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Management handbook for Erasmus CBHE Projects

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Internal Procedure on Project Management

In the framework of:

The project “Developing Research and Innovation Capacities in Albania and Kosovo” / DRIVE

Project reference number: 610307- EPP-1-2019-1-AL- EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of a granting procedure is to allow different actors (including universities) to contribute to community development and access donors' funds. This document aims at providing procedural guidance to all staff members involved in the project management process. In particular, this document is dedicated to the general management of different projects, particularly ERASMUS+ ones. This manual describes in detail the whole project management process, starting from the idea for a project, the process of proposal writing, management, implementation, reporting and audit. It outlines the procedures involved in administering the various grants awarded by different donor institutions and implemented by universities.

Specifically, this manual specifies all the requirements and procedures for each step of the project management at university. Section 1 introduces the main responsibilities of each category within the project management staff. Section 2 describes some steps for a good project proposal; Section 3 provides specific details on implementing and reporting requirements. Section 4 then details the visibility rules. Finally, Section 5 highlights information with regards to project monitoring and evaluation and audit procedures.
The Manual will be reviewed regularly and amended to reflect new requirements and best practices.

1. PROJECT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Project Management Team (PMT)
The project management team refers to all the staff that is fully or partially dedicated to the implementation of a dedicated grant.
The PMT shall be composed of:
(a) The Project Manager responsible for the overall coordination of the grant scheme including:

- Strategic coordination with donor and partners
- Coordination, guidance and management of project staff
- Assuring donor and internal compliance
- Supervising/authorizing the transfer of funds and authorize budget variations
- Supervising monitoring plan and activities
- Assure achievement of expected results and objectives
- Conflict resolution
- Leads if exclusion criteria arise after the signature of the Partner Agreements
- Reporting to donor

(b) The Project Assistant is responsible for the operational aspects of the grant scheme including:

- Operational coordination with partners
- Drafting/Preparing Partnership agreements with partners
- Planning of the activity/compliance with action plan

- Implementation of the monitoring plan including monitoring mission reports
- Quality check on partner expenditures

(c)The Finance Officer

- Responsible for the overall supervision of the financial aspects of the project;
- Specific supervision on partners’ budget expenditures
- Checks on partners financial documentation
- Preparation of all finance format and templates
- Training and capacity building in finance aspects towards partners (if necessary)
- Intermediate and final financial reporting

2. WRITING A PROJECT PROPOSAL

Being in alignment with the requirements of a Call/s for Proposals, the financial and technical support will be provided in accordance with the details of each scheme. This Manual defines all the elements of a project management procedure, including the Application Package for a specific call/s.

Title of the project/idea

<ENTER the full title and the reference number of the project/idea>

Background

<Enter description of the historical background of the project/idea>

The project background usually needs to include information about the reasoning why the applicant wants to implement a specific project in a specific manner (by explaining the methodology) and in a specific location/s. A good historical background has to explain the current situation and its problems and the way in which the applicant wants to solve them.

Objectives of the scheme and priority issues/areas

<Enter description of the objectives and priorities of the project/idea. Note: the number of priorities should be small (say, three); objectives and priorities should give an indication as to which kind of activities are eligible>

• The main objective of this project/idea is: <...>

• The specific objective(s) of this project/idea is/are: <...>

Financial allocation provided by the contracting authority

The overall indicative amount made available under the dedicated call for proposals is usually given as per category/lot/strand the institution (the university) is applying for. In any case, the applicant shall be aware that the contracting authority reserves the right not to award all available funds. In the case of categories/lots/strands:

The applicant shall keep into consideration that main sets of eligibility criteria are related to:
(1) the actors:
- The 'lead applicant', i.e., the entity submitting the application form,
- if not specified otherwise the lead applicant and its partners(s) will be jointly referred as "partners",

(2) the actions:
Actions for which a grant may be awarded;
(3) the costs:
- types of cost that may be taken into account in setting the amount of the grant

Eligibility of applicants

Lead Applicant

- Indicate the relevant criteria with due regard for the objectives and priorities of the call for proposals, complying with the principles of transparency and non-discrimination.
- The lead applicant must declare that the lead applicant himself, the partner(s) and affiliated entity/ies are not in any of these situations.
- The lead applicant may act together with other partners/co-applicants (if applicable).
- The coordinator is the main interlocutor of the Contracting Authority. It represents and acts on behalf of other partners (such as the case of ERASMUS+ projects) and coordinate the design and implementation of the action.

Partners

- In the cases where partners are obligatory (such as the case of ERASMUS+ projects), there must be specified any minimum of requirements for the type and/or the minimum/ maximum recommended number of partners to be involved in the action.

- Partners must participate in designing and implementing the action, and the costs they incur are eligible in the same way as those incurred by the lead applicant.
- Partners must satisfy the eligibility criteria as applicable to the lead applicant himself.
- Partners must fill in all the respective requirements in the grant application form.
- If awarded the grant contract, the partners (if any) will become beneficiary(ies) in the action (together with the coordinator)

Eligible actions

Actions for which an application may be made which are directly related with the eligible project activities (as detailed in the proposal) and with eligible cost that the donor commits to cover in a particular programme/project.

Definition of the actions

Describe the set of activities
The initial planned duration of an action may not be lower than <...> months nor exceed <...> months.

