAT IS A PARTICIPATORY PROJECT?

Beyond ticking the box...

Before going into the technical aspects of your project proposal, we'll focus on the overarching qualities you'll hopefully try to cherish in your approach. Citizen participation, as a democratic concept, is certainly one of those qualities that should be reflected in your project work with and for youth.

SELF-REFLECTION or DISCUSSION EXERCISE:

How would you explain or define participation? What about youth participation? Are there any differences? What are some barriers you can think of for young people to participate actively in society in comparison to others?

Let's see on few examples how youth participation is seen by some of the major stakeholders:

Participation is a <u>fundamental right.</u> It is one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been reiterated in many other Conventions and Declarations. Through active participation, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn vital life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship and to promote positive civic action. To participate effectively, <u>young people must be given the proper tools,</u> such as information, education about and access to their civil rights.

UN4Youth

Youth participation refers to how young people can be involved in processes, institutions and decisions that affect their lives – and this can be active or passive.

Active youth participation means engaging or being ready to engage. Passive youth participation means you are willing to allow whatever happens to happen, and you are not changing or controlling the situation.

For example, you could participate passively by listening to someone speak at an event, but you have no intention of getting involved in the issue or making any changes in your life. By contrast, you could participate actively by researching a topic, finding actions you could take and raising awareness with the goal of changing the behaviour of others.

Voices of Youth (UNICEF's digital community FOR YOUTH, BY YOUTH)

Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (2003) Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

Common aspects in all youth participation definitions:

- Young people have agency;
- They can and should form opinions and views;
- They are able to take an action for positive change;
- They should be able to exert influence and be part of decision-making;
- It is their **right** to participate.

Simply put – when one's voice is taken into account, when one feels they belong to a community and that their opinions and actions make a difference, then one is more inclined to be an active member of that community, to contribute to progress, to engage, protect it and care about environment in which they live. This goes for all people, and young ones don't differ in that regard. Therefore, projects focused on youth, which enable meaningful participation of youth are higher-quality and more precise.

EXERCISE: TWO SCENARIOS

Think of a rough project idea with team members that do not belong to youth as a demographic group. The project idea should focus on youth though.

How do you choose which needs and grievances to tackle?

What will young people do in project activities?

Which are communication approaches throughout the project?

Now, try contemplating a rough project idea in a group where young people are also part of.

Is there any difference in the result? Which project idea you like better? Which do you think would appeal to your main audience – youth? Did you learn something new – youth habits, preferences, tools…? Were any of these two scenarios harder to develop in a group?

Space, voice, audience and influence

LAURA LUNDY MODEL

In 2007, academic Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast published a model conceptualising child's right to participation. This model has a focus on Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that **children and young people have a legal right to have their views heard and acted upon as appropriate.**

The Lundy model that is widely in use[2], was developed to aid practitioners to meaningfully and effectively implement a child's right to participate by focusing attention on the distinct but interrelated elements of Article 12.

It is a straightforward and easy to understand approach, which may help you in 'walking the talk' when it comes to your intentions to enable youth participation.

There are four elements to it and Lundy provided a brief checklist to assist with it.

Elements have a rational, chronological order, and you may consult them whenever you organise an activity, project or process that concerns young people:

Space

Provide a safe and inclusive space for children/youth to express their views.

- ➜ Have their views been actively sought?
- ➜ Was there a safe space in which they can express themselves freely?
- ➜ Have steps been taken to ensure that all of them can take part?

2 The Lundy Model of Participation was prominently featured and endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in their recent National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015– 2020).

Voice

Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's/youth views.

- ➜ Have they been given the information they need to form a view?
- ➜ Do they know that they do not have to take part?
- ➜ Have they been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

Audience

Ensure that children's/youth views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen.

- ➜ Is there a process for communicating their views?
- ➜ Do they know who their views are being communicated to?
- ➜ Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

Influence

Ensure that children's/youth views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate.

- ➜ Were their views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- ➜ Are there procedures in place that ensure that their views have been taken seriously?
- ➜ Have they been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

SELF-REFLECTION:

Recall a recent example – a project, activity or initiative of yours – and assess it against these four elements. Were some pieces of the puzzle missing? Knowing this model, would you do something differently now?

Climbing the ladders

ROGER HART MODEL

Roger Hart, author of the Ladder of Participation (1992)[3], maintains that participation is a fundamental right of citizenship, because it is a way of learning what it means to be a citizen. The Ladder of Participation presents a classification of interaction between children/young people and adults as rungs on a ladder: the higher the rung, the higher the level of participation. It is one of the most well-known developmental models.

1. Manipulation

Adults lead children/young people in accordance with a scheme known only to the adults. The children/young people do not understand what is happening, and they are not free to explore or act on their own thinking. Adults use some of their ideas but do not provide children/youth with recognition on what influence they have. It also happens when there is no understanding of the issues and hence participants do not understand their actions.

2. Decoration

Children/young people take part in an event, e.g. by singing, dancing, wearing T-shirts with logos, but they do not really understand the issue or goal. The reason this is described as one rung up from 'manipulation' is that adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by youth.

3. Tokenism

Children/young people are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.

- -

4. Assigned but informed

Adults decide on the project and children/young people volunteer for set roles within it. Adults inform them adequately and respect their views.

3 First published in Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship by UNICEF in 1992

5. Consulted and informed

The project is designed and run by adults, but children/young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth

Adults have the initial idea, but children/young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Their views are considered, and they are involved in making the decisions.

7. Youth-initiated and directed

Children/young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

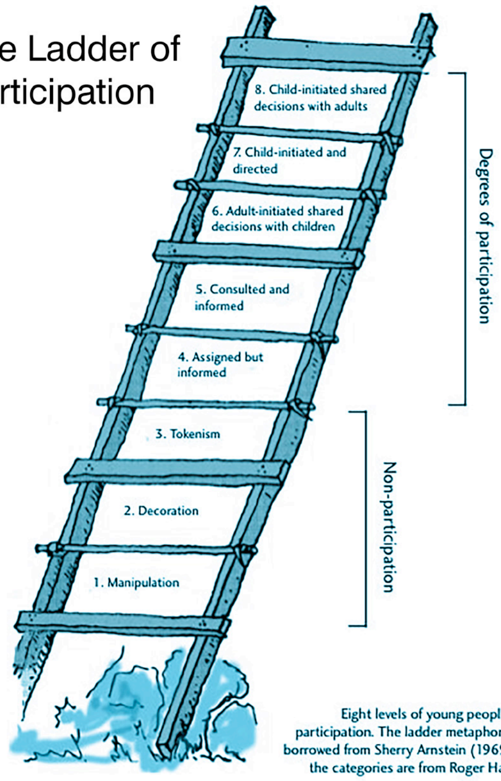
8. Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults

Children/young people have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join with them in making decisions.

Scan the QR code and learn more about this model and examples of how all rungs work in practice in Hart's essay "From Tokenism to Citizenship"

First three rungs of the ladder are **non-participatory** practices, while following represent genuine participation options. It is important though to underline that Hart's model shouldn't be used as an evaluation tool, as he acknowledged. In his recommendation, the important principle is one of choice: programmes should be designed to ***maximize the opportunity*** for any young person to ***choose*** to participate at the highest level ***of his/her ability.***

The Ladder of Participation



Eight levels of young people's participation. The ladder metaphor is borrowed from Sherry Arnstein (1969); the categories are from Roger Hart.

How youth actors want to participate?[4]

Beyond theoretical models, you may establish your own standards and rules of participation within your organization, community where you work with youth, school or another context. This gives young people the ownership over methodology, contributes to transparency in decision making, and sets participatory ground for further projects focused on young people.

For instance, in such facilitated process, youth actors from Serbia and the Western Balkans region expressed importance of the following standards:

➜ Needs-based approach & purposefulness

➜ Communication: transparent, clear, and adjusted to target group

➜ Ensuring security: physical and digital

➜ Engaging methodology

➜ Accessibility & diversity

➜ Youth-adult partnership beyond one-off activity

4 Adapted from the OSCE Mission to Serbia's (2020) Guidelines on youth mainstreaming. This tool is created based on a consultative process with National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), National Association of Youth Workers of Serbia (NAPOR), South East European Youth Network (SEEYN) and representatives of civil society organizations with a track record related to participation practices and youth engagement from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro: Vojvodina Environmental Movement, MUNJA – Incubator of social innovations Sarajevo, Young Researchers of Serbia, Educational Centre Kru{evac, BalkanIDEA Novi Sad (BINS), Association for Democratic Prosperity – Zid, European Youth Parliament Serbia, Centre for Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), Belgrade Open School (BOS) and Centre for youth work (CZOR).

Based on their inputs, a checklist was created to help ensure that principles the youth care about are nurtured in initiatives assuming their participation.

Standard	My activity/project/programme
NEEDS-BASED APPROACH & PURPOSEFULNESS	
How is my initiative corresponding to the actual needs of the target group? Am I in a position to inquire about the needs in some innovative manner?	
How can I map interests and/or concerns of youth? Which particular cohort/group of youth?	
What is the current level of competencies in my target group? What are their learning needs?	
COMMUNICATION: TRANSPARENT, CLEAR, ADJUSTED TO TARGET GROUP	
How can I communicate goals and activities in a clear and transparent way? How formal, how horizontal? Oral or written? Visual?	
What will be the result of youth engagement? How can my participants see their contribution?	
How will I adjust my communication to the specific target group?	

Tip:

The term 'youth-friendly' is often used, referring to the content that youth are able to obtain, which is meeting their expectations and needs. In terms of language and communication this can mean adjusting channels, visuals, wording, motives that youth use and can connect with. Nevertheless, attention should be paid to slipping from youth-friendly to oversimplification and thus underestimation of people addressed.

Standard	My activity/project/programme
ENSURING SECURITY: PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL	
Which are the preconditions for all participants to feel safe in terms of environment of the initiative? Which steps can be taken to prevent any sort of violence from happening?	

Tip:

Security procedures sometimes can be discouraging and an obstacle to participation. It helps to clearly communicate why certain procedures are needed, who will have access to data, and how it will be used. Being transparent and treating young people as rights-holders who are able to understand rationale behind decisions certainly contributes to building trust and partnership.

Standard	My activity/project/programme
Do I plan to check if participants are fine with video and photo taking?	
Can I guarantee that personal data of participants won't be used for other purposes but this initiative by any parties involved?	
ENGAGING METHODOLOGY	
What kind of innovative methods can I use, especially towards ensuring interactivity?	

Tip:

Developing Youth Work Innovation eHandbook published by Helsinki's Humak University of Applied Sciences, brings experiences from Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. The approaches covered include Design Thinking, Humour Techniques, Learning Experience Design etc. You can find it here: http://futurelabs.humak.fi/ehandbook/

Standard	My activity/project/programme
How can this initiative demonstrate trust in youth and offer them space to experiment?	

Standard	My activity/project/programme
What kind of digital tools may be possible to use during this initiative?	

Tip:

For the inspiring list of digital tools compiled by South East European Youth Network (SEEYN) and how to use them in youth work and non-formal education in general, including evaluation, assessment, project management, and group work, visit: http://digiyouth.seeyn.org/digital_tools

Standard	My activity/project/programme
What can I do to make sure that initiative is age-appropriate for the specific group of youth I intend to work with?	
What sort of qualifications and knowledge is needed by people implementing such initiative?	
How is concrete and measurable contribution of youth ensured? How will they know that their opinion counts?	
ACCESIBILITY & DIVERSITY	
What steps can I take to reach various groups of youth for the initiative, especially marginalized ones? Can I make sure that initiative is accessible on all grounds to young people?	

Tip:

Depending on the type of the initiative one may think of following examples: securing sign language interpretation, having materials in multiple languages and in larger fonts, organizing gatherings and sleepovers in venues accessible to disabled, using diverse range of communication channels including face-to-face, securing resources for presence of personal assistants etc.

Standard	My activity/project/programme
How will people feel accepted, equal and comfortable to participate freely?	

Standard	My activity/project/programme
YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP BEYOND ONE-OFF ACTIVITY	
How will I ensure that activity is beyond level 3 on a Roger Hart's scale of participation?	
What kind of follow-up is applicable?	
In which ways can the young participants of this initiative and experience they obtained be engaged in the future?	

See Chapter on Monitoring and evaluation for more insights

Participation meets innovation

SELECTION FOR INSPIRATION

When contemplating on the methodology for your project's activities, try thinking outside of the box. Meaning, following the logic suggested by number of research papers shows that traditional forms of participation are less alluring to young people, so let's try to be innovative. Moreover, methods that are seen and attempted too many times get predictable and thus less engaging for a number of young activists.

Some of the ideas you may try out are:

Digital storytelling

Digital storytelling is the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories. It is learning, creating and sharing experience supported by technology. Such approach may be used in combination with multimedia and is applicable to a range of subjects. Across Europe it is used also in educational systems, libraries and community centres.

TIP:

Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling are often cited as a useful starting point as you begin working with digital stories.

Scan code for TED Talk of Jim Jorstad (CNN iReport), an award-winning journalist and filmmaker, who researches how people can use social media and digital storytelling to connect with people, and the world.

Connecting unexpected groups

One of the ways to bring innovation to your project may be to gather together groups that are usually not brought together. For instance, how often do we see members of local assemblies being part of projects with young people and engaged in joint dialogue and creation of solutions? This can also work with diverse professions involved, thus creating innovative synergies.

For example, project YouthMetre.eu brings together geographers, information technologists, youth workers, advocates, researchers, policy analysts and EU institutions to synthesise and present information online in a format that is accessible to young people, whilst also working with multiple organizations on the ground to build capacities for young people

to make use of this information, to network with each other and to effect change. The goal of YouthMetre.eu is to provide accessible information and to empower young people living in the European Union with tools so that they are able to interact with policy actors and, using these connections, bring about changes to policies at European, national, regional and local levels.

Design thinking

As described in one documentary about this method – "it is a call to the conventional minds to change and collaborate". Design thinking aims at solving problems or questions in a practical or creative way, and is nowadays used in many industries. It originally steams from IT, but its applicability in educational systems is growing too. As explained by SALTO-YOUTH (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth)[5], the common aim of design thinking is to follow a process to design a product or service which will meet the needs of its users, in a continuous loop cycle of questioning, prototyping, trying it out, gathering feedback, improving it and repeating the cycle. It is all about the user's inputs, instead of the developer trying to guess what their needs are. Even Stanford University is using it: dschool.stanford.edu

For instance, one of the examples offered by SALTO is to use design thinking to create a learning programme: ask young people what they would like to learn and how. Brainstorm ideas with them: how to make a schedule, the possibilities for learning different topics, opportunities to learn with each other, etc. Design a learning programme taking into account the results of the previous steps. Test it by implementing it with young people and gather feedback. Improve it, adapt it according to the feedback obtained and implement new tests.

City of Helsinki Participation game[6]

The participation planning game was developed in 2017 under the direction of the Helsinki City Executive Office. By the beginning of 2018, the Participation Game has been played by more than 2,000 City employees.

The City of Helsinki's Participation Game helps city employees consider how the operations and services could be planned in even better co-operation with the residents.

The Participation Game is a board game that can be played by anyone who is interested in the operations of the City and the development of them. The material is available to all on the web.

5 https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/design-thinking.2720/
6 https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/administration/participate/channels/participation-model/participation-game/

EXERCISE: PARTICIPATION CYCLE

Remember the life cycle of a grant? Think about the ways in which you can enable youth participation in each phase. Consult the rest of the Manual to learn more about project elements if needed. We offer you some clues below.

Identifying an opportunity

➔

➔ ***Group of young volunteers will make decision on regional scope of the project and main theme, jointly with the project manager.***

➔

Project proposal development

➔

➔

➔ ***Young team member(s) will draft a part of the application.***

Project submission

➔

➔

Contracting

➔

➔

➔

Project implementation

➔ ***Junior trainer(s) will deliver sessions with a more senior team member.***

➔

Closeout

➔

➔

United in diversity

CREATING INCLUSIVE PROJECTS

Enabling participation means awareness that youth is a heterogeneous category of population. This means that you tend to involve not only 'the best youth from the class', but rather young people with diverse backgrounds, gender identity, nationality, physical ability and different levels of societal privilege.

By doing so you are not only contributing to marginalized youth, that is more often than not excluded from projects, but to all youth. In a wider, societal progress, sense you're reinforcing the value of equal chances and opportunities for all.

SELF-REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION EXERCISE:

What seems to be the difference between these two?

Working with vulnerable youth	Working with youth in an inclusive manner

It is no secret that many youth organizations struggle to be inclusive. There are many reasons for this – from doubting the ability to work with different categories of vulnerable youth in a sensible way, to lacking sufficient resources or the understanding of what inclusion in practice actually encompasses.

SOCIAL INCLUSION[7]: From a youth perspective, social inclusion is the process of individual's self-realization within a society, acceptance and recognition of one's potential by social institutions, integration (through study, employment, volunteer work or other forms of participation) in the web of social relations in a community. It has a particular meaning to those young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and live in precarious conditions. For them, social inclusion involves breaking various barriers before acquiring their social rights as full members of society.

7 https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/social-inclusion

We encourage you to take one step at the time and incorporate some of the following advice:

- ➜ When conducting needs analysis, explore how diverse young people are in the community you intend to implement a project.
- ➜ Research different position of various youth groups and barriers they are facing.
- ➜ Reflect on the ways in which you can motivate different groups of youth to get involved.
- ➜ Promote participation in activities and reach different youth groups. At times, this means going to where they are, and not only online.
- ➜ Plan to enable equal opportunities for those who are facing barriers, be it social or physical.
- ➜ Create conditions for participation of diverse groups of youth in all stages of planning and implementation of your project.
- ➜ Co-operate with organizations that gather diverse youth groups.
- ➜ When procuring different services, mind the accessibility criteria, dietary preferences and other cultural sensitivities.
- ➜ Aim for diversity among your own team members and external consultants that you hire, minding the gender balance and other social identities.
- ➜ When developing project activities, think about all participants and if activities would be suitable in terms of physical ability, cultural differences or relevance for all.
- ➜ When developing materials, inquire from participants if multilingual approach is needed, printing texts in a bigger font, sign language interpretation or audio to follow written presentations.

