DIGI.MUSE

Education in small museums: digital solutions for a renewed accessibility

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Networking Guidelines for museums

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Scale and scope of the Guidelines

The Networking Guidelines for small museums are one of the outcomes of the Erasmus+ project DIGI.MUSE - KA210 Small-scale partnerships in Vocational Education and Training. Genti D'Abruzzo Foundation (IT) together with IHF asbl (BE) and IWS (ES) have developed a set of training resources to enhance the skills of the small museums' operators in terms of digitalisation of the cultural offer and activities, inclusion, European project management and networking.

These Guidelines respond to the training needs of the target group and directly support one of the main project's objectives: setting the stage for the establishment of a transnational network gathering small museums across Europe.

The lack of similar networks at EU level requires leveraging on experiences and best practices extrapolated from different fields which can be replicable by small museums in order to address their peculiar needs, in particular the needs of demo-etno-anthropological museums, which play a pivotal role in the DIGI.MUSE project.

This document represents the first step for outlining the possible structure and functioning of the DIGI.MUSE network (which will be better defined by a Memorandum of Understanding) since it:

- Provides an analysis of the possible forms of networks, which gather small organisations at EU level operating in other fields, with a particular focus on Education and Training;

- Identifies the most appropriate type of network based on the results of the analysis, providing directives for managing the network's activities;

- Enables the Genti D'Abruzzo Foundation's staff and other small museums' operators with the necessary skills to ensure the smooth functioning of a transnational network and guarantee the effectiveness of a collaborative work at European level.

Analysis of network models between European associations

The European Union is known for its extensive network of small and medium associations that come together to address common challenges, share best practices, and influence EU policies. In this paragraph, users will find a quick and practical overview of the definitions, benefits and advantages of different types of networks. In this way, it will be easier for museums' operators to spot the type of network that best suits their needs.

1. Classification of networks according to the membership structure:

HORIZONTAL NETWORK	
Definition	Collaborative structure where equal-level entities (organisations from the same sector and same level) work together, sharing resources and expertise for common objectives without a strict hierarchy.
Main benefits	Greater trust and relationships; sense of equality and inclusivity; encouragement of active engagement and contribution from all participants; flexible adaptation to changing circumstances.
Main risks	Coordination or management challenges due to its decentralized nature; lack of clear direction.
Reasons to choose it	To pursue objectives or interests that could be better addressed through collaboration and knowledge sharing; to influence policy changes; to fill gaps of resources (funds, expertise, personnel…); to strengthen organizational capacities through training, mentoring, and peer support.

VERTICAL NETWORK	
Definition	Hierarchical structure where entities of the same sector but different levels collaborate under a clear chain of command, with decision-making and resources allocated from top to bottom.
Main benefits	Clear decision-making process; structured accountability; streamlined communication; empowerment of the organisation operating on a lower level of capacity.
Main risks	Limited flexibility; power imbalances and less trust among members.
Reasons to choose it	To address the need for a clear chain of command, streamlined decision-making, standardized projects and a structured approach to collaboration.

CROSS-SECTORAL NETWORK	
Definition	Collaborative structure that brings together individuals, organizations, or entities from diverse industries or fields (and also different levels).
Main benefits	Innovative solutions; expanded opportunities; wider knowledge exchange.
Main risks	Conflicting goals; resource inequity; communication challenges.
Reasons to choose it	To address multifaced challenges that requires a range of different skills; to innovate processes and approaches; to influence policies that affect multiple industries; new market opportunities.

2. Classification of networks according to the <u>organisational structure</u>:

INFORMAL NETWORK	
Definition	Unofficial and spontaneous interconnected group of organisations that share information, resources, and support outside of formal structures. It requires some form of coordination but it does not have strong ties or contracts imposed and allows its members to move in any direction, skipping authorities.
Main benefits	Flexible collaboration; rapid information sharing; high autonomy; quick decisive action.
Main risks	The network may exist on paper while little is actually done in practice due to a lack of capacity to coordinate the work in the long run.
Reasons to choose it	To collaborate without the financial and time-related burdens of a formal setup; to address the need for reduced commitment levels that might align better with operational needs and constraints.