WPs

<Specific WPs to which the actions must relate>
Location
Actions must take place in [one or more of] the following [country/ies)] [region/s]: <...>.
Types of action/s
• Specify types of action to be financed under this call
Types of activity
• Specify types of activity which may be financed under this call

Eligibility of costs

Only eligible costs can be covered by the grant/s. The categories of costs that are eligible, non-eligible and the acceptance (or not) for the contributions in kind are always indicated in the call.
To be kept in consideration is the "Justification of the estimated costs" per each of the corresponding budget item or heading. In this case the applicants must:
- describe the information and methods used to establish the amounts of unit costs, lump sums and/or flat-rates, to which costs they refer, etc.;
- clearly explain the formulas for calculation of the final eligible amount.

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At contracting phase, the contracting authority decides whether to accept the proposed amounts or rates on the basis of the provisional budget submitted by the applicants, by analysing factual data of applicants or of similar actions.
The total amount of financing on the basis of simplified cost options that can be authorized by the contracting authority for any of the applicants individually (including simplified cost options proposed by their own affiliated entities) cannot exceed the specified amount in the call.

3. IMPLEMENTING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Once the grant contracts have been signed, partners will start with the implementation of the respective activities or working packages (the case of ERASMUS+ projects). Partners should prepare and submit reports in accordance with the reporting periods specified in the grant contract and Partnership Agreements. Final report is to be submitted after the end of the grant. Reports should be prepared in full compliance with the rules and relevant forms. For any ambiguity or additional information, partners need to be in accordance with the University in the role of Coordinator.

Interim and final reports

Interim and final reports are composed of narrative and financial report. Reports along with the supporting documentation should be compiled in accordance with the templates presented in Annexes of each call (grant contract). Reports/documents as specified in each grant contract must be submitted in electronic format.

Intermediate narrative reports must be submitted in English, in electronic form by the lead applicant (the case of ERASMUS+ projects). These reports should include a discussion on the status of implementation of the idea and should describe the progress made against the forecasts made in the planning phase. They should also describe the impact that the implemented activities have had on the beneficiaries. The final narrative report should contain a discussion on the progress made, against the forecasts made in the planning phase. The report should also describe the impact that the implemented activities have had during this period. In addition, there should be included a summary of lessons learned from implementing the idea that can help implement similar projects in the future.

For the purposes of financial reporting all partners shall submit the detailed list of expenses, originals and copies of all payments, receipts, requests and invoices. Upon their submission, all transactions and supporting documents (payments, receipts, requests and invoices) should be grouped according to the budget lines. When applicable, means of verification of the implemented activities, as specified in the logical framework, should also be submitted in hardcopy. Maintenance of the original file is the sole responsibility of each partner.

Intermediate Financial Report. Each partner must keep Coordinating University informed of any event which has or may have a significant impact on the progress and success of the project implementation. For this, each partner will have to prepare separate reports if needed. In this regard, Coordinator must be kept informed for the status of various elements of the project (e.g., purchases of equipment, number of employees, procurement procedures, budget amendments, etc).

The Final Financial Report should include a summary of expenditures incurred on financing provided by different donors, as well as any other amendment made during the period of implementation

- Interim narrative and financial reports should be submitted in accordance with the reporting periods specified in the grant contract or/and partnership agreement. For short projects or in other special cases, a more frequent reporting may be required.

Reports must be submitted 15 calendar days after the end of the reporting period.

- In the cases of interim or final financial reports to be sent to the auditor, partners are obliged to provide to Coordinator (or directly the auditor)

- All the required information during the audit phase.
- Final narrative and financial reports should be submitted to Coordinator within 30 calendar days after the end of the project implementation. In case partners are required to submit additional documents and/or address comments, this has to be done within 7 working days.
- Final reports are considered approved only when the partner is informed of this, in written, by Coordinator.

Upon approval of the reports, each grant beneficiary (incl. Coordinator) should deliver to donor the reports as per respective annexes. In the case of interim reports, when submitting the final-approved reports, the beneficiary of the grant should also submit the request for execution of the following instalment. Note that approval of the costs through interim reporting does not imply that the same will be approved by the auditor.

When submitting the interim and final reports, grant beneficiaries (incl. Coordinator) must deliver to the respective donor all publications and audio-visual products in electronic version.

If after the end of the project implementation there are remaining funds, the beneficiary is obliged to return the funds upon notification on this by donor.

Payments by partners and record (file) keeping

Subject to and under the terms of the Contractual Agreement/s, all payments must be made to a dedicated bank account. In this regard, all permitted expenditures will be made from this account. Payments under this Contractual Agreement will be made according to the contract:

- Pre-financing - by signing the contract and sending the request for payment
- Further pre-financing - with the approval of the interim narrative and financial report and the request for payment
- Remaining - after approval of the final report and request for payment

Eligible costs

Eligible costs under the Contractual Agreement/s include:

- Costs incurred during the project implementation period:

\- Costs of services, works, or purchases that arise and are implemented during the project implementation period.

- Payments must be made within the project deadline, except for TPI, social and health insurance, and withholding tax, which must be paid prior to the submission of the final report.

• They are included in the approved budget;
• They are necessary for the implementation of the project;
• They are identifiable and verifiable
- Easily identified in bank account
• Meet the requirements of legislation for taxes and social insurance.
• They are reasonable, justified, based on the principle of efficiency and effectiveness.

Under the Contractual Agreement, the eligible direct costs are:

• Project staff costs, gross salaries, including payment of personal income tax and social and health contribution;
• Costs for travel and diet, according to the established rules
• Costs of purchasing equipment or furniture (incl depreciation costs), which must be new, ensuring that they are eventually transferred to the Grant Recipient
• Costs arising from the contracts signed in the framework of the Contractual Agreement implementation;
• Costs arising directly from the requirements of the Contractual Agreement (information dissemination, visibility, translation, etc.)