It’s true – being inclusive may be more time consuming or more expensive – but, projects that genuinely foster diversity and inclusion are more meaningful and have better quality.

Be brave – leave no one behind.

Going regional...

DEMYSTIFYING MAIN CONCEPTS

In developing youth mobility projects, especially ones fostering co-operation in the Western Balkan region, you will frequently encounter terms relating to intercultural learning, peacebuilding, reconciliation or building trust. These concepts may be the main focus of your project or can be seen as horizontal themes that your project is indirectly contributing to, even if the main topic is at first glance about something else. Let's demystify them:

Reconciliation

… is a complex term for which there is no single definition. It is a disputed and controversial term, as some may associate it only with the Yugoslav post-conflict context, some find it 'too heavy' and sensitive, and others find it to be overused and politicized.

It is often said that reconciliation is both a goal (ideal state to aim for) and a process (present way of dealing with how things are). As International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance simply puts it – "It is a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future."

> RYCO believes that building true and enduring reconciliation involves a process that brings together individuals, groups and societies burdened by past or present conflicts and negative representations and perceptions of 'the other'. Through shared experience, co-operation and ongoing exchange, new pathways can be built to reconcile people who would otherwise remain trapped in the past.
>
> RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021

How does a project about reconciliation look like?

There are many inspirational examples that deal with reconciliation across the globe. Here are few ideas where young people are also part of such effort:

Toward strengthening relationships between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, students of one school have launched a long-term initiative to facilitate involvement by young people in reconciliation efforts.

It began with a group of approximately 70 students visiting the Canadian Museum for Human Rights to learn about the history of the residential schools. At the Museum, the group met a writer from the indigenous community. In his illustrated book, a young girl discovers that her grandmother had spent her childhood at an Indigenous residential school, and gradually begins to understand the impact of this time on her grandmother's life. Book also won a national reward.

(Canadian Commission for UNESCO)

Crossing Boundaries project targets young people with a view to bridging deep divides in Sri Lankan society. Within the project youth meetings are held, training courses and exchanges for teenagers and young adults to stay with families of a different ethnic group for several days. The participants at the youth meetings talk about their experiences and preconceptions. They discuss traumatic experiences – both their own and those of others. Above all, they learn how many experiences they have in common with their peers from other ethnic groups. When staying with families of a different ethnicity, they share in the host family's everyday life and come to understand that the main concerns and problems in Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim families are the same: food, health, education and the question when and how young adults can strike out on their own. They bring their insights back to their villages and organize workshops themselves on reconciliation for youths and young adults.

(HELVETAS)

Shared Narratives Initiative is a project that tackles the existence of different and often conflicting narratives about the recent past in Western Balkans, which are nurtured within the ethnic and national groups and communities and which cause profoundly divided communities that teach different histories and disable the effective dealing with the past processes. This project works with youth who studied different histories on production of shared narratives through an open process oriented towards facts rather than myths and reconciliation rather than further division. The project engages 120 young people from the region in the development of shared narratives about the recent violent history through the organization of one regional "bring-your-own-history" conference dedicated to the engagement of youth in the learning process about the recent past, 12 bilateral study visits between the young people focused on on-site researching and experiencing the legacy of the violent recent past, the development of shared narrative through the expert guidance and development of documentary video about tackling exclusive narratives.

(YIHR Croatia)

There is no universally applicable, perfect reconciliation method or model. Nevertheless, projects that bring young people of different backgrounds together and enable the establishment of friendly relations, common interests and dialogue are certainly a step in the right direction.

Remembrance/dealing with the past

Dealing with the legacy of a past political or social conflict is undoubtedly significant to any peacebuilding effort.

> **Dealing with the past is a long-term process that aims at establishing a culture of accountability, rule of law and reconciliation.**
>
> **RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021**

In the Western Balkans, the aim is to allow for different individuals, groups and societies from the region to address the painful issues related to past and present conflicts together. This common engagement contributes to deepening the relations between the involved individuals, groups and societies.

Constructive approach to remembrance involves:

- ➜ Readiness to be self-critical towards one's own past and narratives
- ➜ Empathy and the readiness to listen to other opinions, interpretations and narratives
- ➜ Does not necessarily only relate to violent periods of history, but also other common parts of history

!!!

Keep in mind the "Do not harm" approach: project organisers should at least be aware about the conflict-context within the Western Balkans, and about the possible conflicts that can develop during youth projects dealing with questions of reconciliation and remembrance. The organisers should pay attention to the possible positive or negative consequences their own attitudes can have on the group, and should consciously look to avoid negative impacts, such as deepened divisions within the group.

How does a project about dealing with the past look like?

Youth Action on Memory in Abkhazia is a project aimed to broaden and enrich the perspective on past and history through an intra-Abkhazian co-operation process between members of Georgian-born Gal/i and Ochamchira youth and Abkhazian youth from other regions within Abkhazia.

The "tandem teams" developed their own history and remembrance initiatives and implemented history-related public events in all regions of Abkhazia. The mixed teams with young people from all regions implemented public events with the involvement of the population, such as exhibitions and public discussions. A television broadcaster accompanied the work of the tandem initiatives, so the project was documented in a form of a movie.

(Berghof Foundation)

When developing projects with this focus, it is advisable to ensure that there is sufficient knowledge within your team in relation to:

- History of the Western Balkans or particular parties involved in your project, as well as familiarity with the current state of relations and narratives regarding the history;
- History of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s, and basic knowledge about the contemporary history of Albania, if Albania is part of the project, familiarity with existing narratives, differences and common points about the history;
- Knowledge of project participants about historical topics;
- Dealing with a sensitive topic, inter-personal conflicts and emotional responses constructively;
- Enabling a safe, respectful, non-biased environment.

For further information, you may want to get familiar with educational materials: EUROCLIO – Teaching Practices, Educational Material and other documents: https://www.euroclio.eu/resources/

- EUROCLIO-material which is more specifically dedicated to the post-Yugoslav space: http://cliohipbih.ba/materijali-3/
- "MemorInmotion. Pedagogical tool on culture of remembrance", realized by Forum ZFD Bosnia and Herzegovina, in co-operation with Anne Frank House, EUROCLIO HIP BiH and Youth Initiative for Human Rights: https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/memorinmotionpedagogical-tool-on-culture-of-remembrance.2241/
- Online-material made available on the website "Dealing with the past", a resource platform crated by Forum ZFD: http://www.dwp-balkan.org/en/onlinematerial.php?cat_id=5&text_id=8
- "History and memory in international youth meetings. Pedagogical vade mecum", published by the Franco-German Youth Office: https://www.fgyo.org/resources-publications/history-andmemory-in-international-youth-meetings.html

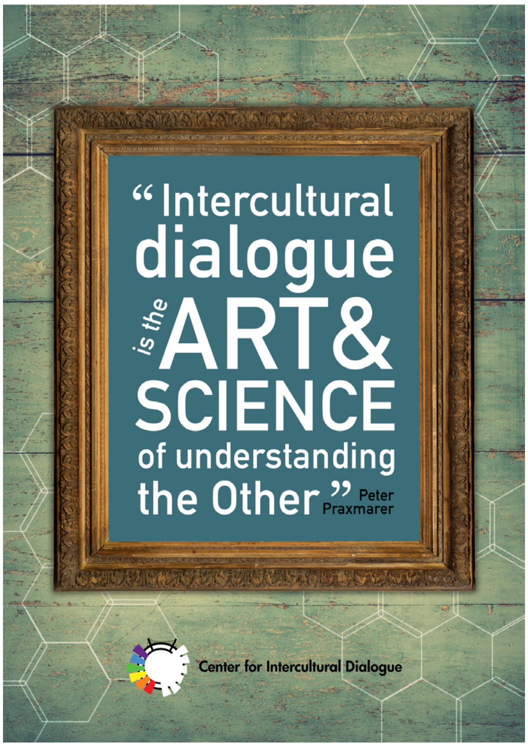
Intercultural learning and dialogue

In the Flash Eurobarometer survey[8] on Intercultural Dialogue in Europe, engaged by the European Commission, over 27,000 randomly selected citizens were asked what comes to their minds when they hear the expression "Intercultural dialogue in Europe". Sixty-six percent of EU citizens provided a meaningful response to the question, most frequent being:

- ➜ ***Communication among different communities***
- ➜ ***Co-operation, exchange, transnational mobility***
- ➜ ***Living together, knowing and understanding different cultures***

Intercultural dialogue is defined as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different backgrounds, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. The ultimate purpose of this exchange is to create a cooperative and willing environment for overcoming political and social tensions.

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



Poster source: Center for Intercultural Dialogue. (2017). Intercultural Dialogue. CID Posters, 3.

8 https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_217_sum_en.pdf

SELF-REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION EXERCISE:

What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase “intercultural dialogue”? What would you say are the conditions in which such dialogue can occur?

Dialogues happen between individuals, more or less interculturally competently. Intercultural competence is not a given, but is learned. In this regard, exchange projects can significantly contribute to intercultural competence, as learning occurs by being exposed to differences, the unknown and by getting to know those who differ from us.

Intercultural learning guides young people to adjust their images of cultural groups and individuals belonging to different cultural groups, and to actively listen and understand others, in order to offer them the space to freely manifest their cultural identity. In this process, young people learn to refrain from labelling people, and from grouping them in preconceived categories. Intercultural learning investigates how people are influenced differently by their dominant culture, how they identify with characteristics of various cultures and how they create their own mosaic of identity.[9]

Intercultural learning is a quality criterion for many European youth projects and for project funding by the European Youth Foundation (EYF), but also Regional Youth Cooperation Office.

Intercultural competence is nowadays seen as a essential skill for living in the inter-connected world in the 21st century.

Deardorff (2011)[10] summarizes the following skills as minimal requirements to attain intercultural competences:

- Respect (valuing of others);
- Self-awareness/identity (understanding the lens through which we each view the world);
- Seeing from other perspectives/world views (both how these perspectives are similar and different);
- Listening (engaging in authentic intercultural dialogue);
- Adaptation (being able to shift temporarily into another perspective);
- Relationship building (forging lasting cross-cultural personal bonds);
- Cultural humility (combining respect with self-awareness).

9 T-KIT 4 Intercultural learning (2008). Council of Europe and European Commission.

10 Deardorff, D.K. (2011). Promoting understanding and development of intercultural dialogue and peace: A comparative analysis and global perspective of regional studies on intercultural competence. Report of the State of the Arts and Perspectives on Intercultural Competences and Skills, UNESCO.

When creating projects with an intercultural dimension, it may be useful to check following the **educational tools**:

PluriMobil is a teaching tool that offers activities and materials to support the plurilingual and intercultural learning of students for the phases before, during and after a mobility activity. This tool can be adapted to multiple mobility projects across all educational levels.

The Autobiography is a resource designed to encourage people to think about and learn from intercultural encounters they have had either face-to-face or through visual media such as television, magazines, films, the Internet, etc.

Images in Action - Break down stereotypes! is a booklet that provides a great diversity of ideas in order to break down stereotypes and to deconstruct prejudice. It enables to tackle how images, stereotypes and prejudice function, where they come from and how to influence them in a positive way; how to plan an image-building campaign; how to involve the young people from your organisation in your image-building campaign.

Value the Difference - A Resource Pack contains nine chapters, each offering background information, case studies and practical examples of how to engage young people, in the framework of a diversity of topics: Media, Migration and Cultural Diversity, Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Mediation, Cross Community, Identity, Intercultural Competence, and similar.

Toolkit on Intercultural Dialogue contains a theoretical review of the concept, followed by methodological information on how to build non-formal education session and number of workshops guides which gives participants possibility to reflect on their own intercultural learning process through facilitated discussions.

Various **activities** to consider if you are contemplating a projects about dealing with the past, reconciliation and intercultural learning and dialogue could:

Developing online and offline games and applications

Peace leadership camps

Peace caravans

Visits to memorials

Policy papers development, resolutions, advocacy campaigns

Educational courses, workshops, trainings

Filmmaking, screenings and discussions

Kismet is a documentary about young women from Albania and Serbia, made by young women from Serbia and Albania, who strongly believe that youth co-operation and gender equality are preconditions for long-lasting peace and progress. The short movie dives into lives of eight young women of different background and experiences, but all living in still predominantly patriarchal systems. It was created through an exchange project ***Humans of Albania and Serbia*** (youthumans.net). Feel free to use it in your activities!

Sports events and tournaments

Creation of common online platforms

Monitoring of media and social media

Dialogue formats, online and offline

Storytelling and creation of constructive narratives through multimedia

Organizing the Living Library

The Living Library is a tool that seeks to challenge prejudice and discrimination. It works just like a normal library: visitors can browse the catalogue for the available titles, choose the book they want to read, and borrow it for a limited period of time. After reading, they return the book to the library and, if they want, borrow another. The only difference is that in the Living Library, books are people, and reading consists of a conversation. Learn how to organize it: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/living-library

Grid for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education activities[11]

Following the grid outlined below may help you to reflect in-depth on the dimensions of intercultural dialogue in your project. It will give you an idea of how you approach intercultural dialogue in your activities. It highlights the aspects that are your 'strong points', but also aspects to grow in order to create spaces for meaningful intercultural dialogue.

To what extent are these aspects present and considered in your activity:

Check the boxes on the right >>>	A little	Moderately	To a large extent
1. The overall aim and the objectives of the activity are explicitly linked to intercultural dialogue and learning.			
2. The diversity of those involved in the activity provides a possibility for intercultural dialogue and learning.			
3. Facilitators use an updated theoretical base and diverse methodologies of intercultural dialogue and learning to plan the programme.			
4. Activities focused on understanding the functioning of stereotypes, prejudices and different forms of discrimination and social injustice are planned in the programme.			
5. Contents of the programme related to intercultural dialogue are clearly connected to the daily life contexts of participants.			
6. Multilingualism is used if needed.			
7. There is a clear connection between intercultural dialogue and other main topic(s) of the programme.			
8. The activity takes into account aspects related to identity and power relations.			

11 Adapted and shortened from *Guidelines for intercultural dialogue in non-formal learning / education activities*, Council of Europe and European Commission
See original tool here: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262115/ICD2014.pdf/73add476-4e8e-4522-8fb5-67df5e4ccfc8

To what extent are these aspects present and considered in your activity:

9.	The activity stimulates participants to develop their knowledge about historical and cultural background of the people they interact with and the social and political context in which they live.			
10.	The activity stimulates the development of attitudes like empathy, solidarity, openness and respect for otherness.			
11.	The activity stimulates the development of skills like critical thinking, multiperspectivity and tolerance for ambiguity			
12.	The activity increases participants' awareness about global interconnectedness and the role of solidarity and co-operation in addressing global challenges.			
13.	Facilitators engage in conflict transformation in compliance with human rights principles.			
14.	Participants are encouraged and supported to act as multipliers of intercultural dialogue and engage in social transformation.			
15.	The activity contributes to building the evidence of good practices in intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue.			

For more information about concepts of intercultural learning and dialogue explore the rich resources of the Council of Europe and UNESCO, collected and developed over decades of work on this topic. If looking for resource materials in your local language, search for civil society organizations that work on this topic, most probably they would have useful tools on their websites, or you can borrow hard-copy publications. (Plus, this is a great way to network and expand partnerships!)

EXERCISE:

Gather your project team. Each member should do the following tasks:

- ➜ Search online for other tools, not described in this Manual, that you can use in your project to foster intercultural learning. Find at least three.
- ➜ Search online for examples of projects about reconciliation and remembrance that you find interesting. Find at least three.

Discuss together examples and what you can similarly use in your own project.


how to write a project?

HOW TO WRITE A PROJECT?

Fasten your seat belts...

Before you even begin to write your project application, it is crucial to check your project idea against the following questions:

Did I READ the Call for proposals/expression of interest and Guidelines explaining the details of it thoroughly?

Although it may look obvious, it is not uncommon for interested applicants to overlook details in the for proposals and guiding documents. These documents can indeed be long, and strike you as boring and full of unnecessary technical information, but not reading them may cost you your grant.

Common mistakes, including eligibility administrative criteria, lead to exclusion from the review. This means that, if you fail to comply with basic requirements, your proposal will not reach the review phase.

!!!

Pay attention to exclusion rules, such as applying only once as a lead applicant. Quite often, opportunities that assume partnerships limit the applicants in applying multiple times with different projects or in different roles (partner, applicant, associate). This may differ depending on the donor; however, it is not uncommon for applicants to oversee this criteria, and be excluded with the otherwise good project because they applied more than once.

Reading the Call properly will also save you time in the later stages of the process, as it allows you to immediately make realistic assessments relating to:

???

Is this Call's envelope for particular projects going to be sufficient for our idea? Is the idea ambitious for it? Is this a good fit? On the other hand, you may also be frank about capacities of your own team and assess – do we even have a proper absorption capacity to spend such a budget in the timeframe foreseen by the Call?

???

From the moment you identified the opportunity to the deadline set by it, is there sufficient time for you and your team to develop the project application properly? Do you have all required paperwork at hand? Do you have a clear idea what to write about? Do you need to look up partners? Can you develop an idea with partners? How will you consult young people on the project in due time? Will someone help you write the budget or any other part you don't feel confident about? How many days, on top of your other commitments, will you need for it?

!!!

Reading in a non-native language or a language you are not fluent may lead to missing or misinterpreting some crucial information. It is advisable to read it with someone who is confident about their language skills or to ask someone (young?!) for translation.

???

Can we even legally apply for this grant? Are there some eligibility criteria that exclud us, such as a minimum financial turn over, specific experiences or years of existence? Do I have someone I can readily consult on this?

!!!

Reading other strategic documents and information provided by the donor, even if it's not directly linked to the specific call, may help you in developing your idea later on.

To sum it up, when reading the documentation for a specific opportunity, before moving forward ensure that:

- As an applicant you are eligible to take part *on all grounds*;
- There are no legal or technical obstacles preventing you from applying (for instance, in Albania schools can't apply for RYCO grants, but CSOs are allowed to apply on their behalf);
- You have sufficient time and human resources to develop the application properly and to avoid rushing.

How this opportunity aligns with our own mission, values, goals and capacities?

