

ENGAGE! project Playbook:

International cooperation for NGOs



Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway

Active
citizens fund

The project is implemented with a grant from the Active Citizens - National Fund funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Funds



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AGDER
County Council



In ENGAGE! project, we are enhancing the cooperation capacity of local actors in Northern Poland with partners from the Baltic Region, especially Norway and Iceland. BISER, together with the Association of Polish Communes of Euroregion Baltic and Agder County Council, is working on building capacities of NGO sector representatives from Pomorskie, Warmia and Masuria and Agder Regions.

We are supporting them in their first steps in international cooperation. We provide knowledge, introduce existing networks and potential project partners, share information on funding possibilities and thematic cooperation platforms. We bring closer the richness of Baltic Sea regional cooperation, including the EU Strategy For the Baltic Sea Region, Sustainable Development Goals and EU Green Deal policy. If you think your organisation is ready to start transnational cooperation, let us know.

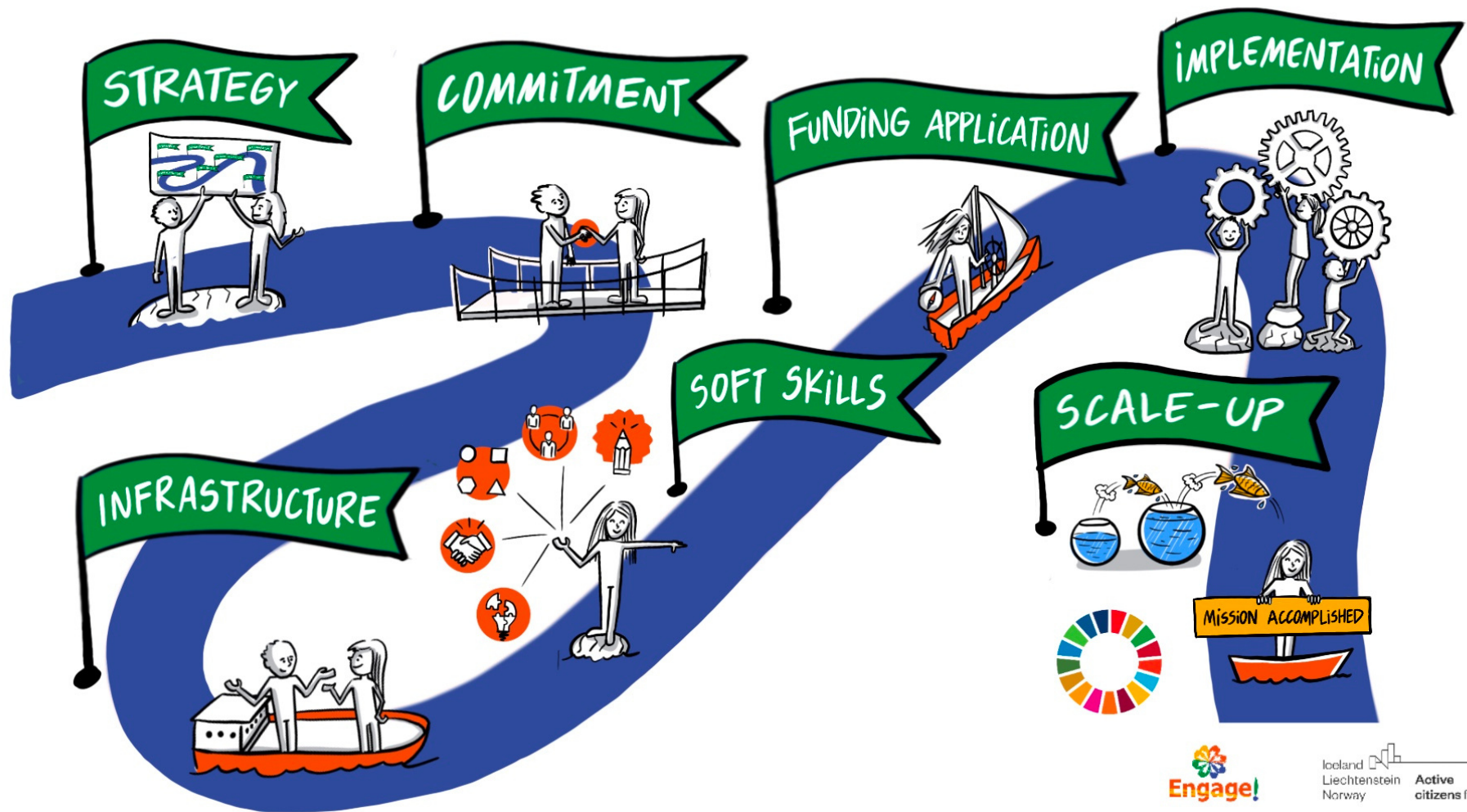
We will be happy to share our experience and provide you with all the information you need!

Project Partners: Baltic Institute for Regional Affairs, Association of Polish Communes of Euroregion Baltic, Agder County Council

The project runs from April 2021 until July 2023.

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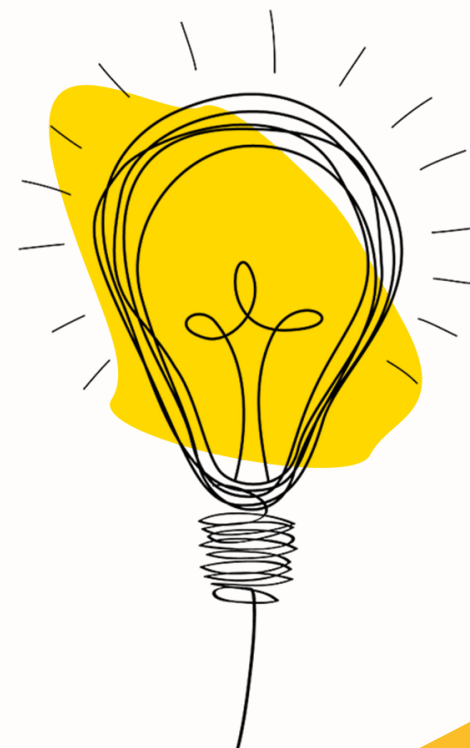






INTRODUCTION

LOTERRY OR STRATEGIC APPROACH



International cooperation is rewarding

Many of today's societal challenges are not bound by borders. Hence cross-border collaboration can help solve local challenges.

To successfully cooperate and co-create across borders and to win international project support, our key message is to apply a strategic approach instead of ad-hoc activities, which is like playing the lottery.

