

"Evaluation of the communication activity in order to support the potential beneficiaries of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme"

ANNEX 4
REPORT OF THE FOCUS GROUP
WITH THE MANAGEMENT BODIES OF THE PROGRAMME

General aspects

Within the contract "Evaluation of the communication activity in order to support the potential beneficiaries of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme", a Focus Group was held with the management bodies of the programme, organized on 27th of September 2017.

1. Role of the Focus Group: The provider proposed to organize a focus group that brought together the representatives of the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat in order to present the results of the evaluation of the communication activities, obtained by applying the questionnaires and conducting the interviews with the potential beneficiaries of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme. Also, the main objectives of this focus group were:

- Identifying the programme managing bodies' opinion on ensuring the correct information regarding the identity of the programme and the opportunities offered in the eligible area of the programme;
- Identifying the programme managing bodies' opinion on how to transmit information in order to ensure the economic and social impact of the projects proposed for funding;
- Assessing the degree of satisfaction towards the press related activities of the entities with attributions in the implementation of the programme;
- Analyzing the opinion of the programme managing bodies on how to identify and use the favorite information channels: online - email, newsletter, website, social media / events, press conference, briefings, training seminars etc.

2. Organization of the Focus group: The focus group was organized on 27.09.2017 and it was held online (via Skype).

ACZ Consulting used the Focus Group grid approved through the Inception Report, which represented the starting point for the Focus Group discussions.

Details about the Focus Group

Date and Time: 27.09.2017, 14:30

Participants: representatives of the *Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds* (Managing Authority of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme), representatives of *BRECO Oradea* (Joint Secretariat of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme), representatives of ACZ Consulting SRL (implementation team)

Organizing the meeting: focus group held via Skype

Purpose of the meeting: collecting qualitative information for evaluating the impact of the communication activities within the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme

The Focus Group took place on September 27th, 2017, at 2:30 pm, being organized for the contract "Evaluation of the communication activity in order to support the potential beneficiaries of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme".

The participants to the Focus Group were:

- Mrs. Anca Simion – Evaluation Counselor, Managing Authority;
- Mrs. Mirela Stănescu - Evaluation Counselor, Managing Authority;
- Mrs. Monica Terean –Joint Secretariat Director;
- Mrs. Daliana Vigu – Communication Officer BRECO Oradea;
- Mrs. Orsolya Camerzan - Communication Officer BRECO Oradea;
- Mr. Marius Olariu – Monitoring Officer BRECO Oradea;
- Mrs. Irina Ciocîrlan – Expert in elaborating databases, ACZ Consulting;
- Mrs. Cristina Cojoacă – Expert in elaborating interviews, questionnaires, focus-groups, ACZ Consulting.

Main findings

The Focus group has started by presenting the meeting agenda, which first approached the preliminary results of the field and desk research, and secondly focused on collecting opinions from the management bodies of the programme, related to the communication activities carried out within the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme.

1. Discussions based on preliminary results gathered during the field and desk research

As a result of the analysis carried out by the Managing Authority of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme on the preliminary results obtained from the research that was carried out by the Provider and their correlation with the communication activities undergone, the following observations were highlighted regarding the Evaluation Report submitted by the provider:

- The recommendations of the potential beneficiaries regarding the future communication activities of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme also include actions that are already implemented by the Managing Authority;
- The opinion of the potential beneficiaries of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme with regards to the Communication Strategy is not relevant for drafting the final conclusions of the research, as the Strategy addresses the structures involved in the management of the programme and not the potential beneficiaries;
- The Evaluation Report aims to correlate and process the opinions obtained on the basis of several questions addressed, so as to give an integrated view on the perspective of potential beneficiaries;
- Focusing on drafting recommendations that can be transposed into viable communication actions within the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme;
- Revise of the tables and figures presented in the Evaluation Report, according to the comments sent by the Managing Authority, as well as the introduction of specific “legends” related to the tables and figures;
- Inserting and structuring a set of conclusions and recommendations correlated with the findings of the analysis, which will also be subsequently included in the synthetic summary of the report;
- Review of the Evaluation Report by including an analysis related to the compliance with the horizontal principles of the communication activities carried out within the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme (free access to information and non-discriminatory participation

in organized events, existence of a score criteria for the horizontal principles within the Evaluation Grids, accessibility of the visually impaired people to the programme's website);

- Including recommendations in the Evaluation Report on how to improve future communication activities within the programme, based on the findings of the field research;
- The analysis of online communication sources should be focused on the analysis of the programme's web page, as an official source of information related to the activities of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme;
- The following deadlines were agreed for the submission of the reviewed version of the Evaluation Report:
 - 02.10.2017 – submission of the revised Evaluation Report by ACZ Consulting, according to the comments received from the MA;
 - 05.10.2017 - comments received from the CS and MA on the revised Evaluation Report;
 - 06.10.2017 – submission of the final version of the Evaluation Report by ACZ Consulting;

2. Collecting opinions from the management bodies with regards to the communication activities carried out within Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme

In order to collect the opinions of the managing authorities on the communication activities carried out within the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme, the approved version (Initial Report) of the Guide for Focus Group was utilized. The guide included a set of succinct and pertinent questions designed to provide the opportunity to capture a more convincing vision of the key stakeholders.

