The West Midlands Partnership can fast track you to success

The West Midlands region has been working with new and potential Structural Funds practitioners through very successful Pre Accession Twinning Programmes in Poland, Hungary and Romania and a number of other well accepted individual interventions. Now we are being asked by many of our inter regional partners to provide this help on a more regular basis. The West Midlands Partnership has therefore been considering how best it can respond to such requests. This leaflet explores the way in which we feel we can help you.

Why the West Midlands?

Over time we have developed an expertise in all areas of programme management and we would be pleased to pass this on to others. We can offer help and advice in all aspects of managing inclusive European Structural Funding Programmes in partnership, at regional, sub-regional and local levels; involving all sectors - Private, Public and Social sectors; from basic principles through to programme development, implementation and evaluation.

Many of our systems are recognised nationally in the UK and have been adopted by the Government Departments which act as managing Authorities for the UK’s Structural Funds. We are therefore confident that we can also help national institutions successfully deliver Sectoral Operational programmes - both in programme management and project development.

A Record of Excellence

- The West Midlands has a long and successful record of managing the delivery of Structural Funds from 1989 to the present day. The 1994-1999 Objective 2 programme was the largest in Europe and likewise the current Objective 2/3 Programmes (2000-06) combined are among the largest at some €820m ERDF and €465m ESF.

- The West Midlands was the first UK region to have fully committed the Objective 2 Programme and has led the way in the UK and more widely, in involving all sectors of the community in the design and delivery of the Programme; and also in managing and implementing the Programme.

- The region has successfully devised plans and strategies which have been implemented nationwide. For example the West Midlands produced the blueprint to ensure that the challenging N+2 target would be met. The region took the lead in developing, with partners, a list of potential projects which could be brought on stream quickly in case of under-spending late in the Programme. The West Midlands has also presented best practice events on monitoring for UK Managing Authorities and much of their national guidance on financial controls is based on the WM model.

How can it be done?

We would help you assess your needs and work with you to choose the precise elements you want and then agree how it can be delivered. The delivery will be flexible so it responds to the best way for you. It can range from our specialists coming to you and passing on expertise on site to fully supervised visits to the West Midlands to see our operations at first hand.

A unique price, based on PHARE rates, would be agreed for each package as we have to cover our costs. We are sure you will find this excellent value for money.

For immediate help and advice, contact

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Choice of Training Packages available for ERDF and ESF projects

Structural Funds
Basic principles, General awareness, Details of strategies, Setting priorities and measures.

Partnership Working and Collective decision making
Taking the broader view; identifying key players; negotiating within partnerships; how to present compromise; urban/rural balance. Involving the whole community in the process of developing Strategies, Programmes and Projects. Institutional building and sectoral capacity building for e.g. rural communities, Chambers and the third sector.

Programme Development and Management

Achieving a Strategic Programme
Identifying Strategic Priorities; developing the Single Programming Document in consultation with Partners; negotiating with the EC. Influencing policies, national and EU; negotiations with national, regional and local partnerships. Commissioning applications.

Managing the Programme
Meeting N+2 targets; controlling Intervention Rates; managing budget allocations at Priority and Measure levels; managing exchange rate variations; managing outputs and results. Managing ‘slippage’. Creation of ‘shelf’ projects. Programme closure.

The Project Pipeline

Developing and writing an application
Bid development; Strategic fit; working in partnership; what’s required in terms of the application forms; explanation of terms, what’s meant by ‘supplementary information’. Business planning. Assistance in particular actions such as urban renaissance, rural diversification, business and industrial heritage tourism, and building institutional capacity in the third sector.

Project assessment
Appraisal against selection criteria; rating or grading projects; relating projects to Priorities and Strategies. Links to other regional strategies.

State Aid and Procurement regulations
State Aid and EU Procurement rules and procedures; harmonisation with national legislation and processes.

Contract Management
Keeping the project on track; agreeing and monitoring outputs and targets; agreeing/monitoring financial profiles; working with partners to achieve common goals.

Monitoring and Evaluation
Collection, analysis and presentation of data; overall assessment of progress at the Strategic and Priority levels. Project Monitoring and systems and process analysis. Ex-ante / ex-post evaluation; developing evaluation skills, preparing baseline data, measuring outputs; evaluating the impact of the SF Programmes. Project under-achievement and failure.

Financial Control and Audit
National financial procedures as adapted to meet EU requirements; ex-ante and ex-post controls, independence of control staff, role of National Audit Offices; the audit trail and how to set it up. Inspection of project management structures and procedures, compliance with regulations, e.g. public procurement rules. Reporting and recording systems. Planning and implementation of regulation 438/2001 controls including risk assessment, reporting and recording systems. Practical experience on the application of EC regulations and eligibility. Dealing with irregularities, fraud and systemic issues. Conflicts of interest. Learning lessons from inspection work. Dealing with national/EC audits.

Promoting the Structural Funds - PR and Publicity
Creating a communications and marketing plan to attract good quality projects to maximise absorption of Funds; involving the wider community in the process of developing projects, programs and strategies. Publicising SF programmes through the media - promoting the availability of funds and publicising completed projects. Developing a corporate brand for the Structural Funds Programme in a region.

Up and coming - available shortly
Strategy setting for regions (also nationally)
The role of Regional Development Agencies; Development of the Regional Economic Strategy; Writing Operational Programmes and their links to the Regional Economic Strategy; Setting delivery mechanisms: business clusters, technology corridors, regeneration zones, rural development.

Project Development to achieve strategies
Examples are:
- Cluster Action Plans
- Remediation Packages (brownfield remediation; Private public partnerships)
- Access to Finance Packages (investment support for SMEs; Venture Capital)