FAQ Project Closure

1. Our final conference takes place one month before the project end date. Is that a problem?

The project end date is the cut-off date for the eligibility of expenditure. Any costs that are paid after this date cannot be reported. If a final conference is scheduled one month before the project end date, there is a big risk that the related invoices are not received in time and the last payments are not made before the project end date. The costs would then be ineligible and would have to be borne by the partners with their own resources. Therefore, we recommend that you give yourself (and your partners) enough time to close the project and do not schedule the finalisation of actual activities and outputs too close to the project end date. Bear in mind that the administrative closure (last payments, preparation of the last progress report and final report, first level control) often requires more time than expected. We usually recommend reserving a period of 3 months for this. No project extension will be granted beyond 31/12/2014.

2. My auditor will only check and certify the expenditure after the project end date. Are there exceptions for these costs and can we still report them?

No! The project end date is the cut-off date for all expenditure and activities. This means that you must not only have paid out the expenditure by this date but also that the activity must have been finalised. In other words, you cannot make advance payments for the first level controller, if the actual checks are done only after the project end date.

3. The preparation of the last progress report and final report, will it require a lot of time at lead partner level?

From our experience, this depends very much on the responsiveness of the partners. All partners will need to work on the finalisation of the project with at least the same commitment as they did with the implementation of the project. However, projects often have to face a situation where there are fewer resources available in terms of time and staff, both on partner and lead partner level. This can easily result in severe delays. Be prepared by allocating enough time and staff resources to the closure of the project, also after the official end date. The failure to do so will almost certainly delay the final payment to the project. We also advise establishing a timetable to clearly define by when partners are expected to submit their reports to their first level controllers and by when their control confirmations must be received by you. You should monitor very closely that all partners adhere to this timetable.

4. One of our partners wants to claim more than the allowed 10%/EUR 20,000 overspending and we have a big underspending in the project. Can we still do something about this?

Remember that you only have one possibility to undertake a major budget change, i.e. to shift up to 20% of the total project budget. Whereas we recommend that such a budget change is not done too early during the project lifetime, a request for change procedure has to be started and finalised while the project is still running. <u>You cannot apply for a budget change after the project end date.</u> Budget changes can be lengthy: allow enough time for the procedure. Make sure that all partners communicate their expenditures to you in time so that you are aware of any potential need for a budget change.

5. We have to submit the report in one month but we still have not received many partner reports and documents. Many have asked for more time – can we ask for an extension?

Keep the deadlines! The programme has a final cut-off date after which we will not be able to give further extensions: <u>progress reports that are received after 1 July 2015 will not be considered and the expenditure will be lost.</u> The same applies for individual partner expenditure in case the signed and, if applicable, validated control confirmations are not received in time. No expenditure can be added later on in the monitoring process. Adhere to the pre-set deadlines, i.e. submit the report three months after the project end date and carefully check that all annexes such as partner control confirmations are in line with the programme rules. Set clear deadlines for your partners from the beginning. Keep in regular contact with them, try to identify the reason for the delay and then agree on a solution. If you have not heard back from a partner, send them an official communication, which should include final deadlines as well as consequences if deadlines are not respected, e.g. the exclusion of expenditure.

6. While compiling the progress report I realise that the information provided on activities/finances by my partners are not entirely clear to me. Can I still include them in the progress report?

The last progress report is not different to previous reports: all questions have to be clarified before submission. It is your task as the lead partner to have an understanding of the activities carried out by all partners and of their reported expenditure. You have to be in a position to judge if the activities/expenditure are in line with the project's objectives and the application form. The last progress report tends to be more extensive and you might have to double your efforts to make the report self-explanatory. Don't forget that after the submission of the progress report it may be more difficult to obtain answers from partners within a short time because people often have moved on to new tasks. Do not jeopardise the timely approval of the report by accumulating delays and seek a good understanding of all partners' reported activities and costs before submission.

7. One of my partners did not have an on-the-spot check during the project implementation. What do I do?

On-the spot checks are an obligation: a project cannot be closed if there is no reassurance that this requirement has been respected. Remind your partners about this so that it does not turn into a problem at project closure. In some countries, these checks may also be done on a sample basis under certain conditions. Double-check the information in the programme manual (grey box on p.48) and get in contact with your finance officer at the JTS to discuss the situation if you are unsure. Check with partners who did not indicate any on-the-spot checks well in advance so that such a check can still be arranged before submission, should this be necessary. Do not wait for the clarifications to address this issue.

8. The project is over and the website is still costing us. Can we close it down?

No. The subsidy contract obliges you to keep the website accessible for further 5 years after the project end date. Remember that you will not be able to claim costs for activities that happen after the project end date. In other words, also prepayments for related hosting costs are not eligible and you will thus need to find alternative solutions. However, hosting does not need to cost much. Also keep in mind that the website will continue to be a valuable tool for the dissemination of your results: do not forget to include the latest information on the website, including, for example, the final publication.

9. Archiving of documents, what does it mean and is this important?

In fact this is very important! Bear in mind that a second level audit or a Commission audit can take place after the closure of the project and that the relevant documents need to be available. The lead partner principle will still be applied even after the project has ended. The lead partner has to make sure that project relevant documents are stored by all partners. We recommend checking whether your partnership agreement covers this issue (in the template provided by the programme this point is under Article 3) and then to remind the partners about it. Over time, changes like mergers, legal status changes, etc. can occur in the partner organisations. For those cases, it is important that partners officially inform the lead partner about this change as long as the archiving period is still running. Documents have to be stored for at least 3 years after the European Commission has made the last payment to INTERREG IVC, independent of the fact when your project is closed. If, for example, this final payment is made in 2019, the documents have to be stored until 2022 (national rules might require even longer periods). The exact date will be communicated to you by the JTS as soon as we know it.

10. The first section of the final report is supposed to be filled in with information that is already reported in the different progress reports. Is this repetition necessary?

Yes. The final report is a document summarising the results and achievements of your project as a whole. This is different from the six-monthly information provided in the progress reports, where only the latest evolutions appear. The final report serves as a final document showing the overall picture of your project. It is important to remember that the information provided in the final report must be coherent with what has been reported in the progress reports throughout the project's lifetime. This is particularly important for the description of the 'Good practices transferred' and the 'Local/regional policies improved' in section 1.1 of the final report. The information provided on these two elements in the final report must coincide with what was reported in all previous progress reports. Let's take an example: in progress report 3 you have reported 1 good practice transferred, and in progress report 6 another 3 good practices transferred. This results in a total of 4 good practices transferred within the project lifetime. All the 4 good practices transferred should therefore be included and described in the final report. The final report has to be filled in the online form system, but a template can be downloaded at http://www.interreg4c.eu/projects/resources-for-project-partners/.

11. The contact person of one of our partners will leave their organisation at the end of the project. What do I do?

One of the most frequent problems is the information flow. You will need to have contact persons at partner level available beyond the project end date. The work might not be done once partners have submitted their individual reports to you. Take into consideration that several months may pass between the submission of the partners' documentation to you, the submission of the final report to the JTS and the first clarifications. It is therefore important that all partners indicate a person taking over the responsibility for the project. Keep in regular contact! This is in the interest of all partners: the failure to provide requested information might lead to the exclusion of expenditure from the report and will delay the payment procedure.