Speaking of prejudices, we already mentioned the overall importance of aligning of what you do with a particular donor who supports your idea. We underlined that finding a good balance between maintaining your integrity and obtaining donor's perspective is relevant. What does this mean practically?

Let's take a look at some examples and comparisons of a sample opportunity and fictional circumstances of an applicant:

Sample 1:

THE SAMPLE CALL	FICTIONAL APPLICANT
The donor and the call itself are dedicated to empowering young people, and supporting stakeholders who have access and impact on them, to be active contributors to reconciliation, democratic development, social and economic prosperity in the Western Balkans.	The applicant is a high school from Prijedor (BiH) with access to a cohort of young people. The school has an active Student Parliament and often co-operates with civil society organizations in organising extracurricular workshops to engage its students further.
Good to go, it seems the applicant is a good fit to this opportunity.	
Grantor will particularly value projects that go beyond a simple encounter and instead build space for meaningful engagement of diverse groups of youth that would otherwise have no chance to meet.	The fictional school has a good twining project with another school from Ni{ (Serbia). Applicant reflects on enabling encounters between students of these two schools, as this is a safe partnership, and many students haven't had the chance to meet their peers yet.
It's not very convincing that the two schools haven't had the chance to foster an exchange of students, if they are already engaged in a project together. Another key word to underscore here is – diversity. Would a mobility idea be better if you included youth from another location? How about national minorities?	
The Call is addressing reconciliation and intercultural dialogue.	The applicant has no previous experience in topic of reconciliation.

While some previous experience and demonstration of good understanding of the topic are usually a plus, it is also okay to explore something new, especially if the Call itself is encouraging less experienced applicants. What can this school do? Reach out to friendly CSOs for advice? Read grantor's approach to the topic by searching their website? Attend info sessions and ask for examples of projects addressing this topic? Maybe suitable partner(s) can compensate for the lack of experience? Not having direct previous experience in this regard doesn't have to be an obstacle for applying, unless it is stated otherwise in the Call. In this case, it is vital to have an enthusiastic but realistic aspiration to try out new initiatives, which complement your system of values.

The projects can be supported with up to 20 000 EUR.	The applicant is considering two exchange trips for 60 students as a major activity/cost. The financial administrator is not fully available to help this planning though.

The budget is a significant the application, as it demonstrates the capacity to assess costs realistically and manage resources responsibly. When written properly, it can inspire confidence in the applicant; while a poor budget judgment may avert from an otherwise interesting project. Having a dedicated person to translate the financial framework into a workable budget can make a big difference. It is rarely a good idea for a single person to deal with all aspects of project management, especially if they are not an expert. This school should, for instance, consider if there are other, less visible costs, that could add up to a significant extent? They may also consider not going for the maximum offered support? Finally, it is important not to assume that, for example, young people have no preferences in terms of accommodation or disregard proper access to premises for disabled students, as this may influence the cost assessment.

Conclusion: By considering a few aspects of the call and the fictional applicant's circumstances, we can observe that this school may wish to further reflect on the value of diversity and how it can be operationalized. Furthermore, they may consider taking a leap into the unknown, in terms of both new partnerships and topic, as long as they address various risks. (***See chapter on Risk analysis***). Finally, all applicants, and particularly the lead person, would greatly benefit from ensuring an active involvement of a colleague in charge of financial management as their main task on the project. Tackling these issues, the school may optimistically decide further develop the project.

Sample 2:

THE SAMPLE CALL	FICTIONAL APPLICANT
Raising awareness of social Entrepreneurship in Western Balkan societies, as a mean for regional co-operation advancement, is a key element of the opportunity at hand.	The objectives of the Association are: Promoting and enhancing education, culture and art, contemporary performing shapes and internet culture, while preserving the cultural and spiritual values, protection of human and minority rights, peace and civic initiatives, humanitarian work, international co-operation, and environmental protection.
At first glance, it is not obvious the Association's objectives align with the main topic of the call. Yet, alignment is possible if social entrepreneurship initiatives correspond to some of the core objectives of the Association.	
Grant envelope is up to 75 000 EUR per project.	The association has a long-standing history in managing EU projects and their annual turnover is about 400 000 EUR.
Our fictional Association has strong financial management capacity, which inspires confidence for most donors as it indicates that the applicant could successfully manage the budget.	
Recommended project activities within the Call are about organizing incubation programmes and advocating for youth social entrepreneurship in the WB6.	While the Association has no internal human resources proficient in this area, they are a well-known actor within public authorities and do have advocacy potential.
An organization, like the Association in this case, is developed and experienced, and may decide to outsource this particular expertise, while building upon potential it has in other areas. However, it raises a question regarding the overall fit for this Call, as the alignment between the applicant and grant is poor.	

Conclusion: Unlike in the previous example, the application for the grant to be based mostly on general project management capacities. Unless the Association comes up with an extraordinarily creative and innovative proposal to link its core expertise with the Call's topic, there is no sufficient alignment to proceed with the application development. Moreover, it is likely that competitive applications to this Call demonstrate a stronger alignment, in addition to their implementation capacity.

Who will prepare this project and with whom?

The question at hand deals with your ability and availability for project application development. This includes the capacity to involve partners, which is usually expected in youth mobility projects.

While a number of experienced project writers prepare an application independently, they too need some guidance, joint brainstorming or another 'flame' to 'light' the idea on fire. As a beginner in project writing, once you identify an opportunity, it is paramount ask yourself:

- Do you have the confidence and time to do this yourself?
- Did you invest in some course or self-learning on project proposal writing?

TIP:

Every year RYCO organizes training courses for novices in project proposal preparation across the Western Balkans, typically after summer break. Follow rycowb.org and keep yourself updated on such open call capacity building opportunities.

- Is there a colleague on whom you can rely to help you think, consult young people and partners, or contribute by writing parts of the application?
- How difficult is the application? What level of detail is expected? What kind of language?
- Do you have a previous draft you can improve on?

Whatever your situation may be, here are some useful tips from the been there, done that' department to assist in your skill development:

- Team up with someone with more experience – not only in writing projects, but in getting grants. One of the best ways to learn is by doing it alongside someone who is familiar with the process;
- Team up with more an experienced lead. This helps you learn about developing an application and managing partnerships, and prepares to you be the lead in the future;
- Take part in more project-writing courses and read more sources on the topic. It is unlikely to excel in this skill after five days of no-matter-how-excellent training;
- Write an application for an opportunity available on a rolling basis to assess how much time and effort you may need, without having the pressure of a deadline;
- Look up well-written projects and analyse them. Uncover the pattern in logic or approach which makes them successful in getting a grant;
- Use opportunities for projects aiming at organizational capacity building

  (For instance, RYCO's third call for proposals had one specific goal focused on strengthening capacities of secondary schools).
- Expect that losses are more probable than wins at first. Don't focus on one opportunity, thinking that it is now or never. Identify multiple opportunities, and compare them before making a decision by evaluation where you have the best chances, based on your time, skills and values.

EXERCISE: MOCKUP WINNER

1. Identify three grant opportunities that are of interest to you your team.
2. List pros and cons for each opportunity (preferably as a team exercise), taking into consideration the different criteria they entail.
3. Once you identified the 'winner', calculate the time you would need to develop the application and recognize the challenging aspects.
4. Assess your means to overcome the challenge by consulting someone, investing in additional learning or getting the resource needed otherwise.
5. Test it – in case you lack human resources, ask for help.

Why is your idea worth supporting?

UNWRAPPING SITUATION ANALYSIS

The first question in project applications is usually along the following lines:

- ➜ **Please describe the background and justification of the proposal;**
- ➜ **What problem is your project attempting to solve?;**
- ➜ **Tell us briefly for what kind of change your project is aiming for;**
- ➜ **Describe the project context.**

There are different ways in which this aspect of the project can be formulated, depending on the application: thorough analysis or a brief, limited in characters, explanation; focused or more broad and strategic; demonstrating the interconnectedness of your vision with the sought information, or a simple description. While the choice is approach may seem overwhelming, it all boils down to offering a solid answer to the question: **Why is my idea worth funding in the context of tackling a *real* issue, with *certainty* of contribution?**

There are two layers to this project element:

1. Is there a real problem or improvement needed that we are identifying?
2. Will our approach actually make a difference?

EXERCISE: GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE...

Let say the call for proposals is about advancing gender equality, encouraging young women to take up leadership positions and networking with other women mentors in the Western Balkans region. How can you tackle this? Put in bullet points what kind of information you'd describe.

Here are some suggestions on how you can go about writing this part. Reflect on whether you have incorporated them all and how can you enrich your argument. Note that they are not mandatory, but are possible options from which you can select the most fitting for your issue and space available in your analysis:

Broader to narrower perspective

What is the bigger picture and context in which the project takes place? Did you narrow your perspective down to the particular circumstances of the area you intend to work in? Or within same field, for example – gender pay gap, how is the overall trend is reflected in the concrete aspect you want to work on?

Focus on various angles of an issue

Issues often have multiple angles or aspects you may choose to tackle. For instance, gender equality may be examined through the (non-)existence of quotas; differences in earnings; and self-perception of a target group on various societal issues; or broadly, it may have political, social, economic or other aspects. Therefore, you may offer the wider context to best demonstrate the complexity of the overall issue, and subsequently narrow your arguments towards the specific angle your project aims to tackle.

Policy level

Are there national or international standards that should be applied in the local context? Is there a local action plan or specific initiative to do this? What legislation exists?

Consequences of not addressing the issue

What happens if the issue remains unaddressed? What is the causality? Is there a comparative experience you illustrate your point? Is there a universal standard that is jeopardized?

Other interventions

Are there other interventions (on a policy or programmatic level) in the given context that are tackling the same or similar issue? What are their shortcomings and how does your project address these gaps to complement the wider efforts?

Making a case for your project

Don't fall into the trap of writing a doctoral dissertation as justification for the project. Be concrete enough in your arguments, while keeping in mind the aims of your project. For example, if your project is about creating networking opportunities for young rural women and advancing their leadership skills to start businesses, no need to mention the wage statistics in capitals. Or, if you are addressing stereotypes preventing young women from taking up STEM careers, it might be a good idea to address the lack of capacity building and mobility opportunities, and show numbers of enrolled students from concrete places you intend to work in.

Metaphorically speaking, writing a sound justification will writing this part make all the difference in your project being perceived as **"Girls just wanna have fundamental human rights"** instead of **"Girls just wanna have fun".**

Importantly, application templates often offer guiding questions to help you. Developing your answer according to these guidelines the safest way to go.

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Assume that the reviewer has no knowledge about the community or environment you are describing. They might be learning it from you for the first time, hence it is paramount to provide sound and objective arguments to convince them. Comparing various project's urgency and depth of the problem analysis of various projects, they are likely to select those with more relevant and verifiable arguments.

Reviewing available data and information is the first step in developing a project proposal. In order for your approach to be comprehensive and convincing, it is recommended that you ensure its participatory nature and address the real needs of your target group, i.e. young people.

SELF-REFLECTION or DISCUSSION EXERCISE:

When writing a project proposal, you want your text to reflect gender-sensitive language. How can this be done? How do you promote gender neutrality? Try to name at least two options:

1.

2.

Needs assesment

UNWRAPPING SITUATION ANALYSIS

A needs assessment is a process used to determine what needs to be done to improve the current state. More specifically, it can inform the development of an organization, map gaps between current and desired state, and/or identify problem areas for a particular target group. It can be a complex process, depending on for what purpose and by whom it is conducted. For the purpose of this Manual, we will focus on needs assessment techniques, to inquire about the target group, allow for their voices to inform your project proposal and enable participation.

Don't get confused - secondary data sources, such as reports, studies, and administrative records and research, can be part of the needs assessment analysis. However, here we focus on techniques through which you collect data **directly** and with the outlook to enable participation of young people.

SELF-REFLECTION:

Think of any of your previous projects or initiatives, no matter how small. How did you know what kind of activities to organize? Did a group of youth complain about something and you responded to it through a project? Did you observe attitudes in your community? Did you conduct a survey to inquire?

There are a number of approaches to collect data directly from your target group. Let's say you are tackling the quality of leisure time for young people. You've read a report, which says:

> *Youth in south Serbia spend their leisure time most often socialising and going out, then watching TV programmes and on the Internet. These three activities comprise around 80% of the free time of youth.*

Now you want to inquire directly in your own community to confirm this data and get more details from the youth themselves, such as where their interests lie and what barriers to higher quality leisure time they face. Perhaps you want to focus on high school students only, or to understand how differences vary according to gender? Maybe you simply want to understand what kind of programmes you can offer to a small group of volunteers in your local organization?

Here are some research methods techniques that help:

Individual

Involves collecting data from people one at a time

Face-to-Face Interviews

Face-to-face interviews are a great way to gather information, especially when you have a relatively small number of interviewees you'd like to talk to in depth. This is very useful in regard to a personalized approach to different youth, as some may be more inclined to share and open in such setting, if perceived as safe and confidential. Nevertheless, interviews are not informal chats, but do require preparation of questions and certain structure. They may also be semi-structured, meaning somewhere between a fully prepared list of questions and a conversation without any guidance.

Find brief advice on semi-structured interviews here:

Group

Allows participants to interact with each other during the needs assessment

Focus groups

Focus groups are a well-known method in research practices across different sciences and industries. They are sometimes referred to as a 'group interview'. They can be used independently, or as means to deepen insights gained through quantitative data, such as surveys. Focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained facilitator who uses previously developed protocol. While there is space for spontaneity and observations of non-verbal cues, this method is structured and requires certain preparation, or even outsourcing a professional.

Find an available guide on how to run a focus group:

Questionnaires/surveys

Surveys are used a lot. Sometimes not in the best way, but it is almost always better to conduct a survey than assume needs. Surveys can be done in a simple manner, with questions you came up with and/or by using existing templates. At times, can be full-scale scientific effort. It all depends on your time, skills and purpose.

Find a step-by-step guide on how to conduct surveys for community needs assessments here:

World café

World Café methodology is a simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue. It can be used not only for needs assessment, but also for consultations and collecting inputs from bigger groups in a creative and participatory manner.

Find Hosting Tool Kit and more free resources here:

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews are one-on-one assessments that allow you to gain insight about specific community problems from key persons. For instance, instead of interviewing the whole class, you choose a few key young leaders or persons who will be able to inform as they have first-hand information or are very knowledgeable about the topic. This technique is also often used in evaluation phases of projects and educational programmes.

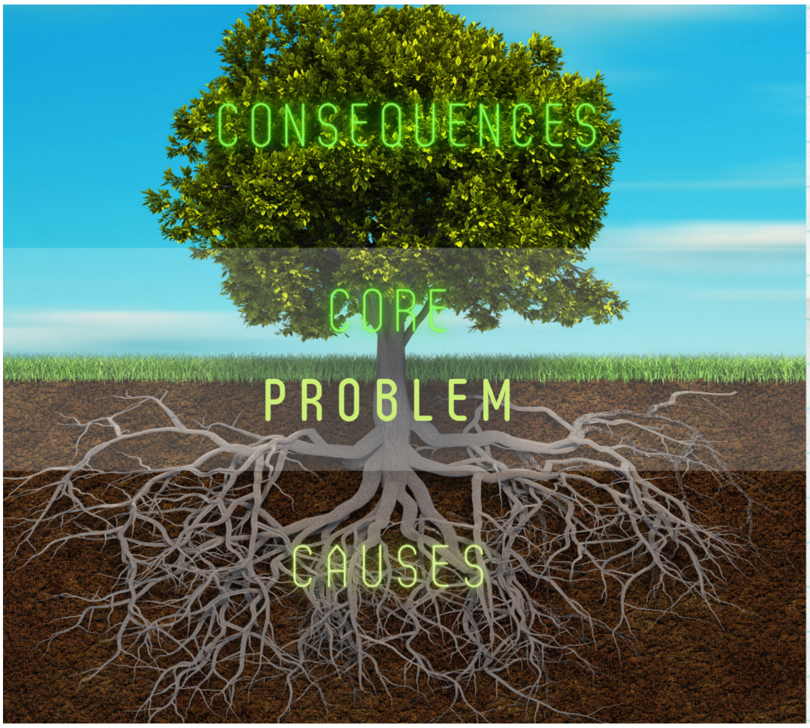
Informal group meetings and workshops

Informal group meetings or workshops can also be a way to inquire about the needs of group you want to do a project with and about. While its always better to learn some facilitation methods or have a professional involved, you can always collect data without having the perfect skills to do so. You can use informal settings to indirectly learn about possible needs and ideas, especially if you already have a relationship with people with whom you could talk.

Diversity and inclusion are vital here – if you care about the opinions and views of youth won't fill in your survey, take action and go to them. If you care about involving young people with disabilities – connect to organizations that work with them or enable assessments in which they can also participate. For instance, create surveys in braille for visually impaired persons. Whichever method you choose, keep in mind different options and alternatives to reach the marginalized groups and involve their voices. In this way, your assessment becomes more objective and inclusive.

Problem tree

UNWRAPPING SITUATION ANALYSIS



Decide upon the main problem you will reflect on or structure thinking around an issue that a call for proposal is tackling.

Discuss the possible causes for the problem situation.

List various consequences that occur from the problem. You can also try to show linkages and hierarchy.

Problem tree analysis is a popular, widely used visual representation of a problem, its causes and its consequences. Using this tool at the beginning of your project proposal development may help you involve young people from the get-go, realise relationships in layers of problem(s) and can serve you well in defining project objectives.

Developing the problem tree with your team and by involving young people can be useful to draft a more detailed analysis of the problem.

This tool is easy to use and doesn't require complex facilitation skills nor materials. In return, it gives you useful information and participatory quality in project ideation.

