



inclusion



Collaborative Laboratories Guidelines



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ACRONYMS

EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
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EU	European Union
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ESN	Erasmus Student Network
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GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
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HEI	Higher Education Institution
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NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
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SOS	Emergency distress signal
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UCD	User-Centered Design
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UX	User Experience
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Part A.

General Collaborative Laboratories Guidelines

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Vilnius University, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the collaborative laboratory preparation and implementation guidelines. This document provides a clear, step-by-step framework for designing and conducting collaborative laboratories (collabs) with diverse stakeholder groups. Collabs are particularly well suited for exploring topics that are under-researched, complex, or sensitive, as they create a structured and inclusive environment for collective reflection.

The guidelines were developed for use in international projects in which partners from multiple countries collaborate, typically with one institution serving as the leading partner. They outline the full collab process – from preparation to facilitation and follow-up – and offer practical tools that partners can adapt to their institutional or national contexts.

These guidelines were originally created for the EU-funded project Tackling the challenges of Erasmus+ mobility inclusion and diversity at higher education level (2023-1-PT01-KA220-HED-000160391). The project aims to improve the opportunities for students with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities to participate in Erasmus+ exchanges by identifying barriers and co-creating solutions. Although developed within this project, the methodology can be applied more broadly where multi-stakeholder dialogue and co-creation are needed to explore under-researched, complex, or sensitive topics.

Within Inclusion+, two types of collaborative laboratories were implemented:

- **National Collaborative Laboratories (national collabs)** – designated to identify the key challenges faced by students with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities participating (or wishing to participate) in Erasmus+ mobility.
- **Master Collaborative Laboratories (master collab)** – designed to collectively develop feasible solutions to address the challenges identified in national collabs and to provide recommendations that could later lead to concrete steps for action.

Collabs implemented in our project served two main purposes:

- to build shared understanding of how mobility-related inequalities are produced across individual, institutional, local, and national levels;
- to jointly develop actionable solutions that can improve institutional practices, inform policy discussions, and contribute to Inclusion+ project outputs.

Collabs were created as intentional co-creation environments where diverse stakeholders can exchange perspectives, engage in dialogue, strengthen collaboration, listen to one another more attentively on issues relevant to all groups, co-design actionable pathways for change and jointly shape recommended solutions. They are not simply consultative events, but structured, participatory spaces grounded in user-centred and collaborative methodologies.

By emphasising co-design and shared responsibility, the collab methodology reinforces the project's core principle that making access to and experiences of mobility more inclusive requires systemic and multi-level solutions, not only individual support measures. The insights generated in collabs directly inform the development of recommendations and change-making tools foreseen in the Inclusion+ project.

Although these guidelines were developed specifically for student mobility in the Erasmus+ context, they can be adapted for any field in which collaboration between multiple stakeholder groups is required to improve communication, coordination, or decision-making. The current version focuses on in-person participation, but the methodology can be easily adapted for online formats.

In addition to the general national collabs and master collab, which are described in Part A of these guidelines, a separate set of guidelines was developed for running collabs aimed at developing an app-prototype (see *Part B*).

HOW TO IMPLEMENT NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY?

The aim of a national collab is to gather insights from different stakeholder groups by creating a structured and safe space for sharing experiences and perspectives on the selected theme. National collabs help identify the main challenges, gaps, or needs that exist within a particular system, sector, or institutional setting.

Preparation for national collabs should be led by one leading partner institution, carried out by a local partner and facilitated by a team of two facilitators and two note-takers. The steps below outline how to organise the collab effectively.

1. BEFORE THE NATIONAL COLLAB

Step
1

IDENTIFY RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

To ensure balanced and diverse input, invite stakeholders who represent different positions within the system or setting you are exploring. The invited participants should include primary users or beneficiaries of the programme or initiative, institutional staff and practitioners, representatives of local authorities, non-governmental organisations and associations, representatives of policy makers, or public institutions.

The following four groups provide a useful structure as an example:

Group 1: Students with disabilities/care responsibilities who did or did not participate Erasmus+.

Examples: current or former Erasmus+ students; Students planning or considering participation in Erasmus+; Students who have chosen not to participate; Representatives of the Student Representation Offices.

Group 2: Higher education institutions (HEI) managers and practitioners involved in supporting student mobility and/ or inclusion.

Examples: International Relations Office staff; Health and Sport Centre staff; Career Centre specialists; Disability Offices; Equal Opportunities Offices.

Group 3: Representatives of host cities from project cities, relevant national authorities and national policy makers.

Examples: Departments of Innovation and Technology; Social Well-being Departments; Infrastructure Departments; Health Care Departments; Departments of Educational Environment; Tourism Departments; Coordinators of disability affairs; National policy makers in related areas.

Group 4: NGOs, including civil society organisations working in relevant fields.

Examples: (1) disabilities-related NGOs: national organisations representing people with disabilities (physical, visual and hearing disabilities); national unions or associations for people with disabilities; (2) care-related NGOs: national associations of families and parents (e.g., www.nsta.it); family associations or centres; family forums and advocacy organisations.

Step
2

MAP STAKEHOLDERS AND INVITE THEM TO PARTICIPATE

1. Compile a list of national organisations representing each stakeholder group;
2. Identify the most relevant departments within each organisation;
3. Select the individuals who work directly with the thematic area of the collab;
4. Send personalised invitations, explaining the purpose and expected contribution, acknowledging the value of their experience;
5. Send a reminder approximately one week before the event.

**Step
3**

PREPARE AND DISTRIBUTE CONSENT FORMS

To ensure GDPR compliance, send the consent form in advance, clearly explaining how data will be handled and whether the discussion will be recorded.

**Step
4**

SEND CALENDAR INVITATIONS

Send calendar invitations to ensure the collab appears in participants' schedules. Specify the time, location, and duration.

