

ERASMUS+ · KA210-SCH

Student Council Guidelines Handbook

A practical guide to establishing, running, and sustaining effective school student councils — and linking their everyday work to Europe's shared democratic values.



Empowering Youth Voice: Developing Democratic Participation through School Councils

Project ID 2023-1-LV01-KA210-SCH-000159652

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK • FINAL VERSION

Funded by the European Union

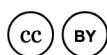
This handbook is the final intellectual output of the Erasmus+ KA210-SCH project “**Empowering Youth Voice: Developing Democratic Participation through School Councils.**” It was created collaboratively by four partner schools across Latvia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania.



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Partner schools



Riga 22nd Secondary School

Riga, Latvia · Coordinator



Vazrazhdane Secondary School

Ruse, Bulgaria



Second Lyceum-Livaneion XIOY

Chios, Greece



Colegiul Tehnic “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Suceava

Suceava, Romania

“The key purpose of the handbook is to assist student councils to be more effective in promoting democratic values, youth participation and youth empowerment.”

PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Why student councils matter — across Europe

Across the European Union, most schools are mandated to establish student councils — bodies that carry a set of responsibilities toward their school communities, local municipalities, and the wider society.

While the mandate may be shared, the traditions, approaches, and pedagogical interpretations of what a student council is and how it functions vary significantly from one member state to another. For one, some national systems favour a lean structure built around a single elected president and a small supporting team, as in Latvia; others build a multi-tier hierarchy in which a president and vice-presidents sit above a secretary, departments, and class-level representatives, as in Bulgaria and Romania; and still others add dedicated roles such as a treasurer and alternate members to the core team, as in Greece. None of these models is more “correct” than another — each reflects the school culture and scale it grew out of.

However, one of the essential goals of the European Union is to come to a unified understanding of how we should prepare the future generations as they plan for the challenges ahead. Equally important is to understand how we shape our student councils to assist our school's students to shape them into contributing European citizens that will be ready for the road ahead that awaits our solidary union of cultures.

As is marked in the title of the project, the goal of this handbook is to link the essential principles of democracy into the practices of a student council in a European school. While over the past years, we have seen growing rates of youth participation if we look at the rise in youth turnout in the 2019 European Parliament elections, the most recent elections in 2024 have shown a rapid decline once again.

42%

youth turnout in the 2019 European Parliament elections — a 14% rise on 2014, and the highest overall turnout in two decades.

EP elections 2019

36%

of youth voted in the most recent 2024 elections — a rapid decline in youth participation once again.

EP elections 2024

Several factors contribute to this disengagement. A 2023 survey of 16- to 26-year-olds across seven European countries found a sharp rise in dissatisfaction, and a meaningful share also agreed that the gap between ordinary people and political “elites” is wider than the differences within the public itself. This sentiment fosters a sense of powerlessness and deters active participation.

49%

were dissatisfied with the state of democracy in their own country — up sharply from 35% in 2019.

Young Europe 2023

59%

felt poorly represented, or not represented at all, by politicians.

Young Europe 2023

How do we ignite the sense of civic duty within students — especially those for whom this sense may not arise intrinsically? How can schools provide a platform for civic engagement and youth participation? Many institutions and researchers have suggested that one of the paths to increasing youth participation on all levels of society is by implementing civic and political education in schools; not only as a part of the curriculum but also as extracurricular activities such as the student council. That said, forming an effective European-minded student council within a school may be one of the essential answers to these questions.

Then we turn to the next question — what steps can we take to promote youth voice and participation in our schools? Gladly, we may have the answers you are looking for. This handbook is intended to be a practical and educational tool for student councils in schools that identify with the values enshrined in the European Union — dignity, democracy, human rights, equality, and the rule of law. It was developed as part of the Erasmus+ project **Empowering Youth Voice: Developing Democratic Participation through School Councils**, in partnership between the following schools:

- Riga 22nd Secondary School in Riga, Latvia
- Vazrazhdane Secondary School in Ruse, Bulgaria
- Second Lyceum-Livaneion XIOY in Chios, Greece
- Colegiul Tehnic “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Suceava in Suceava, Romania

The project explored how student councils can be strengthened as platforms for youth voice and democratic engagement, through international cooperation, shared learning, and the co-creation of tools and materials that will benefit students and educators alike.

The chapters at a glance

In each of the chapters, we provide a detailed look at our work at every phase of the project. Each chapter is grounded in one partner country's mobility exchange.



Chapter 1 — How to establish a working and effective student council?

The sensible first step. This chapter focuses on the key principles of a student council, its responsibilities and its function as an exercise of democracy — how to structure a council, its hierarchy, the division of responsibilities between members, how to manage the council as a working organization, and how to manage conflicts when they arise.



Chapter 2 — What should a student council do?

Once the structure is in place, this chapter focuses on the purpose and potential impact of student councils. It explores the roles councils can play in school life, policy influence, student representation, project management, and community building.



Chapter 3 — How to turn ideas into reality?

Students learn how to transform their ideas into concrete actions and initiatives. It offers tools for project planning, campaigning, budgeting, collaboration, and engaging the school community — and includes success stories and examples from partner schools.



Chapter 4 — From student councils to European democratic processes

The final chapter connects student councils with wider European democratic values and civic participation. It reflects on how local student engagement translates into active citizenship on national and European levels — including youth dialogues, consultations, and policymaking.

DEFINITION & RESPONSIBILITIES

A shared definition of a student council

During the first phase of this project, our task was to arrive together at a definition of a student council that we could all agree upon.

