ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY BUILDING SELF-ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

for Managing Authorities of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy

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European Commission

Administrative Capacity Building Self-assessment Instrument

for Managing Authorities of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy

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1 WHAT IS THE ACB SELF-ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT?

Background and objectives

The Administrative Capacity Building (ACB) Self-assessment Instrument is designed for use by national and regional Managing Authorities in European Union (EU) Member States. It intends to help the Managing Authorities (MAs) of EU funds under Cohesion Policy better understand their strengths and weakness in terms of administrative and investment management capacities, assess the extent to which their capacity-set supports the effective implementation of their Programme[1] over time, and develop targeted solutions to address capacity gaps. Enhancing an MA's administrative capacity contributes to a more effective institution, and also supports better investment management and investment outcomes. This Self-assessment Instrument covers a comprehensive set of perspectives related to administrative capacities, permitting other authorities that implement or manage EU funds under Cohesion Policy, including the Certifying Authority/the accounting function, national coordinating bodies, etc., could to also use and benefit from it, making adaptations if needed.

This Self-assessment Instrument offers subjective evaluation elements, complemented by insights and good practices to support MAs develop actions that will strengthen capacities pertinent to their administrative needs and priorities. Specifically, national- and regional-level MAs of EU funds under Cohesion Policy can use this Instrument to:

- Identify and prioritise the MA's administrative capacity gaps in managing EU funds;
- Develop administrative capacity-building actions to address identified gaps;
- Facilitate auto-evaluation of progress over time.

This Self-assessment Instrument is based on capacity-building activities,(including the development of ACB Roadmaps, undertaken with the five pilot MAs[2] participating in an EC pilot project dedicated to building administrative capacity in the management of EU funds for Cohesion Policy (Box 1). This Self-assessment Instrument is not designed to evaluate an MA's overall performance in EU Programme

[1] In the 2021-207 programming period the term "Operational Programme" (OP) is replaced by the term "Programme". The updated term is used throughout this document, except when specifically referring to Operational Programmes (OPs) implemented in the 20214-2020 programming period.

[2] The MA for the Regions in Growth Operational Programme in Bulgaria; the MA of the Competitiveness and Cohesion Operational Programme in Croatia; the MA of the Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development Operational Programme in Greece; the MA of the Regional Operational Programme for the Lubelskie Voivodeship in Poland; and the MA for the Regional Operational Programme for Extremadura in Spain.

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implementation, in individual Priority Axes or in realising Specific Objectives. Nor is it intended to evaluate and compare performance of an individual MA vis-à-vis its peers in its country or in different EU Member States.

Box 1. The European Commission's pilot project: *Frontloading Administrative Capacity Building for Post-2020*

This ACB Self-Assessment Instrument originates with the European Commission's pilot project *Frontloading Administrative Capacity Building for Post-2020*[3], undertaken in collaboration with the OECD and a set of five pilot Managing Authorities (MAs). The project provides national and regional MAs with hands-on support to strengthen their administrative capacity for managing EU Funds under Cohesion Policy, especially in preparation for the 2021-2027 Programming Period, and beyond.

The pilot project was structured in two phases. Phase 1 identified capacity gaps experienced by the participating MAs in four areas essential to the effective management and use of Cohesion Policy Funds: i) people, ii) organisation, iii) strategy and iv) framework conditions. This Phase helped pinpoint where the MAs needed to build or reinforce administrative and investment management capacity in order to better fulfil their mandates. It led to the creation of Administrative Capacity Building Roadmaps for each pilot participant. The Roadmaps captured realistic actions identified by the MAs, which could help them address the administrative capacity challenges revealed through individual diagnostic exercises. Phase 1 culminated in a synthesis report – *Strengthening Governance of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy: Administrative Capacity Building Roadmaps*[4] – released in January 2020. Phase 2 targets the implementation of a select number of capacity-building actions identified during Phase 1, as well as disseminates the findings and outcomes of the project at the pan-EU level, including through the ACB Self-assessment Instrument.

This ACB Self-assessment Instrument complements the EC's *Roadmaps for Administrative Capacity Building – Practical Toolkit*[5], and the *EU Competency Framework for Management and Implementation of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund*[6]. Together, these constitute a comprehensive package to support administrative capacity building among authorities that manage Cohesion Policy funds. Each element complements the other by contributing to capacity building in different ways. Specifically:

- **The EC's Roadmaps for Administrative Capacity Building – Practical Toolkit** ("EC Practical Toolkit") offers inspiration for developing administrative capacity building roadmaps. The *Practical Toolkit* consists of six sections that reflect the main steps in the roadmap-development process, building on the experiences of the ACB pilot project.

  The ACB Self-assessment Instrument complements the EU Practical Toolkit by: *a)* offering a self-assessment matrix to help MAs understand their "AS IS" situation (as mentioned in the EC Practical Toolkit) in a comprehensive and structured fashion, and *b)* illustrating the OECD analytical framework and approach as a possible pathway for developing capacity-building actions.
- **The EU Competency Framework for Management and Implementation of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund** allows staff in administrations managing the funds to assess the competences

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/frontload/

[4] https://www.oecd.org/publications/strengthening-governance-of-eu-funds-under-cohesion-policy-9b71c8d8-en.htm

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/roadmap_admin/

[6] https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2016/eu-competency-framework-for-the-management-and-implementation-of-the-erdf-and-the-cohesion-fund

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they need to perform their tasks. The individual assessments can be aggregated to provide an overview of the administration as a whole, in order to identify competency gaps and develop both individual and overall learning and development plans.

The ACB Self-assessment Instrument complements the EU Competency Framework by focusing on capacities called upon for the operational, institutional, and implementation processes associated with managing Cohesion Policy funds.

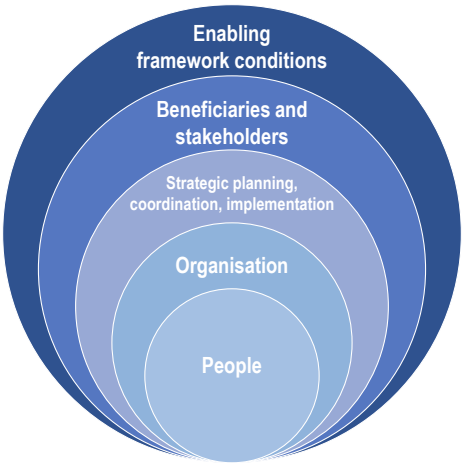
The ACB Self-assessment Instrument is divided into three parts:

1. **What is the ACB Self-Assessment Instrument?**: Introduces the Self-assessment Instrument, as well as its objectives, scope, and the methodology used.
2. **The ACB Self-assessment Matrix:** Provides worksheets for MAs to undertake a self-assessment exercise.
3. **The OECD Pathway for Developing Administrative Capacity Building Actions**[7]: Offers insight into how the OECD worked with the pilot MAs to develop capacity-building solutions and actions.

Scope and methodology: Using the ACB Self-assessment Instrument

The ACB Self-assessment Instrument is structured around the OECD analytical framework's five Pillars[8]: people management; organisation management; strategic planning, coordination and implementation; beneficiaries and stakeholders; and enabling framework conditions (Figure 1):

Figure 1. OECD Analytical framework for building administrative capacities in the use of EU funds



Source: Adapted from OECD (2020), *Strengthening Governance of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy: Administrative Capacity Building Roadmaps*, OECD Multi-level Governance Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9b71c8d8-en.

- **People management**: This dimension examines the mix of staff skills and competences needed in a high performing MA. It looks at how skills gaps can be identified and addressed through

[7] This section is closely linked with Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the EC Roadmaps for Administrative Capacity Building – Practical Toolkit, which illustrate the detailed processes of defining roadmaps, indicators, and suggested structure of a roadmap.

[8] The original analytical framework was organised in four Pillars, with "Beneficiaries and stakeholders" included within the Pillar "Strategic planning and coordination". For this Self-assessment Instrument, "Beneficiaries and stakeholders" is a standalone Pillar so that MAs can take an in-depth and targeted look at their capacities in this area and develop more targeted actions.

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attracting, recruiting, motivating and developing the right skills and expertise. This suggests a review of performance management and incentive systems to set goals and measure progress, as well as a focus on the role of leaders and managers to motivate their employees.

