

# Cooperation works: skills needed to create and maintain good and lasting partnerships

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## Overview

Interreg programmes operate in a space where shared responsibilities meet cultural diversity. In such an environment, trust, strong relationships, and lasting networks do not emerge automatically. They need to be actively built, maintained, repaired, and sometimes rebuilt. Signed agreements and common regulations alone are not enough to guarantee successful cooperation.

The purpose of the session was to encourage participants to reflect on what they can personally do - through their roles, behaviour, and daily decisions - to strengthen trust and contribute to the development and maintenance of long-term partnerships.

Diplomatic skills were introduced as a source of inspiration and linked to practical examples of cooperation. This helped demonstrate that, by becoming more aware of different methods and skills, everyone can improve the way they work, better manage challenging situations, and contribute to building strong and lasting relationships.

## Methodology

Session was built around the facilitated discussions, both in groups and together with all the participants. Discussions were facilitated by short introduction of skills of diplomacy, to build a connection between work in practise and theory.

## Key discussion points

Discussion was grounded in reality based on the participants experiences of difficult situations in cooperation and by reviewing real life scenarios of challenges fased during the previous programming processes.

Both the scenarios and the difficult situations were connected to the nine skills of diplomacy, model prepared by the National Museum of American diplomacy:



Source: National Museum of American diplomacy  
<https://diplomacy.state.gov/discover-diplomacy/the-skills-of-diplomacy>

## Main takeaways

Participants identified the following strategies for addressing challenges in cooperation:

Strategy	Description
1. Don't ignore issue (challenge / problem)	Recognising that the issue won't go away by itself, and that time and resources are required to address it.
2. Refer to objective standards	Reminding an uncooperative partner of objective rules (for example, a partnership agreement, programme rules, regulations) which all parties have signed up to.
3. Mediate	Actively giving a voice to partners who are being marginalised by other members of the partnership.
4. Negotiate	Persuading members of the partnership to adopt a course of action by convincing them that it is in their best interest.
5. Prioritise	Not all aspects of the challenge may be possible to solve. Prioritising involves focusing on those which are possible to change, and which will have the greatest impact.
6. Action plan	Once agreement has been reached, ensuring that the agreed approach is implemented.
7. Be creative	Reaching agreement may require flexibility, compromise and creativity.
8. Be social	When the pathway to a resolution may feel blocked, it can help to continue discussion in a less formal setting – for example, through team building or social activities.

Discussion and group work during the workshop highlighted that the skills needed for successful diplomacy are closely connected to the everyday work carried out within the programmes. By becoming more aware of these methods and skills, programme staff can apply them more consciously in their daily work and further strengthen their capacities and capabilities in diplomacy-related practices.

## Follow-up actions / next steps

Targeted services on diplomacy and negotiations to be prepared to support programmes in their every day work in particular the programming process involving several steps of negotiations.

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