

1 **ERNEST - European Researchers Night Escape**
2 **Science Team**

3 Project Management Handbook

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9 **Disclaimer**

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Deliverable

This document establishes the Project Management Handbook for the ERNEST project. Its primary purpose is to define the governance framework, management structures, roles and responsibilities, and operational procedures necessary to ensure the effective and coherent implementation of the project.

The document provides a common reference for all beneficiaries (BE) and associated partners supporting efficient coordination across the consortium and ensuring alignment with the project objectives. In particular, it formalizes procedures for decision-making, internal communication and reporting.

Given the distributed and highly interactive nature of the ERNEST activities—including multi-site events, school engagement actions, and digital platform operations—this handbook plays a key role in ensuring consistency, quality, and scalability across all participating institutions.

1.2 Relation to Grant Agreement

This deliverable is developed in accordance with the Grant Agreement No. 101305138, and is part of Work Package 5 (Management), which defines the overall governance and coordination framework of the project.

It defines the management bodies and relationships, in particular the structures and procedures outlined for project coordination, work package (WP) integration, and stakeholder engagement. The handbook reflects the multi-level governance model of the project, including the Project Coordination Team (PCT), the Work Package Leaders Group (WPLG), and the Steering Committee (SC), as well as the coordination mechanisms established across work packages.

Furthermore, this document ensures that project implementation complies with Horizon Europe and MSCA-CITIZENS requirements, including obligations related to reporting, dissemination, ethical standards, and data protection.

1.3 Scope of the Handbook

This handbook applies to all BE and associated partners involved in the ERNEST project and covers the full duration of the action (2 years).

It defines the operational framework for project management, including:

- governance structure and decision-making processes;
- roles and responsibilities of consortium members;
- internal and external communication procedures;
- coordination mechanisms across WPs;
- monitoring, reporting, and quality assurance processes;

- risk management and conflict resolution mechanisms.

The handbook is intended to support the day-to-day management and implementation of project activities, ensuring a consistent approach across all participating institutions and countries. This document complements, but does not replace, the legal provisions set out in the Grant Agreement and the Consortium Agreement, which remain the binding framework governing the project. The handbook may be updated during the project lifecycle to reflect significant changes in procedures or organizational structure.

2 Project Overview

2.1 Project Objectives

The ERNEST (European Researchers Night Escape Science Team) project aims to establish a European network of institutions and researchers using scientific escape rooms as innovative tools for public engagement with science. By combining gamification, experiential learning, and direct interaction with researchers, the project seeks to bring science closer to citizens and stimulate interest in research careers, particularly among young people.

The main objectives of the project are:

- **Network creation:** Establish a European network of institutions engaged in science communication through escape rooms, supported by a dedicated online platform for resource sharing and collaboration.
- **Co-creation of scientific escape rooms:** Design, test, and implement interactive, scientifically accurate escape room scenarios addressing a wide range of disciplines and societal challenges.
- **Public engagement and inclusivity:** Reach diverse audiences, including youth, families, and underserved communities, through accessible and engaging activities implemented across multiple locations and formats.
- **Impact evaluation and dissemination:** Assess the effectiveness of the activities through structured evaluation methods and disseminate results, methodologies, and resources following open science principles.
- **Dissemination and communication:** Promote project results and ensure wide accessibility and replicability of materials, contributing to long-term impact beyond the project duration.

These objectives are fully aligned with the MSCA-CITIZENS goals.

2.2 Consortium Structure

The ERNEST consortium is composed of a multidisciplinary and international partnership including research institutions, universities, and science communication organizations. The consortium brings together complementary expertise in physics, astrophysics, environmental science, digital technologies, education, and public engagement.

128 The project is coordinated by the Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (INFN), with the
 129 participation of major national and international research organizations, universities, and spe-
 130 cialized partners in science communication and outreach. These include institutions such as
 131 INAF, CNR, several Italian universities, and international partners such as the CRNS (France)
 132 and the University of Manchester (UK). The list of all BE is reported in Table 1. The BE
 133 representative of each institute is chosen by its members participating in the ERNEST project.

