GUIDEBOOK

HOW ESF MANAGING AUTHORITIES AND INTERMEDIATE BODIES SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP
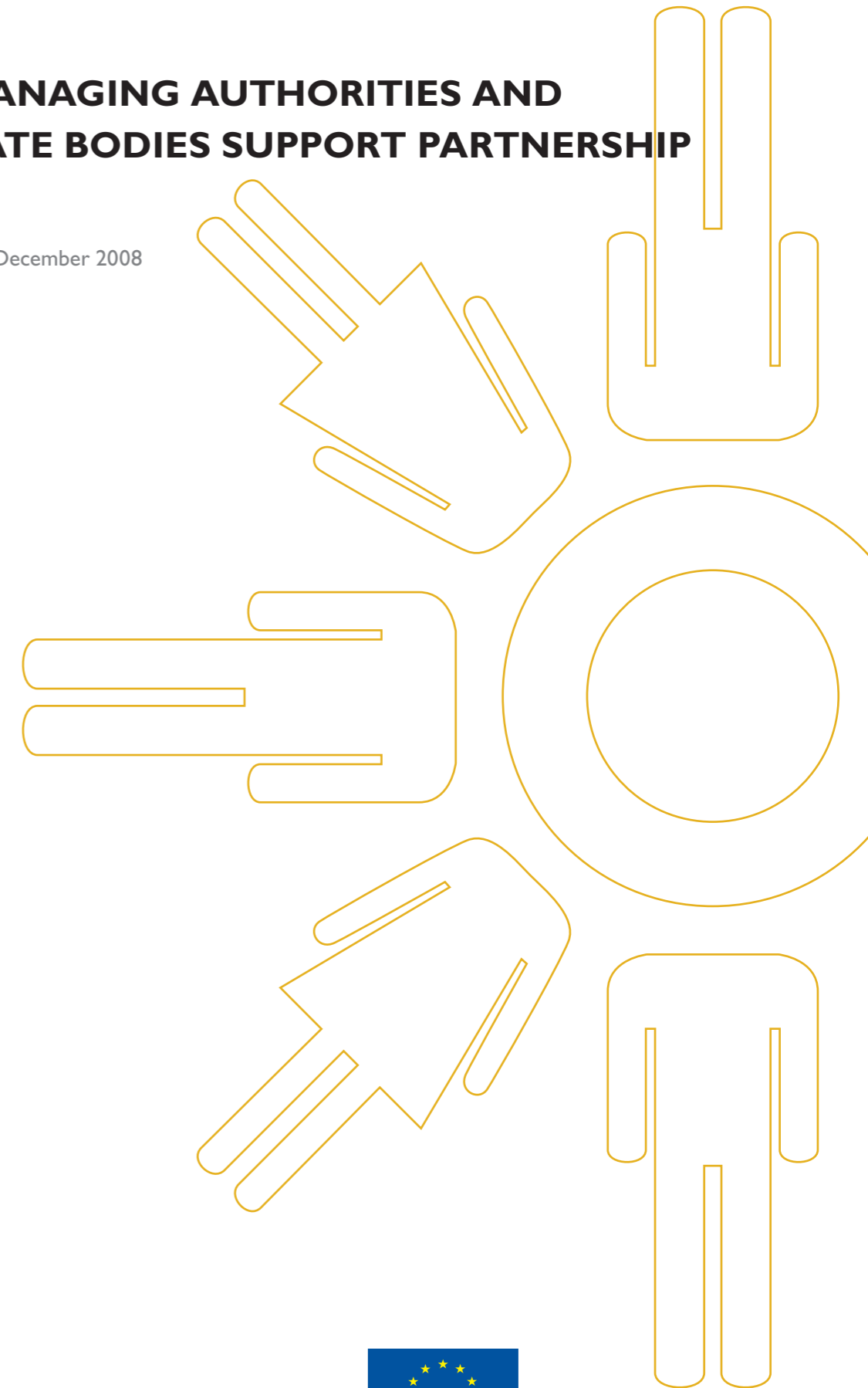
Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF O

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

In 2006 the Managing Authority of Flanders in Belgium, together with Managing Autho-rities in Portugal, Austria, Czech Republic and Malta, decided to set up a "Community of Practice" on partnership in the European Social Fund (ESF).

The need for this Community arose, on the one hand, from the desire to capitalise on the vast experience concerning working in partnership gained in the EQUAL programme, and, on the other hand, the need to take into account the emphasis placed on partnership in the ESF regulation for the new structural funds period. This regulation refers both to the involvement of stakeholders, including social partners, in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes, as well as the provision of financial support to multi-actor projects. In addition, the regulation encourages convergence regions to build social partner capacity through ESF projects in order to ensure an effective governance system at national, regional and/or local level.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are commonly defined as "groups of people who share a passion for something that they know how to do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better". The knowledge gained and shared between 2006 and 2008 by members of the Community from all over the European Union, is presented in this guidebook.

It is hoped that Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies and other stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of European Social Fund programmes will find it a helpful tool to realise their commitment to partnership, as envisaged in the ESF regulation.

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GLOSSARY

CoP	Community of Practice
DP	Development Partnership
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESP	Economic and Social Partners
ETG	European Thematic Group
EU	European Union
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MA	Managing Authority
OP	Operational Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
NTN	National Thematic Network
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PA	Public Administration
ROP	Regional Operational Partnership
RSP	Regional Skills Partnership
RTC	Regional Tripartite Committee
SFP	Structural Fund Partnership
TA	Technical Assistance
TEP	Territorial Employment Pact

INTRODUCTION

In order to deliver the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the European Union has placed great emphasis on partnership with Member States and social partners, "to facilitate and speed up delivery of the reforms needed to boost growth and employment."[1] The EU's Cohesion Policy tasks the Structural Funds with encouraging partnerships between different sectors and regions to promote economic growth, social inclusion and employment opportunities. Within this framework European Social Fund (ESF) regulations regarding partnership refer both to the involvement of stakeholders, including social partners,[2] in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes, as well as the provision of financial support to multi-actor projects. For convergence regions,[3] social partner capacity, seen as critical for ensuring an effective governance system at national, regional and/or local level, can also be built through projects.[4]

Incorporating these two concepts of partnership into ESF Operational Programmes across the European Union is a challenging process. Many Member States have limited experience of working in partnership, while those with a stronger history of collaboration note that partnering is not without difficulties and requires a considerable investment of time and energy. In both cases, promoting a deeper understanding of the overall rationale and added-value of working in partnership is perceived to be important.

The purpose of the guidebook is primarily to assist ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies to promote and support partnership in Operational Programmes. However, in addition to these audiences, the guide is intended to be of use to governance bodies involved in OP decision-making processes, such as Evaluation, Monitoring or Steering Committees, as well as those coordinating and building partnerships at project level. It is also hoped that the information outlined will be of interest to decision-makers and assist their thinking with regard to appropriate policy support for partnership approaches.

The guide draws on the work of the Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF (see Annex 1) which has sought to examine and share information on partnership in the Operational Programmes of different Member States. While country contexts undoubtedly differ, generic success factors for endorsing partnership have been identified and the lessons from these diverse experiences not only provide examples of how partnership can be promoted and reinforced in line with ESF regulations (as both a governance mechanism and in relation to projects), but also in finding solutions to address the challenges encountered in working collaboratively.

1   Commission of the European Communities, Working Together for Growth and Jobs, A New Start for the Lisbon Strategy, Brussels, 2005, p.14.
2   Social partners are management and worker representatives (employers' organisations and trade unions).
3   For the purposes of funding, the European Union has been divided into competitiveness regions, regions that are phasing out from the funds and convergence regions which are fully eligible for funding. See http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/region/index_en.htm
4   Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, Official Journal of the EU, L 210, Volume 49, 31 July 2006 pp 12- 19

The guide is divided into two main sections:

The Rationale for Partnership

This part of the guide aims to provide a clear understanding of why the partnership principle is being promoted in the ESF and what its added value is. The rationale for partnership is situated within the wider policy framework adopted by the European Union which promotes partnership as a central delivery mechanism for the Lisbon Strategy. The reason for a focus on partnership within Structural Funds is explored by drawing out ten key and interlinking areas where partnering can assist in supporting Europe's employment, growth and social exclusion challenges: providing focus, coordination, access to resources, social capital, innovation, capacity-building, empowerment, legitimacy, stability and sustainability. Illustrations of each of these factors are provided with examples from different Member States. In addition a series of cautions and considerations are presented with the aim of drawing attention to the difficulties that may arise within each of these categories. In this way it is hoped that Managing Authorities will gain a deeper awareness of why working in partnership is so important while also reflecting upon, and seeking solutions to, the partnership implementation challenges that they may be confronted with.

The Key Success Factor Framework

The second section of the guide offers practical advice on how partnership can be encouraged throughout the Operational Programme cycle at both programme and project level. Overarching pointers that need to be taken into account throughout this cycle include: accountability, in order to ensure that Operational Programmes and partnership projects are held to account, can give an account of their activities and progress, and take into account the needs and concerns of stakeholders; participation and engagement so that relevant stakeholders are appropriately involved; skills-building to equip those developing partnerships to work effectively with different stakeholders; and an appreciation of time with the development of mechanisms to assist effective time-management during the process of partnership-building. A detailed framework is then provided that shares a series of factors that have been successfully used in different Member States to promote partnership during each distinct phase of the programme cycle:

✔ **Operational Programme Analysis and Design** – carrying out a contextual analysis, promoting an enabling environment, identifying synergies with other programmes, and encouraging stakeholder engagement in the analysis and design process.

✔ **Operation Programme Delivery Planning** – integrating stakeholders into programme procedures and setting up mechanisms for stakeholder involvement in projects.

✔ **Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals** – supporting incorporation of partnership in project proposals and assessing partnership rationale and implementation mechanisms.

✔ **Animation during Project Implementation** – providing ongoing support to partnership projects and building the capacity of stakeholders to actively participate in programme governance.

✔ **Monitoring and Evaluation** – Reporting on the status of partnership projects, promoting participatory evaluation at both programme and project level, and systematically feeding back lessons about partnership into practice.

At each stage of the cycle examples of practices that have worked successfully to endorse partnership in different Member States are given. A series of partnership pointers and tips from programme and project representatives, individual experts, NGO and social partner groupings are also provided.

The final section of the guide includes a list of references relating to partnership from both within the European Community and from external individuals and organisations. The annexes supply details of the work of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Partnership in the ESF, the templates employed by the CoP to obtain information on partnership implementation and good practices in Member States, and a selection of tables with information on how partnership has been approached in ESF Operational Programmes across 18 Member States.

"... European Social Fund (ESF) regulations regarding partnership refer both to the involvement of stakeholders, including social partners, in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes, as well as the provision of financial support to multi-actor projects."

THE RATIONALE FOR PARTNERSHIP

"Why work in partnership? Why invest in bringing partners together when it might be far simpler to proceed alone?" [5]

The central justification for working in partnership is that by drawing upon the resources and competencies of different social actors a common goal can be achieved in a more effective, legitimate and sustainable manner then when each operates separately.[6] Partnership has been endorsed as particularly appropriate for addressing the complex and multi-faceted issues that Europe's employment, social inclusion and human resource development policies are faced with which are "... too complex and interdependent for any one institution to effectively respond to alone."[7] The collective effort of different stakeholders is regarded by the European Union (EU) as central to the achievement of targets for the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.[8] In line with this thinking, the partnership principle is promoted as "fundamental to the implementation of European Cohesion Policy"[9] and the work of the Structural Funds where it is seen as, "… enhancing legitimacy, greater coordination, guaranteed transparency, and better absorption of funds through improved selection of projects and dissemination of information to potential project promoters."[10]

European Commission Regulations on Structural Funds position partnerships as central to the work of the European Social Fund (ESF):

With a view to better anticipating and managing change and increasing economic growth, employment opportunities for both women and men, and quality and productivity at work under the Regional competitiveness and employment and Convergence objectives, assistance from the ESF should focus, in particular, on improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises, enhancing human capital and access to employment and participation in the labour market, reinforcing the social inclusion of disadvantaged people, combating discrimination, encouraging economically inactive persons to enter the labour market and **promoting partnerships for reform**.[11]

5   European Commission, *The principle of partnership in the new ESF programmes (2007-13), A Framework for Programming, Unit B4 June 2006*

6   Tennyson, R. *The Partnering Toolbook, IBLF and GAIN, 2004 p.5.*

7   *The principle of partnership in the new ESF programmes (2007-13) (supra).*

8   *The Lisbon Growth and Jobs objectives are: total (public and private) investment of 3% of Europe's GDP in research and development by 2010 and an employment rate (the proportion of Europe's working age population in employment) of 70% by the same date. Funds are thus to be spent on procuring works, goods and services from all over the EU. EU 15 Member States are committed to earmarking for growth and jobs objectives at least 60% of Structural Funds Investment in convergence regions and 75% in regions under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective. See: http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/faqs/background/ index_en.htm (accessed November 12, 2008) and Commission of the European Communities, Working Together for Growth and Jobs, A New Start for the Lisbon Strategy, Brussels, 2005, p.14.*

9   European Commission, *Partnership in the 2000-2006 Programming Period, Analysis of the implementation of the partnership principle, Discussion Paper of DG Regio, November 2005, p. 3.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, Official Journal of the European Union, L 210/12, July 3, 2006*

The regulations make a distinction between two forms of partnership:

1. Partnership as a governance mechanism

The Member States shall ensure the involvement of the social partners and adequate consultation and participation of other stakeholders, at the appropriate territorial level, in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support. (ESF Reg., Art. 5)

2. Partnership in relation to projects

… promoting partnerships, pacts and initiatives through networking of relevant stakeholders, such as the social partners and non-governmental organisations, at the transnational, national, regional and local levels in order to mobilise for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness. (ESF Reg., Art. 3).

