Blueprint for Council Establishment

A Practical Guide Based on Learnings from the DECODE Sustainability Project

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Preamble

The European Deans Council for Sustainable Development project (DECODE Sustainability) is an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships project co-funded by the European Commission.

The project brings 3 prestigious European Universities, 1 non-governmental organisation and 1 quality assurance body together to empower deans, vice-deans and other leaders of the academic units of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their representatives for Sustainable Development (SD) to strengthen their commitment toward increasing sustainability impacts within and through their institutions.

The current document, Blueprint for Council Establishment, is created as one of the transferrable results created in the second work package of the project. The process taken and experiences gained by the DECODE Sustainability project team in establishing, promoting and launching the European Deans Council for Sustainable Development are summarized and adjusted as a general guide to establishing a council.

More information about the DECODE Sustainability project can be found at https://www.decode-council.org/

Meet DECODE Partners

University of Naples Federico II
(**UNINA**)
Italy

Riga Technical University
(**RTU**)
Latvia

The Center for Higher Education Policy Studies
(**CHEPS**) at University of Twente
The Netherlands

The Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities
(**ACEEU**)
Germany

The Catalan Association of Public University/ The Global University Network for Innovation
(**ACUP/GUNi**)
Spain

Why and When Should You Establish a Council?

Generally, a council is defined as a group of people who come together to consult, deliberate, make decisions or represent a particular group, subject or topic.

In the context of the DECODE Sustainability project, the project has established the European Deans Council for Sustainable Development (DECODE Council) as an innovative strategy to create departmental governance changes that are effective and efficient in the creation of sustainability impact within and through universities. The DECODE Council is an effective mechanism that enables sharing of experiences and knowledge on sustainable development (SD) in higher education institutions (HEIs). It is an impactful community of deans and their representatives, who are seen as the main driving force behind strategic initiatives in HEIs.

A council can be a powerful initiative when there is a fundamental need to bring like-minded individuals (community) together, support its development and its efforts to achieve its shared goal(s). Before starting the establishment of a council, one should have a better understanding of the needs of the council, its aims and objectives, and initial thoughts on the target groups and the services/ activities offered within and from the council.

How to Use this Blueprint

This Blueprint has been developed to support organizations, associations or any individuals who are interested in establishing a similar council or initiative. Although created from the context of the European Deans Council for Sustainable Development, the Blueprint has been designed to provide general ideas and suggestions to create any type of a council. This Blueprint identifies key messages and useful actions to ensure an effective setup phase starting from ideation, formation and introduction of the council to the public.

