DESCRIBING YOUR DELIVERY APPROACH AND
CAPTURING YOUR LEARNING JOURNEY

OPERATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

DESCRIPTION & GUIDANCE

URBACT Implementation Networks

Version 1.0

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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1. WHAT IS AN O.I.F.?

1.1. The Operational Implementation Framework

The Operational Implementation Framework (OIF) is a local output, specific to each city. It is the final product that describes your challenges when implementing your plan, what approach you used to overcoming them and what you learnt from the process. This includes:

Context: What you plan to implement, what the challenges are with this, what the specific barriers are to successful implementation

Capabilities: which tools, skills, knowledge and methods you needed to overcome your barriers to implementation and deal with the Implementation Challenges

Approach: the detail of the approaches taken in implementing your action plan: how you put these capabilities together and used them.

Development & Learning: which new capabilities you needed to develop or acquire, what you learnt from the process of implementing your plan in this way.

It needs to capture and illustrate the journey through the project:
> What you did and how you did it
> Any ways in which your approach changed during the project (e.g. developing new techniques)
> What you learned from the process
> How you will use that learning to change or improve what you do next time

The OIF will include a document or set of documents that describe and illustrate the things above. It may also include other references and other media (e.g. video, audio, blogs etc). It can be thought of as a series of building blocks, rather than a single item. Together, these blocks provide all the needed information.
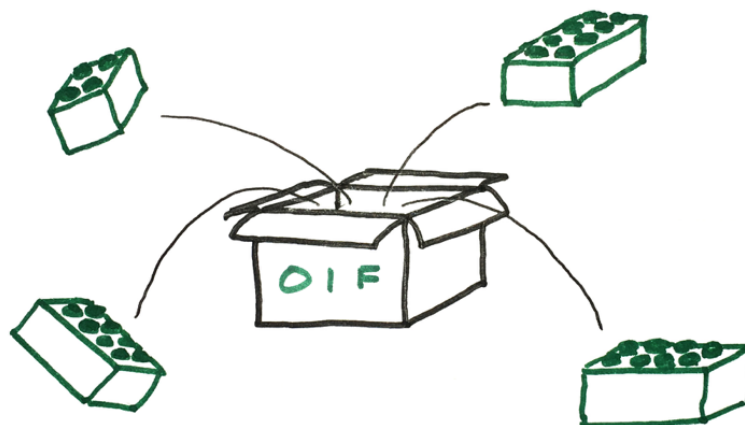
The OIF is essentially a way of illustrating what you did, how you overcame your implementation challenges and describing your journey along the way. It will provide a framework for tackling future projects.

1.2.   Looking forward, looking back

At this stage in the network, the development of the OIF is largely looking at future activity - you will not have implemented everything yet so you might not know the approach you will use.

The end version of the OIF will be a description of what challenges you faced and the approach you took to overcoming them (successful or not; complete or not).

However, whilst you cannot create your final OIF at this stage, you must start collecting now the information you will need at the end. It will be difficult to capture all the necessary information in 18 months' time if you have not been recording it at the time throughout the project.

Think *now* about what you might need – where you think things may be useful, record them as you go.

1.3.   Success is not a pre-requisite

It is important to remember that whether your implementation is successful or not is of less relevance in the OIF than the assessment of your Delivery Approach and the analysis of why things turned out as they did. The quality of the OIF is not judged on how well something was implemented.

A high quality OIF will be honest about levels of success and about where things fall short. It will offer useful insights into what caused things to go wrong, what was learnt as a result, and how you will use new knowledge to change how you work in the future.

1.4.   Version control and tracking

Keep each version of your OIF as part of your learning and development journey. When you make amendments to any sections, create a new version, don't delete the old version of the OIF content. That way, you can see how things developed during the course of the project and this will assist you in your final Synthesis.

Don't overwrite previous versions as these will likely contain useful information for reviewing your learning journey and creating your synthesis.

2. COMPILING YOUR O.I.F.

2.1. How to Structure Your OIF

The OIF does not have a set format. It needs to include statements so that you can see how progress is made during the URBACT network. It is also helpful because it allows people to see how your city is working compared with OIFs from other cities in your network. It should be adapted to local requirements – including local ways of reporting in the municipality.

OIF Contents	
✓	Introduction & Context
✓	Local assessment of baseline position
✓	Outline Implementation Plan and Barriers to Implementation
✓	Response to the Implementation Challenges
✓	Learning Journey
✓	Synthesis of this – which forms the basis for a future delivery approach or framework