Take the following steps:

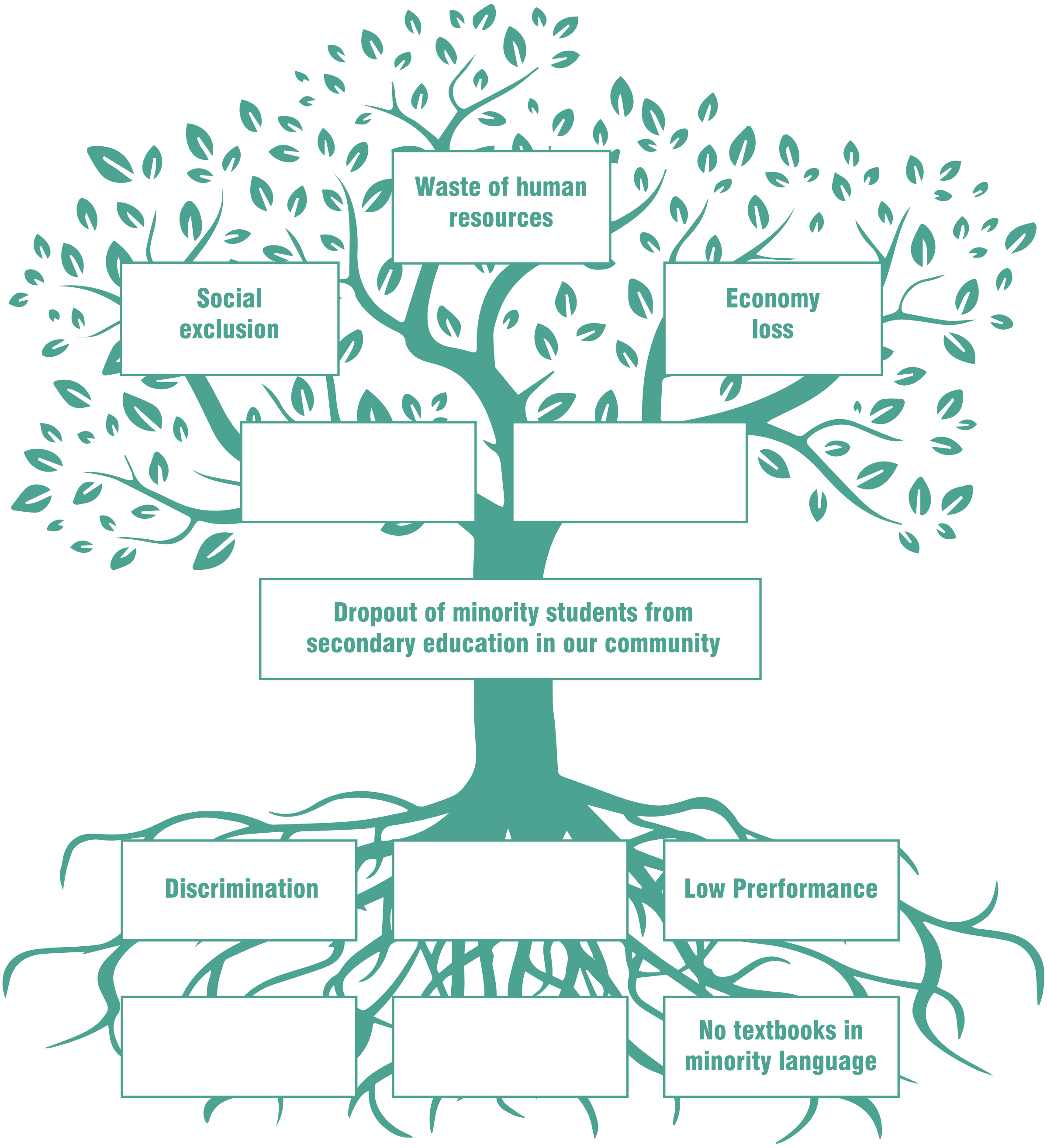
1. Use a large white paper or flipchart paper and markers, or whiteboard and post-its. Draw a tree and explain the three levels of the drawing. The analysed problem is in the middle. The roots symbolise various causes of the problem. The branches represent space where effects or consequences stemming from this problem are grouped.

2. If you already know your main problem, write it down in the middle. Otherwise, you may decide to take a step back and discuss which problem should be analysed with the group. The more concrete you are – the better. It is useful if the core problem is empirically proven, through data review and needs assessment, and not only assumed.
3. Once you identify the main problem, ask the group to think about possible causes, noting them down in the Roots section. Allow time to discuss and elaborate on various choices. The discussion is intended to offer additional information to discover the relationships between the causes and their connectivity to the problem. The causes can stem from knowledge, behaviour, attitude, beliefs, culture, policies and similar.
4. Next you can list the consequences or negative effects of the problem. Same as in the previous step, discuss the linkages and rationale of inputs with the group.
5. Observing the tree as a whole, should lead to more reflection to uncover the underlying causes. Feel free to rearrange the inputs in the tree until you come to an agreement with the whole group.

If you'd like to transfer your findings into another form, you can create a table and further differentiate the hierarchy of causes and effects:

Grass root consequences	Direct consequences	Problem	Direct causes	Subsequent causes

Here is a tree example as an inspiration. You can find different ones for reference online.



What else would you add in the empty slots?

Would you add more boxes?

Stakeholders analysis

UNWRAPPING SITUATION ANALYSIS

Stakeholders are…

People, groups or institutions/legal entities who may be affected by your project, who have influence or power in context of your work, or have an interest in the topic and (un)success of the project.

How to identify stakeholders?

Step 1:

List all possible stakeholders that come to mind. Let's say your project is about social inclusion and advancing the participation of less advantaged youth from Albania, Montenegro and Serbia.

Here is a list of possible stakeholders:

Association of youth workers	Centres for social work	Government	Prominent NGO working on social inclusion from Albania
National Youth Council of Serbia	Ministry of Youth	Local Advisory Council of Youth	Faculty of social sciences in Montenegro
Local newspaper	Key researcher well established in this area	Young member of National Parliament	National Minority Council
RYCO	The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU) of the Government of Serbia	National TV station	Students of social work
School for youth with impaired vision	Company with strong social responsibility policy	Young social entrepreneur	Local youth office

You may also cluster your list differentiating from local to national level, or internal and external or any other criteria that makes sense for you and helps you focus your approach.

Questions that guide you in mapping out relevant stakeholders may be:

Who has a mandate to deal with this area?

Who may benefit from this project being implemented?

Who may be willing to put their resources to our use (such as facilities, expertise or finances)?

Is there someone who is doing something similar to identify synergies or seek advice?

Is there someone who would be jeopardized by our activities?

Who may be influenced (positively or negatively) by the realisation of this project?

Who are the most knowledgeable people on our topic of interest?

Who will obstruct the project if they are not involved?

Step 2:

Once you have your long list – prioritize. Without whom would the project fail? Who can you benefit from the most? Who is accessible and willing? Where do the power and influence lie to either move ahead or push back on your initiative?

This table may be helpful to structure your analysis:

Stakeholder	Interest/ Stake	Influence (positive/ negative, high/low)	Potential role in the project	Priority (high, middle, low)
National Youth Council	Has a mandate to be a voice of youth and advocate for their participation in society	Positive	May help with reaching out to youth organizations, contribute to visibility, may offer a pro bono trainer	Middle

Step 3:

Identifying the stakeholders is followed by assessing the level of their potential participation and information needs. Not all stakeholders need to be involved in all aspects of the project in all life-cycle phases, and not all of them are interested in being informed about all details.

At this stage, you need to pinpoint the stakeholders' motivations, open or closed communication channels, their opinion on your current work, their focus at the moment, etc. This helps you assess how to approach them and specify their potential role in the project. Based on this assessment, you can directly ask them about their interests, and present your proposal for their involvement toward mutual goals based on common values.

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Doing a thorough and solid stakeholder analysis can greatly benefit your project in terms of *sustainability*, as well as *partnership* development.

If you manage to establish quality partnerships with stakeholders who would strengthen your approach and the project early on, the chances of your efforts extending beyond a single project are higher. Sustainable solutions are always a result of multisided interest and efforts. Furthermore, it can result in long-lasting relationships with stakeholders for future projects and initiatives.

Finally, presenting a project proposal with a strong and deliberate involvement of other actors, through which you can demonstrate a higher probability for sustainability, is always a significant plus and increases your chances for financial support.

<u>Take a step back:</u> If you haven't done it before you started this exercise, it is advisable to take a thorough look at your own organisational capacities and environment. This will give you a more accurate starting point when assessing where other stakeholders can contribute to. One easy and well-known method for doing this is a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). If you're not familiar with it, look it up online – there are number of free resources describing this method.

Target groups

PROJECTS ARE ABOUT PEOPLE

The main principle in developing a project is that it should address the needs of *people*. All projects have consequences and impacts on individuals or groups of people. Therefore, it is paramount to clearly define who are the target groups and final beneficiaries, as well as how will the implementation of the project affect other groups, both positively and negatively.

You may encounter confusing terminology in different project applications. What is the difference between target group, indirect target group, direct beneficiaries or final beneficiaries? Note that in some, especially micro-level interventions, some of these may refer to the same group of people or entities. Nevertheless, be cautious of using any of these as synonyms.

(DIRECT) TARGET GROUP	DIRECT BENEFICARIES	FINAL BENEFICARIES
The main stakeholders of a project are expected to gain from the results of that project; sectors of the population that a project aims to reach in order to address their needs based on gender considerations and their socio-economic characteristics. (UNDP) The groups/entities that will be directly positively affected by the action at the purpose level. (EU)	Institutions/legal entities or individuals who are the direct recipients of technical co-operation aimed at strengthening their capacity to undertake development tasks that are directed at specific target groups. (UNDP)	Organizations/persons who will benefit from the action in the long term at the level of the society or sector at large. (EU)

Usual definitions of terms in focus

The grant scheme will most often offer Guidelines associated with the particular opportunity, concretely defining how these terms. Most common terms are **target group**, at times accompanied by the term **final beneficiaries** (mostly in EU funded projects). Sometimes, the term **project participants** may be used to denote the target group.

EXERCISE: WHO IS IT ABOUT?

Who are the potential target groups and final beneficiaries in the following fictional projects? (TIP: Stakeholders analysis will come in handy here!)

For example:

The project is about gender equality in the Western Balkans and awareness raising on a local level.

Target group	**Final beneficiaries**
20 young women and girls, age 15 to 20, from 6 rural municipalities in the Western Balkans	Local government institutions
Young boys and men	Local councils for gender equality
Secondary school teachers of civic education	Secondary schools

Complete the same information for the following projects:

- ➜ Addressing social distance among youth from two areas.
- ➜ Environmental initiatives in areas affected by pollution.
- ➜ Promoting participatory budgeting and youth participation.

Now try defining the same for *your own project idea*.

When writing about target groups in your project application, be concrete and intentional. There is a big difference in saying "young people from Subotica" and "young people in secondary education" or "young Roma women age 18 to 24" or "youth from low-income families" – from Subotica. It is also an indicator that you have done your needs assessment properly; it shows that the project can reach measurable results and **change.**

Always remember that young people are a **heterogeneous** category. Don't forget to involve young people who are marginalized or are coming from less privileged contexts such as: NEETS youth (''not in education, employment or training''); young people with disabilities; marginalised groups based on race, ethnicity (such as Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, etc.), religious identity, gender and sexual orientation; or youth with fewer opportunities such as from rural/remote areas, with unprivileged educational and/or economic backgrounds, etc.

As no part of the project application is independent from another, it is useful to connect the target groups with other aspects of your project logic.

It can look something like this:

Target group	**Their needs/addressed problem** (Needs assessment)	**Their role (how are they involved in the project)** (Participation; Activities)	**How will we reach them (and select, if applicable)?** (Outreach; communication)	**What will change for them thanks to the project?** (Results)

Creating your own table, adding or deleting columns of relevance for your ideation process.

Objective tree

HOW YOUR PROJECT TACKLES THE PROBLEM

An (overall/general) objective represents the overall purpose or aim of the project and is intended to address what has been identified as the problem. The general objective describes a desired state and long-term benefit for the community as a whole, to which project should be contributing.

In order to develop your project objectives, turn to your Problem Tree again. Turning negative statements into positive outcomes leads to the rough visualization of possible objectives for your project through the Objective Tree.

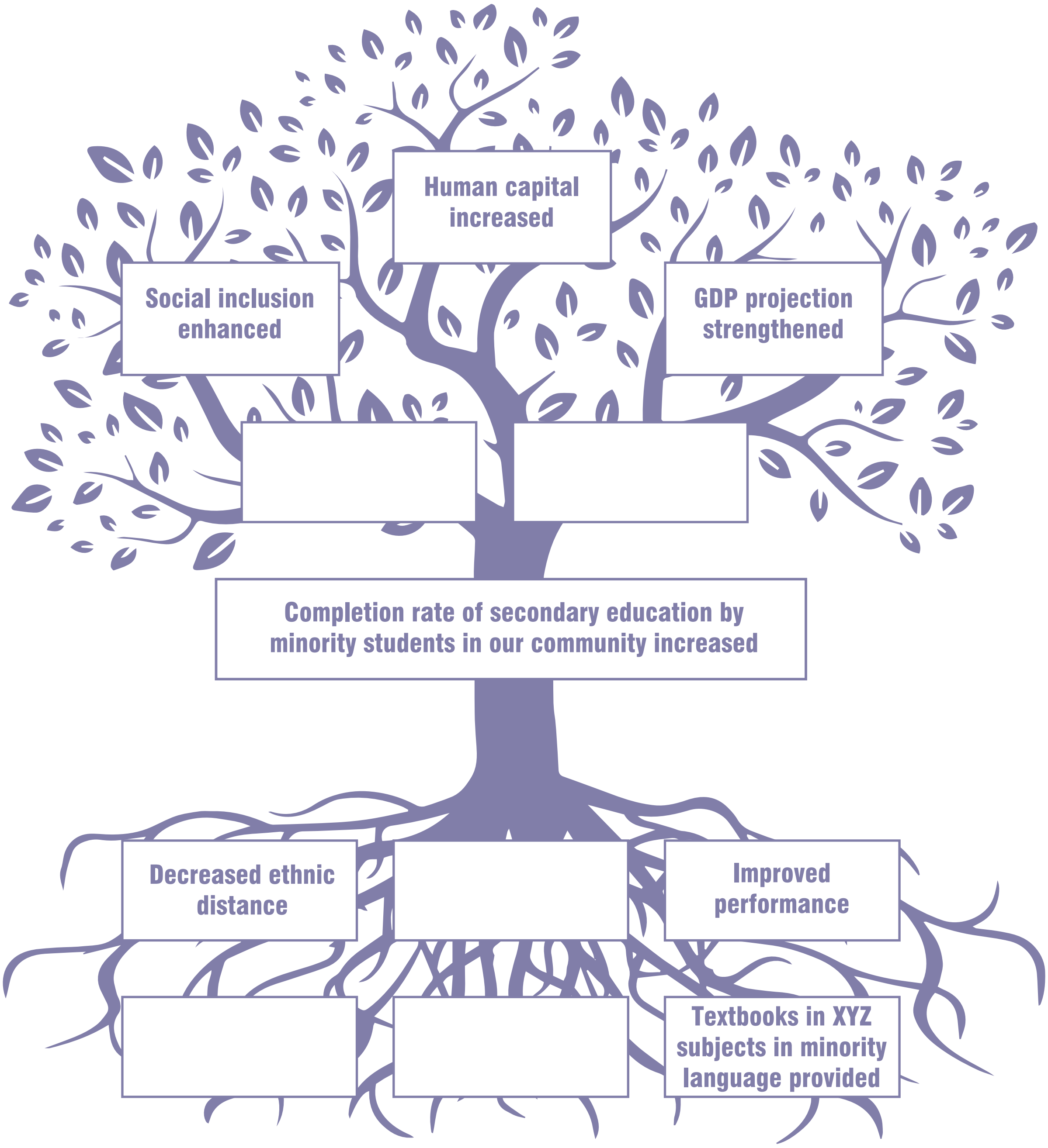
To create the Objective Tree, write 'positive' statements based on your Problem Tree, using the levels you had created for the Problem Tree.

The core problem level will turn into the specific objective, branches level – into overall objectives and roots into - results.

At this stage you can also reassess your Problem Tree – is it concrete enough? Are linkages among causes coherent? Has the core problem you stayed the same? Can some of the inputs be grouped together?

Once you are satisfied with your Problem Tree, translating it into positive statements shouldn't be too difficult. Keep in mind that using inputs such as 'discrimination' from our sample Problem Tree may lead to your Objective Tree being too broad and not helpful in your application development. *How can such inputs be improved?*

Let's see how our fictional Objective Tree may look like:



What else would you add in the empty slots?

Would you edit some of the boxes?

How to actually write an overall objective?

What is the focus of your Objective Tree? Let's strategize!

Your starting point can be a rough overall objective such as "social inclusion enhanced", which you can further polish into the following:

To enhance social inclusion principles in implementation of educational policy in North Macedonia through improving equal opportunities for secondary education and providing enabling environment for minority students to obtain vocational training.

Depending on the concrete opportunity for which you are applying, you may decide to modify your strategy and move results, such as "decreased ethnic distance" to the level of effects/overall objectives. Since the Objective Tree should be formulated in 'positive' terms (such as increase, improvement, betterment), you may reword this input into "increased social cohesion" or "intercultural sensitivity strengthened":

To strengthen intercultural sensitivity of young people in north Albania by enabling development of intercultural competences through educational system and advancement of educational outcomes for minority students.

Depending on the complexity of your Problem and Objective Trees and overall project idea, a sample overall objective may also look like:

To support the civil society in the WB to foster reconciliation and regional youth co-operation during COVID-19 pandemic by providing young people with opportunities that create space for dialogue, mutual learning and increased understanding across communities and RYCO Contracting Parties, in a changed reality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The point of this tool is to play around, think back and forth, discuss jointly until you have your logic ready for transferring it into full sentences. Inputs from this tool will then guide you throughout your project application development.

How to write a specific objective?

Formulating specific objectives follows the same principle as outlined for the overall goal. In the case of specific, as word itself says – you want to be more specific, intentional, concrete. A specific objective is a way in which you contribute to the overall goal, i.e. exact steps you take in your project to advance the overall goal.

Usually, the overall objective cannot be achieved as the result of only one project and may require the implementation of many other projects or programmes. Contrastingly, the specific objective needs to be achieved by the end of the project. It should show changes in behaviours, attitudes, capacities or similar, in relation to the target group of the project. Thus, specific objectives are expressed in terms of benefits to the target group: 'to increase/improve/raise awareness.'

