

# Interreg Programme Management Handbook

## Guide to the 2021-2027 period

The Interreg Programme Management Handbook comprises a series of factsheets. They can be read individually, or collectively, to understand the relevance of certain aspects of Interreg management. They cover the relevance, legal basis, key challenges and approaches to the given subject.

---

### Factsheet | Project Generation

#### 1. What is it? What is the definition of this work?

Project generation is the first step in the project lifecycle.

Project ideas typically originate from the acknowledgement of a problem, a need, or an intended result. They can be described in short form, outlining the project rationale, which answers fundamental questions such as: “Why should this project happen? How will things change?”, “How should it be implemented?” and “What should be realised?”

Project ideas are often put forward by the organisation which will become the Lead Partner, and which is searching for adequate partners. The ideas can originate from different types of stakeholders, and they largely differ in their purpose and scope. However, to be successful, Interreg project ideas must be consistent with the programme’s strategy since their inception.

Once relevant partners have been gathered around a project idea, they are all engaged in developing the idea further through joint discussion and exchange – this is the second stage of the project lifecycle: project development. Here, the objectives, results and outputs of the project are identified and refined. The roles and responsibilities within the partnership are agreed upon, as are the work plan and budget. Subsequently, a complete application form is prepared and ready for submission to the programme.

#### 2. Why are we discussing it?

One of the great benefits of Interreg is that project developers are encouraged to come up with original and innovative ideas, sometimes even visionary ideas. On the other hand, Interreg programmes are focused on their own (programme) strategy, which is the combination of the European and national/regional/local priorities. All Interreg programmes have identified a set of results which they aim to achieve by the end of the financial period. These results will be achieved (mainly) through successful implementation of projects. In addition, the capacity, and resources of Interreg programmes could be limited, restricting the level of ambition of project ideas to a lower degree than expected by project developers.

When thinking of a project idea, partners should be aware of the context and specificities of Interreg programmes. The only successful ideas are those which will probably contribute to the results identified by a programme.

### 3. What are the challenges, key considerations and frequently asked questions?

Programme staff may face several challenges while supporting applicants who are generating or developing their project idea.

- Communicating to potential applicants that Interreg programme is the right one for their idea. It is indispensable that the message given to applicants about what the strategy of the programme is and what the conditions for implementation of projects is a clear and consistent one, so that project development efforts can either be focused, or the idea can be dismissed or directed to another funding programme.
- Communicating the programme results properly. The programme intervention logic in 2021-2027 period is very focused, and projects need to understand and justify what advantages it can bring to the programme and its results.
- Insufficient capacities in Joint Secretariats to support all project applicants during call for proposals. It can be extremely challenging, especially for large programmes receiving hundreds of project ideas, to dedicate a reasonable amount of time to each for analysis and feedback on ideas.
- Level of advice given to applicants on ways of improving their project idea. When programme staff give direct operational advice on how or what to do, they may find themselves in the difficult position of rectifying incorrect advice or justifying why the project was not approved, even though all that was previously advised has been done.
- Potential 'conflict of interest' due to the same members of programme staff being involved in project generation, development and assessment. If the programme Secretariat is also involved in the assessment and selection process of application, there is the risk that one person develops and assesses the same project.
- Insufficient thematic competence in Joint Secretariats (JS) in the field addressed by projects. Interreg projects may address extremely specific or technical topics which cannot be sufficiently understood by non-experts in the field.
- Finding the right partners. Interreg programmes are about cooperation, therefore finding the right partners and the right mix of partners.

### 4. How does it work in practice?

Programmes have implemented different initiatives to support applicants at the stage of preparing a project. Organising regular dedicated events is probably the most common initiative. The Secretariat and/or the Contact Points network organise events for applicants where they present the programme strategy and requirements. Often, these events also foresee bilateral or small group sessions to discuss project ideas between programme staff and project promoters.

Online tools are another increasingly common solution. Technology offers several solutions (including artificial intelligence (AI) for providing efficient, cheap support to applicants. Webinars, skype calls, videos, FAQ, factsheets and tutorials are just a few possible instruments which allow programme staff to guide applicants without travelling long distances, hence saving time and costs. In addition, many of these tools can be used directly by applicants, allowing them to check the information before contacting the programme.

### 5. Good practice examples, innovative approaches

- Set up internal procedures and routines describing how to deal with requests, including draft answers or case scenarios built from previous experiences, to be used as examples or reference material while providing feedback.
- Set up online support through Q&A and FAQ sections.

- Set up templates that applicants can use to submit their project idea so that the essential information necessary for feedback is more likely to be provided, and several email rounds are avoided.
- Organise team meetings with the purpose of exchanging on project development and support cases.
- Communicate cut-off dates by which project ideas will be addressed.
- Share the task across different programme bodies, typically the Secretariat and the network of Contact Points; organise team meetings in programme bodies to discuss the elements of the programme strategy, the intervention logic and selection criteria, to further support the creation of a joint understanding at programme level and consequently a streamlined communication to the applicants.
- In many programmes the assessment of a proposal is assigned to external experts, thus avoiding potential conflicts of interest within the programme and possible insufficient capacities in JS. It is good practice that the projects supported by one officer are assessed by another officer, so that all projects are assessed on an equal basis.
- In case of lack of thematic expertise by the JS, make it clear to applicants that they are responsible for presenting their content in such a way that it can be understood by staff not highly competent in the subject matter, despite how technical or scientific it might be. It is up to the applicants to explain why and how their project is justified and relevant.

**Disclaimer:** Cooperation can be complex, and while Interact's job is to make it easier, Interact cannot offer assurances on the accuracy of our pan-European information in any specific context.

Furthermore, understanding and knowledge evolves throughout the programming period. If you spot something out of date or inconsistent, please contact us at [communication@interact.eu](mailto:communication@interact.eu)

**Copyright:** This product is licensed under Creative Commons, under the 'Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International' license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

You are permitted to share and adapt this work. You are required to attribute the work, indicating if changes were made. You are required to offer revised work on the same license basis. The material cannot be used for commercial purposes.

For more information about this license please visit [creativecommons.org](https://creativecommons.org)

**Publisher** | Interact programme  
**Date** | 07.04.2025  
**Author** | Lamrini Tsoli  
**Contributors** | Kelly Zielniewski

