# Proposal writing advice
Project coordination: management structure

It's usually a good idea to include a figure to show your planned management structure (if the proposal template allows for this).

The example below is a typical structure for a medium-large collaborative research project but could be easily adapted to fit other project sizes and types.

When designing such a figure, the critical thing to remember is to include every management group and show how they relate to each other (with arrows).
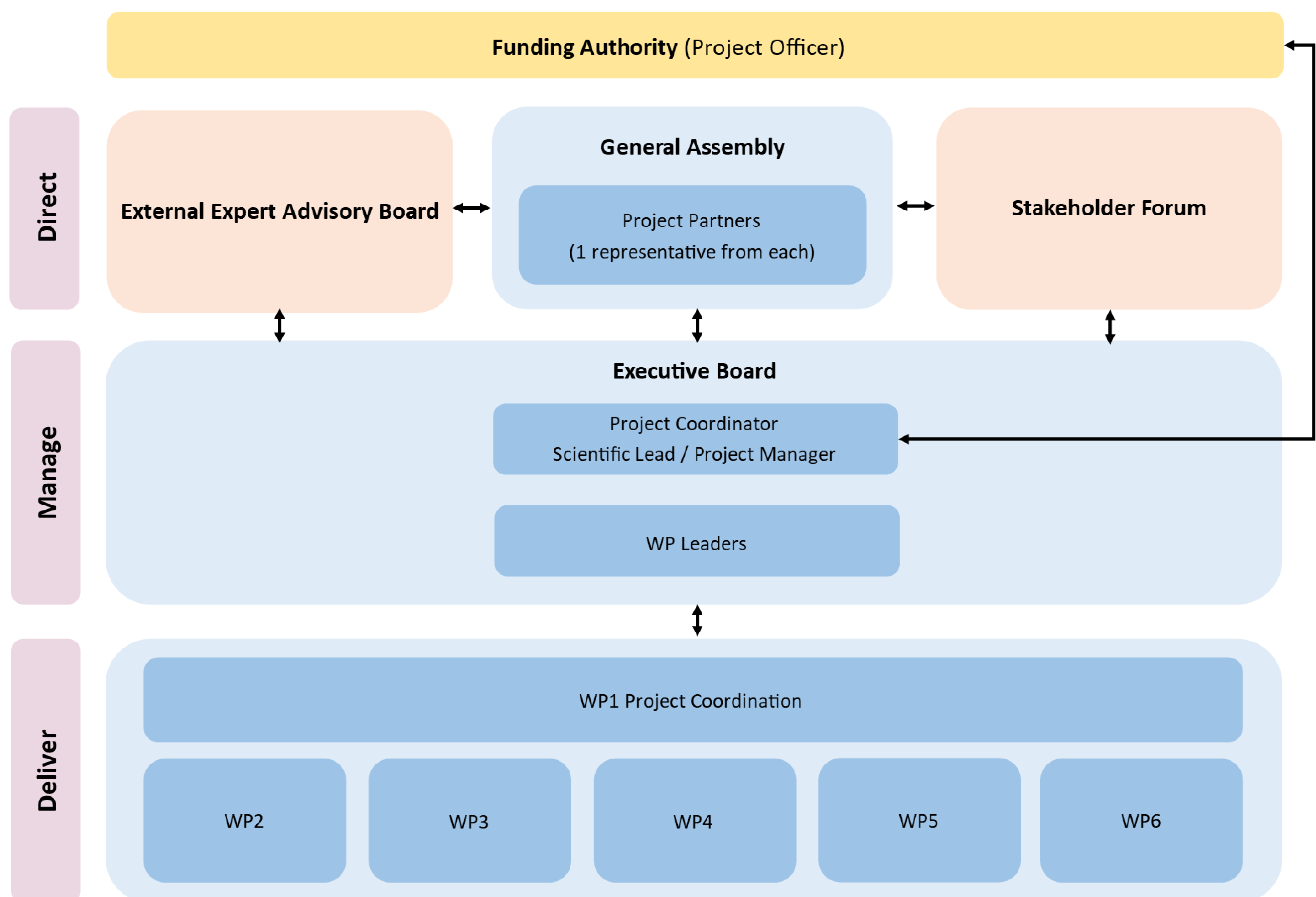
This example structure generally conforms to the <u>DESCA Model Consortium Agreement</u> - the most common model used in EU projects, but adaptable to any collaborative project.

As well as signing a Grant Agreement with the funder, collaborative projects are often required to sign a Consortium Agreement between the project partners.

Using a management structure from a template (such as DESCA) in your proposal can make the process of preparing the Consortium Agreement easier.

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If possible, you should describe all of the management groups or roles represented in your management structure figure in your proposal text. Where relevant, explain:

- who is involved
- what their responsibilities are
- how decisions will be made
- how often they will meet

For the example structure on the previous page, we have provided some details below on how you could describe each of the groups/roles - generally conforming to the DESCA model.

General Assembly

Who is involved?
One person from each partner organisation. The chair is the Project Coordinator.

What are the responsibilities?
The General Assembly is the ultimate decision-making body for the project. They monitor and control project strategy (e.g. verifying achieved objectives and controlling deviations), review and take decisions on changes to the consortium, and resolve any disputes that may arise within the project.

How will decisions be made?
By a majority of two-thirds, with each partner having one vote. At least two-thirds of the General Assembly must be present for a vote to take place.

How often will they meet?
At least once per year. Also, upon the request of the Executive Board, or at least one-third of the members of the General Assembly.

Executive Board

Who is involved?
The WP Leaders. The chair is the Project Coordinator.

What are the responsibilities?
The Executive Board is the supervisory body for the execution of the project. They implement decisions made by the General Assembly, review risks and mitigations, applying contingency measures and corrective actions where necessary, ensure the effective operational management of all project activities, and monitor the project budget and progress.