Coordinator has the right to control and monitor the partner's expenses and to submit itself the request for payment. If the eligible costs at the end of the project are less than the estimated costs, the grant will be reduced to the total value of the recognized costs. In case of any unjustified payment, the payment will be considered not eligible and the grant recipient (lead applicant in the case of ERASMUS+ projects) must return the amount to the respective donor.

Not eligible costs

Under the Contractual Agreement/s not eligible costs will be:

- Purchase or lease of land or buildings, only if agreed in advance through the Agreement;
- Fines, penalties, financial obligations, or court costs;
- Purchase of used equipment;
- Bank costs (excluding monthly fees, transaction costs), bank guarantees or similar transactions
- Exchange rate losses
- In-kind contribution

- Debts and commissions for debt services (interest);
- Provisions for future loss or settlement of liabilities;
- Payment of interest liabilities;
- Costs declared by the Grant Recipient and funded by another project / intervention;
- Lending to third parties

The above listed ineligible expenses and/or those considered not eligible due to non-compliance with the rules set forth in this document will not be considered. If such expenses are noticed when lead partner submits the final report, the funds will be requested to be returned to donor. In such case, the beneficiary will be informed on the decision by the donor.
In case of unspent funds, the beneficiary/partner is obliged to return the funds to the donor (or Coordinator in case of ERASMUS+ projects) upon notification.

Accounting

- The beneficiary records project data in the organization's accounts.
- Project transaction identification should be easily done in the system.
- Every payment must be made by bank transaction.
- For bank payments, the bank document must be accompanied by a tax invoice and other supporting documentation.
- For services for which a tax invoice cannot be issued, withholding tax (15%) and payment to the tax authority must be withheld (it is done in those cases when finding a registered service provider with the tax authorities is completely impossible).

When executing payments, partners shall ensure that all payments are executed from the designated account for the project and in accordance with the following obligations:

Project team (staff)

- the existence of a formal contractual relationship between the employee and the employer.
- the declared workloads are identifiable and verifiable. Evidence is required of work completed and time spent on the project (e.g., attendance lists, tangible outputs / products, compulsory time sheets);

Moreover, time-sheets must indicate:

• the date of the service provided;
• the number of days worked on these dates;
• the tasks performed (short description) in relation to the activity plan.

The amount allocated for salaries according to the specification in grant budget is gross amount with all taxes and contributions included. Salaries are paid at the end of each month implying that retro and/or advance payment of salaries is forbidden.

Travel Cost & Costs of Stay

Project partners will have to be able to justify / prove the following:
• the journeys are directly connected to specific and clearly identifiable project-related activities;
• the journeys actually took place (boarding pass, hotel invoices, attendance list, etc.).

Equipment

Project partners will have to be able to justify / prove the following elements:

- the declared costs are identifiable and verifiable, in particular have been recorded in the accounting system of the beneficiary;
- the equipment is properly registered in the inventory of the institution concerned.

Payment of services (Subcontracting)

For each service provided for the needs of the implementation of the grant, the grantee shall have:

- Regular invoice for the provided service.
- Service contract for intellectual services provided by external associates;
- Proof of the executed bank transfer;
- Proof for the payment of personal income tax;
- Proof for the payment of social and health contribution;
- Proof for the payment of other contributions according to National laws that may become applicable during project implementation;
- Copies of materials produced through intellectual services (trainings, analysis, researches, reports, or other evidence that verifies the provision of the respective intellectual service);

- The maximum amount allowed for cash payments is...
- For goods and services of the value beyond <specify the amount> grantee shall have three offers and select the most economic offer;

Payment of suppliers

Each partner must provide:
- The invoice for the purchased goods specifying all the information that a regular invoice should contain;
- Proof of bank transfer for the executed transfers.

Regular invoices

A regular invoice must include:
- Name, address and phone number of business/organization issuing the invoice;
- Name, address and phone number of the organization to which the invoice is issued (grantee);
- Fiscal number (applicable for both parties);
- Invoice number and date;
- Signature and stamp of the issuing party and signature of the person receiving the invoice;

Financial Reporting (Interim and Final)

For the interim financial report, it is necessary to submit:
- Detailed list of expenses according to the format-Financial Statement (ERASMUS+)
- Electronic copy of documentation - identical to the original.
- Bank statement for the accounts from where the entry and exit of the Contractual Agreement were made - original with the signature and stamp of the bank
- No justification will be asked to prove the level of expenses for staff salaries
- At financial reporting stage, a duly filled-in staff convention for each person engaged by the project must be attached to the project accounts and retained by the coordinator as supporting documents.
- The conventions must be signed by the person concerned, then signed and stamped by the person responsible (e.g., the dean) in the institution where this person is normally engaged.
- For staff performing different categories of tasks a separate convention must be signed for each type of activity.

- At financial reporting stage, for each journey, an Individual Mobility Report must be attached to the project accounts and retained by the coordinator as supporting documents. Supporting documentation will have to be attached to each mobility report in order to demonstrate the fact that the trip actually took place (e.g., travel tickets, boarding passes, invoices, receipts, attendance list).
- Supporting documents regarding Travel costs and Costs of Stay should not be sent with the financial report at the end of the project.
- The Individual Mobility Reports should, however, be retained with the project accounts.
- For the category of Equipment, Invoice(s) for all purchased equipment are required (note that order forms, pro-forma invoices, quotations or estimates are not considered as proof of expenditure).
- When the threshold of EUR 25 000 is exceeded, documentation on the tendering procedures. In such cases, the beneficiaries may not split the purchase of equipment into smaller contracts with lower individual amounts.

