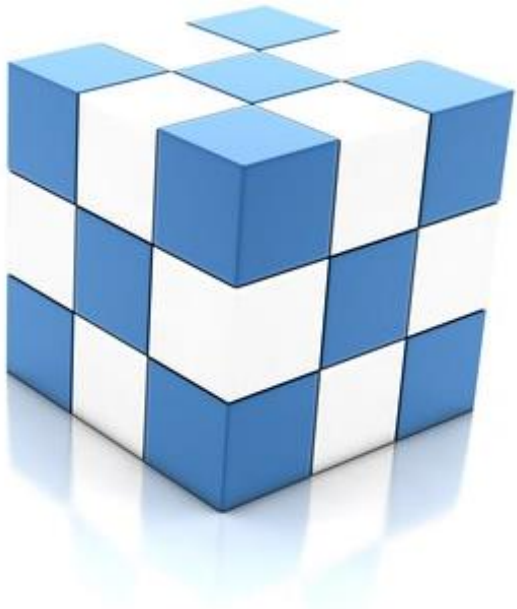
KARL-FRANZENS-UNIVERSITÄT GRAZ
UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ
Büro für Internationale Beziehungen | Office of International Relations

How to write a good project proposal in Erasmus+



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Your project idea

You have a project idea which you think could fit the Erasmus+ framework?

Read up on the Erasmus+ program to find out about the different actions in the program and determine whether your idea matches the objectives and priorities of any of these actions. In order to do so consult the **relevant call for proposals** and, most importantly, the **Erasmus+ program guide** published in autumn each year for any upcoming calls for proposals.

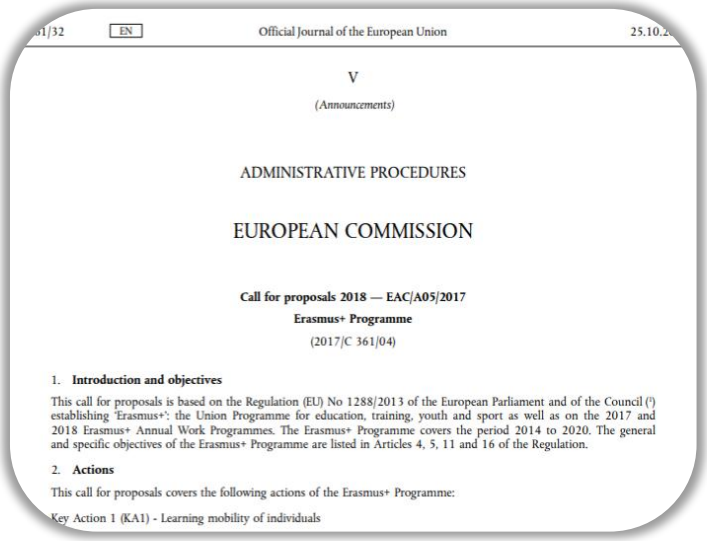
Your project idea is a fit? Get ready to apply…

Getting ready to apply

The Erasmus+ program

Get familiar with the Erasmus+ program and the action you want to apply in.

- Read the relevant **call for proposals**
- Consult the applicable **Erasmus+ program guide**



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(Announcements)

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Call for proposals 2018 — EAC/A05/2017
Erasmus+ Programme
(2017/C 361/04)

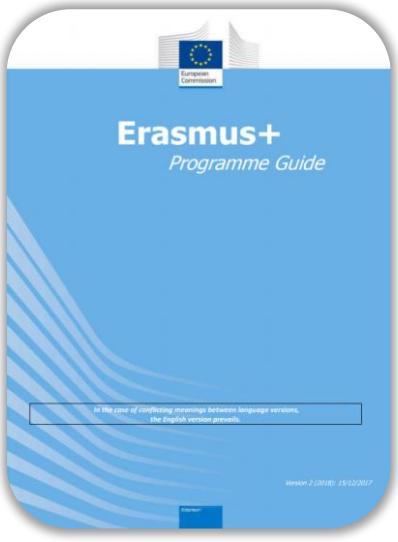
1. **Introduction and objectives**

This call for proposals is based on the Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (1) establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union Programme for education, training, youth and sport as well as on the 2017 and 2018 Erasmus+ Annual Work Programmes. The Erasmus+ Programme covers the period 2014 to 2020. The general and specific objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme are listed in Articles 4, 5, 11 and 16 of the Regulation.