FORMAL NETWORK	
Definition	Network bounded and structured by rules and contracts, defining legal and financial responsibilities.
Main benefits	Clear framework for collaboration, guiding interactions, roles, and responsibilities; accountability; longer-term impact and greater sustainability.
Main risks	High investment in internal processes; time-consuming coordination to enable joint decision-making; focus towards internal dynamics rather than external impact.
Reasons to choose it	To address the need for long-term planning; to ensure legal protection; to get significant funding.

EU networks: a few examples

This section of the Guidelines presents few examples of transnational networks that gather associations working in culture or different fields like business and education. The final aim is to extrapolate experiences and good practices that will help partners to define the possible structure of the future DIGI.MUSE Network. Museums' operators, in particular smaller entities, may get inspiration from transnational collaborative initiatives that have been lunched by organisations from different fields but that can be replicable and adaptable to museums' needs.

1. **Creative Europe Network**
https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand/european-networks

The Creative Europe Network is a network established by the European Commission to support and promote the cultural and creative sectors across Europe. It is a part of the broader Creative Europe programme, which aims to enhance the competitiveness, collaboration, and internationalization of cultural and creative industries within the European Union and beyond. The Creative Europe Network consists of various cultural and creative organizations, including cultural institutions, creative professionals, artists, festivals, and more. These entities collaborate to foster artistic exchange, innovation, and cultural diversity across different art forms such as visual arts, literature, music, film, heritage, and performing arts. Some of the main aspects of these network include:

- Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- Capacity Building

- Cross-Border initiatives
- Project Funding
- Cultural and Artistic Exchange
- Audience Engagement
- Advocacy and Policy Development

2. **Enterprise Europe Network**
   https://een.ec.europa.eu/

One example of an official EU network that gathers small organizations is the "Enterprise Europe Network" (EEN). The EEN is the world's largest support network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with international ambitions. It provides business advice, information on funding opportunities, technology transfer services, and matchmaking events to help SMEs expand their market reach and access resources. The network is composed of nearly 600 partner organizations, including chambers of commerce, technology centers, and regional development agencies across EU member states and other countries participating in the network.

3. **EPALE Community of Practices**

This space, created within the European Platform for Adult Education (EPALE), aims to be an interactive platform for teachers, trainers, in-company tutors to network and exchange good practices and ideas, for finding concrete solutions to their problems with the help of peers, keep up to date with European policies and contribute to European VET initiatives. The Community of Practice (Cop) is a very common typology of network, in particular among entities operating in education and training, since it is informal and present particular flexible features as described in the following paragraph.

Legal forms for an EU network: three possibilities

Establishing a European network requires careful consideration of legal forms that can facilitate seamless collaboration and regulatory compliance across multiple countries. The chosen legal structure serves as the foundational framework upon which the entire network operates. By selecting an appropriate legal structure, organizations can navigate the intricate legal terrain of European collaboration with confidence, enabling them to focus on their core objectives and initiatives. These are three examples of legal forms that may be suitable for a European network:

1. **E.E.I.G.**
   It is a legal figure introduced by the European Union with the aim of facilitating or developing the economic activities of its members by a pooling of resources, activities or skills. An EEIG can be formed by companies, firms and other legal entities governed by public or private law which have been formed in accordance with the law of an EU country and which have their registered office in the EU. It can also be formed by individuals carrying on an industrial, commercial, craft or agricultural activity or providing professional or other services in the EU. The E.E.I.G. is constituted by a group contract drawn up by notary deed in the form of public deed or notarized private writing to be entered in the Register of Companies at the Chamber of Commerce.