- **Organisation management**: Employee actions are shaped to a large degree by the system in which they operate: people with the right skills also require an organisational structure and support that enable and empower them to put their skills to work. This dimension of the framework looks at the systems, tools, business processes and organisational culture that influence how staff of the MAs work. It looks at whether these tools and systems are aligned with the strategic objectives of the MA, and supported by agile governance structures to facilitate effective data-informed decision-making.
- **Strategic planning, coordination, and implementation**: All levels of government recognise that a lack of coordination is one of the main impediments to effective public investment. Quality institutional and governance systems, including strategic planning, coordination and implementation practices, contribute to more effective public investment spending, which in turn can have a positive effect on growth. The strategic planning dimension examines various aspects of the investment cycle – including strategy development, priority setting, and coordination, as well as project planning and selection, project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
- **Beneficiaries and stakeholders**: Building beneficiary capacity throughout the investment cycle includes taking into account their ability to effectively undertake each step of the investment process, from planning to implementation to reporting. It means ensuring that beneficiaries can successfully design and implement projects, easily respond to calls, face a minimal need for adjustments, and contribute to project and programme data collection and reporting. Effective action is also linked to an MA's active engagement with internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include the MA, Certifying Authority/the accounting function, Audit Authority, IBs, national coordinating bodies; external stakeholders are those outside of the MA – from national authorities (e.g. line ministries and agencies) and subnational authorities (e.g. regional and local governments), the private sector, professional organisations, civil society organisations, academia, etc. They also include beneficiaries, and those who support beneficiaries, such as consultants, professional or business associations, subnational government associations, etc.
- **Enabling framework conditions**: In the context of EU funds, framework conditions include regulations, such as EU rules, procedures, conditionalities, audit practices, budgetary allocations and fiscal rules to manage public investment, etc. In addition, they encompass national regulations that affect the use of EU funds, such as procurement, audit, etc. Framework conditions also determine the way the partnership principle[9] works with, for example, the private sector (business community), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizens.

The ACB Self-assessment Instrument combines the OECD analytical framework described above as well as a 5-step methodology that begins with obtaining preliminary insights into potential challenges and ends with implementing capacity building actions, to provide one possible path for MAs to follow when identifying and addressing capacity challenges. Figure 2 (below) illustrates these five steps and highlights how the OECD approach and the EC Practical Toolkit can support MAs as they undertake an administrative capacity building process.

[9] The partnership principle prescribes that each programme be developed through a collective process involving competent authorities at the national, regional and local levels, economic and social partners and relevant bodies representing civil society. This partnership applies to all stages of the programming process, from design, through management and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. The principle is found in Article 6 of the Common Provisions Regulation for 2021-2027.

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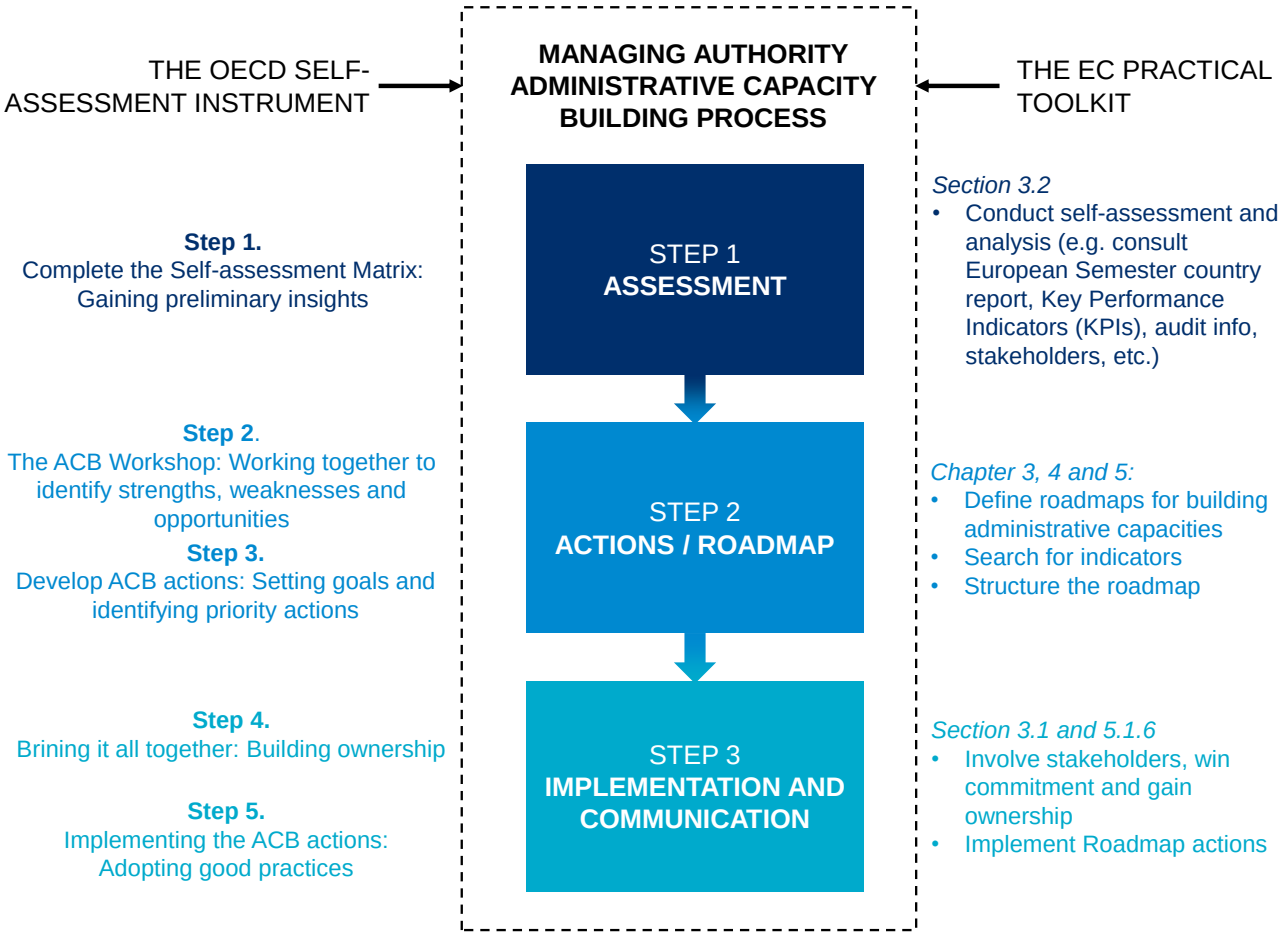
Figure 2. The OECD Pathway for Developing Administrative Capacity Building Actions



Source: Authors' illustration with reference to the European Commission's Roadmaps for Administrative Capacity Building – Practical Toolkit (https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2020/roadmaps-for-administrative-capacity-building-practical-toolkit)

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2 THE ACB SELF-ASSESSMENT MATRIX

Introduction

The Administrative Capacity Building (ACB) Self-assessment Matrix serves as a "conversation starter". It provides a comprehensive list of elements relevant to administrative capacity that can spark discussion or collect opinions regarding an MA's administrative and investment management capacities. It can help an MA understand its administrative strengths and weaknesses, and provide insight into whether the MA is equipped to meet its objectives. MAs are strongly encouraged to complete this Matrix based on in-depth discussions with a diverse and representative group of staff (e.g. from different units of the MA)[10]. This Matrix should not be considered prescriptive or a one-size-fits-all template, but rather as a tool that can help MAs examine their unique challenges and capacity gaps based on the common administrative capacity dimensions.

The Self-assessment Matrix is structured as follows:

- **Pillars**: This Matrix covers four of the five framework elements illustrated in Figure 1: *i)* People management; *ii)* Organisation management; *iii)* Strategic planning, coordination and implementation; and *iv)* Beneficiaries and stakeholders. The dimension of enabling framework conditions is not included as it is generally beyond the capacity or competency of an individual MA to affect these.
- **Goals:** Each Pillar identifies several goals that an MA should consider achieving to reinforce administrative and investment management capacity. For each goal, a detailed description is provided as a reference scenario.
- **Capacities:** Under each goal are a number of different specific capacities that can help an MA achieve the goal.
- **Dimensions (good practice):** Each capacity is broken down into multiple dimensions associated with an assessment level. For each dimension, a clear description of "good practice" is provided as a reference.

For each dimension (good practice), the MA can then assess to what degree their situation matches the reference using a four-level scale associated with different colours: strong (green), significant (light green), moderate (yellow) and weak (red), as well as the option "Not applicable (N/A)". The MA can select the degree by checking the corresponding column, or fill in the corresponding colour for each dimension. This

[10] If possible and necessary, the MA can also engage with external stakeholders external for completing the Matrix. (See more about stakeholder engagement in Part 3, The OECD methodology for developing ACB actions).

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makes it possible to visualise the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the Pillars and Goals that require more capacity-building attention.

