



## LETTER TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS IN EUROPE

Dear colleagues

We have developed this Toolkit in our determination to give countries in transition the opportunities to raise their standards of local government to those of the best.

European experience shows us that decentralisation is needed to deliver high quality local public services, and to improve the quality of life for all citizens. It also shows us that decentralisation is always a difficult challenge, for which there is rarely an end in sight. It makes constant demands on both central authorities and local government. It requires demonstrations of competence by local authorities and acts of trust by Ministries.

The national association of local authorities is one of the keys to success in meeting this challenge. It can represent the interests of local government; it can work with central authorities as a strategic partner; it can build the capacities of local authorities; it can tell the story of local government to the wider public. Local government deserves a strong Local Government Association.

The leadership of the Local Government Association makes the difference. Good leadership can generate the understanding, ambition and commitment necessary for delivering modern local government. It can develop the expertise. This Toolkit gives the leadership a tool to build up the capacities of their Local Government Association, to meet the challenge of decentralisation and European integration.

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This Toolkit on **Local Government Associations** is a partnership initiative between the Council of Europe, the United Nations Development Programme and VNG International (Netherlands).

Valuable material and advice throughout the production of this Toolkit have been provided as follows by :-

VNG International – “Benchmark and Logical Framework for ACB” (Association Capacity Building), “Strategic Planning in a Local Government Association” and the ACB Brochure “Dienstverlening”.

Council of Europe – “Capacity Building for Local Government” Toolkit.

United Nations Development Programme – “Toolkit for Localising Millenium Development Goals” and “Joining Forces: Cooperation among Municipalities – A Guide for Practitioners”.

The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) – “The LGA Toolkit”.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom – “An Organisational Development Resource Document for Local Government”.

The EU’s Common Assessment Framework for public sector organisations.

Other key partners, including The Open Society Institute, SNV (Netherlands), GTZ (Germany), KDZ (Austria), KS (Norway), USAID (Moldova) and The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of SE Europe (NALAS) have also actively participated by providing invaluable advice and expertise.

Special thanks go to Mr John Jackson (Director of Capacity Building International UK) for his leading role in the preparation of this Toolkit.

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## HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

This Toolkit offers a development programme for LGAs. It will be for you – the leadership of the LGA (the Board, the Executive Director and the Heads of Departments ...) – to decide whether or not this Toolkit could be useful for you. You might want to translate it, adapt it as necessary to local circumstances and organise an informal Roundtable among yourselves, perhaps with some key stakeholders, to consider whether and how to take it forward.

If you do decide to use the Toolkit, you may want to invite national or international organisations to support the initiative with facilitation, funding or expertise.

You will be able to put the various tools to good use if you:

- (a) *recognise that your LGA needs to be stronger in response to the challenges of decentralisation and European integration;*
- (b) *are willing to assess their level of performance objectively and learn from both your own experience and that of others;*
- (c) *acknowledge where your LGA needs to be stronger and take action to transform the organisation in a systematic and transparent way.*

***In SE Europe, the Network of Associations of Local Authorities (NALAS) might promote the use of this Toolkit among its members and encourage them to work in partnership with each other to share the experience in building their capacities. Stronger LGAs might offer support to others. NALAS might build up its own expertise in LGA capacity-building and offer a 'facilitation' service to its members. Indeed, NALAS might seek support from international organisations for a significant programme across the region.***

### **Building on Assessment**

The effective use of the Toolkit depends on a willingness to undergo either self-assessment or external assessment. Assessment is at the core. This is because, unless the LGA leadership recognise and 'own' the challenge, they are unlikely to do much about it. Experts can offer guidance, but the leadership themselves must show the vision and commitment.