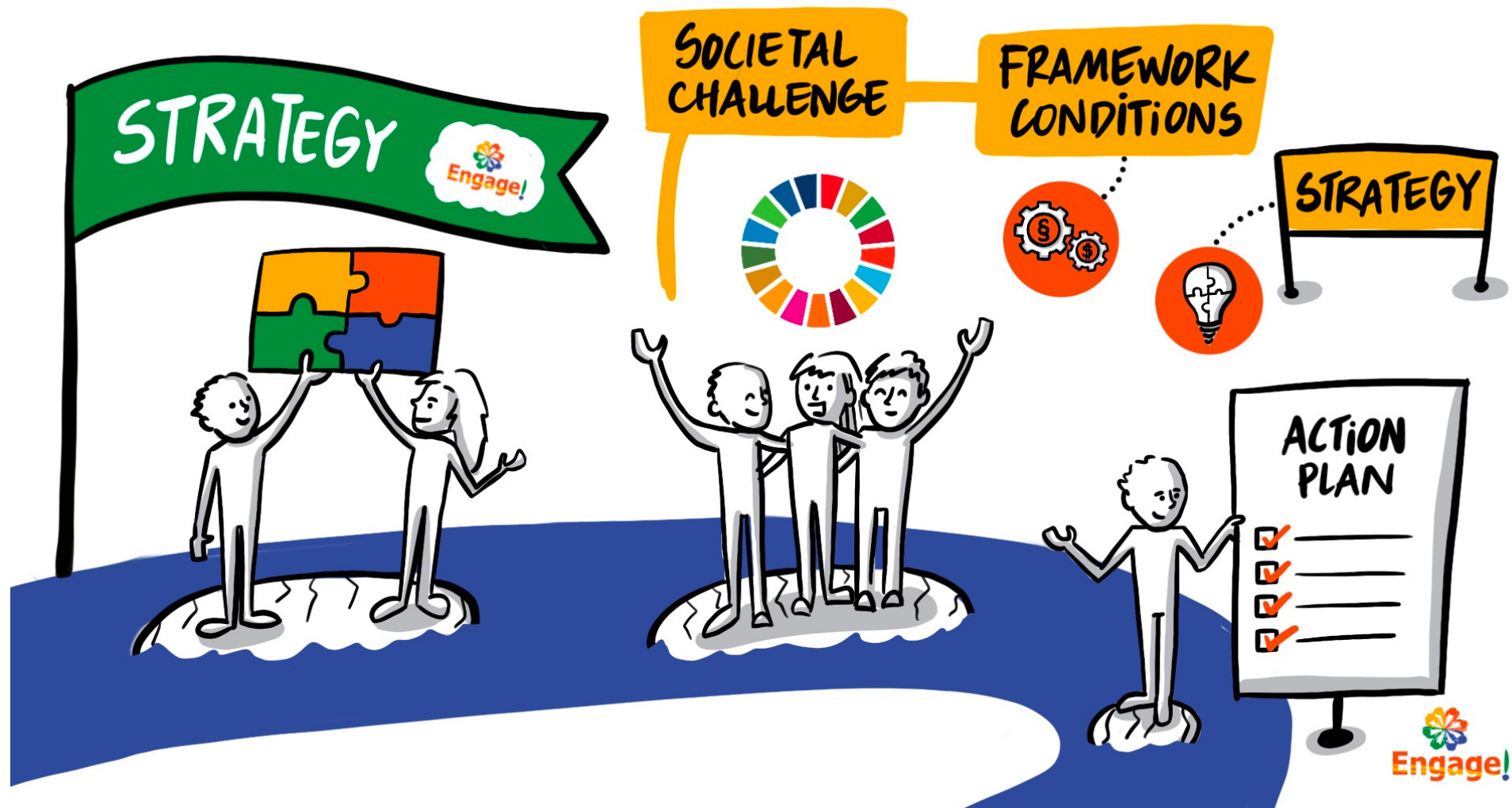
We have created this manual to help NGOs understand how to best engage in sustainable international cooperation, co-creation and partnerships, and hopefully, reap the rewards through successful funding applications.





**The NGO must have a
clear vision and
understanding of its
role and contributions
to society.**







Societal change



What is the domain (market) of the NGO? And which are the key societal challenges and drivers within this domain?



It is important to have a clear understanding in order to set out a path towards helping solve the challenges and contributing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



Framework conditions

FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS



What are the policies, rules and regulations in place in the NGO area? How do they affect the societal challenges?



Who are the key stakeholders, and what are their roles?





Strategy

Building on a clear understanding of the domain, a guiding vision, clear goals and a sustainable strategy to achieve the goal is needed to succeed with international collaboration yielding high impact. The strategy should clearly identify why, how, where and when it would benefit the NGO and what impact it has on its goal achievements, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and other key policies.

Action Plan



Building on the strategy, international cooperation and projects must be considered and defined in the context of a complete action plan for the NGO with concrete and achievable actions within the organisation's available resources.



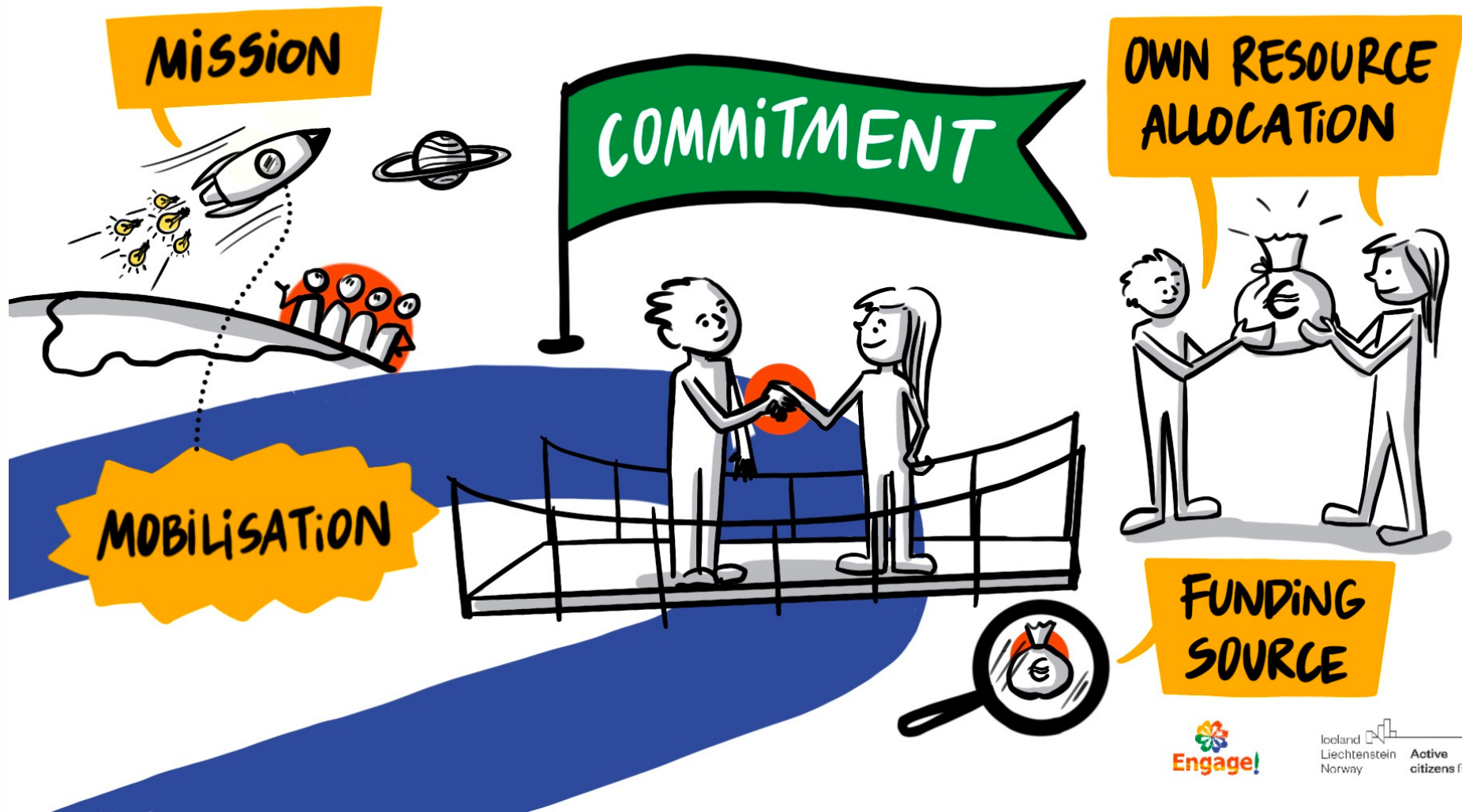
It is crucial to consider medium to long term actions and engagements, as ad-hoc and short-term initiatives often yield low impact.