- In the case of travel activities of subcontracted service provider, individual travel reports together with all copies of travel tickets, boarding passes, invoices and receipts.
- The aim of the supporting documentation is to demonstrate the actual cost of the travel and the fact that the trip actually took place.

Budget reallocations

Request for budget reallocation must be sent in advance to any donor;
* The written request should contain a detailed justification of the need and budget lines for which the reallocation is requested. Same applies in case there is a need to add a new budget line to which the reallocated budget is to be assigned.
**Reallocation can be performed only when receiving the information from the donor that the request is approved.
If the request for budget reallocation is approved by the donor, each partner is obliged to keep the communication/information in the contract dossier.

No cost extension

Requests for project extension without additional costs may be approved only in exceptional cases when:

- delays in project implementation occurred because of internal and external factors on which the grantee did not have any influence, and;
- the extended period of the existing activity(s) or additional activity(s) clearly provide an added value to achieve project results.

Besides exceptional cases, the request should be sent at least 60 calendar days prior to the conclusion of the grant implementation period.

If the request for no-cost extension is approved by the donor, each partner is obliged to keep the communication/information in the contract dossier.

Financial records

During the project duration, each partner shall keep the financial records proving that paid expenses are in line with the approved budget. Attached to the financial report, each partner shall also keep the original documents of expenditures (invoices, contracts, payments receipts, as well as all other necessary supporting documentation. According to the contract and the legislation in force, the accounting records should be kept for 5 years after the execution of the last financial transaction.

Conflict of Interest

Partners/grant beneficiaries must take all measures to prevent or end any situation that compromises the achievement of the objectives impartially. Conflict of interest may arise as a result of economic interest, political and ethnic rapprochement, family and emotional ties, or other ties where interest is shared between the parties.

- Any conflict of interest that arises during the implementation of grant Agreement must be reported immediately in writing to the donor (or to the lead applicant).
- In cases of such conflicts, the partner (beneficiary) must immediately take the necessary steps to resolve it.
- Donor reserves the right to verify that the measures taken by the grant recipients/partners (beneficiaries) are appropriate and may request additional intervention in cases it deems necessary.
- Each partner (beneficiary) must ensure that the staff of the organization / entity, including managerial staff, is not placed in a situation that could create a conflict of interest.
- Each partner (beneficiary) must respect human rights and apply labour and environmental legislation.

4.VISIBILITY

Partners/project beneficiaries must take all necessary steps to publicize the fact that the contracting authority has financed or co-financed the action. As far as possible, actions that are wholly or partially funded by the contracting authority must incorporate information and communication activities designed to raise the awareness of specific or general audiences. Partners/project beneficiaries must comply with the objectives and priorities and guarantee the visibility of the contracting authority.

The guideline is integral part of the contract therefore partners/ project beneficiaries are obliged to respect the specified requirements. For any inquiry or additional information, partners/ project beneficiaries may contact the person designated by the respective donor or lead applicant (in the case of ERASMUS+ projects) to ask questions and request clarifications prior to publishing the information.

For potential questions or requirements not included in this guideline, Coordinator might need up to 5 working days for review and response. In exceptional cases, Coordinator reserves the right to extend the deadline for revision and response. In such cases, Coordinator will make sure to inform the grantees on due time.

The dissemination and exploitation of project results

The dissemination and exploitation of project results also increases awareness of the opportunities offered by the Programme and highlights the European added value of activities supported by Erasmus+. It is fundamental to consider the aims and objectives of the dissemination and exploitation plan. These should link to the project aims to ensure that the methods and approaches used are appropriate for the Erasmus+ project and its results, as well as for the identified target audiences.

Dissemination and exploitation goals are significantly related to:
- raise awareness;
- extend the impact;
- engage stakeholders and target groups;
- share solutions and know how;
- influence policy and practice;
- develop new partnerships

Requirements

Partners/project beneficiaries are responsible for the adequate communication and promotion of activities that are part of projects supported by the scheme/s.
The contracting authority reserve the right to use and promote the communication and visibility materials, and products, during and after the end of the project timeframe. In addition, the above authorities shall be entitled to use and reproduce all publications and audio-visual products without the need for permission and requirement for payment.

Communication and promotion channels

Communication and promotion occur throughout project implementation. Communication and promotion actions must have a logical sequence, so that they correspond to the actual stage of the project, and ensure achievement of maximum visibility and outreach. Furthermore, grantees should be careful in selecting the promotion methodology and approach so that it fits the targeted audience and their interests.

Printed communication

In general, hardcopy materials such as project factsheets, leaflets, brochures and newsletters, should also be provided electronically so that they could be sent via email or posted on websites. All publications should contain the logo of the donor and those of partners and disclaimer presented in the most adequate part enabling easy identification. For project activities involving targeted beneficiaries and/or external participants, the banner/ presentations/ materials should always be placed in an appropriate location.

Online communication and visibility (websites, articles, newsletters, blogs)

The activities supported through the scheme should be posted on social media channels as soon as they are organized (not later than two days from the organization date), and the donor and partners should be tagged in each post.

The website of the grantee should include the logo of the donor and partners as well. If the design of the entire website or any sub-section is supported by the grant, the grantee must ensure that the supporting clause is included in the website or the respective link.
When publishing articles, newsletters and blogs, besides the supporting clause, the disclaimer shown in section Visual Identity, should also be presented and placed in the most adequate part enabling easy identification. When information is to be produced also in hardcopy, in addition to the above, the logo of donor and respective partners should also be presented.