Participant No.	Participant Organization Name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare – INFN	Italy
2	Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica – INAF	Italy
3	Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche – CNR	Italy
4	Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet – LLR, CNRS	France
5	Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro – UniBa	Italy
6	Università di Pisa – UniPi	Italy
7	Università di Pavia – UniPv	Italy
8	Università degli Studi di Perugia – UniPg	Italy
9	The University of Manchester – UniMan	UK
10	Università del Piemonte Orientale – UniUPO	Italy
11	Università degli Studi di Torino – UniTo	Italy
12	LAMA Società Cooperativa Impresa Sociale – LAMA	Italy

Table 1: ERNEST Project Participants

134 This diverse composition ensures:

- 135 • strong scientific excellence across multiple disciplines;
- 136 • extensive experience in public engagement and European Researchers’ Night (ERN) ac-
 137 tivities;
- 138 • established connections with schools, stakeholders, and local communities;
- 139 • capacity to operate across multiple countries and cultural contexts.

140 In addition, the consortium is supported by a broad ecosystem of stakeholders, including
 141 schools, teachers, cultural institutions, media organizations, policymakers, and private partners,
 142 contributing to the scalability and sustainability of the project.

143 2.3 Work Package Structure

144 The ERNEST project is structured into five interconnected WPs, aligned with the prescriptions
 145 of the European call, each addressing a key aspect of the project implementation:

- 146 • **WP1 – Awareness Campaign:** Establishes the communication and outreach frame-
 147 work of the project, including visual identity, digital presence, media engagement, training
 148 of facilitators, and promotion of flagship events. It supports all other WPs by ensuring
 149 visibility and audience engagement.
- 150 • **WP2 – Activities during the NIGHT:** Represents the operational core of the project,
 151 focusing on the design, development, and implementation of scientific escape rooms during

152 European Researchers' Night events across multiple locations, including both in-person
153 and online formats.

- 154 • **WP3 – Researchers at Schools:** Extends project activities into educational settings,
155 involving teachers and students in co-creation processes, training activities, and school-
156 based implementations of escape room experiences.
- 157 • **WP4 – Impact Assessment:** Defines and implements the evaluation framework of
158 the project, including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), data collection, analysis, and
159 continuous feedback mechanisms to assess and improve project outcomes.
- 160 • **WP5 – Management:** Provides the overall governance and coordination framework of
161 the project, ensuring effective planning, monitoring, financial management, risk mitiga-
162 tion, and integration across all work packages.

163 These WPs are highly interdependent and are coordinated through shared tools, regular
164 communication, and structured management processes to ensure coherence, efficiency, and
165 achievement of project objectives. Participation of the ERNEST members in the WPs is on
166 a voluntary basis, depending on the expertise and preference of every member. Every work
167 package is coordinate by one or two work package leaders (WPL), chosen by the WP members
168 and endorsed by the Steering Committee. The WP leader coordinates the work of the work
169 package and reports to the Steering Committee.

170 3 Visual Identity

171 The ERNEST project adopts a unified visual identity to ensure consistency and recognizabil-
172 ity across all communication and dissemination activities. The project logo, inspired by the
173 narrative concept of “ERNEST the quantum cat,” represents the creativity, curiosity, and en-
174 gagement at the core of the European Researchers' Night Escape Science Team. The official
175 black-and-white version of the logo is shown in Figure 1; additional colour variants are provided
176 in the project's communication toolkit.



Figure 1: Official ERNEST project logo (black-and-white version).

177 3.1 Logo Usage Guidelines

178 To maintain a coherent project identity, all partners must adhere to the following rules when
179 using the ERNEST logo:

- 180 • Only the official logo files provided by the PCT may be used. Partners may not alter,
181 redraw, or recreate the logo.
- 182 • Colour, black-and-white, and inverted versions may be used depending on context, but no
183 other modifications with respect to the official versions (e.g. colour changes, distortions,
184 filters) are permitted.
- 185 • Adequate clear space must be maintained around the logo to ensure legibility and visual
186 impact. The minimum recommended padding is equal to the height of the logo symbol.
- 187 • The logo must be placed in a prominent and unobstructed position on all public-facing
188 materials, including presentations, posters, digital content, educational resources, and
189 promotional items.
- 190 • The ERNEST logo must always appear together with the EU emblem and funding ac-
191 knowledgment in accordance with Horizon Europe visibility requirements.