After each group discussed their ideas about the ideal definition in a single sentence — one that would capture the essence of a student council — we tried to pick out the keywords and phrases to combine into a unified definition. As a result, we arrived at the following:

“A student council is a group of students that serve as a link between student representatives, the students and the school employees, and work to improve the school community with the goal of promoting democracy and altruism, tolerance, inclusion and a healthy and happy school environment.”

OUR UNIFIED DEFINITION — PHASE 1

Throughout this handbook, we continue to expand and build upon this definition while blending it together with the core values of the European Union. The responsibilities that flow from it — fostering inclusivity and participation, ensuring every student's voice is heard, and promoting independence and leadership — are explored in detail in Chapter 1.

SOURCES CITED IN THIS INTRODUCTION

1. Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), “Youth turnout in the 2024 European elections: a closer look at the under-25 vote,” 2024.
2. TUI Stiftung / YouGov, “Young Europe 2023,” June 2023 (survey of 7,085 people aged 16–26 in Germany, the UK, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Poland).
3. European Parliament resolution of 6 April 2022 on the implementation of citizenship education actions (2021/2008(INI)).



LATVIA · RIGA

01

CHAPTER ONE

How to establish a working and effective student council

The sensible first step in developing a student council into a responsible youth organization: its key principles, its responsibilities, its structure, and how it runs as a working body — including elections and conflict.

· GROUNDED IN THE LATVIAN MOBILITY EXCHANGE ·

CHAPTER 1 · ESTABLISHING A COUNCIL

Building a council that lasts

Before any school can begin developing or strengthening a student council that reflects European democratic values, it is crucial to first understand the role and significance of student councils in today's school environment.

This chapter explores what makes a student council effective and sustainable, and provides schools and students with practical tools to build and maintain one that fosters participation, responsibility, and leadership.

The importance of student councils

As discussed in the introduction, student councils are not just optional extracurricular activities — they are essential democratic structures within the school. In most EU countries, student councils are a formal requirement, but their impact depends heavily on how they are established, empowered, and supported.

A well-functioning student council provides a practical learning space for democracy. It gives students the opportunity to participate in school decision-making, express their views, and work together to improve their educational environment. More than that, it cultivates essential life skills: leadership, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and empathy.

In the process of defining a student council in the first phase of our project, students and teachers from Latvia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania came together to collectively define what a student council is. As they shared ideas, several keywords consistently emerged: **representation, leadership, participation, democracy, inclusion, altruism, and responsibility**. These are not just aspirational terms — they are guiding principles that reflect what a student council should strive to embody in daily practice.

Importantly, student council members must also serve as role models. Their actions, attitude, and initiatives should reflect the values they advocate for. Whether organizing events, proposing policy changes, or advocating for student well-being, council members should demonstrate a sense of commitment to the greater good of the school community.

Responsibilities of a student council

As we worked collaboratively across partner schools to reflect on what responsibilities student councils should uphold, a rich discussion emerged. Each group had mixed delegates from each of the partner schools, blending together their school cultures and national contexts — yet a clear convergence of core values appeared. We conducted a vote, and three ended up on the whiteboard:

- Foster inclusivity and student participation.
- Ensuring that every student's voice is heard.
- Promote independence and leadership within their schools.

These three capture the essence of what a student council should represent. In the spirit of a handbook that explores the “how” and “why” as well as the “what,” we propose a refined and expanded version of each — paired with practical perspective on the pages that follow.

1 • Creating a culture of inclusivity and participation

A student council must be open, accessible, and representative of the entire student body. It is not a space reserved for the most outspoken or high-achieving students — it is a platform where every student, regardless of background, ability, or popularity, feels welcomed and heard. This responsibility involves:

- **Actively seeking input from all student groups.** Cultivate the sense of participation early on, so even younger pupils feel their contributions matter and are heard — developing further along their academic journey and into adulthood.
- **Creating spaces for dialogue and feedback** — suggestion boxes, forums, or town-hall style meetings — giving the opportunity to fulfil the responsibility of seeking input from all students.
- **Running awareness campaigns and inclusive events** that celebrate diversity and promote belonging.

True participation means enabling students to experience democracy in action, which builds the foundation for lifelong civic engagement. By upholding this responsibility, the council itself becomes a visible, working example of the inclusive culture it is asking the rest of the school to practice.

● TRY THIS

The Suggestion Wall.

Set up a physical board, a digital form, or both, where any student can leave a comment, idea, or concern — signed or anonymous. Once a month, the council reads every entry out loud at its meeting, sorts them into “can act on now,” “needs more information,” and “outside our control,” and reports back to the school on what happened to each category. The point is not to solve everything — it is to show that every voice gets a response.

The Inclusion Audit.

Twice a year, have the council look honestly at its own composition and ask: which year groups, which language backgrounds, which interests are missing from this table? Pick one concrete step in response — a class visit, a translated flyer, a recruitment drive aimed at a specific year group — rather than a general resolution to “be more inclusive.”

2 • Being the voice of the students

The student council should serve as a bridge between students, teachers, and the school administration. At its heart, the council is a representative body, echoing the democratic institutions of the European Union. This requires responsibility, transparency, and consistency in how student concerns are gathered, communicated, and followed up. This responsibility involves:

- Conducting continuous surveys throughout each study year to monitor students' well-being, satisfaction with the curricular processes, and the school environment overall.
- Presenting concerns and suggestions to the administration in a constructive and respectful manner.
- Reporting back to students on outcomes or progress, to build trust and accountability — for example, through town hall meetings where the council informs students of recent or upcoming changes within the school or the educational system.

When done effectively, this function not only empowers students but also strengthens the school as a democratic, responsive institution — much like a nervous system within a living body, where one part sends signals to the other and back to maintain full function.

● TRY THIS

The Termly Pulse Check.