It is frequently underlined that specific objective should be as SMART as possible, meaning:

S – specific	Clear, focused, well defined, to the point. There is no doubt what your initiative is about.
M – measurable	It refers to objective quality that enables you to measure (and not assume or guess) if it is realized.
A – achievable	Specific goals should be realistic, especially in regard to time, resources and other capacities, as well as external environment.
R – relevant	Must make sense in relation to overall goal, be meaningful and impactful.
T – time bound	By when it will happen, minding to still have relevance for the target group.

In relation to our last overall objective sample, a specific objective may look like this:

To increase capacities of civil society organizations working with and for youth in Western Balkans over a 3-month programme, to transfer their services to digital environment and resume connectivity programmes during COVID-19 pandemics.

Let's examine it against SMART criteria:

S – specific	It is clear the objective is about specific kind of skills; it is defined who will benefit and in which context.
M – measurable	Realization of the objective may be measured by comparing capacities before and after the project.
A – achievable	Obtaining such skills seems realistic and some examples of the sort can be seen in other regions or programmes.
R – relevant	As physical contact among youth in the region is reduced, it seems relevant to enable an alternative, which still contributes to the overall goal.
T – time bound	It is understood from the sentence over which period capacities will be increased, as well as over which period (pandemics) its effects are expected.

In some project templates you'll be asked to write a single specific objective, while in others, depending on the scope and donor, multiple specific objectives are expected, or it is indicated what is the maximum you should be developing.

Sometimes, though rarely, the project application template requires only a specific objective, and no overall objective. Regardless, the logic of your approach remains the same.

EXERCISE: WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Here are some examples of overall goals. Think of at least three specific objectives that are SMART for each.

To promote spirit of reconciliation and friendly relationships among youth from the Western Balkans.

1.

2.

3.

To enhance regional connectivity of youth actors from Serbia and Albania.

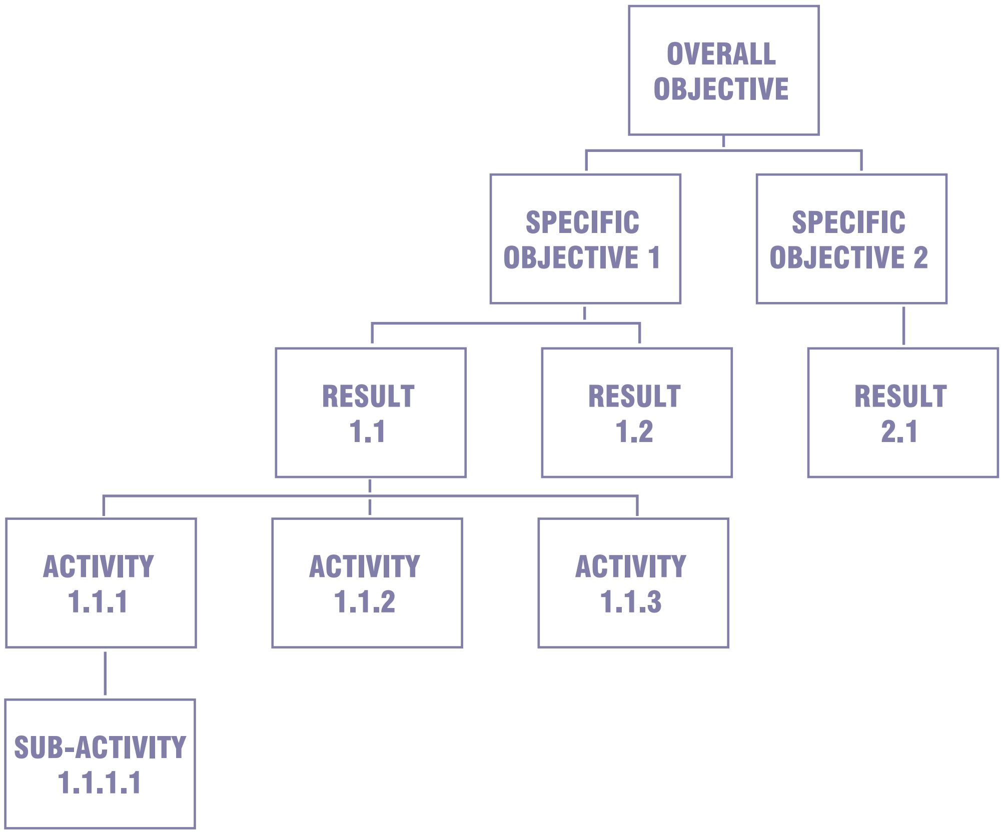
1.

2.

3.

Hierarchy of objectives, results and activities

In writing specific objectives, one easily slides into actually describing the result or an activity of the project, and vice versa. In order to create a clear and logical framework in your application, and avoid confusion, it is crucial to understand the relationship between these layers.



The graph shows:

- Activities that we implement in a project should in a sum enable the achievement of a particular result;
- A result is larger category comprised of a number of activities;
- Results, when achieved, jointly bring us to realization of a specific objective;
- Specific objectives combined, should guarantee to a reasonable extent that the overall objective is reached or that a clear contribution is made toward it;
- Accurate numeration of all layers provides a clear linkage among them, i.e. of what is leading/contributing to what.

Whenever uncertain, check your input against this hierarchy – also called the *intervention logic* – to get a clearer picture of your approach.

NOT A SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

In Beginner's drafts, not writing a specific objective well is a common mistake:

→ Creating a culture hub in city of Podgorica.

(Why isn't this a good example? Specific objective always refers to improvement in comparison to the current state. A sentence defined like this corresponds more to the level of result or even activity, depending on the overall scope. Alternatively, such specific objective may be: "to expand cultural content for youth in Podgorica" OR "to enable sustainable opportunities for intercultural learning". How can you complete these alternatives to also be SMART?)

→ Realization of concrete co-operation among a number of participants to create a joint publication, which would later on promote the values encompassed in the project and serve as a message to wider public about how this kind of co-operation is possible and positive.

(Why isn't this a good example? Although this sentence is loaded with key words related to regional co-operation and with good intentions, it is a mix of describing an activity, result, and even visibility elements. How would you write an alternative?)

→ The goal of the project is for youth to become familiar with the necessity of environmental protection and ecology culture, to participate in the exchange process and exchange knowledge with peers from the region.

(Why isn't this a good example? Can you propose a SMART specific objective?)

Writing results and activities

RESULTS are the direct/tangible outcome (goods and services) delivered by the project. Mind the difference between results and outputs[12] and deliverables of your project, as results are actually achievements or changes that happened thanks to the project's deliverables.

Test yourself to see if you can spot the distinction (correct choices are in the footnote[13]):

What is a result?

1. Youth exchange	2. Raised awareness on remembrance	3. Developed intercultural competences	4. Documentary about a football match	5. Advocacy campaign conducted
6. 20 young persons joined a study visit	7. Students informed about exchange opportunities	8. Info sessions organized	9. Media literacy understanding improved	10. Online platform

ACTIVITIES (and what you directly create through activities) are instruments for achieving result(s). Activities are smaller steps or tasks in the project logic that need to be carried out to deliver the planned results.

For instance, a youth exchange is not a purpose on its own. It is a way, a method, a tool, or an activity, that is performed so that the ones participating in it can have some benefit. That benefit is a result.

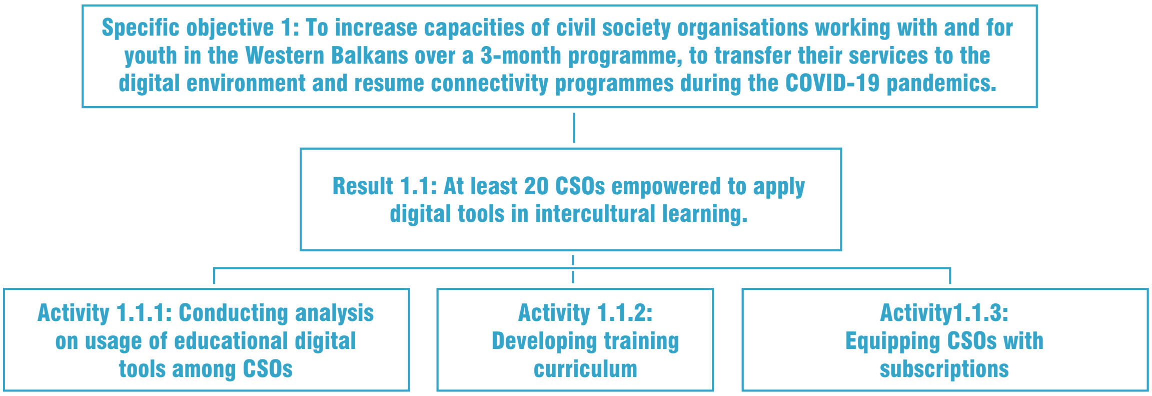
Anything created during the exchange, like a movie, a booklet or a website as a product of an activity (such as workshop, training, camp) is only an output, contributing to result. To illustrate, exchanges are not done for the purposes of movie creation, but to connect people. People connect through the movie-making process (target group) and the movie can subsequently connect more other people who see it.

In order to reach results, a number of chronologically presented activities is usually needed.

12 Keep in mind that outcomes are the difference made by the outputs. Outcomes are the benefits that a project is designed to deliver. Outputs are the tangible and intangible products that result from project activities. Outcomes are hierarchically above outputs.

13 Results are: 2, 3, 7 and 9

Here is an example of the Monitoring areas checklist:



Notice the language:

- Results are expressed as something tangible achieved (written in the past tense)
- Activities are expressed in present tense, starting with an active verb (preparing, analysing, organizing, hosting, conducting)

When writing about project activities, you are usually expected to describe its purpose and what it entails. The level of detail depends on the available space foreseen for this description in the application template.

Your description should be clear enough so that anyone reading it can immediately understand what you plan to do, how will you do it and what's the purpose, i.e. what is the connection to higher levels of intervention logic, and also the linkage between activities contributing to the same result.

Let's try this out:

Number of the activity	Name of the activity	Content and purpose of the activity
Activity 1.1.1	Conducting analysis on the usage of educational digital tools among CSOs	*Try describing this one*
Activity 1.1.2	Developing a training curriculum	This activity will be implemented in the second month of the project, based on insights gathered through the analysis. Two experienced youth workers will be hired to develop the training curriculum. A permanent group of our organization's volunteers will also contribute. The curriculum will be written in English and will serve as a resource in Activity 1.1.4. It will compile…
Activity 1.1.3	Equipping CSOs with subscription	In order to enable quality and undisturbed participation of CSOs, essential digital subscriptions will be purchased for no less than 20 accounts for the duration of the project. In this way, participants will be able to not only take part in capacity building programme, but to also test usage of digital tools independently in their own intercultural activities.
Activity 1.1.4	Organizing an online training course	*Try describing this one*

Methodology

In some project applications, you'll be asked to explain the methodology of your project implementation. This word 'methodology' shouldn't scare you – what you're actually being asked is HOW are you planning to do everything you're describing.

In answering this question, first think of overall guiding points or values that you intend to foster throughout your project, such as:

Active participation – This project is based in its entirety on the notion of active participation of young people. From its inception phases to planning monitoring and evaluation techniques, the project encourages young people to actively contribute, operationalizing the guiding principle "nothing about us, without us". The development methods of educational activities are chosen in consultation with the target group and in line with the latest trends on youth-friendly tools.

Diversity – The implementation of this project assumes the diversity principle as a horizontal value, incorporated through customised outreach efforts, planning of inclusive procurement services, and by engaging human resources experienced and sensitized for working with vulnerable groups of youth.

More specifically, the methodology of particular activities should give more information on how you've envisioned to do everything you said you would. The quality of this description indicates whether you truly understand your topic, if you thoroughly thought about the various aspects of implementation, and what kind of resources, skills or approaches you will deploy.

Let us analyse one example.

Fictional activity: Organizing a regional conference for young leaders

A regional conference will gather youth representatives from the Western Balkans to discuss regional co-operation, exchange good practices and network over three days in Pristina. The conference will enable various decision-makers and members of the business sector in the region to hear youth voices. Two panel discussion on contemporary topics, followed by thematic workshops, will be hosted each day. During the conference, participants will also have an opportunity to visit cultural sights and taste local food. Participation of marginalised youth will be sought too.

Good methodological points	What remains unclear
- The description clearly outlines the format of the conference and the concrete methods for enabling exchange. - It indicates various groups involved. - It states intention to foster an inclusive approach.	- The criteria: how are participants selected and what makes someone a youth representative? - Discussion: what themes will be discussed and in what way? - Are there any outputs of the activity?

Filling in the gaps in the previous example, the same activity can be presented as follows:

A regional conference will gather youth civil society organizations representatives from Western Balkans to discuss national policies and programmes to enhance regional co-operation. They will exchange good practices and network over three days in Pristina with institutional decision-makers in the region. Special attention will be given to initiatives from the business sector that fosters regional co-operation through youth start-ups. Two panel discussion on issues prioritized by youth via survey, followed by thematic workshops, will be hosted each day. In each workshop, one young speaker and one institutional representative will deliver keynotes. The participants will use the design thinking methodology to define solutions and recommendations. During the conference, participants will also have an opportunity to visit cultural sights and taste local food. Up to 50 participants will be selected via an open call, based on the strength of their application, and reflecting a geographical and gender balance. The conference and recommendation papers from all discussions will be in three official languages.

Writing convincing a methodology is about the length or high level of detail. It is rather about demonstrating clarity, competence and a meaningful approach that indicates certainty in achieving project results and main goals.

EXERCISE: MY ALL-STAR ACTIVITY

Define an activity or set of activities for your project proposal. Each team member should write it individually, based on general elements that you agreed upon as a team.

Guiding questions are listed below, choose those applicable in your case:

- How is this activity useful for the target group?
- How are young people involved?
- How is this activity reaching various youth? Is there a selection process? What are the criteria for participation? Any affirmative actions?
- Is there a concrete methodology for implementation?
- Is there an innovative technique to tackle the issue?
- Will you enable language translations?
- How are relevant decisions made?
- How many people are involved?
- Is there a concrete output?
- Why is this activity important?
- What is the role of partners on the project?
- Are there any safety measures needed?

….

Online activities

With the COVID-19 pandemics, the ability to organise an online event became an essential skill for safe project implementation.

Apart from Zoom, which slowly is becoming a synonym for conference video calls, other useful tools to support your online activities can be clustered according to their usage: collaboration tools, assessment and quizzes, brainstorming (whiteboards), polling and evaluation, discussion, etc.

TIP:

Check out digiyouth-seeyn.com for the theory and practical tutorials to explore more digital tools for online learning in youth work.

How to transfer in-person activities online?

When moving in-person activities to the digital plane, it's important to consider that:

- ➜ People can't spend the same amount of time allocated for your activity online, at least not in one chunk;
- ➜ Not all of your participants are digital natives or digitally literate – don't assume everyone will know how to use Zoom or other tools, irrespective of how simple they may seem;
- ➜ Online events don't spark the same excitement, especially for mobility projects, which increases the pressure for quality content. Make the best out of social media and **engage** your target group before the event – through series of mini events, alluring speakers, innovative topics, etc.

Panel Picker is an idea to engage your target group online by giving them an opportunity to be co-curators of the event's content. If the event is an online conference, perhaps 20-30% of proposed topics or speakers can come from the audience through voting and open proposals.

- ➜ Invest in resources, such as a technical assistant or producer, professional platform, quality video streaming, digital tools on paid plans, or any other aspect that will give you more certainty for engagement and technical quality;
- ➜ Going digital offers lots of opportunities for data capture and visualization. Explore creative ways to go beyond power point presentations and monologues.

Don't view the digital events as challenges only – they also bring benefits in terms of savings, wider audience and more opportunities for youth, and space for learning new skills and interacting in new ways to guarantee continuous engagement and active participation of young people.

Good practice example:

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is part of the Erasmus+ programme, providing an accessible, ground-breaking way for young people to engage in intercultural learning. Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange offers a safe online community to participate in facilitated discussions, increasing intercultural awareness and building 21st century skills through virtual exchange.

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange also offers training for educators to develop and integrate their own Virtual Exchange programmes. Scan the code for more information.

Under this programme, Virtual Exchange distinguishes itself from other forms of online learning in several ways:

- The focus is primarily on **people-to-people interaction and dialogue**, whereas the emphasis of many other e-learning programmes is on the content.
- The learning goals or outcomes include **soft skills** that are often not formally recognized, such as the development of intercultural awareness, digital literacies, and group work.
- It is primarily **learner-led**: following the philosophy of dialogue where participants are the main recipients and the main drivers of knowledge; learning through dialogue means that participants will be seeking mutual understanding and co-creating knowledge, based on their own experiences.
- Finally, a key tenet of Virtual Exchange is that intercultural understanding and awareness are not automatic outcomes of contact between different groups/cultures, and virtual exchange programmes explicitly address **intercultural understanding** and engaging with difference.

Manual for digital and ICT tools created by SEEYN and TASCO provides an overview of tools commonly used by civil society organizations. Each includes a brief description, the purpose and the instructions, with additional resources to be explored for further learning.

The manual targets two levels in English, B/H/S and Albanian languages:

- **Internal:** Practical use of digital tools in teamwork and organisational management (communication, coordination, planning, monitoring, overall management of human resources and tasks), especially for local CSOs and grass-roots;
- **External:** Using digital tools for online training and learning activities, promotion and campaigning, direct online work with beneficiaries, especially for high-capacity CSOs, CSOs working in emergency response, social service providers, regional networks, national resource centres, and similar.