To the extent possible, the MA should consider three criteria when determining whether their level of capacity is strong, significant, moderate or weak:

1. **Existence**: if or how many elements are in place or applied?
2. **Frequency**: do the elements take place regularly and in a sufficient frequency?[11]
3. **Quality**: are the elements implemented as planned? Do they yield expected results? Is the operation and effectiveness of the element regularly monitored and evaluated? Does the MA improve and adjust the elements as needed?

When the MA completes the Matrix based on a group discussion, using these three criteria and respective questions can facilitate the discussion in a structured fashion. **The quality principle should be given the greatest weight in consideration.**

The Self-assessment Matrix is flexible in terms of applicability. An MA can complete the whole Matrix, selected Pillars, or specific capacities. An MA can also adapt the capacities and dimensions in the Matrix or include additional ones to reflect its particular context and needs. Nevertheless, it is recommended to complete the whole Matrix at least once (and ideally the first time undertaken) to generate a baseline. This can help track progress over time, identify weak links, and highlight persistent red flags.

The Matrix can be used by national and regional level MAs, although in some cases capacities are differentiated according to the territorial level. The Matrix can be completed by multiple MAs within a country and serve as a basis for exchanging experiences, identifying common challenges and generating a discussion of possible solutions to help address capacity gaps. Additionally, the Matrix could be used for peer-learning, dialogue and exchange among MAs in different countries that implement Programmes in the same sectors (e.g. competitiveness, environment, innovation, transport).

When appropriate, the assessment exercise can be applied by other bodies in the Management and Control System, including the Certifying Authority/the accounting function, the national coordinating bodies, etc., especially when the MA delegates part of its functions to other bodies. These bodies could focus on the capacities and dimensions that are pertinent to their competencies and carry out a self-assessment only of these. Alternatively, they could develop a self-assessment matrix following the five pillars, adapted to their challenges and activities.

Apart from filling in the Matrix itself (i.e. completing the rating), MAs are encouraged to capture the discussions with additional documentation. For example, the MA can prepare a separate sheet or document to write down the justification for the grade of each dimension, i.e. why this dimension is considered significant or weak. Alternatively, the MA can summarise the discussions by writing down a brief qualitative description for each capacity to complement and substantiate the rating.

[11] The frequency criterion might not be applied to the one-off elements, such as a website, a contact point, a long-term planning document etc.

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THE ACB SELF-ASSESSMENT MATRIX

PILLAR 1: PEOPLE

This dimension examines the mix of skills and competences needed in a high performing MA. It includes four goals: 1) attracting and recruiting the right candidates; 2) a strategic approach to learning and development; 3) an effective and engaging performance management system; and 4) effective and capable leadership in the Managing Authorities.

GOAL 1: Attracting and recruiting the right candidates

Managing Authorities need to be able to attract and recruit skilled and motivated candidates. MAs who do this well identify the mix of skills and competences they need. They embed these in job descriptions and engage proactively with candidates (e.g. universities, public employment services) to deepen the talent pool. Assessment methodologies are fair, efficient and allow employers to assess various facets of a candidate, i.e. not just technical or substantive knowledge.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Take a structured approach to identifying competencies	Identifies essential skills and competencies that add value to the work of the MA. These should include specific technical/ substantive knowledge related to the Programme and ESIF, and behavioural/ interpersonal or managerial competencies, such as conflict resolution or team leadership.					
	Lists and describes competencies at different levels of hierarchy, including effective behaviours associated to each in a competency framework.[12]					
	Uses common competencies in job profiles, recruitment processes, performance assessment, training and other HR processes.					
	Engages with central HRM authority to share skills/competence requirements to generate common understanding and approach across the MCS.					

[12] In addition to their existing competency frameworks, or for inspiration if developing new ones, MAs may wish to consult the European Commission's Competency Framework. The EU Competency Framework is a set of excel files that identify the competencies that employees of administrations should possess. It covers all types of administrations that manage or implement the ERDF and Cohesion Fund: national coordinating bodies, managing, certifying and audit authorities, intermediate bodies and joint secretariats. Available here: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/competency/

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	Periodically revises and updates the competency framework.					
Appeal to talented candidates as an employer of choice	Determines what attracts candidates for different positions and levels of seniority, e.g. through employee surveys, exit interviews, university engagement, candidate questionnaires etc.					
	Tailors each recruitment campaign to optimise messaging for the target group, e.g. by creating engaging job descriptions, emphasising the opportunities for growth and development for younger candidates, the unique international environment of EU funds management, and the impact they have on regional development.					
	Uses a variety of recruitment channels (e.g. social media, career fairs, recruitment drives) to maximise reach of job posting and relevance of candidate pool.					
	Engages with universities, public job centres and other organisations to reach more candidates.					
	Integrates diversity considerations (gender, socio-economic background, disability, etc.) into recruitment campaigns to ensure a workforce that represents the society it serves.					
	Offers fair pay benchmarked with the relevant markets for specialised positions/skills (e.g. engineers, IT technicians, lawyers, etc.) and emphasises non-pay incentives (holidays, teleworking, etc.).					
Effective and efficient recruitment processes	Recruitment effectiveness measured and tracked through metrics such as time to hire or time to fill, and these are regularly reviewed by management in order to make improvements.					
	Recruitment processes include techniques to mitigate bias, e.g. 'blind screening', training for interviewers, diversity targets.					
	Recruitment processes have clearly defined selection criteria (weighted to optimise selection of competences). Candidates are made aware of the basic selection criteria.					
	Recruitment IT systems (e.g. online application systems) and assessment tools (e.g. video interviewing, online testing) are fit-for-purpose and well adapted to assess the types of skills and competencies required.					
	Uses induction or on-boarding programmes to help new staff become operational and effective as quickly as possible.					
	Uses different contractual modalities (e.g. contract/temporary work contracts vs. civil service/permanent contracts) to access people with needed skill sets more flexibly, and manage surges in work.					
	Transparent recourse mechanisms exist for candidates/interviewers to report unfair discrimination during the recruitment process, e.g. dedicated/independent HRM contact point.					

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GOAL 2: A strategic approach to learning and development

Managing ESIF strategically and efficiently hinges on continual learning to build and support capability. Managing Authorities that take a strategic approach to learning and development set out a long-term vision for skill and competency development needs. They proactively identify training needs though actions such as consultation with other parts of the Management and Control System (MCS) or through employee surveys. Managers are encouraged to create a culture of continuous and relevant learning, and have various tools to do so.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
A strategic approach to competency identification and development	Has and uses a long-term vision or plan for learning and development, aligned with how the MA intends to achieve the objectives of the Programme.					
	Aligns learning content with competency framework to set clear expectations for different learning objectives in different job families.					
	Provides opportunities for employees, e.g. through the performance management cycle and the competency framework, to identify learning needs and desires of employees to create a 'virtuous circle' of constructive feedback supplemented by opportunities to access relevant learning content.					
Learning is supported by effective tools and processes	Offers differentiated learning methodologies (classroom learning, mentoring, induction, coaching, etc.) for different kinds of learners and content.					
	Targets learning content to different grade/seniority levels or functional areas (differentiated training offer).					
	Learning covers day-to-day and strategic business needs and is evaluated regularly and improved when needed.					
The MA fosters a learning culture	Measures staff perception of the opportunities for learning and development in the MA (e.g. training content, mentoring, learning on-the-job).					
	Leadership and managers regularly emphasise the importance of continual learning, encompassing formal training, supporting mentoring or coaching programmes, and on-the-job learning initiatives.					
	The MA uses a variety of tools to support learning including internal information portals, online training, classroom training, blended learning, study visits, short-term assignments to other parts of the MA, mentoring, etc.					

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GOAL 3: An effective and engaging performance management system

Engaging and motivating employees is a key lever of productivity. The performance management system structures much of this engagement by providing a forum for staff and managers to have constructive conversations that can link to higher organisational performance. Performance management is based on clear and measurable criteria, and clear policies and processes should encourage good performance and provide avenues for the development of staff capacities.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
The MA is committed to a culture of high performance	MA has clear performance objectives which are measured at regular intervals and communicated to staff. Each unit has its own performance objectives which contribute to the objectives of the MA.					
	Managers celebrate and reward high performance and stimulate the further development of high achievers (e.g. specialised training, financial incentives, etc.).					
	MA has clear policies in place to manage and improve poor performance, such as training, mentoring, job-shadowing, or eventual dismissal.					
The MA supports performance management with the right tools	All staff undertake a regular performance assessment process based on clear and transparent performance criteria and linked to a common competency framework.					
	Performance management provides staff with opportunity to provide upward feedback to their manager and have frank discussions on project outcomes, opportunity for growth, quality of the working environment, etc.					
	Employees asked to provide feedback on the fairness of the performance systems, and have recourse mechanisms if they disagree with their performance rating.					
Managers are supported to use performance management as a key lever to engage and motivate staff	Formal performance appraisals systematically used as ways to identify high-performers/potential future managers and leaders.					
	Clear guidance helps managers and their employees engage with the process constructively and with similar expectations.					
	Managers actively encouraged to provide ongoing feedback to their staff in addition to formal performance appraisals.					
	Managers meet regularly to compare and discuss the performance of their teams, and to calibrate their performance ratings to ensure equal treatment across units.					

