WBAA
WESTERN BALKANS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

PROJECT WRITING MANUAL

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Project Writing Manual

Practical guide to applying for WBAA projects

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1.   Introduction

The possibility for WBAA members to implement their own projects is one key essence and relevant task of WBAA in order to realize and follow the objectives of WBAA.

With WBAA projects, WBAA members not only get the chance to realize their own ideas supported by other partners/organizations from the Higher Education context but also improve the regional cooperation within the Western Balkan region and strengthen the idea of the network. In addition to that they are dealing with important issues from the region and thereby provide concrete solutions/ measures for those regional topics.

Bringing people together, developing international project ideas and creating events, concepts and formats that go beyond their boundaries – these are some essential aspects of WBAA-Projects. WBAA members also can acquire relevant learning experiences for their personal and professional life. They can create new networks and relations with other WBAA members and groups, share knowledge, intensify & broaden their skills.

This chance of project implementation is crucial for the impact to augment outreach, to build up and foster networks with the relevant stakeholders, to leverage synergies (especially with other European stakeholders like EUD, NEOs, NAs) and finally to establish WBAA as an active and relevant stakeholder in the arena of international HE mobility, quality and innovation. The possibility to apply for and conduct such projects will attract additional volunteers to get involved in WBAAs work, thus making membership more interesting and WBAA livelier.

WBAA projects are the main tool to give WBAA members room for their creativity, to foster outreach, to activate the local and regional networks and to make WBAA more visible and relevant.

2.   WBAA Project Scheme

WBAA Project Scheme consists of 3 phases:

1) **Project Competition** – that includes submitting your project proposal to WBAA Service Provider. This is the phase where this Project Writing Manual can be useful to you!
2) **Project Elaboration -** that includes further development of your provisionally approved project proposal with the help and mentorship of WBAA Service Provider.
3) **Project Implementation** – that includes implementing your project activities in accordance with the project proposal elaborated with WBAA Service Provider.

Detailed explanation of each phase can be found in the WBAA Call for Projects.

3. Meeting WBAA components

You can submit your project proposal that fall under one or more of the following thematic clusters:

- Cluster 1: Events for Erasmus+ and WBAA promotion
- Cluster 2: Training sessions for volunteers and WBAA activists (capacity building, career development, project or entrepreneurship skills, etc.)
- Cluster 3: Projects promoting research in Higher Education
- Cluster 4: Projects promoting modernization and internationalization of Higher Education in the region
- Cluster 5: Other outreach projects providing knowledge exchange and networking opportunities

- The application needs to align with at least one of the clusters listed above. When submitting the application, the applicant will be asked to justify how their project idea aligns to these clusters.

4. Submitting your project proposal

Your project proposal must include the following:

1) **WBAA-Project- submission** (online application form in which you must elaborate your project idea)
2) **Draft WBAA-Project timeline** (timeline of how you want to implement your project)
3) **Draft Budget plan** (estimation of resources and support needed to implement your project).
4) **Your CV and – if any: an agreement with your partner(s)**
5) **If necessary – ideas of facilitators/trainers (CVs)**

All templates are available in the WBAA online Community Platform.

5. WBAA Submission Form

This Manual serves as guidelines for applying for WBAA funds. It will help you complete the WBAA application documents, i.e. the submission form.

WBAA submission form is the primary document you will need to fill in when applying for WBAA projects. It represents the summary information about your project idea, based on which the WBAA Service Provider evaluates all submitted project proposals.

All proposals must be submitted in English.

> **PRO tip:** Make sure to provide information about your project idea as accurate as possible and avoid repetitions when answering the application questions to simplify the assessment of your project proposal. Follow the concept of SMART when writing your project description (explained below).

6. Submission Form questions explained – General Information (Section I)

1. *Information of applicants*

This question is quite easy. Just fill in your name and surname, email address, current place of residence and nationality/ies. Moreover, write for how long you have been a WBAA member. And that's it!

2. *Short description of submitter*

This is where you present yourself to the WBAA Service Provider and the project evaluators.

You need to attach your short CV and write a short paragraph about your general experience in managing projects for WBAA or elsewhere. Actually, anything you think is relevant matters so put it here, no doubt. We want to learn as much as possible about you (hopefully, our future WBAA Project Coordinator) ☺

Watch out! This section of your application should be half a page maximum in length!

3. *Information of co-organizers*

In case you are applying for a project with some other WBAA members or partners, first you need to decide who will be in charge of the whole project – this person fills in the question 1.1. The other should fill in the question 1.2 with the same data.