EXERCISE:

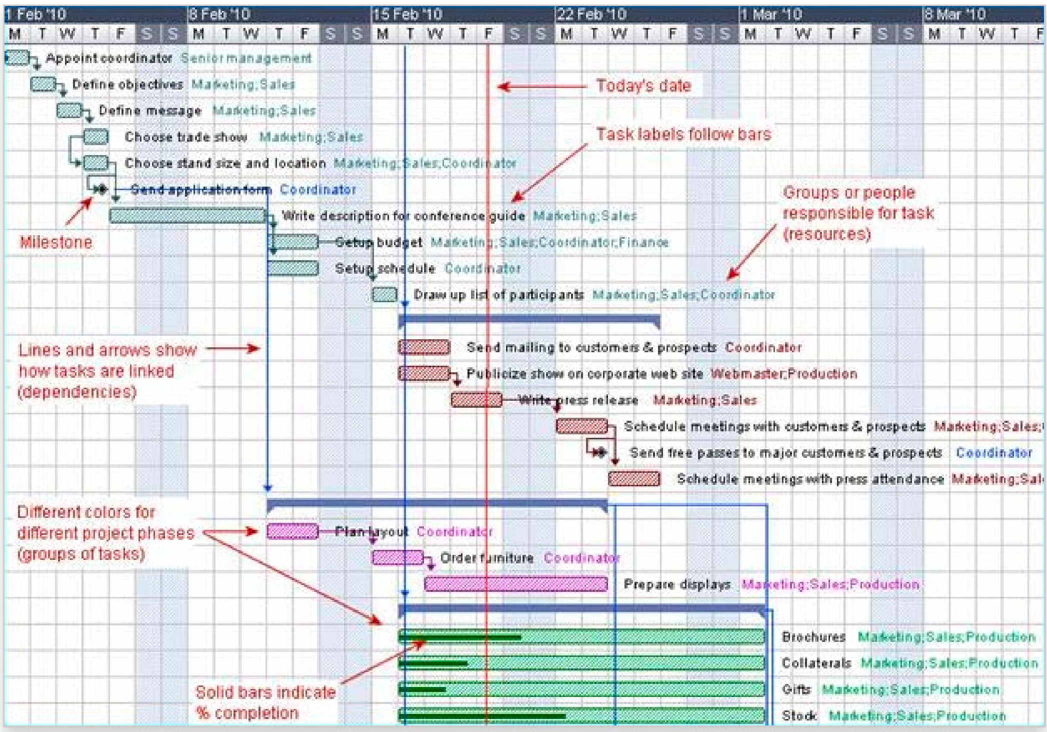
For every activity you have planned in your project, think of a digital alternative. Test your ideas with young people and modify accordingly.

Scheduling activities

A Gantt chart is a tool commonly used in project management, as one of the most popular and useful ways to show activities displayed against time. Donors often have their own version of the chart, but the logic remains the same.

On the left of the chart is a list of the activities and along the top is a suitable time scale. Each activity is represented by a bar; the position and length of the bar reflects the start date, duration and end date of the activity. This allows you to see not only which activities are there, how long they are and when exactly they happen, but their mutual relations, overlapping and project logic.

The Gantt's chart is also useful in monitoring your project flow.



Picture source: gantt.com

Nowadays, there are many ready-made templates and software for Gantt charts to help you make the best out of this tool. Variations of it are often integrated into online collaboration platforms. It is up to you how much complexity you want to deploy through the Gantt Chart, depending on the size of your project: it can look like a simple 'analogue' table with schedule overview or it can be a highly interactive sophisticated multipurpose tool.

Visibility and communication

How a project is communicated externally is a very important aspect. For the most part, the funding authority would expect that the project incorporates this component, as more visibility means expansion of information, impact and/or branding of the donor.

Project application templates may address this component through a single question. In some cases, a thorough communication plan may be required, involving significant documentation for reporting. The promotion of project content, a specific output or the overall message can be planned as a result toward inspiring wider audience beyond direct target groups.

Creating a communication plan

…should ideally be the first step in your visibility engagement. This doesn't have to be a super complex document, but it should provide you with least with the overall framework, including:

- ➜ Who are you addressing?
- ➜ What are your communication goals, what are you aiming to achieve – raise awareness, information levels, grow your community, attract more beneficiaries, strengthen your brand as an organization?
- ➜ How will you know if your communication efforts work? Can you identify ways to measure success?
- ➜ What are the main messages you want to convey?
- ➜ Have you budgeted for it?

Channels of communication

Your communication plan should also answer where your desired audiences are, and how can you reach and engage them. Oftentimes, particular channels are used by default, without assessing their functionality and appropriateness for the target group and type of content.

For instance, Alternative report on needs and position of youth in Serbia (2020) by National Youth Council of Serbia indicates that:

- ➜ *98% of young people, age 15 to 30, use their phone as the main device for informing*
- ➜ *Less than 8% of youth are buying daily newspapers and weekly magazines*
- ➜ *More than 90% of youth have profiles on Facebook and Instagram*
- ➜ *Most used applications for communication are WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger and Instagram DM (direct messaging).*

Knowing this, it is easy to make informed decisions about communication efforts. For instance, you probably won't decide to budget for advertisements in a daily newspaper, but you may decide to start a public Viber group, or budget for sponsored posts on Instagram and Facebook. You may decide it is worthwhile to be updated and well informed about how sponsored posts work on different social media networks, and make the best use of it yourself or with the help of a professional. You may also pay attention to your own web site being mobile friendly, if your target group is accessing the content mostly through their phones.

Ideally, your informed decision should come from even more segmented data in terms of age, geographical area, gender considerations and other intersectional factors.

TIP:

It is recommended to have a responsible and dependable team member who specializes in communication.

TIP:

It is important to gather information on trends and statistics relating to channels used by your target group, rather than assume.

Roughly speaking, channels of communication may be clustered into traditional and new media, unconventional or alternative, online or in-person or in line with its purpose.

EXERCISE:

Step 1: Split in two groups. One group should brainstorm on possible traditional channels of communication, while the other should come up with proposals for unconventional channels. Both may be online or offline.

Step 2: Create a table and analyse which channels would be most useful to use in your project considering: project communication goals, demographic groups using it, and a brief idea on utilization. Keep in mind your human resources, skills or other capacities when choosing the appropriate channels.

Visibility of each activity

One approach is to plan your activities and then ways to make them visible beyond your direct target group. Be aware that such approach can sometimes come across as boring or self-promotional. For instance, you hosted a training and posted photos on Facebook, informing the world that you did it. While this method can bring you some visibility and engagement, it offers limited added value apart from informing on what happened. More effective communication should involve some call to action (CTA) and/or be of direct value to your desired audiences. For example, this kind of effort can be more meaningful if, in addition to the photos, you shared discussion points, ideas, solutions, or questions that may raise engagement.

> **TIP:**
>
> Build your social media presence regardless of the project, so that you can use it for the project with ease, instead of starting from the scratch.

Another approach is to raise visibility of the project through activities. For instance, you can open an engaging call for participants (maybe through *gamification)* for a training you're organise – in this way, your content is shared and reaches more candidates. You can also put activities' outputs in service of visibility by creating content that will live beyond your activity. For instance, creating interesting films, developing an app or a platform, publishing a useful resource is both good for your ongoing activity and engagement of people, and promoting your efforts after the project is done.

Visibility of the donor

As for any other segment of project implementation, it is important to read *and re-read* the Guidelines provided by the donor. The majority of donors expect some communication rules to be honoured, such the manner in which their logo is used or wording in external communicating. Some donors will require to clear all products you create within the project, including social media posts. It is important to comply with these regulations and avoid losing resources or damaging your reputation, as you have accepted these terms when you signed the contract.

Ensuring donor visibility goes beyond placing their logo on the materials you create and disseminate – there are more creative and meaningful manners to do this. For instance, you can invite representative of the funding authority to contribute by delivering a part of the programme, participating in public events, or joining you in media appearances. This may also be useful for you to make benefit of their resources, contacts, and brand, and perhaps expand your reach and improve the quality of your project.

Promotion as an activity or result

Promotion is often planned in projects as a purpose in itself. By this, we mean that it is an intentional effort with the main goal of extending the reach of your content to your target audience and beyond.

You can structure an activity and plan a budget solely for promotion: media conferences, press clippings service, paid social media content, hiring communication experts, developing video materials, printing brochures and leaflets (although it is nice be carbon free!), buying space in media outlets, engaging influencers, ordering roll-ups and other branded project material, hosting promotional events and similar.

TIP:

Keep a neat table of contacts that can advance your promotion, such as journalists, bloggers, influencers, young leaders with significant reach, and CSOs. Maintain relationships and communicate with the plan without spamming them all with everything you do.

Partnerships

The importance of partnerships in all aspects of youth mobility projects can't be underlined enough! While good and well-developed partnership can take the project far, loose and conflictual partnerships can come at a high cost.

How to decide on partnerships?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but some things are worth considering:

- ➜ The project should reflect diversity: the significance of the project increases if the connected parties have less opportunities to do so otherwise;
- ➜ Youth input, their curiosity and wishes are a vital part;
- ➜ Reliable partners, on whom you can count and from whom you can learn, is important: this can be a tricky assessment to make when you want to co-operate with a partner in an area you never implemented mobility projects before.

TIP:

Work on establishing relationships outside of your search for project partners – go to events, participate in projects of others, act as a partner rather than a Lead first. This will allow you to make a better assessment based on experience, and partner holding realistic expectations and awareness of mutual benefits.

- ➜ Choice of partner can be based on the topic or expertise, or it can be a product of good collaboration when working on something together.

Having all of this in mind, applicants should decide in line with their own priorities, capacities, ability to mitigate risks and other similar factors.

When to search for partners?

Partnering up in the early stages of the project development creates more ownership over the whole project, offering less space for misunderstandings and shortcomings. Ideally, you would reach out to a partner with a rough idea and then it in detail together.

Where to find partners?

It is always a good idea to act on experience or recommendations, if you don't have the contacts yourself. Alternatively, you may reach out to organizations whose work you are familiar with and have respect for. Finally, you can benefit from online meeting points to explore new partnerships, such as:

- ➜ **RYCO Meeting Point Facebook group** is an informal group established by Regional Youth Cooperation Office, to enable easier connectivity of parties interested in regional mobility projects and be used for networking between future beneficiaries of RYCO.
- ➜ **Humans of Albania and Serbia** is a platform with a database of organizations from this geographical area. You can also make yourself more visible by submitting profile of your organization, school or institution to this website. Link: youthumans.net
- ➜ **Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform** acts as a resource centre for finding partners for joint activities, exchange initiatives, youth projects, discussing co-operation ideas, building up joint activities, get advice, and implementing those projects together. Link: connecting-youth.org

Principles of meaningful partnership to consider

- ➜ Establish partnership in early phases of project life cycle
- ➜ Aim for diverse partnerships that foster a strong intercultural dimension
- ➜ Sign partnership agreements between parties, clearly defining the scope of each other's responsibilities, roles and management procedures
- ➜ Strive for clear formal relations, with empathy and readiness to make modifications, be there for each other and draw lessons learned at the end of the cycle

Sustainability

All projects have to end eventually, but the project impact should continue.

The bigger the project, the more sustainable it is expected to be. A project is described as sustainable when a continued utilization of its results or high probability of impact can be assured after the completion of the project. It means – it doesn't end with you submitting the financial and narrative reports to the donor.

You should strategically consider and include sustainability from the beginning, meaning that your approach to developing project results and activities should always aim for long-term effects. That's why it's important to develop partnerships and relations with relevant stakeholders at an early stage of project development. This way, you ensure that once the ongoing project terminates, there is a strong interest by both you and other actors to continue the project results show that it benefits the community.

It is, of course, challenging to promise sustainability in your project proposal. At times, it isn't even realistic to expect huge or systemic changes from projects of small scope. Nevertheless, adopting sustainability as a mindset allow us to make small efforts that will matter today and be of use tomorrow.

Sustainability is a well-researched topic. Across literature three types of are usually outlined:

Financial	Institutional /organisational	Programmatic
Ensuring a steady flow of funds and generating revenue for maintaining and continuing the work. Describes the ability of your project to survive financially.	Describes the ability of your organization as a whole to survive. Can also refer to rooting your results in a community or as a systemic solution through institutional frameworks.	Refers to survival of the project content in the context of long-term programmatic approach, where the project is seen as an element contributing to wider programme.

Most applications require at least a paragraph in your proposal to address the sustainability of project. Larger programmes may require you to write a full sustainability plan.

What to write about in sustainability section?

The sustainability section should describe what components of your project can continue to live after the project ends. The continuation can come in a range of ways:

- ➜ Continuing to offer services to young people beyond the end date of your project based on additional funding or integration in other permanent programmes;
- ➜ Pledges from other donors to continue supporting the project/programme, and diversified funding sources overall;
- ➜ Using resources that your organization can keep and utilise after a project, be it physical equipment or intellectual property;
- ➜ Involving local, national or regional institutions and systemic mechanisms in project design, as a strategy to ensure project content is being offered by state actors or supported by them;
- ➜ Creating outputs that can outlive the project and be used by different entities and individuals without a time constraint (movies, books, murals, art, educational resources, web sites with low maintenance);
- ➜ Investing in capacity building of people, through activities such as trainings of trainers, so that competences can be disseminated further;
- ➜ Advocating for policy changes that will be reflected through longer periods of time (creation of action plans, strategic documents, signing memorandums on co-operation);
- ➜ Strengthening partnerships with stakeholders with whom other initiatives contributing to a similar set of values can be developed (such as schools committing to regular exchange, or periodical meetings in some regard);
- ➜ Establishing networks and new legal entities, social enterprises and other binding the interests of multiple stakeholders.

TIP:

Do not make ambitious and unrealistic promises that you can't deliver. Ideas that are difficult to realise are easily spotted; taking this approach will not strength your application – on the contrary, it will show poor risk management, bad planning or naivety in planning.

Financial and budget planning

When considering an idea that will address a challenge you identified, you also think about the type of activities that have to be implemented in parallel. This means that you need to list the activities that will be carried out, as well as the resources needed.

Have a discussion with your team about the costs involved in implementing various project activities. What kind of human resources and material support is required for these activities? Estimate the realistic costs for these inputs. Whether it is to cover expenses of the people involved in the activity, buying material or paying for travel, all these should be written down for each activity.

Once you complete this task in you first draft, you will have your financial plan/ budget forecast.

A financial plan/ budget forecast is based on a detailed list of costs for the required people, material, tools, travel, accommodation, etc. Outlining expected expenses, you complete an overview of costs.

Pay attention! This is a very important moment in the process!

Based on this, you can make many decisions. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is this Call the right for our plan - will it provide enough resources for our activities?
- What is the amount that we would need to secure on our own? Are we comfortable with planning ahead with this amount in mind?

Some of these answers might actually orient you to revise your decision - either a decision to apply for a specific call or a decision on how you formulate your set of activities.

Quick tips:

- When going through the financial planning, make sure that you include all costs. Whether you already have funds for them or not is not important at this stage.
- The financial plan is an internal document. Feel free to add notes, explanations, and details that will help you, your associates, and especially partners to understand. This way you will optimize your budget easily and faster, together. More importantly, in this way you ensure that the process is transparent. You also might hear some good new ideas. Tt the end of the financial planning process, if all is clear and resolved, you will easily "pack" the information up in any Budget template form.

When planning a budget for a project, the exercise involves going back and forth from your activities to your financial plan. This process will continue until you have polished it and gained confidence in the entire proposal.

Developing a budget is usually the last part of the process where you actually take a budget format (usually provided with the Guidelines) and fill it in. As the budget is usually in a spreadsheet format, this process includes following the formulas, calculating, and checking numbers. Budget forms can seem complicated. However, if you have your financial plan of the action clear, the task of transferring it into a given sheet becomes simple. Use the spreadsheet format to insert activities and proposed costs, and calculate the total expenses.

The budget usually has two parts: financial and narrative.

See the following sections: "Some of the main terms you encounter when thinking about budget planning for a project" (p. 89) and "Why we need the budget narrative/justification?" (p. 95).

KEEP IN MIND:

- The project description provides the picture of your proposal in words.
- The budget further polishes that picture, but with numbers.
- In short, a budget is a description of the project in numbers.

Some of the main terms you encounter when thinking about budget planning for a project

Total project budget/ total project costs

This refers to sum of all project costs, regardless of source of funding. This is sometimes defined as “Total eligible costs of the action”.

Financial allocation provided by the donor per project

It refers to the maximum amount that the donor is providing per project for the specific call. This is why “your contribution” (explained further) is needed.

Eligible and non-eligible costs

Eligible costs are the ones that are necessary for project implementation, identifiable and verifiable and in compliance with financial regulations of the donor. A list of what is eligible and ineligible for a particular grant scheme is almost always available in the Call for proposals documentation and certainly as a part of your contract. Non-eligible costs usually refer to currency exchange losses, fines, customs expenses, and debts.

Your contribution

It often happens that donors don’t cover 100% of the overall budget for the project. Their contribution varies but it represents a major part of the resources needed, unless the Call itself is an opportunity for co-financing larger initiatives. This means that you need to secure the remaining percentage of your budget from other sources. Sometimes your contribution may be ***in-kind***, which means that you can offer your services, existing equipment or other resources represented in terms of assumed (or agreed) value in money, but is not new money directly. At other times, applicant’s contribution must be strictly monetary in a foreseen percentage. For instance, the EU rarely finances projects up to 100% and grants are a form of complementary financing, with the beneficiary organisation will also putting up a percentage of the funding for their project.

Donor payment

This part comes once you have signed the Grant contract. However, it is advisable that you familiarize yourself during the preparation of the proposal with the Donor payment terms. Very frequently, donors do not pay the entire contracted amount at once, but in several tranches. Therefore, you specifically need to check number of instalment, dates of payments, and other details to see what this means for you.

Co-financing

Co-financing or co-financing rate is defined as a percentage of the total value of the project. This means that many calls for proposals foresee only partial funding of the total value of your project. In this regard, your contribution may also come from applying to two or more donors. While co-financing through multiple donor funds is pretty standard, it may also come at a cost in other ways – become starvation instead of salvation. More donors mean also more reporting, different visibility, financial, and contractual rules that can become a challenge for less experienced applicants. Therefore, depending on specific circumstances (such as your own capacity, your partnerships or percentage needed), you should carefully assess co-financing.

Budget cash flow planning

Along with the expenses and when they occur, you should also plan the inflow – the timing and amount of the sum given by the donor (usually by making a payment to your account in several tranches).

Pay attention to the difference

Cash flow forecast is a projection, detailing when the receipts and payments that are likely to occur.	A budget details what will be done with the actual finances for a specific period of time.