Information campaigns and events

The materials to be used in information campaigns should always contain the supporting clause along with the logo of the donor and partners. When materials contain information beyond the general information of the project, disclaimer should also be included.When organizing public events, partners/project beneficiaries should make sure that requirements of the visual identity are properly addressed. Depending on the targeted outreach, each beneficiary should make sure that events are covered appropriately by the media. Dates of the public events should always be organized in coordination with the donor.

Audio-visual materials, pictures and other publications

Audio-visual productions should contain the supporting clause, logos of the donor and partners.
Partners/project beneficiaries shall ensure that copies in their final professional format are saved in the respective folders of each partner.
If images of persons, their voices or any other private personal attributes feature in a recognizable manner in the communication and visibility results, it is the sole responsibility of the beneficiary (and partners if applicable) to obtain statements from the persons concerned (or, in the case of minors, from the persons exercising parental authority) giving their consent for the specified use of their image, voice or other private personal attribute.

Each beneficiary must take the requisite steps to obtain such consent in accordance with the legal provisions applicable.

Logo of the donor and partners

Logo of the donor (and partners if applicable) should be present in each material. In case other logos are presented, logos of the main supporting donors should be presented first. Logos for should be presented in the same place and in similar dimensions.

Supporting clause

Supporting clause is to be used in every presentation, announcement and/or material related to the activities supported by the project.

Disclaimer

For publications such as analysis, research and reports that contain information, findings and/or recommendations respective disclaimer should be used.

5. MONITORING, EVALUATION & AUDIT

Monitoring process includes an overall system and procedures of reviewing, tracking, and reporting on different projects managed or lead (the case of ERASMUS+ projects) by POLIS University. The monitoring process is accomplished through technical assistance, desk review, on-site review, and on-going communication.

Monitoring procedures

It is the responsibility of the grant beneficiary to periodically report on the proper implementation of proposed activities. Grant Manager, Finance Officer, or any other person authorized by the donor usually monitors the evaluation of the activities/WPs. The purpose is to assess and evaluate the capability of beneficiaries (or partners if applicable) to accomplish the overall aim of the grant, its affectivity in implementation in the field and to ensure the correct use of funds in compliance with the anticipated budget. Donor responsible staff usually conduct at least one monitoring visit per projects that have a duration of less than 6 months, and at least two monitoring visits per projects that have the duration of over 12 months.

Monitoring Reports and onsite visits

These are some rules and explanatory notes regarding onsite visits. Visits should be conducted with reference to the documents below:

- the contract, including the log frame matrix (timeline activities and indicators), addenda, reallocations/amendments (by notification);
- frequent reports, if applicable;
- reports of any meetings or previous project visits;
- project/beneficiary website/ social media.

A list of issues for discussion, for instance, coming out of the contract addenda/progress/frequent reports, where appropriate, should be sent prior to the onsite visit to the beneficiary, partner or third party which is in charge for the implementation of a specific activity/working package, etc. The monitoring report contains a checklist, which represents a non-exhaustive list of actions to take/ questions to ask/issues to check during project visits by the project manager and the finance manager together.

The assigned staff for the onsite visit will assess another set of issues regarding project progress, reporting, management, sustainability, budget, procurement, and visibility. Where documentation should be checked, this does not need to be done on a 100% basis; rather a sample (either random or selected on some objective basis – e.g., size of payments/procurement) should be examined. In the end, the grants manager in collaboration with the finance manager should make a summary of the issues discussed and the recommendations left for the beneficiary, partner, third party, etc.

Dedicated staff engaged with the monitoring task usually prepares an evaluation report based on the onsite visits. The report conducted after the monitoring visit must be shared with the beneficiary (partner). Both parties have to sign the report.
The beneficiary institution has the responsibility to reflect the recommendations during the remaining period of the project implementation.

Compulsory external audit

An external audit report (audit type II) on the action's financial statement and underlying accounts must be sent with the Final Report and the required supporting documents (for ERASMUS+ projects).

The purpose of the audit is to provide the donor with a reasonable assurance that the costs as well as the receipts have been declared in the Final Financial Report in accordance with the relevant legal and financial provisions of the Grant Agreement.

Each beneficiary is free to choose a qualified external auditor, including its statutory external auditor, provided that the following cumulative requirements are met:

- the external auditor must be independent from the beneficiary;
- the external auditor must be qualified to carry out statutory audits of accounting documents in accordance with national legislation implementing the Directive on statutory audits of annual accounts and consolidated accounts or any European Union legislation replacing this Directive.

A beneficiary established in a third country must comply with equivalent national regulations in the audit field.

Supporting documents

When required, readable copies (not originals) of the supporting documents must be sent. If there are doubts on any particular point, the donor may request that all the supporting documents be forwarded.

- Submitting the required supporting documents is an integral part of the agreement obligations and failure to submit one or more documents may lead to a request for reimbursement of the corresponding expenses.
- Copies of subcontracts and invoices along with procurement procedures exceeding EUR 25 000 (for ERASMUS+ projects) must be sent with the Final Report.
- Quotations from at least three suppliers must be obtained for all purchases of equipment and services in excess of EUR 25 000 (for ERASMUS+ projects), irrespective of the budget heading.