Watch out! Here you can just add max. 5 additional members (even though your group might be even bigger!) You – as the submitter – will remain the main person of contact and mainly responsible.

4. *Third partners/organizations/stakeholders*

Third partners are organizations that are expected to provide either a financial or in-kind contribution to the WBAA-Project but are not eligible to apply themselves. This can be public institutions/ organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), associations, chambers of commerce, societies, etc.

Project partners are those entities responsible for carrying out specific project activities in the manner and scope indicated in your application form or supporting the overall project

implementation in any other capacities which is defined beforehand.

For a successful partnership, the partnership should be built on a shared vision, shared values and a joint objective. Another key principle for a successful partnership is to identify and set clear roles and responsibilities for each partner. Often, partnerships are formalized with mutual agreements or memorandums of understanding which defined the project partners, communication methods, roles and responsibilities, specific tasks, reporting, finances, etc.

In case you have a project partner, you should briefly present them here and describe their role and their tasks on your project. Tell us who they are and why you chose them. Tell us also what they would be doing in case your project is approved.

In case you already made some written agreement with them to secure their support, mention it as well! You should also scan that documentation and upload it on the Submission Form.

Watch out! This section of your application should be half a page maximum in length!

7. Submission Form questions explained – WBAA Project Proposal (Section II)

1. General information

Think about what you want to do with your project. What problem are you tackling? Why do you want to do your project? This section is all about presenting your project idea as much as possible.

> **PRO tip:** Once you complete the Submission Form, give it to someone else to read it (someone who has nothing to do with your project idea). This will give you a pair of fresh eyes to look at your idea and give you feedback – such as whether your idea is comprehensible, attainable, etc. They might also give you constructive feedback about how you can improve your idea.

Every project has a title, which is usually short and associates to the overall project idea. You can play with the words, be creative and your project title can have more words, but it is usually kept short, so the reader can remember it easily. Avoid putting whole sentences as project title.

2. Background and relevance

First, you need to define your project problem. Why do you want to do your project?

Defining the project problem means identifying an existing issue your target group faces in the community which needs to be addressed through project activities. It is an undesirable situation that requires adaptation in social, economic, educational, health or environmental condition in the community. Your project aims to improve this situation by resolving the problem / tackling the issue (we cannot always fully resolve a community problem through a project). The project problem is also identified as the gap between the problematic (current) state and desired (goal) state of a process or product. The gap is solved through project planning and implementation, hence aiming to get you to your desired goal.

In order to easily define your project problem, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the problems my community faces?
- What are the issues that require immediate attention?
- What are the things I can improve with my project?
- Why do I need this project?

Example: You want a cup of tea, so your problem is defined as "the need for a cup of tea". The solution to this problem is "make a cup of tea". The process between expressing your need for the "tea" (problem) and making it (solution), represents your project. So, in order to make yourself a cup of tea, you will need the following: **purpose/aim** (tired of work, needs refreshment, thirsty, healthy lifestyle…), **actions/activities** (go to kitchen, put water in the pot, boil the water, put the tea leaves in…), **equipment** (pot, water, electricity, tea leaves, sugar, spoon, cup…), **timetable** (time needed to do each of the actions/activities: find the pot, pour in some water, boil the water, prepare tea leaves, let them sit, wait for the tea to cool down…), **results** (drinking a cup of tea), **dissemination of results** (telling your friends how good the tea was, post a picture on Instagram story…), **sustainability** (whether you will make it again, whether you will offer it to others).

Secondly, you need to describe the challenges you might be facing when implementing your project.

What might be the obstacles? Do you need institutional support, and some institution might not support your idea? Will COVID-19 prevent you from organizing a training you wanted? Write it all down but try to be as precise as possible. The more risks you identify now, the easier it would be to manage your project later, because you will know the dangers your project might face.

Thirdly, explain how your project contributes to regional cooperation.

This is the added value of your project idea. Why does it have a regional approach? Will you include people from WB6? How will they interact and what is the expected outcome from that?

Lastly, briefly state which WBAA cluster your project addresses.

We already explained clusters above. Here you should explain why your project is connected to a specific cluster(s).

3.   Short description of your idea

Watch out! This section of your application should be 2 and a half pages maximum in length!

a) **WBAA Project Summary**

As its name says, this part should summarize everything that your project is about. It should briefly present the following:

- **WHAT**: Overall project idea and project aim,
- **WHO**: Project target group, as well as partners (if applicable),
- **HOW**: Main activities and their expected results/outcomes.