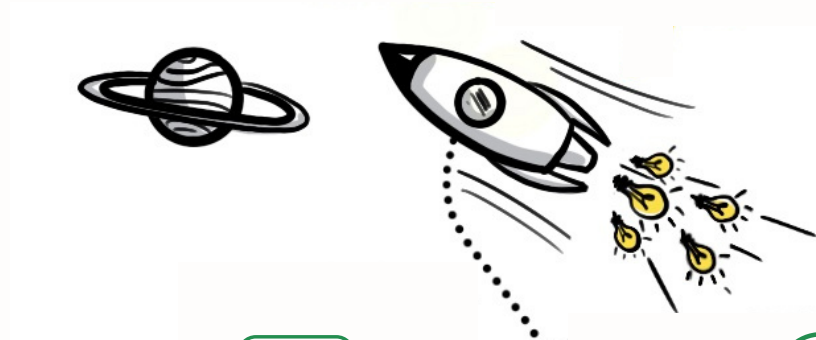
**Failure to undertake
the action plan should
never be a reason to
change the strategy!
Ensure commitment.**







Mission



The international mission of the NGO, as set out in the action plan, must be clearly operationalised.



Set out clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), organise them properly, and ensure it is an integral part of the NGO's core.



Please pay attention: International activities may tend to live their own life. Do not let this happen.

Mobilisation



Ensure buy-in to the international mission from the governing board, executive management and staff, next to the highly important members and donors of the NGO.



Gain insight about which members and donors would like to take an active part in the international mission, and engage them! Shared mission – shared results & responsibility.



Own resource allocation



Allocate a sufficient budget.

Employ competent staff on your project.



- Remember that the people working for you are your best ambassadors. Therefore do not leave it to fresh juniors and trainees to undertake the important international work and represent you at international arenas.



Do not underestimate the complexity of international projects.

- It may require more time and resources, especially when working with new alliances.
- Manage risks.



Allow for a sufficient travel budget.



Funding source



Set out a clear plan on how you intend to finance the international activities and projects.



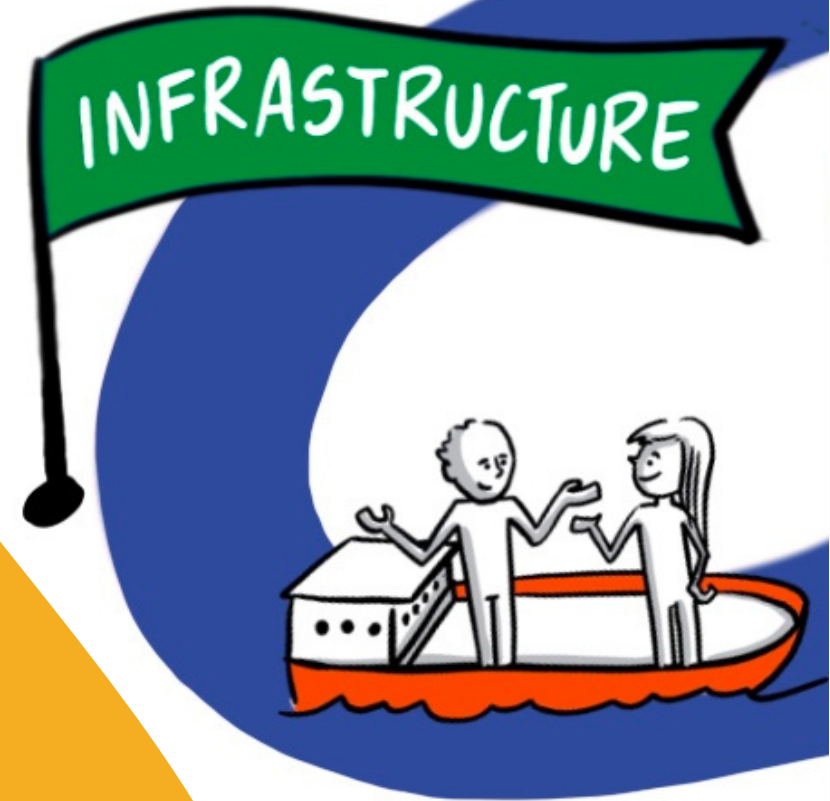
There are many opportunities to co-fund projects from EU programmes and other funds such as EEA Grants Norway Grants. Some local EU-funding specialists help for free. Consult them

