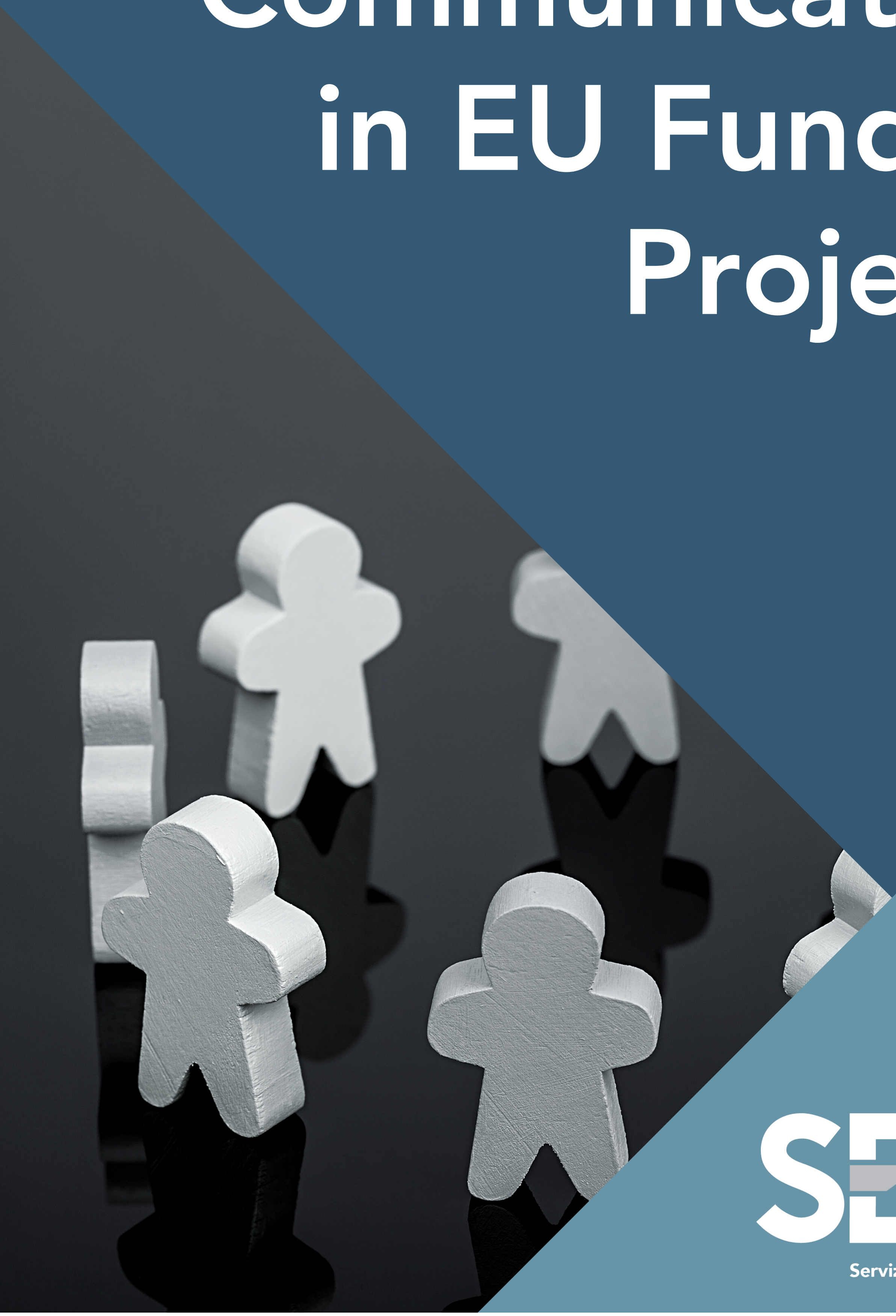
Communication in EU Funded Projects



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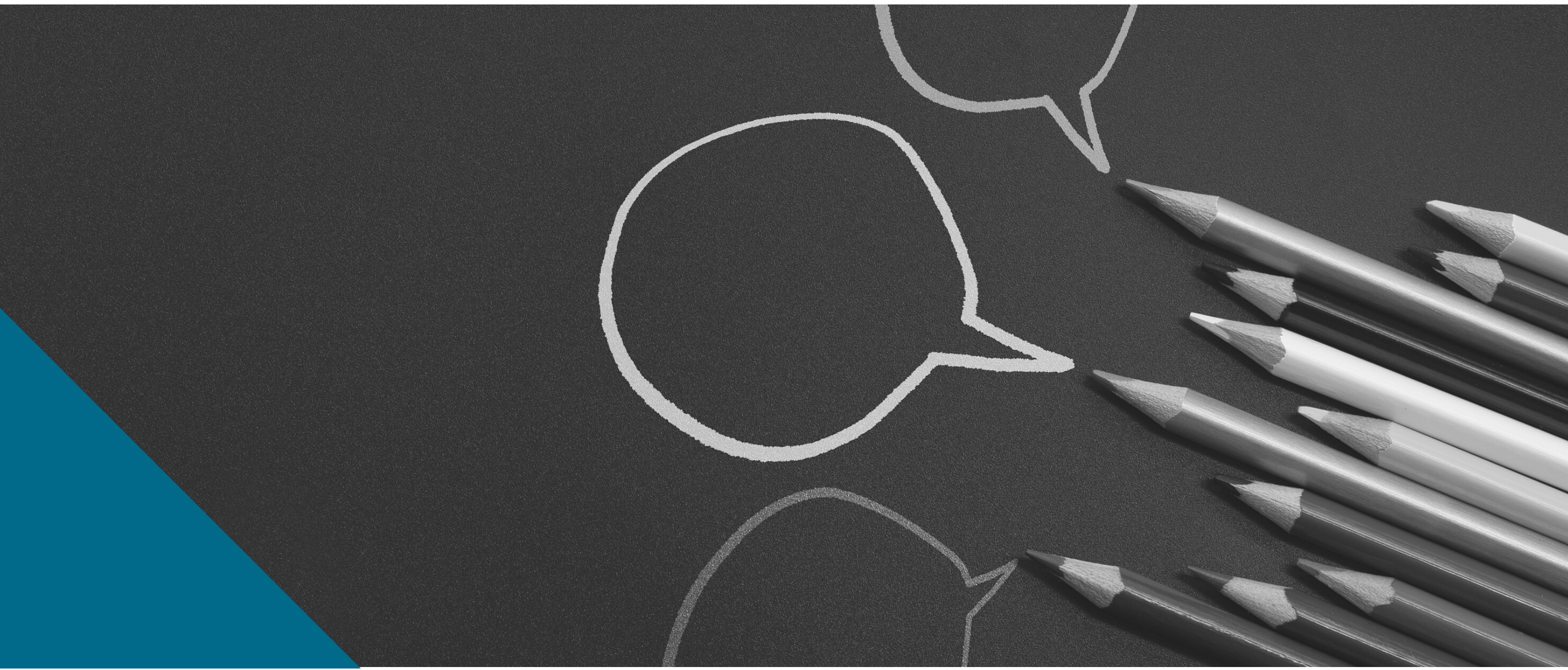
01 Introduction

Communication is key for the success of any project. This includes both internal communication within the project consortium and external communication with other relevant entities and the project's target groups.

Proper internal communication ensures that the project consortium is able to handle any risks or mitigate them within an appropriate time, and it will also ensure that all involved entities are aware of their role within the project and by when certain deliverables are required.

On the other hand, proper external communication is not only a contractual obligation when it comes to EU funds, such as the case of requesting approval for an extension to the project timeframes from the fund operator, but also an important component of making sure that project results are visible to relevant target groups.

Lack of communication during the implementation of any project may result in problems as certain issues might not be tackled on time, tasks may be duplicated if it is not clear who is doing what, and issues might be experienced with the fund operator if the latter is not informed before certain decisions are taken. In some cases, problems that ensue from lack of proper communication can result in the recalculation of an EU grant or recovery of EU funds.



Internal Communication 02

Communication within the organisation's project team

When implementing EU funded projects, it is important that a team of persons be tasked with monitoring the progress of the project for each involved entity within the project consortium. No matter the size of the project, keeping track of all the obligations arising from EU funding such as evaluation, ensuring proper visibility of EU-related logos and text, keeping track of the provisions in the grant agreement, reporting, etc. can be a lot for one person to handle. To ensure effective communication within a project team, the following measures should be considered:

1 Define a Clear Internal Structure

Tasks should be distributed within the project team according to the position of that person in the organisation, their availability to participate in the project and their skills and resources. For instance, someone who is good at writing and using social media can be tasked with communicating information about the project through print articles and online posts. Similarly, the person monitoring the finances within a project team should ideally possess basic knowledge in managing budgets. Roles should be clearly defined and clearly communicated so that project team members know exactly what is expected of them.