192 These rules apply to all communication, dissemination, and outreach materials produced
193 within the project. Questions regarding logo usage or requests for alternative formats must be
194 directed to the Communication Manager.

195 The grant agreement number must be also cited in all articles and presentations.

196 **4 Governance and Decision-Making**

197 **4.1 Governance Bodies**

198 The governance of the ERNEST project is structured to ensure efficient coordination, transpar-
199 ent decision-making, and effective implementation of activities across all partners. The project
200 adopts a multi-level governance model composed of the following bodies:

- 201 • Project Coordinator Team (PCT)
- 202 • Work Package Leaders Group (WPLG)
- 203 • Steering Committee (SC)

204 These bodies operate in a coordinated manner to ensure both strategic oversight and oper-
205 ational efficiency, in line with the structure defined in WP 5 (Management).

206 **4.2 Roles of Governance Bodies**

207 **Steering Committee (SC)**

208 The SC is responsible for the operational and strategic coordination of the project. It includes
209 the Project Coordinator and at least one representative from each BE, including WPLG and
210 PCT. The SC monitors project progress, ensures coordination across WPs. It plays a key role in
211 ensuring coherence between technical activities, outreach actions, and impact objectives. The
212 SC meets every month in occasion of the "ERNEST-Days". The SC is chaired by the ERNEST
213 Project Coordinator.

214 **Project Coordinator Team (PCT)**

215 The Project Coordinator Team is responsible for the overall management and external repre-
216 sentation of the project. Acting as the main interface with the European Commission, the PCT
217 ensures compliance with the Grant Agreement, oversees administrative and financial manage-
218 ment, and coordinates reporting activities. The PCT also facilitates communication among
219 partners and ensures the timely execution of project tasks and deliverables.

220 The Project Coordinator Team membership is chosen by the Project Coordinator and en-
221 dorsed by the BE board. The Project Coordinator, leading the PCT, was established at the
222 moment of writing the proposal. In the event that the Project Coordinator becomes unavailable,
223 a successor shall be elected by the Board of Beneficiaries (BEB).

224 **Work Package Leaders Group (WPLG)**

225 WPLG is responsible for the implementation of their respective WPs. They coordinate the
226 activities within their WP, monitor progress against objectives and milestones, and ensure the
227 timely delivery of outputs. WPLG also contributes to cross-WP coordination, working closely
228 with the PCT and other WPs to ensure integration and consistency across project activities.
229 The WPLG meets every two weeks.

230 **4.3 Decision-Making Procedures**

231 Decision-making within the ERNEST project follows principles of transparency, inclusiveness,
232 and efficiency. Decisions are normally taken by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached,
233 a vote may be held, with each BE having one vote. The voting body is the beneficiaries board
234 (BEB) where each BE is represented by its leader and presided by the Project Coordinator. In
235 case of vote each institute leader has one vote. In case of parity, the Project Coordinator may
236 also cast a vote.

237 Decisions are adopted by simple majority unless otherwise specified in the Consortium Agree-
238 ment. A quorum is considered reached when at least two-thirds of the beneficiaries are repre-
239 sented.

240 The Steering Committee handles day-to-day strategic and operational decisions. It prepares
241 proposals and ensures their implementation. Decisions within the SC are preferably taken by
242 consensus; if needed, a simple majority vote applies.

243 The Project Coordinator is empowered to take operational decisions necessary for the day-
244 to-day management of the project, provided these do not affect the overall scope, budget dis-
245 tribution, or contractual obligations.

246 An escalation mechanism is in place to resolve issues efficiently:

- 247 1. Issues are first addressed at the WP level;
- 248 2. If unresolved, they are escalated to the SC;

249 **4.4 Conflict of Interest Policy**

250 All project participants are committed to acting in the best interest of the ERNEST project
251 and in compliance with the principles of integrity, transparency, and impartiality. A conflict
252 of interest is defined as any situation where a participant's personal, institutional, or financial

253 interests could compromise, or appear to compromise, their objectivity in the execution of
254 project tasks or decision-making processes.