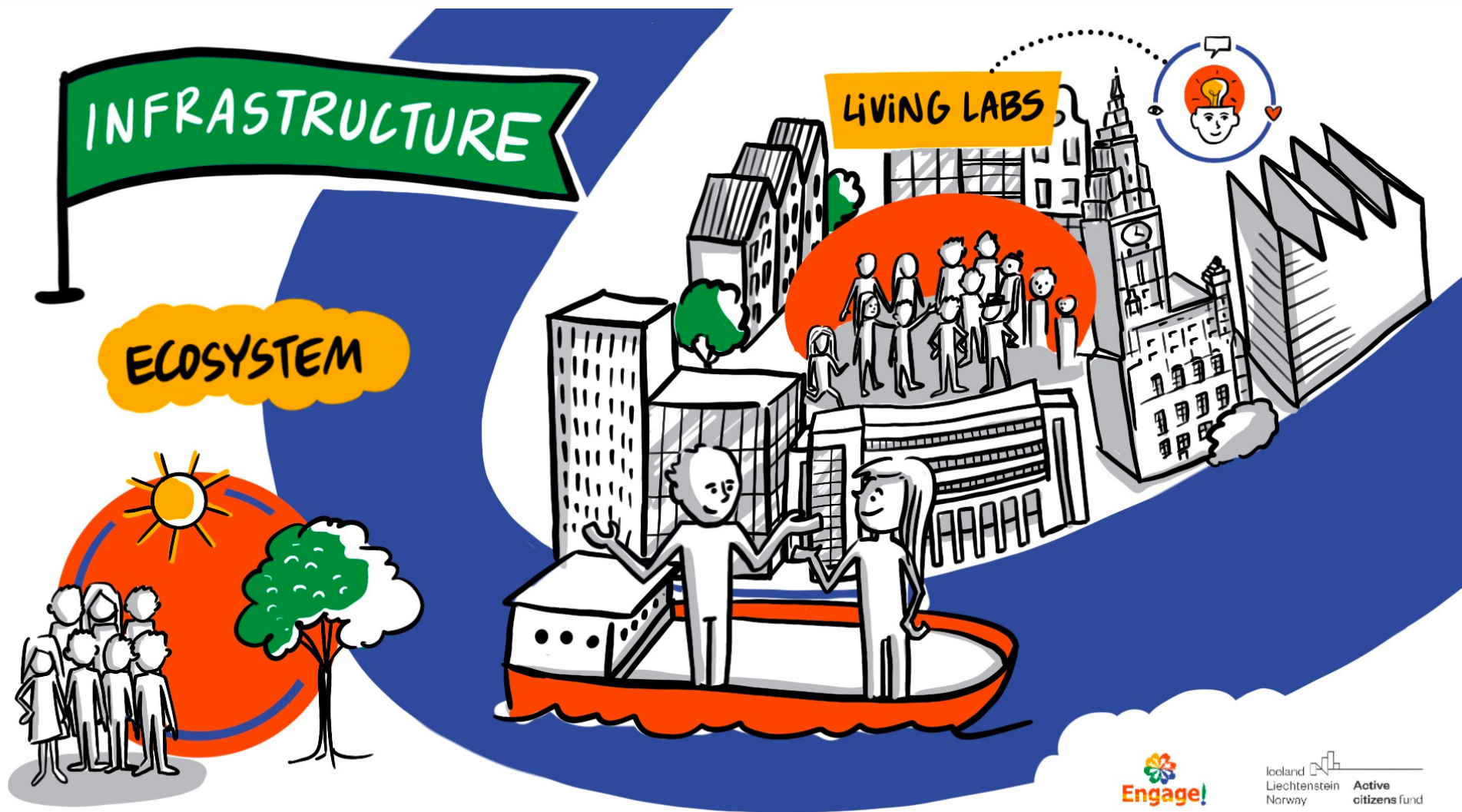


Identify potential sources of co-funding at the national level to the EU-funding, such as your donors, members and local/regional authorities.



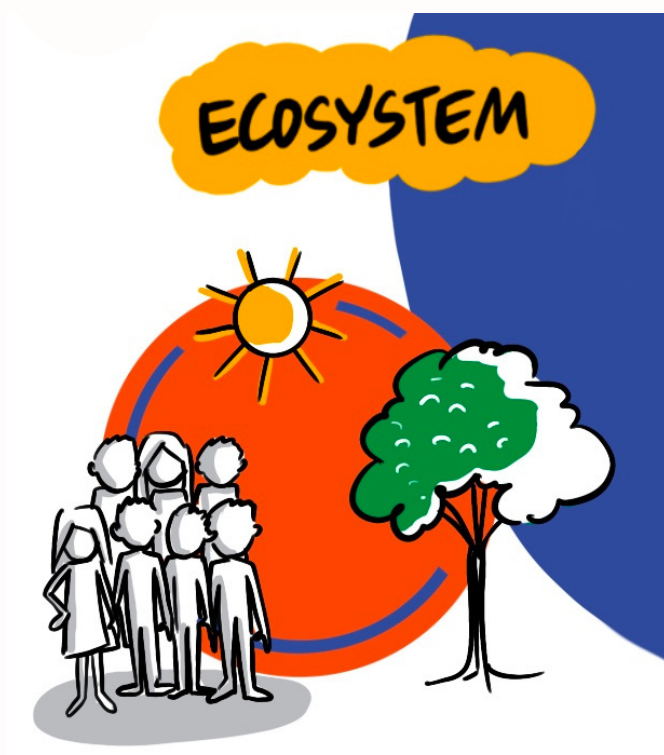
Soft and physical infrastructure may be needed to attract international interest and secure funding for your international mission.







Ecosystem



At local, regional and national and European levels, the stakeholders within the respective domain engage in informal and formal ecosystems driven by mutual purpose and include development actions.



Mapping, understanding and monitoring relevant ecosystems is needed.



Participate to successfully position yourself as an attractive contributor to the ecosystem(s). As a result, you will be invited to activities and projects.

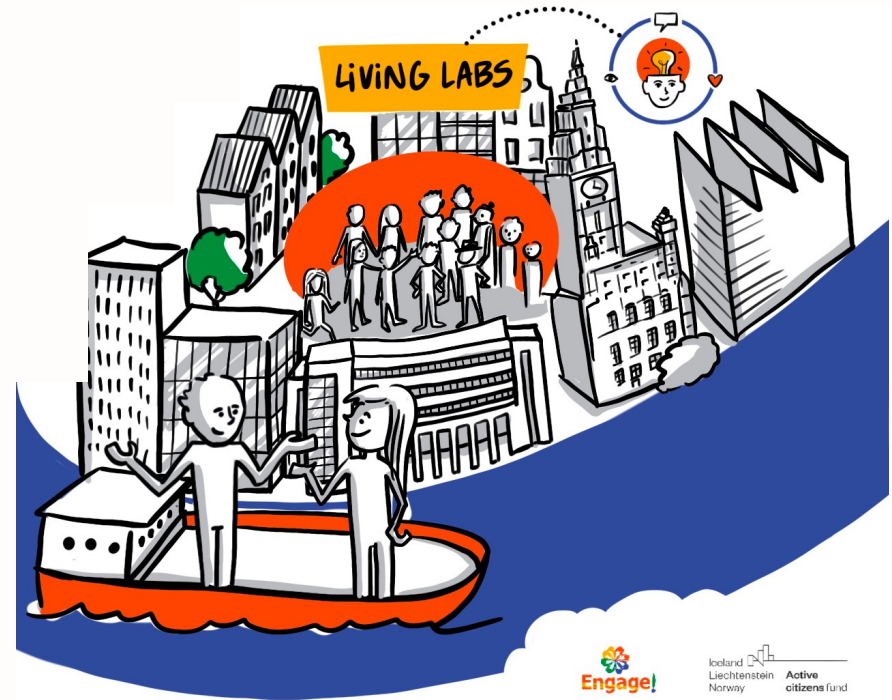
Living Labs



Around your mission, create an arena in which users (society), business, public sector and academia come together to discuss and engage in topics of interest.