Try not to *copy-paste* from your project proposal and avoid repeating yourself in this part. The project summary should be informative, but concise and to the point. If a project evaluator was to read and evaluate your proposal, they must have a clear picture of what your project is trying to achieve just by reading your summary.

The project summary is best if written in the end of project proposal writing.

Watch out! This section of your application should be 8 lines maximum in length!

b) <u>Project goals and objectives</u>

Overall goal/objective

The mechanism with which your project aims to tackle that problem is called the project aim. There are number of synonyms which you might encounter in project management world: project purpose, project main/overall goal, project focus, project main objective, project main idea, project mission, etc.

Specific goals/objectives

Apart from one main aim, projects usually have their specific goals and objectives. This is because the projects are much more complexed and sometimes identify more tools and mechanisms that tackle the project problem, and/or more activities to be implemented in order to reach the overall project aim. Specific goals/objectives are understood as milestones in your project implementation.

In most cases, these goals are defined against criteria called the SMART goals. Check table below.

> *Specific* – target a specific area for improvement.
>
> *Measurable* – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
>
> *Assignable* – specify who will do it.
>
> *Realistic* – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.
>
> *Time-related* – specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

However, when defining your specific goals, bear in mind that not all of them might have all these elements. Nonetheless, if it is possible to frame all your specific goals/objectives according to SMART technique, it would be easier to implement the project late

> **PRO tip:** The best way to stay on target is to systematically revisit goals and to track progress regularly as it keeps the team focused on priorities. You should assign difficult or complicated goals to experienced and ambitious project team members. The harder the goal, the greater the sense of achievement. Once you define your specific goals, revisit them by asking yourself the following questions:
>
> - *Is it specific enough? o Can it be measured?*
> - *Is it achievable?*
> - *Is it relevant?*
> - *Does it have a time constraint?*

c) **Project measures**

Project measures are specific activities that you want to implement as part of your project in order to achieve its goals. These can be 'one-time' events (e.g. conference) or a 'long-term' thing (e.g. research).

Here's how to best identify what activities you need on your project:

Lay out the problems/issues you want to address with your project. What actions are necessary in order to resolve/tackle those issues? Those are your activities. Lay them out and brainstorm their format. Eventually, you will come up with concrete activities that your project encompasses. Next step is defining the activity calendar, which means putting all your activities in a timeline sequence and arrange them chronically. You might end up having an activity that must be organized before the next one happens.

For each activity, you can identify the following:

- Activity Name;
- Activity Scope – a brief description of what the activity entails (with its objective)
- Planned Start Date – from the project timeline;
- Planned End Date – from the project timeline;
- Activity-specific expenses.

Once you have laid out your project activities against a project timeline, try to **_break down_** each of your project activities into its sub-activities. This is make sure you do not miss anything important for your project implementation.

Example: In order to make a cup of tea, you need to buy the tea leaves and boil the water. So your first activity will be to go out and buy the tea leaves. If you do not do this, you won't be able to make yourself some tea. After you buy tea leaves, the next activity is to put some water in the pot, then turn on the stove, boil the water, pour it in the cup, put the tea leaves in, put some honey in the cup, wait for the tea to cool down and only then you will be able to drink it. All these small steps are project activities, arranged in a chronological manner. Doing them in a different order does not make sense

PRO tip: When planning your activities, try to estimate the time you need for each activity (in hours, days, months, etc.). Also, when defining your activities, try to estimate all the resources you might need (people, money, equipment, etc.). This will help you plan your timeline and budget more easily later.

d) <u>Sustainability</u>

This part serves as an explanation of what measures you will take during and/or after your project that will ensure its impact is long-term. We implement projects to have their results sustained beyond the project duration, so that our beneficiaries benefit from our project even after it is completed.

Briefly explain what exactly you will do regarding this.

e) <u>Project management</u>

This part is about how you plan to implement your project. Think about the human resources you need to implement it (Do you need a coordinator? Do you need volunteers? Do you need technical staff / experts for some activities?). Write it all down – roles and responsibilities of each of your team members, as well as any external expertise you might need (trainers, lecturers, etc.).

> **PRO tip:** Also think about the back-up plan. What happens if one of these people cannot partake in the project once it begins? Plan a contingency measure and briefly state it here.

f) <u>Draft of an agenda</u>

This is the place to explain when your project will be implemented, i.e. when each activity happens.