**Step
5**

SEND REMINDERS

Send a short reminder the day before the collab.

**Step
6**

COMPILE THE PARTICIPANT LIST

Prepare a table containing:

No.	Name	Institution	Position	Responsibilities	Other comments
1	Ana Danna	Vilnius Municipality	Universal Design Coordination Advisor	Works at Social Welfare Department in Vilnius Municipality	Also works with and helps people with multiple sclerosis

Step
7

PREPARE PRESENTATION AND NOTES

The leading partner prepares slides that should be adapted to a national context. Before the event each team reviews the presentation slides, updating information about national team, the project and the event. Facilitators should add their own notes or print them if needed to ensure a smooth facilitation process.

Example of some slides is provided below:

Inclusion+: Tackling the challenges of Erasmus+ mobility inclusion and diversity at higher education level

- To raise awareness among policymakers, HEIs, education practitioners, and city representatives about the intricate nature of mobility barriers within Erasmus+ at the HE level.
- To enhance the capacity of HEIs and host cities' local representatives to implement new and existing recommendations related to the inclusivity of students with caring responsibilities and students with disabilities.
- Project funded with the support from the European Commission (Project number: 2023-1-PT01-KA220-HED-000160391).

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Participation rules:

- No right or wrong answer;
- Safe space to share;
- Duration: around 2 hours;
- Avoidance of external distractions (phone calls, messages etc.);
- Respect;
- One speaker at a time;
- Confidentiality.
- Acceptance for the recording of the session.

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<p>Facilitator 1 Topics for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances • Infrastructure • Medical, social, psychological services • Tailored study process 	<p>Facilitator 2 Topics for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informing and guiding • Extracurricular activities • Attitudes • Policy and strategies
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Step
8

TRANSLATE SLIDES

Translate the slides into the local language for clarity and accessibility.

Step
9

ADAPT SLIDES FOR INTERACTIVE TOOLS

Prepare the interactive component of the collab using a tool such as Mentimeter. The tool helps gather basic participant information, initial perceptions of the main topic and scores on the collab's thematic areas.

Step
10

PREPARE THE INTERACTIVE TOOL

Slide 1: Participant introductions (open-ended question type):

Write down your name and institution you represent

All responses to your question will be shown here

Each response can be up to 200 characters long

Turn on voting to let participants vote for their favorites

Slide 2: Perceptions of the collab topic (word cloud):

What word or phrase do you associate with INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

fast bold
creative
leader inspiration
focus
transpiration

This slide is used for collecting participants' initial perceptions of the key concepts to the collab topic (e.g., their understanding of inclusion in higher education). After gathering these perceptions, it is helpful to explain that such concepts may not have a single, universally accepted definition and that purpose of the collab is to develop a shared understanding that reflects perspective of different stakeholder groups.

This is a good moment to remind participants of the specific target groups that the collab focuses on. In this example, the focus is on students with disabilities and students with caring responsibilities.

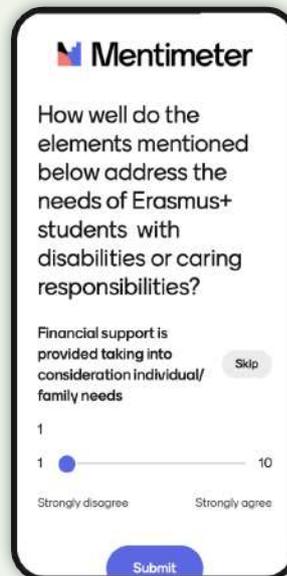
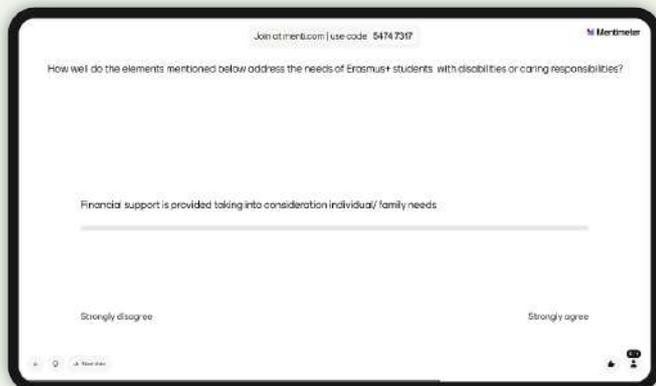
The collab draws on eight thematic areas, which were identified from the material collected during dialogue forums and questionnaires with relevant stakeholders. If you choose a different number of topics, make sure that the total can be evenly divided to ensure the smooth implementation of the collab.

To assess the situation in the selected thematic areas, create one interactive slide for each of the eight topics. Add a scale question for each topic. In the statement field, enter the topic name (e.g., "Finances") and set the scale range 0-10, where 0 = not at all and 10 = very much. At the end of the discussion, these markings will be added together to have a joint score.

Slides 3–6 cover the first four topics. The example provided focuses on the theme of “Finances”, but the slides for the remaining topics should follow the same format.

Participant's screen

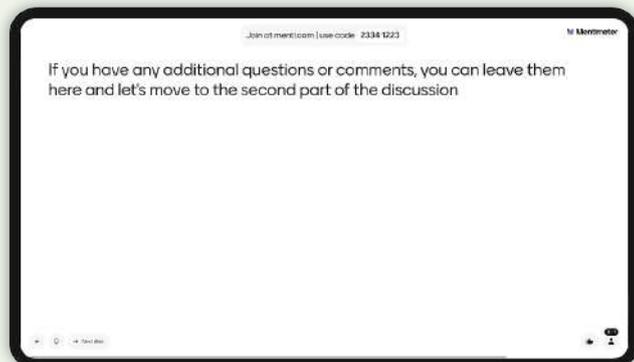
Your screen



Slide 7: After presenting the first four topics, include a transitional slide with the following prompt: “If you have any additional questions or comments, you may leave them here. We will now proceed to the second part of the discussion”. This transition slide allows participants to share any remaining thoughts before the facilitation team moves the discussion to the next set of topics.