Run a short, anonymous survey once per term — five to seven questions, ten minutes to complete — covering well-being, satisfaction with school life, and one open question. Publish the headline results to the whole school within two weeks, alongside at least one concrete action the council will take in response.

The Open Town Hall.

Twice a year, hold a whole-school assembly where the council reports on what it has done, what the administration has changed in response, and what is still unresolved. Leave real time for questions from the floor — a town hall that only delivers a monologue is not a town hall.

3 • Encouraging student leadership and independence

This responsibility includes supporting student-led initiatives that address real issues — from mental health to environmental sustainability, aligned with EU youth goals and the vision of active citizenship — and encouraging reflection on the impact of their actions, helping students grow not just as leaders, but as change-makers for a better future.

● TRY THIS

The Pitch Slot.

Reserve ten minutes at every council meeting for any student — council member or not — to pitch a small initiative: a club, an event, a fix for something annoying about school life. The council's job is to say yes, point to a small budget or a free classroom, and get out of the way — not to act as a gatekeeper that filters out ideas before students even get a hearing.

The After-Action Reflection.

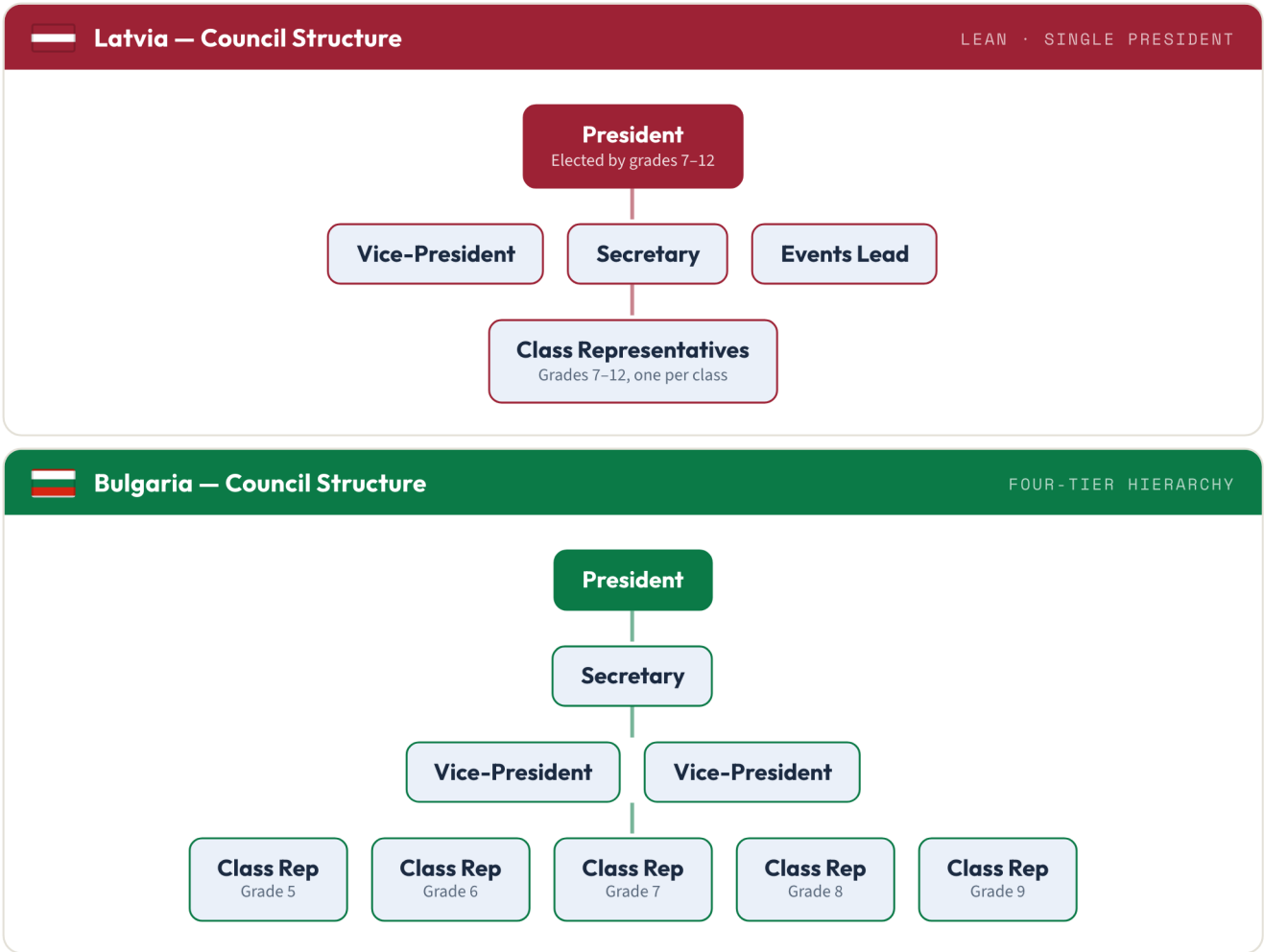
After any council-led event or campaign, set aside fifteen minutes for the team that ran it to answer three questions out loud: what worked, what would we do differently, and who outside the council deserves credit. Write the answers down — next year's council will thank this year's for it.



The ideal structure of a student council

There is no single correct structure for a student council — only a structure that fits the size and culture of a particular school. Comparing the four partner schools' own models makes this clear.

Latvia keeps the structure lean: students elect a single council president, who then builds a small working team. Authority is concentrated, decisions move quickly, and accountability is easy to locate. **Bulgaria** builds a four-tier hierarchy — a president, a secretary, vice-presidents, and beneath them a representative from every class. This guarantees that even the youngest year groups have a named seat at the table, at the cost of a larger, slower-moving body.