Brief description of DRIVE

o Project background

Research and innovation are fundamental for the development of any country in today's globalized and knowledge driven economy, and higher education institutions hold an important role in the innovation system of a country. The higher education system in both Albania and Kosovo saw a robust increase of student participation and institutional expansion of the system within less than a decade (2006 – 2015). This proliferation of student intake and institutions has brought about increased access, but it has also posed numerous challenges for the student population, academic staff and new institutions in both the public and private sectors. Due to the young age of most institutions as well as the limited legacy in terms of research capacities from the past (for historic reasons), these challenges pertain largely to the research activity as well. It is not surprising therefore, that both countries score poorly in almost all indicators regarding research, innovation and competitiveness. Considering the identified limitations at national and institutional level for capacity building in research and innovation, it becomes imperative to rely on the expertise of HEIs in programme countries, and an integral support for 3 years in the form of a targeted CBHE project.

DRIVE – “Developing research and innovation capacities in Albania and Kosovo”, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and led by Polis University brings together 8 partners. The project adopts an integral and systemic approach towards the capacity building process for research and innovation in Albania and Kosovo, identifying several target groups and their specific needs, and tailoring the project activities to such needs. In addition to capacity building and exchange of experience with EU partners, the project foresees establishing new structures in 4 HEIs that will focus on research and innovation adopting an inter-disciplinary approach and eventually a close cooperation with partners from businesses and industry in line with the quadruple helix goals. Other HEIs will reinforce existing structures in place. Furthermore, the openness of HEIs towards other partners, local and international, will be further enhanced through the development of a network, supported also by a virtual platform that will ease the interaction and synergy among the members.

1.2 Project aim and objectives

The general objective of this project is to contribute in the development of the research and innovation capacities of HEIs in Albania and Kosovo by enhancing their institutional capabilities, staff skills and networking.

Specifically, the project intends to:

1. Enhance the teachers' capacities and their methodologies so that they effectively equip the students (graduate level and beyond) with the skills to conduct independent research.
2. Enhance the mentors' capacities to effectively guide the students in their research activity.
3. Enhance the research capacities of the academic and managerial staff through study visits and tailored trainings.
4. Strengthen the managerial capacities for research activities and innovation in institutional level by setting or strengthening dedicated research and innovation support structures (RISS).
5. Promote research excellence and innovation by developing a network that eases the interdisciplinarity and cooperation among local and international actors.

1.3 Project partners

DRIVE – "Developing research and innovation capacities in Albania and Kosovo", co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and led by Polis University brings together 8 partners:

P1 - Polis University – Lead Partner
P2 - Polytechnic University of Tirana – Project Partner
P3 - European University of Tirana – Project Partner
P4 - University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" – Project Partner
P5 - University of Gjakova "Fehmi Agani" – Project Partner
P6 - Universum College – Project Partner
P7 - Hamburg University of Technology - Project Partner
P8 – Politecnico di Milan – Project Partner
P9 – Aalborg University – Project Partner

- DRIVE Communication Strategy

This section presents the overall approach to the communication strategy for DRIVE Project. It is based on the assumption that all project partners are willing to disseminate the results of the project within their institutions and network, also including all other events they participate. There is a slight risk of lack of attention to the importance of dissemination, but partners are experienced in project development and appreciate the relevance of dissemination and communication.

o Communication Strategy Aim

The aim of this communication strategy is to ensure that the results and activities of DRIVE Project are fully disseminated to project partner, target group, stakeholders and public at large.
The strategy focuses on internal communication and particularly external one, with the aim to gather key stakeholders around DRIVE agenda and ensure that all project outputs and results are transferred outside the partnership and disseminated and used in the most effective way. In order to achieve such objective, transparent instruments of communication will be used, as well as adequate and timely inclusion of the targeted audience for the project.

The Dissemination Strategy ensures a smooth roll out of key messages, while synchronizing targeted outreach with project implementation milestones. In order to ensure cohesive delivery of project outputs and results, internal communication activities will be performed concurrent to the external ones.
DRIVE Communications Strategy aims at:

- ensuring effective communication,
- consistent and efficient communication,
- ensuring the visibility of the project and Erasmus+ programme,
- contributing to sustainability of DRIVE Project and embeddedness of results in all project partners.

o Internal project environment affecting communication strategy

All project partners are bound by the Erasmus+ rules regarding communication and dissemination. In addition to that, all project partners are experienced in project development and thus in utilizing communication and dissemination tools. More so, PPs have existing cooperation with media channels in a combination of digital, print and broadcast outlets, which can adequately be used in the communications plan in order to ensure successful implementation of the communications strategy objectives of DRIVE.

o External environment affecting communication strategy

The external environment assessment affecting communication is performed through the use of the PESTEL (Political Social, Economic, Environmental, and Legal environments) tool. The use of PESTEL tool enables identification of key societal drivers which open up new opportunities for more effective and efficient communication or pose certain threats which need to be considered when designing the communication plan of the project. The PESTEL analysis for the needs of the communications strategy of DRIVE is provided in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 PESTEL Analysis	
Political	• Democratic societies with well-developed information sectors which are characterized with a variety of state and non-state media as are: print and broadcast media, many digital newspapers, many online media. • Societies with democratically elected and appointed officials, established government structures on local, regional and national level, which should support good communication of the project with various officials.
Economic	• Liberal economies, where the traditional participants in the information sector are gradually disappearing (print newspapers, broadcast TV and similar) due to low market demand and due to the entry of companies with new business models based on technology. Price is the key driver; • Market oriented participants in the economies, predominantly SMEs who have vested interest in sustaining their operations and growing at national, regional and global markets.
Social	• Emerging culture among the majority of the age groups in the region which favors a two way / many to many communications. • New generations which like to actively participate in the mass communication avoiding the role of a mere spectator i.e just reciever of the information typical for the traditional print and broadcast media. • Clutter of information, information sources and types;
Technological	a. High penetration of Internet and use among all age groups, and among all business entities in the region, which facilitates digital two way / many to many communciations.
Legal	b. The region has an enabling legal environment for both, traditional and digital communications. Legal frames for protection of privacy and identity are in force in all countries of the EU and also to a certain extent in WV.

o SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis help us in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the consortium and the opportunities and threats existing in the external environment when it comes to the communication of the project and its results. This is named a SWOT analysis.