Participant's screen

Your screen



Slides 8–11 cover the remaining four topics. The slides should follow the same format as in the example of “Finances” provided above.

Slide 12: After presenting the remaining four topics, include a transitional slide asking with the following prompt: “If you have any additional questions or comments, you may leave them here. We will now proceed to the overall discussion” (see example above). This transition slide allows participants to share any remaining thoughts before the facilitation team wraps up the discussion.

2. DURING THE NATIONAL COLLAB

Set up

To run a national collab, you will need **two rooms**, each equipped with a computer and projector, as well as two voice recorders. You will also need two facilitators and two note-takers.

The collab begins in the main room with the whole group (e.g., 10-12 people) and then divide into two smaller groups (e.g., 5-6 people in each).

The discussions in the smaller groups are divided into two parts. The facilitators remain with the same group throughout, while the note-takers switch groups after the first set of the topics. This approach ensures consistency and continuity in how notes are taken across two sets of topics and makes the preparation of summaries easier later.

After completing the two discussion rounds, both smaller groups reconvene in one of the two rooms together for general discussion.

15 min

Introduction:

Present the collab, its aim, and your team;

Explain the process, including that participants will be asked to assess eight different topics during the collab and that all the scores will be combined.

Divide participants into two groups and move to separate rooms: Facilitator 1 and Note-taker 1 accompany Group 1; Facilitator 2 and Note-taker 2 accompany with Group 2.

15 min + 60 min

Group work:

1. Start audio recording (ideally, both note-takers are encouraged to use voice recorders);
2. Share the prepared interactive slides (e.g., Mentimeter);
3. Begin with brief participant introductions: each person states their name and institution they represent;
4. Conduct an icebreaker activity using slide 2 by inviting participants to share one word or phrase related to the collab topic (e.g., what defines inclusion in higher education).
5. Ask 2-3 participants to offer short comments on the emerging word cloud.

Next, the discussions proceed into two rounds:

- Facilitator 1 leads a 30-minute discussion on elements 1-4 with Group 1, note-taker 1 takes notes.
- Facilitator 2 leads a 30-minute discussion on elements 5-8 with Group 2, note-taker 2 takes notes.

After 30 minutes, note-takers switch groups, while facilitators remain with the same groups:

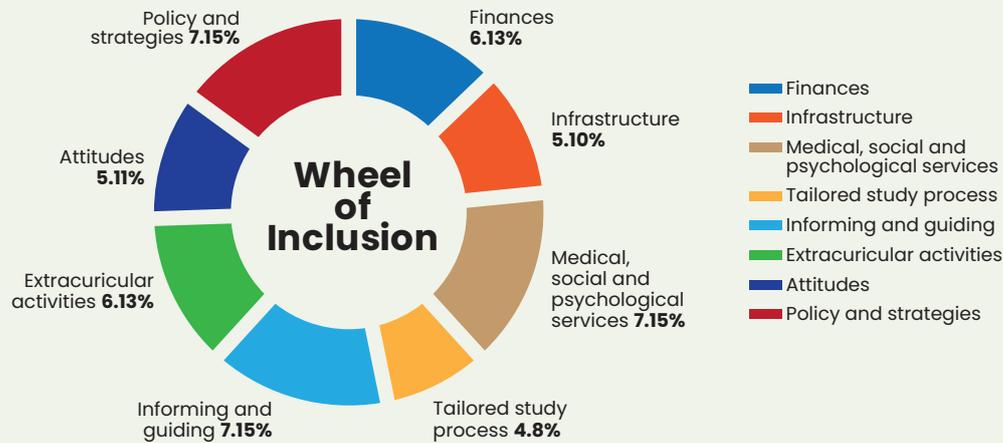
- Facilitator 1 leads discussion on elements 5-8 in the same group.
- Facilitator 2 leads discussion on elements 1-4 in the same group.
- Note-taker 1 continues to focus on elements 1-4, as in previous round.
- Note-taker 2 continues to focus on elements 5-8, as in previous round.

During each round, participants evaluate the situation element by element using interactive slides (e.g., Mentimeter). The note-takers record the scores for each element in their group so they can later combine them for general discussion.

25 min

Overall discussion:

1. Bring groups back to the main room;
2. The note-takers then combine the scores they recorded on each element from both groups. In our collab, we referred to combined scores as the “*Wheel of Inclusion*”. The chart can be created in Excel, for example:
3. Facilitator 1 shares the combined scores with all the participants and opens



a discussion: what has not yet been mentioned? What concrete solutions could address the identified challenges?

5 min

Feedback and Closing

- Distribute the feedback form and collect evaluations.
- Take a group photo of the participants.

3. AFTER THE NATIONAL COLLAB

Step
1

TRANSLATE SLIDES

Save the photo of the participants.

Save all signed consent forms in one folder.

Save all notes and combined scores in one folder.

