

Time Management in EU Funded Projects



SEM
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01 Introduction

This document presents the importance of proper time management in the context of EU funded projects. The next few pages provide an overview of tools and measures to mitigate delays and other risks to timely project implementation as well as potential consequences of not adhering to agreed project time frames.



The Importance of Time Management 02

EU funded projects have clearly set start and end dates, which are listed in the grant agreement – the contract signed between the Fund Operator and the entity awarded funding (the beneficiary). Within the project duration, all proposed activities and all planned expected results must be delivered.

Projects typically comprise a number of different activities and events e.g., training, workshops, research, study visits, conferences, etc. To this end, all participating organisations must contribute to the implementation of the project and monitor time management in order to deliver all that was proposed at application stage.

Many entities do not have paid staff to manage projects full-time. This means that projects are implemented in parallel to regular work tasks, which makes time management all the more important.

Projects also require planning, which may be quite time consuming. Logistical planning will be an important component of projects involving numerous activities and events. For example, event planning includes rental of venue, development of an agenda and any workshop materials, inviting speakers and participants, managing registrations, promoting the event and ensuring visibility requirements (promotion of EU funding to the project) in all project documents and promotional activities. In the spirit of fairness and transparency, market research should be undertaken and the most economically advantageous offer selected. It therefore follows that during the planning phase the event organiser should know the number of participants, whether break-out rooms or similar facilities are needed, whether audio equipment is needed (such as microphones) and other considerations.

Not delivering what was proposed at application stage could also have repercussions on the EU grant awarded to the project.

Embedding Time Management in Project Management 03

At application stage applicants are required to explain how they plan to manage their projects, mitigate and manage risks (including delays), divide tasks, undertake financial management of their EU grant, etc.

Once awarded funding, beneficiaries of EU funds must then put their management plans into practice, including time management plans.

Project management meetings should be held among participating organisations. Such meetings are held to discuss current project progress, any foreseen or encountered risks and to look at the results to be delivered. Project management meetings should be attended by project team members from all participating organisations and various aspects of project management should be discussed: project promotion, budget management, activity organisation, etc.

The frequency of such meetings should be flexible so that if needed they can be held more frequently. Typically, project management meetings should at least be held monthly in order to keep track of all ongoing activities.

Embedding time management in the project management framework will make it easier to keep track of the time available for project implementation, the planned phases of the project and what and when certain project results need to be delivered.

This is useful for all projects but particularly important for projects which involve a number of activities, events and deliverables e.g. research results to be used for training and then promotion of training materials to entities outside of the participating organisations.

TIP 01

Communication among participating organisations should be constant throughout the implementation of the project.

Time Management tools 04

Good time management tools can help detect risks to project implementation, including delays. This makes it easier to mitigate the impact of delays or avoid the risk from materialising by monitoring and evaluating project progress.

Time management tools can be used to help plan what needs to be delivered, and by when. Tools can also facilitate the division of tasks so that every organisation and member of the project team knows what is expected from them. Examples of such tools include software options, Gantt charts and calendars.

There are numerous software options which can help project teams manage their time wisely including project management or task management software. The cost of each varies by company and the type of features needed. Such software can be used to create and assign tasks, map out timeframes, monitor progress on documents e.g. proposals, event agendas, resource materials, and general communication tied to the project. This allows for a more organised approach to the project whereby communication is kept in one place and is accessible by all members of the project team.

Gantt charts are ideal tools to map out tasks and/ or project activities against the time available. Regularly checking a Gantt chart developed for the project will illustrate the results to be delivered and the time available within which to deliver them.

TIP 02

The ultimate aim of proper time management within EU funded projects is to achieve the project objectives and deliver the proposed activities and expected results by the project end date stipulated in the grant agreement.



Below is an example of a Gantt chart demonstrating the timeline of a project.