Table 2.1 SWOT Analysis

Strength	*Weaknesses*
1. Established organizations in their respected communities; 2. Established network with a variety of stakeholders; 3. Established cooperation with a combination of media partners, predominantly in the digital media outlets; 4. Budget for External expertise and creative design.	5. Limited internal expertise for video and multimedia productions;
Opportunities	***Threats***
— Low-cost new media, digital communications; — Target groups well versed in the use of digital media for communication purposes	Lack of attention by public/ stakeholders.

o Principles: Integrated Communications Strategy

In the case of DRIVE, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) will be utilized. The IMC is defined as a concept of communications planning that recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of tactics, for instance general printing, direct response, and public relations, and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact. IMC is based on the use of a combination of media drivers, which deliver the message to the final target audience. Each element of the IMC mix integrates with the other communication tools so that a unified message is consistently reinforced at each contact point with the target audience.

The communication strategy of the project is based on the following principles:

Innovative and forward-looking: new media (Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter Instagram.) provide many opportunities for communication both with the general public as well as with specific target groups and intermediate and final beneficiaries. The project will utilize new media as an integral part of the communication strategy, creating integration with traditional communication tools.

Simple: the project aims to keep to clear, consistent and understandable messages to its different audiences.

Cooperative: in order to make best use of the available resources, the project will try to involve the different partners as well as beneficiaries in the communication strategy as much as possible.

Interactive: the project will make an effort to listen to and incorporate feedback from its target groups and beneficiaries in order to increase interest in its activities and achievements and fine-tune its messages.

Targeted: a generic approach to communication could lead to important target groups not being addressed. The project will customize its communication efforts for each target group identified in order to ensure that the message reaches the relevant actors.

Inclusive: PPs are from different countries. It is therefore important to provide access to information about the project to different target groups.

Accountable: the communication plan itself will be monitored and evaluated according to the project activities plan and specifically to the relation between communication goal, target group/beneficiary, message and communication timing. Furthermore, the focus on communication strategy will change depending on the stage in the project implementation, reflecting the priorities relevant to that stage.

- External and internal communication mix

According to the European Commission (2004), in order to ensure a successful Communication and Dissemination Strategy, the following actions must take place:

– Define the message
– Target the audience
– Select tools
– Plan the programme

These four elements are examined in the context of the project and within the External and the internal communications.

o External Communications

3.1.1 Message

The message for dissemination will be developed based on each activity and result of DRIVE Project and will be consulted with P2 – Leader for WP7 Dissemination and P1 – Leader Partner and in charge of management. All partners can contribute to the definition of the message, particularly so if they are organizing activities and preparing reports and other outputs.

3.1.2 Key Target Audiences

The main target audiences of the project are lecturers and academics, researchers and scientists, innovators, project managers, students, public authorities at central and local level, NGOs, interest groups, SMEs, research centres, higher education institutions, development partners, donors, general public.

The listed actors will be involved in the project through implementation of various activities as are dissemination and communication, awareness raising, educational/training activities and through the access to the Network. The dissemination and communication activities (info days, conferences) will target all of the aforementioned groups as shown below.

3.1.3 Tools

The dissemination plan aims also to give partners an overview of channels of communication for the implementation of communication activities. The Consortia will apply an Integrated Communications approach. The project will have its logo, creative strategy and message which will be placed at every point of contact with the target group and the public in general. The consortia will apply a combination of traditional and digital media channels and tools to reach the target group along with the standard direct communication at project activities.

Based on the Dissemination Strategy the project will develop the following activities:

- Project visual identity materials like flyers, posters, roll-ups, brochures, promotional video, interactive and user-friendly website, modular learning and information materials will be developed. The materials will be tailored to the context and the preferences of the target groups, also materials like postcards or film clips will be used to attract young learners.
- Newsletters will be published every six months announcing and reporting about relevant achievements and events.
- Tailor-made publications will inform and attract different target and user groups, e.g. students, enterprises, HR-experts, researchers, networks and administrations.
- A project website shall be dedicated to the project results, with a special corner using interactive features such as “forum”, “contact your peer” section. Such website goes in line with the main focus of DRIVE, to create an innovation and research network in the Western Balkans. The website will also contain a subscribe section where new researchers express their interest in being part on virtual forums and potential meetings.

More specifically, there are four main groups of communication tools which will be used in the external communication of the Project:

Digital media:

o Project webpage;
o Project partners' websites;
o Social Media avatars: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube;
o Electronic newsletters following project implementation.
o Video.
o Online articles, blogs, reports and publications.

Traditional publications and broadcasts:

- National studies, reports, training materials
- Publications of articles, interviews in newspapers or specialized magazines in each of the PP countries;
- Interviews for radio programs.
- Interview for television programs.
- Interim dissemination evaluation report
- Final dissemination evaluation report

Traditional promotional sets:

o Project informational leaflets
o Project poster
o Project roll up
o Promotional material (folders, notebooks, pens)

Events

• Project kick off/ Launching event
• Project managerial meetings
• Trainings and field visits will be delivered both, face-to-face and online.
• Info days - National info days will be organized for each of the participating partner countries with pilot presentations. These info days will serve also for the participation of third parties.

