

Partnership building

CHECKLIST | Interreg North Sea 2021-2027



Tips & tricks on building a powerful partnership

This document provides guidance on building powerful partnerships. Besides the elements in fact sheet 14 (*Roles & Responsibilities*), it highlights aspects to consider when looking for new partners. This document is developed by the Contact Points based upon their experience in the field of project development.

Background

Finding good partners, building a strong consortium that succeeds in working together for the entire project duration and delivering the solutions that the project application promised... it is a challenge! This checklist offers a set of aspects to consider when you are building your consortium. Some are 'requirements' that you can find in the Factsheets and will be repeated during project development consultations. But equally important to consider are the 'success factors' to powerful partnerships. Those are rarely mentioned, but are essential to look for in the people and organisations that you meet and consider to add to your partnership. Dare to ask these questions!

This document divides these checklist elements in 3 sections: 1) partnership requirements, 2) elements that should be found in your proposal, and 3) success factors.

1. Partnership requirements

★ Lead partner is a public body

This is a non-for-profit organisation, either a governmental organisation (regional government, municipality, water board, management authority, etc.), or a non-for-profit NGO that serves a public role or common interest.

★ 3 partners from 3 different countries

This is a minimum-requirement for both regular and small-scale projects! Small-scale projects can have up to 7 partners, while regular Interreg North Sea projects ideally

have somewhere between 8-15 partners.. and a geographical spread over regions from 4-6 countries. The programme encourages applicants to include organisations in more than the minimum requirement of 3 countries in their partnerships.

★ **Partner located in programme area**

Start with this as a rule-of-thumb! Then, when the project idea and partnership develops, look in fact sheet 14 whether exceptions should be introduced ...and can be allowed.

2. Partnership elements that should be found in your proposal

★ **Partner capacity**

- **financial resources** Partners should be of sufficient financial capacity to join an Interreg consortium. There are no advance-payments and reimbursements by the Interreg programme . Please note that the first progress report deadline is one year after project approval, which means that the first payment a project partnership receives may be well over a year after activities start. Furthermore, in addition to the 60% co-financing by the Interreg programme, the 40% has to be matched from own or other sources. In addition, project management costs and communication activities are often shared among the project partners. Only financially stable organisations and SME's should (and are allowed to) join as partners. If not joining as a partner, an organisation can be involved as a stakeholder in project activities and communication without receiving Interreg co-financing.

- **human resources** Although many exceptions can be found, ideally Interreg partner organisations join with their own personnel/staff. That makes calculating staff-costs the easiest (fact sheet 2) and least error-prone. In addition, the staff that cooperates in the project should have the time and intrinsic interest to do so (see also: section 3: success factors). Involved experts should feel supported by their financial staff and management. That is the only way to get good transnational cooperation during the project lifetime, and easy administration and reporting. It also guarantees the uptake of co-created transnational solutions within the partner organisation (= legacy of the project, as meant by the result indicators).

- **relevant network** Partner organisations should not just be added to the consortium to complement the partnership mix (see below). They actually represent 'that type of partner' from the wider group of stakeholders dealing with the common territorial challenge or problem. The transnational learning experience to find shared solutions in Interreg projects works best with representative, well-connected partner

organisations. Those are able to mobilise knowledge, stakeholders and effectively communicate and ensure the transfer of solutions towards the end of the project.

★ **Geographical balance: evenly spread across North Sea region**

A transnational challenge or problem is only solved, and solutions only transferred and replicated around the North Sea region, when relevant partners from that entire region participate! The Interreg North Sea projects are required to have a reasonably balanced mix with organisations from all corners, pilots should spread out geographically and ideally the budget balance between partners is also distributed accordingly.

★ **Complementing partnership mix**

The complex and often 'wicked problems' tackled by Interreg projects require an integrated, multi-stakeholders approach. These integrated solutions require innovation on different aspects (technical, social, economic, and on several governance and organisational levels). Often described with the 'quadruple helix' paradigm, that should be reflected in the partnership mix. The type of organisations that participate in the partnership should complement each other: public-organisations and local governments, knowledge- and education institutes, NGO's and interest-group-representatives, business and entrepreneurs (SMEs, sometimes larger), consultants, and representatives of civil society.

★ **Shared transnational challenge**

At the core of each Interreg project is a shared transnational challenge. A challenge that presents itself as an urgent problem to be solved for a large group of stakeholders in the North Sea region. Each project partner organisation should have an intrinsic link to that shared challenge and a link to working on shared solutions and approaches.