Special attention is also given to projects that increase the capacity of social partners to work in partnership:

Under the Convergence objective, an appropriate amount of ESF resources shall be allocated to capacity-building, which shall include training, networking measures, strengthening the social dialogue and activities jointly undertaken by the social partners, in particular as regards adaptability of workers and enterprises. (ESF Reg., Art. 5).

"The collective effort of different stakeholders is regarded by the European Union (EU) as central to the achievement of targets for the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs."

Working in partnership is not an easy option. Combining diverse organisational approaches, resources and styles can be extremely difficult and requires a considerable investment of time and energy. In addition, partnership as a model for addressing social issues has come under increasing scrutiny with calls for greater evidence of its accountability and impact. In order to raise awareness about partnering challenges and encourage those involved in developing ESF Operational Programmes to identify possible ways of addressing these, a series of cautions and considerations have also been provided in relation to each of the points below.[12]

12 In order to understand the thinking behind these concepts and embed a deeper understanding of why partnering is being so strongly promoted, members of the Community of Practice on Partnership (CoP) in the ESF explored the rationale for partnership in Structural Fund programmes. An expert panel then discussed, added to and validated the work carried out by CoP members. The many interrelated issues that emerged from this exercise were grouped under ten key headings. These are outlined in the table below with specific examples from the ESF Operational Programmes of different Member States (see Annex 3 and http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/223).

RATIONALE FOR PARTNERING	EXAMPLES	CAUTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
FOCUS		
By harnessing the perspectives and resources of different societal actors, we are able to more clearly identify gaps, needs and priorities relating to Europe's employment, social inclusion and human resource development challenges, and develop targeted approaches to address them. *"Working in partnership shows us more clearly where the gaps are and how we can address them better."* Zdenek Foltyn Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs Czech Republic	In **Sweden** focus is achieved through strong regional and political Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) in which politicians work alongside social partners, NGOs and representatives of the public and private sectors. SFPs act as selection boards for multi-stakeholder cooperation projects that best match the priorities of both ESF and ERDF plans.	Because different societal actors have diverse goals and agendas, which will vary according to the context of each Member State, agreeing on a focus and ensuring that action is targeted towards this, is not easy. Partnership programmes and projects must devote adequate time and energy to developing an agreed vision, and then an action plan for delivery.
COORDINATION		
Working in partnership can improve and synchronise policy coordination, targeting and adaptation of programmes and projects to local conditions so that reach is improved and duplication avoided. *"The partnership model assists a better use of synergies and helps to establish a common ground between actors responsible for labour market policy."* Anette Scoppetta TEP Co-ordination Unit (Kooo) Austria	In **Austria** Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) aim to better link employment policy with other policies in order to support employment policy objectives through improved coordination at regional and local levels. In **Romania** partnership is an instrument for planning at regional level and delivery at county and local levels and is viewed as assisting an integrated and decentralised approach to deliver employment and social inclusion policies.	The enemies of effective co-ordination include fixed ideas, a tradition of 'silo working', and too much haste in building a partnership and its strategy. Synchronisation and avoidance of duplication rest on robust preparatory work. This includes an assessment of prior partnership experiences, the identification of synergies with different actors, as well as linkages with relevant existing programmes and initiatives. Such analysis should lead to conscious decisions about how to build on what currently exists rather than on the often destructive efforts of creating new activities in a vacuum.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

A range of diverse resources from different stakeholders can be accessed in order to address particular problems and challenges.

"Partnership is centred on a rational division of work based on each partner's respective comparative advantages."

Maria do Carmo Nunes
EQUAL Programme
Portugal

In the **Czech Republic** project partnerships are particularly encouraged to draw on the specific organisational experiences and know-how of their members in a given regional or thematic field in order to use resources in a complementary way.

Combining different stakeholder resources is often conducted rapidly without an assessment of their suitability for a chosen goal and/or analysis of how they best complement other inputs.

Detailed 'resource mapping' of both financial and in-kind resources can assist in verifying the specific added value that different resources bring to a proposed programme or project. Using a tool for this and developing protocols which set out the inputs that partners will make, alongside the outcomes from which they will benefit, are also helpful.[13]

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Connections and relationships across different countries, regions, sectors and organisations can reinforce social networks while also promoting a deeper shared understanding of the value and importance of other sectors and their role in society.

"Cooperation will lead to dialogue, experience exchange and improvement of routines and processes in the organisations involved."

Lena Rogeland
EQUAL National Thematic Group on Partnership
Sweden

In the **Netherlands** partnership assists and reinforces a strong 'partnership' tradition related to social dialogue and links among social partners, municipalities and ministries, and a long history of programme and project development that builds upon pre-existing collaboration.

In **Estonia** linkages with umbrella organisations[14] representing social partners and NGOs are seen as guaranteeing solid connections with target groups while also ensuring that programme managers responsible for ESF implementation have grassroots feedback to inform their work.

Contextual issues particular to different Member States can impact on the different types and levels of relationships, and the connections between them. In addition, both time and the solid and consistent organisational interaction that builds mutual respect and trust among societal actors are often overlooked.

Crucial for promoting partnership is the need to find ways of moving beyond individuals representing organisations to wider institutional connections and buy-in. Ultimately social capital will only be created when empathy is derived from unpacking what drives different individuals and institutions to behave as they do in the specific contexts in which they operate.

INNOVATION

More creative, new and dynamic approaches to societal challenges are engendered by sharing diverse perspectives, ideas and resources.

"Partnerships are primarily about the development of new approaches."

Benedict Wauters
ESF Agency
Flanders

Partnership projects in **Portugal** are oriented towards developing new and integrated approaches with a view to influencing social cohesion policies in favour of vulnerable groups.

Space for the development of new approaches can be limited by obstacles at organisational (e.g. lack of internal buy-in) and inter-organisational levels (e.g. misunderstandings between partners), as well as in relation to the wider context (e.g. legal and institutional frameworks that limit the development of partnership approaches).

It is helpful to identify potential blockages to partnership innovation at the levels mentioned above and make decisions about whether it is possible to influence, circumvent or redirect them.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

Beyond simple accessing of resources, working in partnership with different actors can also enhance the opportunities for building and improving strategic and operative capacity in order to overcome resources / size / skills limitations.

"Partnership promotes more effective social and civil dialogue through capacity-building civil society and social partners."

Alison Mizzi
Planning & Priorities Coordination Division
Office of the Prime Minister
Malta

In **Malta** the limited administrative capacity of social partners and civil society organisations is being addressed through a focus area of the ESF OP which deals with the promotion of more effective social and civil dialogue.

In **Estonia** one of the OPs offers institutions representing employees the possibility of enhancing their capacity as a partner for governmental institutions.

Capacity-building those actors who may not easily be able to participate in partnership programmes and projects demands time, commitment and resources. It also relies upon a clear awareness of the importance of offering training and support facilities for working in partnership.

Programmes or institutions will benefit by developing an action plan for capacity-building, and integrating this to form part of a partnership learning culture.

13 See *Building a Resource Map* in Tennyson, R. *The Partnering Toolbook, 2004 (IBLF & GAIN) p.13*

14 An umbrella organisation is an association of institutions with a common interest that work together to coordinate activities or pool resources.

EMPOWERMENT

Improved capacity and direct engagement with target groups should enable those who are disadvantaged/marginalised to have a stronger voice in the political arena and take a more proactive role in addressing issues that affect them.

"Partnerships promote empowerment of actors, the increase of trustful relationships as well as the competencies for working together."

CRISTINA IOVA
ESF MANAGING AUTHORITY
ROMANIA

In **Italy** the principle of empowerment is centred on the active involvement of all stakeholders, including final beneficiaries, and is promoted at all partnership levels.

In **Greece** partnership is viewed as the best way of encouraging the participation of the highest possible number of actors to reinforce inclusion and mediation processes with respect to an increasingly heterogeneous and constantly changing social fabric.

Empowerment is often diluted by lack of genuine stakeholder engagement or, conversely, by expending time and resources in conducting wide participatory exercises when simpler response mechanisms and/or more focussed approaches would work equally well.

Finding the best channels for different groups to participate in decisions that concern their lives, and understanding the reasons for none or low participation, both from and within different groups, can help to identify where a stronger or more representative voice might be encouraged. It should also be understood that a responsive approach to problem-solving may not always involve extensive participation as channels for proper suggestions /grievance mechanisms such as public hearings, help desks, etc can be more efficient and effective.

LEGITIMACY

Wider stakeholder mobilisation can give a more democratic policy 'mandate' as involvement and support of organisations that are 'trusted' by society can increase public acceptance of necessary reforms while at the same time encourage more responsive policy approaches to problem-solving.

"Partnership offers a new multi-level model of governance."

PAOLA ANDREANI
INSTITUTE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
WORKERS VOCATIONAL TRAINING (ISFOL)
ITALY

In **Lithuania** and the **Netherlands** partnership is regarded as encouraging wider involvement in policy-shaping and decision-making processes at both policy and project level.

In **Hungary** one of the OPs focuses on supporting partnership between the administration and social partners in order to strengthen participatory democracy and improve social outcomes at both local and regional levels.

Partnership can sometimes undermine democracy if decisions are apparently taken by an elite group whose legitimacy is not clear. Collaborative governance approaches can also be cumbersome to develop and maintain.

It is important that partnership is firmly anchored in the democratic process and that accountability is clearly demonstrated in both stake-holder relationships and decision-making procedures.

STABILITY

The inclusion of civil society concerns in strategic planning exercises, stimulation of corporate involvement in local projects and greater satisfaction with public policy, can contribute to a more integrated and cohesive society.

"Partnership is a cooperation model which promotes democracy and equality by giving an added value to existing practices and policies and going further to improve quality of life and social cohesion."

RANIA OIKONOMOU
CIP EQUAL
GREECE

In **Ireland** partnership promotion in the ESF mirrors the country's social partnership model which is an established and accepted form of governance and participation. Social partners and NGOs are familiar with working within this structure and understand how to participate in a meaningful and constructive manner.

There is concern that partnerships co-opt and divide civil society groups by diluting their mandate and encouraging them to adopt less confrontational demands for change. In addition, if expectations are raised and responses are inadequate this may lead to frustration and disappointment and thus reduce, rather than assist, stability and cohesion.

It is important to ensure that civil society concerns have been genuinely taken on board and responded to in a systematic and accountable manner as it is the predictability of an institutionalised process which leads to stability.

SUSTAINABILITY

By promoting societal engagement, joint ownership and mutual benefit, working in collaboration can promote long-term, durable and positive change that addresses social problems in an accountable way and integrates learning within, between and across different actors in society.

"Partnership is a learning process in which the knowledge and experience accumulated generates new collective knowledge and experience that is incorporated into ongoing policy developments."

MARIA RAUCH
ESF PARTNERSHIP EXPERT

In **Austria** evaluations show that TEPs have proved their added value by adapting measures to local circumstances and target groups; increasing the involvement of actors in labour market and employment policy; successfully linking policy areas at regional, sub-regional and local levels and contributing to the better coherence of objectives related to labour market and economic policies; improving effectiveness, efficiency and transparency in labour market policy through the use of continuous and systematic procedures; and securing financial support for the regions.

Weak evaluation and mainstreaming processes that do not share lessons that demonstrate the added value of partnership reduce the possibility of lasting long-term change.

Effective monitoring and evaluation systems showing the added benefit of working in partnership need to be put in place. The lessons from these processes also require appropriate dissemination and action in order to impact policy changes and ensure the development of appropriate strategies for the future.

Most Member States see partnership as developing positive new and integrated approaches that promote social cohesion and endorse all ten of the factors outlined above (see Annex 3, Table 10). However, a range of drawbacks to promoting partnership have also been identified (see Annex 3, Table 11). Some of these relate to particular historical and social contexts and the impact of these on the development of partnerships, while others concern the time investment required to start up and build collaborative relationships. The difficulties of ensuring engagement at particular levels are also highlighted, particularly where social partners and civil society organisations lack capacity. In some countries too, there is disquiet about the possibility that partnership implementation may become "a formal procedure" rather than a dynamic and innovative contribution to achieving the Lisbon objectives and creating durable change.

