

4th call Lead Partner Seminar

Copenhagen, Denmark
23 January 2012

Event Report

The 4th call Lead Partner Seminar took place in Copenhagen (DK) on 23 January 2012. The staff of the Joint Technical Secretariat and the four Information Points welcomed 173 participants, representing all 82 projects approved under conditions in December 2011.



Michael Koch-Larsen, Programme Monitoring Committee member representing the Danish Regions, opened the event and congratulated all 4th call approved projects on behalf of the Monitoring Committee members. Stressing the importance of interregional cooperation, he saw it as a possibility to exchange experience and improve regional and local policies.

Michel Lamblin, Director of the INTERREG IVC programme, welcomed the Lead Partners and presented the results of the fourth call for proposals. He noted that in four calls for proposals, around 14,000 partners had applied to become partners in INTERREG IVC projects. Now, with 82 new projects recommended under conditions, the programme supports 204 projects with 2276 partners. He also stressed that 90% of all EU NUTS 2 regions are now benefiting from interregional cooperation. In the second part of his presentation, Michel presented the management structure of the programme as well as introduced the staff working at the Joint Technical Secretariat in Lille (FR) and the four Information Points in Rostock (DE), Katowice (PL), Valencia (ES) and Lille (FR).



Erwin Siweris, Deputy Programme Director, presented the subsidy contract and the model partnership agreement to the audience. In his presentation he called attention to the most important sections of the subsidy contract, explained the flexibility rule and highlighted the importance of the n+2/n+3 rule. While the model partnership agreement is already available on the programme website, Erwin reminded all lead partners that the subsidy contract will be mailed to them once all conditions for approval are fulfilled.

Petra Geitner, Senior Finance Officer, ended the first plenary session with an overview of the main reporting principles. In her presentation she highlighted the importance of the application form,

which will be the basis for all monitoring. Furthermore, she explained the timing of submitting different reporting documents and of receiving the ERDF payment.

After a short coffee break, the participants were divided into six smaller groups to discuss activity and finance reporting in more detail. As these interactive workshops were repeated twice, all participants received a practical insight into both topics.

The workshops on activity reporting

were led by the project team and first provided an insight into activity reporting – the main channel through which projects achievements are communicated to the programme. Project officers explained the need for monitoring and how it is carried out in practice. It was emphasised that projects should rather be realistic than over-ambitious when it comes to setting targets, as the programme is very demanding with indicators and will carefully monitor project achievements.



The project team also explained the meaning of several core indicators. Afterwards, the new knowledge of participants was tested on two practical case studies. The first case study required good attention to detail by asking the participants to identify inconsistencies in the component 2 work plan. The second case study tackled a common shortcoming in the reports of running projects – the justification of component 3 result indicator ‘number of policies improved’. After discussing the correct answers, the project officers presented some final points of attention and distributed a compilation of the most common clarification requests.

The workshops on managing finances

were led by the finance team. After an overview of the reporting and financial control system, the team presented the basics of finance monitoring. This covered not only the eligibility periods and eligible costs but also information on first level control systems. The finance officers highlighted the importance of sound financial reporting and reminded that partners from decentralised systems should already start selecting their first level controllers to make sure that they are approved by the approbation bodies in time. In addition, the finance team reminded lead partners that starting from the fourth call, a flat rate is applied to administration costs



- this will be calculated automatically as 12% of reported staff costs and no supporting evidence is required from the partners. The complexity of shared costs was also discussed and the team provided some useful tips how to avoid them. The last point of the presentation concerned public procurement, recalling basic principles and common mistakes. After the presentation, the participants were handed a case study on external expertise items, where they needed to check if the budget items were sufficiently specified and in line with the application form.

After another short coffee break, it was time to gather in the plenary room for the final presentations. **Aous Tamimi**, IT Officer, informed all lead applicants that instead of using Excel forms, all future progress reports will be submitted using online forms. The lead applicants will soon receive their access codes, after which they will be able to access the forms at www.e-4c.net. It is then up to the lead partners if they wish to give predefined limited access to their partners, so that partner organisations could report expenditures and modify their contact information, he explained. Even if some screenshots could already be presented, Aous announced that two in-depth seminars on online forms for 4th call lead partners will take place in February 2012 in Paris and Rome.