255 All members of the governance bodies are required to:

- 256 • declare any potential conflict of interest without delay;
- 257 • refrain from participating in discussions or decisions where such conflicts exist;
- 258 • ensure that decisions are taken in an objective and impartial manner.

259 The PCT is responsible for assessing and managing conflict of interest situations. When
260 necessary, the issue may be escalated to the SC for resolution. This policy is implemented in
261 accordance with the provisions of the Grant Agreement.

262 5 Roles and Responsibilities

263 5.1 Key Roles

264 The successful implementation of the ERNEST project relies on a clear definition of roles and
265 responsibilities across the consortium. Each participant contributes according to its expertise,
266 ensuring effective coordination, high-quality outputs, and alignment with project objectives.

Role	Responsibilities
Project Coordinator Team (PCT)	Overall scientific, administrative, and financial coordination of the project. Acts as the main interface with the European Commission. Ensures compliance with the Grant Agreement, supervises reporting activities, monitors progress across work packages, and facilitates communication among partners.
Beneficiaries (BE)	Implement project tasks as defined in the Description of the Action. Contribute to deliverables, participate in meetings, provide data for reporting and evaluation, and ensure alignment with project objectives and timelines.
Work Package Leaders Group (WPLG)	Lead the implementation of their respective Work Packages. Coordinate tasks and partners within the WP, monitor progress against milestones and deliverables, ensure quality of outputs, and report to the PCT.
Task Leaders	Coordinate specific tasks within WPs, ensuring timely execution, collaboration among contributing partners, and delivery of expected results. Support the WPLG in operational management.

Communication Manager (WP1 Lead)	Oversees communication, dissemination, and outreach activities. Ensures a consistent project identity, manages digital platforms and media engagement, coordinates public events, and supports partners in communication activities in line with EU visibility requirements.
Impact and Evaluation Manager (WP4 Lead)	Designs and implements the project evaluation framework, including KPIs and data collection tools. Monitors project impact, analyzes results, and provides feedback to improve activities. Ensures compliance with ethical standards and data protection regulations.
Technical and Content Contributors	Researchers and experts contributing to the design and implementation of scientific escape rooms and related activities. Ensure scientific accuracy, innovation, and alignment with societal challenges.
Facilitators and Trainers	Deliver escape room activities, workshops, and training sessions. Engage directly with participants, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and high-quality user experience.

267 5.2 RACI Matrix

268 To ensure clarity in responsibilities and accountability, the ERNEST project adopts a RACI
 269 (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) model for key management and operational
 270 activities.

- 271 • **Responsible (R):** Executes the task
- 272 • **Accountable (A):** Ultimately answerable for the task
- 273 • **Consulted (C):** Provides input and expertise
- 274 • **Informed (I):** Kept informed of progress and outcomes

Activity	PCT	WPLG	BEs	SC
Overall project coordination	A	R	I	C
WP implementation	C	A/R	R	I
Deliverables preparation	C	A/R	R	I
Communication and dissemination	C	A	R	I
Escape room development (WP2/WP3)	I	A/R	R	I
Impact evaluation (WP4)	C	A	R	I
Reporting to EC	A	C	R	I
Financial management	A	C	R	I

Risk management	A	R	C	I
Strategic decision-making	C	R	I	A
Conflict resolution	R/A	C	I	A

275 This structured allocation of responsibilities ensures transparency, avoids overlaps, and sup-
276 ports efficient coordination across all project activities. The RACI framework is regularly
277 reviewed and may be refined during the project lifecycle to reflect evolving needs.

278 5.3 Working Groups

279 To support efficient coordination and targeted implementation of project activities, the ERNEST
280 consortium establishes thematic Working Groups (WGs). These groups bring together experts
281 from relevant partners to address specific operational, scientific, or communication needs that
282 extend across WPs.

283 Working Groups serve as collaborative structures designed to:

- 284 • address specialised topics requiring cross-partner expertise;
- 285 • facilitate harmonisation of methodologies, tools, and procedures;
- 286 • support WPLG in the execution of complex or transversal tasks;
- 287 • accelerate decision-making through focused discussion and expert input;
- 288 • improve consistency and quality across multi-site activities.

289 Each Working Group:

- 290 • includes representatives from partners with relevant expertise;
- 291 • is coordinated by a designated WG Lead appointed by the PCT in consultation with the
292 Work Package Leaders;
- 293 • may involve additional members on an ad hoc basis depending on needs.