Step
2

FOLLOW-UP

Identify the main challenges after national collabs event and use them during the master collab.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

1. Don't forget to explain participation rules at the beginning of the collab.
2. Use two audio recorders to ensure reliable documentation of discussions.
3. Arrange two separate rooms for the smaller group discussions.
4. Ensure you have each room equipped with a computer and projector.
5. Collect all signed consent forms before the collab begins.
6. Take anonymized photos of participants during the national collab, if consent is provided.
7. Review the presenter notes included in the prepared slides. Read them carefully before the national collab and add your own notes or print them if needed to ensure a smooth process.
8. Be attentive to group dynamics:
 - If one participant dominates, encourage them to focus on one key aspect or example.
 - Begin the next round with quieter participants to ensure everyone feels heard.
 - If the group is very talkative, ask each person to share only one key aspect or example.
 - If you are running out of time, avoid asking everyone to speak on every element. Instead, assign speakers per element and note who has already contributed so you can involve others in the solutions stage.
9. Be mindful of power dynamics (e.g., between students and university administrators) so that participants feel equally comfortable sharing their experiences.
10. Use deep listening techniques during discussions and reflect key insights back to participants to focus and clarity.
11. Prepare participant name cards in advance.
12. If possible, and with participants' agreement, consider extending the national collab beyond two hours (adjust the time allocation accordingly).

HOW TO IMPLEMENT MASTER COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY?

The aim of the master collaborative laboratory (master collab) is to bring together diverse stakeholder groups into a safe space to co-develop solutions and recommendations based on the challenges identified in earlier national collaborative laboratories (national collabs). The master collab focuses on solution-oriented co-creation rather than problem identification.

The master collab requires a coordinating institution to lead the preparation. During the event, a main facilitator oversees the overall process and timing, while moderators and note-takers support topic-based discussions. The number of moderators and note-takers depends on the number of topics and discussion groups, ideally moderator and note-taker covering no more than two topics each.

1. BEFORE THE MASTER COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY

Step

1

INVITE STAKEHOLDERS

Where possible, it is recommended to invite stakeholders who participated in earlier collabs to ensure continuity. Inform them that this final event focuses on developing solutions and recommendations based on previously identified challenges. Additional or new stakeholders may also be included if relevant to the solution-development phase

Suggested number of participants: approximately 25-30 people, depending on the number of topics and facilitation capacity.

Stakeholder composition should reflect the thematic focus of the collab and include actors with lived experience, institutional responsibilities, policy-making roles, and practical expertise.

For four groups below illustrate one possible configuration:

Group 1: Students with disability and/or care responsibilities (7 participants).

Examples: Erasmus+ students, students who previously participated in Erasmus+, students who have not yet participated (planning to, considering, or unsure), student representation (ESN, student representatives).

Group 2: Higher education institutions (HEI) managers and practitioners (7 participants).

Examples: International Relations Office, Health and Sport Centre, Career Centre, Disability Office, Equal Opportunities Office.

Group 3: Representatives of host cities, national authorities and national policy makers (8 participants).

Examples: Departments of Innovation and Technology, Social Well-being, Infrastructure, Health Care, Educational Environment, Tourism; Coordinators of disability affairs; relevant national policy makers.

Group 4: NGOs (8 participants: 4 disability-focused + 4 care-responsibility-focused).

Examples: national organisations for disabled people; national union of disabled people; national families' and parents' association (e.g., www.nsta.lt), family centres, family forums.

Step

2

IDENTIFY ANY NEW STAKEHOLDERS

If you decide to invite additional stakeholders who did not participate previously, follow these steps:

1. Prepare a list of key national organisations across stakeholder groups.
2. Identify relevant departments working on the collab topic.
3. Identify specialists working in the departments linked to the collab topic.
4. Contact them personally, explaining the purpose and value of their contribution.
5. Send a reminder approximately one week before the event.

Step
3

SEND CONSENT FORMS

Send the consent form to participants in advance, clearly explaining how data will be collected, stored, and used.

Step
4

SEND CALENDAR INVITATIONS

Send calendar invitations and clearly specify the venue, timing, and duration of the event.

Step
5

SEND A REMINDER EMAIL

Send a reminder email approximately one week before the event, including the preliminary programme.

Step
6

PREPARE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND GROUP ALLOCATION

Prepare a table including participants':

- Name
- Institution
- Position
- Responsibilities (if known)
- Group assignment (A, B, C, or D)

Each group should include a mix of **stakeholder categories** to ensure diverse perspectives.

No.	Name	Institution	Position	Responsibilities	Other comments
1	Ana Danna	Vilnius Municipality	Universal Design Coordination Advisor	Works at Social Welfare Department in Vilnius Municipality	Also works with and helps people with multiple sclerosis

Step
7

REVIEW PRESENTER NOTES

Slides prepared by the coordinating partner should include presenter notes. Review them carefully in advance and add your own facilitation notes, if needed.

Step
8

UPDATE THE SLIDES

Use the prepared master collab slides and update them with:

- Your team's information;
- Thematic challenges or problem statement identified in earlier phases.

Step
9

PREPARE COLOR-CODED NAME CARDS

Prepare name cards using colors to indicate stakeholder categories (optional but recommended to support facilitation).

Step
10

ASSIGN FACILITATION ROLES

Decide on:

- Man facilitator
- Moderators for each topic
- Note-takers for each topic

Each topic requires one moderator and one note-taker, who remain responsible for the same topic across all discussion rounds.

Step
11

PREPARE SHORT TOPIC PRESENTATIONS

Each moderator prepares a short (approx. 2-minute) introduction outlining the topic and summarising the key challenges or problem statements to provide a common starting point for discussion.

2. DURING THE MASTER COLLAB

60 min

Introduction:

- 1.** Prepare tables with chairs, recorders, sticky notes, and writing materials.
- 2.** During registration:
 - Inform participants of their assigned group and guide them to their table
 - Collect signatures on the participant list
 - Check consent forms (if missing, collect during registration)
 - Distribute name cards (if possible, color-coded)
- 3.** Display the list of groups on the projector for Session 1 to show participants to which group they are assigned.
- 4.** Present the aim of the master collaborative laboratory and introduce the team.
- 5.** Explain participation rules and create a safe and respectful discussion environment.

Facilitators may use a short inspiration story (e.g., about Walt Disney) or reflective prompt to encourage participants to think creatively when developing solutions and to emphasise that there are no right or wrong ideas.