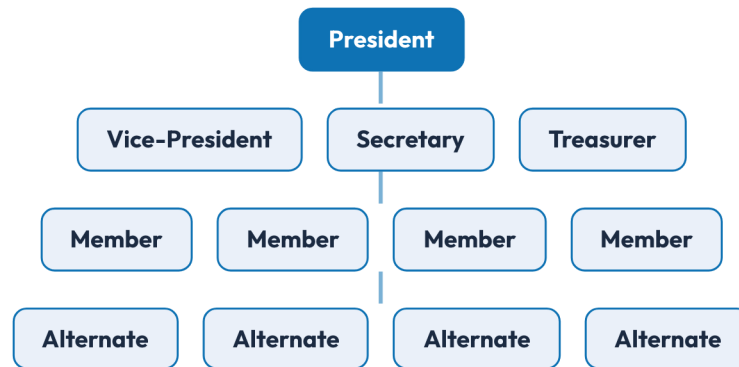




Romania goes a step further, adding vice-presidents, a secretary, a dedicated “advocate” role, working departments, and class representatives beneath them — with annual elections and a requirement that members present an activity report to keep their seat. This rewards sustained effort, but means more departments to staff and, as the Romanian team noted, a real risk of too many departments for too few genuinely interested people. **Greece** elects a fifteen-member council with a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, main members, and alternate members — a structure that, unusually, gives the council its own dedicated budget-holder from the outset.

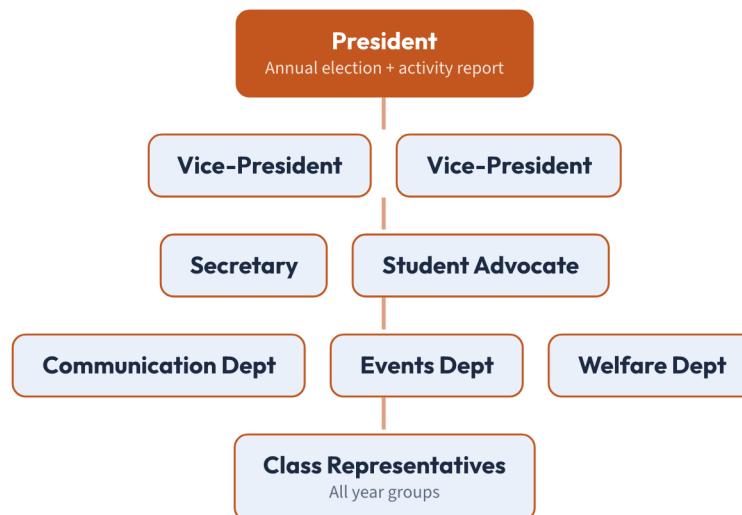
Greece — Council Structure (15 members)

WITH TREASURER + ALTERNATES



Romania — Council Structure

DEPARTMENTS + ACTIVITY REPORTS



● THREE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER MORE THAN THE MODEL

When designing your own structure, ask: **Is every year group represented in some form? Is it clear, in writing, who is responsible for what? Is the structure small enough that people actually show up and do the work, rather than existing as titles on paper?** A council of six committed students with clear roles will outperform a council of twenty with none.

Decision-making processes

Whatever the structure, a council needs a clear and written-down answer to a simple question: when members disagree, how is the decision actually made? Three practical rules help.

- **Default to a simple majority vote** for routine matters, and record the vote in minutes so nobody has to rely on memory later.
- **Reserve unanimous or near-unanimous agreement** for decisions that bind the whole council long-term, such as changing the council's own structure or election rules.
- **The majority of the council, not any single officer, should hold the final say.** This lesson came directly out of the Bulgarian mobility, where one of the clearest pieces of feedback was that the majority should set the final say, not the president.

A president or chair can set the agenda and guide discussion, but a structure where one person can simply overrule the rest stops being a council and starts being a hierarchy with extra meetings.

Setting goals and objectives

A council that never sets explicit goals tends to drift into whatever is most urgent that week. At the start of each school year, hold a dedicated goal-setting session: agree on no more than three to five priorities, write them down, and post them somewhere every student can see — a noticeboard, a shared document, the council's page on the school website. Each goal should be specific enough that, at the end of the year, anyone could check whether it happened.

“Improve communication with students” is a wish; “run a termly suggestion wall and report back within two weeks each time” is a goal. Revisit the list at the midpoint of the year and be honest about what needs to be dropped, not just what has been added.

Developing agendas and facilitating meetings

Meetings that run without an agenda tend to run long and decide little. A simple, repeatable format works best:

- Circulate the agenda at least a day in advance, with each item given a rough time limit.
- Open with quick updates before moving to discussion items, so announcements do not eat into time needed for decisions.
- Close every meeting by reading back the decisions made and who is responsible for each follow-up action.
- Keep brief written minutes — even three or four lines per item — so a member who missed a meeting, or next year's council, can see what was decided and why.

Rotating the role of chair and minute-taker across members, rather than always assigning it to the president, is also a quiet but effective way of building leadership skills.



Communication with the administration and student body

A council sits between two audiences, and needs a deliberate channel to each. **Upward**, towards the administration, this means a regular — not just crisis-driven — meeting with school leadership, where the council arrives with concerns already gathered and prioritised rather than raised one at a time. **Downward**, towards the student body, this means the reporting mechanisms already described: the suggestion wall, the termly pulse-check survey, and the open town hall. The two directions reinforce each other. A council that only talks to the administration risks losing the trust of its electorate; a council that only talks to students risks promising things it cannot deliver.