294 Working Groups operate according to the following principles:

- 295 • Meetings are held regularly or as required by the project timeline.
- 296 • Minutes and action points are documented and stored in the shared project repository.
- 297 • WG Leads report progress and recommendations to the WPLG.
- 298 • Issues requiring strategic decisions are escalated to the SC.

299 Depending on project needs, the consortium may activate several WGs, such as:

- 300 • **Scientific Content WG** — coordination of scientific accuracy, puzzles, educational
301 value, and thematic coherence across escape rooms.

- 302 • **Digital and Platform WG** — management of digital tools, web site, platform develop-
303 ment, and technical support.
- 304 • **Communication and Outreach WG** — harmonization of communication materials,
305 branding, logo usage, and outreach strategies.
- 306 • **Evaluation and Data WG** — coordination of data collection, impact assessment pro-
307 tocols, and alignment with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements.

308 Working Groups may be created, merged, or discontinued during the project life-cycle based
309 on evolving needs, with approval from the PCT and notification to the SC.

310 6 Communication and Reporting

311 6.1 Internal Communication

312 Effective internal communication is essential to ensure coordination across the distributed and
313 multidisciplinary ERNEST consortium. A structured communication framework is established
314 to facilitate information exchange, support decision-making, and ensure alignment across all
315 WPs.

316 The project adopts a combination of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools,
317 including:

- 318 • regular virtual meetings (e.g., monthly SC meetings, bi-weekly WPLG meeting, WP-level
319 meetings);
- 320 • collaborative platforms (e.g., shared document repositories, version-controlled storage sys-
321 tems, SharePoint hosted by INFN);
- 322 • instant communication tools (e.g., mailing lists (INFN egroup), chat platforms (matter-
323 most));
- 324 • a centralized project calendar for coordination of activities and deadlines.

325 A shared digital workspace is used to store all project-related documents, templates, and
326 outputs, ensuring accessibility and transparency among partners. Standardized templates are
327 adopted for reporting, meeting minutes, and deliverables to ensure consistency.

328 Meeting structures include:

- 329 • **SC meetings:** monthly meetings called ERNEST-days to review project progress and
330 address strategic issues;
- 331 • **WPLG meetings:** bi-weekly meetings to coordinate tasks and monitor progress;

332 All meetings host a round-table to review the progress of each component and are docu-
333 mented through minutes, which are shared with relevant partners and archived in the project
334 repository. The optimal meeting slots are chosen democratically through a poll. The schedules
335 will be adapted during the months accordingly to updated teaching and research schedules of
336 the participants.

337 **6.2 External Communication**

338 External communication is a core component of the ERNEST project, in line with the objectives
339 of MSCA-CITIZENS to bring research closer to society and enhance public engagement.

340 The project implements a comprehensive communication strategy aimed at:

- 341 • increasing public awareness of research and innovation;
- 342 • promoting the societal relevance of scientific work;
- 343 • engaging diverse audiences, including students, families, and underrepresented groups;
- 344 • fostering direct interaction between researchers and citizens.

345 Key communication channels include:

- 346 • a dedicated project website and digital platform;
- 347 • social media channels;
- 348 • press releases and media engagement;
- 349 • public events, including ERN activities;
- 350 • school-based initiatives and workshops.

351 All communication activities comply with Horizon Europe visibility requirements, including
352 the use of the EU emblem and appropriate acknowledgment of funding.

353 **6.3 Multilingual Communication**

354 Given the transnational nature of the ERNEST project, the use of multiple languages will be
355 managed in a structured and inclusive way in order to ensure both effective coordination among
356 partners and broad accessibility for target audiences. English will be adopted as the main
357 working language for project management activities, including official documentation, internal
358 reporting, deliverables, and communication with the European Commission. This will ensure
359 consistency, transparency, and mutual understanding across all project partners. Italian and
360 French will be used, where appropriate, for national and local communication activities, partic-
361 ularly in relation to outreach, dissemination, engagement with schools, citizens, stakeholders,
362 and local media. The use of national languages will facilitate wider participation and improve
363 the accessibility of project content for local audiences.

