

PROVIP

# D4.3 Insights about setting up a university – business network

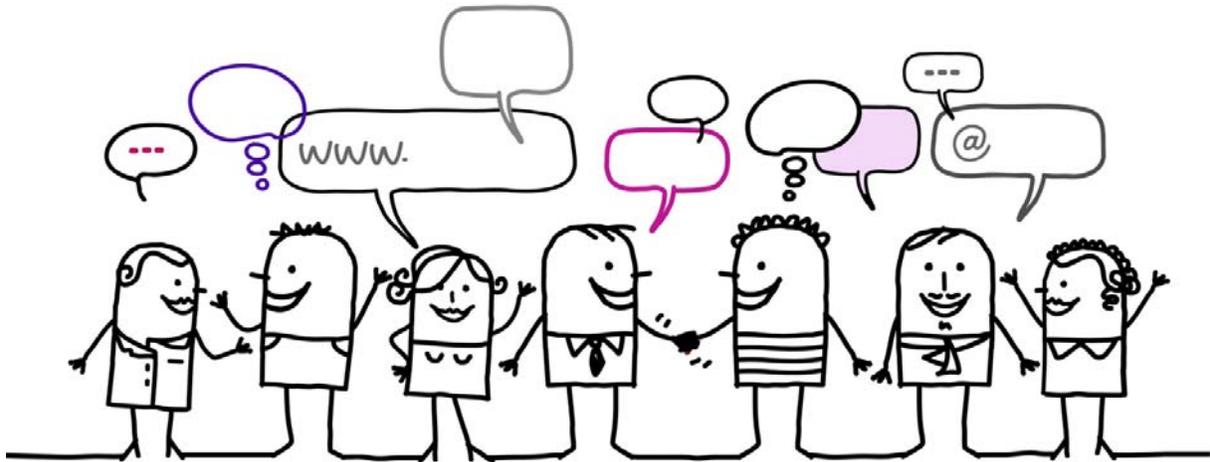
Guidelines and advise from the PROVIP project



## Introduction

In this document we will present the insights we have gained during the PROVIP project regarding setting up a network between higher education institutions (HEIs) and businesses. In our case we specifically aimed at forming a network around the Pathway tool, an online platform to support virtual internships. The PROVIP network would therefore exist of registered Pathway members (HEIs and companies) and concentrate on bringing together students, teaching staff and company representatives in the organisation, implementation and execution of virtual internships.

The guidelines and advise you will find in this document are a representation of the experiences of the PROVIP partners, of input from all PROVIP partners based on a questionnaire<sup>1</sup> and of interviews with PROVIP partners experienced in the formation and support of university – business networks: H  l  ne Yohannes (AIESEC), Tiago Monteiro (BEST) and Christophe Terrasse (EFMD).



**A network is a group or system of interconnected people or things**

<sup>1</sup> All partners were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Describe a network you belong to
2. Why are you a member of this network?
3. Which communication strategies does this network use?

## Starting up

### A matter of added value

Members of a network are interconnected through a joint theme, interest or goal. PROVIP partners who are part of a network were brought to this network because it revolves around a theme or a goal that is closely connected to their core business. Network membership brings them mainly new knowledge, a possibility to stay up-to-date about the latest trends and a possibility to get into contact with peers, working around the same topics.

To have common interests and goals between HEIs and companies is a difficult issue. For companies the added value of being member of a non-commercial network is not evident. They really need to be convinced of the "profit" membership will bring them. In this light, it is very important to think of a specific marketing strategy, aimed at potential business members and stressing the gains membership of your network can bring them.

*e.g. When AIESEC reaches out to companies to ask for international internship opportunities for AIESEC students, they can propose a real win situation for the company because they take care personally of matching student and internship and of all practical arrangements (like obtaining a visa) surrounding an international internship.*

One binding factor between higher education institutions and companies are the students. In setting up a network revolving around internships, students are obviously the biggest stakeholder and can be an important catalyst in the network formation process.

If you want to form a network, connected through an online tool, you will also need to make sure that the added value of this tool is very clear to all potential users. The software needs to have reached the phase of maintenance (development has been done and verified through testing) and you will need to be able to provide technical support, at least in the startup phase.

### Start small...

If you want to start a network from scratch, it is advisable to keep it small. Start with only a few enthusiastic members who are already intrinsically convinced of the added value the network can bring them. Let them work together so the full potential of joining forces can become visible and tangible before you try to convince others to join. Networks preferably grow organically bottom-up. This process takes up a lot of time.

### ... or start from existing networks

In a similar case like PROVIP where you want to bring people together around a tool, it might be a good idea to look at related networks that are already out there and that could be interested in using your tool. In this case you will need to bring your tool to these existing networks, emphasizing how your tool can add to the network and its goals.

### Bring people together

In case you are aiming to setup an international network you can work in two phases. Start by bringing local potential members together in face-to-face meetings and expand in a second phase to international virtual

meetings. Give participants to opportunity to explore what they can mean for each other and which potential there is for collaboration and exchange.

### Keeping your network alive

Actively starting up a network already takes some time and dedicated effort. But in the end, getting people to express interest and sign up for a free network is not that difficult, compared to the resources it will take to keep your network alive. Members will need to be reminded on a regular basis that they are part of the network and why they are part of the network. This usually happens through the organization of network events or other communication channels such as newsletters, magazines or mailing lists. When the binding element in the network is an online tool, active presence of an online administrator will also be important.

### Expanding your network

Next to the efforts devoted to maintaining the network, another set of activities needs to be aimed specifically at reaching out to potential new members. Here you need again to think about who these potential new members are and which marketing strategies you can use to convince them. When developing an international network, localisation is also an important issue here. Make sure you take specific local contexts into account. In international student networks like AIESEC and BEST, dedicated teams are being setup to build partnerships with companies.