Student council elections

Of everything compared across the four mobilities, election processes varied the most — and produced the richest practical lessons, since each partner school arrived already running its own system.

 **Latvia** elects only its council president directly, over a fixed two-week window in May. Candidates put themselves forward, the outgoing council narrows the field to a top three, each finalist runs a short campaign, students in grades 7–12 vote, and the result is announced on 31 May. The strength noted by students themselves: the rules and timeline are fixed and known in advance, which makes the process feel predictable and fair.

 **Bulgaria** elects across its full hierarchy — president, secretary, vice-presidents, and a representative from every class — with the explicit safeguard that final decisions rest with the majority rather than any single elected officer.

 **Greece** holds its election once a year, typically in October, to fill all fifteen seats at once. Every student votes, marking up to seven names anonymously on a paper ballot in the main hall; an electoral committee — the outgoing council's most senior members rather than teachers — counts the votes. Students flagged a genuine tension: the outgoing president may be out of touch with younger students' ideas, yet the new members also need real listening and induction before they can act.

 **Romania** re-elects its full structure every year, but ties re-election to performance: members must present an activity report to keep their seat, validated by a small commission of council members with a supervising teacher. Any student may vote or stand, and votes are counted jointly by council members and an independent observer.



A workable election process

Beyond comparing the four existing systems, mixed-nationality student groups also worked together to design a single “ideal” election process from scratch. Several distinct groups arrived at strikingly similar answers — itself a useful finding: a fair election process looks much the same whichever country you start from. Pulling their proposals together produces a workable template any council can adapt.

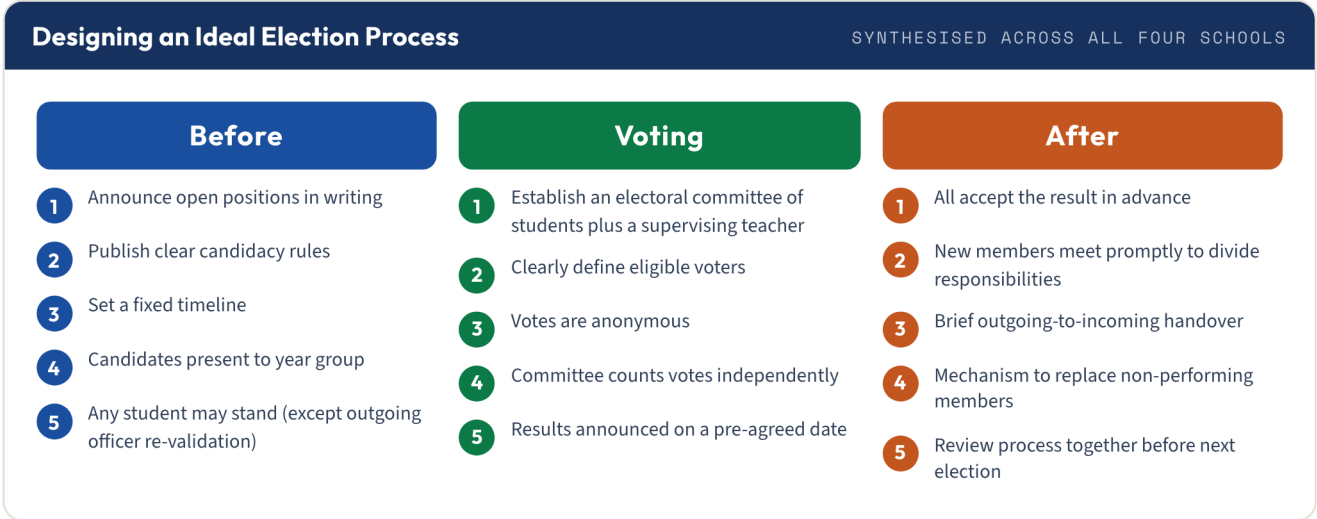


FIGURE An ideal election process – synthesised from student group workshops across all four partner schools. Pair it with the Election Checklist (Support Material 1) when running your own.



Conflict management and consensus-building

Disagreement inside a council is not a sign that something has gone wrong; it is a sign that the council contains more than one perspective — which is the entire point of having one.

The goal is not to eliminate conflict but to manage it so that it strengthens decisions rather than ending friendships or paralysing the group. A few habits help:

- **Separate the disagreement about the issue from any disagreement about the person** — and say so explicitly in the room if discussion starts to blur the two.
- **Use a vote as the agreed tie-breaker** once a question has been properly discussed, rather than letting a decision drag on indefinitely or be settled by whoever argues loudest or longest.
- **Rotate who chairs difficult discussions**, so that the same one or two members are not always cast as referees.
- **When a disagreement is personal rather than procedural**, take it outside the full meeting and resolve it one-to-one or with the supervising teacher, rather than litigating it in front of the whole council.

As the earlier note on decision-making put it, the majority — not any single officer — should hold the final say. Consistently honouring that rule is, in practice, the single most effective tool a council has for preventing conflict from curdling into resentment.



GREECE · CHIOS

02

CHAPTER TWO

What should a student council do?

Chapter 1 answered how a council is built. This chapter answers what it should actually spend its time on once it exists — the four fields of responsibility, reaching beyond the school gates, and growing the council's influence and inclusiveness.

· GROUNDED IN THE GREEK MOBILITY EXCHANGE ·



CHAPTER 2 · WHAT A COUNCIL DOES

From values to fields of activity

Chapter 1 answered the question of how a council is built. This chapter answers what it should actually spend its time on — a question the project explored most thoroughly during the Greek mobility, which focused specifically on the fields of student council responsibility.