364 To guarantee coherence across languages, key project messages, templates, and communica-
365 tion materials will be prepared first in English and then adapted into Italian and French when
366 needed. Partners responsible for dissemination at local level will ensure the quality and accuracy
367 of translations, with particular attention to preserving the scientific meaning and institutional
368 tone of the original content. This multilingual approach will support both efficient consortium
369 coordination and effective public engagement, while respecting the linguistic diversity of the
370 participating countries.

371 **6.4 Dissemination and Exploitation**

372 Dissemination and exploitation activities are implemented in accordance with the project's
373 Dissemination and Communication Plan and Horizon Europe requirements.

374 The project ensures that results, methodologies, and materials (e.g., escape room scenarios,
375 educational content, evaluation tools) are made accessible to a broad audience through open
376 and reusable formats, whenever possible.

377 Dissemination activities include:

- 378 • publication of results and methodologies;
- 379 • sharing of tools and resources through the project platform;
- 380 • participation in scientific and outreach events;
- 381 • engagement with stakeholders, including schools, educators, policymakers, and cultural
382 institutions;
- 383 • participation in national and international conferences;
- 384 • publication of conference papers and proceedings.

385 Exploitation focuses on ensuring the sustainability and long-term impact of project results,
386 including the reuse and adaptation of escape room formats and educational approaches be-
387 yond the project duration. All dissemination and exploitation activities are coordinated with
388 WP1 (Awareness Campaign) and aligned with the project's open science approach and data
389 management policies.

390 **6.5 Intellectual Property and Content Sharing**

391 For the purposes of this project:

- 392 • **Results** refer to any output generated within the ERNEST project, including escape
393 room scenarios, narratives, puzzles, designs, and related materials ("Project Content");
- 394 • **Background** refers to pre-existing materials brought into the project by partners;
- 395 • **Access Rights** refer to rights to use Background or Results under the conditions defined
396 below.

397 **Ownership of Results**

398 Results are owned by the partner(s) generating them. Joint ownership applies where Results
399 are jointly developed and cannot be separated. All Results are made available to the consortium
400 for the implementation of the project and its activities.

401 **Access Rights**

402 Beneficiaries are granted royalty-free access rights to Results and, where needed, to Background
403 for the sole purpose of:

- 404 • implementing ERNEST project activities;
- 405 • carrying out dissemination and public engagement actions.

406 Such access rights are granted on a non-exclusive basis and limited to non-commercial use,
407 unless otherwise agreed.

408 **Use, Adaptation, and Sharing**

409 Partners may:

- 410 • use, reproduce, and adapt Project Content for project-related purposes;
- 411 • translate and localize content for different audiences;
- 412 • share Results within the consortium.

413 Adaptations must acknowledge the original authors and, where relevant, be shared with the
414 consortium.

415 **Dissemination and Open Access**

416 In line with Horizon Europe principles:

- 417 • Results may be disseminated through the project platform and public channels;
- 418 • Whenever possible, Results should be made available under open licenses (e.g., Creative
419 Commons), subject to agreement of the owning partner(s).

420 Dissemination must not compromise legitimate interests, including protection of intellectual
421 property or confidentiality. Results are primarily intended for non-commercial educational and
422 outreach purposes.

423 **Attribution and Visibility**

424 All use of Project Content must:

- 425 • acknowledge the ERNEST project;
- 426 • include EU funding acknowledgment in accordance with Horizon Europe requirements;
- 427 • credit the contributing partner(s).

428 **Free Access to Activities**

429 In line with the objectives of MSCA-CITIZENS and the public engagement mission of the
430 ERNEST project, all escape room activities developed and implemented within the project
431 shall be offered free of charge to participants. No fees or mandatory contributions may be
432 requested from visitors for accessing escape room experiences during project-related events,
433 including European Researchers' Night and associated school activities. This principle ensures
434 inclusivity, equal access, and broad participation, particularly among students, families, and
435 underrepresented groups.

436 **6.6 Reporting to the European Commission**

437 The ERNEST project complies with all reporting obligations defined in the Grant Agreement
438 and managed through the Funding & Tenders Portal.