All contributions are welcome and may be valuable, as even seemingly utopian ideas can sometimes lead to the most effective solutions. So, let's dream big!

Example of an inspiring story:

Everything Is Possible: The Story of Walt Disney

Once upon a time, there was a young boy named **Walt Disney** who loved to draw. He grew up on a small farm in Missouri, surrounded by animals and endless imagination. But life was not easy – his family was poor, and his father often told him that drawing would never earn him a living.

Still, Walt refused to give up on his dreams. He worked as a paperboy and drew cartoons in his free time. One day, he applied for a job as an artist – and was **fired** because his boss said he “lacked imagination.” Most people would have stopped right there. But Walt didn’t.

He started his own animation company – and it **failed**. He went **bankrupt**. At one point, he was so poor that he could barely afford food. Yet, with a heart full of hope, he created a little mouse named **Mickey**. No one believed in the idea at first – except Walt.

When “**Steamboat Willie**” premiered in 1928, the world met Mickey Mouse for the first time. That one cartoon changed everything. Walt Disney built an empire of imagination – films, characters, and theme parks that brought joy to millions. He once said:

“If you can dream it, you can do it.”

Disneyland was called “Walt’s Folly” before it opened – critics said it would never succeed. But when it opened in 1955, it became a symbol of **hope, creativity, and courage**.

Today, Walt Disney’s name stands for the belief that **dreams really can come true** – not because he never failed, but because he **never stopped believing that everything is possible**.

- 6.** Each participant is invited to briefly introduce themselves for up to one minute, so that everyone in the room understands participants’ backgrounds and the perspectives they bring.
- 7.** Main facilitator explains that the master collab builds on earlier phases, in which challenges were identified and clustered into thematic areas. In our case, we had 16 challenges grouped into 8 main topics.
- 8.** Each of the four moderators presents their topic (2 minutes each).
- 9.** The discussion follows a World-Cafe-inspired format, in which moderators and note-takers rotate between groups to ensure that each topic is discussed with multiple stakeholder constellations.

In our case, four topics with two associated challenges each were discussed before lunch, and a further four topics were discussed after lunch. Each moderator and notetaker led four discussion rounds on the same topic before lunch and another four rounds on a different topic after lunch.

80 min
(4 rounds for
20 min.)

Group discussions – session 1:

1. Participants are invited to share their imagined solutions to the presented challenges. Moderators start the audio recording and write proposed solutions on sticky notes, while note-takers type key insights into a pre-prepared note-taking form.
2. After each round (20 minutes each), the main facilitator announces the rotation.
3. After 4 rounds, the main facilitator invites everyone to lunch.
4. Before lunch ends, show the list of groups on projector for Session 2.

60 min LUNCH BREAK

10 min

Moderators introduce the next set of topics and associated challenges (2 minutes each).

80 min
(4 rounds for
20 min.)

The process continues in newly composed groups, following the same structure.

Group discussions – session 2 (in new groups):

1. Participants are invited to share their imagined solutions to the presented challenges. Moderators start the audio recording and write proposed solutions on sticky notes, while note-takers type key insights into a pre-prepared note-taking form.
2. After each round (20 minutes each), the main facilitator announces the rotation.
3. After four rounds, main facilitator invites participants to the wrap-up session.

20 min

Wrap-up session:

1. Present key insights and outline next steps.
2. Emphasize that all solutions will be documented in the report and shared with participants.
3. Invite each participant to share **one word** reflecting their experience of the event. Record the words and use them to create a word cloud for the final report.



4. Facilitator may close the session with a short reflective exercise or expression of gratitude (e.g., Story of Gratitude) to help participants leave with a sense of meaning, hope, and connection.

For example:

The Story of Gratitude – From “Love and the Cabby” by Art Buchwald

One day, the famous humourist **Art Buchwald** was riding in a taxi through the busy streets of New York City. As the cab came to a stop at a traffic light, Buchwald noticed something remarkable. The passenger in the taxi ahead leaned out of his window, waved, and shouted,

“Thank you for the beautiful work you do!”

The person he was shouting to was a **street cleaner**, a man sweeping trash from the sidewalk.

The street cleaner looked up, surprised, and then smiled – a big, bright, honest smile. He waved back and called:

“You’re welcome, sir!”

As the light turned green and the cars began moving again, Buchwald turned to his driver and said:

“That was a beautiful thing to see. Why don’t more people do that?”

The cab driver shrugged and replied:

“People just don’t think about it. They’re too busy or too wrapped up in their own lives.”

Buchwald thought for a moment and said:

“Let’s try it.”

And so, as they drove through the city, he began to **thank people** – the traffic officer directing cars, the construction worker holding up a stop sign, the man selling newspapers on the corner. Each time, people were surprised, then **smiled**. The simple act of gratitude changed their faces – and the mood inside the taxi.

When Buchwald finally reached his destination, he said to the cab driver:

“You know, if everyone in this city did that – if everyone said thank you just once a day – it would be a different place.”

The driver smiled and nodded. “You’re right,” he said. “It might just start a chain reaction.”

Showing empathy, offering a smile, giving a hug or saying a warm word cost nothing. Thank you very much for being here today and contributing to this meaningful and valuable event.

5 min

Take a photo of the participants.

3. AFTER THE MASTER COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY



Save photos and consent forms.



Consolidate notes and solution ideas.



Prepare outputs and share them with participants for feedback and further refinement.

This report was commissioned by the Vilnius University.

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Part B.

Collab Guidelines for Developing App-Prototype

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the collaborative laboratory (Collab) preparation and implementation guidelines. Here you will find all the information needed to design and carry out collaborative laboratories for the **Inclusion+ project**.