The topics covered and the answers provided by the managing authorities are presented below:

a. Ensure correct information on programme identity and funding opportunities

- The feedback from potential beneficiaries was sent via the questionnaires distributed to the participants of the information events organized by JS - Info Days and Partner Search Forum. Through the collected questionnaires, it was highlighted the fact that potential beneficiaries prefer direct information (information events) and online information sources (official programme page, e-mail, newsletter).
- Recently, the managing authorities of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme have extended the direct communication network by transmitting information to applicants also through the eMS platform, by publishing an alert message when Corrigen-dums are issued on active calls.
- It has also been pointed out that the JS has already started implementing measures and actions based on the findings and conclusions of this research, such as increasing the number of online newsflashes transmitted to the potential beneficiaries contact database.

- From the perspective of the JS, the information actions with the greatest impact among the potential beneficiaries were the information events organized as well as the continuous communication actions, such as helpdesk, through which the JS representatives ensured and maintained a permanent communication with potential applicants.

Identifying how the information should be submitted in order to ensure the economic and social impact of project proposals

- In order to increase the awareness of the potential beneficiaries about the financing opportunities offered by the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme and their economic and social impact, the structures involved in the programme management intend to carry out in the future, actions to present examples of good practice. Examples of good practice will be illustrated through dedicated photos, articles, reports or brochures. Thus, for the future information and communication activities, the programme's authorities are looking to present examples of good practice also through the newsletter and brochures that will be published, thus capturing the impact of the successfully closed projects, in the financed fields.

Assessing the degree of satisfaction towards the information and communication activities

- The JS's opinion on the level of satisfaction related to the information and communication activities is that the organized events, the programme's webpage, the newsletter and the e-mail were the most appreciated means of communication and information among potential beneficiaries, aspect that was also highlighted in the satisfaction analysis of questionnaires applied to potential Counselor participating in various events organized. One of the areas where communication could be intensified/improved, is represented by the publications related to the programme, aspect which was also identified during the quantitative research. In this respect, the representatives of the programme managing bodies stated that the elaboration of publications drafted after the implementation period of the projects will be pursued in order to include information on the results achieved by the completed projects. In the same context, it was also mentioned that the communication actions were mainly directed towards the transmission of electronic messages, since the population shows a lower interest for the printed information.
- Regarding the Facebook page of the programme, the JS emphasized that this tool aims to briefly present the news of the programme. In order to access more details on the topics presented in the Facebook posts, there are references to the complete news, published on the programme's website.
- The representatives of the JS stated that the media has participated in the information events, at the time of the current evaluation, only during the launching conference of the programme and at the annual event organized with the occasion of the European Cooperation Day in 2017.

- The impact of organized information events has also been proven by the number of programme applicants, which increased considerably in the second call for proposals.
- Regarding the Info Points in Hungary and their role in the communication activities, the authorities of the programme pointed out that they are coordinated by the Joint Secretariat and undertake helpdesk activities, participate in project idea generation sessions, and that their personnel is involved in project evaluation activities. At the moment, the Info Points from Hungary have a representative in each county.

The analysis of the programme authorities' opinion on how to identify and use the preferred information channels

- According to the feedback sent to the Managing Authority and to the Joint Secretariat by the potential beneficiaries of the programme, the preferred information channels are represented by the information and communication events and online communication channels (newsletter, programme's website, and e-mail communication).

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
At the level of the JS, a series of actions have already been implemented to enhance the communication activities with potential beneficiaries, such as increasing the online newsflash and implementing direct communication with applicants through the eMS platform.	The authorities involved in the management of the programme have started implementing the recommendations contained by the evaluation report, thus confirming the utility and applicability of the evaluation.	Not the case.
Potential beneficiaries suggest that online communication is the preferred mean for receiving information, in comparison to the printed materials.	High importance should be allocated to optimization of online tools and means of communication.	Increasing the number of newsflashes and newsletters transmitted to the potential beneficiaries' contact database, which exists at the level of the JS.