The following chapter offers a framework for addressing some of these challenges at both programme and project level.
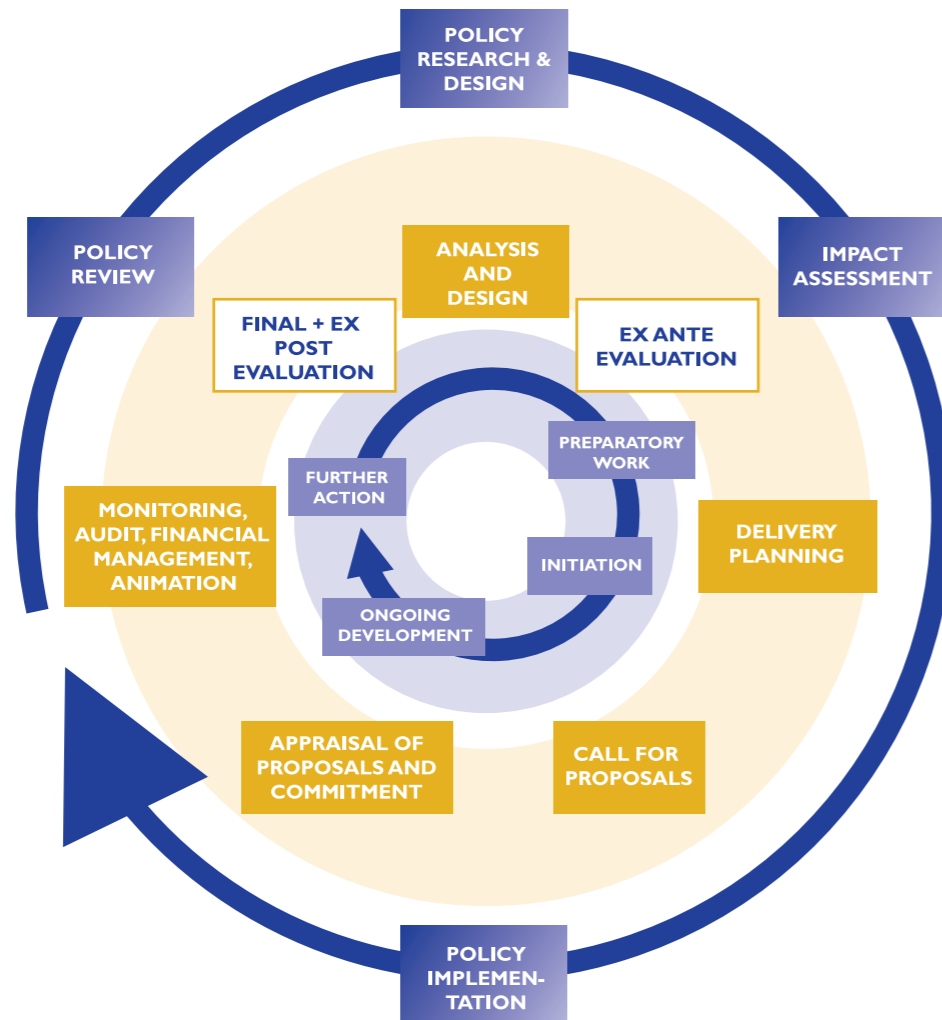
THE KEY SUCCESS FACTOR FRAMEWORK

"Successful partnership promotion depends upon creating the right environment at programme level." [15]

The programme cycle

Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies have a key role to play in promoting and supporting partnerships. Ensuring sustainability and long-term impact depends upon developing linkages within, between and across different institutional levels. Programme work provides the essential link between policy and project levels and ideally placed to share learning about partnership that will influence policy changes.[16]

POLICY RESEARCH & DESIGN

POLICY REVIEW

ANALYSIS AND DESIGN

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

FINAL + EX POST EVALUATION

EX ANTE EVALUATION

FURTHER ACTION

PREPARATORY WORK

MONITORING, AUDIT, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, ANIMATION

INITIATION

DELIVERY PLANNING

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

APPRAISAL OF PROPOSALS AND COMMITMENT

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

POLICY IMPLEMEN-TATION

The policy, programme and project cycles

15   Comment from partnership project interviewee, June 2008
16   See European Commission, Sourcebook on Sound Planning of ESF programmes, 2006

For the purpose of this guide, this framework has been reduced to only five phases:

1. Operational Programme Analysis and Design
2. Operational Programme Delivery Planning
3. Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals
4. Animation during Project Implementation
5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Each of these phases has been carefully analysed across a selection of Member States in order to identify ways in which partnership can be endorsed at distinct points in the development of Operational Programmes, and provide examples that demonstrate successful practice in doing so. This information forms the Key Success Factor Framework.

In pursuing this methodology a number of important provisos are necessary to bear in mind:

✔ Partnership needs to be understood at two levels; as a governance mechanism and as a project methodology.

✔ All partnership approaches are conditioned by particular environments and need to be viewed in relation to these specific and dynamic contexts.

✔ The phases outlined interlink and overlap, particularly monitoring and evaluation processes which are implicit throughout the programme cycle.

✔ Although the good practice examples shared here have been used to illustrate specific success factors, they may also be applied at other stages of the programme cycle.

Overarching pointers

Four overarching and mutually reinforcing issues are useful to bear in mind throughout the programme cycle as they can contribute to the development of successful partnership approaches at both governance and project level. These are:

Accountability: Ensuring that Operational Programmes and projects have standards and guidelines that hold them to account, can give an account of their activities and progress, and demonstrate that they take into account the needs and concerns of stakeholders.

Participation and engagement: Ensuring that all relevant stakeholders participate appropriately during the different phases of the programme cycle, and engagement options are also promoted and shared at project level.

Skills-building: Ensuring that those developing partnerships at programme or project level have (or can obtain) the necessary skills for working with different stakeholders.

Appreciation of time: Ensuring that the time needed to develop partnership is acknowledged and that ways are developed to assist effective time-management during the process of partnership-building.

Accountability

Accountability is a central component of good governance[17] which has been identified as vital to Structural Fund provision.[18] In this context the basic premise of good governance is that institutions and actors involved in ESF programmes and projects should ensure that decision-making and implementation are conducted in an open, inclusive and responsible manner. They can check that their partnership approaches at both programme and project level are accountable by ensuring they respond both internally and externally to the three key components of accountability: being held to account, giving an account and taking account.[19]

ACCOUNTABILITY			
	Being held to account	**Giving an account**	**Taking account**
General meaning	Stakeholders know what is required of them to achieve objectives. Clear standards and commitments are in place to which stakeholders must adhere.	Accessible information and documentation exists on decisions and related actions, performance and expected outcomes.	Stakeholder feedback is carefully considered and the reasons why a particular decision or action has been taken can be publicly demonstrated.
Action at governance level	The OP has outlined how their approach to partnership should be judged in relation to ESF regulations.	Appropriate mechanisms have been put in place by the OP to ensure that information on decision-making, finances and monitoring and evaluation is accessible.	The existence of channels for stakeholders to ask questions, make suggestions, state grievances etc. and hear how these have been taken into consideration and/or had an impact on the functioning or activities of the OP.
Action at project level	Projects are encouraged to abide by clear rules and procedures and clarify roles and responsibilities. Project partners sign up to clear standards and commitments.	The OP supports projects with clear and accessible guidance and advice and promotes the importance of transparent information-sharing among project partners.	The OP ensures that information on projects is publicly available. It also encourages partners to demonstrate how they have taken target group concerns on board and why particular decisions/actions have been taken.

> *Keep accountability in mind at all stages of your work!*

Participation and Engagement

Both participation and engagement of stakeholders are central to partnership. Here participation describes the simple act of sharing in partnership activities, while engagement is a generic term that describes the broad range of stakeholder interactions with an Operational Programme or partnership project. The involvement of different stakeholders will vary, and require adjustment, according to time, context, the nature of particular groups and the programme/ project development phase. Engagement may range from a limited or passive association to a more dynamic connection in which the lead is taken in a decision or activity. A broad range of possible stakeholder engagement levels in different OP and project phases are identified below.

STAKEHOLDERS:		
4	STEER	Lead particular steps or activities in the work of the OP or project
3	INFLUENCE	Participate directly in decision-making in the OP or project, have a vote
2	ARE CONSULTED	Involved in discussion about the OP or project and able to express opinions & give feedback
1	ARE INFORMED	Receive information about the OP or project and are made aware of its work/activities

The categories portrayed above are not static and within each there are enormous degrees of variance. In addition, the passive levels (1 and 2) are not necessarily less worthy than the more active ones (3 and 4). What is important is to ensure that the most appropriate mechanisms are tailored appropriately for the contribution of different groups and that the chosen engagement option is not contrived as a substitute for genuine participation. Accusations of manipulation can be made when engagement focuses on simply ticking boxes or rubber-stamping desired objectives without giving stakeholders real legitimacy or providing guarantees that their contribution will be heeded.

When working in partnership, organisational commitment, as opposed to just that of individuals, is crucial. Change is only

" ... the basic premise of good governance is that institutions and actors involved in ESF pro- grammes and projects should ensure that decision-making and implementation are conducted in an open, inclusive and responsi- ble manner."

17 See Commission of the European Communities, European Governance, A White Paper, Brussels, 25.7.2001, COM(2001) 428 Final The European Commission's White Paper on European Governance suggests that openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence are key elements of good governance.

18 Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, Official Journal of the European Union, L 210/12, July 3, 2006

19 Caplan, K. Partnership Accountability: Unpacking the Concept, BPD, June 2005

likely to take place when institutions, as opposed to 'personalities', are fully involved in partnership programmes and projects. Organisational representatives should have a clear 'licence to operate' and this mandate needs to be checked regularly. At the same time efforts should be made to find ways to promote internal buy-in and promote active institutional ownership of partnership activities. This centres on a clear organisational understanding of why working in partnership is important, confidence in the solutions that partnership can bring, and the capacity to implement partnering in policies and practices.

Central to institutional buy-in, and improved stakeholder engagement generally, is openness to investigating both the visibility and invisibility, of individuals, groups and organisations in partnership activities. This involves looking beyond those who apparently 'speak' on behalf of particular stakeholders, to those who do not. The latter are often important representatives of target groups, or the most vulnerable or excluded members of them, and thus the most necessary to involve. The table below offers a checklist of some of the reasons why there may be low or non-engagement among stakeholders and suggests possible options for addressing them.[20]

Low or non-participation could suggest that individuals/groups are:	In which case the programme or project may need to:
Disenfranchised Have no 'say' or not asked to participate in right way	Reassess channels of engagement
Indifferent Benefits are unclear and / there may be a weariness towards efforts that, from past experience, are unlikely to yield results	Identify, clarify and review incentives for participation among these individuals/groups
Intimidated Feel unwelcome, lack confidence	Examine operational culture in order to find ways to encourage them
Under-resourced Lack time, money, seniority, educational levels etc.	Examine implicit criteria for participating e.g. timing of activities, resources and capacity-building needs.
Unrecognised Invisible and unacknowledged, have not even been considered	Revise approach and activities in order to incorporate 'missing' stakeholders
Waiting Need to be convinced that participation is worthwhile	Anticipate triggers for participation through focussed consultation and / achievement of early tangible results

> **Broad stakeholder engagement should be followed by efforts to deepen and improve its quality!**

Skills-building

Working in partnership and managing relationships across different sectors requires particular skills. As well as technical and programme management skills, a range of 'soft' skills such as interpersonal and relationship-building abilities are valuable for working in partnership. Different skills are naturally required at different phases of programme and project development but we may generally find that those necessary throughout include:

KEY SKILLS	
ADVOCACY	Raising awareness about the rationale for partnership and why this is a useful way of working in the ESF – transmitting this to stakeholders at both programme and project level.
BROKERING	Bringing stakeholders and partners together by acting as an intermediary or facilitator, especially in the early stages of developing programmes and projects.
CAPACITY-BUILDING	Supporting the development of skills for working in partnership at both programme and project level, especially for those who lack capacity to work in this way.
COMMUNICATION	Ability to engage stakeholders and partners at programme and project level, and share information through oral and written channels of communication.
LEADERSHIP	Championing and promoting partnership with flexibility, insight, sensitivity to different audiences and strong convening skills.
MANAGEMENT	Sound administration, coordination and planning skills.
MONITORING & EVALUATION	Assessing both programme and project work to ensure that it is meeting objectives, reviewing, revising and assessing partnership approaches and their impact.
NEGOTIATION	Being equipped to dialogue, balance and facilitate different interests and experiences on an equitable basis and mediate where there is conflict.
NETWORKING	Developing and maintaining learning networks between individuals and organisations where experiences and practices can be shared.

> **Find ways of integrating partnership into routine skills training!**

20 Drawn from Stott, L. & Keatman, T. Tools for Community Engagement in Partnership, BPD, 2005.

Appreciation of time

"When working in partnership, organisational commitment, as opposed to just that of individuals, is crucial."

Time is often mentioned as the key challenge in developing partnerships. Working in collaboration can be slow and add an extra resource burden to individuals and organisations already busy with other day-to-day activities. This is particularly the case at the start of a programme or project when the mechanisms for working in partnership have not yet been developed or institutionalised.

Although the time factor is always an issue those with a long partnership trajectory stress that this can be addressed somewhat by ensuring that:

✔ Clear, simple and accessible guidelines are in place with advice on rules and procedures for working in partnership.

✔ The incentives of different stakeholders and partners for working together are clearly identified and aligned.

✔ Roles and responsibilities are clearly established and information about these is disseminated appropriately.

✔ Quick milestones are achieved jointly that demonstrate the added value of partnership.

The building of trust that emerges from the process of working together can also limit time issues as partners and stakeholders learn to respect and rely up one another. This has a "self-sustaining effect"[21] that enables smoother and more efficient collaboration.

Spend time building good relationships – it will reduce the burden later!

The framework

1. Operational Programme Analysis and Design

"Partnerships and their activities are not created in a vacuum but must be framed around the specific contexts in which they operate." [22]

In order to prepare the foundations for developing an OP, a thorough analysis of the particular context in which it will operate is important. Such a study will assist in identification of key target groups and relevant stakeholders, and ascertain where partnership solutions may yield added value to particular policy areas. At the same time the existence of both positive and negative triggers and drivers for/against partnership can be recognised and work undertaken to promote an 'enabling environment' by making use of those that favour a partnership approach, or, alternatively, dealing with those that may impede this. Stakeholder identification and engagement are central to this process as the participation of different social actors in the analysis, design and writing of the Operational Programme document can ensure that it is appropriate in terms of focus and scope.

1.1 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Conduct a careful study of your particular country context with identification of key target groups for programmes and clarification of their needs in order to identify major policy areas where partnership solutions can yield added value.