How will decisions be made?
By a majority of two-thirds, with each member having one vote. At least two-thirds of the Executive Board must be present for a vote to take place.

How often will they meet?
At least quarterly. Also, upon the request by any member of the Executive Board.

The DESCA model indicates that the General Assembly will appoint members of the Executive Board. Instead, we suggest that it is formed of the WP Leaders and Project Coordinator - this is a very common structure.

In medium-large projects, it is common to have both a General Assembly and an Executive Board. The General Assembly ensures that all partners have a voice when they are not all represented by WP Leaders.

In smaller projects, it is common to forego the Executive Board and have the General Assembly span both the 'manage' and 'direct' levels of the structure. This makes good administrative sense if WP Leaders represent all partners or there are a small number of partners in total. If you decide to have only a General Assembly, remember to incorporate the responsibilities of the Executive Board into the description of the General Assembly.

Project Coordinator

Who is involved?
In our example, this role is split in two - a Scientific Lead (usually the principal researcher) and a Project Manager (e.g. a department administrator or postdoc). This is not always the case and can be a single person, or sometimes several people.

What are the responsibilities?
In our example, where the role is split, the Scientific Lead is the promoter and supervisor of the overall project progress. The Project Manager is the administrator of the day-to-day operational activities of the project. Overall, the Project Coordinator is responsible for monitoring compliance of partners with their obligations to the project, reviewing and submitting periodic/final reports, deliverables and financial statements to the funder, administering advance/final payments from the funder to partners according to the Grant Agreement, and any other tasks defined by the Grant/Consortium Agreements.

Many larger projects split a full-

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time coordinator role, for example, into a Scientific Lead and a Project Manager. We recommend this approach, but you must judge what is best for your project and the available budget. Remember, it must be convincing to an evaluator.

Please note that in Consortium/Grant Agreements, 'The Coordinator' usually refers to the coordinating organisation (i.e. SLU). Therefore, it does not matter from a contractual standpoint whether you split the role or not. You should also be aware that under some grants, for example, European Partnerships, each partner is responsible for communicating with and reporting to their own national funder - rather than via the Project Coordinator.

Work Package Leaders

Who is involved?
Each WP should have one named lead organisation (or individual - if the funder prefers that or it makes sense for your project).

What are the responsibilities?
To coordinate WP activities, manage the WP to agreed tolerances concerning budget and schedule (deliverables, milestones, and objectives), report progress to the Project Coordinator regularly, organise and facilitate regular WP meetings, and monitor/ manage risks within their WP.

How will decisions be made?
The General Assembly may set tolerances within which WP Leaders have decision-making authority over their own WPs.

The role of the WP Leaders is not included in the DESCA model, so you can modify the description to fit your project. Ensure that you include anything unique to your project set-up - for example, you may have co-leads for your WPs. You may also have other leadership roles to support the WPs, for instance, leaders within countries or case studies. Make sure to include them in your management structure figure and under a sub-heading of their own.

External Expert Advisory Board(s)

Who is involved?
Formally appointed by the Executive Board. The number of boards/participants depends on your project - partner organisations cannot employ board members. Aim for a board that is interdisciplinary, international, and gender-balanced.

What are the responsibilities?
To assist and facilitate decisions made by the General Assembly, support the principles of collaboration, and advise on the project's direction/strategy.

How often will they meet?
They should be invited to the General Assembly meetings but have no voting rights.

It is not mandatory to have an advisory board - it depends on the size and context of your project. It is usually a very positive feature, a good way to include individuals from international organisations or who are renowned in their field of expertise and can add an element of independent evaluation of progress throughout the project lifetime. They can also add an extra dimension to the project's dissemination activities by providing access to their professional networks. If you plan to have an advisory board, describe the types of individuals that will be involved, or list those who have already committed their involvement.

It is usual that advisory board members cannot receive payment for their participation in project meetings, but that they can be reimbursed for travel costs. It is important to check the funding rules in each case.

Some projects will have a single, interdisciplinary advisory board, while others may have multiple smaller boards for specific purposes - for example, to review scientific progress, gender perspectives, or innovation exploitation potential.

Stakeholder Forum(s)

Who is involved?
Individuals or organisations representing groups who influence or are influenced by your research. The number of forums/participants depends on your project - it is typical for the forum(s) to continuously accept new members and adapt to the project's changing needs. Aim for multi-actor, international, and gender balanced.

What are the responsibilities?
To support the principles of

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collaboration and knowledge sharing, provide a real-world perspective on project strategies and progress, and offer the consortium the opportunity to ensure that project outputs are suitable for application across the broadest possible range.

How often will they meet?
Once per year, in advance of the General Assembly meeting. However, the forum can also be used as a communication and dissemination route and as a network of 'informal partners' who can co-create and co-own the project results with you. The Executive Board and the WP Leaders can engage with forum members on an ad hoc basis, as required.

It is generally not mandatory to have a Stakeholder Forum - it depends on the size and context of your project. Often, it is a requirement that you actively engage with relevant actors outside of your project consortium - and a forum can be one tool to achieve this. If you plan to have a forum, describe the types of organisations that will be involved, or list those who have already committed their involvement. There are many ways to engage with stakeholders, and you must tailor your approach to fit your unique project.

More information

- DESCA Model Consortium Agreement

  Section 6 of DESCA contains a description of the Governance Structure for the project. The examples we have used above generally conform to this suggested governance structure.

  http://www.desca-agreement.eu/

- Proposal writing advice

  The SLU Grants Office have developed guidance on writing good proposals focusing on various cross-cutting issues, including project coordination.

  https://internt.slu.se/en/support-services/external-funding/proposal-writing-advice/

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