

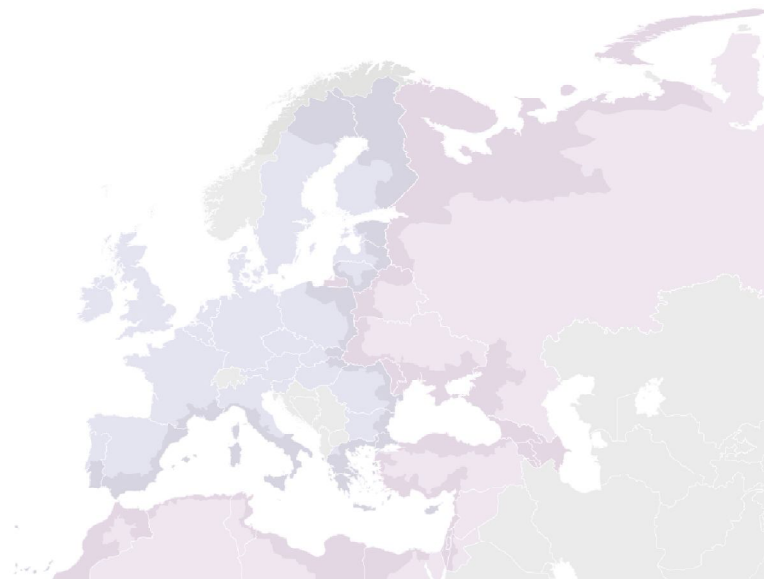


TESIM

Technical support to the implementation and management of ENI CBC programmes

Sharing practices on support to partner search and partnership building

October 2018



Introduction

At a time when ENI CBC programmes have all launched their first calls for proposals and most have selected a number of projects, the map of what cooperation on the ground will look like is taking shape.

Reviewing the scope of already successfully established partnerships, programmes may want to consider how to further widen partnership opportunities for their next calls. This may be to extend cooperation benefits to eligible regions or types of organisations that have not been so involved yet, or overall to expand the network of cross-border cooperation partners. A broader involvement of eligible organisations is likely to bring new capacities, experiences and positive changes for the bordering regions.

With some projects about to start, programmes may also wonder how to support partners into building an effective partnership leading to successful implementation of the projects. As highlighted in ROM reports during the previous ENPI CBC period, project underperformance is often related to a failure of partners to establish proper relationships.

This document therefore aims to provide **information, tips and tools on effective support to cross-border partner search and partnership building**. It is based on a review of resources developed by programmes and TESIM, as well as looking at interesting practices beyond the ENI CBC community. For each topic, you will find a short **overview of practices** followed by some **highlights on effective and innovative techniques**.

We hope you will find this review of experiences inspiring.

Supporting partner search

The search for partners remains a challenge for many organisations willing to apply to ENI CBC, both in Partner Countries and in EU Member States. There are often poor links between, for example, public authorities in CBC Partner Countries and equivalent structures in EU Member States.

One of the key factors facilitating involvement of partners in the various ENI CBC programmes has been the use of already existing partnerships established under the previous ENPI CBC programmes, but also other programmes such as for instance the EU Research Framework Programmes, INTERREG programmes with ENI participation (i.e. Baltic Sea Region, Danube) or the Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation.

The current implementation period still brings the opportunity for forging new partnerships. To this aim all ENI CBC programmes have devoted some resources to supporting partner search, though to various degrees.

Although partner search forums appear to be popular means for getting in contact with potential partners, due to time and budget constraints not all potential applicants and partners are able to attend these events. Online support for finding partners is therefore also a key resource explored by all programmes.

Online tools and resources

Even if good cooperation often comes from personal contacts, partner search online resources provide effective additional tools to this purpose and often allow to initiate the contacts.

❖ Partner and project idea search tools

Most ENI CBC programmes provide some online opportunity to search for partners and/or project ideas and **a specific partner search tool is available on their websites**, including as a minimum the possibility to **filter search by country/region** and by **programme priority or field of interest**. Several programmes offer additional filters, namely by **type of organisation** or by **budget amount**.

Effective practice

- Make the partner search tool **visible and easily accessible** from the website home page menu or in the banner menu (it is sometimes quite tricky to find where the tool is and find out about its existence!). Promote it intensively in events held by the programme and in the programme social media, as well as if possible in the National authorities websites and social media, so as to attract enough organisations and ideas for the tool to be effective.