Partnership approaches in the Operational Programmes of different Member States are governed by particular and changing country contexts. Good practice rests on ensuring that chosen partnership options, numbers, size and scope are both 'fit for purpose' in relation to the needs of target groups and flexible enough to respond to change (See Annex 3, Tables 1, 2 and 3 for information on numbers, geographical and thematic focus of OPs in different Member States). A thorough background study may involve review of:

✔ The country's geographical/ historical/social/political/economic/cultural situation
✔ The urgency of need among different target groups
✔ Positive/negative government policies and legal/regulatory frameworks that might impact programmes
✔ The nature and extent of previous partnership activities in addressing social challenges
✔ The existence of reputable intermediary organisations who can work across different sectors
✔ Availability of skilled individuals capable of working with different stakeholders

21   Geddes, M.N. comment at Expert Workshop, London October 29th, 2008

22   Caplan, K, Gomme, J., Mugabi, J. & Stott, L. Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the drivers for success, BPD, London, 2007

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS IN AUSTRIA

In Austria a system of Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) was established country-wide in the late 1990s to develop and co-fund projects at regional, sub-regional and local levels in order to link policy areas and reach out to those on the margins of the labour market and bring them into the mainstream. TEPs now assist in the implementation of the ESF Operational Programme for Employment (2007-2013) with a focus on Priority 3b which calls for innovative projects for the integration of persons distant from the labour market.

Contextual analysis showed that 6% of the Austrian population are poor and 13.2% are in danger of becoming poor (Sozialbericht 2003/2004). The reasons for poverty relate to a number of factors such as discontinuation in employment; vulnerable job positions where the unskilled labour force faces higher risks of becoming poor; atypical employment in which social security is marginal (15% of independent workers are poor, part-time workers) and a gender gap whereby the income of women is below that of males and 87% of female workers work part-time. Responsibility for supporting those within this target group lies with the Labour Market Service, Regional Governments, Cities and Municipalities. Good cooperation between these institutions is vital for improved assistance in dealing with their personal, social and labour market problems. Although these institutions already work together within the TEPs, contextual analysis demonstrated that this cooperation required deepening for this specific target group. The overall strategic aim of Priority 3b is thus centred on improving integration of marginalised groups into the labour market through testing and developing innovative measures, and improved cooperation of institutions.

At the end of 2007 the first call for proposals was launched for projects at the interface of labour market and social policy with the target group defined as beneficiaries of social welfare and those without financial support. It was agreed that only TEPS could apply and that all partners should agree on the project focus based on a joint analysis, strategy and implementation plan. In addition funding would only be given to innovative projects and measures. These could include both new projects and projects adapted from EQUAL Development Partnerships.

Quality criteria for Priority 3b were established by the TEPs with the nation-wide TEP Coordination Unit (Kooo). In terms of TEP structure this means that the TEP should be responsible for the overall project so that all relevant partners are integrated, that the action space of TEPs is enlarged, that institutional, financial, legal and economic barriers are overcome and communication gaps minimised. With regard to project implementation criteria are established for the overall strategy as well as for the quality of activities, sustainability and monitoring and evaluation.

This involves a focus on the following areas:

- **System development** e.g. improved interface between labour market and social policy.

- **Structural innovations** e.g. single dedicated support points like one-stop shops for target groups.

- **Implementation of holistic approaches for solving problems** e.g. integration chains and mixtures of activities and target groups.

Demand-oriented integration has been central to a partnership in Vienna that consists of 8 strategic, 12 operative and 3 financing partners. The target group is youth, migrants, social welfare beneficiaries and drug addicts for whom 11 coordinated measures have been devised including support in finding employment, social worker assistance, social advice, counselling, crisis intervention, housing and health measures. The target group is thus supported cohesively through a holistic bundle of innovative measures and cooperation is promoted between actors.

In using TEPs and enlarging the scope of their activities by making good use of their unique collaborative position, Priority 3b assists in closing gaps and mobilising reforms in social and labour market policies; implementing innovative measures and improving the situation of the poorest.

Co-ordination Unit of Austrian TEPs, Kooo
http://www.pakte.at   http://www.zsi.at
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/363

" ... the existence of both positive and negative triggers and drivers for/ against partnership can be recognised and work undertaken to promote an 'enabling environment' by making use of those that favour a partnership approach, or, alternatively, dealing with those that may impede this."

OTHER EXAMPLES

In **Romania** the ESF Managing Authority was responsible for conducting a contextual analysis prior to the country's accession to the EU. As well as providing the basis for negotiation, this document served as the key programming document for the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and Operational Programme. The analysis showed high levels of poverty, especially in non-urban areas; the urgent need for creating social inclusion mechanisms for disadvantaged groups; and a requirement for the improvement of active labour market policies. As well as the need to work in partnership with the most relevant policy actors for the programming exercise at national level, it was clear that partnership mechanisms at regional and local levels were needed to capacity-build actors for decision-making and action in order to address the diversity of regional and local problems.

Within this framework a background analysis regarding employment and social inclusion in each region was conducted via meetings and discussions with all relevant actors at regional and county levels. In the North East region, for example, more then 200 actors were involved. In addition to baseline information the analysis also identified local initiatives that operated as existing and potential partnerships. This allowed the elaboration of a Regional Employment and Social Inclusion Action Plan for each region alongside the construction of a partnership model with strong support from an enlarged network of regional and local actors.

The Regional Pacts for Employment and Social Inclusion model also includes Technical Secretariats that provide support to the Pacts. Because the Operational Programme was finalised in parallel with the development of the partnership model it was possible to include a key priority area for funding the Technical Secretariats across the whole country and the creation of an enabling framework for partnership projects.

http://www.fseromania.ro/

KEY POINTERS

Invest time in conducting a thorough contextual analysis.
Use this study as an opportunity to deepen and reinforce the rationale for working in partnership.

Keep open the possibility of changing objectives during the design process!

1.2 PROMOTING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT[23]

Find ways to reduce barriers to partnership implementation outside ESF Operational Programmes by pressing for positive government policies and supportive legal and administrative frameworks, addressing regulatory issues such as tendering requirements, promoting good cross-sectoral relations and a culture of cooperation, working with intermediary organisations capable of bringing different institutions together, and providing opportunities for increasing partnership skills and expertise.

A contextual analysis (see 1.1 above) can help identify where there are openings and/or blockages that assist and/or limit a partnership approach in different Member States. In this way partnership 'enablers' and 'disenablers' can be identified relating to the policy/legal environment; sector relationships; and the internal cohesion of the programme delivery agency itself. It is worth noting that sometimes an apparent challenge can actually serve to stimulate partnering e.g. a particular incident or crisis can provoke different sectors to work together systematically to address an urgent resulting need. In any case the following questions are worth asking:

"... sometimes an apparent challenge can actually serve to stimulate partnering ..."

✔ **Programme consistency:** Is partnership fully understood and endorsed by programme managers? Is there a sufficient partnership expertise and skills base? Are senior staff supportive of working in partnership?

✔ **Relationships between sectors:** Are sectoral relationships positive/negative? What is the history of cross-sector collaboration? Can positive experiences be built upon and integrated into the design of the OP?

✔ **Wider environment:** How far does the legal/regulatory environment favour or impede working in partnership? Is the overall policy context favourable / restricting to multi-stakeholder collaboration?

If obstacles to partnership are identified at these different levels, decisions need to be made about whether programme managers should address them by seeking to:

✔ **Influence or overcome** – address and change the blockage directly e.g. by appealing to policy decision-makers in order to make legal changes that assist partnership promotion or working to address lack of skills, knowledge and expertise so that a partnership programme is able to develop more effectively.

23 This section draws extensively from Newborne, P. & Caplan, K. Creating Space for Innovation, BPD, London, 2006, which also provides a useful discussion tool for exploring and addressing challenges to partnership innovation. See http://www.bpd-waterandsanitation.org/bpd/web/d/doc_113.pdf

✔ **Circumvent** – move around the obstacle by finding innovative ways of addressing it e.g. working around legal and regulatory impediments and/or enlisting the support of other organisations to push through partnership activities alongside the ESF.

✔ **Redirect** – shift the partnership focus e.g. by using a different approach or location.

ADDRESSING LEGAL IMPEDIMENTS TO PARTNERSHIP IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In the Czech Republic, in line with EU legislative requirements, partnership is promoted at both programme and project levels. At programme level the concept is well established and relevant stakeholders are involved in the preparation of the OPs and compose membership of Monitoring Committees. At project level, however, legislative drawbacks were encountered in 2004-6 when it was discovered that partnership was not defined in relevant national legislation and public procurement regulations applied to partners as they could be considered as 'suppliers'. This had a major impact on the EQUAL programme by endangering the implementation of partnership projects.

In order to address the situation the Managing Authority worked to put the Amendment of the Act on Budgetary Rules (no. 218/2000) in place. This means that although partnership was still not legally defined it could nonetheless be supported. In order to further assist this, sample contracts between project promoters and partners were published on the web alongside typical examples of partners and suppliers in ESF projects.

In the programming period (2007-13), although there are no extra points for working in partnership, it is encouraged and supported. Guidance to applicants centres on ensuring that partnership is not obligatory (unless specified in the call); that it must not replace the provision of routine administrative work on the project and the provision of standard services or delivery of goods, and must not be used to bypass public procurement law.

Two types of projects exist: <u>Non-financial partnerships</u> which are individual projects based on public procurement prepared and implemented by the state administration at ministerial or regional level, and <u>financial partnerships</u> for grant projects in which partners are specified in the application and agreements are signed between the project promoter and partners within 2 months of receiving the grant decision. These agreements include definition of roles, activities, a budget breakdown, rights and obligations. In essence, partners have to fulfil the same eligibility criteria as the project promoter, but only the project promoter (one institution) can be the grant recipient.

The partnership project application must also include a clear description of the added value it can bring. The application is then assessed carefully in order to ensure that projects with 'hidden suppliers' are excluded and the partnership is not 'artificial'.

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic
http://www.esfcr.cz
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/257

OTHER EXAMPLES

In Austria and Ireland intermediary organisations exist that have assisted in the promotion of an enabling environment for partnership. In Ireland Pobal's work has assisted in promoting cross-sector collaboration as an established and accepted form of governance and participation, while in Austria the TEP Coordination Unit, Kooo, has assisted the involvement of actors in labour market and employment policy and successfully linked these policy areas at regional, sub-regional and local levels.
http://www.pakte.at   http://www.zsi.at
http://www.pobal.ie

In Greece facilitation of the EQUAL programme was enabled by the implementation of a law which regulated the legal status of Development Partnerships. This law assisted in the promotion of social cohesion and multi-sectoral involvement in decision-making procedures.
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/235
http://www.equal-greece.gr

In Portugal a postgraduate Partnership Project Management course was developed with a special focus on managers and technicians of EQUAL Development Partnerships. The purpose of the course was to develop personal, interpersonal and technical skills to achieve effective partnership project management.
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/237
http://www.equal.pt

Key Pointers

Conduct an assessment of the factors that both favour and obstruct working in partnership at different levels.
Build upon partnership 'enablers'.
Prioritise 'disenablers' and spend time addressing them.

Find innovative ways to address contextual challenges!

1.3 IDENTIFICATION OF SYNERGIES

> Make connections to key existing national/regional/local programmes, structures and strategies related to the focus areas of your programme.

" ... it is useful to coordinate with established structures and traditions of social dialogue ..."

Intrinsic to the promotion of an enabling environment is the identification of existing partnership synergies which can be built upon to inform the work of an OP. Here it is useful to coordinate with established structures and traditions of social dialogue in the wider context, as well as previous partnership experiences and programmes in similar areas developed by other funding agencies. Attention has been drawn by social partners to the importance of ensuring synergies between the ESF and other financial instruments used to support social partner activities such as the three autonomous budget headings exclusively dedicated to the support of European social dialogue, and the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS.[24] Complementing the work of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can also assist a more harmonious development approach that reinforces existing social connections and avoids funding duplication. At project level it is also important that the OP supports a multi-dimensional approach that integrates partnership as a solution for addressing problems where necessary and appropriate. Links should therefore also be sought in line with findings from the contextual analysis (see 1.1. above) e.g. in the case of Austria where criteria have been developed to ascertain clearly where partnership is needed.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Austria** the Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) link employment policy with other policies in order to improve the employment situation at regional and local level. The partnerships balance the interests of partners and elaborate linkages between institutions in order to find joint solutions and promote synergies between national and regional programmes such as the ESF OP Employment Austria (2007-2013) and regional ERDF OPs.
http://www.pakte.at   http://www.zsi.at

In **England (UK)** the OP has sought to complement and add value to existing regional structures and strategies, rather than create new ones, by giving a leading role to Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) which have brought key regional planning and funding stakeholders together to address skills and employment priorities within each region of the country.
http://www.esf.gov.uk/

In **Italy** many of the 21 Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) work with Regional Tripartite Committees (RTCs). The RTCs are made up of representatives from social partners and employers' associations and act as coordination bodies in which training system and employment policies that fall under the remit of regional government are proposed, assessed and evaluated.
http://www.lavoro.gov.it/lavoro   http://www.isfol.it

In the **Netherlands** the OP reinforces existing partnership arrangements between municipalities, national employment centres (CWI) and the national executive body for employee insurances (UWV) which exist outside the ESF, are promoted by law and are fairly institutionalised. They have also provided incentives and co-funding to complement sector funds run by social partners for (vocational) education and training of employees that were set up long before the ESF.
http://www.agentschapszw.nl

KEY POINTERS

Use the process of identifying synergies to minimise duplication and build upon progress to date.
Carefully examine Structural Fund connections e.g. between ESF and ERDF.

Build creatively and strategically upon what is already there!

24 See http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/docs/tp_complementarity_en.pdf (accessed December 3, 2008)

1.4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN THE OP ANALYSIS AND DESIGN PROCESS

> Clearly identify stakeholders and encourage them to participate in the analysis, design and writing of the Operational Programme document.

" ... it is useful to think beyond traditional partners and look imaginatively at the possibility of involving wider connections from other key groups ..."