- 439 • **Periodic Reports:** Submitted at the end of each reporting period, including both techni-
440 cal and financial components. These reports describe the progress of the project, achieve-
441 ments of milestones and deliverables, and use of resources.
- 442 • **Continuous Reporting (Funding & Tenders Portal):** Ongoing updates provided
443 throughout the project duration, including deliverables, milestones, publications, commu-
444 nication activities, and other relevant outputs.
- 445 • **Deliverables Submission:** All deliverables are prepared according to the agreed sched-
446 ule, reviewed internally for quality assurance, and submitted via the Funding & Tenders
447 Portal. Each deliverable includes appropriate documentation, version control, and ap-
448 proval by the responsible bodies.

449 The PCT oversees the reporting process, with contributions from all BEs. WPLG is respon-
450 sible for providing timely and accurate inputs related to their respective activities.

451 **7 Project Management Procedures**

452 **7.1 Planning and Scheduling**

453 The ERNEST project adopts a structured approach to planning and scheduling to ensure the
454 timely and effective implementation of all activities. A detailed project timeline is established
455 at the beginning of the project and regularly updated throughout its duration. This includes:

- 456 • definition of milestones to track key progress points;
- 457 • scheduling of deliverables in accordance with the Grant Agreement;
- 458 • coordination of activities across multiple locations and partners;
- 459 • alignment of project events with the ERN calendar.

460 WPLG is responsible for planning and coordinating activities within their respective WPs,
 461 ensuring consistency with the overall project timeline. A centralized project calendar is used to
 462 monitor deadlines, meetings, and key events. Regular progress reviews are conducted through
 463 SC and WP meetings, allowing for adjustments to planning when necessary. This flexible
 464 approach is particularly important given the distributed and event-driven nature of the project.

465 7.2 Monitoring and Risk Management

466 Continuous monitoring is implemented to track progress, identify deviations, and ensure that
 467 project objectives are achieved. Monitoring activities include:

- 468 • regular reporting from WPLG;
- 469 • tracking of milestones and deliverables;
- 470 • collection of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) defined in WP4;
- 471 • feedback from participants and stakeholders.

472 Risk management is an integral part of the project management process. Risks are identified
 473 at the outset and continuously updated throughout the project lifecycle. Each identified risk is
 474 assessed in terms of likelihood and potential impact, and appropriate mitigation measures are
 475 defined. Risks are regularly reviewed by the SC, and mitigation strategies are updated as needed.

Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation
Delays in development of escape room activities	Medium	Early planning, regular WP2/WP3 coordination meetings, use of shared resources and templates to accelerate development.
Low public participation in events	Medium	Strong communication campaign (WP1), engagement with schools and local stakeholders, use of multiple dissemination channels.
Coordination challenges across multiple sites	Medium	Use of centralized digital tools, regular meetings, clear roles and responsibilities, and standardized procedures.
Technical issues with digital platform or tools	Low	Use of tested platforms, technical support, and backup solutions for online activities.
Data collection or evaluation inconsistencies	Medium	Standardized data collection tools and protocols defined in WP4, training of partners.

478 **7.3 Quality Assurance**

479 Quality assurance in the ERNEST project ensures that all outputs, activities, and deliverables
480 meet high scientific, technical, and organizational standards.

481 A structured quality assurance process is implemented, including:

- 482 • internal review of deliverables before submission;
- 483 • validation of scientific content by experts;
- 484 • consistency checks across WPs;
- 485 • alignment with project objectives and EU requirements.

486 Each deliverable undergoes a multi-step review process:

- 487 1. Preparation by the responsible partner(s) under the supervision of the WPLG;
- 488 2. Internal review by at least one additional partner to ensure quality and completeness;
- 489 3. Final validation by the PCT;
- 490 4. Submission to the European Commission via the Funding & Tenders Portal.

491 In addition, feedback collected through WP4 (Impact Assessment) is used to continuously
492 improve the quality of project activities, particularly those involving public engagement and
493 educational content. This systematic approach ensures that the project maintains a high level
494 of quality and credibility throughout its implementation.