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GOAL 4: Effective and capable leadership in the Managing Authorities

Managing Authorities depend on effective and capable leadership. The OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability calls on adherents to invest in three pillars of public sector leadership. For Managing Authorities implementing Programmes, leaders have a critical role to play in setting expectations, marshalling resources, and providing timely, evidence-informed decisions.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Values-driven culture and leadership	Leaders clarify and communicate the shared fundamental values which should guide decision-making in the MA.					
	Leaders support and help develop measures of diversity, inclusion and well-being, and conduct measurement and benchmarking at regular intervals to monitor progress, detect and remove barriers, and design interventions.					
	Leaders recognise the importance of investment in foresight, innovation and analytical skills and capabilities.					
Employee engagement is recognised as a core priority for the MA	MA explicitly recognises the importance of staff engagement: this is addressed in planning/strategy documents, and is measured at regular intervals (once or twice a year) through employee surveys.					
	Results of employee surveys followed up on by managers and used to make adjustments to the management of the MA.					
	MA provides comprehensive leadership learning opportunities to current and future/potential MA leaders. This should include structured training and development programmes, and tailored coaching for senior management.					
	The MA includes competencies related to employee engagement in its competency framework. It uses this framework when recruiting and promoting staff.					
	Leaders meet with HR managers and department heads to discuss current and desired skill/competency mix in the leadership pipeline.					
	To the extent possible, MAs align pay and non-financial incentives with relevant market levels and Programme objectives in order to recruit leaders.					

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PILLAR 2: ORGANISATION

This framework dimension looks at the systems, tools, business processes and organisational culture that influence how staff of the MAs work. It includes three goals: 1) ensuring organisational structures are fit for purpose; 2) improving knowledge management and information-sharing mechanisms; and 3) improving resource flexibility through better workforce planning and mobility.

GOAL 1: Ensuring organisational structures are fit for purpose

Managing Authorities operate in complex and multi-layered environments. In this context, organisational structures must ensure a clear chain of command and accountability for decision-making. MAs must also be flexible enough to enable reallocation of resources when necessary, and to take on board the view of a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. While operating within the bounds of tightly-constrained legislative environments, systems and business process can be reviewed and optimised to facilitate this.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
The organisational structure of the MA optimises performance	Each work unit has clear objectives that contribute to the overall objectives of the MA. These objective are coherent – they require similar competencies and facilitate common work.					
	Work units comprehensively cover all the work that needs to be done in the MA. It is obvious who does what when new work arises.					
	There is no overlap or duplication of work in the MA – no two work units are doing exactly the same thing.					
	The organisational structure is reviewed periodically (e.g. every programming period or more often) to ensure that it remains appropriate to the demands of Programme implementation over time.					
A transparent and clearly defined organisational structure	An organisational chart or similar internal portal provides the basic details of each unit and its roles and responsibilities in the MA and its IBs. This includes the relationship among units in terms of reporting, oversight, and collaboration.					
	Staff in the MA and the MCS have a common understanding of who does what, and how their unit contributes to the wider system.					
	External stakeholders, such as beneficiaries, understand which organisational/unit to contact in all cases, through the appropriate channel (e.g. internet site, FAQ, generic mailbox).					

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GOAL 2: Improving knowledge management and information-sharing mechanisms

Effective knowledge management strategies are essential to MA operations. Systems, protocols and processes – supported by IT systems – can help staff collaborate better and take key decisions effectively. Knowledge management can help direct internal knowledge at tough problems and accelerate innovation.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Ensure effective staff collaboration	Effective management committee structures enable information sharing and coordination across the management team of the MA and across the wider MCS.					
	Operational/Non-managerial staff have forums or channels to share experiences, solutions to common challenges, and improve work practices. This could include cross-functional teams, informal mechanisms through staff networks, communicates of practice or 'discussion groups' along thematic lines to enable practitioners share experience throughout the MCS.					
	Management takes steps to encourage horizontal collaboration and support staff networks, and communicates with their staff regarding coordination activities they are involved in.					
	Staff are encouraged to identify duplication of effort or coordination problems and to raise those issues with their manager or an appropriate contact point.					
ICT systems support and drive knowledge management, information-sharing and records-management	Information portals in the MA provide real-time, updated information on legislative developments to guide decision-making and support all implicated stakeholders. This information is proactively shared.					
	ICT tools exist to document and share experience. This may include areas to share standard templates and tools, answers to frequently asked questions, a knowledge platform to gather and distribute experience, such as recent solutions to common problems, user-created internal Wiki, guides, manuals, calendars, contact points, consultants database, audit planning calendar and past audit decisions, etc.					
	Staff have a common understanding of the correct use of IT systems and information/document management systems in order to ensure knowledge transfer. This is supported by periodic training and/or communications.					
	IT systems are user-friendly and well adapted to the day to day reality of the MA – enabling integrated real-time tracking of ESIF spending, ex-ante controls, ex-post audit, and other necessary management functions.					

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GOAL 3: Improving resource flexibility through better workforce planning and mobility

Rules and procedures underpin the actions of MA staff in the interests of transparency and accountability. Yet MAs with a degree of flexibility can better direct resources – people and money – to where they can have maximum impact. This implies empowering managers to make decisions on budget allocation (e.g. for training) while remaining within an overall budget envelope, and having streamlined internal processes for moving people and money around as easily as possible.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Financial management rules enable an appropriate level of managerial flexibility	MAs have an appropriate level of budget flexibility to manage their Programme objectives. This may include the ability to spend Technical Assistance funds in ways that match the needs of the MA and meet EC standards.					
	A clear and common understanding among actors exists with regard to budget flexibility, e.g. when it is acceptable and useful to shift funds or carry forward funds for a delayed project. This is supported through common communications, tools and training.					
Matching people and workflows through internal reallocation	The MA has systems in place to allow for flexibility in matching workforce supply with demand, e.g. temporarily re-assigning staff to other parts of the MCS. This includes a pool of staff with the appropriate qualifications, skills and competences able to undertake secondment or short-term work exchange.					
	People who take part in these systems are rewarded through improved opportunities for career advancement or other incentives, and these are integrated into employee performance and learning plans.					
Strategic workforce planning	HR professionals in the MA understand the skills needed to meet the strategic priorities for the MA, and play a strategic role in building the required workforce.					
	Senior managers play an active and strategic role in supporting the development of their workforce.					
	The MA uses staff departures/organisational reviews as opportunities to better match skills with demand, e.g. through re-profiling or adjusting certain jobs or tasks to ensure a better use of skills.					

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PILLAR 3: STRATEGIC PLANNING, COORDINATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION

The strategic planning, coordination and implementation dimension examines various aspects of the investment cycle – from strategy development, priority setting, and coordination, to project planning and selection, project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. It includes four goals: 1) take a more strategic approach to Programme planning, programming and priority setting; optimise coordination and communication for Programme design and implementation; 3) render Programme implementation process more strategic; and 4) expand performance measurement practices to better support outcome evaluations.

GOAL 1: Take a more strategic approach to Programme planning, programming and priority setting

OP objectives have strong and clear links to higher-level strategic documents (e.g. national/regional development plans, sectoral strategies). Programme priorities reflect actual local, regional and national development needs, balancing strategic and technical considerations. The Programme is implemented in an integrated manner to capture synergies across Priority Axes and facilitate cross-jurisdiction projects.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Ensure the Programme is coherent with and linked to higher-level (national or sector) strategic frameworks	Define clear Programme objectives, and articulates the linkages between Programme objectives and national-level strategic development goals.					
	Articulate the linkages and coherence between Programme objectives and strategic goals of individual policy sectors relevant to the Programme.					
	Consult or refer to the Programme strategic documents (e.g. Programme action plans, national/regional development strategies) to guide decision-making and Programme implementation.					
	Check or consult the Partnership Agreement and/or other Programmes in the country to avoid contradiction in strategic goals					
Ensure that Programme investment priorities reflect	Engage with a broad range of internal and external stakeholders[13] to set Programme investment priorities.					
	Explain how Programme priorities support national, regional and/or local level priorities and strategies, and matches the priorities with available co-financing.					