These structured guidelines were developed specifically to tackle the challenges of Erasmus+ mobility inclusion and diversity at the higher education level. While the goal is to improve the situation for students with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities, a key specific outcome of these Collabs is to **co-design the prototype of a mobile application** that will support these students during their mobility experiences.

The Collabs are designed as interactive workshops rooted in **User-Centered Design (UCD)**. They provide learning environments in which stakeholders jointly identify barriers, reflect institutional practices, and co-design actionable pathways for change.

These guidelines define the methodological framework for implementing two types of collaborative laboratories:

- 1. National Collaborative Laboratories:** Focused on defining the challenges, mapping experiences, and understanding the specific barriers (physical, academic, social) faced by the target groups.
- 2. Master Collaborative Laboratories:** Focused on developing possible solutions to these challenges, specifically brainstorming features and functionalities for the Inclusion+ mobile app.

NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY

AIM OF THE NATIONAL COLLAB

The aim of the National Collab is to gather valuable insights by creating a safe space where stakeholders can share their knowledge and experiences regarding international mobility. The primary research goal is to understand the **“User Journey”** of students with disabilities and caring responsibilities to inform the initial design requirements of the Inclusion+ App.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

For the preparation of each collab, a leading partner is required. Each collab should ideally have **two facilitators** and **two note-takers**.

1. BEFORE THE NATIONAL COLLAB

Step
1

MAP STAKEHOLDERS

Group 1: Students with disabilities/caring responsibilities.

Examples: Current/former Erasmus+ students; students considering participation; students who chose not to participate due to barriers.

Group 2: HEI managers and practitioners.

Examples: International Relations Office staff; Disability Offices; Career Centre specialists.

Group 3: City Representatives & Policy Makers.

Examples: Dept. of Innovation; Transport; Social Well-being; National authorities.

Group 4: NGOs.

Examples: Organizations representing visual, hearing, or physical impairments; family advocacy groups.

Step
2

RECRUITMENT & INCLUSIVITY

1. Partner: Contact disability organizations and student associations directly.

2. Personalize: Send personal invitations acknowledging the value of their experience.

3. Accessibility Check: Ensure the venue is fully accessible (entrances, restrooms, acoustics).

4. Incentives: Consider small incentives (e.g., gift cards) to acknowledge time contributions. *(Tip from Istanbul: A \$15 gift card was presented to each participant after the pilot study.)*

Step
3

PREPARE TOOLS

- **Technology:** Laptop, projector, reliable audio recording equipment (digital recorders with external mics are essential).
- **Materials:** Name tags, consent forms, flip charts, sticky notes, markers.
- **Access:** Braille materials, large print agendas, or sign language interpreters if required by registered participants.

Step
4

PREPARE FACILITATORS

Facilitators must review the **Inclusion+ Research Questions:**

- What are the barriers to mobility?
- What features would an app need to solve them?
(Tip from Istanbul: If participants exceed 10, assign at least one experienced facilitator and a dedicated note-taker to each table/group.)

Step
5

CONSENT FORMS

Prepare and distribute consent forms. Ensure the form explains data usage for the app development and guarantees anonymity. **Audio recording consent is mandatory.**

2. DURING THE NATIONAL COLLAB

Total Duration: Approx. 3.5 – 4 Hours

Format: Offline Workshop (preferred for accessibility)

15 min

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

- 1. Project Overview:** Explain Inclusion+ and the goal of the mobile app.
- 2. Participation Rules:** Create a warm, safe atmosphere. Emphasize that there are no “wrong” answers.
- 3. Findings:** Briefly present key findings from WP2 (Needs Assessment) to set the context.
- 4. Logistics:** Ensure all consent forms are signed and recorders are ON.

30 min

ICEBREAKER & INTRODUCTIONS

Activity: “The Timeline of Moments” Ask participants to introduce themselves and share one positive and one negative moment in their daily life related to the city, university, or technology.
(Tip from Istanbul: Group participants by disability type [e.g., visual, physical] if the group is large, to allow for specific accessibility needs to be met at each table.)

60 min

SESSION 1: CONTEXT SETTING & EXPERIENCE MAPPING

Goal: Understand the “User Journey.” **Key Questions to ask:**

- 1. Mobility:** Have you participated in Erasmus+? If not, why? What barriers (financial, physical, academic) stopped you?
 - 2. Daily Life:** What are key moments in your day regarding transport and navigation?
 - 3. Existing Solutions:** What tools/apps do you currently use? What works, what doesn't?
- Facilitator Note: Encourage participants to narrate specific stories (e.g., “The airport experience,” “The cobblestones in the city center”).*

15 min

COFFEE BREAK

Ensure refreshments are accessible to all.

45 min

SESSION 2: EXPERIENCE HARVESTING

Goal: Dig deeper into specific domains.

Topics to cover:

- 1. Urban Mobility:** Transport, navigation, safety.
- 2. Education:** Classroom accessibility, communication with staff.
- 3. Technology:** Accessibility of current university or city apps.

Note-taker Task: Capture direct quotes and specific pain points.

45 min

SESSION 3: ASSUMPTION DUMPING

Goal: Challenge misconceptions.

Activity: Facilitate a discussion on common assumptions about disability in mobility. Example Prompt: "People assume that if a building has a ramp, it is accessible. Is this true in your experience?" Use this to identify "hidden barriers" that the mobile app could address (e.g., malfunctioning elevators, unlisted steep slopes). *The group is large, to allow for specific accessibility needs to be met at each table.*

15 min

FEEDBACK & CLOSING

1. Summary: Facilitator summarizes key themes heard today.

2. Evaluation: Distribute feedback forms.

3. Next Steps: Explain that these insights will feed into the Master Collab to design the App Prototype.

4. Closing: Thank participants warmly. Take a group photo (with permission).

3. AFTER THE NATIONAL COLLAB

Step

1

SAVE DATA

Save all audio recordings and photos immediately. Ensure filenames are consistent.