495 **7.4 Ethical Compliance**

496 All activities carried out within the ERNEST project shall comply with the highest ethical
497 standards and the applicable national and EU regulations. Partners must ensure that no ethical
498 risks arise from the implementation of project tasks, particularly in relation to interactions with
499 minors, public engagement events, and data collection activities. Any activity requiring ethical
500 approval shall be undertaken only after obtaining the relevant authorization from the competent
501 bodies. Partners are responsible for ensuring that ethical considerations are addressed during
502 planning, implementation, and reporting phases.

503 **7.5 GDPR Compliance**

504 The project is fully committed to complying with the EU General Data Protection Regulation
505 (GDPR). Any processing of personal data must be:

- 506 • lawful, fair, and transparent;
- 507 • limited to the minimum necessary for project purposes;
- 508 • collected for specified, explicit, and legitimate objectives;
- 509 • stored securely and accessed only by authorized personnel.

510 Each partner acts as a data controller for the data they collect and is responsible for main-
511 taining appropriate documentation and implementing security measures. Data breaches must
512 be reported immediately to the Project Coordinator and handled according to GDPR require-
513 ments.

514 **7.6 Data Management**

515 All project data shall be managed in line with FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable,
516 Reusable) principles whenever applicable. A shared repository is used for storing non-sensitive
517 internal documents, while sensitive data shall be kept in secured, access-controlled environments.

518 Data management procedures include:

- 519 • definition of data types and sources,
- 520 • secure storage and controlled access,
- 521 • clear retention periods,
- 522 • anonymization or pseudonymization when required,
- 523 • procedures for secure data disposal.

524 **8 Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

525 **8.1 Conflict Identification**

526 Conflicts may arise in relation to task ownership, resource allocation, delays, interpretation of
527 responsibilities, or disagreements on scientific and operational decisions. Partners are expected
528 to identify potential conflicts early and notify the relevant WPLG or the PCT.

529 **8.2 Resolution Procedure**

530 The project applies a structured approach to conflict resolution:

- 531 1. Conflicts should first be addressed at task or WP level.
- 532 2. If no agreement is reached, the issue is escalated to the SC.
- 533 3. The Steering Committee will seek a solution based on the Grant Agreement and project
534 objectives.

535 The objective is to ensure efficient and fair resolution of issues without impacting the overall
536 project implementation.

537 **8.3 Escalation Path**

538 When a conflict cannot be resolved at SC level, if required, the PCT may consult external
539 bodies or guidelines provided by the European Commission.

540 **9 Financial and Administrative Management**

541 **9.1 Budget Allocation**

542 The project budget is allocated across partners as defined in the Grant Agreement. Each partner
543 is responsible for managing its own budget and ensuring that expenses correspond to planned
544 activities and comply with the eligibility rules of Horizon Europe. Transfers of budget between
545 cost categories or beneficiaries must follow the rules and procedures established by the EU and,
546 where required, must be approved by the SC.

547 **9.2 Financial Reporting**

548 Each partner BE must provide accurate financial reports for the periodic reporting periods.
549 Financial data must be accompanied by supporting documentation and submitted to the PCT
550 on schedule. The PCT compiles and submits the consolidated financial report to the European
551 Commission when required.

552 **10 Tools and IT Infrastructure**

553 The project uses shared digital tools to support communication, collaboration, document man-
554 agement, and reporting. Core components include:

- 555 • a secure shared document repository (INFN SharePoint),
- 556 • collaborative editing and communication platforms (Mattermost),
- 557 • a centralized project calendar,
- 558 • version-controlled storage for deliverables and templates.

559 Partners are responsible for ensuring the security of their systems, enforcing access control
560 policies, and complying with GDPR requirements related to storage and transfer of sensitive
561 information.

562 **11 Amendments and Updates**

563 This handbook is a living document. Updates may be introduced to reflect changes in project
564 procedures, governance structures, or EU requirements. Amendments can be proposed by any
565 partner and are subject to approval by the SC and, when applicable, must be communicated to
566 the European Commission.

567 **12 Conclusions**

568 This Project Management Handbook provides the operational and organizational framework
569 supporting the efficient implementation of the ERNEST project. It complements the Grant
570 Agreement and serves as a reference for all partners throughout the project lifecycle. The

571 structures, procedures, and guidelines defined herein ensure a shared understanding of respon-
572 sibilities and support effective coordination, communication, and quality assurance across the
573 consortium.