

InterLoc is a project based on municipal partnerships within the EU. The aim of the project has been to gather knowledge and making it accessible in order to facilitate cross border cooperation between local authorities.

*"We use international cooperation as an everyday tool for developing our municipalities"*

## THEME: International Action Plans

International Action Plans are important results of the InterLoc project

The seven project partners have each developed an International Action Plan for the entire municipal organization and for a selected pilot department.

The experiences from developing and using international action plans are many and will be shared in this newsletter.

### The purpose of international action plans

International cooperation is new in many municipalities and in their individual departments, as well as to many municipal staffs. In this situation it is generally needed to identify the goals of the international cooperation, as well as define how the work should be organized, what kind of international work should be prioritized and what volume the international work should have.

An international action plan – as well as an international strategy – is first of all a foundation that can provide the framework and political support for international initiatives and cooperation.

**The obvious purpose is to provide direction for the international cooperation and describe the objectives.**



The action plan has also a role as a guideline and instruction on how to work internationally. Detailed descriptions may be helpful and important in order to reduce the barriers to international cooperation that often is seen among staff and leaders.

The planning document is also an information tool both internally and externally. Internally it will assist in gathering support from management and political levels and spread the work into the corners of the organization.

Externally, the action plan will inform to relevant actors and potential partners that the municipality is engaged in international cooperation, and is contributing to the branding of the municipality.

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## Preparing International Actions Plans

### The Proces

You can start international cooperation preparing an international action plan. But normally it is the other way around; you only prepare an action plan when you have gained some experiences. And, anyway, do not hesitate starting international cooperation because of lack of an international action plan or strategy.

The experience from Guldborgsund Municipality was that the need for an international strategy only developed after several years of international cooperation and implementation of EU funded projects. The need was to provide an overview of the international work, receive a clear political endorsement on the direction and spread international cooperation further into the core citizens-service departments.

The preparation of an international action plan or strategy is an iterative process starting from what is already on-going combined with what the international

coordinator / coordinator-team envisage for the international cooperation and the opinions of the top-level management.

Following steps has been experienced from developing the InterLoc-work:

1. Get the mandate to prepare an action plan (or strategy)
2. Inform all units that are supposed to use the action plan.
3. Develop and distribute a skeleton for the action plan
4. Obtain inputs to the content from all relevant departments/units

Use e.g. e-mails, round-table meetings and interviews in collecting the inputs. A SWOT analysis is a particular helpful starting point for inputs to the action plan. Give focus to those units and staffs that find international work interesting and fun.

5. Compile the text into a document
6. Conduct a formal hearing process for all relevant departments/units.
7. Submit the document for approval.

It is attempting to submit the action plan for approval at the nearest level of management. However, the document should be endorsed from the highest level in the municipality, e.g. the Board for Directors, the Political Executive Committee or even from the Municipal Council Assembly.

This is important for the authority of the document and for the function as an information tool.

### Content

The content of an action plan will depend on the specific purpose. Is it an overall guiding strategy covering the entire municipal organization? Is it a concrete stepwise action plan for a specific department? Or is it something in between?

In the InterLoc project the partners have developed a variety of planning documents for the international cooperation.

Many of them (both on municipal level and department level) comprise 2 – 3 pages stating the:

- Overall framework
- Objectives
- Tools for the cooperation
- List of actions (with tasks, dates and responsible units)

Sölvesborg Municipality has focused on the important function as a communication tool and has developed a communication plan for the development of the international cooperation.

Guldborgsund Municipality has prepared a 24-pages interna-

tional strategy for the entire municipality and a 2-pages international action plan for the Health and Care Department based on the international strategy and a specific SWOT analysis for the Health and Care Department.

### Experiences from International Action Plans

Most of the international action plans prepared as part of the InterLoc project are less than one year old. And the experiences of using them in daily work are still new.

One main experience is that the process itself of developing the Action Plan is very valuable: discussing the goals of the international cooperation, clarifying how it should be organised and which areas should have priority, and reaching agreement of directions.

Thus, even a very precise and elaborated International Action Plan has only a limited value if it is merely developed by the International Team and just approved by the Head of the Team (“a hidden Action Plan”).



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Marie Eriksson, Project Manager, InterLoc Project