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Understanding Calls & Setting Project Objectives

Participant Workbook

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Pre-Workshop: Call Reading Guide

Read one of the assigned calls before the workshop.

Programme & Call ref: _____

Deadline: _____

1. What EU strategy or policy goal does this call serve?

2. What specific priorities or topics does this call fund?

3. What outcomes does the EC expect to see? (the "wish list")

4. Who can apply? (eligibility requirements)

5. How will proposals be scored? (award criteria + weights)

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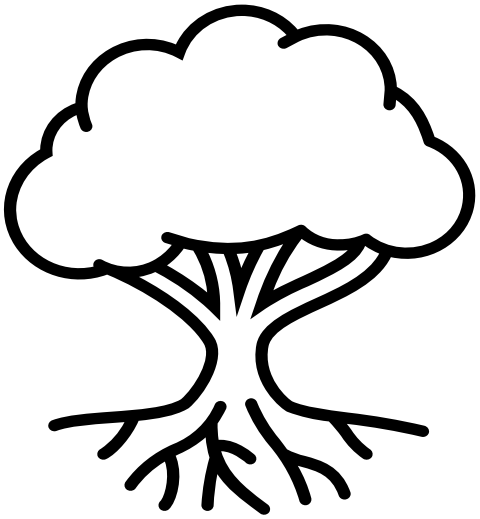
6. Budget, duration, co-financing?

7. Your questions / unclear points (bring to workshop)

Your Methodology Toolkit

Three tools that work together. Each answers a different question. You don't need all three for every project, but understanding them helps you think clearly.

1. Problem Tree — What's the problem?



The Problem Tree is a visual brainstorming tool. You draw it like an actual tree:

- The trunk is your core problem — the central issue you want to address.
- The roots are the causes — why does this problem exist? Dig into root causes, not symptoms.
- The branches are the effects — what happens because of this problem? Who suffers, and how?

Once you have your problem tree, you flip it into a solution tree. The root causes suggest your activities (what you'll do to address each cause). The core problem points to your objectives (the change you want to create). The direct effects, when reversed, become your outcomes (what improves for your target group), and the broader effects become your impact (long-term systemic change). Note that outputs — the tangible things your activities produce — don't come directly from the problem tree; you add those by asking "what will my activities create?" This is the analytical foundation for everything else.

In plain terms: if your problem is "maternal mortality is high in rural areas," the roots might be "lack of trained health workers" and "poor access to information." Flip those into activities: "train health workers" and "build an information platform." The objective becomes "reduce maternal mortality through improved care and information access."

2. Theory of Change — Why will this work?

The Theory of Change is a story — a logical chain that explains how your project leads to change. It has five links:

- Needs: What problem exists and for whom?
- Activities: What will you do about it?
- Outputs: What tangible things will you produce? (reports, tools, training sessions)
- Outcomes: What changes for your target group because of those outputs?
- Impact: What broader, long-term change does this contribute to?

The key test: can you explain why each step leads to the next? If training 100 teachers (activity) produces a curriculum guide (output), why would that improve student learning (outcome)? Your theory of change makes these connections explicit. If you can't explain the link, evaluators won't buy it either.

3. Logical Framework (LogFrame) — How will you prove it?

The Logical Framework is a structured matrix that EU applications often require. It has four columns:

- Objectives: what you want to achieve (at each level: overall, specific, results, activities)
- Indicators: how you'll measure success (concrete numbers, percentages, deliverables)
- Means of verification: where's the evidence? (surveys, reports, certificates, databases)
- Assumptions: what must hold true for your logic to work? (partners deliver, policy doesn't change)

Think of the LogFrame as the operational blueprint that sits behind your narrative. The Theory of Change tells the story; the LogFrame proves it's achievable and measurable. Many EU application forms have sections that directly map to LogFrame columns, so learning this structure saves you time when filling in forms.

How they fit together

In practice: start with the Problem Tree to understand the problem, use the Theory of Change to build your logic narrative and draft objectives, then use the LogFrame to structure your indicators and evidence. Problem Tree is the analysis, Theory of Change is the strategy, LogFrame is the proof.

Exercise 1: Fit Check & Problem Analysis

Workshop minutes 30–45 | Individual work

Part A: Fit Check Matrix

Compare what the call says with your project idea. Mark fit as ✓ / ~ / ✗.

Call Element	What the Call Says	Your Project Idea	Fit?
Priority / Topic			
Target Group			
Expected Outcomes			
Geographic Scope			
EU Added Value			

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Part B: Problem Tree

Sketch your problem tree below. Write the core problem in the centre, causes below, effects above.