[13] Internal stakeholders include the MA, Certifying Authority/ the accounting function, Audit Authority, IBs, and national coordinating bodies; external stakeholders are those outside of the MCS – from national authorities (e.g. line ministries and agencies) and subnational authorities (e.g. regional and local governments), to the private sector, professional organisations, civil society organisations, academia, etc. They also include beneficiaries, and those who support beneficiaries, such as consultants, professional or business associations, subnational government associations, etc.

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national, regional and/or local development needs						
Capture the complementarities and synergies across Priority Axes	Facilitate regular exchange across policy sectors relevant to the Programme, and set coordination mechanisms (e.g. joint internal structures, ITIs) and incentives to attract and select investments that address multiple Priority Axes within the Programme.					
	Regularly review Programme implementation progress to ensure complementarities among Priority Axes, and make adjustments when needed.					
Support cross-jurisdiction cooperation[14]	Systematically identify investments that can benefit from cross-jurisdiction cooperation through dedicated mechanisms or procedures (e.g. task force, or incorporating it in the guidance for call design).					
	Proactively design calls and offer incentives to encourage cross-jurisdiction projects.					
	Provide corresponding support to beneficiaries to respond to such calls (e.g. advisory support on inter-municipal cooperation, ITIs, setting a dedicated contact to advice on cross-jurisdiction cooperative investments).					

GOAL 2: Optimise coordination and communication for Programme design and implementation

Effective coordination among internal and external stakeholders at all stages of the Programme implementation using institutionalised as well as informal mechanisms. The mechanisms are regularly used and accessible by all targeted stakeholders. The Programme implementation is coherent with national, regional, sectoral development. Information exchange between the MA and internal and external stakeholders is two-way, targeted, regular, timely, and covers issues throughout the whole Programming cycle.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Ensure an effective mix of "hard" and "soft" coordination mechanisms throughout the Management and Control System (MCS)	MCS coordination rules and procedures are well implemented (i.e. meetings are organised as scheduled, no significant delays in communication, etc.).					
	Regularly assess and collect feedback from actors in the MCS to ensure the quality and effectiveness of coordination mechanisms.					
	Establish formal dialogue mechanisms (e.g. thematic network, working groups, etc.) that regularly bring together internal stakeholders.					

[14] Cross-jurisdiction cooperation refers to projects and investments proposed and executed by more than one local administration-beneficiary, so that the investment is applied across municipal or regional jurisdiction boundaries within a country, for example, ITIs.

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	Actively participate in dialogue opportunities organised by others, such as the national coordination body, IBs, or other MAs.					
Make the most of exchange opportunities offered by the European Commission	Engage in active and constructive dialogue with the country's associated Geographical Unit in DG REGIO					
	Exchange with MAs in other Member States using the tools offered by the European Commission, e.g. TAIEX-REGIO Peer-2-Peer					
For national MAs Ensure effective coordination with national and subnational level authorities	Coordinate with other public authorities (e.g. line ministries) regarding policy sector regulations, policy sector strategies, etc., to ensure smooth Programme implementation (e.g. fulfilment of *ex ante* conditionalities).					
	Coordinate with other national MAs and public institutions (and regional MAs when applicable) throughout the Programme design and implementation process to promote coherence and avoid overlap or duplication in objectives, project types and possible beneficiaries.					
	Regularly discuss with subnational MAs and authorities (i.e. regional, local) on Programme design and implementation to tap into regional and local knowledge.					
For regional MAs (RMAs) Ensure effective coordination with national and subnational level authorities	Coordinate with national and local level authorities throughout the Regional Programme implementation process to ensure coherence across jurisdictions and alignment with national priorities.					
	Actively discuss Regional Programme design and implementation with local authorities at different stages of the investment process to best tailor the Regional Programme implementation process to meet local needs and capacities.					
Share information and knowledge throughout the MCS in a timely and effective manner	Ensure that information-sharing mechanisms (e.g. web portal, emails, meetings, etc.) are effective, accessible, and regularly used by all actors in the MCS.					
	Organise regular, formal meetings with different actors (e.g. managers, technical staff and experts) in the MCS to exchange information, identify problems and solutions; meetings have a clear agenda, free information exchange, articulated next steps and expectations, assigned responsibility for action and follow-up.					

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GOAL 3: Render the Programme implementation process more strategic

Project calls and selection processes support Programme objectives and align with capacities of different beneficiaries based on solid planning exercise and robust project appraisals. The calls have high uptake rates and attract innovative projects. The MA can identify and mitigate various risks throughout the Programme cycle and help IBs and beneficiaries to do so. There are few or no delayed projects.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Align project calls and selection with beneficiary capacity	Consult and cooperate with stakeholders (IBs, beneficiaries, subnational authorities or bodies, etc.) when designing calls and project-selection criteria.					
	Conduct *ex ante* market research when designing calls and project-selection criteria when necessary (e.g. to understand the needs of potential beneficiaries).					
	Structure calls tailored to different types of projects, beneficiary group (e.g. public versus private sector entities), and beneficiary capacities to ensure the effectiveness of all calls (e.g. high uptake rates, broad beneficiary pool for competitive calls).					
	Regularly collect feedback from different groups of beneficiaries and make adjustments to call design in the programming period when necessary.					
Design calls and selection criteria that identify innovative projects	Conduct market research to understand new market trends and technology in policy sectors relevant to the Programme, integrating the insights obtained into the project calls.					
	Regularly consult with stakeholders (IBs, beneficiaries) to understand new market trends and technology in policy sectors relevant to the Programme, integrating the insights obtained into the project calls.					
	Design calls and selection criteria to attract innovative projects (e.g. projects using new technologies, projects that contribute to more than one Priority Axis, etc.).					
Minimise the need to carry projects forward into the subsequent programming period	Prepare a pipeline of ready projects ahead of the new programming period.					
	Continually monitors and mitigates project implementation risks throughout the investment cycle via dedicated mechanisms/tools (e.g. a task force).					
	Periodically exchanges risk management information and good practice with the MCS via dedicated mechanisms/tools (e.g. web portal, regular meetings, working groups).					
	Periodically exchanges risk management information with other MAs or external public institutions.					

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GOAL 4: Expand performance measurement practices to better support outcome evaluations

Performance measurement captures both the strategic and technical progress of the Programme (i.e. meeting higher-level development goals). It is based on robust evidence (e.g. well-designed indicators, effective data collection). The results are used to support decision-making throughout the investment cycle.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Build robust measurement systems for Programme investment performance	Complement EU-required performance measurement for the Programme with an additional set of clear and streamlined indicators that capture the desired financial, technical and strategic outcomes of the Programme vis-a-vis national, regional or sector development goals (e.g. to what extent does the Programme contribute to achieving Programme and national/sectoral/regional goals).					
	Engage with IBs and beneficiaries in the indicator design process to ensure that indicators are useful and realistic based on stakeholder reporting capacities and resources.					
Ensure effective data collection	Use various tools and methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data, including actively coordinating with relevant public institutions (e.g. national or regional statistics institutes, sectoral authorities or associations) to improve data collection over time.					
	Provide continuous and active support to IBs and beneficiaries for data collection and reporting (e.g. sharing monitoring tools, organise workshops and trainings, etc.).					
Update indicators to support outcomes evaluations and use the results to improve Programme implementation	Regularly examine the results of evaluation exercises and use these to improve Programme implementation (e.g. call structure, selection criteria).					
	Discuss with IBs and beneficiaries throughout the programming period to ensure that indicators are up-to-date and relevant over time.					
Strategically use the Monitoring Committee for better Programme implementation	Design a clear and constructive agenda for the Monitoring Committee meeting to ensure that the technical and strategic progress of the Programme, implementation challenges and potential solutions are discussed in the Committee meetings.					
	Follow up with the results of the meeting and implement the solutions within a clear and agreed upon timeline, and report back at the next Committee meeting.					

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PILLAR 4: BENEFICIARIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

This Pillar looks at capacities for ensuring that beneficiaries and stakeholders can successfully design and implement strategies and projects, easily respond to calls, face a minimal need for adjustments, and contribute to project and programme data collection and reporting to support monitoring and evaluation. It includes two goals: 1) build beneficiary capacity effectively; and 2) actively engage with a broad base of external stakeholders.