The contextual analysis will reveal which key stakeholders are important to involve in the Operational Programme analysis and design process. ESF regulations emphasise the need to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of key players such as social partners, government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The importance of different social actors and the contribution that they can make will differ in each Member State. In all cases, it is useful to think beyond traditional partners and look imaginatively at the possibility of involving wider connections from other key groups such as academic institutions and think tanks, business coalitions, chambers of commerce, workers education associations and training bodies, and different civil society, voluntary or community organisations. Wider NGO connections have been highlighted as something that programmes could promote more actively.[25] Opportunities for this exist through links to more diverse networks and umbrella organisations that have close ties with target groups. Target groups can provide relevant and useful input into the writing of the OP document if given encouragement and the right channels for this. Ultimately the cultivation of these associations will assist better absorption of funds and ensure an improved selection of projects. Appropriate options for the involvement of different stakeholder groups in the OP design process will need to be carefully considered in relation to time, resources and context and may include meetings, consultations, surveys and workshops.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN OP ANALYSIS AND DESIGN HUNGARY

In Hungary about 4000 partner organisations, including trade unions, employee interest groups and non-governmental organisations, representatives of business, education and science, were invited to advise on the direction of the OPs. The general public was also able to access and comment on the OP via a webpage and workshops were organised to discuss draft versions with relevant professional and social partners and ministerial representatives.

Each of the programming documents (including Operational Programmes, Action Plans and calls for applications) are open to the public for debate via internet for at least a two week period before final approval. Opinions can be given on a dedicated website (http://www.nfu.hu/partnerseg) by registered users, either as individuals or as organisational representatives.

Apart from the internet-based discussion, key relevant stakeholders (including umbrella organisations) were contacted directly for their opinions on the OPs. All feedback is answered by the Managing Authority, in many cases in cooperation with line Ministries and the documents in question are then modified if the comments are approved. In case of rejection, justification is given to explain why such a decision has been made.

This approach appears to have been judged favourably as all relevant stakeholders are involved in the drafting of interventions. Documents are thus prepared, and decisions made, based upon information that guarantees greater acceptance by wider society while at the same time ensuring transparency. Disadvantages include the time-consuming nature of this type of dialogue and the administrative capacity required, especially at the introductory phase. In addition, sometimes good ideas are rejected due to lack of resources or no close relation to the overall objectives.

Website with list of partnerships and links to information and discussion pages

Those wishing to apply a similar system should consider the availability of human resources for professionally processing the opinions given, the need to clearly define objectives when using the consultation tool and elements of the document that might particularly benefit with input from a wider audience.

National Development Agency, Managing Authority for Human Resource Programmes
http://www.nfu.hu
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/361

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25 See for example Greening Regional Development Programmes Network (GRDPN)Partnership as a tool to green Regional Development Programmes, Experience and Recommendations, GRDP, Exeter, UK, 2006; Harvey, B. The Illusion of Inclusion, Access by NGOs to the Structural Funds in the new member states of central and eastern Europe, Report for the European Citizen Action Service, July 2004

OTHER EXAMPLES

In **England**, **UK** a formal country-wide consultation was conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions over a 3-month period. This exercise involved a wide range of different sector organisations including local authorities, regional and sub-regional partnerships and networks, voluntary and community organisations, private enterprises and higher education institutions, whose responses were used to make appropriate adjustments to the OP.
http://www.esf.gov.uk

In **Malta** stakeholder engagement in the analysis and design process for the ESF OP formed part of the overarching National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) consultation process which went through different layers of partner involvement. It included the setting up of four working groups on a number of priority areas, the organisation of a national SWOT workshop, and a number of public dialogues to which stakeholders and the general public were invited. Following inter-governmental discussion, the first draft of the OPs was published for public consultation through a press conference and formally presented for comments to the Malta Council for Social and Economic Development, a tri-partite consultative and advisory body on matters of economic and social policy representing the interests of government, unions and employers.
http://www.ppcd.gov.mt

Key Pointers

Draw upon the mandate and expertise of NGOs and social partners.[26]
Acknowledge the diversity of the NGO sector and seek input from more than just 'traditional' partners.
Ensure that the timing is right and that the consultation process is clear to the stakeholders involved.
Allow sufficient time for stakeholder feedback.
Share consultation outcomes e.g. through a workshop/report/website.

Systemise the consultation process!

2. Operational Programme Delivery Planning

"If stakeholders have influence on – rather than simply information about – the programming, they can input by bringing in the practical aspects of project implementation."[27]

The promotion of partnership at the delivery planning stage of the OP is focussed primarily on ensuring that the stakeholders identified in the analysis and design stage are firmly integrated into OP systems and decision-making processes. In order to ensure that stakeholder engagement is robust the identification and development of appropriate support structures that operate alongside ESF programmes may be required. At the same time clear frameworks and guidelines for participation are vital. Dedicating time to addressing stakeholder engagement systematically is a worthwhile investment as, if conducted carefully and methodically, it can impact positively on the ongoing work of the OP.

2.1 INTEGRATING STAKEHOLDERS INTO PROGRAMME PROCEDURES

Integrate relevant stakeholders into programme monitoring and decision-making procedures.

The systematic involvement of relevant stakeholders, including those from other programme/structures where synergies have been identified, is a useful way of strengthening the OP. This involves finding ways to ensure that appropriate representatives are involved in programme monitoring and decision-making procedures e.g. through Monitoring Committees.

"Dedicating time to addressing stakeholder engagement systematically is a worthwhile investment ..."

26   NGO pointers throughout text are drawn from Fazi, E. Putting Partnership in Practice: An NGO Perspective on the Key Success Factors, EAPN, CoP Presentation, Vienna, 20th February, 2008

27   Greening Regional Development Programmes Network (GRDPN) Partnership as a tool to green Regional Development Programmes, Experience and Recommendations, GRDP, Exeter, UK, 2006 p.5.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Sweden** Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) act as selection groups which give priority to project proposals that best match regional ESF plans. The SFPs are established by a law that stipulates their composition and tasks. Municipal and regional politicians must form more than 50% of SFP membership. The chairperson is appointed by government and selects the remaining members from social partners, NGOs and public authorities such as county councils, administrative and labour boards. In the northern part of Sweden the Sami Parliament are also represented. The SFPs create synergy and cooperation between the ESF and ERDF and, because they are politically-rooted, give a mandate to implement contributions for the labour market in the region.
http://www.esf.se

In **Estonia** special Monitoring/Steering Committees have been established to approve, monitor and review measures and/or activities. The Committees include partners at both OP and priority axis levels and the majority of places are reserved for social partners. Committee members are usually from umbrella organisations whose strong grassroots connections ensure a good two-way information flow between final beneficiaries, target groups and the ministries responsible for ESF implementation.
http://www.hm.ee

In **Romania** integration of stakeholders is promoted at regional, county and local level through analysis and design of Employment and Social Inclusion Pacts. More than 50 working groups have worked to identify and select ideas for projects.
http://www.fseromania.ro

KEY POINTERS

Ensure widespread participation in Monitoring Committees.
Ensure that the selection process for stakeholder input into programme procedures is transparent.

Have clear rules for appropriate stakeholder engagement!

2.2 SETTING UP MECHANISMS FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN PROJECTS

> Put mechanisms in place for stakeholder involvement in project planning and implementation processes and ensure that adequate time is dedicated to establishing partnership before delivery.

It is important that uniform and accountable mechanisms for stakeholder involvement in projects are developed e.g. through application forms, selection criteria, financial rules and reporting requirements. The careful elaboration of such mechanisms is helpful in ensuring that adequate time is dedicated to establishing partnership before delivery (see Annex 3: Tables 4 and 5 for information on partnership formalisation and partnership in application forms in different Member States).

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIP THROUGH APPLICATION FORMS IN FLANDERS

In Flanders (Belgium) the application forms for project proposals encourage partnerships in two ways:

First, the results based management philosophy behind the application form encourages project applicants to think in a holistic way (using a comprehensive problem analysis) about the issues they want to resolve and about what they want to achieve for a target group. This promotes the use of partnerships composed of relevant stakeholders when it becomes clear that no single actor is able to understand and/or tackle all the issues affecting the target group. The methodology then facilitates the reaching of a common understanding and consensus among stakeholders;

Second, the form also incorporates explicit questions regarding stakeholder involvement: it requests the identification of stakeholders and an explanation of why and how they are (or are not) involved in planning, implementation and evaluation. Next to this, the form also asks applicants to elaborate partnership management arrangements (identifying roles and responsibilities, tasks etc).

The application form is supported by a guide containing practical tools to help promoters provide high quality answers to the questions. All questions have a tool connected to them. The provision of these tools is intended to allow wide participation of stakeholders in the project formulation process by demystifying what makes a good proposal. The guide therefore also makes clear how the information in the proposal is used for appraisal.

Implementation of such an application system requires commitment from top management. The bottom-up philosophy (stakeholders coming together to figure

out a solution to a complex web of issues for the benefit of a target group) and results-oriented nature of the system can be quite revolutionary, especially in top-down cultures or where most attention goes to checking inputs rather than results, and can create negative reactions from programme personnel and stakeholders. This requires an unwavering leadership. It is also vital that programme personnel involved in appraisal of proposals have analytical minds and focus on results instead of simply complying with financial/audit rules. In this regard performance of personnel in the knowledge and use of the system should be incorporated into training and recruitment and be a key discussion item in annual personnel reviews. Programme level stakeholders should also receive training to understand what 'results oriented' means and why it is useful, while guides, experts, training and a dedicated help-desk should be put at the disposal of both projects and programme personnel. Finally, the objectives of the OP should themselves be formulated in terms of benefits for target groups in order to provide a good starting point for results oriented calls.

The system is transferable but is designed to work as a bottom-up approach to using the ESF. The call focuses on a single objective (linked closely to the OP) and then lets the stakeholders on the ground who are closest to the issues come up with a solution. The system does not work well with a top-down approach where the call itself already dictates what projects should be doing in terms of activities. Obviously implementing such a system has its challenges because it requires adjusting to new ways of working. However, as a project manager who has undertaken training in the new proposal methodology states, "This requires a serious switch in our thinking. But it also is part of becoming a more professional organisation."

ESF Agency Flanders
http://www.esf-agentschap.be
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/271

OTHER EXAMPLES

In **England, UK** ESF funds are distributed through 'Co-financing Organisations' that are able to bring together ESF and domestic funding for employment and skills and complement domestic programmes by contracting organisations or 'providers' that deliver ESF projects on the ground. Small community grants are made available to support the participation of voluntary and community organisations in the OP which would otherwise not have been able to become involved.
http://www.esf.gov.uk/

In the **Czech Republic** and **Hungary** the Managing Authority has provided a standard contract to ensure that partnerships are in compliance with the legal framework.
http://www.esfcr.cz
http://www.hefop.hu   http://www.nfu.hu
http://www.equalhungary.hu

KEY POINTERS

Make relevant documentation on OP delivery planning available to relevant stakeholders in advance.
Ensure that OP staff understand and have appropriate skills for chosen stakeholder engagement strategy.

Invest time in developing a clear understanding of the added value of working in partnership!

2.3 DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Use dedicated partnership support structures alongside the programme to provide assistance, resources and advice on partnership coordination, management and development.

In a number of Member States organisations exist to promote and support partnership nationally. Many of these bodies have a long history that can reinforce and assist the development of partnership in ESF OPs at both governance and project levels. Some countries have found it necessary to invest in the establishment of such structures in order to assist their work. In both cases the support function offered by these bodies can play a vital role.

POBAL: SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIP IN IRELAND

Pobal is a company that was established by the Irish Government in agreement with the EU in 1992. It has responsibility for the national management, coordination and support of partnerships. In addition, it manages several other programmes on behalf of government (e.g. include the Community Services Programme, Equality for Women Measure, Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, National Childcare Investment Programme and Rural Transport Programme), a number of which are EU funded.

Pobal operates under company law and legal requirements that apply to public bodies. Its role in relation to partnerships includes developmental and technical support, appraisal of plans based on clear criteria and guidelines (which it publishes),

allocation of budgets, financial, performance management and audit functions, evaluation and research. It also identifies best practice and informs policy on the basis of analysis of the lessons learned through the work of the bodies funded.

The role of an intermediary such as Pobal is important to the establishment and development of partnership. An intermediary is well placed to provide overall coherence and coordination to a partnership's work and to facilitate the aligning of 'top-down' national/OP requirements with bottom-up responses. It can also provide tools and support to enable high-level goals to be operationalised in order to meet local/county level needs. National reporting and accountability requirements imply the development of, and training in, procedures and guidelines. The intermediary is a key consultative and facilitative 'space' that enables policy and procedures to become a reality, while also providing sufficient flexibility to unlock local commitment and ownership.

Pobal recognises that partnership support needs to be strategic with due regard to the evolving policy and institutional environment, and to the challenges facing partnership organisations at the different stages in their development. In the Irish context, in the early period, this involved training and guidelines regarding the management and control systems expected, setting high standards in HR practice and good governance. It also involved advice on the 'how to' in the establishment of partnership structures, including methodologies likely to be successful in engaging participation of key stakeholder groups. It required skills in deepening partnership processes and building commitment to the principles and focus of the work.

Later stages of partnership have benefited from specialist expertise with respect to programme content areas. Pobal's formal links to government departments through, for example, seconded staff, assist in advancing alignment between the work of partnerships and state agencies, and the development of framework and protocol agreements. In its programme management work Pobal is ready, if appropriate, to take corrective or remedial action where a partnership is not functioning optimally or where there are issues of concern. In this regard, a key need is the ability to take the necessary steps on the basis of clearly publicised and understood criteria and procedures.

A challenging review and learning culture has been promoted with the implementation of case study and research strategies. Utilising the knowledge gained through an analysis of partnership work, Pobal is able to comment authoritatively and objectively on the impacts, the successes and lessons learned. Effective links with partnerships, state agencies and other bodies have also enabled Pobal to contribute positively to the policy evolution process.