International missions often need a platform to experiment and try out new solutions. Your quadruple helix alliance may benefit from providing access to facilities such as an existing community (service) that may want to try out new practice.





Mission alliances



The quadruple helix arena may be used as a partnership in international projects. This means engaging: public and local authorities, academia, business and NGO partners.

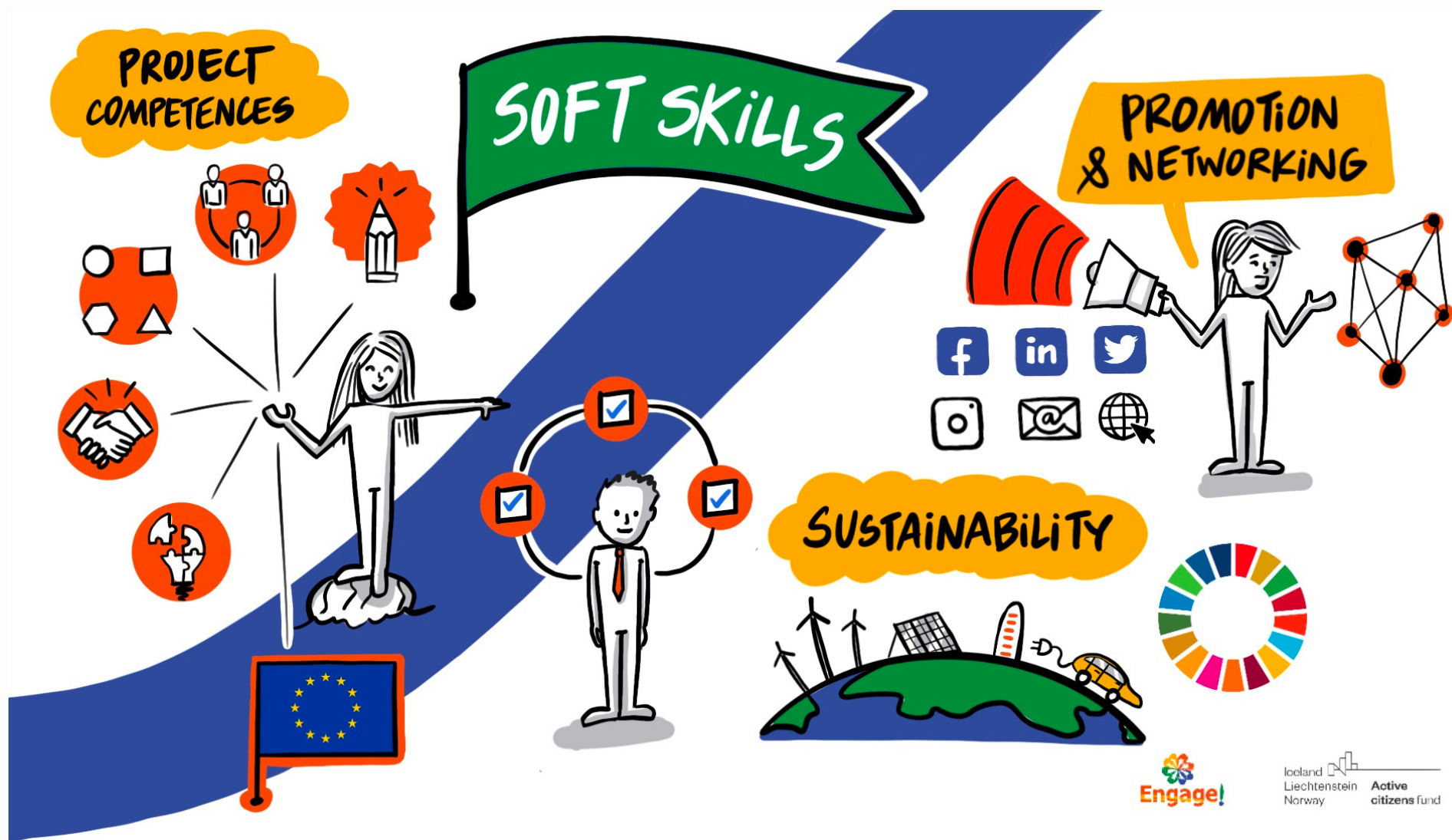


For international projects, your alliance would need international partners. Think complementarity and impact when setting up the alliances.

SOFT SKILLS

Your NGO must hold specific skills to successfully take part in international cooperation and co-creation





International & EU competences



Understanding and having skills to operate on international arenas is advantageous. If you do not possess such skills, you may consider hiring, using a mentor or step-by-step developing such.



Make sure you cover basic EU skills (institutions, policies, etc) and understand the dynamics of the EU-arenas.





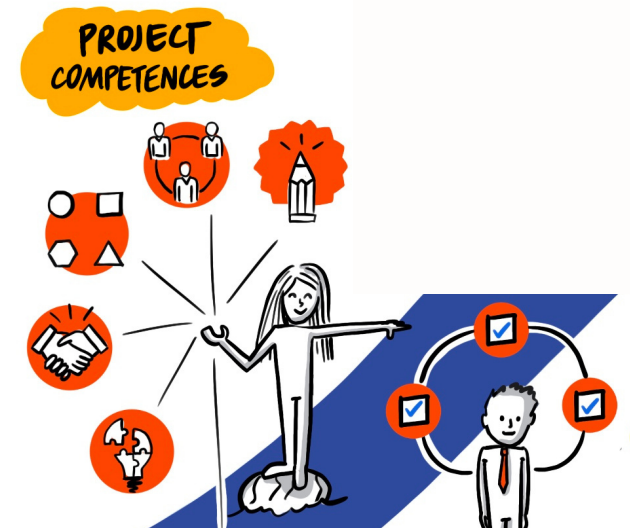
Project competences



Being well acquainted with EU programmes, funding mechanisms and how to write competitive proposals are essential to winning EU funding. If you do not have it, please do not despair. There are many professional courses and training materials available for free, both online and offline.



International projects require experience in international project management. If you do not possess such skills, a good strategy is to learn step-by-step by taking part as a partner rather than a project leader.





Sustainability



Addressing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and linked policies at the European level is a requirement for all international projects. Hence, develop a thorough understanding of these and a clear insight into your contributions.

Promotions & Networking



Your NGO must develop skills and tools to promote your mission and network at the international level, including maximising the impact of your work.



Active participation in relevant EU-driven and international ecosystems and networks is essential.



Communicate regularly and showcase your achievements and work. Build on a promotional and networking plan with concrete actions which makes sense within your budget.