GOAL 1: Build beneficiary capacity effectively

Different groups of beneficiaries receive continuous, timely and targeted support from the MA/IBs. The MA has good knowledge of beneficiary needs and capacities. Beneficiaries have clear guidance on project application and implementation procedures/processes. They can request help easily from the MA/IBs and receive effective responses within an agreed upon timeframe. They receive information concerning Programme implementation, including regulation changes, in a timely and regular fashion.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Provide tailored and quality support to beneficiaries	Implement a clear action plan to guide and support different beneficiary groups with concrete and regular activities based on identified beneficiary needs and capacities.					
	Ensure that beneficiary guidance and support measures are accessible, user-friendly and up-to-date.					
	Consult with different beneficiary groups when designing beneficiary guidance and support measures, and regularly collect their feedback to update and improve the guidance/activities.					
Communicate with beneficiaries in a timely and effective manner	Have a single contact point (or a consolidated list of targeted contacts) that can respond to beneficiary questions, and provide guidance on project design and implementation issues that arise throughout the project cycle.					
	Respond to beneficiary requests within a predetermined and well-communicated timeframe.					
Promote ongoing information exchange with and among beneficiaries	Provide a variety of information exchange tools and platforms for beneficiaries, including physical networks and online platforms.					
	Share information regarding Programme implementation with beneficiaries on a regular basis (e.g. quarterly).					
	Actively support exchange among beneficiaries on common challenges and good practices of Programme implementation (e.g. by creating mechanisms such as regular workshops).					
	Actively consult with a wide range of professional organisations (e.g. consultants, business chambers, etc.) to support beneficiary capacity-building activities.					

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Partner with professional beneficiary-support organisations	Regularly exchange with professional organisations to identify and better understand beneficiary needs, project implementation challenges, etc.					

GOAL 2: Actively engage with a broad-base of external stakeholders (e.g. subnational entities, private sector representatives, civil society)

The MA has dedicated mechanisms to ensure active engagement with internal and external stakeholders throughout the investment cycle. The MA has a strong, trusting, and cooperative relationship with stakeholders, based on regular and effective two-way communication. Stakeholders' inputs are used to develop concrete solutions to address Programme implementation gaps.

Capacity	Dimension (good practice)					N/A
Understand the needs of a broad range of stakeholders	Regularly capture the needs of different external stakeholders (beyond the Programme's beneficiaries) through surveys, research, focus groups, etc.					
	Encourage a broad range of external stakeholders to participate in the Programme implementation cycle (from objective and priority setting to evaluation), regularly collecting their insight on challenges and potential solution to Programme delivery.					
	Share information on stakeholder needs and insights within the MCS and use it to improve Programme implementation.					
Building stakeholder capacity to participate in Programme design and implementation	Identify the challenges that different types of stakeholders (e.g. enterprises, NGOs, research institutes, subnational entities, etc.) face at different stages of Programme implementation.					
	Provide tailored support to different types of stakeholders (e.g. subnational entities) to build their capacity in contributing to Programme implementation (e.g. workshops, online consultation, etc.).					
	Regularly collect feedback from diverse stakeholders regarding the quality and effectiveness of the capacity building activities with which they engage.					
	Use the feedback to update the capacity building activities for stakeholders.					
Build multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms for broader and more effective stakeholder input	Develop a dedicated, formal multi-stakeholder dialogue platform for stakeholders to provide regular, systematic and coordinated input to the full Programme design and implementation cycle.					
	Facilitate constructive dialogue through the multi-stakeholder platform to identify clear next steps to improve Programme implementation.					
	Disseminate the results of the discussion and the follow-up (implementation of the next steps) among stakeholders and beyond (wider public).					

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3 THE OECD PATHWAY FOR DEVELOPING ACB ACTIONS

Introduction

Developing administrative capacity-building actions begins with self-assessment and input from diverse units in a Managing Authority as well as internal and external stakeholders[15] relevant to implementing the MAs Programme. It then requires structuring and prioritising concrete actions targeted to specific capacity gaps. There are a variety of ways that an MA can go about this process. One approach is to develop an ACB Roadmap, which includes comprehensive measures for building capacities in managing and making use of EU funds. This approach is promoted for the 2021-2027 programming period as a tool for MAs to more strategically use technical assistance and build administrative capacity. It has been strongly recommended that those Member States experiencing weaknesses in administrative capacity or having less convincing implementation records develop ACB Roadmaps. The Roadmap is a strategic document that can be developed for individual programmes or for Member States[16].

An ACB Roadmap clearly sets out capacity building goals, priorities and initiatives and can be used to measure progress over time. It can also be used to communicate expectations, create buy-in among the Programme's implementing stakeholders[17], and generate a sense of accountability for delivering Roadmap initiatives. The European Commission's *Roadmaps for Administrative Capacity Building – Practical Toolkit* provides hands-on support and instructions for MAs wishing to apply this approach. To support MAs as they identify administrative capacity challenges and appropriate actions, this section of the ACB Self-assessment Instrument presents a method for developing an ACB Roadmap, which is in line with the approach described in the EC Practical Toolkit. The methodology was used during the administrative capacity building project undertaken with the five pilot MAs (Box 1, Section 1). It is not the only way to approach the exercise, but rather it is one option for MAs to consider. What is different in the approach described below when compared to the EC Practical Toolkit is using the Self-assessment Matrix as a first step (see Figure 2 in Section 1).

[15] Internal stakeholders include the MA, Certifying Authority/the accounting function, Audit Authority, IBs, and national coordinating bodies; external stakeholders are those outside of the MCS – from national authorities (e.g. line ministries and agencies) and subnational authorities (e.g. regional and local governments), to the private sector, professional organisations, civil society organisations, academia, etc. They also include beneficiaries, and those who support beneficiaries, such as consultants, professional or business associations, subnational government associations, etc.

[16] European Commission (2020), Roadmaps for Administrative Capacity Building: Practical Toolkit https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/roadmap_admin/

[17] Including within the MA, Intermediary Bodies (IBs), beneficiaries and National Coordinating Bodies, and other MAs and public institutions involved in EU fund management.

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The OECD methodology for developing ACB actions

The OECD methodology helps MAs take a constructive look at their administrative strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. It is a process of discovery – one that permits the different actors involved in a Programme's design, management, implementation and evaluation to share their experiences, observations, and ideas. Successfully exploring and addressing administrative and investment management capacity challenges requires an open mind, a willingness to consider different perspectives, and a willingness to implement change. The OECD methodology uses a multi-stakeholder, interactive workshop format to gather information, identify solutions and design actions. To support implementing these actions, the EC Practical Toolkit gives specifics on developing indicators and on financing arrangements. Other actors – including national coordinating bodies – that would like to carry out the self-assessment exercise could gain insights from this section, especially if they plan to involve multiple stakeholders in the process.

This OECD methodology has five main steps (see Figure 2 in Section 1):

1. The Self-assessment Matrix: Generating preliminary insights
2. The ACB Workshop: Working together to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities
3. Developing ACB actions: Setting goals and identifying priority actions
4. Bringing it all together: Building ownership
5. Implementing the ACB actions: Adopting good practices

Stakeholder engagement is a fundamental component of the OECD approach to developing ACB actions, and it should be part of the whole self-assessment exercise. The scope and format of stakeholder involvement will vary according to the step/stage, and depends on the objectives and tasks. For example, Step 1: Completing the Matrix, is an opportunity for the MA to gather internal representatives from different departments to reflect on the organisation's capacity, identify key challenges and set priorities for further in-depth discussion. When possible, the MA may also want to involve some external stakeholders in the first step, for example via a questionnaire, or in-person consultations. Step 2: the ACB Workshop, is meant to bring together a broader range of stakeholders to continue gathering different perspectives and to validate the findings in Step 1. For Steps 3 and 4, it is also important that the MA keep stakeholders informed on the progress of developing and implementing capacity building actions, and continuously collect their feedback.

MAs also need to ensure effective internal communication and engagement when developing ACB actions. For example, the MA team leading the work will need to build consensus around the capacity-building objectives, processes and expected outcomes. The team needs to clearly communicate this information to all staff across the MA in order to raise awareness, articulate and manage expectations and contributions, and collect feedback and ideas from different departments. This engagement should begin before the assessment exercise and continue until its end (i.e. the completion of ACB actions).

Step 1. Completing the Matrix

Completing the Self-assessment Matrix launches the first step of the OECD methodology. It represents a stock-taking exercise for the MA to begin identifying where capacity gaps may lie, as well as give preliminary insight into MA strengths.