2 Retain Constant Communication Between Project Team Members

Communication among the project team should be constant and ideally weekly communication should be in place – at least between project manager/team leader and the other members of the team. Updates on the progress of project activities can take place through internal meetings. However, project team members should immediately alert the project manager/leader of any issues that arise during implementation. This will ensure that such issues are tackled in time, mitigating the risks associated with them.

Communication between the lead applicant and project partners

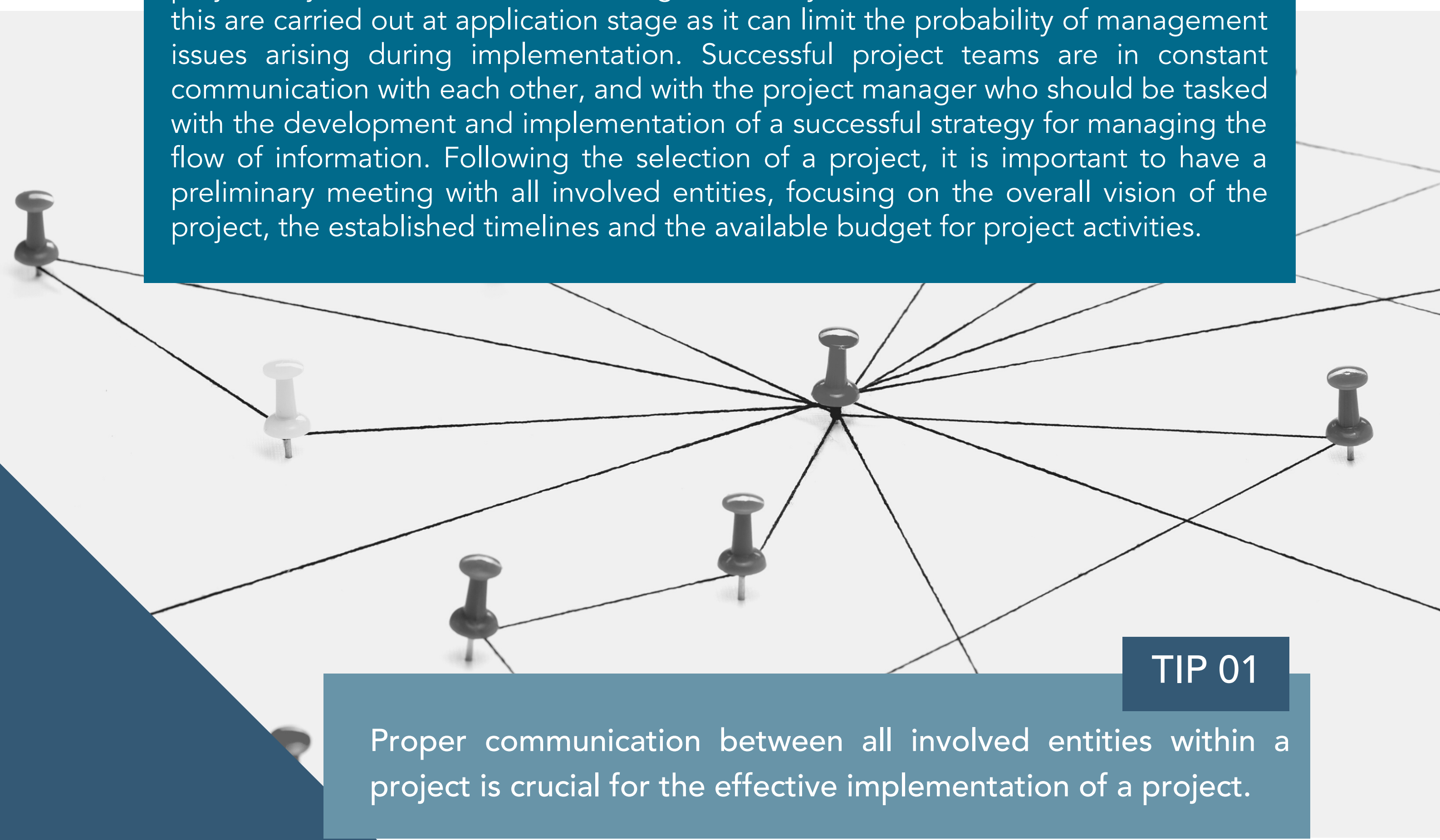
Most EU funded projects involve partnership with other organisations, including entities from countries other than the host country of the lead applicant. In most cases, communication methods to be used between the involved entities within the project consortium during the implementation stage of a project would have already been agreed at application stage.