Step

2

TRANSCRIBE

Transcribe audio recordings.

(Tip: Automated tools like Otter.ai or MaxQDA work well, but always manual-check, especially for technical terms).

Step

3

ANALYZE

Categorize findings into the **4 Key Areas:**

1. Mobility (Urban & Project based)

2. Education

3. Technology & Accessibility

4. Social/Psychological Aspects

Step

4

REPORT

Complete the **National Collab Report** (See Annex for template). This report will be the input for the Master Collab.

MASTER COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY

AIM OF THE MASTER COLLAB

The Master Collab focuses on **developing solutions**. Using the challenges identified in the National Collabs, stakeholders will brainstorm, prioritize, and co-design features for the **Inclusion+ Mobile Application Prototype**.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Requires a **Main Facilitator** to oversee timing and **Moderators** for small groups.

1. BEFORE THE MASTER COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY

Step

1

INVITE STAKEHOLDERS

Invite the same stakeholders from the National Collab to ensure continuity. You may add new technical experts (e.g., app developers, UX designers) if available.

Target size: Approx. 30 people.

Step

2

REVIEW NATIONAL DATA

The facilitating team must review the **National Collab Reports**. Identify the top 10 barriers that need technical or systemic solutions. Prepare these as “Challenge Cards” or slides for the workshop.

Step

3

PREPARE MATERIALS

Prioritization Matrix: Draw a large 2x2 matrix on a whiteboard/flipchart (Axis X: Feasibility, Axis Y: Impact).

Wireframe Templates: Print blank phone screens or provide paper/markers for drawing app ideas.

Name Cards: Use color-coded cards for different groups (Students, HEI, City, NGO).

2. DURING THE MASTER COLLAB

Total Duration: Approx. 4 Hours

20 min

INTRODUCTION & INSPIRATION

1. **Recap:** Briefly present the main challenges found in the National Collabs.
2. **Inspire:** Use a story or example (e.g., the Walt Disney story from the original guidelines) to encourage “Dreaming Big.”
3. **Goal:** Clearly state: “Today we are designing an app to solve these problems.”

60 min

SESSION 1: "HOW MIGHT WE" BRAINSTORMING

Activity: Divide into mixed groups (students + tech + HEI).
Frame discussions with “How Might We” questions based on National findings.

Examples:

- “How might we use an app to navigate cobblestone streets?”
- “How might we communicate disability needs to a host university before arrival?” Participants write ideas on sticky notes.

15 min **BREAK**

60 min

SESSION 2: CO-DESIGNING THE APP

Activity: Feature Definition.
Ask groups to group their sticky notes into App Features.

Categories to prompt:

- **Content Features:** Guides, contact lists, rights info.
- **Functional Features:** Maps, text-to-speech, chat forums, SOS buttons. Groups should sketch rough ideas of what the screen might look like (Wireframing).

45 min

SESSION 3: PRIORITIZATION

Activity: Matrix Sorting. Bring all groups together.

Place the feature ideas on the **Impact vs. Feasibility** matrix.

- **High Impact/High Feasibility:** Must have in prototype.
- **High Impact/Low Feasibility:** Long-term goals.
(*Tip: Focus on features that offer autonomy and agency to the student*)

20 min

WRAP-UP & CLOSING

1. **Review:** Summarize the top 3-5 priority features agreed upon.
2. **One Word:** Ask each participant for “One Word” to describe the future app (create a word cloud).
3. **Gratitude:** Close with a story of gratitude or warm appreciation.

3. AFTER THE MASTER COLLABORATIVE LABORATORY



COMPILE FEATURES

Save photos and consent forms.



REPORT

Create the **Master Collab Report**. This document will be handed over to the technical partners for software development.



FEEDBACK LOOP

Share the final report with participants. Let them know how their specific ideas influenced the app design.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

1. Group Dynamics & Inclusion

- **Balance Power:** In mixed groups (students + university rectors), ensure students speak first. Facilitators must manage dominant voices.
- **Deep Listening:** Use techniques like “What I hear you saying is...” to validate participant experiences.
- **Icebreakers:** Use thematic icebreakers. Example from Istanbul: “Super Hero” – If you could have one superpower to fix the city, what would it be?

2. Handling Accessibility

- **Visual Impairment:** If using visual aids (post-its, matrices), the facilitator or a peer must read everything aloud. Use tactile markers if possible.
- **Hearing Impairment:** Ensure facilitators face the group for lip-reading. If a sign-language interpreter is present, pace the discussion to allow for translation.
- **Physical Impairment:** Ensure tables are at wheelchair height and aisles are wide.

3. Audio & Data Collection (Lessons from Istanbul)

- **Equipment:** Use high-quality digital recorders. Phone microphones are often insufficient in large rooms.
- **Backup:** Always have a human note-taker as a backup to technology.
- **Confidentiality:** Remind participants before recording starts that data is anonymized.

4. Focusing on the App

- Participants may want to complain about general city infrastructure (e.g., “fix the pavement”).
- **Facilitator Pivot:** Acknowledge the problem, then ask: “Since we cannot pave the road today, how can a mobile app help you navigate this road right now? (e.g., warning maps, route planning, reporting tools)

This report was commissioned by the Galatasaray University.

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Annexes

ANNEX I: SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FOR NATIONAL COLLABS (UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM)

- **The Person:** "Please walk me through a typical day. What resources help you the most?"
- **The School:** "Have you faced challenges accessing educational resources (PDFs, exams)? How did you solve them?"
- **The City:** "How do you plan your route? What happens when you encounter an unexpected barrier (e.g., broken elevator)?"
- **The Technology:** "What apps do you use now? Why do you like/dislike them? (e.g., Google Maps, WhatsApp)."