Pobal
http://www.pobal.ie
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/236

Key Pointers

Use a partnership support structure to promote partnership development by:
- raising awareness about the added value of working in partnership
- assisting with dissemination exchange on particular partnership experiences
- producing targeted information in relation to specific partnering issues and challenges

Draw on the experience and knowledge of intermediary organisations!

3. Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals

"At this stage partnership projects need reassurance from Managing Authorities that the application and appraisal process is safe and just."[28]

The OP analysis, design and planning stages are followed by calls for proposals which are then subject to an appraisal process that judges whether a proposal merits funding. Attention at this stage is primarily focussed on using the mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in projects (outlined in 2.2. above) and ensuring that they are acted upon. This involves ensuring that the concept of partnering is clearly incorporated in proposals and that criteria for assessing why a partnership approach has been adopted and how it will be implemented are effectively used. In addition to checking that partnership has been integrated into proposals during the appraisal period, efforts can also be made to draw upon the expertise of suitably qualified stakeholders to assess applications and make a fair and balanced judgement as to their quality and relevance.

3.1 ACTIVELY SUPPORTING INCORPORATION OF PARTNERSHIP IN PROJECT PROPOSALS

> Actively provide clear advice and information to project promoters on how to incorporate working in partnership into a proposal.

"Attention at this stage is primarily focussed on using the mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in projects and ensuring that they are acted upon."

The integration of partnership in funding proposals can be actively promoted by MAs and Intermediate Bodies. This support can be offered through information sessions, training, helplines, other meeting opportunities and the use of dedicated web-based information systems. It is important that such information is shared systematically and includes specific assistance on how to deal with finances when working in partnership as this is an area that partnership projects have found particularly challenging.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Austria** project applications for "Integration of marginalised people into the labour market" (Priority 3b) are only eligible if delivered and implemented by Austrian partnerships or TEPs. Kooo, the Austrian-wide TEP Co-ordination Unit, supports development and implementation of projects via specific activities such as jointly developed quality criteria (by the TEPs and the ESF Managing Authority in preparation for the call), the "3b Learning cycle" process (during implementation), and ongoing individual partnership advice (for both project development and implementation).
http://www.pakte.at   http://www.zsi.at

In **Romania** a Technical Secretariat provides training and coaching for all actors to support partnership consolidation, development and management tasks. In order to address a poor collaborative culture and lack of experience of working in partnership, training sessions have also been organised for project promoters in all 8 regions of Romania. The aim is to ensure the quality and quantity of projects by informing project promoters about calls and application procedures, supporting them in the elaboration of solid project proposals and increasing their knowledge of project management. The training is also expected to increase competencies for working in partnership by providing good practice examples that emphasise the benefits and skills required for working in this way.
http://www.fseromania.ro

KEY POINTERS

Provide active support for partnership project preparation and appraisal.
Clearly demonstrate that partnership information is judged seriously in application and assessment processes.
Monitor and evaluate how well partnership criteria in applications are working.

Streamline partnership application advice and ensure that it is clear and simple!

3.2 ASSESSING PARTNERSHIP RATIONALE AND IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS

> Rigorously assess the rationale for setting up a partnership and the appropriateness of the proposed implementation mechanism in project proposals so that the partnership is likely to add value and be executed well.

This involves using appraisal procedures (as set out in 2.2 above) for reviewing how partnership is addressed in a project application, with criteria for assessing what the added value of working in partnership brings to a project. It is vitally important that project applicants understand that such assessment mechanisms will be acted upon and are thus encouraged to think carefully about how partnering enables them to reach their goals and meet the needs of target groups. Examining how the project will work in partnership, including the delivery mechanisms to be adopted and the division of roles and responsibilities, will also inform judgement about whether the partnership project will be well-executed.

28   *Comment from partnership project interviewee, June 2008*

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Flanders (Belgium)** the assessment criteria for project proposals incorporate explicit questions regarding stakeholder involvement and partnership added value as well as roles and responsibilities. (See 2.2 above).
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/271

In **Hungary** the mechanism for project implementation has to be presented in application forms details of tasks and responsibilities and a correlating budget breakdown. In the project plan all forms of cooperation should be presented, including working groups, common internet sites and managerial meetings on project implementation. Based on this information assessors and decision making committees have the opportunity to examine the added value of partnership to a given project. In essence, partners have to fulfil the same eligibility criteria as the project promoter.
http://www.hefop.hu   http://www.nfu.hu

In **Ireland** Pobal undertakes a rigorous assessment of strategic plans and particularly the capacity of a local partnership to effectively implement the plan. This includes an examination of the previous partnership track record, organisational and staffing composition and structure, as well as proposed strategies and methodologies.
http://www.pobal.ie

Key Pointers

Spend time raising awareness about the added value of working in partnership at project level.
Ensure that information about incorporating partnership into project proposals is clear and accessible.

Spend time in assessing the extent to which applicants genuinely seek to work in partnership!

3.3 Drawing upon the expertise of stakeholders in assessing proposals

> Ensure that relevant stakeholder expertise is integrated into drawing up calls for, and appraisal of, proposals while guarding against conflicts of interest.

The partnership principle can be further endorsed at programme level by making good use of stakeholder expertise during project appraisal processes. The participation of suitably qualified and experienced stakeholders with knowledge of relevant issues and target groups is a useful way of ensuring that project proposals are rigorously assessed. However, it is also important that such involvement is accountable and that conflicts of interest are avoided. This requires incorporating clear selection and review procedures for the evaluation of appraisals.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In the **Czech Republic** relevant stakeholders are involved in preparation of individual grant schemes in the form of submitting comments or discussing the schemes in expert working groups. The detailed composition of stakeholders involved differs according to the content of the scheme. For project evaluators in the Human Resources and Employment OP, there is a database where anyone fulfilling the given criteria (prior experience, expertise in the relevant area, education etc.) can register on-line. After this registration the person is offered a general training for project evaluators. The training culminates in a test that includes a trial evaluation of a project. If the test is passed successfully, the person becomes a project evaluator and can be contacted by a body launching calls (generally intermediary bodies or the Managing Authority). The evaluator then has to pass a specific training for each individual call after which s/he can evaluate projects. The database enables on-line working with the evaluators and new functionalities will include random choice of evaluators and their scoring by the bodies launching the calls. The projects that receive a score of at least 65 out of a 100 from the evaluators can afterwards be approved by the Selection Committee. The composition of Selection Committees differs according to the content of the grant schemes, but generally includes deputies of social partners, NGOs, regions, ministries, labour offices etc.
http://www.esfcr.cz

In **Slovakia** participation of social partners and regional and local government authorities is being applied to all implementation phases of the OP Education, including evaluation and selection of submitted grant applications. To ensure fairness project evaluator selection is based on prior experience, impartiality, expertise and equal opportunity principles. Evaluators are provided with training and projects selected by them are approved by a Selection Committee with representation from the education sector, self-governing regions, social partners and civil society.
http://www.esf.gov.sk

KEY POINTERS

Develop accountable appraisal systems for proposals.
Invest in training programmes for proposal evaluators.

Be transparent about appraisal procedures!

4. Animation during Implementation

"Rather than merely issuing policies and enforcing rules, MAs and Intermediate Bodies should be forthcoming with joint solutions to problems and difficulties."[29]

As projects are being implemented it is important that they have access to, and are provided with, adequate support from programme staff. Working in partnership is not an easy process, particularly at the start of a project. Apart from the time involved in developing appropriate structures and procedures for working together, combining different organisational styles and perspectives can create challenges and even conflict. Managing Authorities and Intermediary Bodies can assist in overcoming difficulties by offering advice and guidance to projects in the form of information resources, personal contact and partnership skills training. In addition, those partners who may not have adequate expertise or resources can be encouraged to work in partnership through the provision of capacity-building opportunities.

4.1 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT TO PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Give projects continuous proactive support on working in partnership throughout the different phases of their project cycle.

Support for projects to work in partnerships goes beyond supporting the writing of a proposal (see 3.1 above) e.g. through ongoing provision of partnership information materials and guidance, access to partnership tools, partnership skills-training opportunities and participation in COPs. Rather than simply waiting for projects to make contact when partnering challenges arise it is useful to provide information in advance and to be proactive in offering advice so that an accessible relationship is developed. This may require having dedicated staff responsible for different elements of partnership projects, information systems and training sessions. The more systemised and less ad hoc that this partnership support is the better as projects are then able to pursue their work with confidence and an assurance that they will have assistance as and when required. This is particularly important for issues related to finance as many partnership projects are uncertain about how to ensure they are abiding by financial regulations.

" Support for projects to work in partnerships goes beyond supporting the writing of a proposal ..."

29 Comment from partnership project interviewee, June 2008

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Austria** the nationwide TEP Co-ordination Unit (Kooo) serves to support the various projects carried out by Austrian partnerships and their partner institutions as well as to cultivate, implement and further develop TEPs. Joint activities are set up by Kooo together with TEPs, thereby providing a framework for multilateral advice between partnerships, as well as between TEPs and actors at national level.
http://www.pakte.at   http://www.zsi.at

In **Ireland** Pobal provides partnerships with developmental and technical assistance as well as guidance on organisational management and governance and specialist training around specific issues. This can include provision of information material on programme target groups, feedback on performance and strategies, or training inputs and discussions designed to address specific areas of challenge within the work. A liaison system in which 12 officers service approximately 70 partnerships between them, attending board and management meetings, also provides useful support to projects as they develop. In addition, events are organised as required at regional and national levels for key partnership staff and board members.
http://www.pobal.ie

In **Portugal** during the EQUAL programme constant support was provided to projects through seminars, guides, workshops, visits and the allocation of a monitoring 'tutor' to each project. Managing Authority personnel developed an accessible and proactive style with warm personal connections to project partners and this, alongside opportunities for meeting together, mainly through EQUAL thematic networks, has helped to build and reinforce partnership skills and create a collaborative culture which strongly contributes to improved partnership work and innovation.
http://www.equal.pt

Key Pointers

Encourage a strong shared partnering culture among ESF promoters.
Look innovatively at the opportunities and methods for encouraging this.

Be proactive and coordinated in project support!

4.2 Opportunities for capacity-building of programme level partners

Build the capacity of stakeholders to actively participate in programme governance.

Many stakeholders refrain from working in partnership or linking up with other social actors because they feel that they do not have the skills, knowledge or resources to engage in this form of interaction. Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies can do much to assist with this by offering partnership capacity-building opportunities to equip such stakeholders to work collaboratively at governance level with greater confidence and understanding. Capacity-building opportunities can be provided through dedicated workshops and training sessions to specific groups.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PARTNERS IN ITALY

In southern Italy a Technical Assistance (TA) structure has been established at national and regional level to offer partnership support to Economic and Social Partners (ESP) by hosting planning meetings, workshops on key themes, documentation for improving ESP activity and direct support to ESPs through focussed analyses and studies.

In 2003 it was recognised that the integration of ESPs in programming was very weak, especially at regional level. This was manifested in the poor contribution of ESPs in decision-making; weak dialogue between the Public Administration (PA) and ESPs; potential conflicts of interest and unrepresentative agreements; lack of continuity in programme engagement and gaps between programmes and territories. The negative effects on a development strategy oriented towards developing local resources were clearly apparent.

In order to address this situation a TA to ESPs was established in 2005 with the aim of supporting ESPs to participate in regional and sectoral programmes. It was agreed that this would be a pilot programme until June 2008 and, if successful, would be replicated in the new programming period.

In order to promote coherence the National Managing Authorities of the ESF launched a tender calling for the management of the TA. This was won by Ismeri Europa, an Economic Research and Consultancy organisation specialising in European Regional Policies. A Steering Committee, including the National Managing Authority for Objective 1 Regions and ESP representatives was then established to control the activities of TA based on six-month plans. The President is an ESP representative and ESPs have the majority on the Steering Committee.

The main objectives of the TA are to: promote a stable and organised relationship between PAs and ESPs; increase the skills of ESPs in Structural Fund procedures and rules; support the ESPs in territorial animation and transmission of knowledge; and define and introduce a new and more efficient partnership model.

Main activities of the TA

AREAS	SERVICES	OBJECTIVES
Knowledge Development of favorable conditions for partnership	Studies and reinforcement of partnership models, National-Regional linkages, promotion of good practices	Promote shared partnership models
Competences Stimulation and growth of competence	Seminars, workshops and direct support in decision-making at regional level	Increase competencies and know-how of ESPs
Communication Information and back-up	Improvement of information flows for ESPs and production of specific documents	Put in place a functioning model of partnership

The TA makes use of a range of tools including: partnership meetings between the ESPs and Managing Authority in order to plan activities on the basis of their needs and objectives; workshops with presentations and discussion on critical themes; summary reports of interventions and documents oriented towards improving ESPs knowledge and activities e.g. on state aid, evaluation, use of national resources, etc. and direct support to ESPs with specific analyses and dossier preparation before a meeting or for supporting an ESP proposal for funding.

Results have shown that there has been constant and direct involvement of about 200-250 representatives of ESPs and about 15-20 regional and national departments. There has also been a general improvement in relationships between the PAs and ESPs and increased participation of weaker ESPs (third sector, environmental and equal opportunity associations) in programme development. Knowledge has been shared widely through documents and guides and Social and Economic partnership has, as a result, been an important focus for discussion. In addition, this new partnership model that the TA has promoted has been adopted in the 2007-13 National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF).