This Blueprint for Council Establishment contains a roadmap for council creation. The roadmap describes the 5 steps that can be followed to build an impactful and successful council. At each step, some tips or examples are given to better explain the process.
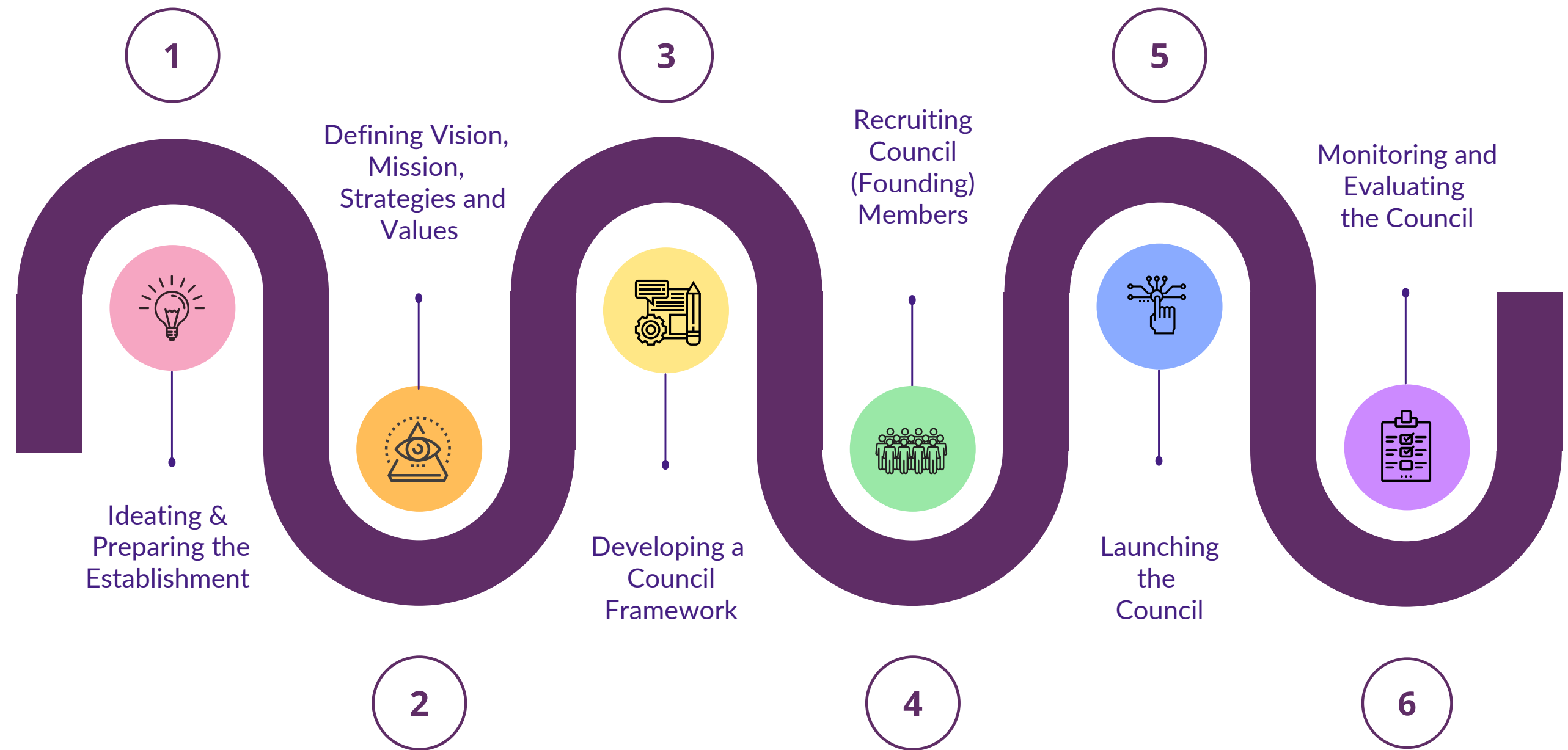
Please keep in mind that this Blueprint is not intended to be prescriptive as it has been designed as a flexible planning technique to prompt ideas and support strategic and long-term planning.

Figure 1. Roadmap to Establish a Council

Effective Steps to Establish a Council

1 — Ideating & Preparing the Establishment

2 — Defining Vision, Mission, Strategies and Values

3 — Developing a Council Framework

4 — Recruiting Council (Founding) Members

5 — Launching the Council

6 — Monitoring and Evaluating the Council

1 Ideating and Preparing the Establishment

To begin the process of forming a council, a clear purpose of the council and the impact it wishes to create should be determined. To achieve this, a good ideation or brainstorming session is needed. A series of activities are suggested below to support the ideation process that leads to good preparation of the Council.

I. Forming a Team of Like-Minded Individuals to Establish a Council

This involves carefully choosing partners or team members in terms of expertise, location and alignment among them and assigning specific roles and responsibilities to lead the development of the initiative. Essential leadership roles and functions include, but are not limited to, team leader, executive secretary, operation manager, communication leader, finance and administration manager, and (project) officers. See Figure 2 for an example.