2. **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION**
   When establishing a European network, members may register it as a national association compliant with the national law of one or more of its members. For instance, the DIGI.MUSE Network may assume the legal form of a National Association in accordance with the national law of its coordinator (Fondazione Genti d'Abruzzo). The following are different types of national associations, which may be suitable for a European network; they are extrapolated from the italian legislative framework as an example but they can be useful to spot similar legal forms in other countries:

o **The Network Contract**: legal form suitable for enterprises. It is a type of agreement introduced in the Italian legal system in 2009, allowing companies to form collaborations for mutual benefit. This legislative initiative was prompted by the European adoption of the Small Business Act. Through the network contract, companies can pursue shared projects and objectives, thereby increasing their innovative capacity and market competitiveness, while retaining their independence, autonomy, and specialization. This legal form is not appropriate for small museums that are often public or private associations but almost never businesses registered in the Register of Economic Operators.

o **Not recognised association:** collective entities that are not legal entities. The contract concluded among the founders is a constitutive act, which is not subject to any formal constraints. Therefore, it could be drawn up through a simple private writing or even orally. From a regulatory perspective, in not recognised associations, there is a very broad freedom, as the entity is governed by the agreements of the members, who can therefore regulate its functioning as they see fit, within the limits, of course, of the general and specific principles inherent to the legal system.

o **Associations' network**: informal and non-recognised groups of small, medium, or large sizes, comprising generic and third sector entities, established to realize specific projects (a single fundraising campaign, a specific social project, a tailored promotional campaign, etc.). They do not fall under the category of structured and solid associative networks. On the contrary, they are variable, fluid entities, subject to sudden changes in purposes, objectives, and operational methods. Moreover, they frequently undergo turnovers among the members.

3. **European Association**
European institutions are currently working on a new legal form for European cross-border associations which will provide a new regulation for the activities of non-profit organisations working within the EU space. This legal form could constitute a further and interesting possibility of operational aggregation at a European level.

The Community of Practice

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly[1]; CoPs are informal networks that entail shared domain that becomes a source of identification.

Small museums across Europe could consider establishing a Community of Practice being a flexible and informal structure. They may opt for different types of CoPs, depending on their needs and objectives:

- **Helping Communities**: to provide a forum for community members to help each other with everyday work needs.
- **Best Practice Communities:** to develop and disseminate best practices, guidelines, and strategies for their members' use.
- **Knowledge Stewarding Communities:** to organize, manage, and steward a body of knowledge from which community members can draw.
- **Innovation Communities:** to create breakthrough ideas, new knowledge, and new practices.

Organisations willing to develop communities or even networks and other formal or informal structures are recommended to consult the [Playbook for Community of Practice](#) (2021), developed by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, which outlines a methodology to set up, run and evaluate Communities of Practice. The Commission identifies **eight community success facets**; for each of these facets it sets specific

questions that organisations need to answer when establishing or running a community.

1. **VISION – What is the challenge you want to address? What is the long-term goal?**

    - *Community purpose*: what is your community raison d'être?
    - *Objectives:* what is your strategy to reach the vision? Which are your SMART objectives?

2. **GOVERNANCE – How do you work together, and with whom and how do you take decisions?**

    - *Stakeholders Mapping*: who are the actors involved in/impacted by the community?
    - *Risk-free environment:* what are key elements to build trust and guarantee a safe place?

3. **LEADERSHIP – How will you ensure strong leadership participation by both sponsors and core groups?**

    - *Core group:* how do you get the core group to steer the community?
    - *Investment and sponsorship*: what support do you need? How do you get them involved?

4. **CONVENING – What kind of convening opportunities work for your community?**

    - *Communication, connection and conversation:* what convening opportunities will you design to encourage communication and connections?
    - *Boundary-spanning*: how do you regularly feed your community with external expertise and promote access to other networks?

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[1] Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity

5. **COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION – How do you co-create and coordinate to enrich the common practice and produce knowledge assets/quantitative deliverables?**

   - *Coordination:* how do you coordinate members' work towards delivering on the objective agreed?
   - *Co-creation:* what content needs to be curated/synthesised/co-created and what methods will you use to succeed in this?

6. **COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT – What role and tasks will the community manager perform?**

   - *In real life and online:* how will you combine and ensure the flow between real-life and online, asynchronous and synchronous community interactions?
   - *Facilitation*: what facilitation methods do you need to get the best out of the community's dynamic social processes?