Setting up the TA has not been easy. Political influence, tackling different capacity levels, a high number of often conflicting relationships, and continuous changes in the PA agenda have made TA development difficult but it has nonetheless proved useful and the experience will continue. It has shown that partnership needs a systematic framework that connects political and technical levels and promotes territorial dissemination of the value of partnership. It is also important to recognise that although ESPs need support they do not have to become "experts", they simply need access to relevant information via instruments adapted to their context and habits (i.e. ESPs are not habitual web users).

The TA experience is transferable but, according to Ismeri Europa, requires careful adaptation to the context. In countries where partnership working is embedded it can facilitate and improve partnership results while in situations where there is less experience of working in collaboration it can promote more continuous relationships and introduce a method for integrating partnership into the programme cycle. TA staff essentially have to work as facilitators and adapt flexibly to the changing needs of the different actors.

Ismeri Europa
http://www.ismerieuropa.com   http://www.partenariato.org
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/240

OTHER EXAMPLES

In **Malta** the limited administrative capacity of social partners and civil society organisations is being addressed through the focus area of intervention under Priority Axis 4 of the ESF OP which deals with the promotion of more effective social and civil dialogue in Malta. To further facilitate participation of social partners, a series of presentations have been provided to social partners and NGOs on issues related to Structural Funds.
http://www.ppcd.gov.mt

In **Slovakia** a possible model for that could be developed using ESF technical assistance was offered by a PHARE funded project in the accession year of 2004. This technical assistance project provided training to all members of Monitoring Committees and stakeholders on the role of these structures and their importance for good programme development. Legal issues and the composition and roles of structures were covered with practical examples from other Member States and in some cases team-building schemes were used to foster the better joint working of different actors.

Key Pointers

Providing targeted capacity-building opportunities for 'weaker' stakeholders with:
- Information on the ESF and other funds
- Financial and project management training
- Networking opportunities

Use technical assistance to strengthen the ability of stakeholders to take part in programmes and projects!

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

"Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of partnerships will enhance our knowledge about working collaboratively and inform decisions on the potential of partnerships for replication and scale-up at the levels of both policy and practice."[30]

Monitoring and evaluation of partnership at both programme and project level are implicit throughout the programme cycle and should not be viewed as an add-on at the end of the process. At programme level tracking how far stakeholders are engaged in the OPs work and making adjustments for this is important while at project level monitoring will focus on assessing the status of the partnership and dealing with problems that may arise as it develops. Partnership can be promoted in evaluation by ensuring that stakeholders actively participate in both programme and project partnership reviews. It is also vital that efforts are placed on ensuring that the learning from monitoring and evaluation processes, especially concerning the added value of partnership, is shared at both project and programme level so that working in partnership is improved and reinforced, and relevant lessons are extracted which can be fed back into ongoing practice.

5.1. REPORTING ON THE STATUS OF PARTNERSHIP AT PROJECT LEVEL

> Pay attention to the status of the partnership at project level so that problems are identified in time and resolved satisfactorily.

Programme and project managers need to ensure that some form of tracking process is in place to see if partners are working as planned at project level and/or if there are challenges that need addressing such as conflicts, drop-outs, dominating partners etc. Lack of attention to such issues can impede the smooth development of partnering activities so visits, meetings and workshops may be required to identify and assist with solutions to them. It is important that monitoring is systematic and that the processes for it are clearly understood and communicated to projects. If time and resources are scarce, a useful way of addressing issues is to provide opportunities for bringing projects together, either physically, through dedicated meetings and workshops, or virtually, via e-mail or web-based discussion platforms, to share progress and discuss challenges together.

30 Caplan, K, Gomme, J., Mugabi, J. & Stott, L. (2007) Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the drivers for success, BPD, London, 2007

THE ESF INFORMATION SYSTEM IN PORTUGAL

In Portugal partnership reporting has been assisted by the development of an internet-based project management information system. Through this platform materials such as lists of candidates, visits, declarations of expenses etc. are made available to both the Managing Authority and project partners. All ESF grant recipients can register on the system and access and disseminate information easily. The system's transparency has reinforced confidence between both partners and the Managing Authority.

All the information included in the application form for funding is accessible to members for consultation but it can only be edited/ filled in by the appropriate representative of the Partnership. The application form includes the same information about each one of the organisation's members, this includes: identification and the CV of the person responsible of the project for each organisation, members' contributions to each activity of the project and a detailed budget from each member. The system shares Partnership Development Agreements which clarify the responsibilities of each partner and how the decision-making process works. The application form for funding is validated electronically by all partners and only the "acceptance plan" of the funding is signed on paper after approval. For the rest, paper forms have been totally eliminated.

The Information System for Partnerships provides added value to partnership projects because it:

- Enables formalisation of the application for the Partnership

- Allows transparency and the sharing of information between all partners, and between partners and the Managing Authority, as well as enables partners to monitor physical and financial data such as payment authorisations, expenses statements, physical information, visits, etc.

- Ensures accountability regarding compliance with funding rules, especially with regard to the "verification" and "validation" of the legal situation of each partner

- Simplifies communication between the Managing Authority and the Partnership projects as access to the same information limits the number of requests for information and clarification

- Enables more rigorous procedures with electronic validations and automised operations substituting paper use, allowing for less errors in applications, and resulting in benefits in terms of time, resources and quality of work

- Allows public access to information about different approved and developed projects

EQUAL Portugal
http://www.equal.pt

Key Pointers

Develop consistent 'tracking' procedures.
Ensure a focus on partnership in project monitoring and reporting.
Share resources and tools on the process of working in partnership.

Conduct regular health checks on partnership projects!

5.2. Participatory evaluation

Ensure that there is clear stakeholder participation in evaluation of partnership interventions at both programme and project level.

" ... it is important that evaluation explores what the added value of partnership has been for partners, stakeholders and target groups."

Evaluation or assessment of the performance and effectiveness of partnership at both programme and project level is important to undertake in order to demonstrate results for target groups and inform future practice. If evaluation is conducted as a collaborative process its purpose, direction and expectations can be negotiated among relevant stakeholders and enable learning for all involved. Participatory evaluation is helpful in reinforcing and promoting partnership and can be done through self-evaluation methods or employing an external evaluator. A mixture of both internal and external evaluation can also be used e.g. peer reviews. In order to promote partnership more deeply it is important that evaluation explores what the added value of partnership has been for partners, stakeholders and target groups.

PARTNERSHIP PEER REVIEWS IN ENGLAND

In England (UK) 'Peer Review Quality Statements' were developed for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The peer review tool was established to help partnerships undertake a self-assessment with peers in a constructive and supportive environment. The reviews were conducted by teams drawn from a number of LSPs and each lasted one day. LSP members, such as local authority members and officers, public, private voluntary and community sector stakeholders worked together in a panel that visited a particular partnership as "critical friends"

in order to explore their performance. They used quality statements as a guide to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership which were grouped into "strategic", "inclusive", "action-focused", "performance managed", "efficient" and "learning and development" characteristics. The process offered an excellent learning opportunity for all involved and also developed informal networks between partnerships.

Warwick Consortium Research on Local Strategic Partnerships
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/lgc/research/consortium/lsp/

OTHER EXAMPLES

In **Flanders** (Belgium) EQUAL partnerships were offered a standardised questionnaire to score projects on key implementation issues as well as results. Each partner was encouraged to use this tool for discussion by exploring divergences in scores.
http://www.esf-agentschap.be

In **Portugal** the EQUAL DP self-evaluation exercises promoted by Programme Management reinforced both partnership internal cohesion and dynamics as well as collective participation and learning through sharing of contributions from different members.
http://www.equal.pt

Key Pointers

Use a mixture of internal and external evaluation methods.
Draw on, and encourage, diverse stakeholder opinions to deepen partnership evaluation.

Make evaluation processes interesting and engaging so that they promote learning!

5.3 FEEDING BACK SYSTEMATICALLY INTO PRACTICE

> Promote and encourage ongoing learning from partnership successes and failures at both programme and project level and ensure that lessons from these are acted upon.

" ... the needs of different audiences at programme and project levels need to be carefully identified."

Material that shares lessons about partnership is required by practitioners, planners and policy makers in order to improve the way partnerships are promoted and supported. Partnership tools, tips, guidelines, case studies and policy recommendations can all assist with filling gaps in our knowledge about how partnerships function and ensure a clearer understanding of what works, and what does not. As well as collecting this material it is important to ensure that it is appropriately disseminated and acted upon. Tailoring data effectively and taking into account sectoral, contextual and cultural variables are vital if partnering knowledge and skills are to be spread and sharpened. In order to ensure that learning information is 'fit for purpose' the needs of different audiences at programme and project levels need to be carefully identified. A useful distinction can be made between 'internal' audiences, such as partnership beneficiaries, partner representatives and staff from partner organisations/ programmes, and 'external audiences' that encompass funders, policy makers, the media and members of the general public.[31] Feeding partnership learning effectively back into practice depends upon the selection of the 'right' information format for these different groups.

THE NATIONAL THEMATIC GROUP (NTG) ON PARTNERSHIP IN SWEDEN

In **Sweden** the National Thematic Group on Partnership, supported by the Swedish ESF Council, was established to gather and disseminate experiences from the EQUAL programme. It now works to share knowledge about partnerships more widely through interactive research, regular work group meetings, participation in conferences, the development of papers and publications, as well as a web page.

31   Tennyson, R. The Partnering Toolbook, IBLF & GAIN, 2004 p.35.

*The website
of the NTG on Partnership*

The NTG is composed of: a Secretary responsible for coordination; a Research Team composed of a research leader and a PhD student; and a working group with representation from 10 EQUAL DPs, DP coordinators, partners, evaluators and the ESF Council.

Close contact with the Swedish ESF-council, at both leadership and employee level, ensures that NTG experiences are taken into consideration at OP level e.g. dialogue has taken place with programme writers and OP research is integrated into all the work of the NTG Partnership.

The activities of the NTG include:

• **Working group meetings** – six meetings are held each year in order to share information about partnership. During the meetings planned activities enable an organised exchange of knowledge and ensure joint analysis of research material. A principle of openness and honesty is promoted during which different opinions are equally valued.

• **Participation in conferences and meetings** – the NTG arranges and participates in conferences and meetings involving the ESF Council, DPs and other organisations working in the same thematic areas. This work is conducted flexibly and is based upon demand and practical relevance.

• **Research** – research is conducted using interactive methodologies that combine informal contact, interviews and questionnaires. This approach ensures that research has both practical and immediate relevance.

• **Developing papers and publications** – including field survey reports, inquiry reports, an "Idea Book" and conference magazines which create an interest in partnership.

• **Web page** – where access to information about Partnership and the work of the NTG is shared (www.ntg-partnerskap.se)

The NTG bases its success on an active working secretary, interested participants, informal discussion with a broad range of stakeholders, and the ability to combine concrete results that are useful for both participants and wider society, all of which promote a culture of active learning.

National Thematic Group on Partnership
http://www.ntg-partnerskap.se
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/242

OTHER EXAMPLES

In Austria the intermediary body Kooo uses a well-established information network to respond to, share and balance information between TEPs and the ESF Managing Authority. The network makes use of an online restricted access platform to share learning between TEPs with downloadable documents such as partnership contracts, rules of procedure, programmes, application forms, progress reports and case studies which revolve around 'story-telling'. All available documents are filled in on an ongoing basis. In addition Kooo has also developed a method for learning from failures through a "TEP Open Reflection Cycle" which seeks to develop and build upon trust between actors.
http://www.pakte.at   http://www.zsi.at

KEY POINTERS

Develop information links with wider networks and institutions that promote partnership.
Find ways of sharing and learning from failures as well as successes.

Use the learning from partnership experiences to inform future practice!

REFERENCES

Key websites

- Community of Practice on Partnerships in the ESF
  http://partnership.esflive.eu

- European Social Fund
  http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/index_en.htm

European Commission Publications

- *Complementarity and Consistency with other EU Financial Instruments, European Social Fund support to social partners in the 2007-2013 period*
  http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/docs/tp_complementarity_en.pdf

- *EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships Learning from the experience of EQUAL partnerships, 2004*
  http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/partnerguide-lo_en.pdf

- *European Governance, A White Paper,* Brussels, 25.7.2001, COM (2001) 428 Final
  http://ec.europa.eu/governance/white_paper/index_en.htm

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: The Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF

The contents of this guidebook have been developed from the work of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Partnership in the European Social Fund (ESF).[32] The CoP was formed in 2006 by the European Commission and the EQUAL Managing Authorities of Austria, Czech Republic, Flanders, Malta and Portugal. Its aims were to capitalise on the experience of partnership in the EQUAL Programme[33] and to take into account the emphasis placed on partnership in ESF regulation for the new Structural Funds period.

Etienne Wenger, who coined the term "communities of practice", describes them as, "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."[34] The CoP's mission is to stimulate more creative partnership thinking and implementation in the Structural Funds, especially in the ESF, by convincing programme managers of the importance of partnership, and enabling them to provide high quality support to partnerships in a Structural Fund context. CoP members include representatives from the Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies of ESF Operational Programmes. In addition experts, project managers and partnership coordinators and managers from other European funds who possess the necessary expertise, and are committed to supporting partnerships, are also able to join. Important linkages have also been established with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

Since its inception the activities of the CoP on Partnership have included:

✔ **The development of a web platform** for information exchange and discussion Community of Practice on Partnerships in the ESF http://partnership.esflive.eu

✔ **Regular bi-monthly basecamp meetings** in different Member States during which key issues, challenges and practices relating to programme support for partnership have been shared and discussed. http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/148

✔ **A Partnership Exchange Event** in Malta in January 2008 which enabled participants from different Member States to showcase successful practices and debate and discuss some of the issues involved in promoting partnership. http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/226

32 *Full details can be found on the CoP website: http://partnership.esflive.eu/*
33 *Working in partnership has been central to the ESF-funded EQUAL Programme (2001-8) which sought to find new and innovative ways of addressing discrimination and inequality in the European labour market. In EQUAL, Development Partnerships (DPs) brought together a range of actors such as local and regional authorities, training bodies, public employment services, NGOs, enterprises and social partners, and stimulated cooperation at various local, regional, national and transnational levels.*
34 *Wenger, E. (2004). Communities of practice: A brief introduction http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed June 30, 2007)*

✔ **A study visit programme** involving an exchange between a small team of CoP Premium members and a selected ESF Managing Authority or Intermediate Body in order to share viewpoints and information on partnership in particular country settings. Interviews with relevant stakeholders at programme and project level prior to a workshop and site visit in which findings and recommendations are shared. The first study visit took place in Flanders (Belgium) in November 2008.