Irma Astrauskaite, Communication Officer, continued with a presentation on information and publicity requirements. After each participant had completed the task of writing down a sentence about their project, Irma presented the legal basis for publicity requirements as well as the main requirements and recommendations. In addition to the main regulations, she encouraged the participants to go through the communication requirements in the programme manual and read the INTERREG IVC Communication Guide for projects. Next, she gave a short technical guidance on the use of logos, which were also included on the USB key all participants received. In order to assist lead partners in their communication endeavours, Irma informed all participants of a communication seminar, which will be organised in April 2012. For further assistance, partners were invited to contact either the Communication Officers in the Joint Technical Secretariat or Communication Advisers in the four Information Points. In the end of her presentation, Irma asked all participants to say the sentence they wrote out loud at the same time and concluded that each project needs to find a way to make sure that their message stands out in the crowd.



Final recommendations were given by **Erwin Siveris**. First and foremost, he reminded all lead partners to carefully read the programme manual, which was given to each seminar participant in a handy A5 format. He explained that the aim of the programme is to build a nice and constructive collaboration with each lead partner: “Programme’s success relies on projects’ success”. Consequently, he urged all lead partners to be proactive in informing their contact persons at the Joint Technical Secretariat or at the Information Points about important issues also outside the mandatory progress reports. Erwin also presented an overview of upcoming events and briefly explained the process of capitalisation at programme level. The overall objective of the capitalisation, he explained, is better exploitation of projects results for the benefit of EU local and regional authorities. However, this process will also help to identify synergies between projects, visualise project achievements, and propose policy recommendations for national and EU level. Projects who are allocated to the 12 thematic topics will be asked by thematic experts to provide input to data collection and analysis as well as to participate in topic workshops, expected to take place in autumn 2012.

Finally, the floor was given to partners who already have experience with INTERREG IVC projects, so that they could share practical tips on project implementation. Several project partners stressed the importance to start the project immediately and not to lose time, which becomes very important at the end of the project. Good relations with the project and finance officers in the Joint Technical Secretariat are also essential: “Better to consult with them not only about reporting issues, but also to ask for advice on how to handle specific issues when they come up”.

It was also noted that good internal communication and knowledge of partners’ expectations is crucial: “It is important to develop a feeling of trust between partners and motivate them at the very beginning. Everyone has to be part of the orchestra”. In order for all partners to have a common understanding about the rules, it was suggested to form a financial group within the project. It was also deemed important to agree on common standards and quality for deliverables and to think how any language issues could be solved.



One more advice concerned new media. An experienced communication coordinator recommended using new media to involve stakeholders and to disseminate project results, because many important organisations and the European Commission are active on Facebook and other social networks. Therefore, it is an extra opportunity to profile the project. “And do not forget the logos,” reminded project implementers.

At the end, all participants were invited to exchange experience at the cocktail reception.

A more practical part of the seminar – **individual consultations** – followed in the late afternoon and on the next day, where lead partners could discuss the conditions for approval with programme staff. The deadline for fulfilling the conditions is set for 3 February.

All in all, the event was very successful and useful judging from the feedback of participants. 120 participants (82% of project representatives at the event) filled in the evaluation sheets and scored all aspects of the event on a scale of 1-5 (1 being ‘very poor’ and 5 being ‘excellent’). The event received a very positive overall evaluation with an average score of 4.38. The highest scores were given to the workshops on activity monitoring (4.52) and finance monitoring (4.34). Also the interactivity of the event, venue and the practical organisation all received average scores of 4 and above.

The programme staff was especially moved by the additional comments provided by participants and was very glad that the INTERREG IVC team is seen as approachable, creative, enthusiastic and supportive.

The Joint Technical Secretariat and Information Points staff thanks all lead partners for their active participation, wishes a fruitful project implementation and will be looking forward to assisting them with this task.