Effects (what happens because of the problem):

CORE PROBLEM:

Causes (why does this problem exist):

Part C: From Problem Tree to Theory of Change

Your Problem Tree feeds into a Theory of Change, but it's not a simple one-to-one flip. Here's how the pieces translate:

ToC Element	Where it comes from	Your project
Needs	Your core problem + its causes. The problem tree IS your needs analysis.	
Activities	Flip the root causes: each cause suggests an action. "Lack of trained workers" → "Train workers."	
Outputs	The tangible products of your activities. What do the activities produce? (curriculum, app, report)	
Outcomes	Flip the direct effects: what changes for your target group? These are close to your specific objectives.	
Impact	Flip the broader effects: the long-term, systemic change. Close to your general objective.	

Notice: outputs don't come directly from the problem tree — they sit between activities and outcomes. Ask yourself: "When I do these activities, what concrete things will exist that didn't before?" Those are your outputs.

Exercise 2: Draft Your Objectives

Workshop minutes 45–65 | Individual drafting

Step 0: Choose Your Drafting Pathway

Your approach shapes how you start. Circle the one that fits your situation:

↓ TOP-DOWN: Start from the call	↑ BOTTOM-UP: Start from the need
1. Highlight call priorities & expected outcomes 2. Identify what the EC wants changed 3. Reverse-engineer objectives from those outcomes 4. Check: can you realistically deliver? 5. Refine wording to mirror the call	1. Define the problem (evidence + experience) 2. Map your theory of change 3. Draft objectives from the change you want 4. Check alignment with the call's priorities 5. Adapt wording to fit the call's framework
Best when responding to a specific call with clear, narrow priorities.	Best when you have a strong idea and need to find or adapt to a call.

My approach: ☐ Top-down ☐ Bottom-up ☐ Mix of both

General Objective

The broader change your project contributes to. 1 sentence, aligned with EU policy goals and call priorities.

Top-down hint: Look at the call's policy context and expected impact — your general objective should echo these.

Bottom-up hint: What is the big-picture change your project contributes to? Frame it in EU-relevant language.

Specific Objectives

What YOUR project will achieve. 2–3 objectives. Measurable, concrete, achievable within the project.

Top-down hint: Reverse-engineer from the call's expected outcomes. What must your project achieve for those outcomes to happen?

Bottom-up hint: Look at your ToC — what are the key changes between your activities and the impact? Those are your objectives.

Specific Objective 1:

Specific Objective 2:

Specific Objective 3 (optional):

SMART+ Self-Check

Criterion	Question	Your assessment
Specific	Clearly states what + for whom?	
Measurable	Can be assessed through indicators?	
Achievable	Realistic given budget & timeline?	
Relevant	Aligned with call priorities?	
Time-bound	Achievable within project duration?	
Evaluable	Could an evaluator score this?	

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Peer Review (minutes 65–80)

Swap with a partner. For each of their objectives, check:

- Is it an objective (describes change), not an activity or output?
- Does it align with what the call is asking for?
- Does the theory of change connect logically?
- Could an evaluator clearly score this?
- Is the language specific enough, or could it describe any project?

Notes from peer review:

Quick Reference: Checklists

Call Reading Checklist

1. Identify programme and call reference
2. Read policy context — what EU strategy does this serve?
3. List specific priorities and topics funded
4. Extract expected outcomes (the EC's wish list)
5. Map award criteria and their weights
6. Check eligibility (who, where, what)
7. Note budget, co-financing, timeline
8. Separate mandatory elements from desirable features
9. Assess fit with your idea using the matrix
10. Mirror the call's language in your objectives

Objective-Writing Checklist

1. 1 general objective (1 sentence, EU-goal aligned)
2. 2–4 specific objectives (concrete, measurable, project-level)
3. Each one is an objective, not an activity or output
4. SMART+ check applied to each
5. Aligned with call priorities and expected outcomes
6. Theory of change connects: problem → objectives → activities → impact
7. Uses the call's own terminology
8. Peer-checked: an evaluator could score this

EU Terminology — Quick Glossary

Term	What It Means in Practice
European Added Value	Results that couldn't be achieved by one country alone. Cross-border, scalable.
Sustainability	How results last after funding ends. Institutional embedding, open resources, policy uptake.
Impact	Long-term broader effect beyond direct beneficiaries. Systemic change.
Dissemination	Actively spreading results. Strategy + channels, not just a project website.
Exploitation	How results will be used. Business models, curricula integration, policy recommendations.
Horizontal Priorities	Cross-cutting themes (inclusion, digital, sustainability) to weave into any project.