When planning the activity dates, keep in mind the date when the donor will send the first tranche (often 80% of the entire amount) to have that money at disposal for activity implementation. Similarly, expect for the final 10-20% to be provided upon the project's end, after you have submitted both financial and narrative reports. Planning on how to remain ***liquid*** in that period is very important. For instance, you may delay requests for payment when the balance is sent, in particular because you are waiting for the balance of the grant to be able to pay this expenditure. This situation is mostly acceptable in EU projects, if you have provided reassurance that the debt (invoice or equivalent) exists, as long as services or goods are actually supplied during the lifetime of the project.

Mind the fact that some donors allow for certain expenses to be reported with unpaid bills, while others don't. Nowadays, there are software and applications which can assist you in accurate financial management. Depending on the donor's policy, you may even budget to use them your project.

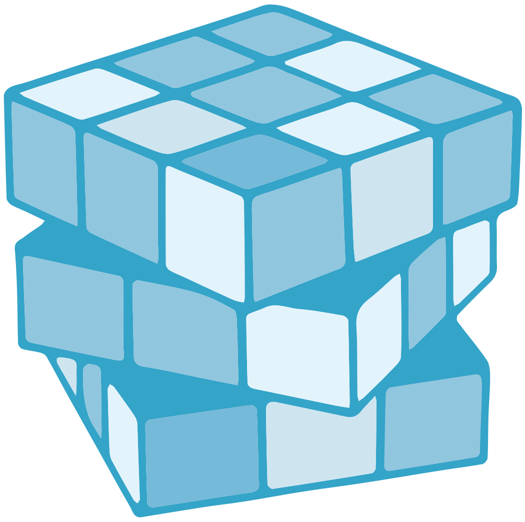
Budget form and narrative budget

After you planned the project, it is time to start developing the project budget by filling out the required form. The Budget form usually has two parts: financial and narrative. In practice, of course, these are not two separate and distinct activities; you will often work by filling out both documents at the same time and adapting your project, either in the narrative part or in the budget.

A narrative budget simply refers to a document that specifies how the money will be allocated to implement the activities described in the proposal. The budget gives a clear picture of all expenses involved in carrying out a project.

1 On 1 with some of the main elements of the budget form units:

There are usually three most common ways in which units are divided:



1. **Unit costs:** Unit cost is the cost of a single item or a unit. It could be a daily cost of a staff member or a consultant, or single cost of a computer machine. They cover specific categories of costs identified as an amount per unit. For example: EUR 50 per return ticket, or EUR 500 per monthly gross fee.
2. **Lump sums:** cover in global terms specific categories of costs in global terms. This is usually not a practice, except when the costs of many diverse items are low, in order to avoid reporting on each and every one of them.
3. **Flat rate financing:** covering specific categories of costs which are fixed in advance. For example, flat rate is used to calculate indirect costs. Usually, it is defined as "7% of the total direct costs". Flat rate is also sometimes used in budgeting travel cost per specific geographical area or for per diem allowance.

HUMAN RESOURCES/ Staff costs: Presentation of all costs related to salaries and wages of people specially engaged in the implementation of the project. Their roles in the project are usually stated as: co-ordinator, assistant, financial assistant and similar. All personnel incomes are stated in gross amount (net amount plus social/health insurance and other costs). Usually, this should not be more than 30% of the total project budget.

EXTERNAL EXPERTS: They are external, therefore not employed permanently by any of the partners of the project. Experts are engaged for knowledge/services unavailable in your own organisation. Their outputs are usually very easy to spot: a video, visibility material, workshop session, training, research.

TRAVEL/TRANSPORT: Costs calculated typically based on rates per either a kilometre or the actual running costs (fuel, maintenance and insurance). Some grant schemes, such as under Erasmus, foresee flat rates for travel of participants and provide a strict maximum amount that may be charged against the project. The usual practice is to budget travel based on the most economic means of transportation depending on the distance.

PROJECT VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION COSTS: These are mandatory costs very frequently. For example, you are expected to promote the project in the media (press conferences, appearances on TV and radio) and in public; to print appropriate publications and brochures in which you will present the project; and communicate the main project ideas and call to action through boosting content on your social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok).

EXPENDITURE VERIFICATION: In other words - audit of the project. Both you and the donor want the finances to be neat, correct and matching the budget. This will help you when writing the financial report. In most of the cases, the % for EV is given in the Guidelines. Some donors want to check the Audit agency you plan to engage, therefore, you will need their approval before making a contract.

DIRECT COSTS: All listed above present “direct costs” or costs made as a result of project implementation.

INDIRECT COSTS: Costs that occur in your organization *because* of the project. They are not directly linked to any activity. To illustrate, you have a new activity which comes with new efforts, such as: office material/stationary, accountant, internet, post/ courier, and office phone. When in doubt about what falls into this category – check with the funding authority. The % for indirect costs is given in the Guidelines, and usually goes from 5-10%. Such costs usually don’t need to be supported with documents. However, you still might want to keep the documents, at least until the project’s ended and all payments have been settled.

Budget drafting

When to draft the budget?

Developing a comprehensive budget takes time and focus, and **should not be left as the final task**. Doing it first is also not a good idea. While writing the proposal, your project will probably change and evolve with the process. Be careful to reflected these changes in the budget.

The budget should evolve with the project design. This way you have enough time to spot the potential challenges and adapt. At the same time, you ensure that your budget truthfully represents your proposal, leaving nothing out.

Who drafts the budget?

Sometimes, you lack the required knowledge needed to prepare a good budget. Of course, you can tackle the simple parts, but what about calculating overheads and contingency cost? If you require assistance, you might want to check with your partner organizations. By doing so, you can learn from them and/or ensure a transparent process that prevents misunderstandings and conflicts later on.

You can also ***consult*** an accountant. It is, however, vital that you participate – an accountant might understand the expressions, percentages, and calculations, but they are not fully familiar with the project. They might leave important budget items out because they don't know how the activities will be implemented. Artificially splitting the writing parts of the project can result in discrepancies, so it is important to actively consult one another!

Ideally, you should develop a budget together. Learning from each other and combining the inputs from the activity management side and the financial management side produces the best results.

At the end, consider having a "proof-reader" to check if your budget is streamlined with the rest of the proposal. More pairs of eyes always see better!

Should we share the responsibility for finances with young people?

The question is to whom the project belongs – is it the leader's project or a project of the youth group, in which the leader takes part? Youth participation is a learning process for everyone. ***See the chapter on Youth participation for more detail.***

The learning process takes place all the time – the more the participants are included, the more they can learn – and the leader should support them in this. Young people will learn the most if they are given the responsibility to carry something out.

Some advice to consider:

- ➜ Include youth in thinking and planning, so that the rationale for financial decision-making is clear to everyone;
- ➜ If possible, involve a young person interested in finances to closely follow this part of project management and learn by doing;
- ➜ Involving young people in budget planning contributes to better quality of applicant's decisions on choices of acceptable travel or accommodation aspects, and ultimately leads to a project which is responsive to needs of youth as main beneficiaries.

This is exactly what youth work is meant for – to give young people a chance learn by doing. This includes making the occasional mistake, and learning how to deal with them responsibly. You should not forget to offer mentoring and create a safe environment for this to happen. And – remember to celebrate the outcomes of a learning process together!

Why we need the Budget narrative / justification?

The budget narrative/justification is an accompanying text that explains and validates the numbers in the budget. They are usually specifically required by the donor in their guidelines. They are usually part of the Budget form.

Budget narrative is also used to explain any unusual items in the budget that are not clear at first glance. Sometimes it is unclear how specific items in the budget help with the project – and this is the section where you can explain that.

Furthermore, the amounts in the budget might need further clarifications. Always ask yourself if the items in your budget are self-explanatory or if a text with additional information is needed for some, such as when a specific item is more expensive or doesn't obviously relate to the project. An example are additional or more complex venue facilities that are particularly expensive due to functionalities, season, accessibility features or other reasons not obvious for someone outside of your team.

!!! Important notes on BUDGET planning

The project budget defines the programmatic and administrative costs you need to implement the project. While specifics of budget planning may differ from donor to donor, there are few universal principles that make a good budget:

- ➜ **REALISTIC –** Both in terms of amounts planned for each budget line (actual prices and standard prices on the market), and in terms of organizational capacity. It is not realistic that an organisation with a modest annual budget in the previous year(s) and lack of extensive experience in project management plans to lead the implementation of a project that significantly surpasses previously demonstrated capacity for financial management;

- **COMPREHENSIVE –** Should cover ALL project costs. For instance, some items are forgotten when planning the budget (e.g. costs of an accountant, audit costs). Make sure that this is not the case with you! Similarly, don't seek funding for an activity that is not already described in the project. For example, if you didn't specify transport in your activities, don't look for funds in the budget for a new minibus!
- **BALANCED –** Refers especially to the ratio between eligible costs for activities, staff, and other needs.
- **PRECISE –** You mustn't allow for the budget to contains wrong figures or sums in rows/ columns. Also, always check if you should round the amount by budget lines;
- **BY THE GUIDELINES –** A good budget shows the necessary resources, and above all it follows the Guidelines and Budget form provided within the specific Call.

Technical and administrative tips:

- Check the currency of the project.
- Take into consideration currency conversion costs as you will using the money in the domestic currency. Check if currency conversion is an eligible cost under a specific call.
- Consider bank charges. Check if they are an eligible cost under a specific call.
- Pay attention to the expenditure verification/audit required by the donor – the amount is usually stipulated in the Guidelines. Make sure to use the exact amount.
- Whenever in doubt - check! You can usually contact the donor, visit Info days (if organized), read the Guidelines again (and again). Try avoiding relying only on advice from colleagues/friends.
- Count on unplanned costs. For instance, an unforeseen group of public officials may join an activity. Naturally, you should offer a lunch/ dinner. Similarly, the drivers/translators sometimes need accommodation. No need to stress about it – just have in the planned contingencies and provide a few extras.
- Pay attention to the financial requirements from the Guidelines, especially the maximum budget and the percentage of the contribution.
- Make sure that someone from the team double checks the budget accuracy at the end of the budget development.
- Check if every activity described in the project is reflected in the budget in a correct manner. For example, accurate numbers of participants, duration of overnight stays, human resources and material needed.
- **"Guess the amount" –** Pay attention to the exact meaning of the expressions. When talking about human resource expenses, does it mean the gross or net amount? When talking about taxes, does the amount include taxes (especially VAT) or not? Check if duties, taxes and charges, including Value added Tax (VAT) are eligible costs.

Simply calculating the amounts and numbers is takes you only halfway. Understanding the correct numbers is the game changer!

EXERCISE: Let's plan a budget!

Here is a fictional framework of a project for which you will plan the budget. Only the main details are included. At the end of the explained setup, you will find a internal financial plan/budget draft to practice:

- Twelve (12) months project duration;
- One (1) Project Co-ordinator (from the Lead partner organisation) engaged full time on the project. Their job includes coordination, planning, implementation, reporting and other similar responsibilities.
- One (1) Assistant (from Partner organisation) engaged part time (50% per month for the duration of the project). They are responsible for continuous work with participants, programme design and implementation during the visits;
- Twenty (20) young participants;
- An agency contracted to design the project logo;
- A photographer engaged for one of the two visits;
- One (1) training event during first visit, with two (2) trainers. The trainers are tasked with preparing the handout materials: three (3) handout materials per participant that need to be printed as small booklets.
- Two (2) exchange visits for two (2) days each, with twenty (20) participants each. The participants will be transported by bus, while the trainers and project team will travel by car. Hotel accommodation with three (3) meals for everyone.
- One (1) online conference for all participants, with costs for the online hosting application. Other stakeholders invited: press & media outlets; local self-government, partner organizations, community representatives, ministries, international organizations… and of course, the donor ☺.

Step 1:

Map other potential costs and add them to the budget plan below.

Step 2:

In the table below, some of the planned expenses planned are broken into units with assigned unit price and total amount.

In line with the costs mapped as needed in the first step of the exercise, fill in this table with the missing data and calculate price of all budget lines. The overview is broken into aggregate data (e.g. travel, accommodation, food).

Costs related to the project: only some costs are in the table below, as examples. All amounts are in euros.

Expense	Unit	No of units	Unit price	Total cost	Provided	Needed
Coordinator (full-time)	Month	12	700	8.400	1000	7.400
Programme assistant (part-time, 50%)	Month	6	700	4.200	1000	3.200
Trainer	Day	10 (2 trainers * 5 days)	200	2.000	500	1.500
Photographer for the visit	Day	1	50	50		50
Logo for the project (designed)	Item	1	80	80		80
Participants transport (by bus, 2 round trips)	Return bus ticket	40 (20 participants *2 trips)	35	1.400		1.400
Transport for trainers and team (by car)	Km	1220	0.20	244	244	0
Accommodation and food for participants	Day	80 (2 days* 20 participants * 2 visits)	40	3.200		3.200

Expense	Unit	No of units	Unit price	Total cost	Provided	Needed
Accommodation and food for trainers and team	Day	16 (2 days* 4 members * 2 visits)	40	640		640
Handouts for participants	Item	60 (3 handouts * 20 participants)	10	600	600	0
Accountant	Month	12	50	600	600	0
Online Conference (application costs)	Item	1	200	200	200	0
Translation for the Conference	Day	1	150	150	150	0
add more						
Total				**21.764**	**4.294**	**17.470**

Games for financial planning and budget design process

- **Where's Waldo?** is one a favourite game to financially recognise all participants in the project (also known as "human resources"). The participants can be under various budgetary categories, depending on their role in the project. Categories may include: permanent staff costs, half-time staff costs, consultants, trainers, service providers (i.e. website developer), evaluators, and other. Make sure this classification is correct!

How to play it?

Allocate everyone in the correct budget line.

- Project coordinator – Core staff member, engaged full-time on the project
- Programme co-ordinator – Core staff member engaged part-time on the Project
- Designer (person)
- Trainer
- Technical specialist for online conference
- Courier

Person and their Role in the project	Budget line

Solution: (Do not peek! ☺)

Person and their Role in the project	Budget line
Project co-ordinator – Core staff member, engaged full-time on the project	Staff costs
Programme co-ordinator – Core staff member engaged part time on the project	Staff costs
Designer (person) fee	Expert cost/ External expertise
Trainer fee	Expert cost/ External expertise
Technical specialist for online conference	Expert cost/ External expertise
Courier	Indirect costs

What's your (unit) type?

The unit type in the approved budget needs to be respected during the entire implementation. This is why it is useful to play this game and determine the correct unit type, as it impacts the way in which the invoices are collected and reviewed. For example, if you and a web designer have agreed to complete your website for EUR 400 **per item**, they cannot submit an invoice for 2 months of work showing EUR 200 per month. Your job here is to choose the unit type, among several options: per month, per day, per person, per night, per item and so on.

How to play it?

Allocate the most optimal unit per the budget line. You have a list of budget items and a list of possible units. Pick the most suitable type for your budget item and fill in the blank form below.

Budget items to be allocated:

1. Office rent
2. Project manager fee
3. Logo design
4. ZOOM purchase
5. Travel for participants
6. Travel insurance
7. Translation
8. Brochure
9. Rent of a camera
10. Photographer
11. T-shirts

List of possible units:

Per item
Per month
Per day
Per km
Per journey
Per person
Per print
Per event

Budget item	Unit

Common Mistakes in the Budget Proposal

- **Not Following Grant Application Guidelines**

Most donors have their own Guidelines for applicants. As an applicant, you need to understand those Guidelines and design your budget accordingly. Read (and re-read) them thoroughly and follow them exactly. If the donor provides a budget template, use it!

- **Focusing too Much on the Needs of Your Organization**

Donors are not giving money to benefit only your organization. Grants are not meant to primarily pay your organization's operational and administrative costs like rent and staff payroll (unless the opportunity is precisely for operational grants). However, every project comes with additional operating costs, which need to be paid (additional rent, more kilometres, higher phone bills). When you ask for operating support for the purpose of the project, identify the cost in the budget and justify it in your narrative. Define why it is necessary to have that cost to perform the project.

- **Budget Doesn't Match the Narrative**

The budget should not only add up, but it also has to support the logic of the application's narrative. A budget should always match the narrative part of your application. From a donor's perspective, the budget is often the main part of the application. Always re-check the synchronism between them.

- **Mathematical Errors**

One of the most common mistakes, which can be easily prevented, is the mathematical error. Double and triple check the equation. With so many free applications available today, avoiding basic mathematical errors is easy. The donor usually provides a budget form as a spreadsheet, such as Microsoft Excel. This makes it easier to formulate, calculate, and organize the numbers. While it happens rarely, it might occur that the occasionally formulas in the given template don't work properly – it is up to you to not take the template for granted and double-check!

- **Untidy Format**

Make sure it is easy for donor to look at your budget and easily understand what is going on. Budgets can make or break a funding opportunity. Your application should interest the readers, not irritate them. Try to be concise and to the point. If the donor has given a guideline on the budget format, always follow it.

- **Mathematical Puzzle**

As explained, the budget should be easy to follow. You do not want to puzzle your donors with heavy mathematical terms or equations. Simple, straightforward language is what you need. If you do make use of formulas, make sure it is clear how you arrived at the result. Make it simple.

- **Asking for the Wrong Amount**

Donors have a set range of grant sizes they can award per Call. Requesting an amount outside that range is a major mistake. It usually happens when an organisation submits the same proposal to every grant opportunity.

- **Not Including the Actual Amount you are Requesting**

At the end of the budget always mention the net amount you are applying for. Asking for a specific amount always helps. Do not make it a guessing game by giving a range. Remember to also sum up all subtotals, and subtract any co-funding.

- **Using different currency**

Always check the currency in which the donor is giving funds and use it. This is important for financial planning, budget and financial reporting. In many cases, the donor refers to a specific "project exchange rate" to your local currency. This initial exchange rate usually remains until the very end of the project, even if the market one changes.

SELF-REFLECTION:

It is just a mistake. We all make them. Let's learn from them and don't repeat. So, what are the common mistakes you have made? Think and note the lesson learned!

The general rule is "best value for money"

Do a market research of standard prices in planned locations – a single item's cost can vary if a project is implemented in more than one location!

Make sure not to cut costs in ways that will affect the quality of your activities. For example, consider:

- ➜ Suitability of the location for the target group and their activities (e.g. not too close to busy intersections);
- ➜ Accessibility for all (e.g. wheelchair access, toilet for person with disabilities);
- ➜ Meeting the needs for your program (e.g. Wi-Fi, extra rooms for workshops or gathering, outdoor space).