When registering into the partner search database, organisations are invited to include the information needed for the filtering process as well as their contact details. They also have the possibility sometimes to **provide further information** as follows:

- **Previous project experience** or previous experience in cross-border cooperation (in one case requesting to specify the project(s) budget amount)
- **Languages** spoken in the organisation
- Proposed **project idea** for cooperation
- Planned project **implementation period**

Effective practice

- Make the **database available also before and in between calls**, not only during the calls. Though tying the database to calls can help address the issue of out-of-date ideas (see below), having an ongoing resource allows partnership and project ideas to be developed well in advance of a call.
- Indication of the **date of upload** of the partner search request and of the project idea, or information on the planned project implementation period, is very useful so that organisations looking for partners may assess the relevance of the post. Organisations may have registered in view of the current/coming call, a previous one or in some cases even during ENPI CBC calls (when the database is a continuation of the previous period), and may not be interested any more in partnership opportunities.
- Information on the previous **experience of the organisation** is helpful to identify the needed potential partner. Successful beneficiaries and partners often say that working with an experienced partner was the way they overcame the challenge of the complex application process.

The description of the **proposed project idea** is sometimes following a standard format suggested by the programme, or left to the discretion of organisations

registering. The standard format is usually similar to the one used during the partner forum, and uploaded after the event. This description usually includes **expected results** and **key activities**. The project idea description form also sometimes requests to include: **objectives, description of the problem, target groups, final beneficiaries, budget, duration and/or already existing partners**.

Effective practice

- Inviting organisations to **describe their project idea**, and providing a standard format for it, encourages organisations to think about what they can expect from CBC, rather than just registering as a “grant seeking” organisation. However, potential project partners are sometimes reluctant to reveal their project ideas online as they fear that other organisations might take the idea, so that some flexibility should remain in the request for provision of information.
- Indication of **already existing partners** for a specific project idea is a helpful information for organisations seeking partners, to understand how advanced the project idea is and what type of partnership is still missing.

Several though not all partner search tools also provide the opportunity to indicate **which type of partner(s)** the organisation registering is looking for, indicating that they search for a specific **country, type of organisation or specific knowledge/experience**.

Effective practice

- Providing information on **which type of partner(s)** the organisation registering is looking for, in particular in terms of specific knowledge and experience, allows to better target the search and to save time and efforts of potential project partners.

What more could be done? Looking beyond ENI CBC practices...

Think about a **user-friendly communication** approach to encourage online partner search, such as for instance the one found on some of the Creative Europe Culture sub-programme national desks:

"Welcome! Now you can... Share your project and give it a go!"

"Are you getting down because you have a super project idea, but you still don't have partners? Or would you like to participate in a cooperation project? No panic. You're in the right place. Through this partner search database, you can have the chance to find your project partner/s or present your project idea. So what you are waiting for? (...)"

<http://cultura.cedesk.beniculturali.it/partnersearch/>

❖ **Other online resources and social media supporting partner search**

Beyond the specific search tool, a relevant source of information for organisations looking for potential experienced partners is the list of previously implemented or awarded projects. As for the organisations that have already been successful beneficiaries, even if they are often tempted to build new projects based on their usual partnerships, they may also be willing to expand or build more relevant partnerships fitting the objectives of their new project ideas.

An easy access to information on previously implemented or awarded projects allows potential applicants not only to contact relevant organisations with new partnership proposals, but also to know what has already been funded in the previous period and possibly build upon it (capitalisation process).

Publication of awarded projects is a compulsory requirement followed by the programmes, but at this stage it does not often provide very helpful information to organisations looking for partners, as the list of awarded projects usually includes only a project title and the name of the lead beneficiary organisation.

Useful online information for partner search can be found in **projects implemented during the ENPI CBC** period. Two-third of ENI CBC programme websites ensure continuity with the previous period and provide information on previously implemented projects, either **directly or via a link to the website from the previous period**. In the latter case, the helpful information on projects beneficiaries is sometimes scattered and not obvious to find, however some user-friendly practices can also be highlighted.

Effective practice

- To facilitate the use of online resources, include all those relevant to “**Searching for partners?**” in one place (as for instance in the Kolarctic website <http://kolarctic.info/applying/#partnersearch>) with a short presentation and access to different tools: programme partner search tool, database of previously implemented projects, other useful links for partner search (KEEP, etc.), material from events. Suggest in any case under “partner search” to look also at previous projects database, and provide the link for it (as for example in the Mediterranean Sea Basin website <http://www.enpicbcmmed.eu/enicbcmmed-2014-2020/project-ideas-and-partner-search>)
- Publish the list of **awarded** projects as soon as possible after the award decision (PRAG limitation on display of awarded projects only after contract signature do not apply under ENI CBC), including at least the name of **all beneficiaries**, not only the lead one, and make it visible in your website.