Your project implementation starts with creating a calendar of activities to be carried out in order to successfully conduct your project. You should list all projects activities and place them on a timeline of your project (from the project start date until the project finish date).

Defining your project timeline means putting your activities in a timely order according to your start and finish dates. You should revisit this timeline as often as possible during the implementation.

> **PRO tip**: Add 'buffer time' to your activities. This means that if a certain activity is foreseen to last for 3 days, you can put that it takes 5 days (1 extra day before, 1 extra day after), so in case there are some unforeseen delays, you can be sure that you have enough time to implement it.

4. Development Impact

Here, you need to explain a couple of things:

- Project results and their positive impact
- Target group and the project's impact on them
- Contribution to WBAA aims and mission
- Contribution to promotion of WBAA, the EU-funded higher education mobility schemes, regional cooperation in WB6 and the EU accession of WB6
- Promotional and media strategy for your project
- Cooperation with stakeholders not directly involved in your project

Bear in mind the maximum length for this section, so stay brief in your explanation!

g) **Project results and their positive impact**

Project results are the specific changes you want to achieve with your project. They are tangible, verifiable and can influence the current situation in the community. Sometimes, these are called project outcomes or project outputs. Your result is the solution to your project problem, therefore, it must be connected to your problem as a realistic outcome of the change you make.

Think about what good should come out of your project result(s). This is what you need to point out in this part. Does your project develop skills that people will be able to use after your project ends? Does your project contribute to creating a long-term policy that will influence higher education in your countries many years after your project is completed?

PRO tip: Be realistic with your desired results. Just as in the case of goals, the results neither should be intangible, but possible to reach. Think big but act in small steps: you might want to change the world with your project but remember that this change starts with small things. Adjust your project accordingly. This will allow you to recognize its positive impact more easily.

h) **Target group and the project's impact on them**

One of the key elements in writing a project proposal is to define the target group or audience. A target group is the specific group of people you want to reach with your project. They are the people who are most likely to benefit from your project, and they are united by some common characteristics like demographics (age, gender, education level, etc.) and behaviors (conmen, unemployed, disabled, etc). You can have multiple target groups (primary and secondary) if your project reaches out directly to one group (primary target group) and indirectly to another (secondary target group). Everyone (even slightly) affected by your project can be considered as one of your target groups.

You can divide your target group according to the following factors:
- Age;
- Gender;
- Location (local, regional, national &/or urban, suburban, rural);
- Education;
- Occupation…

PRO tip: "It's all about balance. If you try to reach everyone you will likely appeal to no-one, but if only a handful of people meet all your criteria you have broken things down too far."

When describing your target group, start by identifying their profile by asking yourself:

Who is this person? What are they like? - How many am I trying to reach out to? - What kind of impact do I want this project to have on them?

Describe also the actual needs of your target group and how your project meets those requirements:

How does your idea/project help your target group? - What problem does your project solve for this target group? How does it make their lives easier/better? - What would motivate this target group to participate?

PRO tip: The most common mistakes to avoid when defining your target group: (1) Thinking that your target audience is the same as you are. (2) Assuming that your audience knows the same things you do.

i) Contribution to WBAA aims and mission, and contribution to promotion of WBAA, the EU-funded higher education mobility schemes, regional cooperation in WB6 and the EU accession of WB6

For WBAA, it's imperative to convey the aims and the mission to the interested parties through projects. During the writing stage of your project, take a close look what WBAA has accomplished during these years, the mission and the aims of WBAA[1].

WBAA's objectives:

- *Establishing* a strong union of alumni from the Western Balkans
- *Promoting* mobility opportunities in Europe and beyond
- *Sharing* experience by supporting and mentoring students
- *Increasing* employability through the exchange of best practice, experience and contacts
- *Empowering* and inspiring young people to achieve their goals
- *Contributing* to the modernization of higher education systems back home
- *Liaising* with other alumni associations in the EU and beyond

When designing your project, include a section in the activities to talk about the participants' experiences with the Erasmus program and how it has affected their personal and professional aspects. Cooperation with different bodies from other countries is vital to give e boost the project and create new connections and spread the message of WBAA.

j) Promotional and media strategy for your project

Go back to your target group. How do you plan to reach out to them? Via social media (if they are active users, young people, etc.)? Or via schools and universities (if they are students and teachers)? Think of any possible medium via which you can reach out to your target audience and tell them about your project.