MAs are encouraged to complete the Matrix based on a group discussion among MA staff. There are two ways to organise the self-assessment discussion: i) representatives/employees from different departments can first complete the Matrix individually, and then the MA can organise a group discussion based on the results; ii) staff gathers together to discuss and complete the Matrix collectively. Either way, the discussion is fundamental as it can help articulate recognised strengths and weaknesses and reveal capacities gaps

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that normally may be overlooked. Before starting the exercise, the MA should give a presentation to the persons who will fill in the Matrix to provide them with the necessary background, explanations and guidance, including background knowledge of some specific topics and terminologies (for example, not all the participants have knowledge in the field of human resource management). This support should be secured during the whole process of completing the Matrix.

Apart from filling in the Matrix itself (i.e. completing the rating), MAs are encouraged to capture the discussions with additional documentation. For example, the MA can prepare a separate sheet or document to write down the justification for the grade of each dimension, i.e. why this dimension is considered significant or weak. Alternatively, the MA can summarise the discussions by writing down a brief qualitative description for each capacity to complement and substantiate the rating.

The completed Matrix and the results of the discussions combined can not only help the MA prioritise the most pressing areas for capacity building, but also feed into the organisation of the ACB workshop (Step 2). It is as important to speak with technical or operational staff as it is with senior managers in each of the MAs functional areas, as well as the national coordinating body. This can sometimes be difficult for MA staff to undertake, and consideration may be given to bringing in an independent, external third party to conduct the interview/roundtable discussions.

The MA can also undertake additional information gathering exercises to better complete the Matrix. Doing so helps generate a more robust self-assessment on the MA's capacities, as relying on just one information source can give an incomplete or unbalanced snapshot of the current situation. Additional information can be obtained by conducting a simple survey, consulting evaluation documents, and organising focus group discussions. Additional information gathering activities and the Matrix are complementary. For example, collecting the existing documented information and a short questionnaire can help complete the Matrix. The findings from interviews and/or focus group discussions can feed into the Matrix, or be used to validate and refine the Matrix. The Matrix can be used to design the questionnaire, or structure the interviews, roundtable or focus group discussions. When appropriate, the MA can also extend the assessment exercise to other bodies in the Management and Control System, including the Certifying Authority/the accounting function, the national coordinating bodies, especially when the MA delegates part of its functions to other bodies.

3Annex A provides MAs with a list of topics to focus additional information gathering, as well as potentially useful sources of information. Similarly, the EC Practical Toolkit's Annex 1 also provides a detailed list of questions around structures, human resource management (HRM), systems and tools to help MAs gather information for assessment.

Step 2. The ACB Workshop: Working together to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities

Once the background information is gathered and thoroughly considered, the next step is to bring together internal and external stakeholders – those who participated in the focus group discussion as well as others – for a one-day, interactive workshop.

The OECD structured the workshop process by leading participants through a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis. This was followed by a discussion of possible solutions, as well as ways to reinforce MA strengths and take advantage of identified opportunities. This methodology can also be found in the EC Practical Toolkit.

Preparing the ACB Workshop

Before the workshop, the MA identifies a set of pressing themes and issues in each of the five dimensions of the analytical framework that 'bubbled up' during the information gathering step. The completed ACB Self-assessment Matrix can be particularly useful here, as it clearly highlights perceived weaknesses. If

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necessary, the Matrix can be further refined after the workshop to reflect the additional insights gained from a broader set of stakeholders.

The workshop space is furnished with tables – generally one per Pillar of the OECD analytical framework (i.e. People, Organisation, Strategic planning, etc.) – so that participants can work together on a specific theme. At each table there should be a mix of stakeholders in terms of type (e.g. from the MA, from IBs, from beneficiaries, etc.), and in terms of function or activity (e.g. human resource management, strategic planning, communications, etc.). Prior to the workshop, it is important for the MA to have an idea as to how it would like to populate the tables in order to ensure an appropriate participant balance.

Each table is equipped with a flipchart and markers. The table's theme and key issues to explore – identified during the information-gathering step – should be already marked on the flip chart when participants arrive so they know where to go. It is important that the MA helps direct people to appropriate tables to ensure a good mix. MAs can chose to pre-assign seating, or facilitate seating upon participant arrival. Figure 3 offers an idea of a room layout – each oval represents a table, indicating the table's discussion theme based on what was learned in Step 1, as well as some of the key issues identified for discussion.

Figure 3. Example of table themes and identified issues for an ACB workshop

Also prior to the workshop, the MA will need to select and instruct a table rapporteur or facilitator from its staff who will guide the discussion during the workshop. It is also recommended that once everyone is at their tables, a note taker be designated.

During the ACB workshop

The workshop is generally divided into four sessions, plus a lunch break.

1. **Why we are here**: an introduction by the MA to the self-assessment process and outline of the workshop day.
2. **The SWOT**: at each table, participants focus on their theme, taking time to discuss and record on the flipcharts what they consider to be the MAs strengths together with opportunities to build on these, and the MA's weaknesses or challenges, including potential root causes, and who could help manage them. While it is important that some of the pre-identified key issues are discussed, there should be room and flexibility for participants to introduce other issues as well. After the SWOT analysis discussion, participants identify 3 or 4 priority areas that they feel the MA should

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address. The rapporteur for each table briefly (5-7 minutes per table) presents the strengths, challenges and priority issues that were identified and discussed. After each table presentation, the MA opens up the discussion to hear what workshop participants think of the findings – including if there is anything missing or anything additional to consider.

3. **Moving towards solutions***:* After the lunch break, participants return to their tables, and based on the 3 or 4 priorities identified in the morning, they brainstorm as many solutions as possible for each priority and associated issue, thinking in the short term and in the longer term. They should consider the steps necessary to develop the solution, who might be the main actors that can contribute to implementing the solution, and what tools/mechanisms they need in order to take action. Key among this last consideration is whether or not the tools/mechanisms are within or beyond the MA's mandate/responsibilities. It is important that the thinking not be limited to what appears to be possible, or what is known, but that participants are encouraged to be innovative in their solutions. At the end of approximately 90 minutes, the tables once again present (5-7 minutes per table) to the larger group the solutions they identified for feedback and discussion. These solutions should also be captured on the flip charts.
4. **Conclusions and next steps***:* At the end of the workshop, the MA can wrap up the day with some of the key ideas that came forward, and share with stakeholders the next steps in the ACB Roadmap development process, including a potential timeline.

After the workshop, it is very helpful if the MA team spends some time considering what they heard and learned, as this will feed directly into the ACB actions. The flipchart pages are an essential tool to support this activity. It is strongly recommended to develop a general analysis that documents what was found in the information gathering stage and through the workshop (Steps 1 and 2). This offers a clear record of the underlying capacity issues and gaps and the overarching goals for the overcoming specific capacity challenges.

Box 2. Tips for running a 'virtual' workshop (e.g. due to COVID-19 restrictions)

Depending on COVID-19 restrictions, the workshop can also be done virtually. While it is hard to replicate the advantages of a diverse group meeting in-person, online workshops can allow more people to participate with less disruption to their schedules (e.g. because of travel).

The 'breakout rooms' feature of video-conferencing tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams can be used to replicate thematic tables. The chat function can allow participants to suggest questions or provide comments in real-time, and interactive tools such as Groupmap or Padlet can help structure the conversation.

It is generally recommended to keep online workshops to two hours maximum – beyond that point, participant interaction diminishes. Good practice in online workshops is to break up the time into a series of activities. An online workshop on capacity building could involve an introduction from MA leadership for example, before attendees move into separate 'breakout rooms' to discuss specific topics in more detail. Reporting back to the group from these discussions can help give participants a sense of progress and discuss next steps.

Step 3. Developing capacity building actions

Once Steps 2 and 3 are complete, the MA is now ready to prepare its set of actions. The EC Practical Toolkit provides techniques to help MAs move from analysing the state of play (e.g. the findings from the gathering information and the ACB workshop steps) to identifying actions, namely mapping out the intervention logic by using a problem tree and constructing a theory of change.

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It may not be possible to address all of the areas for action or all of the actions that were identified during the workshop. For this reason, it is important that the MA a) prioritises what is realistic and considers the sequence of actions; b) discusses with stakeholders why it has chosen to address the issues it has. MAs can build an ACB Roadmap that incorporates all possible actions, which can be highly valuable, but it should also be realistic with respect to the time and resources required to implement the actions, and properly manage stakeholder expectations.

Elaborating administrative capacity building actions is an iterative process. The MA team working on this should expect to come together several times to refine their work. They may also want to periodically consult with the relevant key stakeholders in each dimension as they think through the design of the actions and develop ideas on how to implement these. Additionally, it is important to keep three principles in mind with respect to administrative capacity building actions. They should be:

1. realistic
2. mutually reinforcing
3. spread over the short, medium and long-term in order to achieve quick wins followed by more sustainable gains

Additionally, it is essential that senior management is committed to and supports change.