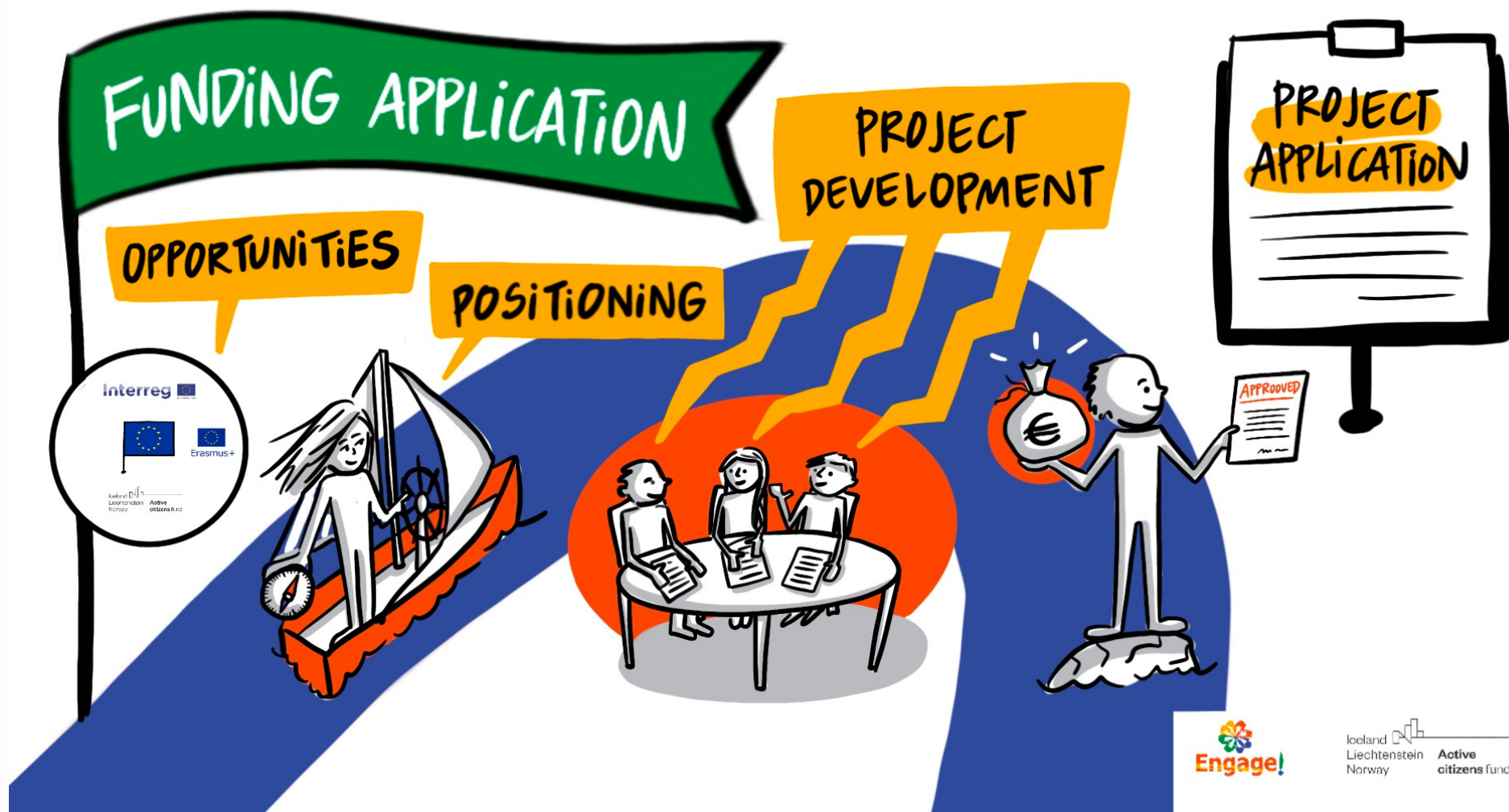
Communicate in English and other relevant foreign languages, including your web service.





FUNDING APPLICATION







Opportunities



Match your mission with available funding. Monitor the funding sources and read the work programmes.



The EU Funding & Tenders Opportunities is the place to go to for EU project funding opportunities.



EEA Grants
also offers
Polish NGOs
funding.



Additional funds for Poland can be monitored via the European Funds Portal and its information points.

Positioning



Understand your position and contribution to the goals of the funding source.



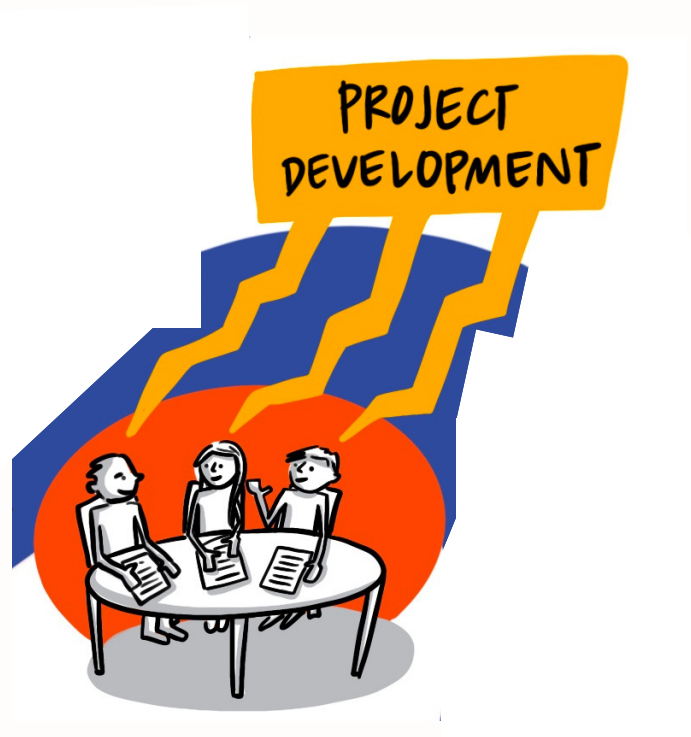
It is essential to have a clear understanding of:

- European and international policies and actions in your domain
- State-of-the-art
- Earlier projects and initiatives funded and how you should build on their work.
- The players and stakeholders you must strategically and practically align with in order to succeed with your mission.





Project development



Develop a project outline that matches the funding call.



Develop a partnership, where needed, with players identified in your positioning work.

Discuss and agree with partners on:

- Excellence – your proposed solution to the identified challenge
- Impact – the difference will your mission make in the target domain
- Implementation – the way you organise your work with partners, including roles, milestones and deliverables





Project application



Read carefully and use the programme manual actively when doing your application.



Together with partners, write your proposal according to the proposal template.