FOR MASTER COLLABS (FINDING SOLUTIONS)

- "How might we design a profile page that communicates your needs to a professor without you having to explain it every time?"
- "If the app could do one thing to make you feel safer at the airport, what would it be?"
- "What kind of social features would help you connect with other students without feeling 'othered'?"

ANNEX II: REPORTING TEMPLATE

THE COLLAB REPORT STRUCTURE

1. Executive Summary

Brief overview of participants and main outcomes.

2. Mobility Insights

- a. **Mobility Project Participation:** Motivations and barriers to signing up.
- b. **Obstacles During Mobility:** Transport, airport, accommodation issues.
- c. **Urban Settings:** Specific city challenges (e.g., cobblestones, audio signals).

3. Education Insights

- a. **Classroom:** Acoustics, furniture, exam accommodations.
- b. **Communication:** Interaction with professors and admin staff.

4. Technology & Accessibility

- a. **Existing Devices:** Pros/cons of current tech (VoiceOver, hearing loops).
- b. **Proposed Technologies:** “Wishlist” items.

5. Mobile Application Recommendations (For Master Collab Report)

- a. **Key Features:** (e.g., Real-time navigation, Object recognition).
- b. **Top Priorities:** (Impact vs Feasibility results).
- c. **User Interface Requests:** (e.g., High contrast, text-to-speech defaults).

6. Conclusion

Final thoughts and next steps.

ANNEX III: UX DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSION+

To ensure the insights from Collabs translate effectively into the App, keep these **User Experience (UX)** principles in mind during facilitation:

1. User-Centeredness

Design decisions are made with the user's needs, goals, and limitations in mind. The "expert" in the room is the student with the disability, not the researcher.

2. Empathy

We are not just solving logical problems; we are addressing emotional and psychological needs (e.g., the fear of getting lost, the frustration of unwanted pity).

3. Accessibility First

The app itself must be a model of accessibility.

- **Visual:** Alt-text, scalable text, high contrast.
- **Auditory:** Captioning, visual alternatives for sound.
- **Motor:** Large touch targets, voice commands.

4. The "Why" behind the "What"

If a participant asks for a "Chat feature," ask why.

- Is it for social fun?
- Is it for peer support?
- Is it for safety?

Understanding the 'why' helps developers build the right feature.

ANNEX IV: INSIGHTS FROM THE PILOT (ISTANBUL)

Reference for Facilitators to stimulate discussion

Mobility Challenges Identified:

- **Visual Impairments:** Cobblestone pavements trap canes; lack of consistent Braille signage; unreliable public transport announcements.
- **Physical Impairments:** Inaccessible/malfunctioning elevators; ramps that are too steep; accessible toilets used as storage; "single occupancy" dorm rooms preventing companions.
- **Hearing Impairments:** Poor acoustics in lecture halls; lack of visual cues in airports; battery charging issues for cochlear implants.

Social/Psychological Aspects:

- **Unwanted Pity:** Participants dislike being treated as "charity cases" (e.g., not being allowed to pay).
- **The "Companion" Dilemma:** Traveling with a companion offers safety but reduces independence.
- **Invisibility:** Non-visible disabilities (hearing, chronic pain) are often ignored by university staff.

App Feature Wishlist (from Pilot):

- 1. Real-Time Navigation:** Voice-guided or haptic feedback that warns of obstacles (construction, steep slopes).
- 2. Object Recognition:** AI camera tools to read signs/menus.
- 3. Community Rating:** Users rate the actual accessibility of a cafe or classroom (crowdsourcing).
- 4. Digital "Passport":** A profile that lists accessibility needs to be shared with professors/staff easily.
- 5. Volunteer Connect:** A "panic button" or request system to find a nearby volunteer helper.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT & ETHICS

Ethical Checklist:

- 1. Informed Consent:** obtain written consent before the event. Explicitly mention that data contributes to software development.
- 2. Anonymity:** Ensure the final report does not link specific quotes to named individuals.
- 3. Withdrawal:** Participants can leave at any time without penalty.
- 4. Data Security:** Store audio files on secure, password-protected drives.

Sample Consent Clause:

"I understand that my participation in the Inclusion+ Collaborative Laboratory is voluntary. I agree that the insights, ideas, and feedback I provide will be used to design the Inclusion+ mobile application and related research reports. I understand my identity will remain confidential in all public outputs."

CHECKLIST: BEFORE YOU START

Logistics

- Venue booked (Accessible?)
- Refreshments ordered (Dietary needs?)
- Transport info sent to participants

Stakeholders

- Students (Visual, Hearing, Physical, Caring represented?)
- University Staff (Intl Office, Disability Office?)
- City/NGOs confirmed?

Materials

- Recorders + Batteries
- Name Tags (Color coded?)
- Printed Consent Forms
- Slides translated to local language
- Gift cards/Incentives prepared

Facilitation

- Roles assigned (Main facilitator, table moderators, note-takers)
- Protocol/Script reviewed
- Findings from WP2 reviewed for context

CLOSING THOUGHT

When facilitating these Collabs, consider sharing the concept of the “Curb Cut Effect.”

In the 1970s, disability activists fought for “curb cuts” (ramps on the sidewalk) to allow wheelchair users to move freely between the street and the pavement. Once cities implemented them, they realized that **everyone benefited**: parents with strollers, travelers with suitcases, workers with delivery carts, and cyclists. cyclists.

When we design our app to help a student with a visual or physical impairment, we are not just helping a “niche” group. We are creating a more robust, navigable, and user-friendly experience for every student who feels lost or overwhelmed in a new city.

Encourage your participants to see their specific needs not as “burdens” to the project, but as the catalysts for better design.

Thank you for your contribution to Inclusion+.

inclusion



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