## Approach

There are 6 general steps in the recommended approach:

1. *Get the agreement of the Board and possible support from other organisations to undertake the change programme offered by the Toolkit.*
2. *Use the Performance Benchmark in Section 2 to analyse the LGA's capacity and performance and draw up an Assessment.*
3. *Identify the priorities in the Assessment and prepare a draft Action Plan. Some actions may be urgent; some might depend on other actions to be completed first; some might wait for the following year(s).*
4. *Agree the priorities with the Board and use other sections of the Toolkit to take the priorities forward.*
5. *Integrate the priorities into the LGA's Strategic Plan and Financial Strategy.*
6. *Use the Performance Benchmark or the Service Provision Health Check every year to monitor progress; **make assessment part of the culture.***

## Principles

- A. Some sections can best be used in an operational manner; for example, the section on strategic planning should be used to make the actual Strategic Plan of the LGA more effective.
- B. The LGA should maximise the opportunities for dialogue with internal and external stakeholders; each of them has a stake in a strong LGA; they have valuable perceptions and ideas. The leadership should listen to them.
- C. The individual sections can be used on their own. But the section on Organisation Development (OD) suggests that real change will only come with a '*whole-organisation*' approach as different aspects (eg advocacy and communications) reinforce each other. This is why the OD approach is significant and could provide the foundation for the other tools.

## Leadership or facilitation

Both leadership and facilitation are necessary if this Toolkit is to be used to maximum effect. What is the difference? The Executive Director has to be able to do either, depending on the circumstances.

<b>LEADERSHIP IS:</b>	<b>FACILITATION IS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Taking a long term view.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Concerned with values and moral purpose.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Pointing out the challenge to be faced.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Articulating vision.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Focused on the future, on innovation and change.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Seeking collaboration and commitment.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Giving work back.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Listening to the hard questions.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Moving towards conflict and difference.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Seeking to serve and improve service to others.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ <i>Helping people see their own future.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Clarifying different values and creating common purpose.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Relating the challenge to individuals in their work and attitudes.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Helping people clarify own hopes.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Helping people make sense of what is new and consider alternatives.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Exploring opinions and commitment; seeking common ground.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Helping staff get work done together.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Challenging assumptions.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Showing people conflict is normal and resolution can be achieved.</i></li> <li>➔ <i>Focusing staff on practical ways to deliver better services.</i></li> </ul>

To start using this Toolkit to transform the LGA requires the vision, understanding and commitment that come with leadership. To bring the LGA Board and staff on-side requires facilitation; to deliver change requires leadership again. Perhaps leadership and facilitation are two sides of the same coin. Facilitation is a skill of leadership.

## How to start

The Executive Director might bring the Board and senior managers together for an informal half-day session of 'blue skies' thinking. This can be used to think whether the LGA needs to reform in the face of current challenges, what its priorities for reform might be, how it might reform, whether it is ready for reform, whether local authorities would welcome reform and what the obstacles for reform might be.

The following format might be helpful:

**Use 'blue skies' thinking to generate proposals for the reform of the LGA. Follow the steps set out below to facilitate the group in developing a plan for the proposals:**

<b>STEP</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>KEY QUESTIONS</b>
<b>1. Generate aims</b>	<b>Ask each person to write their aims for reform on a Post-it note, then stick on wall and brainstorm for any others.</b>	<b>What needs doing in this situation? Have we missed any important aims?</b>
<b>2. Sort aims</b>	<b>Ask volunteers to cluster the Post-it notes around the main aims; check the meaning of the clusters with the group.</b>	<b>Have we got all possible objectives? What are the main clusters about?</b>
<b>3. Agree priorities</b>	<b>Ask pairs to agree the top 3-4 priorities among the different aims; compare lists of the group.</b>	<b>What are our key aims? Are we agreed? Would other stakeholders share our priorities?</b>
<b>4. Action plan</b>	<b>Form into sub-groups - one for each aim - and draft action plans.</b>	<b>How will these aims be accomplished? What needs to be done by when...?</b>
<b>5. Mandate actions</b>	<b>For each action plan, ask groups to allocate roles and responsibilities.</b>	<b>Who will do what by when? How will we know when an aim is accomplished? How and when will we review progress?</b>

Typical steps in using facilitated discussion in meeting challenges are:

- *Acknowledge the challenge; get agreement on the problem.*
- *Express differences; get all opinions on the table.*
- *Clarify differences; what are the dimensions of difference?*
- *Establish common ground; what do we agree on?*
- *Negotiate on areas of non-agreement.*
- *Agree and decide.*

This approach of facilitated discussion involves everyone and seeks to bring about agreement. It encourages the leadership to be ambitious and confront challenges rather than avoid them.