7. **USER EXPERIENCE – How do you ensure a user-centric experience while delivering on the tasks set?**

   - *Experience design*: what are the community's personas and their user requirements?
   - *Support:* what processes and content do you need to put in place to provide support?

8. **MEASUREMENT – What have you achieved? What can you learn for those measurements and how will you address the challenges?**

   - *Vitality:* what habits and behaviours should you observe and encourage?
   - *Results*: How do you measure the key results in delivering on the community objectives? How will you capture impact stories?

For the creation of the DIGI.MUSE Network, partners are recommended to consider the abovementioned questions, levering on the CoP Success Wheel (see Annex 1).

To mitigate the risks associated to the different types of networks or to tackle the different elements of the Success Wheel (Edit 1) it is necessary to develop and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) so to produce an efficient action and positively influence the relationship and trust-building process among the members. By tackling the 8 facets of the Wheel, the MoU will allow:

- Describing the values and principles of the network/community;
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of each member;
- Explaining the decision-making and information sharing processes as well as budget allocations.

Stakeholders' management

The second section of these Guidelines focuses on the two aspects of the Governace facet within the Success Wheel: *Stakeholders' Mapping* and *Risk-free environment*. These factors, indeed, are particularly challenging within an international network composed by actors from different geographical and cultural backgrounds.

When setting up a network, organisations shall be able to identify, engage and mobilise the socio-economic actors co-sharing the same operative context, in line with the three-layer process of **Stakeholders Mangement** (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: Stakeholders Management Framework
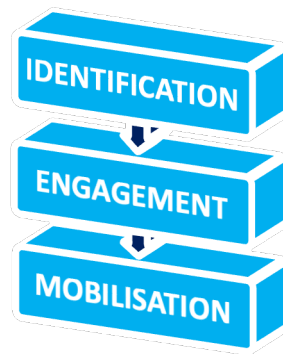
Source: Developed by the authors

Stakeholders' mapping

For the identification phase, organisations may leverage on the **Power-Interest Matrix** (Exhibit 2) based on two variables: Interest and Impact. This tool allows classifying stakeholders into four clusters, to which correspond a different management strategy. The higher the level of Impact and Interest, the higher the priority of the considered stakeholder.

Exhibit 2: Power-Interest Matrix

Passive Passengers **Keep satisfied**	*Key Players* **Manage closely**
Distant Cousins **Monitor**	*Mavens* **Leverage**

Level of Impact (vertical axis) — **Level of Interest** (horizontal axis)
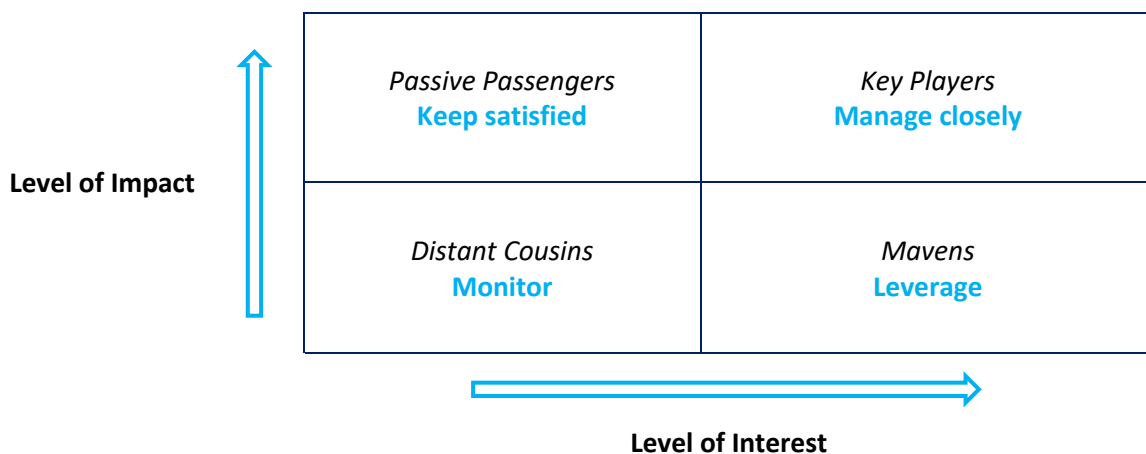
Source: Developed by the authors

Stakeholders' engagement

Engagement represents the second phase within the Stakeholders Management Framework; engagement can be defined as the managing of stakeholders' expectations while building common ground for actions.