Four fields of responsibility

The three core responsibilities introduced earlier — inclusivity and participation, voice and representation, leadership and independence — describe the values a council should hold. In day-to-day practice, those values translate into four recurring fields of activity:

School life & student well-being

Running events, supporting students who are struggling, and shaping the everyday experience of being a student at the school.

Representation & policy influence

Carrying student concerns into rooms where decisions are made — staff meetings, governing-body discussions, curriculum reviews — and carrying the reasoning back out again.

Project & event management

Turning a good idea into a planned, budgeted, delivered activity — the skillset Chapter 3 covers in detail.

Community & external relations

Connecting the school to the wider community it sits inside — local government, other schools, the university sector — where a council's influence stops being confined to its own corridors.

Working with the school administration

A council's policy influence is only as strong as its working relationship with the adults who run the school. That relationship works best when it is treated as a genuine collaboration rather than a one-way petitioning process: come to meetings having already gathered and prioritised student concerns, as described in Chapter 1; ask the administration to explain its own constraints — budget, regulation, staffing — rather than assuming reluctance is the same thing as disagreement; and agree on which decisions are genuinely the council's to make, which are joint, and which sit with the administration alone, so that nobody is surprised later about whose call something was.



Reaching beyond the school gates: local government

A council's community and external-relations work does not have to stop at the school gate. During the Greek mobility, students met with the Deputy Mayor of Chios to explore how a student council and local government might work together — on shared youth initiatives, on giving students a voice in municipal decisions that affect them, or simply on understanding how local democracy actually functions outside the classroom. The meeting illustrated a point worth carrying into any school's own practice: local officials are, in our experience, generally open to engaging directly with young people, but it is the council that has to make the first approach, arrive with a specific, concrete ask, and follow up afterwards rather than treating the meeting as a one-off.

Learning from outside the school: higher education

The same mobility also included a lecture from University of the Aegean leadership on the theory behind effective leadership and governance. Bringing in an outside voice — whether from a local university, a youth organisation, or a community leader — is a low-cost way for a council to step back from its own day-to-day routine and test its practices against a broader body of thinking on leadership and decision-making, rather than simply repeating whatever the previous council happened to do.

● TRY THIS

Invite a local decision-maker.

Identify one local official or community leader whose work touches young people, prepare three specific questions or asks in advance, and request a short meeting. Write up what was agreed and share it with the rest of the school afterwards.

Map your community.

As a council, list every organisation within reach of the school — local government, charities, nearby universities, other schools — that could plausibly become a partner on one of the four fields of responsibility. Pick one to approach this term.

Inspiring other students to get involved

A council that does excellent work but stays invisible to the rest of the school has only solved half the problem. Inspiration spreads in predictable ways, and a council that understands the pattern can deliberately grow its own influence rather than hoping good work speaks for itself.

It starts with **modelling the behaviour the council wants to see**. Open meetings that any student can sit in on, minutes posted somewhere visible, and visible follow-through on promises all do more to build trust than any announcement could. **Celebrating small wins** matters just as much as delivering big ones — a short message saying “the suggestion wall led to X this month” keeps the council present in students' minds between larger initiatives. The single most effective recruitment tool is not a poster but **a person**: a council member who personally invites a classmate reaches students that a notice board never will. And **low-commitment entry points** lower the barrier further still — a one-off helper role, a chance to shadow a meeting, or a junior council all give a way in that does not demand full commitment up front.

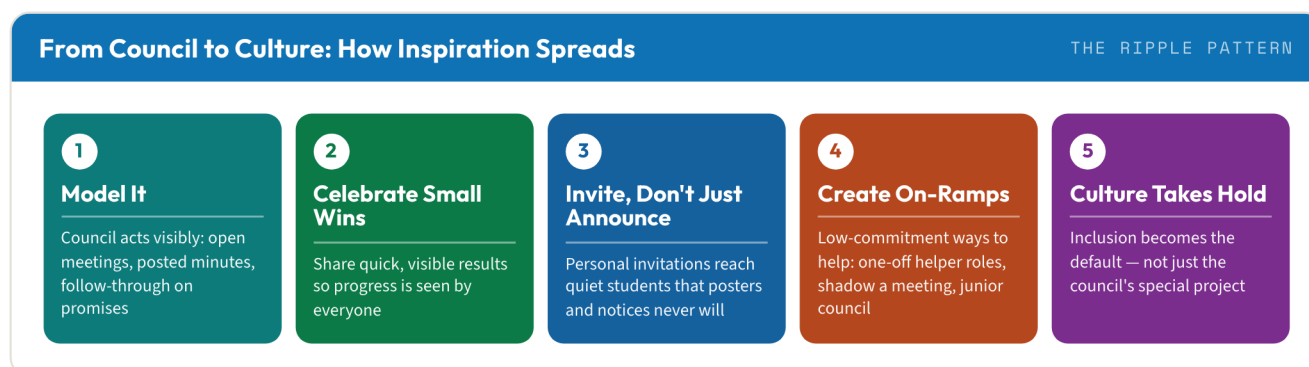


FIGURE Inspiration spreads in a predictable ripple. This pattern matters most for the students least likely to self-select into council life: younger years, quieter personalities, and students who do not see themselves reflected in who currently sits on the council.



Building a more inclusive school environment

The inclusivity responsibility introduced in Chapter 1 describes how the council should run itself. This is about something broader: how the council can shape the culture of the whole school, not just its own membership.

Across all four partner countries, the same pattern emerged: a council's most lasting contribution to inclusion is rarely a single big event. It is the accumulation of small, consistent choices — translating key announcements for students who speak another language at home, making sure event timing and location do not quietly exclude students with care responsibilities or accessibility needs, and actively partnering with whichever clubs or groups already work with under-represented students rather than duplicating their efforts. Greece's outward-facing work with the Deputy Mayor of Chios is one model for this — the council does not have to build every inclusion initiative alone when local organisations already have the expertise.