To ensure effective communication between the organisations of a project consortium, the following measures should be considered:

1

All involved entities should be fully aware of all the project activities and their role/s within the consortium

The lead applicant needs to make sure that all of the partners are aligned on the project objectives, activities and budget. It is key that at least initial discussions on this are carried out at application stage as it can limit the probability of management issues arising during implementation. Successful project teams are in constant communication with each other, and with the project manager who should be tasked with the development and implementation of a successful strategy for managing the flow of information. Following the selection of a project, it is important to have a preliminary meeting with all involved entities, focusing on the overall vision of the project, the established timelines and the available budget for project activities.



TIP 01

Proper communication between all involved entities within a project is crucial for the effective implementation of a project.

2

Supplement day to day communication with periodic meetings

Project meetings between lead and partner organisations will serve as a space where the involved entities can update each other on the implementation of their activities within the project. It is important that such meetings continue throughout the project timeline. Through such meetings, involved organisations can also discuss the different logistics of the project and its activities. Such meetings do not necessarily have to happen in person - virtual meetings through tools such as Microsoft Teams and ZOOM can be an alternative to physical meetings. In certain cases, project applicants can budget for in-person meetings in their application forms for EU funding. For the efficient flow of such meetings, an agenda may be prepared and circulated with all involved parties, so that everyone is aware of the topic/s to be discussed and the involved entities may include any item/s they wish to tackle. During the meeting, minutes can be taken of what was discussed and any follow-up actions to be taken, including which entity and which specific persons are to take care of it.

Although meetings provide a good opportunity for the project's involved entities to update each other and discuss relevant matters, communication between the lead and partner organisations should not be limited to these meetings. Tools such as shared Google documents and e-mail will facilitate communication and the sharing of information amongst the involved entities. It might be useful to set up a contact person sheet for the project team of each participating organisation, so that everyone is aware who to contact and how to contact them on specific issues.

3

Lead applicant should be clear when communicating tasks and responsibilities to project partners

Communication between lead applicant and partner organisations should be clear to avoid duplication of work between involved entities in the project or having certain project activities not being implemented or monitored by the consortium. When an organisation is leading the project, it is important that it sets internal timeframes when the different partners are to provide certain results and this information should be communicated clearly. Clear communication is a key aspect in the successful implementation process of a project.

03 External Communication

Communication with the fund operator

There will always be an entity managing the EU funding programme through which a project is financed. The fund operator can be a national Managing Authority, a National Agency of a Programme or an Agency of the EU Commission.

To ensure effective communication with the fund operator, the following measures should be considered:

1

Organise an introductory meeting with the fund operator

Most funding operators will appoint a contact person to monitor the progress of a project. These contact persons will offer their assistance when it comes to any queries that might arise during the implementation of a project. When leading a project, it is recommended to organise an introductory meeting with the assigned contact person for proper introductions to take place and to better understand any procedures that may need to be followed during the implementation stage of the project. During this introductory session, the lead applicant can also go through the provisions of the grant agreement with the said contact person to ensure that it fully understands the terms and conditions tied to the payment of the EU grant. The contact person can also provide any necessary templates which may be used for the execution of certain processes.

2

Keep regular contact with the fund operator

Throughout the project the lead applicant should continually keep the fund operator informed of the implementation of the project and updated on the spending of the project budget. The fund operator is especially to be notified if a significant change is to be made to the project, e.g. a change in the project partners, the need to extend the project timeframes or change in budget.

TIP 02

The grant agreement signed with the fund operator before the start of a project outlines both the instances when the fund operator is to be kept informed of project changes as well as the procedures that should be followed for the communication of such information.