After the identification phase, it may be useful to develop a Stakeholders Engagement Plan resuming the evidences, findings and results of the identification assessments and remarking the better strategies that fit each stakeholder's category.

A practical tool that may be integrated into this phase is the **Stakeholders Engagement Matrix** (Exhibit 3) used to monitor, assess, and evaluate the stakeholders' **CURRENT** (C) level of engagement compared to the **DESIRED** (D) level. It is recommended to update the Matrix on a regular basis, preferably every six months. It will be possible to confirm the success of the engagement strategies when D and C match the same box.

Exhibit 3: The Stakeholder Engagement Matrix

STAKEHOLDER	Unaware	Resistant	Neutral	Supportive	Leading
Stakeholder 1		C		D	
Stakeholder 2				D/C	
Stakeholder 3	C			D	
…	…				
…	…				
…	…				
…	…				

Source: PMBOK® Guide – Sixth Edition (2017)

For a high priority stakeholder, a situation like the one reported in Stakeholder 1 is much more alarming than the case of Stakeholder 3; indeed, an overall resistance compromises the efforts of the organisation more than what could do the simple unawareness.

Mobilisation of stakeholders: soft skills to mitigate risks

The Mobilisation, the third phase of the Stakeholders' Management Framework, refers to the introduction of stakeholders to participatory processes to facilitate bilateral decision-making; it is strictly connected to the building and managing of the network.

The management modalities of a network depend on its size and structure, its geographical scale and scope and the nature of its members. However, regardless the type, there are common behaviours that should always be adopted in order to keep communication and cooperation smooth and effective:

- Keep the network's members updated

- When communicating use simple words as well as short and clear sentences, use bullet points to better structure the speech and allow the recipient to re-examine the message easily

- Emails must always include a clear subject summing up the main core of the message

- Seek for inputs and feedbacks

- Guarantee accountability

- Be authentic, sincere and genuine

- Ensure the conditions for a trust-based relation

- Negotiate so that the result of the relation is a win-win outcome

- Be more emotional and socially intelligent, showing empathy and care

- Be sensitive to diversity

Cultural differences represent one of the main challenges in the management of an international network because of the different understandings of the members' working process; actions and strategies as well as the priority given to specific objectives may vary depending on the cultural background.

To reduce cultural misunderstandings the network needs to build a **Culture of Trust**, for instance by organising regular meetings, team-building activities and mutual learning moments that promote reflective dialogue and relationship building. Through an open dialogue, it is possible to understand how a task might best be approached or accomplished in a diverse country or culture, becoming more "**culturally sensitive**". Furthermore, it is important to remember that different countries may have a completely different idea of what a strong work ethic means.

Another challenging factor within international collaboration is the diversity in the working calendar. It is better to know in advance the major religious holidays or cultural events in the partners' countries since they may affect the workflow and the ability to meet deadlines.

To conclude, it is worth reminding that the cultural differences within a network must always be celebrated, since they allow enriching one's vision and knowledge of problem solving, developing new soft skills and deepening personal knowledge.

Annex 1 - The Communities of Practice Success Wheel

Measurement
Assessing community vitality - practices and behaviours, as well the results delivering on the objectives

Vision
Strategic shared agreement about the long-term mission and goals of the community

User experience
Ensuring a user-centric experience constantly adapting community workings and tools to the members' needs

Governance
Structures and decision-making rules and practices that make sense and lead to co-ownership

Community management
Facilitation of the synchronous and asynchronous flow of the community dynamic social processes

Leadership
Leaders from both within the community and senior and middle management steer and invest in the community

Collaboration/cooperation
Working purposefully together towards delivering a community concrete deliverable

Convening
The art of to bringing the community together to connect members and engage them in meaningful conversations

Source: The Communities of Practice Playbook, Joint Research Centre, EC, 2021