A genuinely inclusive school environment is also quietly self-reinforcing. A council that is visibly diverse in who it represents makes participation feel possible to a wider range of students, which in turn makes the next council more diverse still. This is the same ripple pattern, applied to inclusion: the council models inclusive behaviour, the student body notices, and over several years the culture shifts from “the council's initiative” to simply “how things are done here.”

● TRY THIS

Run an inclusion audit alongside a recruitment push.

Pair the Inclusion Audit exercise from Chapter 1 with a deliberate, personal-invitation recruitment round timed to follow it — so whatever gap the audit reveals is immediately met with a concrete attempt to close it, rather than just being recorded and forgotten.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter began with four fields of responsibility and ends with a simple observation: none of them function in isolation. A council that influences policy but never shares the credit, or that runs excellent events nobody hears about, has not yet found its full impact. The thread connecting school life, representation, project management, and community building is the same thread connecting inspiration and inclusion — a council's actions are only as effective as the rest of the school's awareness of, and access to, them. Chapter 3 turns from what a council should do to how it actually gets things done.



BULGARIA · RUSE

03

CHAPTER · THREE ·

How to turn ideas into reality

Student-led initiatives and European identity — two ideas that belong together. An initiative reaches its full potential only when the students running it understand not just the logistics, but the values behind it.



· GROUNDED IN THE BULGARIAN MOBILITY EXCHANGE ·

CHAPTER 3 · IDEAS INTO REALITY

European identity: the “why” behind an initiative

The Bulgarian mobility focused on student-led initiatives and European identity. European identity is the “why” — it turns a school project into something that means something beyond the school gates.

European identity: what it actually means

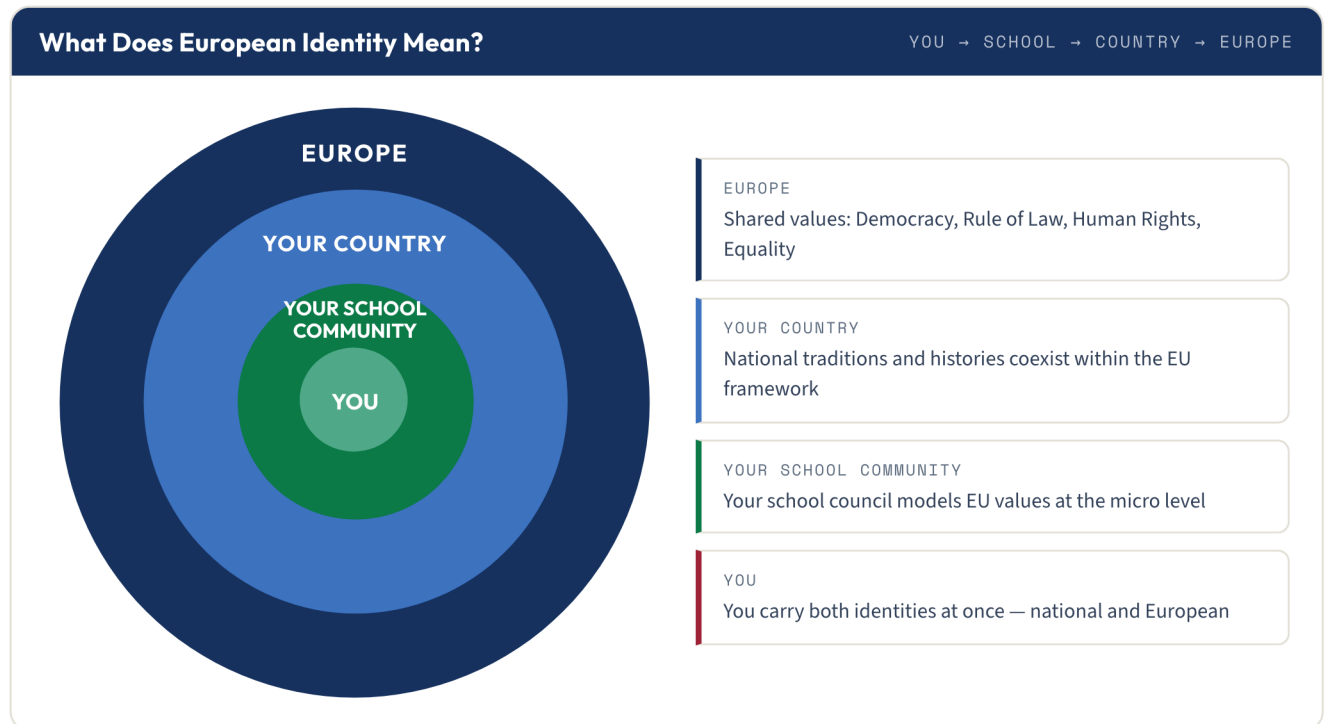
“European identity” is not about replacing your national identity with a flag. It is about recognising that alongside being Latvian, Bulgarian, Greek, or Romanian you also belong to a community that shares a set of values across borders. Those values are worth examining one by one, because each has a direct equivalent in how a student council should operate.


The Core Values of the European Union
SIX SHARED VALUES

01 Human Dignity The inviolable foundation of all fundamental rights.	02 Freedom To think, speak, move, and assemble without fear.	03 Democracy Government by the people, for the people.
04 Equality Equal treatment before the law, regardless of origin.	05 Rule of Law No one is above the law — not even governments.	06 Human Rights Rights that belong to every person by birth.