Several programmes have online **databases with search tools on previously implemented** projects. These tools allow search in a **thematic way** (theme, priority or key words), which makes it easier to identify an organisation that has worked in the field of interest of the planned project idea. The search is usually also possible by **region**, as well as in some cases by:

- **type of partner** (joint project portal of programmes between Finland and Russia),
- **project budget** (Black Sea Basin, joint project portal of programmes between Finland and Russia),
- **type of deliverables** (Mediterranean Sea Basin) or
- **start year of implementation** (joint project portal of programmes between Finland and Russia).

In addition to the features above, the joint project portal of programmes between Finland and Russia (also including, in the case of Kolarctic, Norway and Sweden) allows a search on the funded projects from the previous ENPI CBC as well as current ENI CBC period **within the same tool**.

Information on previously implemented projects displayed in these online databases is supportive, including the names of **all partner organisations**, sometimes **contacts persons/details** and/or **web-site of the organisations**, as well as usually main achievements of each project.

Effective practice

- Make the database on previously implemented projects **easy to navigate**, not only presented as a long-list of projects but organised at least by priority or themes to facilitate the search.
- Information on all partners with **details on relevant contacts** and/or website is particularly helpful for partner search.

Some programmes also provide an **interactive map of project beneficiaries** on their website, which allows potential applicants to find out about possible experienced partners in their own region, and those from outside to find experienced partners in a particular region.

Effective practice

- Interactive maps provide a **user-friendly** way to identify partners, such as the one in the Black Sea Basin <http://blacksea-cbc.net/interactive-map/> (the map should however also allow to link easily to some information on the project).

Online resources also include **publications** made available through the programme websites (either directly or via a link to their former ENPI CBC website). Several programmes provide publications on previous projects under ENPI CBC period **along themes or priorities**, which allows an easier search by field of interest. One programme (Poland-Belarus-Ukraine) provides **regional brochures** detailing for each eligible region the established cross-border partnership links and regional results. Publications are sometimes provided in **several national languages** of the programme area.

Effective practice

- **Publications in national languages** allow easy access to information on previously implemented projects and their beneficiaries, while the online database of previous projects is usually only available in English.
- **Regional partnership map** within the regional brochures are helpful to identify visually the cross-border links of each region and established partnerships (see more on <http://pl-by-ua.eu/en,6,91>)

Several programmes also mention on their website **links to other useful databases** when looking for potential partners.

- Five programmes provide a clear link to **KEEP** database, though only three present what it is and how information provided can be useful when looking for partners.
- A few programmes link to **other ENI CBC programmes** with overlapping areas and/or to **regional networks** (such as the Euregio Karelia Cooperation Forum for the Karelia programme).
- One programme (Kolarctic) also mentions the link to **CORDIS** (EC Community Research and Development Information Service) that provides a partner search tool allowing to find organisations having experience in some of the 21 EU-funded programmes in research and innovation such as Horizon 2020 (using keywords, type of organisation and country; it provides organisation profile and description of its previous experience in terms of programme and established partnerships).

Effective practice

- **KEEP** database can be a useful source of information to identify potential project partners under ENI CBC – make this information visible on your programme websites.
- Make sure links to other **relevant programmes** (in particular partnership programmes operating in the same region(s)) **and regional networks** of organisations where to look for potential project partners are also provided online.
- TESIM has developed a specific **video tutorial on Partnership** including tips and tools for partner search within ENI CBC programmes, already available on the *GoforENICBC!* platform in English <https://www.goforenicbc.eu/index.php/en-partnership-videotutorial/>, Russian, French and (from autumn 2018) in Arabic – include this under the useful links for partner search!

In terms of **social media**, 14 out of 15 programmes make use of Facebook, 9 of Twitter and 2 of LinkedIn. The use of the social media for partner search is often limited and focuses mostly on advertising the programme activities.

Effective practice

- Consider setting up a specific **“Partner search group” under Facebook**, as created by the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus Programme – the group was quite active during the call (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/411476279255800/>).

What more could be done? Looking beyond ENI CBC practices...