In all cases, communication with the fund operator and the necessary approvals are to be sought before changes are affected, not after, as otherwise this could lead to a recalculation of the EU grant to the project.

It is also good practice to keep the fund operator informed of changes to the project which do not require amendment to the grant agreement, e.g. a change in planned dates for events (provided they do not affect the overall duration of the project).

3

Be aware of the communicative methods in place when dealing with fund operators at European level

When it comes to centralised funding (funding programmes managed centrally by the European Commission and not a local managing authority), projects are predominantly managed through an online system. For example, in the case of the Horizon Europe funding programme, communication with the European Commission about the project, including the submission of project reports, is carried out through the Grant Management system.

The Grant Management system is not only used for project implementation but it is also the platform that organisations implementing EU funded projects should use to communicate with the European Commission. Access to this system will be made available once a project is selected for funding and all communication with the European Commission will be done through the "Communication Centre" tool highlighted below.

4

Know when to refer to the fund operator and when to consult the project documents

As a beneficiary of EU funding, an organisation should be aware of the provisions in the grant agreement signed with the relevant fund operator. For further information about what a grant agreement is and what information it typically contains, please refer to SEM guidelines on grant agreements.

Since fund operators monitor multiple projects simultaneously, it is advisable to look up project documents for the answers to any questions before reaching out to the fund operator for clarifications. The grant agreement, as well as the application form submitted to receive EU funding, should be the first places to look for information about:

- Eligible costs,
- Applicable procurement procedures for goods and services for your project,
- The results to be achieved by the end of the project (number of planned activities, persons to be reached, reports/ manuals/ training programmes or other results to be produced, etc...),
- The duration of the project, including start and end dates – and therefore, the time period within which costs are eligible to be covered through the EU grant,
- Procedures to follow if an amendment needs to be made to the grant agreement,
- The division of tasks among the participating organisations,
- The obligations of the lead applicant for EU funding,
- Any applicable penalties or procedures for failure to adhere to the grant agreement and submitted application form.

Communication with project target groups 04

Communication with project target groups in EU funded projects is divided into:

- Dissemination activities
- Visibility requirements

Dissemination Activities

All EU funded projects must include dissemination activities which communicates the aims, objectives and achieved results of the project. To this end, communication about the project to relevant target audiences should be ongoing throughout the project rather than left to the last few months of the project's duration.

When submitting an application form for EU funding, applicants are asked to identify the communication methods to be used for dissemination activities as well as the target audiences. It is important to take note of the communication measures listed in the application form, the target audiences for such activities as well as quantified targets for the number of persons and/or organisations to be reached. When planning out communication measures it is useful to:

Visibility Requirements

It is an obligation of beneficiaries of EU funding to promote the EU grant received for their project.

It is important for all project partners to be aware of these requirements and relevant instruction documents on the logos and text to be used. Failure to respect these obligations can result in a recalculation of the EU grant or recovery of funds by the fund operator.

Visibility requirements are not only intended for external communication activities but can also apply to internal project documents such as internal and annual reports. Examples of items subject to visibility requirements are:

- Registration sheets for project events,
- Invitations and/or invitation emails to target groups and participants for project events,
- Promotional materials including roll-up banners, leaflets, billboards, plaques on buildings (in the case of infrastructural projects), etc
- Online content about the project including blog articles, social media posts, online advertisements, etc...
- Presentations either about the project or for project events, e.g. presentations for conferences, training activities and seminars.

TIP 03

The grant agreement will include information about visibility requirements of EU logos and the text to be included next to such logos (if relevant). The grant agreement can also make reference to more detailed documents on visibility requirements as well as where to download high resolution copies of the relevant logos.

Communication with SEM 05

SEM can assist local entities to implement their EU funded projects.

When such assistance is provided, it is important that the beneficiary is in constant contact with the Agency throughout the implementation of the project - especially when approaching key project milestones, such as:

- Development of procurement documents;
- Conclusion of the evaluation of Request/Call for Quotations or Tenders;
- Submission of payment claims;
- Extensions to the project deadline;
- Development and submission of reports.

It is important that the Agency is informed prior to the start of any of these milestones or project phases so that it can provide the beneficiary with the appropriate assistance. Remedying any problems which might come up during project implementation will be difficult unless communication with the Agency is ongoing.

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