In the pilot project with the five MAs, all actions were summarised in an overview table[18] that contained a series of general features:

- **Preamble**: a text describing the reason for the exercise, providing relevant context;
- **Administrative Capacity Pillars**: groupings of concrete actions or initiatives into the five pillars – people management, organisation management, strategic planning and coordination, beneficiary support and stakeholder management, as well as framework conditions. These Pillars provide a structure for articulating high-level strategic goals, and help organise the actions in a more systematic way. While the Self-assessment Instrument provides a general framework, an MA can group the actions in a way that is most comprehensible and operational for it.
- **Projects/Actions**: the specific initiatives meant to address the challenges and gaps identified through the self-assessment exercise and the ACB design process; projects should state the desired deliverables.
- **Responsible body**: each action should have a responsible body and identified implementing stakeholders to ensure the accountability of actions. Sometimes the responsible body is the only implementing stakeholder. In other cases, the responsible body may be joined by other actors to ensure implementation. Ideally, there should also be accountability at the MA's management level.
- **Timing**: actions should be time bound, but the time frame or extent of specificity is flexible. Clear consideration of timing is important to sequence the actions, to avoid crowding several actions at the same time, and to ensure actions are completed. It also supports accountability.
- **Resources**: estimated resources can be assigned to the actions. Resources can include funding, human resources and required skills or expertise, and infrastructure, e.g. IT tools, etc.
- **Deliverables, milestones/benchmarks**. Deliverables reflect what the MA expects to produce as a result of its action, for example an internal document identifying standards, or a beneficiary workshop. Milestones and benchmarks highlight key actions or activities that need to be completed along the way and are a means for the MA to determine if it is on track to deliver on its action. If these features are included they should be realistic and measurable.

[18] The sample table can be found in the OECD report *Strengthening Governance of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy: Administrative Capacity Building Roadmaps*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9b71c8d8-en, Table 1.1 in Page 31,

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An alternative sample table is provided in the EC Practical Toolkit (Section 5 of 5.1 Structural elements of roadmaps), structured around the analytical framework developed by the OECD. This sample table also include features such as indicators, funding sources and budgets, in addition to those listed above. MAs can incorporate these features in their action plan table according to their own needs.

In addition, actions can be captured in a living document that is updated as actions progress. MAs are encouraged to consult the following checklist when formulating their actions:

- ✓ Clear, concrete and plain language is used
- ✓ Actions are limited in number (quality over quantity)
- ✓ Actions are realistic and can be completed by the MA itself
- ✓ Actions are focused on the MA's capacity (i.e. not just on IBs/beneficiaries).
- ✓ The output can be shared with relevant actors within the MA
- ✓ The output can be publically available if desired

Step 4. Bringing it all together: Building ownership

Once the MA has completed its ACB Roadmap exercise it should reconvene the stakeholders who participated in the Workshop in order to validate the work. This is an opportunity to obtain feedback and also generate support for the actions. Hopefully, only minor adjustments will be necessary in order to finalise the Roadmap and launch the implementation process. When the ACB Roadmap is finalised, MAs can also share it with a wider audience, including staff throughout the MA, within the ministry that houses the MA (if desired and/or appropriate), IBs, beneficiaries, and even the public (such as publishing it on the website, if applicable). MAs can also regularly update their progress in implementing its capacity building actions.

Involving stakeholders throughout the ACB Roadmap development process is fundamental to building support and ownership for the full administrative capacity building cycle – from identifying the capacity gaps to developing the actions to address the gaps, and determining the effectiveness of these actions at the appropriate time.

Step 5. Implementing the ACB actions: Adopting good practices

Different MAs will undoubtedly identify and implement different kinds of capacity building actions. How they implement the actions will also vary, depending on their capacity gaps, human and institutional resources, working culture, etc. Nevertheless, there are some good practices that may be applicable to most MAs, if not all. These good practices are mainly drawn from the experience of the five MAs involved in the pilot project. MAs are encouraged to consider adopting and adapting these good practices according to their needs.

- Establish clear structures and teams to implement the ACB Roadmaps, and design mechanisms to mobilise staff and expertise across the MA to contribute. For example, the Greek MA of Operational Programme Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development 2014-2020 created implementation teams coordinated by staff who are not members of the MA's management team. They are supported by a pool of "champions" for the Roadmap – a group of managers who have volunteered to support the teams.
- Different implementation teams can freely consult any champion from the pool according to their needs, rather than assigning one champion to each team.
- Develop action plans. While the Roadmap may provide basic information about the actions, such as responsible bodies, implementing bodies, general timeline and milestone, etc., it is helpful to have detailed implementation plans for the actions identified. Developing an action plan on

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improving employee engagement, for example, is an activity that the Croatian and Lubelskie (Poland) MAs implemented as part of the pilot project.

- Ensure regular communication and interaction among implementation teams, especially among actions that are interlinked. Regular meetings, workshops, or online platforms for sharing updates can help accomplish this.
- Produce a short document(s) that summarises the findings and lessons-learned from implementing a specific action. For example, the MA in Extremadura, Spain, with the assistance of the OECD, will produce a summary of findings arising from the strategy setting action they are undertaking, accompanied by a toolkit for strategic programming. In the case of Bulgaria's MA for OP Regions in Growth, a toolkit for undertaking consultation processes to analyse capacity gaps will be produced, including the design of appropriate consultation training or support tools. This kind of documentation can be applied to various types of actions, and builds institutional memory to help MAs carry out similar exercises in the future.

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Annex A. Information gathering

This Annex supports MAs that wish to undertake information gathering exercises other than completing the Self-assessment Matrix, as the first step to gain preliminary insights for assessment.

In terms of topics, the MA can collect information on the following:

- **People**
  - General employment framework
  - Strategic human resource planning practices
  - Recruitment and promotion processes
  - Pay system
  - Performance assessment practices
  - Available training possibilities
- **Organisation**
  - Leadership
  - Structure and lines of responsibility for the MA's operational strategy and practices
  - Internal communication practices
  - Practices to support monitoring and reporting on operations and performance
- **Strategic planning, coordination and implementation**
  - Actors (ministries, agencies, subnational authorities, IBs, beneficiaries and others) with whom the MA works closely to manage and implement its Programme.
  - Coordination mechanisms to ensure effective exchange with the actors
  - Performance monitoring and evaluation
- **Beneficiaries and stakeholders**
  - Involvement of beneficiaries and other external stakeholders in relevant Programme design and implementation processes
  - Training and support programmes for beneficiaries
  - Communication with external stakeholders
- **Framework conditions**
  - External challenges, such as conditionalities, procurement processes, external audits, etc.
  - Potential risks to effective Programme management and implementation

There are at least three different sources of information MAs can draw from to gain insight into their administrative capacity, in addition to the Self-assessment Matrix. These include:

1. **Existing information in the MA**, including strategic/operational planning documents, organisational charts and structures, decision making protocols, already collected data and information (e.g. HR information, beneficiary information, etc.).
2. **A short, targeted questionnaire** circulated to internal (within the MA and MCS) and external (e.g. beneficiaries) stakeholder for insight into their perceptions.

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3. **Interviews/roundtable/focus group discussions with diverse actors**, including representatives from the MA, IBs, the national coordinating body, beneficiary and beneficiary support bodies, the Monitoring Committee, etc. During these conversations, information can be sought on:

- MA Capacities, for example:
  - Does the MA's structure and organisation make sense to stakeholders and is it conducive to meeting their organisational/technical needs or meeting their objectives?
- MA Organisation, for example:
  - How familiar are stakeholders with how the MA works?
  - What are stakeholder perspectives on MA procedures and processes? What would they improve?
- MA Strategic planning, coordination and communication, for example:
  - How well aligned are the Programme objectives with other strategic objectives, for example for regional development?
  - How well do stakeholders perceive coordination mechanisms to work?
  - How effectively does the MA communicate with stakeholders regarding new knowledge, activities, opportunities, risks, etc.?
- Engagement with and support to beneficiaries and stakeholders, for example:
  - How well does the MA engage with or cooperate with stakeholders when determining how to implement the Programme, designing calls, etc.?
  - How clearly does the MA understand beneficiary capacity – strengths and gaps – and how effective is MA support?
  - How frequently or how effectively are potential beneficiaries engaged?
- Framework conditions, for example:
  - What do stakeholders experience as framework constraints, e.g. administrative procedures, monitoring and control mechanisms, etc., and what works smoothly?

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https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/roadmap_admin/

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