Effective Steps to Establish a Council

Effective Steps to Establish a Council
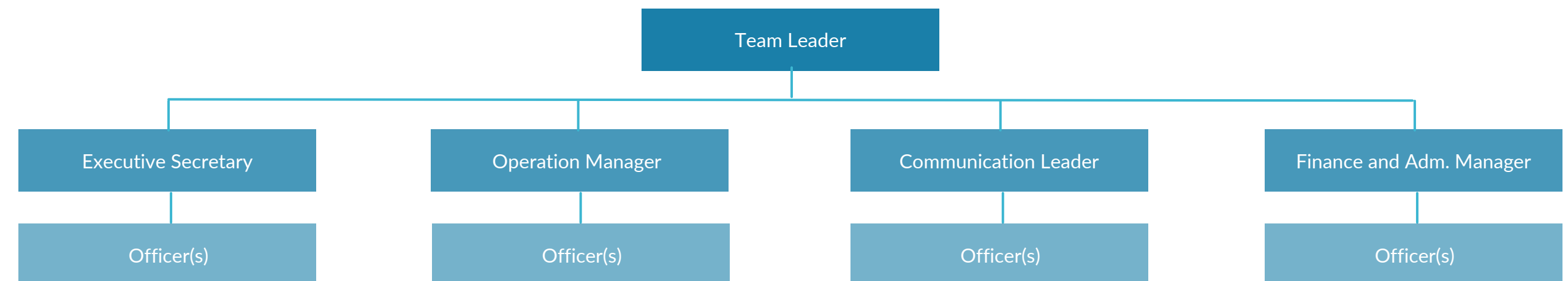
(Virtual) regular meetings to communicate the development of the council are recommended to ensure that everyone involved shares a common understanding of the intent of the council, the tasks designed and the results expected in the establishment process.

II. Defining Target Groups

Knowing exactly who the target groups of the council are early on in the process is important in ensuring the success of the council. A clear definition of target groups supports the council in the development process as it helps shape the initial purposes into concrete objectives and goals. The target groups include the people **who will be recruited as members** of the council and **for whom the council is established.**

The following three key questions would help define the most appropriate target groups:

- *Whom do we need to reach? (Define particular profiles, ages, specific community, etc.)*

- *Why do we want to reach them? (Specify the motives/ reasons why these groups should be targeted)*

- *Why should they respond to this initiative? (Consider their contribution, benefits, interests and needs)*

III. Creating a Database to contact target groups and recruit potential council members

Now that the target groups are clearly defined, the next step would be collecting information and building strategies on how to reach them.

Effective Steps to Establish a Council

Some ways to create database and build contacts are:

- ✓ *Collecting existing contacts and networks of involved partners or team members*

- ✓ *Building a contact database through an internet search*

- ✓ *Attending networking seminars/ webinars on the relevant topics*

- ✓ *Disseminating promotional materials through social media channels*

- ✓ *Integrating a newsletter subscription on the project/ initiative's website*

IV. Preparing Further Tasks/ Activities

There is a list of tasks and activities that need to be prepared while establishing a council. Some of the critical tasks include:

- ✓ *Identifying effective online and offline channels to promote the council and the activities involved*

- ✓ *Drafting an Intellectual Property Rights Agreement to ensure all the materials and results produced are used properly*

- ✓ *Ensuring financial and administrative support and control throughout the development of the establishment process e.g. setting up quality and budget control team, finding sponsors, etc.*

Defining Vision, Mission, Strategies and Values

The second step for successfully creating a council is to define the council's vision, mission, strategies and values. Having these elements clearly defined early on in the process enables the organization and coordination of the council to be run smoothly and effectively to achieve its objectives.

Effective Steps to Establish a Council

Vision

The vision is the why. It describes the change the council and its people believe they can make and where they go moving forward.

Mission

The mission is the how. It describes the work the council and its people do toward the vision, what they attempt to do and what impact they want to create.

Strategies

The strategies are the plans. They describe the specific work organized and implemented by the people joined in the council.

Values

The values describe who the people behind the council are and what they stand for. They speak about how the activities or work are done to achieve the vision and mission.

3   Developing a Council Framework

A framework is created as a foundation for establishing the council and implementing its activities. It provides a clear structure and description of how the processes are done, what and how activities are undertaken and how the people are formed including their roles and responsibilities. In general, a framework guides a council to work toward its goal while being flexible enough to adapt to evolving conditions.