Budget as comfortably as possible – to counter potential fluctuation in the price, always budget more than less. A common misconception is that "if we are modest with the expenses, the donor will like us". This is not correct. As the title says – best value for money.

- ➜ The budget is viewed as a whole, not per activities. The budget is only presented per activities to make it easier for grantees.
- ➜ The donor may request a justification of the proposed costs from you, if they seem to be "too low", "too high" or unclear.
- ➜ Budget justification needs to be filled out for each cost. Budget should be done in a collaborative approach between the Lead applicant and the partners.

If your project gets approved there is a **budget clearance phase.**

Donors' financial contribution often can't be increased during the budget clearance or in a later phase.

Additional resources:

Free software for NGOs in Western Balkans:

Guidelines for Grant Budgeting, The Global Fund:

At the end, make sure to check:

- ➜ I have assessed and included costs to secure equal participation for all beneficiaries/ participants.
- ➜ I have included the costs for travel medical insurance for the participants or reflected on how this is otherwise addressed in the project.
- ➜ I have calculated the costs of visas, if participants in the project need them.
- ➜ If I have volunteers involved in project's organisation, I have included the costs to cover volunteers' meals and local/ international travel and lodging costs, if needed.
- ➜ I have anticipated, within the budget, measures to protect young people and project participants against safety challenges (e.g. providing masks, gloves, other equipment).

Benefits of risk management

RISK ANALYSIS AT GLANCE

Effective risk management can contribute to strategic planning and the general running (operational activities) of your organization. It creates confidence that your organization can deliver the desired outcomes, manage threats to an acceptable degree, and make informed decisions about opportunities.

Risk management helps organizations to:

- ➜ Reduce the likelihood of potentially costly surprises;
- ➜ Prepare for challenging events and improve overall resilience;
- ➜ Improve the quality of decision-making at all levels;
- ➜ Enable effective implementation of decisions;
- ➜ Improve planning processes;
- ➜ Prioritise resources;
- ➜ Establish clear purpose, roles and accountabilities for all team members;
- ➜ Improve donor, partner and other stakeholder' confidence in the organisation.

Risks and risk assessment

RISK ANALYSIS AT GLANCE

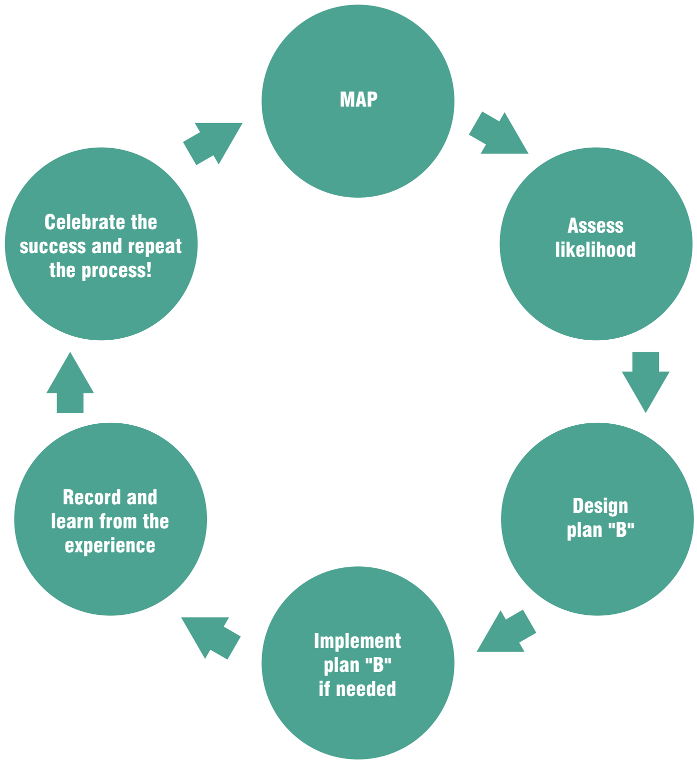
Tackling risks doesn't receive enough attention in practice, leading to filling out the application form superficially. Still, risks transform into problems, therefore is important conceptualise mitigation strategies.

Mitigate…what? Let's explain the usual terminology first:

What?	When?
Mapping risks = Facing that things might not go as planned. Making a list of potential unplanned situations (risks).	Drafting application
Assessing risks = What is the likelihood of this risk happening? The greater the likelihood, the more energy should be put into a mitigation strategy.	Drafting application
Mitigating risks = Designing steps that you will take if the unplanned situation occurs.	Drafting application. Throughout the implementation.
Managing risks = On a regular basis during the project, from its design to the end- map, assess and mitigate.	Throughout the implementation.

Risk management is a process. On the left, you can see which steps should be taken and in what order, to ensure smooth implementation of your project.

While not all project applications focus on this part in detail, and may simply require a brief input (usually a table), it is advisable to make this process a habit in your project management style.



When mapping risks, reflect upon these key questions:

- What can go wrong, when and how?
- What is the potential cost to time, money, and performance?
- How likely is it to happen?
- What are the impacts of each risk?
- What is the source of the risk?
- What can be done to reduce/control the risk?

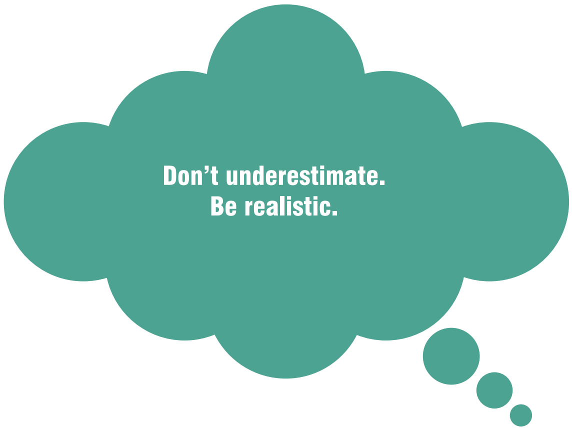
Select the most suitable mitigation measure(s) by considering:

- The financial and other resources required;
- The feasibility (including timing) of implementing it;
- The potential impact of the measure on stakeholders' values, perceptions and interests – some may be more acceptable to stakeholders than others;
- Whether the measure will compromise or be in conflict with any legal, regulatory or other obligations that your organisation has.

TIP:

Projects benefit more from using a combination of measures.

How does this look in practice?



How to be realistic?

If you are concerned/ worried/ uncertain about a particular aspect, it is a sign to place extra focus on it. Don’t hide your concerns under the carpet hoping they will come out.

Example: You have new partners on this project. You are worried about them taking the administrative and financial aspects of the project seriously.

DON’T: Decide not to address it unless something goes wrong. It will.

DO: Raise the issue with them, sign a Partnership agreement and offer assistance in these matters. Plan for additional human resources, if needed. Ask them to do the same.

Talk with your associates. Talk with your partners. Openly and honestly. Hear their concerns.

Example: An organisation was very happy with their project design. Partners from area X said they might face a challenge with obtaining parent’s permit for their participants’ travel during the exchange.

DON’T: Disregard their concerns because you never perceived it to be an issue. It turned out that nearly 40% of participants from X couldn’t attend an event.

DO: Understands this might be a risk. Assess the probability of its occurrence as “low” with the partners. Plan one (not five) way of mitigating this through early announcement to parents and co-operation with schools and teachers.

Example: Ana told her boss that she is not very happy in the role of a project coordinator. She said that she doesn’t have the skills and leadership attitude. Her boss knows Ana is simply brilliant in everything that she does, very responsible, but modest. He was sure in her capacities. Additionally, he couldn’t find another person, especially not with the budget he had.

DON'T: Convince Ana to be a Project coordinator. Ana had difficulties in co-operation with new partner organisation and with new administrative rules. After several unsuccessful attempts to organise everything to feel confident and "under control", she was offered another job and resigned.

DO: Assess that the probability of that Ana being unhappy is high, but that she is also feeling insecure for the time being. Come up with a plan including several (not one) options: Ana agrees to start, with an intern next to help. Talk with partners and ensure that they can find a replacement, if needed. Additionally, decide to engage additional financial resources for hiring a new person. Finally, the entire project team agrees to start identifying a new project manager.

Avoiding risks - smart or risky decision?

Trying to avoid risks might sound like a strategy. However, there is no such a thing as a project without risks. Focusing your efforts on designing risk-free activities could lead to a decrease in your creativity, innovative spirit and, most importantly, your own enthusiasm!

Remember:

You can overcome almost anything with good planning. Don't "kill your idea"!

1. Do donors like to see a risk-free project?

No.

Donors are aware that risks are part of every activity. Unplanned situations might occur. Presenting an activity as perfect will probably send a signal that:

a) You are not being realistic;

b) You do not put efforts in responsible planning, but in avoiding.

2. There is no such thing as a good AND "risk-free" project. Why?

➜ Risks are not universal. Something that is uncertain for organisation A, might not be for organisation B. Look at the risks from both your and your partners' perspective.

➜ If all is certain, the action is highly-likely routine and not very innovative. You don't want this, right?

➜ We simply cannot predict **everything.** This doesn't mean that you should overanalyse.

Example: The COVID-19 pandemic affected the entire globe. Project activities were not immune to this development. Lockdowns and prohibition of public gatherings meant that a different approach to activities is necessary – and they were adapted! In a short time projects, education, jobs, lifestyle in general was organised to accommodate these new changes. The entire planet agreed to change their "project activities" in just few weeks, and continued fulfilling results with a different approach.

3. There is no “high risk” project. Why?

➜ If your idea sounds good to you, don’t let overanalysing stop you from drafting it. If it seems new, daring, challenging - the odds are that you are on the trace of something that can be innovative and have a big impact on the community. Don’t be paralysed by risks, they are manageable!

Finally, demonstrating that you are not only aware of uncertainties, but that you have discussed them and mitigation tactics shows to donor that you are trust-worthy. It signals that you will be responsible with their resources, that you have a good and trustworthy team, open relations, good communication, and people motivated to solve and advance. Finally, this means that you are open and cooperative with a donor. This means a lot.

EXERCISE:

Conduct a risk analysis for your project idea.

Step 1: MAP – Define risks. Some examples are included in the table below – use them if they are applicable, or add some that might be more relevant for your project idea.

Step 2: ASSESS – What is the likelihood of this risk happening? High, Moderate or Low? Based on what do you make this assessment?

For each identified risk, tick the corresponding box (High/ Moderate/ Low) and explain why.

Step 3: MITIGATE – Plan steps for mitigation. What exactly if the mapped situation occurs? Who will do it? When shall you start looking at it?

Use this table to structure your work and improve your practice.

Risk	**Probability:** **High, Moderate or Low?** (Explain why)	**Mitigation measures**
Activities		
Changes in the project team (Project Manager/other staff)		
Unclear division of work among project partners hampering implementation		
Improper estimation of costs negatively affecting the activities (not enough resources for good quality)		
Overlap with other projects or activities of organisation/ partners/ stakeholders		
Outdoor activities not implemented due to bad weather conditions		
Accessibility barriers for participants with disabilities		

Risk	Probability: **High, Moderate or Low?** (Explain why)	Mitigation measures
Participants		
Not enough participants from the desired target group		
Administrative challenges with borders/ travel/ parent's consent documents		
Not enough sensitivity among participants/conflict situations		
Language barriers		
Results		
Not all results of the project may be achieved		

Risk	Probability: High, Moderate or Low? (Explain why)	Mitigation measures
Budget		
Co-financing for the project will not be available in due time/amount		
Some of the costs occurred may not be eligible		
Contract and Procurement		
Extension of the implementation period may be required		
Complexity of grant and procedures may impact good reporting		
Sub-contractor for catering or travel might not deliver services as discussed		
Not enough understanding among team members on how to keep recordings and data		

Risk	Probability: High, Moderate or Low? (Explain why)	Mitigation measures
Visibility		
Project activities/Donor funding may not be visible		
Reporting		
Late or inadequate reporting may be expected		

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Projects differ in size, cost and time, but all have the following characteristics:

- ➜ A start and a finish
- ➜ A life cycle involving a series of phases in between the beginning and end
- ➜ A budget
- ➜ A set of activities which are sequential, unique and non-repetitive
- ➜ Use of resources which may require coordinating
- ➜ Centralized responsibilities for management and implementation
- ➜ Defined roles and relationships for participants in the project

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) is an approach that ***serves*** to measure and assess the success and performance of project.

Making an **MEL plan** ensures assessment of your project's success, and enables you and your partners to monitor and adapt activities while they are being implemented.

Monitoring starts when indicators are defined during the planning of a project. Basically, monitoring means collecting data about the progress of a project against predefined indicators, comparing real-time project progress against the planned progress. **The main goal is to be able to see if a project is going according to plan, or if there is a need for any adjustments.**

The indicators

Success can be measured through various **quantitative and qualitative indicators**, depending on the planned activity and expected. While indicators are not required to be defined in some project applications, other ask for rigorous ones on a level of activities, results, outcomes and/or outputs.

The indicators are a measurement guide of the results used to evaluate the development of the project. The indicators provide evidence on whether designed result occurred and measure the changes in the activities of the project. They can be quantitative (number, percentage, ratio) and qualitative (fact, knowledge).

Quantitative Indicators measure the amount or value of inputs or resources available. They have a numerical value, and are measures of quantity, such as: number of man and woman in decision making; level of income per year by gender. Therefore "quantity" reflects a numerical condition such as the number of students, teachers, facilities or textbooks.

Qualitative Indicators reflect impact – in most of the cases peoples' judgment, opinions, perceptions and attitudes of a given situation or subjects. They are intended to measure the "quality" of the input, process and output of the program. The term "quality" can mean different things depending on the context. Examples can include: the sense of well-being; the application of information or knowledge; the degree of openness; the quality of participation; the nature of dialogue; level of awareness.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the second step in the approach, where the data collected is analysed for various purposes. With the results of the evaluation process, you can decide if an approach is worth repeating or upscaling if adjustments have to be made.

The MEL system

The M&E system has a twofold purpose:

- ➜ To serve as **project tracking system** and inform on grant progress indicators and milestones;
- ➜ To serve as an **early warning system** – in the run-up to key grant implementation related milestones, the team will be able to check if they are on schedule and if any support shall be provided.

Monitoring refers to the measuring and documenting of progress, achievements, and results. The main goals of monitoring are to **collect and compare data** to be able to **learn** from experiences to improve present or future actions, to have accountability for the resource used, to be able to decide what works and what does not for the future development of the project.

Monitoring is an ongoing process throughout the lifespan of the project or program.

Here is an example of the Monitoring areas checklist:

Area to Monitor	Tasks
Procurement of inputs	Monitor the quality and delivery of procured equipment, use and functionality.
Production of Outputs	Monitor the number of people serviced/ trained/ benefiting against the set targets.
Performance control/ Adherence to contractual rules	Monitor the fulfilment of contractual obligations in terms of meeting set requirements, deadlines, and sequence.
Human rights based monitoring [14]	Monitor fulfilment of human rights based standards in the implementation (such as prevention of discrimination; equality; accessibility).
Sustainability monitoring	Monitoring the level of mainstreaming of launched actions into the existing setting, continuation of available funding, prospects in meeting future projected needs.
Risks monitoring	Identification and monitoring of risks, escalation observance, conduct of the mitigation strategy
Visibility requirements monitoring	Monitoring adherence to donor visibility requirements Observing the communicability of the measures in wider public
Stakeholders involvement monitoring	Observing the views of local communities, local authorities, associated services, relevant membership-based organizations, general public towards the project
What else would you add?	

14 Some donors require this to be included.

How to describe evaluation approaches in project proposal?

Most often, evaluation in youth mobility projects occurs on the activity level, through evaluation questionnaires at the end of an activity. These questionnaires collect information about participants' satisfaction and other subjective perceptions related to the activity. However, such evaluation is the bare minimum. Obtaining feedback in this manner is useful, but richer information is obtained by combining different evaluation methods focused on different levels of the project.

For bigger and multiyear projects, external evaluations can be commissioned too. This is sometimes a donor requirement.

Additional evaluation method encompass:

Pre and Post Test Testing for knowledge, understanding of concepts, skills development or levels of awareness before and after an educational activity is a great way to compare if your activity made a difference you were hoping for.	**Participation** Evaluating through: Attendance Completion Activity observations
Surveys **Questionnaires** **Interviews** **Checklists** **Feedback forms**	**Financial Reports** Cost to budget Cost per unit of service On time on budget
In-depth interviews **Case studies** **Review meetings**	**Subjective (Qualitative)** Journals Testimonials Observations Photographs Clippings

TIP:

Make use of digital tools such as Mentimeter or Kahoot to engage participants in a more informal and fun evaluation sessions.

FINAL COUNTDOWN CHECKLIST

Having gone through this Manual in detail, you have learned that preparing a good participatory youth mobility project includes:

- ➜ **Responsibly assessing opportunities to match your capacities, interests and vision**
- ➜ **Involving young people in a meaningful manner every step of the way**
- ➜ **Cherishing diversity and promoting equality to leave no one behind**
- ➜ **Enabling intercultural dialogue and a safe environment for all**
- ➜ **Diligently analysing context of your project, internal capacities, problems and stakeholders to create smart objectives**
- ➜ **Knowing your target group and delivering sustainable solutions to serve people through suitable channels**
- ➜ **Developing a methodology that is innovative, educational and purposeful through realistic and mutually connected activities that will bring desired results**
- ➜ **Creating real partnerships and mutually beneficial co-operation that empowers your project idea**
- ➜ **Responsible and skilful budgeting and financial management**
- ➜ **Taking risks, but planning for mitigation measures**
- ➜ **Observing, modifying, evaluating and asking for feedback**
- ➜ **Continuously learning from mistakes and growing in the process!**

… AT THE END

We hope that you have become an absolute rockstar in developing great project proposals by now! If you feel like you're not there yet, just keep practicing – we learn by writing, failing, improving and starting all over.

We sincerely hope that this Manual was a helpful tool to begin your journey of mastering this skill.

Don't forget to have fun and find joy in learning something new and different through this process!

We wish you many successful project applications and inspiring projects connecting the youth of our beautiful region!

A better region starts with you(th)!