- Create programme **virtual discussion fora for different themes**, linked to calls for proposal, or on an ongoing basis, so partners can be found, ideas shared, and partnerships created well in advance of calls for proposals. Link the discussion forum with the partner search facility on the website, so that instant personal messages can be sent to possible partners. URBACT Programme launched for instance a programme blog open to the general public where you can find articles, posts, discussion on several topics related to the Urban policies. <http://www.blog.urbact.eu/>
- Consider setting up a **LinkedIn group** for partner search, as done by the Interreg Europe programme on top of their partner search tool. The LinkedIn group includes over 1800 members and is intended to facilitate finding & networking with possible future partners: the partners can either describe their project idea or contact a project idea holder. <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/6819107/profile>. Specific partner search groups or “conversation” area have also been set up under LinkedIn by the Baltic Sea Region Programme, Interreg Central Europe and Interreg North-West Europe.

Events for partner search

Even though online tools and resources can provide a successful mean to establishing partnerships, it often serves only as a first step for communication. When looking for new partners, many potential applicants or partners are not used to, or do not trust internet contacts and still heavily rely on personal relations for building partnerships, in particular in CBC Partner Countries. Events facilitating partner search have therefore been a successful mean for **establishing face-to-face contacts** between potential partners, both in the previous ENPI CBC and the current ENI CBC periods, and remains highly appreciated by participants.

Most ENI CBC programmes have organized a **partner search event** when launching their call and/or held **specific sessions** to facilitate partner search within their programme launching conference, inviting participants from all eligible regions to attend. These events were usually held with TESIM support.

The typical format of partner search events includes **networking sessions and sharing of project ideas** among participants. Participants are usually split according to programme priorities, subdivided into more specific themes if relevant (in case of large number of participants and broad priorities), to allow networking within their field of interest.

Effective practice

- On top of the discussions around thematic tables, which are usually fruitful, more innovative techniques have also proven to be very successful. In particular, where there are well over 100 participants in a partnership event it will be difficult to meet all other participants, even within only one priority – in this case, rounds of **speed dating** per priority/theme can be organized where people quickly meet (1-2 minutes) and then move on to the next organisation (this however requires a fairly balanced number of EU/non EU participants to work well). Another possibility is to introduce an **elevator pitch** (a 30" presentation of participants in plenary). More information on these techniques can be found on the partner forums trainers agenda available on the *GoforENICBC!* platform <https://www.goforenicbc.eu/index.php/en-partnership-training/>. TESIM experts also remain at your disposal to provide further support on these techniques as needed.

Participants are invited to **register ahead of the event**, indicating their thematic field of interest (which allows an appropriate setting of the networking sessions) and describing their proposed **project idea** for cooperation, as well as the **types of partners** they are looking for. These project ideas are usually displayed in the venue of the event, as well as on the programme website.

Effective practice

- To take full benefit of a partner search event, it is important that participants come to the event **prepared**, already aware of programme priorities, of the benefits they can expect from CBC and of the type of partners they are looking for. Requesting to indicate their field of interest and to submit a project idea form during registration ahead of the event is encouraging this.
- If project ideas are displayed on the programme website **ahead of the event**, it allows initial contacts to take place before the face-to-face meeting and increases participants preparedness. In any case, sharing of project ideas during the event is usually highly appreciated by participants.

Effective practice

- Make sure that during the event participants **can easily identify** each other's field of interest and country (e.g. with a colour code and a flag on their badge) to facilitate relevant contacts.
- **Multiply the opportunities for networking** during the event, in particular allocate tables during meals according to priorities. Networking during lunch (or dinner) is one of the opportunities the most highly valued by participants.

Beyond the difficulty of finding partners, in some cases there is still an insufficient understanding of the CBC partnership approach or a lack of generic skills (such as using logical framework methodology), therefore the partner search events are sometimes combined with providing **information and skills training** that are needed by potential partners.

Effective practice

- Partner search events aim first of all at **establishing new contacts** among participants, therefore long presentations should be excluded – there are information events to this purpose, and participants to partner forums are expected to come prepared. However, some capacity building can still be introduced into the networking sessions. Rather than having partners exchanging on what they want “to do”, participants are encouraged during thematic discussions to brainstorm on common regional problems and possible solutions requiring cross-border cooperation (initial stages of project development according to the logical framework approach).
- To reduce the length of presentations and still provide partners with relevant information, a “**partner support pack**” prepared by TESIM was distributed in numerous events, including tips, tools and useful links for finding partners available on the *GoforENICBC!* online platform in English <https://www.goforenicbc.eu/index.php/en-partnership/>, Russian, French and (from autumn 2018) in Arabic.