The council framework can take form in, but is not limited to, the following documents:

- ***Strategic, Tactical and Operational Plan for Establishing the Council:***
This document is usually created as an internal working document used to guide the development/ establishment process. The strategic element describes strategies and the directions needed to achieve the goals and other critical elements of the establishment process of the council. The tactical element is concerned more with the roles and responsibilities of each individual joined in the establishment process while the operational part translates all the strategies defined into specific action plans relevant to a distinct area of the organization.

Effective Steps to Establish a Council

- ***The Council Statue:***

A formal written rule of the council. A well-written statute generally contains detailed information of the council, its aims and activities, its governance structure, the types and criteria of involvement i.e. memberships, admission, rights and obligations, its leadership, how the general assembly is conducted, elections for a leadership position and voting procedure *(an example for the structure of the council can be found in Appendix 1)*. The dissolution process of the council and the amendment process of the statute should also be included in one of the chapters in the statute. Once finalized, the council will be made public and support potential members to make a decision on whether or not to join the council. It is also essential to add a section on how the activities of the council are monitored and evaluated.

- ***The Council Policies and Procedures:***

It is a document that features a set of general guidelines that outline's the council plan for tackling specific issues. Policies communicate the council's vision and values and its daily operations while a procedure explains the specific action(s) for carrying out the policies. An example of the structure of the policies and procedures can be found in Appendix 2.

4 Recruiting Council (Founding) Members

Once the target group of the council is clearly defined and the criteria for different types of memberships are determined, the next step is recruiting founding members. Recruiting council founding members is a significant step in establishing a council as they can be a source of support during the further development of the council before the official launch is held. Founding members can help shape the council framework, suggest more meaningful and relevant council activities and further promote the council.

The following strategies are suggested to recruit founding members:

✓ Publish Open Calls for Council Founding Members distributed via the website, emails and social media channels. Before the recruiting phase begins, ensure that the Council establish a strong online presence.

✓ Special events i.e. organizing a topical open discussion, local event or a guest talk to attract target groups

✓ Making use of networks of individuals involved in the establishment process, for example, if the council is created as an initiative of a partnership, make sure each partner promote and communicate about the council within their

Effective Steps to Establish a Council

It is important to define the roles of founding members to ensure that they are aware of what is expected and how they can contribute to the setting up of the council. Consistent communication and constant update of the development project should be carried to keep the momentum alive.

Here are some activities/ collaboration that can be carried or initiated with founding members:

- ✓ Reviewing the Council Framework i.e. Council Statute, Policies and Procedure
- ✓ Proposing key topics addressed in the Council
- ✓ Proposing relevant activities or working groups within the Council
- ✓ Providing expertise and advice related to the engagement strategy of the council
- ✓ Becoming the founding chairs and vice-chairs leading the council before and after the official launch until a proper election of council leadership is carried out

Once the chosen activities, the next step is preparing the launch event of the council to officially "kick-off" the work/activities of the council.

It is important to have the council framework finalized before the launch event.

5 Launching the Council

Create momentum for the establishment of the council with a launch event. A launch event is an excellent way to reaffirm the vision, mission and goals of the council and to inform the existing members on the next steps of the council. Moreover, a launch event can also be used as an opportunity to get people talking more about the council and will result in increasing numbers of memberships.

Here are some tips to build an effective and engaging launch event:

✓ When a face-to-face event is not possible, a launch event can also be organized online in a webinar format. Plan ahead. Set the date, build the program and consider a guest speaker to increase the attraction of the event. A rehearsal for an online format is highly recommended to minimize technical problems that can occur.

✓ Make the event exclusive. Consider two types of attendees: the registered members and those who can help promote the council.

✓ Engage the attendees as well as inform them about the council and its activities. Interactive activities will not only help to keep the attention of the attendees during the informative sessions but also leave the attendees with a meaningful memory.

6 Monitoring and Evaluating the Council

After the council has been officially formed and launched, it is necessary to monitor and evaluate how the council is run. One of the key roles that should be included in the council governance structure is how the key activities in the council are monitored and evaluated to make sure that the impacts are created.

Why? An evaluation can help determine if the council is effective and if the time and effort spent is worthwhile. Ongoing evaluations can help keep track of the progress and indicate the success of the council in achieving its objectives.