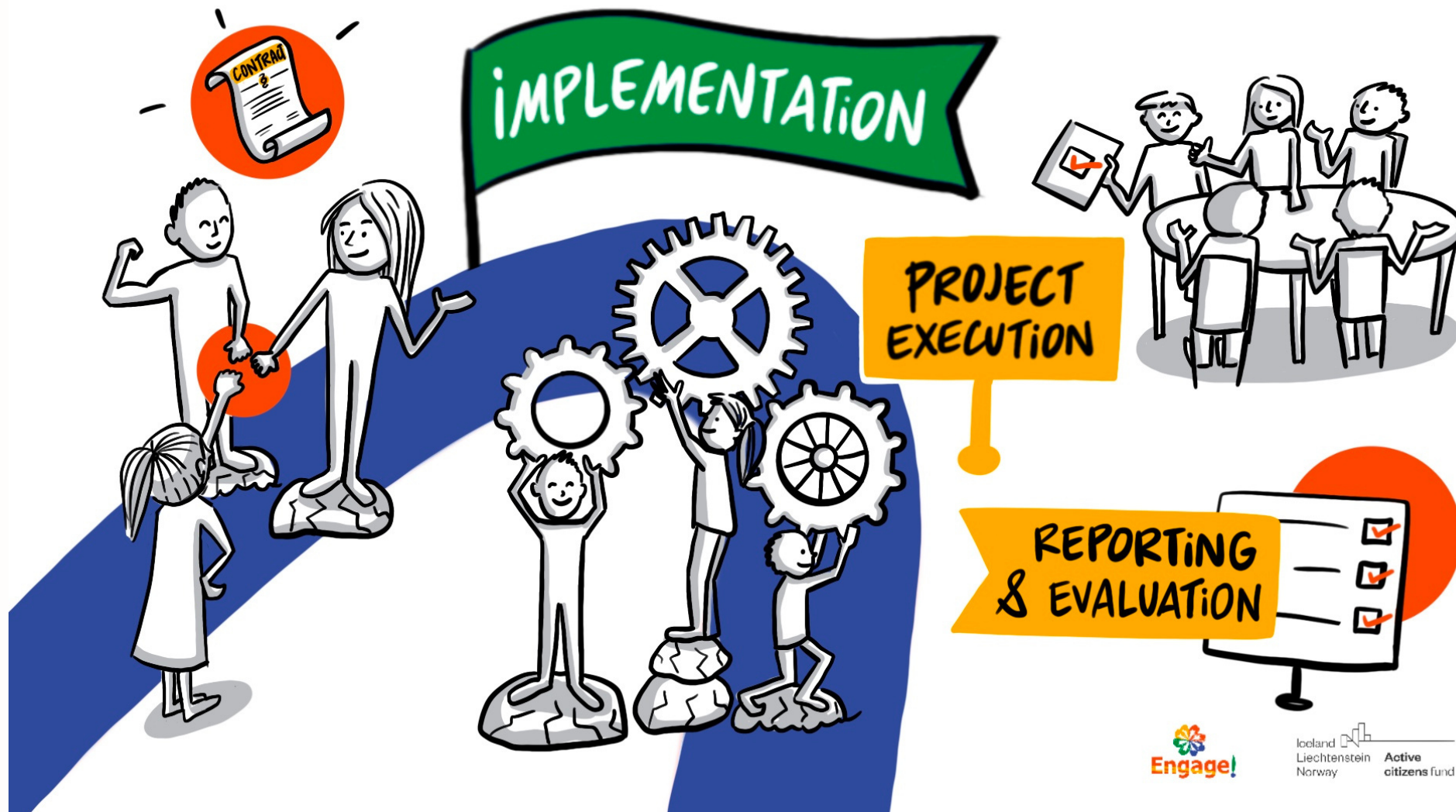


If you do not have experience in writing, you may get help from professional proposal writers.



IMPLEMENTATION





Contract



After a successful evaluation, your project will be shortlisted for funding. In some funding programmes, you may have to negotiate the contract, which in principle means you can be confronted with the requirement to alter your proposal, budget and/or partnership.



Most funding programmes have a standard contract which is applied. Your proposal becomes a technical annexe to the contract.



Normally, at this stage, you and your partners must enter into a partnership agreement. Most programmes have templates which can be altered to your needs.



Project execution



Follow your proposal. Undertake the project according to the Technical Annex, which is your proposal.



Comply with the contract.
Payments vary between funding programmes. Most offer a prepayment, then regular instalments and a retainer for the end of the project.



Reporting & Evaluation



Evaluate your own work. Which results are worth scaling up beyond the project and building on for further work?



The funding programme may also want to evaluate your work throughout the project period in order to see if you achieve your objectives.