Effective practice

- A **mix of experienced and less experienced** organisations in the events is highly valuable. Even though partner search events aim at forging new partnerships, involving beneficiaries from the previous period allows to build upon the previous experience and share good practices. As mentioned in the ex-post evaluation report, ENPI CBC was instrumental in developing project management skills with the less experienced partners gaining from the exchange of information and practices which took place within the partnership. **Interview sessions** of experienced project partners are appreciated during the events (these should be short and clearly targeted at providing tips and advices on how to find partners and work in partnership). The value of expanding and renewing existing partnerships should also be highlighted during the event to encourage experienced participants to meet newcomers.

During the partner search forums, in most cases participants **managed to overcome the cross-border language challenge**. A bigger obstacle, especially in the sea basin programmes, were **travel costs** for participants to arrive to the venue of the partner search, while **visa requirements** could also sometimes be an issue. The **location** of the event had an obvious and considerable impact on the nationality and regional origin of participants.

Effective practice

- One of the added value of partner search events is to allow partners to find a **common language**. The programme official language(s), mostly English, rarely reflect the variety of languages widely used for cross-border communication in the programme eligible areas. Unlike the online partner search tools provided on programme websites usually only allowing searches in English, partnerships during partner forums can also be built and project ideas shared using other regionally commonly understood languages, such as Russian or Arabic, French or Romanian.
- The choice of the **location** for a partner forum is strategic: on top of considering practicalities (easily accessible location...), it can allow to encourage participation of organisations from a region with fewer applications to the first calls.

Effective practice

- **Support** provided by the Managing Authorities/Joint Technical Secretariats to facilitate broad participation of potential partners from all countries is essential: for instance, by arranging registration and joint transportation to the meeting venue, and by spreading the information on the event directly through mailing lists of contacts. National authorities can also effectively contribute to spreading further the information and encourage participation, in particular from local and regional authorities and other public entities.

In some programmes in the previous ENPI CBC period, partnership opportunities were also opened during **thematic cross-border events** targeting both **actual beneficiaries** from both sides of the border and **newcomers**.

Effective practice

- It is relevant in any case that participants are split **by theme**, whether within the same event (along different tables/rooms) or within specific thematic events, so that potential partners have the opportunity to network with organisations sharing the same field of interest.

Partner search is also promoted to a lesser extend sometimes in information or capacity building events for applicants, through the provision of tips and **advices on how to find partners**.

Effective practice

- **Link events and online resources**: publicising online the **list of participants** with contact details of those attending programme information and partner forum events (provided authorization from participants for the online publication is collected during registration to the event) can also prove useful to identify a potential partner organisation and reach a contact person that is aware of the ENI CBC programme.

Facilitating partnership building

While finding the right partner is a key step towards a successful project proposal, partnership building is essential **both when preparing the proposal and when ensuring a joint implementation** of the project if the application is successful.

Quite commonly, organisations within the same proposal have not had the opportunity to all meet jointly before submitting their application, particularly in sea basin programmes, as travelling to meet partners is costly. However, forming and maintaining viable partnerships is crucial to the success of ENI CBC projects.

The programmes have therefore a role to play in **facilitating and encouraging** the development of strong CBC partnerships, and are providing various resources to this purpose.

Supporting partnership building during the application process

Eligibility of applicants, of partners and of partnerships is presented in the Guidelines for applicants of all ENI CBC programmes, and sometimes in a more directly accessible way also on the programmes websites. A few programmes provide as well detailed information in the **Guidelines for applicants** or the programme **manual** on the distinctive **roles and responsibilities** of the lead applicant/lead beneficiary and of the applicants/beneficiaries.

Some programmes accept as eligible costs, as possible under ENI CBC implementing rules, the **travel costs** of project partners during project preparation. In this case the use of simplified costs (e.g. 500€ per beneficiary) could be considered.

To provide an incentive for active involvement of all partners, several programmes have inserted in the application packs clear **requirements to describe each partner's role** in the development and implementation of the project and/or **to establish long lasting partnerships**, and reflected in the **evaluation criteria** appropriate ratings to motivate a serious effort of applicants towards partnership building.