When? On a regular basis. Depending on the number of activities done, an evaluation should be done every 6 or 12 months or when certain concerns arise i.e. the decreasing number of membership

What? Council organization, member participation, council involvement in the community

How? Using a council member satisfaction survey, council leadership self-evaluation questionnaire, anonymous suggestion box, etc.

Is Your Council Ready to be Launched?

The following checklist will help you determine if your council is ready to be made public and officially launched:

No.	Tasks	Status
1.	Build a council establishment team and assign specific leadership roles	
2.	Define target groups of whom the council is established and potential council members	
3.	Create a database of target groups	
4.	Plan tasks related to the communication, legal, financial and administrative aspects of the establishment process	
5.	Define the vision, mission, strategies and values of the council	
6.	Develop the council framework	
7.	Define roles of council founding members	

Guiding Checklist to Launch a Council

Guiding Checklist to Launch a Council

No.	Tasks	Status
8.	Communicate/ publish a call for council founding members	
9.	Recruit council founding members	
10.	Actively engage the council founding members i.e. webinars, reviewing council framework	
11.	Finalize the council framework	
12.	Prepare a launch event (set a date, plan the communication, program, invite a guest speaker when necessary)	
13.	Communicate the launch event with founding members and relevant stakeholders	
14.	Launch the council	

Appendices

List of Appendices

Appendix 1. An Example for the Structure of a Council Statute

Appendix 2. An Example for the Structure of Council Policies and Procedures

Co-funded by the
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Appendices

Appendix 1. An Example for the Structure of a Council Statute

Chapter 1. Name and Seat
Article 1 - Name
Article 2 - Registered Address

Chapter 2. Aims and Activities of the Council
Article 3 – Aims
Article 4 - Activities

Chapter 3. Belief, Vision, Mission, and Values of the Council
Article 5 – Belief
Article 6 – Vision
Article 7 – Mission
Article 8 – Values

Chapter 4. Involvement in the Council
Article 9 - Memberships
Article 10 - Eligibility Criteria
Article 11 - Admission
Article 12 - Rights and Obligation
Article 13 - Membership Fee
Article 14 - Loss of Memberships

Chapter 5. The Structure of the Council
Article 15- The Council Core Stakeholders
Article 16- Rights and Responsibilities

Chapter 6. The Council Leadership
Article 17 - Composition of the Council Leadership
Article 18 – Functions
Article 19 – Operation
Article 20 – Nomination of Candidates
Article 21 – Election
Article 22 – Representation of the Council
Article 23 - Ending the Leadership Mandate

Chapter 7. General Assembly
Article 24 – Composition
Article 25 – Functions
Article 26 – Operation
Article 27 - Observers

Chapter 8. Dissolution of the Council
Article 7 - Dissolution Process

Chapter 9. Amendments to the Statute
Article 8 - Statute Amendment Process

DECODE Council Statute can be found on the website: www.decode-council.org

Appendix 2. An Example for the Structure of Council Policies and Procedures

An Introduction to the Document

Article 1 - Appeal Policy
1.1. Application: A policy detailing the process when a formal change/ a specific decision is requested to be reviewed
1.2. Procedure

Article 2 - Complaint Policy
2.1. Application: A policy detailing how a complaint can be handed and handled fairly and consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction
2.2. Procedure

Article 3 - Conflict of Interest Policy
3.1. Application: A policy detailing the process when a possible conflict exists between members' personal interests and the Council
3.2. Procedure

Article 4 - Copyright and Confidentiality Policy
4.1. Application: A policy detailing copyright, confidentiality treatment, between the Council members, applicants and the other stakeholders involved in the set up of the Council
4.2. Procedure

Article 5 - Data Protection Policy
5.1. Application: A policy detailing protection with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.
5.2. Procedure

Article 6- Logo and Promotional Materials Usage Policy
6.1. Application: A policy detailing the usage of the logo, visual identity and other materials produced and used in the Council.
6.2. Usage Rules

DECODE Council Policies and Procedures can be found on the website: www.decode-council.org

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