The sections listed above are the main parts of the OIF. The Introduction and Context section sets the scene to ensure the reader can understand the main purpose of the project, the policy area the city is focussing on within the Implementation Network and any other relevant background information that is relevant for the implementation plan of the project. The Synthesis is essentially the conclusions drawn from the project.
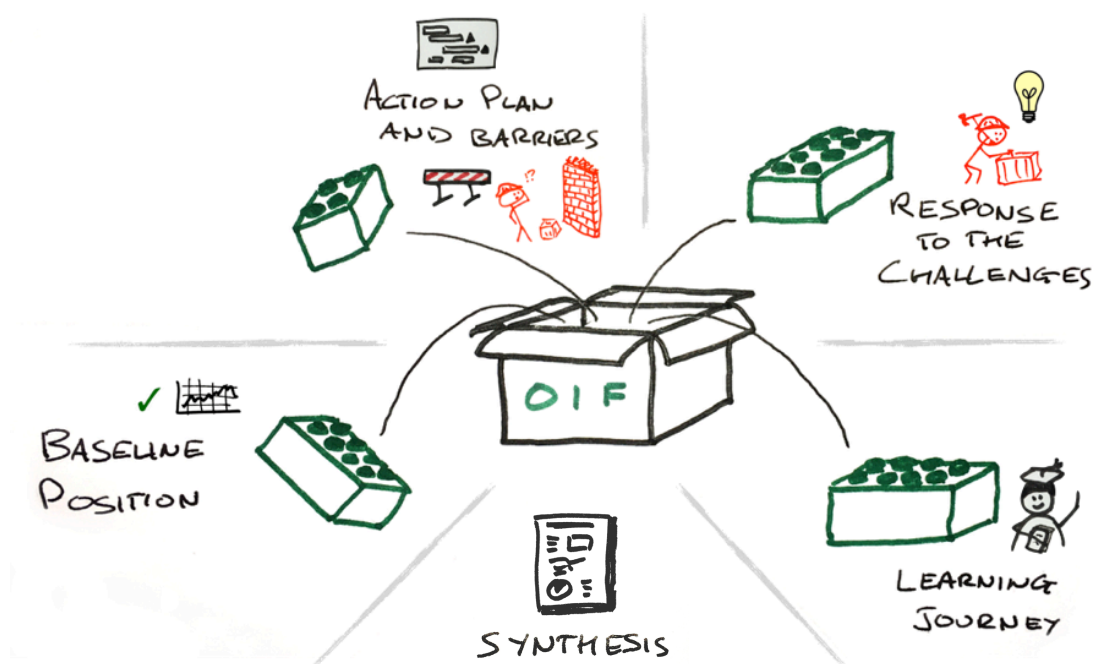
2.2. What to Include in Your OIF?

In the most general terms, you will need to capture and record anything that you will need to illustrate:

> the implementation of actions in your implementation plan
> the learning journey that you take during the URBACT network

You will need to be able to demonstrate your delivery approach for the relevant action plan. You should also describe both your starting point and the distance travelled during the project i.e. how did you implement things before the project and how did that change as a result of the project. Here are *some* things to consider:

Example OIF Questions

?	What is/was your starting position in terms of thinking about "Implementation" (did you think about it at all? Did you have a process?)
?	What implementation or project delivery strategy / methodology did you have in place at the start?
?	What did you find when you assessed your local conditions? e.g. as a report or synthesis of findings
?	Who are you working with at different stages of the project; what are those working relationships like; do they change or evolve over time; is that due to deliberate action or just 'naturally'?
?	What surprised you during the delivery of the actions? What was it? Why was it surprising? (looking back at the end, asking yourself whether it would be surprising again in the future is a good way of examining learning)
?	What questions did you have during the process of delivering the actions? Try to record these when you think of them i.e. at the time - not just when you have answered them. Being able to look back and see what your questions were and if/when/how you answered them will give good insights into your learning journey during the project.
?	What did you capture in your project journal? Capturing thoughts and experiences during the project could be a good way to record this.
?	What difficulties were encountered; how were these solved (if at all!)?
?	What successes did you experience; why did some things work well?

Please note that **this is NOT an exhaustive list**. You will need to consider your own circumstances and specific objectives and decide what might be needed at the end to produce your final OIF. We can provide examples and prompts and any outputs or templates we help you to create during the network will all contribute to the production of your OIF.

A big reason for the lack of understanding of implementation practice is a lack of information to review after a project. A rule of thumb is: if you are not sure, try to record it somehow. It will be difficult to understand and be clear about why things worked or not if you haven't captured the right information along the way.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE OIF SECTIONS

The OIF will be comprised of information grouped into the following sections:

3.1. Your baseline position

This section describes how you implemented actions in the municipality and with partners before you were involved in this URBACT network:

> What is your current/previous implementation practice in the field covered by the network

> What capabilities do you have locally to support implementation (tools, methodologies, teams, skills, personal qualities)?

> How do you use these capabilities in implementing projects?

Use examples of how thing are done locally to illustrate your baseline position. Ideally, make this assessment at the URBACT Local Group (ULG) level, considering how the group works and how the individual partners work. However, reviewing individual partners and practices can help gain a better understanding of the exact position and hence help to identify the important areas that you wish to develop.

From this baseline, you can then clarify your focus and specific objectives for this project:

> What do you want to explore and develop in this network in terms of implementation practice?

> What do you wish to achieve in terms of local implementation abilities e.g. better use of existing methods, development of new capabilities etc.

Remember that this baseline is not about the state of your policy theme in your city; it is about how you implement things in your city/department/ULG. However, the current situation in relation to your policy theme may help provide you with examples.