Representatives from local and national businesses, industry, and governance will be invited, introducing to them also the Research and Innovation Network
• One Conference will be organized in Albania in the first year of the project implementation and the next one in Kosovo in the second year of the project implementation.

• **Final conference -**

A final conference will be organised to attract regional researchers and potential network partners from all 6 WB countries; or researchers who are not from these countries but who focus in studying the region. It aims to regionally disseminate and discuss project results. It will be held in the premises of the coordinator (POLIS University), and all the partners of the Project Consortium will attend this event.

• Since the research and innovation network will be launched during this Conference, stakeholders like local and national businesses, representatives from industry as well as National/

State bodies, responsible for the policies and quality of research, will attend this activity.

3.1.4 Plan

The plan for external communication will follow the plan of activities of the project implementation.

Internal Communications

The internal communications define the communication among the project partners and between the project consortia and the Lead Partner. The main premises on which this communication will be based are:

a. Transparency;
b. Openness;
c. Participation;
d. Inclusion in the decision-making process.

3.2.1 Message

The message for dissemination will be developed based on each activity and result of DRIVE Project and will be consulted with P2 – Leader for WP7 Dissemination and P1 – Leader Partner and in charge of management. All partners can contribute to the definition of the message, particularly so if they are organizing activities and preparing reports and other outputs.

3.2.2 Key Internal Target Audiences

The project has a Steering Committee and a Project Team. The steering Committee is made out of representatives from all project partners. Members are officially appointed by the legal representative of their institutions. In line with the guidelines, grant agreement and partnership agreements, the Steering Committee decides with all votes on important project implementation matters and monitors its progress.

The Project Team consist of the Project Manager, the Financial Manager, contact points at each PP and the work packages coordinators. The Lead partner communicates with the EACEA on all issues related to project implementation, while Project Partners communicate on all issues with the Lead Partner.

3.2.3 Tools

The Communication mix and tools for the internal communication among the project partners and between the lead partner and EACEA will be facilitated through the use of following communication direct and electronic communication tools:

Direct communication

Project meetings and Steering Committee meetings. The project team will have official project meetings and two half day project meetings held in the period of both Project conferences. The Steering committee will have project meetings during the project duration. The project meetings are organized by the Lead Partner and the hosting partner.

Electronic communication

- o Day –to-day electronic communication by e-mails on a daily base
- o Regular video or skype call
- o Document sharing platform implemented to facilitate the exchange of project document - Google Drive
- o Bilateral Skype meetings with project partners on demand and on every issue of concern.

3.2.4 Plan

The plan for internal communication will follow the plan of activities of the project implementation and organized as per the needs of each partner during project implementation.

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- Visual Identity

o Project Logo

A strong visual identity is essential to a wide and effective dissemination of the project results. This is why a consistent and recognisable visual identity has been developed. It will be used across all products to guarantee a common look and feel and ensure consistency in the targets' mind.

DRIVE DEVELOPING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CAPACITIES IN ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

All visual identity will adhere to Erasmus+ Guidelines and the project communication strategy.

o Programme Logo

The European Union emblem (flag) must be used and the name of the European Union displayed in full. The name of the Erasmus+ programme can appear with the flag. The preferred option is to write "Co-funded by" or "With the support of", then "the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union" next to the EU flag. E.g., "Co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union" or "With the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union".

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Annex I Project Partner Dissemination Report – Indicators

This Document has the scope of the provision of Dissemination Information by the Partners to the WP7 Leader in every three months. The input will be used for the preparation of the General Dissemination Reports. Please, in case you provide further evidence about your activities (photos, documents or other files), please attach them with reference to the Dissemination Activity Number and Partner Number as per template provided for news item and website update.

Partner's Name: ____
Partner's Number: _____
Month of Reporting: _________

Dissemination Activity Number	Date	Scale (Regional, National, International)	Target Groups	Number of People Reached	Description of the dissemination action	Evidence (Links to articles, Videos etc)
1						
2						
3						

Annex II Event planning checklist

Before the event

- Tasks are allocated to all organizers
- Invitations and registration
- Budgeting
- Welcoming participants
- Venue, coffee breaks and catering
- Agenda (Speakers? Moderator?)
- Photographer
- Set up script or roadmap of all details of the event
- Invitations sent out in time (speakers, media and participants)
- Social media and website are updated before the event
- Make a block reservation at a recommended accommodation, that are included in practical information for participants
- Upon registration, participants receive a confirmation email with the final version of the agenda + practical information / info pack
- All organisers are briefed to answer frequently asked questions
- Speakers (and the moderator) are briefed
- All presentations are compiled and checked
- Check technical equipment

During the event

- A reception desk is available for registration
- Registration sheets
- Name badges arranged in alphabetical order
- Conference packs (if applicable) and promotional materials (if any)
- Place labels and water are available for speakers
- Conference room equipment is checked
  - Laptops with presentations
  - Multimedia Projectors and screens
  - Cables and electricity sockets
  - Microphones, sound system; persons available for handing out microphones
  - Air conditioning and lights
- Enough toilet facilities are available
- There are recycle bins in the conference room
- Access for people with disabilities is ensured
- All activities comply with the publicity requirements (e.g., EU flag on display)

After the event

- Event documents and photos are uploaded to your website
- all social media are updated with results / photo of the event
- Thank you notes sent to all participants and guests
- Conclusions made based on feedback forms and debriefing
- All costs and fees are taken care of