Defining your communication strategy is about defining the key messages and information you want to send to your target audience. Do you want to persuade, to advocate, or to change a behavior? Do you want to inform your audience about progress made, results achieved? Identify the key messages that you will convey to each type of audience to reach your objectives.

It would be good to identify the timing and frequency of your messages (when do you post what and on which channel). Maybe you want to post on Facebook every day, and on Instagram once a week. It's up to you! Furthermore, consider your constraints, which can be your budget, or access to specific technology.

PRO tips:

- Diversify your messages according to your target groups (students and teachers process information differently and require different piece of information).
- Diversify your messages according to the medium you use (social media information is different from flyers and booklets)
- You can use various communication channels to send your messages: social media, websites, blog, press, TV, radio, newspaper, etc.
- Stay creative: use word games, pictures, videos, etc.

k) Cooperation with stakeholders not directly involved in your project

In this section is very important to define who else is going to contribute from/in your project. You can collaborate with different institutions or NGOs for your project. You can use different stakeholders to increase your project's visibility or use spaces to hold activities or any other utilities. Also, you can do TV, Radio appearances promotion your project. When it comes to stakeholders, you have to find a fine line on how you can cooperate with them and find the same interest for both parties.

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[1] https://www.western-balkans-alumni.eu/

5. *Environmental sustainability*

The environment is very important when it comes to implementing the projects. WBAA is a big advocate for environmental protection. After you have finished the activities and the promotion material beware: Cities states connected via train, you can use the train for transportation (transportation of the participants or vice-versa). Activities that are planned to be held on venues, you can come up with a strategic plan to no-plastic activities and define when designing the merch of the project to include reusable materials which will help the environment, for example, you can design cups where participants can use them for drinking and not plastic bottles.

6. *Mitigation and flexibility towards external factors like COVID-19*

COVID-19 is a very serious situation, and participants can only participate in the project activities. They have to take a test for COVID-19. Only participants who resulted negative can participate in the project's activities. During budget preparation as a suggestion, you can make a line about supplies and reimbursed them the test. If the situation gets worst, always have plan B. See how you can move your activities online and also this goes when you are preparing the budget, please leave a line, for example, to buy a session in ZOOM or any other platforms, also see how your activities can be moved online and still have the same results also keep in mind to keep the participants engaged all the time with your program. If the activities are being held live, please respect the social distancing, wear masks, and gloves. In every table, there should be disinfectants.

7. *Cost estimation/plan of needed resources*

The budget is the financial backbone of your project. It lays out all expenses that you anticipate for your project. The budget must relate directly to project activities.

The budget should be presented in EURO, VAT exempt. This means that for any costs you make for your project, you are entitled to be exempt from paying the taxes to those products and services. More details will be given by the WBAA Service Providers in the Project Elaboration Phase.

Figures must be rounded to the nearest single unit of currency.

Only proved costs (receipted) will be reimbursed, please ALWAYS provide a receipt for the expenses.

In WBAA projects, the following costs are considered eligible:

- Actual costs incurred during the implementation of the action (not before and not after the project implementation period).
- All costs must be indicated in the overall budget for the action.
- All costs must be identifiable, verifiable and necessary for the implementation of the action.
- All costs incurred must be paid before the submission of the final report.
- In WBAA projects, the following costs are not eligible:
- Debts and debt service charges (interest).
- Costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union (including through EDF) grant.

- Purchases of land or buildings-currency exchange losses.
- Credit to third parties.

There are a few categories of costs you can anticipate for your project:

- **Material costs** – any material your project requires should go in this category (paper, pens, mugs, shirts, printed material, etc.)
- **Cost of external experts** – if you plan to engage experts (trainers, lecturer, etc).), they should be presented here. No WBAA members working on the project can be presented as external experts not budgeted.
- **Travel costs, accommodation, subsistence costs** – all costs related to travel, accommodation, food, catering or else that is necessary for your project should be presented here.
- **Other costs (please specify)** – anything that does not fall under the previous categories, add it here and explain.

8. *Ideas for trainers/ facilitator/ moderator etc. for your project*

You almost made it, good job so far.

After the activities have been finalized, if any activity needs a trainer/facilitator/ moderator, you need to attach to the application for granting a CV of a person you will hire to train you participant etc. You should choose someone who is a professional of a specific field. Because if you choose someone to train your participants in a field for example digital marketing and has the CV of that person shows no indication that has an experience in that field, it lowers your project's chances to be selected. Also be aware, choosing someone you have to consider the conflict of interest.