3. Success factors

Any partner search starts with 'ticking the boxes' for the requirements and elements listed above. But in the end, the 'success factors' below are essential to creating truly powerful partnerships.



★ Essential partners

Interreg project partners represent the wide group of stakeholders dealing with the 'shared transnational challenge' at the core of the project. In order to create truly replicable and transferable solutions, you need the best possible partners in your partnership. That means that they are:

- relevant in expertise and well connected in relevant networks
- they are a good representation of the wider stakeholder community
- willing to act as 'early adopters' and feel ownership to solve the shared challenge.

★ Motivation to participate

It should be clear from the start why a partner is interested to join an Interreg consortium. Several reasons can be valid, as long as the motivation is clear, for example:

- using the EU co-financing to cover costs of pre-market innovation and testing solutions in pilots
- using the transnational cooperation to position yourself in the forefront of innovation and become better connected to a transnational network
- using the project participation to show your expertise in an EU context and to highlight the relevance of your work
- using the transnational cooperation and expertise exchange to accelerate your own innovation and pilots.

Check:

- ✓ are they passionate about the topic and accelerating solutions together, or are they looking for money to fund their own activities?
- ✓ are the organisations joining with activities that are entirely new (= high risk), or were they already planning to do part of these activities in the near future?

★ Good cooperation

Is this partner a reliable partner? You need to work together for approximately 3 years (1,5 years in a small-scale project). That means that you have to find out quickly whether the organisation and participating staff can deliver what they promise in the project development phase.

Check:

- ✓ do you understand your cultural differences and can you work with that?
- ✓ can you have fun together, as well as cooperate and deliver outputs?
- ✓ does your partner answer their emails and share their thoughts?

★ Equality / mutual interest

The partnership should be complementary: each adding expertise and experiences that the others don't have, but can eventually use and work on. That implies that every partner should have a mutual interest in the activities and expertise of the others. And that often works best when there is a certain amount of 'equality', which implies that every partner should be able to bring something to the shared solution, as well as get something out of it to improve their own expertise and governance. Of course there can be differences between 'experienced partners' and eager 'followers'. But beware of creating too large a gap between experts and absolute-beginners.

★ Clear roles and responsibilities

Deciding on roles and responsibilities is a shared effort by all partners, and eventually agreed on in the project plan. The roles and responsibilities should be clear from the start. Possible roles: Project manager, knowledge expert, work package manager, pilot manager, communication expert, financial expert

Check:

- are there clear working agreements? Is it clear who will take the lead?
- are the practical working relations clear? = means of communication, shared documents, sharing of communication/dissemination materials, live/online meetings, documentation and reporting, etcetera.
- is the added value of the partner in the project clear?

★ EU-minded organisation & personal involvement

This sounds like an 'open door', but is essential to check.

Which persons/staff will be involved from the partner organisation? Is it just one enthusiastic expert, or does he/she have the backup of the entire organisation? Will the involved project staff be able to draw upon the resources of the organisation. In order to ensure:

- network, and take-up of developed solutions from the project
- replacement of staff if the occasion arises
- support for doing EU projects
 - by the management, securing staff hours and match-funding (40%)
 - by the financial department, documenting and reporting activities and expenditure

★ Political involvement

Most transnational Interreg project have long term implications on a governance and/or policy-making level. The developed transnational solutions commonly require further support for upscaling results. Involvement of management, policy makers and

politicians should be sought and secured at all stages!

- 1) project development: make sure that the project topic is relevant
- 2) project implementation: show progress and results, involve policy makers in communication and milestone events
- 3) project follow up: make sure that policy makers are actually welcoming the project outcomes and are willing to use and develop these.

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CHECKLISTS

Checklists are tools, not the rules. The [Interreg Programme](#) and the [fact sheets](#) provide the formal rules and guidelines for developing and implementing projects under the Interreg North Sea programme 2021-2027.

The checklists compile **the 'implicit information'**, the **'between the lines' meanings**, and **'the plain obvious' that everyone forgets to mention**. And they sometimes present the already available information and explanations in a different way (bullet-points, schematics, infographics, tables, etc.). They are rarely complete, always a work in progress, and really helpful at different stages of the Interreg project- and programme cycle.

The checklists were developed based on the experiences from

- the [National Contact Points](#)
- the [Joint Secretariat](#)
- ... and the countless inputs from **the project community** itself: the project partner beneficiaries, lead partners, consultants and other stakeholders.

If you read this checklist and feel that from your experience essential aspects are missing, information could be presented in a different way, or if you would notice actual mistakes: **let us know!** (→ the National Contact Points).