2. **Actions**

This call for proposals covers the following actions of the Erasmus+ Programme:

Key Action 1 (KA1) - Learning mobility of individuals



- Get familiar with the application form
  - *How does it work and what are the technical requirements?*
  - *What information is required? What data and documents do you need to ask your partners for?*
  - *How much time will you need to complete the application, including all the required annexes?*

- Check the **website of the EACEA[1] and/or the Austrian National Agency**

  They provide additional useful documents such as FAQs, model grant agreements, financial and administrative handbooks and expert assessment manuals. The latter will give you an idea of what the experts evaluating your application will consider important and pay particular attention to.

- Check the **Erasmus+ Project Results Platform**

  This will allow you to explore projects funded in the past, find inspiration and avoid repeating what other projects might have done already.

USEFUL LINKS

EACEA: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus_en

Austrian National Agency: https://bildung.erasmusplus.at/

Erasmus+ Project Results Platform: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/

Consultation

Use the consultation services provided by the Austrian National Agency for the Erasmus+ program and the International Relations Office at Uni Graz

- Discuss your project idea and ask for advice
- Participate in (inter-)national information events on Erasmus+ (if available)

This is not your first proposal in Erasmus+?

If you have submitted a proposal within previous Erasmus+ calls, please note that there might be changes with regard to different aspects such as thematic priorities to be covered, requirements for the composition of the consortium, activities eligible for funding, etc. **Don't rely on information from previous calls! Get familiar with the new call and the pertinent documents!**

Institutional commitment

Discuss your idea with your **colleagues** and the **head of your unit/department**. The planned project should fit the **expertise and strategy** of your unit/department. Ensure that you have the institutional support and required resources for the preparation of the proposal and, if it is selected for funding, the implementation of the project.

[1] Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission

Writing the proposal – HOW?

Have a clear concept!

Have your project idea clearly in mind before starting to write your application.

You should be able to answer the following questions:

- What do you want to do?
- Why do you want to do it?
- How are you going to do it?
- Who do you want to work with?
- What is the expected impact?

Start early enough!

Set up a realistic timeline for preparing and submitting the proposal.

Do not underestimate the time it takes to **collect input and documents** from the partner institutions and to write up the proposal. **Substantial quality time** needs to be assigned for writing a proposal which clearly and convincingly presents the project idea, the need for the project and the expected impact. Time should be set aside to allow your **partners** to **review the proposal and give feedback.**

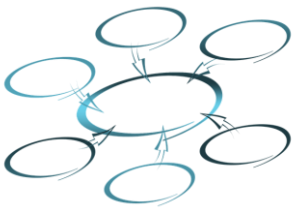
Work in a team!

Discuss ideas, consider different angles and approaches.

An Erasmus+ project proposal should be developed by a team of people who can **share the tasks** of collecting information and documents, writing the narrative parts of the proposal and setting up a cost-effective budget. Given the scope of Erasmus+ project proposals, it is very difficult for one person to single-handedly produce a comprehensive proposal. Having a team of at least two people is important to **discuss ideas, consider different angles and approaches**, and continuously **revise and optimize** the different parts of the proposal.

Involve the partners!

A good proposal is a proposal that has been prepared and agreed jointly by the partnership.



The partners should be actively involved in **drafting and revising** the application. Their input and contribution of ideas ensure their commitment to the project.

Make it easy for the evaluators!

Do not expect the evaluators to have specific background knowledge or to look up things you might not have explained sufficiently.

Your proposal will be evaluated solely on the basis of the information it provides. In order to make it easy for the evaluators, try to produce a proposal which is all of the following:

CONSISTENT	*e.g. use uniform abbreviations and terms*
COHERENT	*e.g. avoid contradictions between different sections in the application, avoid "patchwork"*
SIMPLE	*e.g. a few concise sentences (clear and to the point) are better than long and/or vague explanations*
CONCRETE	*e.g. provide examples, justify your statements – refer to research, policy papers, needs analysis, etc.*
CLEAR	*e.g. follow the questions and answer them in the right order*
EXPLICIT	*e.g. do not expect the evaluators to know what you are talking about, do not assume anything – the evaluators cannot read your mind; avoid abbreviations or explain them*
FOCUSED	*e.g. make sure you understand the questions and provide the required answers (stick to what is actually asked!)*
COMPLETE	*make sure that your proposal is complete, including all required annexes, and that it meets all the mandatory (formal) requirements*

Ask for feedback!

Ask a colleague who is not involved in the application process to read through the proposal.

This person has a perspective similar to that of the evaluators and might therefore be able to point out things and ask questions which evaluators might also come up with.

Check the eligibility requirements!

No matter how excellent your proposal is, it will be automatically rejected if it does not meet the funding program's eligibility criteria.

Therefore, in addition to producing a convincing proposal as far as project contents and design are concerned, make sure that the proposal is formally correct and eligible. For example, check the text of the call and the program guidelines for the following information:

- What are the formal submission requirements?
- What are the thematic priorities the project needs to address?
- What are the rules for the composition of the partnership (number of partners, number of countries, status of the applicant, eligibility of partner institutions, etc.)?
- What is the grant size (minimum/maximum) and possible project duration?
- What ceilings are there for specific items in the budget?

Writing the proposal – WHAT?

The evaluators will assess your proposal against four main criteria:

- Relevance of the project
- Quality of the project design and implementation
- Quality of the project team and the cooperation arrangements
- Impact and sustainability

Relevance of the project

*You need to convincingly present **WHAT** you want to do and **WHY** you want to do it.*

Objectives and priorities of the call

Explain how your project idea matches the objectives and priorities of the funding program.

Refer to the relevant objectives and priorities and link them to what you and your partners are planning to do in terms of contents, aims and beneficiaries/target groups.

Needs analysis

Convince the evaluators that your project addresses an important problem/challenge and is therefore actually "needed".

Do so by demonstrating that you have conducted a needs analysis which has revealed a requirement for the proposed product/activities. The **results of the needs analysis** should be presented in a clear and consistent way and **support the relevance of the project proposal**. While a more in-depth analysis may be planned for when the project actually starts, there needs to be a **preliminary pre-project needs analysis** to underline the importance of the planned initiative.

The needs analysis can refer to **different levels**, such as the individual level (e.g. students and staff involved), the institutional level (each participating partner organization), the national level (e.g. higher education systems), and the international level (e.g. if the project addresses an issue of transnational importance).

Provide **evidence** to support your needs analysis. This may include, for example, relevant **statistics**, findings from **surveys** on a specific topic, recent research findings, and expert **reports**.

Do research to find out whether the identified need has already been addressed by **other projects**. If so, make your project **stand out** and describe its **added value**.

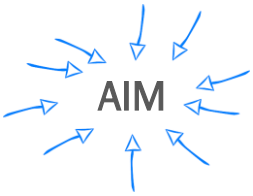
Target groups

Clearly define the target groups of your project and explain how their needs will be addressed during and after the project.

Try to be **specific** and **quantify** the target group(s) – e.g. 20 students per partner institution will be trained, 50 teachers in each partner country will participate in the events, etc.

A frequent weakness in project proposals is that the target groups are not clearly identified and/or not quantified, which makes it difficult to demonstrate and measure the impact of the project.

Motivation for and aim of the project



It needs to be clear what the project wants to achieve.

The aim should be clearly stated, the objectives described and convincing.

Innovation

Explain how your project is different from existing or past projects/activities covering the issue you are planning to address.

How will your project achieve what other projects/activities have not achieved? The innovative features of the project need to be pointed out in relation to the identified needs.

International cooperation

Demonstrate that international cooperation is necessary for achieving the aim of the project.

Explain why similar results cannot be achieved through national, regional or local projects.

Quality of project design & implementation

Present a sound project management methodology which is appropriate for achieving the project objectives.

The proposal needs to provide the answers to the following questions:

- What are the planned activities and how do they relate to the project objectives?
- How are the activities integrated into a realistic work plan?
- How will the implementation of the project activities according to the work plan be monitored?
- How does the partnership ensure that the project is implemented in the most economical way?
- What mechanisms are put in place to handle challenges and risks?

Activities and work plan

The proposed activities need to be appropriate to achieve the project objectives.

All the activities should be integrated into a clear and realistic work plan with **well-defined deliverables and milestones**. The work plan needs to consider all the different project phases, including **preparation**, **implementation**, **evaluation** and **quality assurance**, follow-up and **dissemination** of results. Try to link the planned activities to the project objectives (i.e. which activities are required for which objectives).

Do not set too many specific objectives – be focused and realistic!

The specific project objectives should be **SMART**:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic
Time-bound

Quality control

Your project proposal needs to include a quality control strategy.

Introduce the quality control measures and tools the partnership will use to make sure the project activities are carried out according to the work plan and the available budget and produce results of high quality. Ideally, the project should be subject to **internal and external** quality control measures.

Quality control measures can include, for example, **work package reports**, regular **reviews** by a project **quality assurance committee**, satisfaction **surveys/questionnaires**, **site visits**, as well as **testing phases** for specific project outputs and **evaluation reports by external experts**. The **target groups** of the project should be involved in the quality assessment as much as possible.

For each quality measure/tool, the following should be explained:

- What will it cover, i.e. which output, result or general aspect of the project?
- When and how often will it be used?
- Who will be responsible for the measure/tool?
- How will the findings be used to improve or adapt the project?

Make sure to define **quantitative indicators** against which to measure the quality and success of the project.

> *For example: At least 25 students have participated in the training on intercultural communication. At least 70% of the participants state that they found the contents of the training very useful.*

Cost-effectiveness

The proposed budget plan needs to be adequate for the activities to be implemented.

Make sure that it is possible to relate the different budget items to specific objectives, outputs and/or outcomes. It needs to be clear what the partnership is going to use the money for. **Justify the costs!**

The project needs to provide **"good value for money"**. Therefore, try to be as realistic and economical as possible when calculating the costs. For example,

- do not overestimate staff costs.
- consider whether and to what extent sub-contracting is actually necessary.
- try to combine travels for different events, for example, by organizing a project management meeting back-to-back with a staff training event.
- if you plan to buy equipment, explain how the budgeted equipment is relevant/essential for the project objectives and expected results.
- ensure that the distribution of the funds within the partnership reflects the partner institutions' role and tasks.

Challenges and risk management

Show that the partnership is aware of the potential challenges and risks it might be faced with in the implementation of the project.

Challenges and risks may relate to the **project implementation** itself (e.g. conflicts among partners, lack of commitment due to management change at a partner institution) or to **external factors** beyond the control of the partnership (e.g. political or security situation in a partner country).

The proposal needs to define potential challenges and risks and present possible **ways of handling or mitigating** them. It is important not to list risks which should have been eliminated by the partnership before even submitting the proposal. Therefore, do not list risks such as "the budget may not be sufficient for implementing the action" or "it could be difficult to engage the target groups". Through the design and methodology of the project the partnership needs to rule out these situations from the beginning: The budget plan needs to be tailor-made, measures for how to engage the target groups need to be presented already in the proposal.

Key concepts explained

Wider objective

- broader/longer-term impact or result to which the project contributes; often transcends the project lifetime
  Example: *Strengthening the capacities of the partner institutions to provide state-of-the-art training/education in industrial ecology answering to the needs of the labor market.*

Specific objective

- direct impact or result expected at the end of the project

Example: *Adapting the curricula at the partner institutions by July 20XX in order for them to be more interdisciplinary and research-based and include innovative teaching methods and materials.*

Outputs

- tangible and measurable results ("products")

  Example: *five new / restructured courses for an undergraduate program in the field of industrial ecology*

Outcomes

- intangible effects

  Examples: *new teaching skills acquired by staff in the field of industrial ecology at the partner institutions*

Activities

- actions taken and tasks performed to produce the envisaged outputs/outcomes

  Example: *analysis of staff training needs or employers' needs; development of a course*

Make sure there is **consistency** between the project objectives, results and activities: The project needs to be designed in a way that the planned activities lead to the expected results (outputs/outcomes) and that the results (outputs/outcomes) lead to the identified specific objectives of the project.

Quality of project team & cooperation arrangements

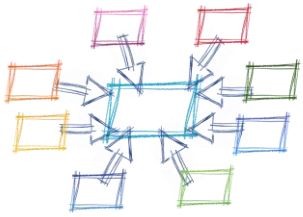
Your proposal needs to demonstrate that the partnership has been composed with the objectives and aims of the project in mind.

Convince the evaluators that you have an excellent team whose experience and expertise are **complementary** and perfectly suited to deliver the project. Explain how the partnership will ensure efficient communication and decision making.

Partnership composition

Choice of partner institutions

The partnership needs to include all the expertise, skills and competences required for the successful implementation of the project.



This is also why **sub-contracting needs to be clearly justified** and should be limited to what is absolutely necessary: The idea is to choose partner institutions which, taken together and complementing each other, have the expertise and resources required for the project.

The **motivation** of the partners to join the project needs to be clear. Each partner institution must (a) bring a concrete added value to the project and (b) gain a concrete added value from the project. In other words, the partnership needs to benefit by having a specific partner institution on board, the partner institution needs to have a stake in the success of the project (institutional commitment!).

If you include **associate partners** in the project, explain why their participation is required/beneficial. Describe how they will be involved and what their specific tasks will be.

Whenever possible, refer to **previous experience** the partner institutions have in working together. Positive experience resulting from cooperation in other contexts (e.g. projects, staff exchange, conferences) should be highlighted as it underscores the potential of the project partnership.

> Do not write a project proposal to suit a particular set of partners, but choose your partners to match the project idea!

Size of partnership

Reflect on the size of the project consortium. A large consortium is not necessarily better.

The number of partner institutions should be appropriate to the objectives you want to achieve. In any case, make sure that the **formal requirements** for the composition of the consortium (e.g. minimum and/or maximum number of partner institutions and countries) according to the call for proposals are respected.

More than one key staff member per partner institutions should be involved in the project. If there is only one staff member responsible for the project at a given institution, his or her leaving the institution or temporary absence/unavailability may jeopardize the project implementation.

Tasks and responsibilities

The involvement of the partner institutions in the project in terms of their tasks and responsibilities should be as balanced as possible.

It needs to be clear that each partner institution has an active and essential role in the project. This is important to encourage a sense of "ownership" of the project among the partner institutions. Tasks and responsibilities should be distributed among the partner institutions according to their specific expertise.

Communication and decision making

The proposal needs to present a well-thought-out management structure covering communication, decision making and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Explain at which **levels** the project will be managed and **by whom**:

- international / project level
- national / partner country level
- local / institution level

Present the **management bodies** to be established at the different levels. For example:

- overall project management board, in which all the partners are represented
- local management team at each partner institution
- quality assurance team
- associate partner advisory board

Describe the **composition and responsibilities** of each body and the relationships between them. All the partner institutions should play an active role in the project management so that the project is a truly joint initiative of the consortium.

Provide information on **how and how often** the partner institutions will **communicate**:

- *Methods/channels:* e.g. face-to-face project management meetings, virtual meetings, email, telephone, newsletters
- *Frequency of communication:* e.g. face-to-face project management meeting twice a year, one Skype meeting per month, communication via e-mail and phone on a daily/regular basis, quarterly project newsletters

The communication strategy should also refer to possible **conflict resolution mechanisms**. If there is a conflict among partner institutions, how will it be handled?

> ***For example:*** *In a first step, the conflict will be referred to the coordinator and/or the project management board. If the conflict cannot be resolved within the partnership, an external mediator will be engaged. Failing amicable settlement, the legal departments of the involved partners will look into the matter. Etc.*

Impact & sustainability

You need to demonstrate that what you are planning to do in the project will result in significant benefits for the identified target groups (**impact**). Describe how you will inform the target groups and any other stakeholders on the project and its results (**dissemination and exploitation**). Explain how the results of the project will continue to have an impact even after the project has come to an end (**sustainability**).

Impact of the project

Impact refers to the benefits the project has for the target groups at different levels and to the beneficial changes resulting from the project during and after its completion.

In order to be able to demonstrate the impact of the project, you need to have clearly **defined and quantified** the **target groups** of your project in the appropriate sections of the proposal. Be specific and systematic in presenting the expected impact. Refer to all the different target groups and consider the different levels of impact (e.g. individual, institutional, local, regional, national and/or European level). Explain how you will **assess** whether the expected impact has actually been achieved.

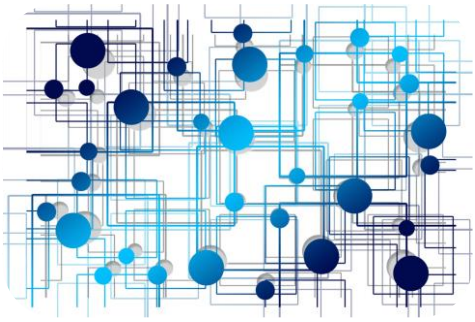
Dissemination and exploitation

Show that you are aware of the concepts "dissemination" and "exploitation" and that your project takes into account both.

Dissemination refers to activities and measures aimed at spreading information about the project and making it visible beyond the circle of direct participants.

Exploitation refers to activities and measures aimed at mainstreaming and multiplying project results beyond the circle of direct beneficiaries. It involves encouraging people and institutions outside the project consortium to use and benefit from the results of the project. In this way, the impact of the project will be maximized and continue beyond the project funding period.

Dissemination and exploitation are distinct but closely related processes. Both increase the project impact and contribute to its sustainability.



What are the features of a good dissemination and exploitation strategy? In order to be convincing, your strategy needs to

- assign an **active role** to all the partner institutions (including the associate partners if applicable)
- **define the project results** to be disseminated, mainstreamed and/or multiplied
- identify and quantify the **target groups to be addressed**, both within the partner institutions (e.g. students, staff, management) and outside the consortium (e.g. other higher education institutions, national authorities, employers)
- rely on a wide variety of **different methods and tools** (e.g. websites, social media, webinars, events such as conferences or fairs, training sessions, printed material) suitable for the different target groups
- envisage dissemination activities **from the very start** of the project and exploitation activities as soon as relevant results are available
- include **cooperation** with institutions/organizations which can support the spreading and mainstreaming of results (e.g. national authorities, associations, networks)

Sustainability

Your proposal needs to show that the notion of sustainability has been a central element in the design of the project. Specific activities and measures to ensure sustainability need to be presented.

Sustainability refers to activities and measures aimed at ensuring that the results of the project will exist and be used beyond the duration of the project.

The sustainability strategy for the project should

- specify the project results which will continue to be available after the project and the activities which will continue following the end of the project funding period

  Examples of sustainable results: *a newly developed or modernized study program, a new unit (e.g. a career center), a network of experts in a particular field, an e-learning platform*

  Examples of sustainable activities: *joint supervision of master/PhD thesis by project partners, regular network meetings, the use of teaching material developed in the project*

- explain what the partnership will do in concrete terms to ensure the results and activities will be sustainable

  Examples:

  The project website will be maintained after the completion of the project and the developed teaching material can be downloaded from there as open educational resources.

  The partner institutions will sign a contract to officially establish the expert network and ensure the partners' long-term commitment to the network initiative.

  The partnership will try to obtain complementary funding, e.g. from within their institutions or from external stakeholders, to be able to keep the e-learning platform up and running after the project.

- include activities targeting sustainability as early as possible in the implementation phase

- demonstrate the involvement of external stakeholders and relevant authorities (e.g. through update meetings or consultations) to facilitate the mainstreaming/exploitation of project results

Sources

Erasmus+ Program Guide

Feedback by evaluators on various project proposals involving the University of Graz

Presentations given by Martina Friedrich and Halina Klimkiewicz at the Erasmus+ information and training event in Brno, Czech Republic, in November 2017

Pictures: https://pixabay.com [1], Microsoft Word ClipArt

[1] Authors: PIRO4D, OpenClipart-Vectors, Wokandapix, OpenIcons, geralt, Clker-Free-Vector-Images, 472301