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct
Online project management meetings (monthly)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Kick-off meeting in Malta		■						
Focus groups to identify target group needs		■	■	■				
Interim project evaluation				■				
Transnational partners' meeting 2 (Italy)				■				
Development of training tools (all countries, lead - Spain)				■	■	■		
Piloting of training tools						■	■	■
Final evaluation								■

Calendars might seem like an over-simplified tool, however online calendars can be integrated into project management software and therefore accessible and visible to all participating organisations. This makes it easy to mark down deadlines, key dates and milestones.

TIP 03

Calendars can be used to map out how time should be divided for different tasks by specific days rather than only looking at weeks or months on a Gantt chart. This makes day to day management of the project easier and enables better synergy among the tasks coordinated by the project team

Mitigation Measures 05

As explained above, proper project management and the use of management tools will help to detect risks and potential delays. It is then important to address such risks in an effective way.

Key to proper time management is clear and effective division of tasks among the participating organisations, as well as the project team within each organisation. All participating organisations are expected to contribute their expertise and resources to project implementation. Within each participating organisation should be a team of people who are experienced and qualified to perform their assigned tasks within the project.

In the case of delays, it is possible to mitigate negative impact by shifting project timelines to divide tasks better internally and prioritise tasks according to need and urgency. In this way, different tasks can be performed concurrently by Team A and Team B so that both are delivered by their planned due dates.

If needed, beneficiaries also have the option of requesting an extension to project duration through an amendment of the grant agreement. Further details are provided in the following section.



Tackling delays to project implementation 06

Proper communication with the Fund Operator is required throughout the implementation of the project. In cases of risks that materialise during project implementation, it is even more important to maintain communication with the Fund Operator as solutions can be sought. In cases of force majeure, extraordinary extensions to the project duration might be awarded e.g. during 2020-2021, numerous Fund Operators allowed beneficiaries to 'freeze' their projects until travel resumed and project activities could be implemented as normal. Certain Fund Operators also allowed the option of implementing projects online, with a reduction in grant (since travel would not take place and physical events were shifted to online events with limited expenses involved).

Working with the Fund Operator should be the first course of action to see the possibilities available. Any requests for amendment should be made as soon as possible after coordination with the Fund Operator and not left to the last minute. Poor project planning is not considered force majeure, however sometimes project activities take longer than envisaged and third parties might cause delays to project implementation.

As explained above, an extension of the project duration can be sought by beneficiaries of EU funding. Approval of the extension request is at the discretion of the Fund Operator and depends on numerous factors. This includes the maximum eligible duration of projects as listed in the call documents for the EU funding strand applied under and also whether the project is being implemented towards the end of the multi-annual financial framework. EU funding programmes are available for a specific duration of seven years, after which the name of the funding programme and its funding strands might change, be integrated with another EU funding programme, etc. We are currently in the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (MFF).

Calls for EU funding are published up until the last year of each MFF. As can be imagined, projects awarded funding during the last year of the MFF are then implemented after the MFF. To this end, the total extension of project duration allowed in such cases might be more restricted since Fund Operators are obliged to conclude the evaluation and reporting on each MFF within either two or three years, depending on the funding programme.

The extension must be formalised in an amendment to the grant agreement. For further information on this, please consult the resources on managing changes in EU funded projects and the grant agreement available on the [SEM website](#).

Funding awarded for expected results or activities not delivered by the project end date is either deducted from the EU grant or is recovered if already covered by the EU grant disbursed.

TIP 04

Costs incurred beyond the project end date listed in the grant agreement without the granting of an extension by the Fund Operator are not considered eligible for EU funding.



Conclusion 07



Time management is important within EU funded projects. All activities and deliverables are to be implemented, and all related expenses are to be incurred between the start and end dates of the project.

The role of the participating organisations and respective project teams is key in ensuring tasks get implemented efficiently and effectively. Tools such as project management software can facilitate communication and allocation of tasks among the project team members within each participating organisation.

Improper time management within EU funded projects can lead to recovery of funds or reduction of the EU grant, particularly if an extension of the project duration is not sought.



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