These activities have resulted in a range of outputs, including:

✔ **Compilation and analysis of country fiches** – responding to a series of questions about how partnership has been approached in 18 Member States (Austria, Flanders (Belgium), Czech Republic, England (UK), Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden) and analysing the information gathered from these (See Annex 2). http://partnership.esflive. eu/node/223

✔ **A Key Success Factor Framework** – outlining how MAs and Intermediate Bodies can support the development of effective partnerships at different stages of the OP cycle (see Annex 3). http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/224

✔ **Collection of good practices** – provision of information on particular tools and practices that have been used in different Member States to support and promote partnership (See Annex 4). http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/254

In order to develop the guidebook, the information derived from these sources has been further supplemented by:

✔ **Desk-based research** – identifying and collating appropriate tools, practices resources and tips from different Member States and wider partnership sources.

✔ **Interviews** – face-to-face and telephone interviews with CoP members from Austria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Sweden (July-September 2007); OP Managers from Bulgaria, England, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (July-September 2008); and Project Coordinators from Austria, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden (July-September 2008). Interviews were semi-structured and sought to identify challenges and good practices when promoting partnerships at programme level.

✔ **Expert input** – a small group of partnership experts offered comments and insights on the content of the guide with a view to ensuring appropriate focus and cover at a workshop in London in October 2008 and in follow-up from this.

✔ **Discussion and revision among members of the CoP** – Premium members shared information, provided contacts and discussed and revised the content of the guidebook throughout the process of its development.

Annex 2: Partnership Country Fiche Template

How many OPs are there in your Member State? Do they have very different provisions in terms of partnership?
Does partnership have a geographical focus in your Member State's OP(s)? If so, national, regional, sub-regional e.g. county, district, group of municipalities, municipality, etc.?
Is partnership linked to specific thematic issues / objectives (incl. possible targeting of specific groups / links with policy) in the OP(s)?
Please specify further what is understood as "partnership" in the OP(s) in your Member State? (See Note 1)
What requirements are there for partnerships to become formally established in your OP's? (e.g. they need to: write a declaration with intent to work together, prepare a more detailed partnership agreement detailing tasks/roles, launch a call for tenders to acquire partners through contracts or join up in a separate legal entity)
What specific questions regarding partnership are asked in (previous/current) ESF application forms?
Types of organisations typically involved in partnership (e.g. social partners, NGOs, companies, academia, etc.) in the OP(s)
If partnerships are embedded within existing national, regional or local structures, how are these different levels linked to each other and how does this facilitate mainstreaming in the OP(s?) (See Note 2)
How do the choices of the OPs in terms of partnership address the EC regulation? (See Note 3)
Are there major differences with how partnership was organised in the past OP(s)? Why was the choice made to change? Did EQUAL have influence on this choice and, if yes, how?
What are the strong points of the way the OP(s) organise(s) partnership?
What are the draw-backs of the way the OP(s) organise(s) partnership?
What measures, if any, are being taken to build on the strong points and reduce the draw-backs in the OP(s)?
Contact name
Contact address
Contact email, phone, fax

Note 1

✔ function of partnership within the OP: ranging from implementation of activities on the ground (e.g. through projects) to high level strategic decision making (e.g. in monitoring committee etc.)
✔ stability of partnership: ranging from supporting ad hoc, task oriented partnerships to permanent, institutionalised partnerships
✔ importance of ESF funding for partnership: highly dependent to small influence
✔ mainly cross-sector partnerships or within a sector
✔ mainly cross-(sub)regional partnerships or within a (sub)region
✔ highly formalised (e.g. legally binding agreements) to informal
✔ etc. ...

Note 2

Mainstreaming refers here to vertical mainstreaming where lessons learnt and good practice need to be taken up by higher levels of the organisational or political system.

Note 3

Art. 3: promoting partnerships, pacts and initiatives through networking of relevant stakeholders, such as the social partners and non-governmental organisations, at the transnational, national, regional and local levels in order to mobilise for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness.

Art. 5:

1. The ESF shall promote good governance and partnership. Its support shall be designed and implemented at the appropriate territorial level taking into account the national, regional and local level according to the institutional arrangements specific to each Member State.
2. The Member States shall ensure the involvement of the social partners and adequate consultation and participation of other stakeholders, at the appropriate territorial level, in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support.
3. The managing authority of each operational programme shall encourage adequate participation of the social partners in actions funded under Article 3. Under the Convergence objective, an appropriate amount of ESF resources shall be allocated to capacity-building, which shall include training, networking measures, strengthening the social dialogue and activities jointly undertaken by the social partners, in particular as regards adaptability of workers and enterprises referred to in Article 3(1)(a).
4. The managing authority of each operational programme shall encourage adequate participation and access by nongovernmental organisations to the funded activities, notably in the domains of social inclusion, gender equality and equal opportunities.

Annex 3: Country Tables on Partnership

Table 1: OP numbers

	NUMBER OF ESF OPS				
	1	2	3	4	5 and above
Austria		✔			
Czech Rep.			✔		
England (UK)	✔				
Estonia			✔		
Flanders (Bel.)	✔				
Germany					18 (1 national, 16 State/Länder, 1 regional)
Greece					8 (3 sectoral, 5 regional with flexibility to implement ESF-funded activities)
Hungary		✔			
Ireland	✔				
Italy					24 (3 national, 21 regional)
Lithuania				✔	
Malta	✔				
Netherlands	✔				
Poland	✔				
Portugal	✔				
Romania		✔			
Spain					22 (3 national, 19 regional)
Sweden	✔				

Table 2: Geographical focus of OPs

	LOCAL	REGIONAL	NATIONAL
Austria		✔	✔
Czech Rep.		✔	✔
England (UK)		✔	✔
Estonia			✔
Flanders (Bel.)		✔	
Germany	✔	✔	
Greece			
Hungary	✔		
Italy		✔	
Lithuania			✔
Malta			✔
Netherlands			✔
Portugal			✔
Romania		✔	
Spain		✔	
Sweden		✔	

Table 3: Thematic links of OPs

	Employment & labour market access	Social cohesion	Skills supply & vocational training	Equal Opportunities	Transnational & cross-border co-operation
Austria	✔	✔		✔	
Czech Rep.	✔	✔		✔	✔
Estonia	✔		✔		
Flanders (Bel.)*	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Germany	✔	✔	✔		
Greece	✔		✔		
Hungary	✔	✔			
Ireland		✔			
Italy	✔		✔	✔	
Netherlands	✔		✔		
Poland		✔			
Portugal	✔		✔		
Romania	✔	✔			
Spain	✔	✔		✔ (Planned)	
Sweden	✔	✔	✔		✔

* No specific link of partnership with any theme except innovation. However, partnership is supported as a cross-cutting theme.

Table 4: Partnership formalisation

	INFORMAL — Co-operation agreements Declarations/ statements of intent/ commitments to work together	Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) Covering work programmes, roles and responsibilities, codes of conduct, rules and procedures, written charters, association guidelines	Legally-binding partnership contracts Between all partners/ bi-lateral	FORMAL — Legal requirements in national law Entity formation Explicit partner roles No. of partners
Austria		✔	✔	
Czech Rep.		✔	✔	
Estonia	✔			
Flanders (Bel.)	✔ (in proposal)	✔ (after approval)		
Germany		✔		
Hungary	✔		✔	
Ireland				✔
Italy		✔		
Lithuania	✔	✔		
Malta	✔			
Poland	✔ (most likely option)			
Portugal				✔ if p-ship option chosen
Romania	✔			
Spain	✔ (at start)	✔		
Sweden				✔ (for SFPs)

Table 5: Partnership and application forms

	Specific questions asked in application form	Additional materials required to support application e.g. activity plans, stakeholder analysis, detailed budget breakdowns	No specific questions asked	Forms not yet available
Austria	✔	✔		
Czech Rep.	✔			
England (UK)			✔	
Estonia	✔	✔		
Flanders (Bel.)	✔	✔		
Germany	✔			
Greece				✔
Hungary	✔	✔		
Italy	✔			
Lithuania	✔			
Malta	✔			
Netherlands	✔			
Poland			✔	
Portugal	✔	✔		
Romania	✔			
Spain				✔
Sweden	✔			

Table 6: How OPs promote linkages and mainstreaming

	INTERMEDIARY SUPPORT STRUCTURES	USING MONITORING AND EVALUATION
Austria	✔	✔
Czech Rep.		✔
England (UK)	✔	
Estonia		✔
Flanders (Bel)	✔	
Germany	✔	
Greece		✔
Italy	✔	
Poland	✔	✔
Spain	✔	✔
Sweden		✔

Table 7: EC regulation and main OP focus

Examples:	Stakeholder engagement in preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support (art. 5)	Strengthening the capacity of social partners (art 3+5 for convergence obj.)	Partnerships, pacts, networking (art. 3)
Austria			✔
Czech Rep.		✔	✔
Estonia	✔	✔	
Flanders (Bel.)	✔		
Germany		✔	✔
Greece	✔		
Hungary	✔	✔	
Italy		✔	✔
Lithuania	✔		✔
Malta		✔	
Portugal			✔
Romania		✔	
Spain			✔

Table 8: Differences between past and present approaches

	STRONG DIFFERENCE	MINIMAL DIFFERENCE	UNSURE/ UNDECIDED
Austria		✔	
Czech Rep.		✔	
England (UK)		✔	
Flanders (Bel.)		✔	
Germany	✔		
Greece			✔
Hungary		✔	
Italy			✔
Lithuania	✔		
Malta	✔		
Poland	✔		
Portugal	✔		
Spain	✔		
Sweden	✔		

Table 9: The impact of EQUAL on development of new OPs

	STRONG	MINIMAL	UNSURE/ UNDECIDED
Austria		✔	
Czech Rep.		✔	
England (UK)	✔		
Flanders (Bel.)		✔	
Germany	✔		
Greece	✔		
Hungary	✔		
Italy	✔		
Lithuania	✔		
Malta		✔	
Netherlands	✔		
Portugal		✔	
Spain	✔		
Sweden	✔		

Table 10: Perceptions of the value-add of partnership in OP approaches

	Focus	Coordination	Resource use	Social capital	Innovation	Capacity-building	Empowerment & inclusion	Legitimacy	Stability	Sustainability
Austria	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔					✔
Czech Rep.							✔	✔		
England (UK)	✔	✔								
Estonia						✔	✔			
Flanders (Bel.)	✔			✔	✔		✔			
Germany	✔	✔								
Greece		✔			✔				✔	
Hungary								✔		
Ireland							✔	✔		✔
Italy	✔	✔			✔		✔			
Lithuania							✔	✔		
Malta	✔					✔				
Netherlands				✔						✔
Poland				✔	✔	✔	✔			
Portugal	✔				✔					
Romania				✔	✔	✔	✔			
Spain		✔								
Sweden		✔						✔		

Table 11: Perceptions of drawbacks to partnership in OP approaches

	Time	Top-down approach/ bureaucratic	Legal environ-ment	Conflicts of interest	Lack of representation engagement/ skills / capacity	No clear design
Austria					✔	
Czech Rep.			✔			
Flanders (Bel.)	✔					
Germany					✔	
Greece						✔
Hungary					✔	
Ireland					✔	
Italy		✔		✔	✔	
Lithuania					✔	
Malta	✔				✔	
Netherlands	✔					
Portugal						✔
Romania	✔	✔				
Sweden	✔					

Table 12: Measures adopted to address challenges

	Strengthening application, monitoring and evaluation processes	Addressing legal impediments	Technical assistance, capacity-building and advice	Awareness-raising activities
Austria			✔	
Czech Rep.		✔		
Estonia	✔		✔	
Flanders (Bel.)	✔		✔	
Hungary			✔	
Ireland	✔			
Italy	✔		✔	✔
Lithuania	✔			
Malta	✔		✔	✔
Romania			✔	
Sweden			✔	

Annex 4: Partnership Good Practice Template

PARTNERSHIP IN THE ESF PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

Name of practice:

Stage of use: *Add X to the table where applicable*

OP Analysis and design	
OP Delivery planning	
Call for and appraisal of proposals	
Animation during Implementation	
Monitoring and Evaluation	

Partnership success factors that are addressed:

Author:

Country:

Summary: *Brief description of tool – 100 words max.*

Please focus on explaining how the practice addresses Key Success Factors at Programme Level chosen earlier.
Format and language:

Testimonies from users:
Brief accounts of how it has worked in practice, strong and weak points etc. from the point of view of users (Managing Authorities, partnership managers, final beneficiaries, etc.)

Implementation guidance
List and explain crucial steps to take or pitfalls to avoid when setting up a similar practice elsewhere (e.g. 10 tips).

Discuss transferability: are aspects of the practice closely tied to its original context (region, country, organisation, thematic issue…)? If so, what additional tips can be given to address this specificity when trying to implement the practice outside of this context.

Contact person for more information:

Name: . . . .

Organisation: . . . .

E-mail: . . . .

Telephone: . . . .

Web address: . . . .

Skype Address: . . . .

Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF O