**Improving Proximity Responses for the Adaptation of Vocational Education and Training**

**2015-1-ES01-KA202-015976**

# Guide 1:

# HOW TO BUILD A LOCAL PARTNERSHIP
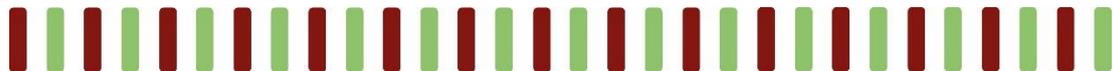
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## INTRODUCTION

This "How to Guide" has been developed in the framework of the Project "Improving Proximity Responses for Vocational Education and Training – ImproVET" funded by ERASMUS+, Key Action 2 under the contract 2015-1-ES01-KA202-015976.

The aim of the project is increasing the labour market relevance of VET provision and reducing skills mismatches and shortages in economic sectors through timely adaptation of curricula and qualifications profiles and establishment of stable partnerships. The project assumes that local agents involved in VET (as local authorities, VET providers, employers' associations, chambers of commerce, workers' unions, development and employment agencies or research institutions) can play a major role when it comes to ensure labour market relevance of VET in their territories.

In order to provide these local agents with the tools and methodologies needed to actively take part in the adaptation of the VET offer to real needs, project partners have developed an Intervention Model that will guide local actors along the process of designing, implementing and assessing local action plan for the continuous monitoring of labour market needs and the adaptation of VET provided. Accordingly with this purpose, the Model is structured in 4 parts:

A.  Four (4) "How to" Guides. Each of those guides will describe the basic process and considerations that partners, based in previous experience, analysis of already developed experiences in different European countries and knowledge exchange, recommend to be taken into consideration in the following areas.

> a) How to build a Local Partnership for VET.
> b) How to monitor labour market needs to proactively adapt VET offer.
> c) How to design and implement a Local VET Plan.
> d) How to assess the local impact of VET.

B.  An Implementation Toolkit, providing more information and links to information sources on the tools and methodologies recommended in the Guides so that the reader can use them.

C.  Four (4) Case Studies with the experience and lessons learnt by partners in the pilot implementation process of the Intervention Model carried out in their territories in the framework of the project. Those experiences have been used to improve the How to Guides.

D.  Inspiring practices dossier with experiences carried out in several European countries, gathered and analyzed by partners and that have provided useful information in the process of building the Intervention Model.

Each one of the Intervention Model elements can be read separately, but partners strongly encourage the reader to keep in mind its internal coherence as shown in the following diagram.

**Inspiring practices**

**How To Guides**

| *How to build a Local Partnership for VET* | How to monitor labour market needs of VET | How to design and implement a Local VET | How to assess the local impact of VET |

**Implementation Toolkit**

**Case Studies**
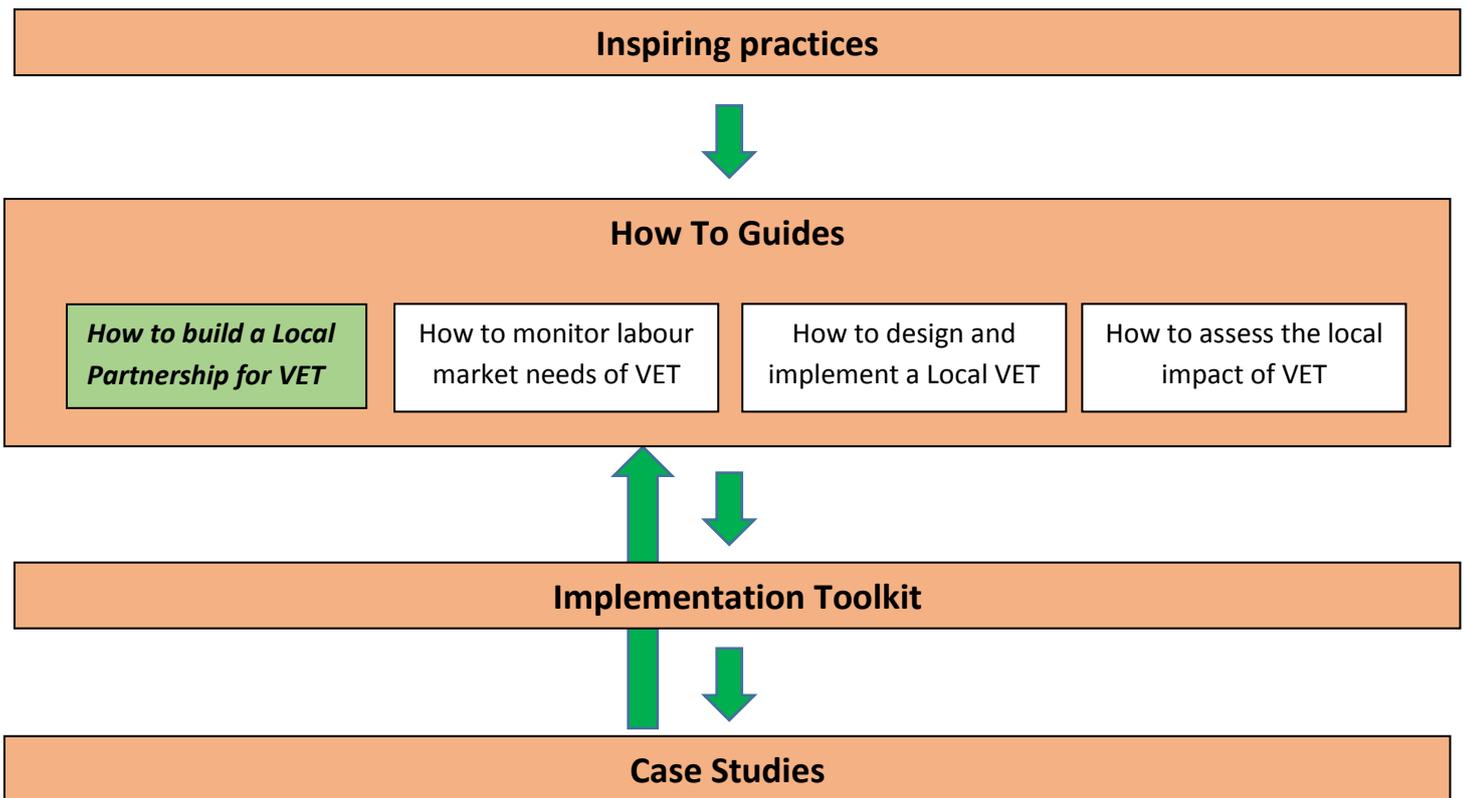
In this diagram, the *How to Guide* you are about reading has been highlighted in green. Along the following pages this Guide will provide tools, methodologies and tips that will help local agents involved in Vocational Education and Training, both from public and private sectors, to build partnerships that will enable them to play an essential role in the adaptation of the VET offer to the real needs of their territories.

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**PREVIOUS CONSIDERATIONS**

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Along this Guide we are going to talk about "local partnerships for Vocational Education and Training". The importance of this "local approach" to enhance the territorial implementation of educational, employment and  labour market policies (VET policies among them) has been recognized by the European Union since 1997 (with the launching of the first wave of Territorial Employment Pacts) and developed by the Lisbon European Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

Furthermore, the *Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 12 May 2009 on enhancing* <u>*partnerships between education and training institutions and social partners*</u>*, in particular employers, in the context of lifelong learning* invited Member States „to consider the needs of society and the labour market, taking into account both the existing situation in <u>local</u>, regional, national and European labour markets and any expected changes to these, when developing and implementing education and training policy" (underlining added).

Nevertheless, when we try to implement the local approach by building local partnerships for VET, we find that it is not always clear what this expression (Local Partnership) means, as it could depend on the geographical, political and legal framework of the reader.

Generally speaking, we will consider a local partnership as a particular type of public – private partnership (PPP) which can be described as *" localised networks that connect some combination of local community groups, education and training providers, industry and government to work on local issues (...)"* (Seddon & Billett 2004). This is a very open definition and many fundamental characteristics will depend, as already said, on the specific situation of each territory and community. Among them:

- The number and nature of agents supposed to take part in this network
- The meaning of "local" that, depending on the country can go from regions (NUTS 2 or 3 in the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) to municipalities or even under-municipality level (LAU 1 and LAU2).
- The „issues" they deal with

In order to be to useful and as concrete as possible, this guide will make certain assumptions and will focus on those networks of public agents (local and regional/national representatives working at the local level, when appropriate) and private agents (from educational, employment, economic and social fields) which work on Vocational Education and Training (VET) on a under-regional territory (NUTS 3 – LAU 1 and 2) and which generally have no fundamental role in policy making.

Another important characteristic that will have a major influence in partnership development (at least in its early stages) is the origin of the cooperation idea.  According to Allie Clemens and Terri Seddon (*"Initiating, developing and sustaining social partnerships through partnership work" – University of Monash),* partnerships can be divided into enacted partnerships (those initiated and sponsored by agencies external to the communities in which they are located), community partnerships (initiated by agents internal to the community) and negotiated partnerships „best characterised by being initiated through interaction between internal and external interests".

As the target group of this Guide is mainly local agents, we will assume that cooperation is basically the result of an internal process. Nevertheless, the influence of external factors (as, for instance, the promotion of partnerships by the European Social Fund or any other European, national or regional funding scheme) must never be neglected.

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS**

The following diagram shows the stages that should be considered when planning to build a local partnership for VET. Each one of the Stages is described in the following section. In the right hand main products and outcomes for the Step have been indicated.

In Step 1, we will make a diagnosis of the existing situation regarding VET in our territory, including the legal and administrative framework in which it develops and that, usually, goes beyond local level.  As a result of this step, we will have the information we need in order to start the process of building the partnership.

In Step 2, we will face the need of building shared objectives among those stakeholders and key agents identified previously. It is one of the less technical but more challenging steps we will need to face. After going through it, we will have settled up the bases to define the partnership.

In Step 3, it is time to define how the partnership is going to work, including such important things as how decisions are going to be taken or which the scope of its action will be.

And once this is defined, in Step 4 we will take this into action, by defining the partnership strategy and its implementation plan.

| Step 1. Where are we? | → | Knowledge for action |
| Step 2. Setting up the bases for the | → | Shared objectives |
| Step 3. Defining the partnership | → | Cooperation Model |
| Step 4. Partnership at work | → | Strategy for development |
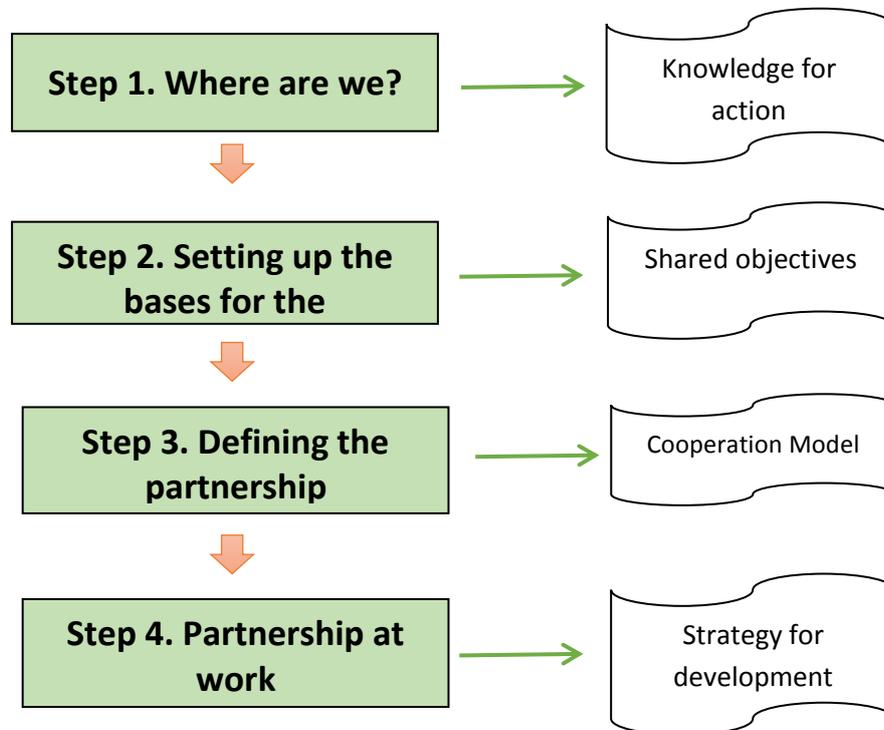
**DESCRIPTION**

## Step 1. Where are we?



| Consideration of the legal framework of VET | ✓ IVET / CVET<br>✓ Policy making and implementation<br>✓ Role given to Local Agents |

✓ Previous cooperation experiences in VET
✓ Previous cooperation experiences in related fields

Culture of cooperation in the territory

*Who is who in VET* Identification of Key Agents of VET in the territory

✓ Aims and objectives. Nature
✓ Role played till now
✓ Relation among them (power, dependence, competence...)

*A picture of VET* Diagnosis of the VET system in the Territory

✓ Sectors reached
✓ Beneficiares
✓ Extent
✓ Challenges and potential

**Description**

The global aim of Step 1 is to have a first diagnosis of the VET system in our territory and the issues that could facilitate or hinder its development.

The initial consideration of the **legal, financial and administrative framework of VET** in our territory is essential as it will influence the development of the partnership, its scope, its members or its intervention possibilities. Promoters should have an accurate idea of aspects as, among others, the level of centralization regarding VET policy making and policy implementation and the role that the legal and administrative framework entails for local agents (as local authorities, social partners at a local level or local employers' organizations) in VET design and provision or the links (if any) envisaged between initial VET (I-VET) and continuous VET (C-VET). Also, the funding framework established in regional/national regulations for the design and provision of VET is very important to ensure the viability of the new partnership. By taking into consideration the legal, financial and administrative

framework from the very beginning, we will avoid the possibility of raising unrealistic expectations about partnership potential among local partners in the following steps. Furthermore, we will have an idea of the legal and administrative burdens that the partnership will have to face depending on the aims and objectives it may assume. As a consequence, partners will have the opportunity to take an informed decision on the scope, mission and objectives of the partnership in the following steps.

After a first look at the external framework, it is time to pay attention to those internal factors that could influence the development of the partnership. The **partnership culture** in the territory is one of them. Quite probably, this is not the first cooperation initiative in the territory. Some of the potentially involved partners could have taken part in previous cooperative territorial processes regarding VET or other fields that could even have involved citizenship. Some examples of these possible cooperation experiences among agents are Territorial Employment Pacts, Agenda 21 processes, Urban Strategic Development plans (as the ones fostered by the European Fund for Regional Development - ERDF), rural development strategies funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), Development partnerships or any other public – private cooperation initiatives.

The knowledge gained in these previous cooperation processes, their results and, even more, the perception that involved partners have kept from this experience is an important source of information that should be used to avoid previous mistakes.

Keeping the eye on the territory, we will try to **identify which are the key agents** that should be considered for the design process (Steps 2 and 3). Of course, the output of this activity won't be a closed list. On the contrary, this list could be enlarged or shortened along the partnership design and creation processes depending on the identification of new agents, the final scope and focus of the partnership or the failure to engage a specific agent. In any case, the objective of this step is that no one with something to say on VET in the territory is out of the process. In the end, some of them will be part of the partnership, some others will be part of the partnership's network, the rest will only have a punctual relation with it, but all of them are important in this stage.

To ensure that we don't miss anyone, promoters should consider three situations regarding the agents:
- Those who are both affected by and interested in VET
- Those who are affected, but not interested (maybe because they are not aware to which extent they are affected)
- Those who are not affected, but are interested

Some typical agents you should identify in your territory are local authorities, representatives of regional / national authorities involved in VET, employers' organizations, trade unions, sectorial / professional organizations, research and innovation centers, educational centers, VET providers, local development agencies, employment services, entrepreneurship and business development services or industrial clusters.

This key agents list can be used to start the **diagnosis of the current VET system in the territory**. This activity will provide a sound base for the debates to be held within the participative process of setting the partnership bases (Step 2). It could consist of two basic actions:

- A first approach to the VET system situation according to the perception of key agents. Its aim is to identify which are the main challenges the community will have to face in the next future regarding education, training, economic activity and labour market. On the other hand, it will be equally important to identify the potentiality perceived in the territory by key agents to tackle these challenges. As we are not in the consensus building phase (which will be faced in Step 2), our proposal is to identify those challenges and potentialities by means of individual interviews or questionnaires.

- A technical diagnosis of the VET system, focusing on (but not restricted to) the challenges and potentialities perceived by key agents. Objective data and figures will be used to determine main strengths and weaknesses, main threats and opportunities using the SWOT methodology (see the ImproVET Toolkit). Some issues that are likely to be studied in this analysis are:
  o The extent of VET (number of VET courses and beneficiaries, number and nature of VET providers…)
  o The influence that regional regional Smart specialization strategies, which are defined in the Operational programs of ESF and ERDF, and the ERDF and ESF Operational program themselves have in the VET system and the VET offer in the territory.
  o The sectors, professional profiles and territories on which it is focused
  o The involvement of employers, the educational system and other stakeholders in the design and provision of VET
  o The profile and characteristics of the people taking part in VET actions (gender, age, educational level, socio – economic situation…)
  o The results in terms of the improvement of employment possibilities and any other relevant issue.

## Key questions and critical points

- Don't try to close partnership objectives or scope at this stage. Listen first to the other involved agents (in Step 2).
- Be sure you've considered anyone who could be relevant for VET
- Use the lessons learnt (positive and especially negative) through previous cooperation processes in the territory.
- Compile and analyse the information gathered in the diagnosis in a usable way so that it can be shared during the following steps

## Inspiring experiences and useful tools

- The municipality of Seville (Andalusia, Spain) adopted in 2002 the project REDES aimed at improving the local provision of VET for employment and the labour insertion of unemployed. The project has been active since then, under different names (REDES I, II, III and IV for the period 2002-2008 and REDES SEVILLA I and II for the period 2008-2015).
  The project is called 'Redes' (networks) because it is based on the collaboration with a wide range of local actors: employers' organizations, trade unions, companies and civil social organisations active in the field. This collaboration is reflected in the signature of the "Local Employment Pact".  You can get more information at the ImproVET Best Practices dossier

- In the ImproVET Toolbox we have included a brief description of the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) methodology that we recommend to be used in the analysis of VET in the territory.

## Results and outputs for the step

The main output of this Step will be the knowledge to be used in the following steps. We will have an accurate picture of the environment in which the partnership will have to be developed, including:

- The fields in which a local VET partnership can play a role.
- The cooperation culture of the territory. The mistakes and success factors of previous cooperation initiatives.
- The key agents to be engaged in the following process.
- The main challenges and strengths of the VET system, according to objective (technical diagnosis) and key agents perceptions.

This "picture" will be shared and discussed with local partners in order to set the bases of the partnership.

## Step 2. Setting up the bases for the Partnership



| Identifying shared concerns and interests | ⟵ | ✓ Are there bases for a partnership?<br>✓ Which concerns are shared? |

| Knowing and understanding each other | ⟵ | ✓ Round tables<br>✓ Workshops and seminar<br>✓ Focus groups |

| Bulding shared objectives | ⟵ | ✓ Engagement<br>✓ Participative approach<br>✓ Empowerment<br>✓ Consensus building |
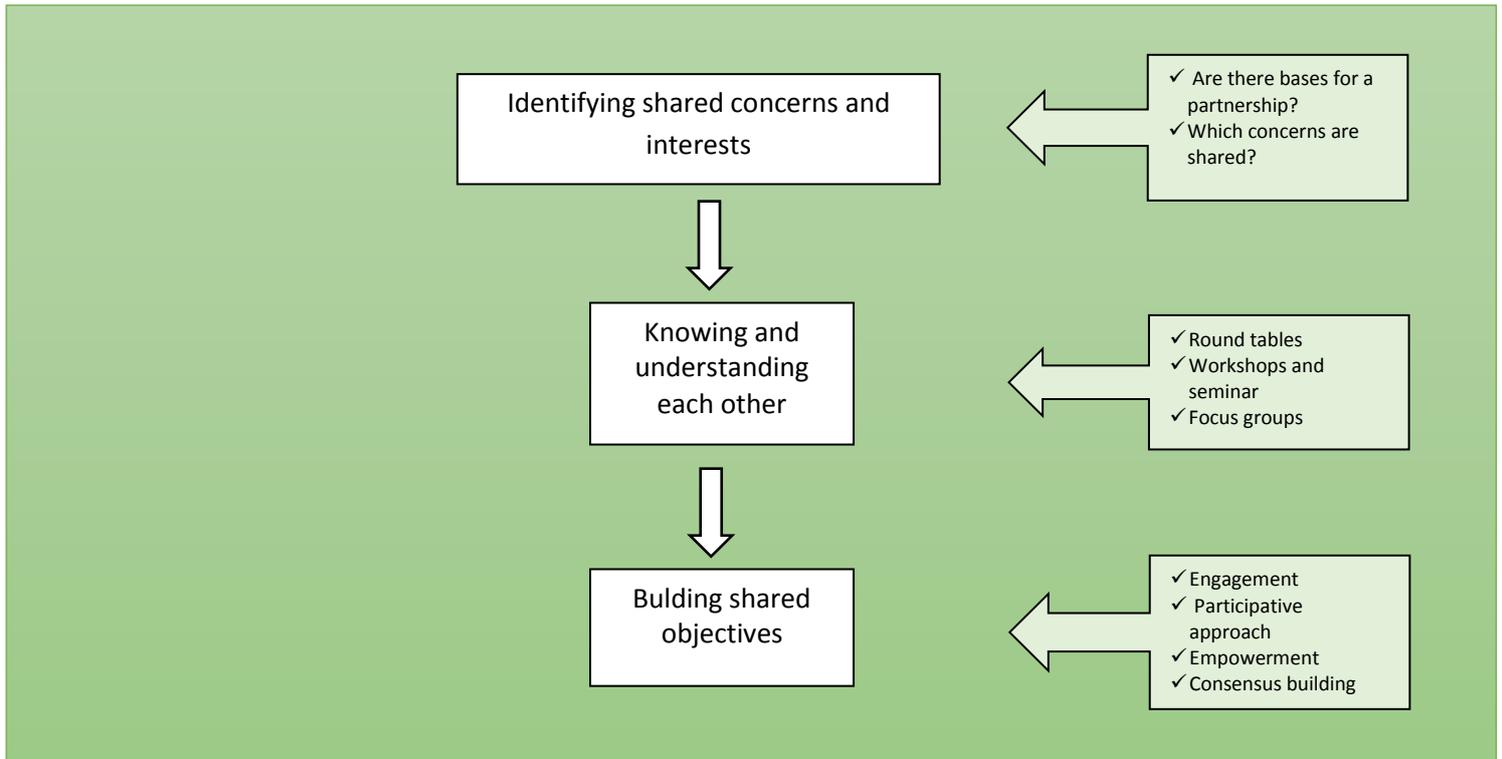
### Description

In this step we are going to face the most critical phase in partnership building. So far we have been dealing with documents and information and we have confronted our points of view at an individual level. Now, it comes the time to share it with the whole agents' group. As in any other group, we will find different points of view, different approaches to problem solving, different attitudes regarding partnership and consensus… and we will have to handle this.

Nevertheless, we won't start the step from scratch. During Step 1 we have gathered and compiled information (including the information gathered in face-to-face meetings) that will help us to face this step. A first thing to do with this information is to try **to identify concerns and interests shared by key agents involved in VET**.

It will not always be easy, as the diversity of agents implies diversity (and sometimes, opposition) of interest. Probably, the challenges perceived by VET funders (regional or national officers in charge of VET administration in the territory) won't be the same as the ones perceived by VET providers. The needs perceived for the improvement of VET by employers are quite likely to be different from those perceived by local authorities. Agents involved in I-VET could have quite different requirements when compared with those of agents involved in C-VET. Even more, while for some agents collaboration to improve VET in the territory can be a major priority while it can be of little interest for others.

But if we find those issues and concerns that, more often, can be discovered under the key agent's declarations, then we will be in the position to answer a critical question:

**"Is there any room for partnership?"**

Let's assume it is. We have found common concerns and interests among key agents that, hopefully, can be tackled more efficiently by working together. These shared interests will be the base from which we will start working to build the partnerships but it is important that we keep our mind open. Throughout the process development, those concerns may be extended or reduced, may be expressed differently or simply may vary.

Nevertheless sharing interests is not enough. Agents must be aware of this circumstance, learn to prioritize the common elements rather than the differences and understand the other's point of view. One of the best ways to do it is to sit around a table. In those territories with previous successful cooperation experiences, it may be easy to engage local agents. But depending on the particular circumstances (for instance, territories with no partnership experience or previous negative collaboration experiences) it could be convenient not to start with global targets (as the building of a partnership) but for the tackling of a particular issue that is in line with the majority of agents' concerns. For instance, in territories with a large unemployment rate among youngsters, we could start by analysing in a collaborative way which actions should be implemented in the territory to foster employment for people under 25. Technical seminars, round tables, workshops and focus groups can help local agents to **know and understand each other**. Even more, and depending on the circumstances, it can be useful to start collaborating in specific projects, with objective results and outputs (employment programmes for youngsters, capacity – building activities for VET professionals, awareness raising campaigns to promote VET in the territory…)

In any case, this preparatory work will lead us to the next stage, in which the idea of cooperation will be shared among local agents and they'll see the building of a partnership as a realistic approach to tackle shared challenges. Now, it is time to decide what for do we need a partnership, which should be their goals. We have called this process as **building shared objectives**. Therefore, in order to be effective it is important that this process is carried out in a participative way, empowering agents to make their contribution to the debate. There is a full range of methodologies and tools that can be used to carry out this process. Among all of them we will focus on thematic workshops, which have been used, among other participative methodologies, in the design of development strategies and other participative processes. These workshops enable the participation of a limited number of individuals (between 10 and 20) representing key VET agents in the territory. Along a short process (2 – 3 sessions) involved agents work on:

1. Priorities. The prioritization of the challenges identified in the participative analysis carried out in Step 1. Which of the challenges should be considered as a priority due to its importance or urgency?

2. How internal and external circumstances affect the priority challenges? Agents work on the SWOT analysis carried out and identify the most important factors to be considered.

3. A vision for VET. Provided the priority challenges we have to face and the internal and external factors identified, how should the situation be in the future? The time in which we situate this "future" can depend on the challenges we have identified, but consider that we are talking about the situation we want to reach as a result of the partnership work (among other factors). Therefore, we are talking about mid-long terms.

4. Partnership Objectives. In order to turn this vision into reality, which framework objectives should be achieved?

The following could be a very simplified example of such a process

| CHALLENGE | Engagement of SMEs in VET |
| --- | --- |
| VISION | A territory where SMEs base their development and growth in knowledge and innovation ← SWOT analysis |
| OBJECTIVE | To increase the perceived labour market relevance of CVET offer among SMEs |
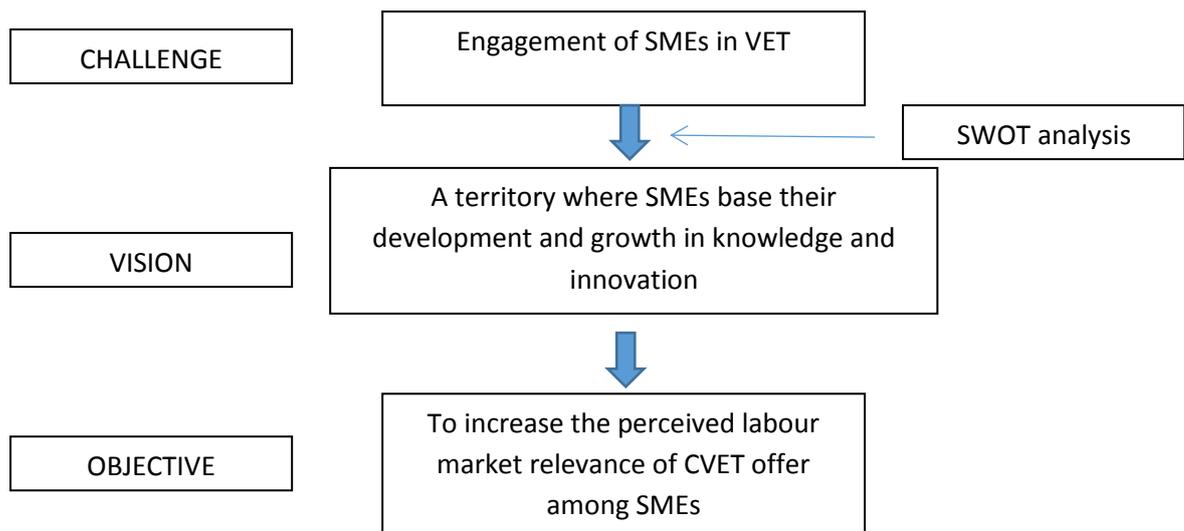
## Key questions and critical points

- All throughout this step you will have to keep the balance between the promotion of active participation of agents and stakeholders and the need to keep the focus on challenges of common interest. Avoid the temptation of including any individual challenge in the partnerships' scope. The partnership must be inclusive and ambitious but not to the point of being unable to define a coherent vision for the future. The results of the SWOT analysis and the participative identification of shared concerns and interests will help you.

- We are not in the phase of defining operational objectives. In this stage, when we talk about "objectives" we refer to framework partnership objectives, meaning the general objectives the partnership will work to achieve. In the following steps those framework objectives will be turned into specific operational objectives by means of strategic plans and programmes.

**Inspiring experiences and useful tools**

There are a lot of books and documents that can help you in the process of setting up the bases for the partnership, especially by providing teambuilding and consensus building exercises or examples of collaborative methodologies for problem solving.

Despite its scope in which it is different (participative processes for urban development), the "Urbact II Toolkit for Local Support Groups" can be of great interest. It can be downloaded from the Urbact web page (www.urbact.eu)

**Results and outputs for the Step**

At the end of this Step, we will have reached the following goals, all of them in a collaborative way:
- We will have agreed on the prioritized challenges to work on
- We will have defined where do we want to get to (our vision)
- We will have identified the framework objectives that will define the working lines addressed to reach that vision.

## Step 3. Defining the Partnership



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                    ┌──────────────────────┐      ✓ Sectorial
                    │  Cooperation scope   │◄─────✓ Territorial
                    └──────────────────────┘      ✓ Processes covered
                         │            │
                         ▼            ▼
✓ Y/N?. Which       ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐   ✓ Levels of participation
✓ Already existing  │Legal form?│  │ Engagement   │◄─ ✓ Engagement of 2nd
  cooperation    ──►└──────────┘  │ Structure    │     step stakeholders
  structures              │       └──────────────┘
✓ Benchmarking           ▼              │
                                        ▼
✓ Funding needs     ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────┐
✓ Public / private? │Funding Scheme│  │Decission making process│
✓ Own funding?   ──►└──────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘
✓ Sustainability                            │
                                            ▼
                    ┌──────────────────┐   ✓ Relations with policy
                    │Networking / Relations│◄ makers and regional /
                    └──────────────────┘     national level
                                            ✓ Relations with other
                                              policies / areas
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### Description

Once we have defined through a participative process a clear and shared idea what for we need a partnership (the Partnership Vision and the Partnership Framework Objectives), now we are faced to the need of taking those general statements into practice. And with this aim we will have to look into many "operational" issues that are less motivating than the vision and the framework objectives, but equally important as they will have a decisive influence in partnership development and sustainability.

In order to do so, it is important to keep the participative approach you've started in previous steps. It makes no sense to define a partnership which necessity is shared by all agents and with the idea of which everyone agrees, if afterwards you define, by your own, a structure in which partners do not feel comfortable. Nevertheless, in order to keep this stage operative, our recommendation is that it should be carried out by a small group of people (a working group) with representatives of most engaged partners. Afterwards, once we have a proposal, it can be shared, discussed and adapted with a wider group even in public events.

The following are some of the issues you will have to look into:

- **Cooperation scope**. It will be quite defined by the challenges prioritized in the previous steps and by the framework objectives we have established for the partnership. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to clearly define issues linked to the partnership scope as:
  o Is the partnership going to focus in a specific economic sector or will it be multi-sectorial? In some territories, where the economic activity is concentrated in one sector with very specific challenges and where sectorial agents are very active, it could make sense to engage them in a sectorial partnership.
  o Which territory will be included in the partnership's area of intervention? Is it going to stick to existing administrative divisions? Is the territory represented homogeneously among the engaged partners? It is especially important when local authorities are considered.
  o Is the partnership activity going to cover all the processes related to VET? Again, here the prioritization of challenges and the needs identified will be crucial to decide if you have to include aspects as needs analysis, VET design, awareness raising and information, VET provision or coordination of VET providers, VET resources and equipment, Programme assessment…
  o Which is the scope of the partnership in terms of regularity? When forming a partnership, local agents should also think about some practical issues: responsibilities of each partner, regularity in meetings (of course depending on the amount of activities), etc.

- **Engagement structure**. In order to have an operative and functional partnership, it is important to make a reflection on how the different identified agents are going to engage in it. In those territories with a "dense" VET sector with many different agents it can be interesting to define more than one engagement possibility. For instance, those partners with the strongest involvement can take part in the core, some of them can engage only for specific topics and programmes (by means of work groups) and others can be part of a wider participation organ.

- **Decision making process**. Linked to the above mentioned, it is important to define how decisions will be taken within the partnership, in which statements strategic decisions will be approved and which government bodies will rule the day-to-day activity like the administration of the partnership. A process that ensures the bottom – up approach and the relevance of participative instruments should be combined with the appropriate decision making structure to face everyday activity. Also communication might be an issue – which ways of communication are used and who will mainly be responsible for the management and administration of the partnership?

- **Legal form**. Do we need to provide a legal form for our partnership? In one hand, it will carry administrative workload and costs. On the other, the lack of a formal structure could prevent the partnership to be recognized as a valid interlocutor, the application for funds from regional, national and European administrations and their participation in projects.

- **Funding scheme**. The foreseen activity of the partnership will determine the need of funds (it won't be the same level of funds needed to provide VET courses compared to the funds needed to raise awareness on the importance of VET, for instance). To ensure that the partnership will have a trustable source of resources to carry out the expected activities will avoid the launching of a partnership with no activity or whose activities are only linked to a particular funding opportunity. Partners need to consider how they are supposed to cover not only activities but for instance staff costs for someone managing and administrating the partnership and taking care about the communication and other structural costs.

- **Networking / Relations**. Apart from the agents involved in VET in the territory, the partnership should establish mechanisms to work on win–win relations with agents from other sectors or areas with potential impact on VET. Depending on the territory, it can include policy makers (in areas as industrialization, touristic promotion, rural development, inclusion…), other partnerships (as Employment territorial pacts, Rural Action groups for rural development…) and others. Furthermore, the partnership should foresee how it is going to benefit from the knowledge and experience gained through networking activities with other partnerships (for instance, by means of national networks of VET or by means of European projects on best practices transfer).

### Key questions and critical points

Once you have a draft of the cooperation model, developed with the engagement of key agents, be sure it is understood by the rest of stakeholders. Show how the Cooperation Model developed is the best tool to cope with the challenges prioritized and to achieve the expected results.

Avoid the "subsidy partnerships". There are a lot of examples of partnerships that started linked to the possibility of getting specific funds and without considering what was going to happen when those funds disappear. As a result, their activity was as long as the subsidy's life. Some Territorial Employment Pacts and Local Action Groups for local development are among those examples. Consider always sustainability. The involvement of regional / national policy makers and of the representatives of the authorities in charge of the implementation of VET policies in the area could help, but don't forget to consider public – private collaboration when it comes to designing the funding scheme.

**Inspiring experiences and useful tools**

The cooperation model can take many different forms. Here you have three examples of this diversity:

- Network for continuous VET Pforzheim (Germany). The regional network for continuous vocational education and training Pforzheim is one of 32 such regional networks in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. It provides information on continuous education and training in the region and develops the regional event calendar on continuous training. Furthermore, the partners of the network give advice on continuous education and training during events, supported by the regional office for continuous education and training. Furthermore, the partners of the network give advice on continuous education and training during events, supported by the regional office for continuous education and training.

- Local Development Companies (LDCs) tackle the multi-dimensional nature of social exclusion through a responsive, innovative and integrated approach that is 'owned' locally. LDCs are autonomous, independent bodies that focus on local activity. Each of them has a board, including members from the business community, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector and state agencies working at the local level. More information can be found in the Report „*Joint public-private local partnerships for employment to cope with the recession*" – The tripartite EU Agency for the development of social and industrial relations –EUROFUND (www.eurofund.europa.eu)

- In the Netherlands, recent efforts to develop PPPs in VET have focused on the creation of Centres of Expertise in higher vocational education (HBO) and Centra voor Innovatieve Vakmanschap (Centres for Innovative Craftsmanship) in middle vocational education (MBO). There are now more than 40 Centres actively working on PPP in VET across the Netherlands. Substantial funds, both public (to the tune of 250 mio euros) and private, have been invested in these Centres. Extracted from the report „*Public-private partnerships in Dutch vocational education and training: Learning, monitoring and governance*" Dr. Eelke Heemskerk (UvA, Galan Groep) & Prof. dr. Jonathan Zeitlin (UvA). 2014

**Results and outputs for the Step**

As a result of this Step, you will have a Cooperation Model agreed among involved partners. This document will define how the partnership is going to be organized in order to achieve its goals.

## Step 4. Partnership at work

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                          ┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
                          │          Partnership Strategy            │
                          └─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                                            │
                                            ▼
┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
│ ✓ Internal   │   │    Knowledge     │  │ Implementation│  │  Evaluation and  │
│ ✓ Networking │──▶│ management and   │◀─│     Plan     │─▶│    monitoring    │
└──────────────┘   │ exchange Strategy│  └──────────────┘  │     systems      │
                   └──────────────────┘        │           └──────────────────┘
                            │                   ▼
                            │          ┌──────────────────┐
                            │          │  Management and  │
                            │          │   Participation  │
                            │          └──────────────────┘
                            │            │            │
                            ▼            ▼            ▼
                   ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
                   │ Operational  │  │   Project    │
                   │ Procedures   │  │ Development  │
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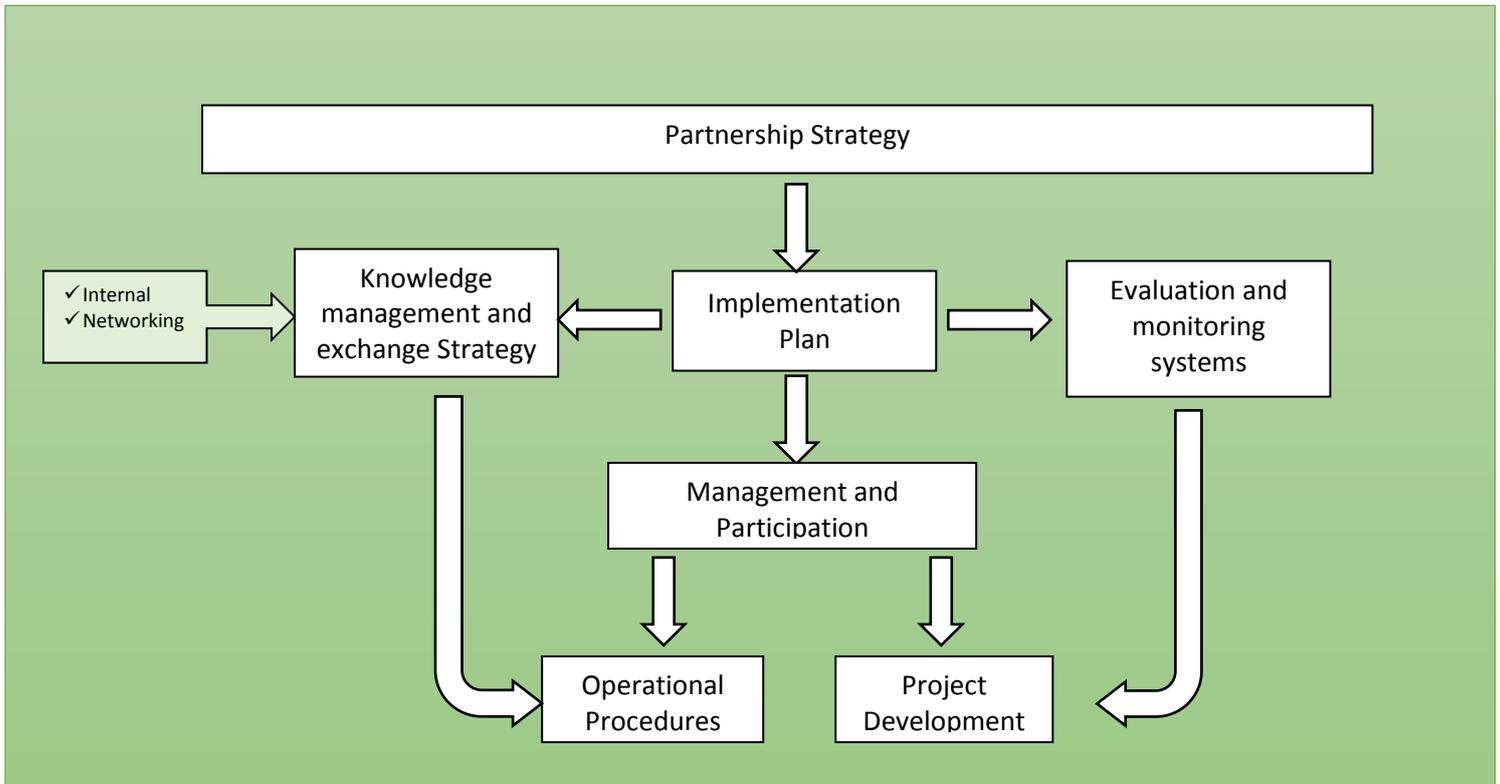
### Description

After the design of the Cooperation Model designed in Step 3, we can start to take it into practice by means of *Partnership work* which can be defined as *"the interactive and collaborative process of working together to identify, negotiate and articulate goals, and to develop processes for realising and reviewing those goals"* (Billett, Clemans & Seddon 2005).

It means that, starting from the Framework Objectives and using the Cooperation Model, we should be able to define the **Strategy** we are going to follow in order to achieve those general goals. This Strategy should allow everybody to link the activities effectively carried out by the partnership with the challenge tackled and the desired vision.

Therefore, defining the strategy will consist of a sequential process in which, step by step, we will identify the following points, among others:

- **Action Lines**. For each of the Framework Objectives we will define the type of actions and projects that will be carried out in order to achieve the related objective. Following the example given in a previous section, we have identified as an objective for the partnership:

> *"To increase the perceived labour market relevance of CVET offer among SMEs"*

the Action Line like the following could be included among others:

> *"Improving knowledge on the perception by employers of the labour market relevance of VET"*

- **Impact indicators**. These indicators will measure the extent to which the implementation of the Action Lines have modified the initial situation, approaching reality to the partnership vision. As a consequence, those indicators will be directly linked to the Framework Objectives of the Partnership and will answer to the question *"Is the partnership on the way of meeting its key objectives?"*
Despite indicators will depend of the objectives, among them we could eventually find among others:
  - Employment rate among trainees
  - Percentage of workers involved in training paths
  - Participation of groups with special needs
  - Career development of workers involved in training
  - Uncovered job offers due to lack of adequate candidates
  - Training plans in SMEs

- **Monitoring and Evaluation systems.** The partnership should design and implement systems to monitor and evaluate the partnership performance. That system can include project performance, but it is a wider concept that may include, for instance, the monitoring of the involvement of key agents in partnership decision making or the evaluation of the impact of partnership activities in the improvement of SMEs competitiveness. As a consequence, those systems may include impact indicators, project performance indicators and other groups of indicators linked to partnership management, the implementation of transversal principles (see below) and others. The partnership strategy should define which monitoring and evaluation systems will be implemented and how the information obtained will be systematically turned into improvement.

- **Knowledge management and exchange**. The partnership should establish procedures to ensure that it takes advantage of the knowledge gained throughout partnership intervention and how this knowledge is used to increase capabilities of involved agents (including beneficiaries of the partnership activities) so that they are empowered to take an active participation in the achievement of the partnership objectives.

Moreover, the partnership can foresee methodologies and tools to consider knowledge management as an objective of its networking with other partnerships or agents.

-   **Transversal principles**. Some basic principles as gender equality, equal opportunities, environmental sustainability or non-discrimination are supposed to guide the partnership intervention. As a consequence, the partnership strategy should include the description of how those principles are going to be applied.

The Partnership Strategy will be deployed by means of an **Implementation Plan.** The Implementation Plan is the concretion of the Action Lines. While these Action Lines provide a stable framework for partnership activity and have not necessarily a determined time scope, the Implementation Plan describes the concrete projects that the partnership is going to develop, within each of the Action Lines, in a determined period. Partners should decide which is the adequate timeline for an Implementation Plan, but an annual or biannual plan is very usual. An Implementation Plan could include, among other things, the following data:

o   Projects which the partnership envisages for the determined period. Description of the activities to be carried out, responsibilities for project development, target public, resources to be used, timing and budget for the project and objectives to achieve.

o   Timing and budget for the Plan. Apart from the timing and budget for each particular project, we should consider time and resources envisaged for management, monitoring, reporting and dissemination, among other things.

o   Responsibilities for Implementation Plan management, monitoring and evaluation, among other transversal activities.

o   Performance indicators. Those indicators will inform about the projects accomplishment and the fulfilment of specific project objectives. If impact indicators answered to the question of meeting partnership key objectives, the performance indicators answer to the question: *Have projects included in the implementation plan met their operational objectives?*

Apart from the strategy and the implementation plan, the partnership will have to identify a variable set of **operational and management procedures** whose number and content will depend of the Cooperation Model adopted but that, generally, will include issues as how projects are reported, how costs and budgets are monitored or the tender procedures to be followed.

## Key questions and critical points

- We have mentioned that, while the Implementation Plan is clearly limited in time, Action Lines tend to not have a timeline. But it doesn't mean we should consider them as invariable. On the contrary, all components of the strategy, from the vision and the framework objectives to the knowledge management system should be under revision (using for this aim the monitoring and evaluation system) to be adapted to the changes in the environment. Specify clearly how the partnership will manage the evaluation and improvement of the strategy and its components.

- The indicators are useful tools to provide information on how the situation is and how it has changed compared to the initial one. But if you design an excessive number of indicators, indicators too difficult to measure or whose meaning is not clear, then their usefulness will be in danger. Generally, it is recommended that a limited number of indicators should be selected and presented to decision makers in friendly formats (as Dashboard). To decide if you should include an indicator in your list or not you always can try to answer the famous question (Doran, G. T, 1981, "*There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives*". Management Review) :

  Is it **SMART**?

    o **S**pecific – target a specific area for improvement.
    o **M**easurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
    o **A**ssignable – specify who will do it.
    o **R**ealistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.
    o **T**ime-related – specify when the result(s) can be achieved

## Inspiring experiences and useful tools

In their Strategic Training Plan for 2015, the Barcelona Province Administration (Catalonia, Spain) has included the design of a Training Activities Bank *("Banc d'Activitats Formatives")* which has been conceived as a flexible and dynamic recipient for all the possible training activities which could be of interest for the 36.000 civil servants which work in the province. The information gathered through this bank and the training requests are used to continuously adapt the training plan to employees' needs. You can get more information on http://www.diba.cat/web/formacio/formacio-planificada.

**Results and outputs for the Step**

After the end of this step you will have a partnership strategy and you will have deployed it by means of an implementation plan. An example of an implementation plan section is provided in the ImproVET Toolkit.

**ImproVET**

| CHECK LIST |
|---|

When building a local partnership for Vocational Education and Training (VET), make sure you have considered the following items:

| Consideration | Y | N |
|---|---|---|
| You have taken into account the legal framework of VET in my country / region | | |
| You have identified key VET agents and cooperation culture in my territory | | |
| You have made a diagnosis of the current state of VET provision in my territory | | |
| You have engaged key agents in a process to identify common concerns and objectives | | |
| Partners have decided in a participative way which will be the scope of the partnership in all the aspects, including the legal form | | |
| Partners have decided how they are going to manage the partnership and its participation in it (engagement, decision making process…) | | |
| Coordination, knowledge exchange and mutual learning have been considered | | |
| Funding needs and sources have been identified and addressed | | |
| You have identified other relevant actors in the territory and you have decided how to manage relations with them | | |
| Partners have agreed in a Strategy and it has been turned into an Action Plan | | |
| Monitoring and impact assessment methods (including indicators) have been implemented within the partnership | | |
| Operational procedures have been put in place in order to achieve partnership objectives | | |