A few programmes are requesting applicants to describe clearly in their project communication plan also activities related to **internal communication** among partners.

Effective practice

- Mention the responsibility for **establishing and maintaining efficient and effective partner relations**, including clear and regular internal communication, whenever describing the role and responsibilities of the Lead applicant/beneficiary, such as in the applicant guidelines or at training workshops.
- TESIM has developed a **video tutorial and written material** to support **Partnership building** among project partners, available on the *GoforENICBC!* online platform in English <https://www.goforenicbc.eu/index.php/en-partnership/> but also in French, Russian and (from autumn 2018) in Arabic.

Programmes have also developed templates or detailed instructions for partnership statements and **partnership agreements**, to provide a relevant frame to the legal relationship between partners if the project is selected. The partnership agreements focus mostly on requirements and obligations, that though necessary may not be enough to give the relevant tools and tips for partnerships to develop into a fruitful cross-border relationship.

Programme **events**, in particular the partner search events, have also provided the opportunity to focus on partnership building and provide practical information and exchange of experience between organisations in this regard.

Effective practice

- Support the **sharing of experience from experienced project partners/beneficiaries**, which proves very useful to anticipate “what can go wrong” in a partnership and prepare for it already in the application process. This can be done through targeted interview during partner search or information events, but it can also be done via written or video resources. For instance, a *Guidebook for applicants* available in the programme national languages has been developed by the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programme as a result of a series of meetings of ENPI CBC beneficiaries, providing best practices and experiences from the development and implementation of projects, including partnership aspects <https://www.pbu2020.eu/en/news/46>. Similarly, the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus Programme has produced a video with interviews from project beneficiaries telling about their experiences, lessons and advice, including on building and maintaining partnerships https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGuA_yMc_0k

What more could be done? Looking beyond ENI CBC practices...

- Interreg Europe organises **webinars on building a successful partnership**, as part of a series of webinars targeting lead applicants. On top of receiving presentations, participants registering are able to ask questions and interact with the speakers. More information on <https://www.interregeurope.eu/news-and-events/event/708/lead-applicant-webinar-on-building-a-successful-partnership/>

Supporting partnership building during project implementation

Programme manual and/or **guidelines on communication**, when available, are so far the main resources available to support partnership building during ENI CBC project implementation. Several programmes provide in particular guidance on communication; however, this guidance focuses mostly on visibility requirements and external communication, and/or technical aspects such as confidentiality.

In any ENI CBC project, communication is the key to a good partnership, therefore projects need to establish good and clear **communication procedures**. For projects where many partners work together, well organized and managed internal communication and meeting procedures are a critical factor for success. Good internal communication is also a prerequisite for efficient external communication: without a successful internal communication projects run the risk of not communicating externally with one voice.

Effective practice

- Incorporate **guidelines for good and clear internal communication** as a communication tool for lead beneficiaries and their partners. Projects could be advised to establish an internal newsletter (or regular email bulletin), regular meetings in person as possible, or otherwise ensure internal communication flows via telecommunication tools or an intranet component in their website.
- A TESIM video tutorial and written guidance on project **Communication** is part of the Project implementation e-module available (from autumn 2018) on the www.goforenicbc.eu platform – visit us and inform your beneficiaries!

On top of communication procedures, partners need to establish clear **roles and responsibilities** right from the start (as outlined in the partnership agreement), set up the **project team** and its coordination mechanisms. Defining clear **procedures for**

internal monitoring and reporting, as well as ensuring a shared understanding of financial obligations and flows, is also essential to a smooth joint implementation.

Effective practice

- Include a section on **building partnerships** in your programme manual (or project implementation manual) with tips from experienced partners.
- TESIM video tutorials and written guidance on project **Management and monitoring** and on **Financial management**, including details on how to set up internal project monitoring and reporting, are part of the Project implementation e-module available (from autumn 2018) on the www.goforenicbc.eu platform – visit us and inform your beneficiaries!

These aspects are expected to be addressed in **trainings for beneficiaries** that most programmes foresee to deliver when the projects will be launched, either soon after project starts and/or just before the end of the first reporting period.

Effective practice

- Organise joint training of lead beneficiaries and beneficiaries preferably soon after contract signature, so as to build a joint understanding and convey key messages on the importance of partnership building from the beginning. Allow **time for project teams to work together on their projects during the training**, so project teams have the opportunity to forge good partner relations (remember some of them, especially in sea basin programmes, will have probably not met in person before!).