An Example

As a simple example, consider an Implementation Network whose policy theme is about the development of public green spaces. For a partner city in this example network, part of the Implementation baseline (what we need in this section) might look like:

"city partners, including municipality parks department and the local community group for the seafront neighbourhood work together effectively when carrying out gardening works, however they do not always communicate changes to their local activities effectively between ULG partners."

Alongside this, cities will have also looked at their policy baseline, in terms of what the current state of parks and green spaces in the partner city is and what their action plan includes. This should already have been covered and documented during phase 1 and a part of this might look like:

"The city has good practice in parks development in the inner city neighbourhoods but needs better green spaces in the seafront neighbourhood. We have developed a new action plan and we will be creating a new park in the seafront area as part of this project."

This policy baseline is relevant and might help find concrete examples, but the Policy baseline statement above is about the action plan, *not* the current implementation practices (it's about the *What* not the *How*). It provides background to the implementation plan, but is not the baseline implementation position, whereas the first statement gives information about how the city works in relation to a specific implementation capability.

For an example set of implementation capabilities, see the checklist in the *Description and Guidance* documents for each of the URBACT Implementation Challenges or alternatively, for a more detailed set, the Stay Tuned *Implementation Themes Pack* and *Self-Assessment Templates*.

3.2. Outline Implementation Plan

This sets out what you plan to do (i.e. What you are implementing) and the difficulties / challenges / problems / barriers that you foresee. As the project progresses this section may develop further, as you either adjust your implementation plan or encounter new challenges or barriers to overcome.

This should include:

> An overview of the Implementation Plan

> What the Implementation Challenges mean in practice for your city

> The Implementation Barriers, Blockers and Risks that have been identified already: what will stop things being implemented, what will make it difficult or reduce quality?

The various exercises carried out in the Implementation Network Training sessions in Paris in September 2017 and February 2018 will be major inputs into this section. This includes the analysis exercise on the Implementation Challenges, the completed Implementation Plan template and any completed Action Sheet templates.

3.3.   Response to the Implementation Challenges

This section documents how you responded/will respond to the various challenges you face(d) during the lifetime of your implementation network. It will include a subsection for each Implementation Challenge plus any other relevant Implementation Themes.

This should include, for each Implementation Challenge:

> What this Challenge "looks like" in your city – how it presents
  itself in practice, what is the exact nature of the problem to be overcome? Include the specific barriers/blockers/problems that you experience or that you worked on in your local situation as part of the network (i.e. to what will you apply your capability/methods?)

> The assessed importance/relevance of the Challenge in the local city context.

> How you plan to overcome the Challenge. In the final version this will become how you *overcame* the challenge, or tried to – success is not a pre-requisite. What concrete tools or responses will you / did you develop and put in place in your city to improve your response to the various Implementation Challenges. For example a new governance structure for projects, a monitoring & evaluation plan. When available these tools / descriptions of them would be annexes to your Operational Implementation Framework and are important local outputs to refer to and illustrate.

> Where do you need to develop (new) capability/capacity? Where will you use existing capability?

> What are the success factors for this Challenge (more specific than just "overcome this challenge")? What will success mean, in terms of changes to your implementation ability and practice? How will you know how far you have travelled, in terms of improving your Implementation practice?

3.4.   Learning Journey

This is a review and illustration of what happens during the IN project, how the approach is formed and develops, how new things are learnt and applied, what works and what doesn't, what was learnt from that etc.

Questions to help think about and capture information on the learning journey include:

- What happens along the way?

- What works or doesn't work and WHY?

- What do you learn from others?

- What do you learn from your own (local) experience / practice?

- What have you done to apply these lessons to your local practice?

- What happened that you didn't expect? With hindsight, could you predict this in future?

3.5. Synthesis

So what? What does all this mean for your city?

This final section is to draw together the most important parts of the Delivery Approach you took to overcome the challenges. This should look at how your specific challenges were tackled in practice and what skills, methods, tools you used to do so. What will this mean for the future? What have you learnt and what may be relevant to other cities.
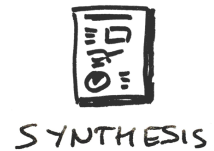
Some possible questions to answer:

> Which actions have been implemented? Are there any still to be completed?

> Did you plan change at all during implementation? If so, which parts changed and why?

> Are you on track to achieve the expected results?

> What were the most important learning points?

> Which of your responses to Implementation Challenges were most interesting and why?

> Which parts of your responses to the Implementation Challenges will you use in the future?

> What will a (revised) implementation framework for your city look like? (i.e. how will you implement future projects?). In what ways does this differ from your previous approaches (comparing this new framework to your baseline position).

> What else has changed as a result of the work? (in your team, in your municipality, in your delivery partners etc?)

> Which things could be applied to other teams, implementation of policy in other thematic areas/departments? What could be shared with other cities?

The Synthesis is a summary of all the building blocks in your OIF "box", how they all relate to each other and how together they inform your understanding of implementation in your city. It should summarise the project, illustrate the most interesting and relevant points and provide a view of how you will approach implementation and tackle implementation challenges in the future.