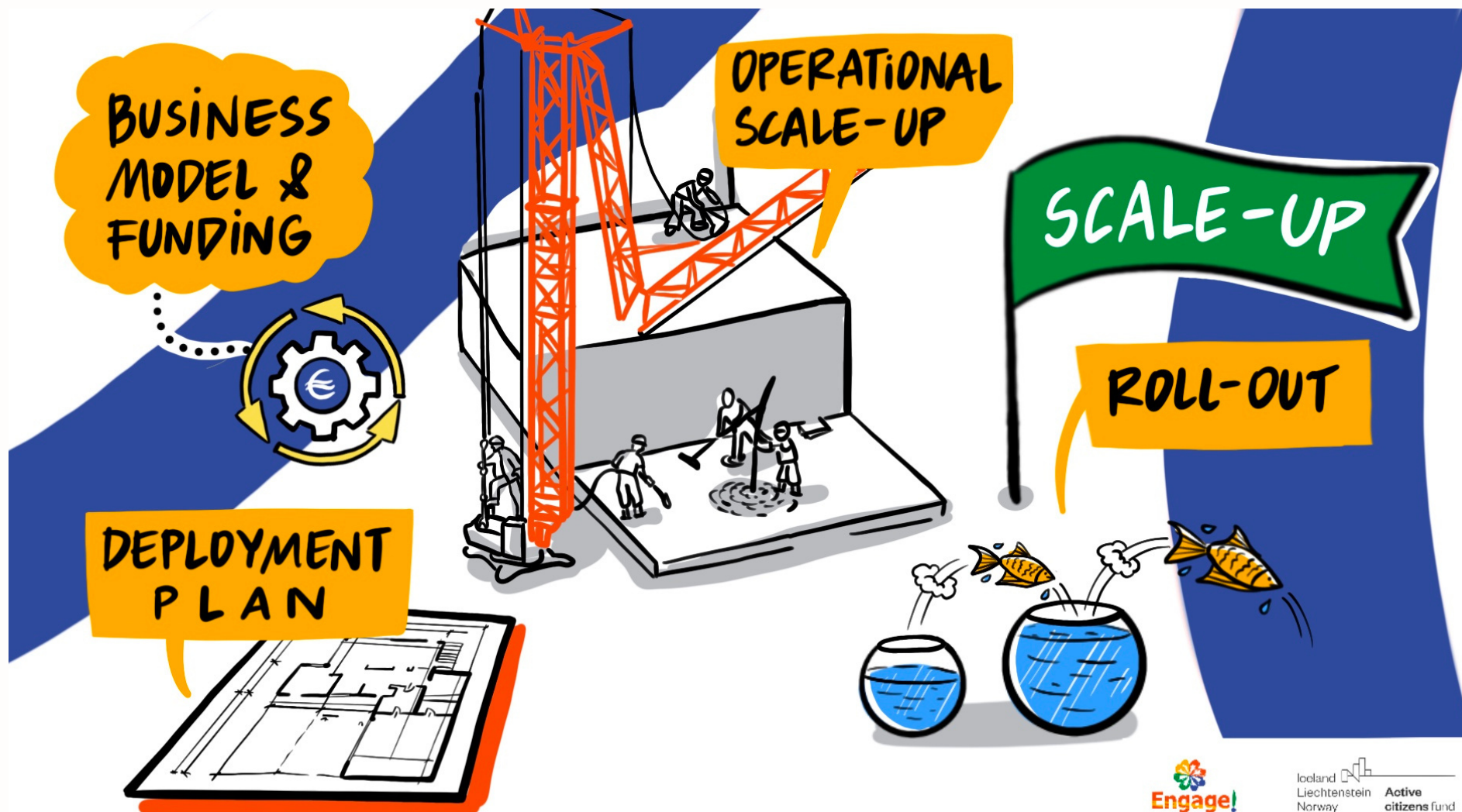
SCALE - UP

Maximise the impact of your project

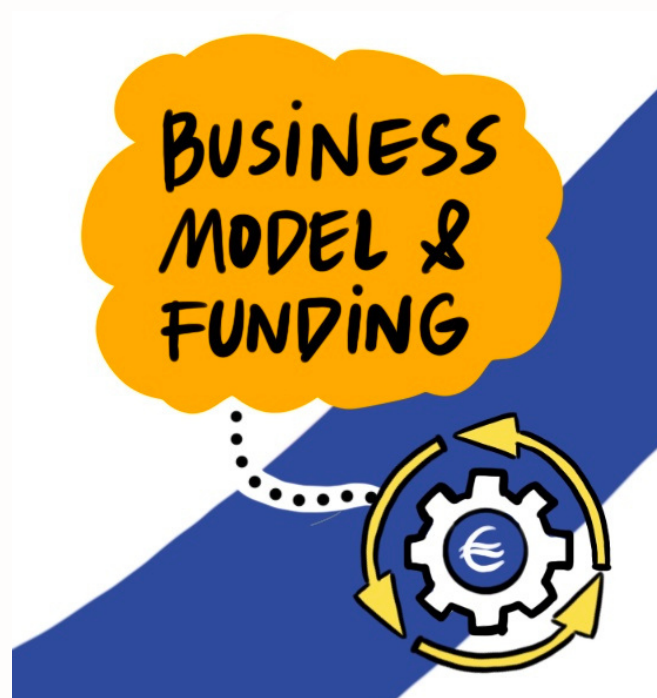


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Business model & funding



How can you capitalise on your project results? Set out a «business plan» on how you want to take the results to new users, further develop the products/services and deploy them in new areas.



Set out a funding plan for scaling up.

Go fund it!





DEPLOYMENT
PLAN



Deployment plan

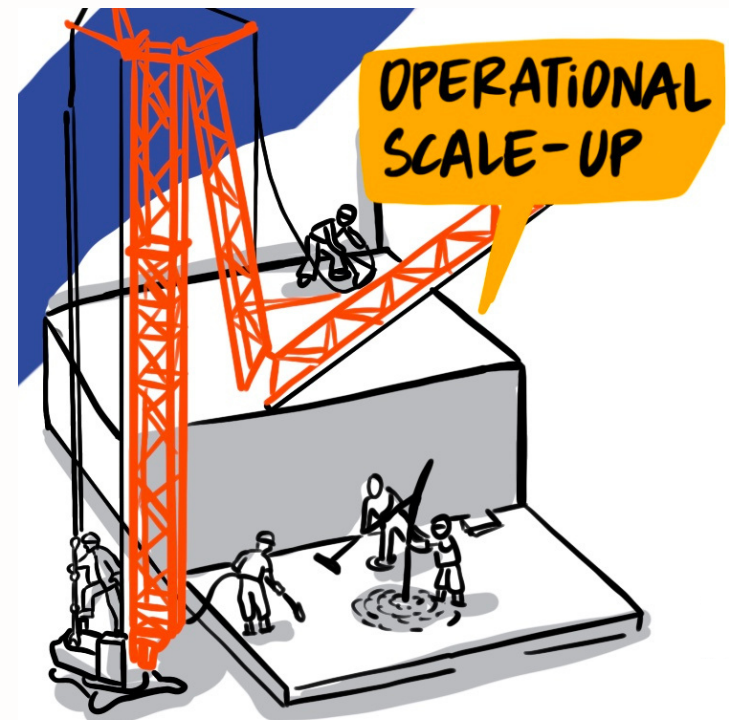


Building on the business model and funding plan, set a concrete action plan for scaling up your project achievements to the next level.

Operational scale-up

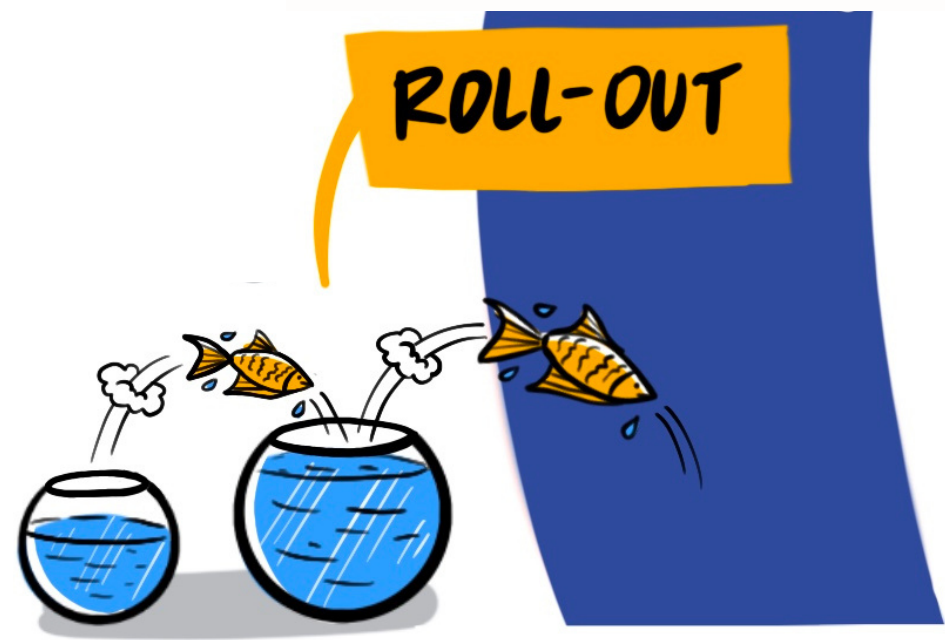


Your operational capacity may need to be scaled up. Additional staff, training of staff, new infrastructure & systems, next to new alliances may be required.



There are increasing benefits to organisations as they mature their project management capabilities.

In this phase, you develop the long-term solutions, continue the project mentoring effort, conduct additional pilot tests (as appropriate), and gradually roll out the fully-functioning Project Office in your organisation.





Congratulations!
Your NGO is well prepared
to work in transnational
environment!

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