A council that practises inclusivity embodies **equality**. One that holds open elections embodies **democracy**. One that refuses to let the president overrule a majority vote embodies the **rule of law**. One that listens to a student with a complaint about how they are being treated embodies **human dignity**. These are not metaphors — they are structural features of a well-run council.

The diagram below shows how different scales of identity — from the individual outward to Europe — coexist and reinforce each other rather than competing.



When student council members from Latvia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania worked together during this project, they were practicing European identity: finding shared values across four different languages, school cultures, and national histories. The fact that their independently designed ideal election process worksheets converged on almost identical steps is itself evidence of what European identity looks like in practice — not uniformity, but shared principles.

Designing an initiative with European values in mind

The strongest initiatives are not purely logistical — they are rooted in a value. Before committing to an idea, ask: which of the six EU values does this initiative uphold or demonstrate? An anti-bullying awareness week upholds human dignity. A student-led environmental campaign upholds freedom and equality. A school constitution project upholds the rule of law and democracy. This framing makes an initiative easier to explain, easier to justify to the administration, and more likely to win broader student support.

From idea to plan: the initiative lifecycle

Most good ideas fail not for lack of enthusiasm but for lack of structure. The Initiative Lifecycle shows the six stages that take an idea from concept to completed action and back again — because the most valuable step, reflection, is also the most frequently skipped.

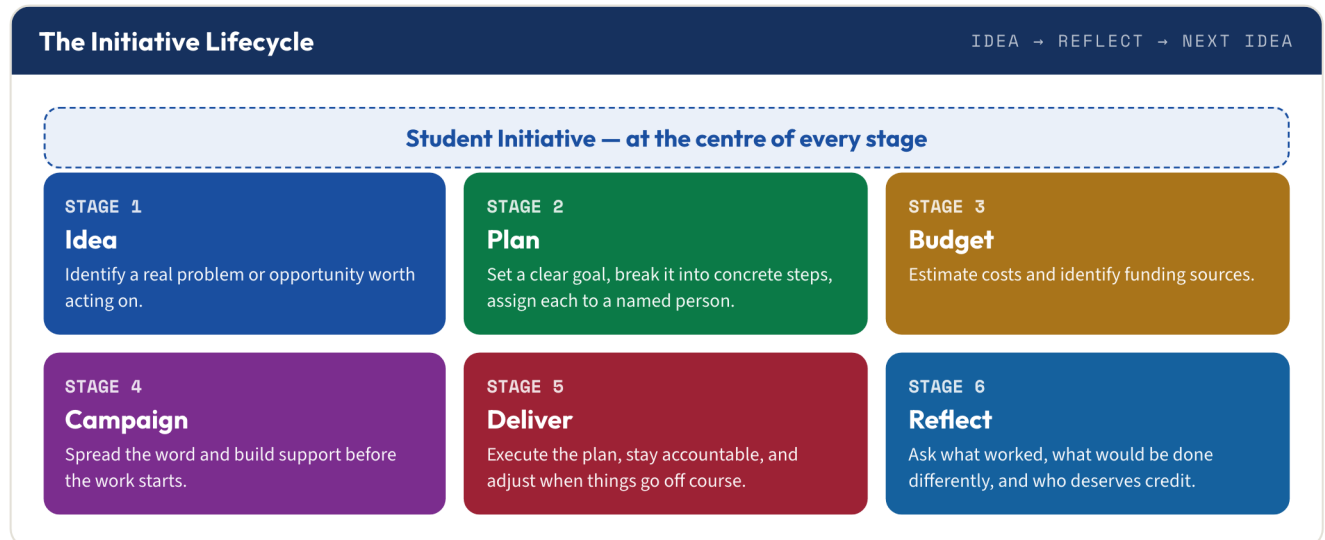


FIGURE The six stages form a loop — that last answer, reflection, feeds directly back into the next idea.

Budgeting basics

A budget does not need to be sophisticated to be useful — it needs to exist and be honest. List every expected cost on one side and every source of funding on the other. Build in a small contingency (10–15%), because the first estimate is almost always optimistic. Keep a running record of actual spend. This is what makes it possible to ask for a larger allocation next year with evidence rather than just a request. (Use the *Initiative Budget Tracker* — Support Material 7.)



Campaigning and engaging the school community

An initiative that students do not know about will not change anything. A campaign does not need to be elaborate: it needs to use more than one channel and speak to what students care about. Combine a brief, specific assembly announcement (one sentence describing the initiative and why it matters), a poster that can be understood in ten seconds, and at least one teacher willing to mention it in class. Personal invitation is more powerful than broadcast: a council member saying “We really want your year group involved” will get more traction than a notice board.

Collaboration tools and how to share the work

A council that concentrates all initiative work on one or two members will burn them out and teach everyone else that showing up is optional. Spread the work across named owners at every level. A shared task list — even a single shared document with “to do,” “in progress,” and “done” columns — makes ownership visible and reduces chasing. Check in on the task list at every meeting rather than starting from scratch each time.

● TRY THIS

Fill in the Idea-to-Action worksheet together.

Before committing council time to any idea, complete the six fields below as a group. They take about twenty minutes to do honestly, and prevent the most common failure mode: an initiative that everyone agreed on and nobody followed through. A blank version is in the Support materials (Tool 6).

Idea-to-Action Worksheet

PREVIEW · BLANK VERSION IN TOOL 6

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Goal | What are we trying to achieve? (one sentence) |
| 2 Steps | List 3–5 concrete actions needed |
| 3 Owner of each step | Name a person — not just a role — for each step |
| 4 Deadline & checkpoint | Finish date, and a midpoint check-in date |
| 5 Budget & funding | Estimated cost, and where the money comes from |
| 6 How we'll know it worked | Our measure of success |



ROMANIA · SUCEAVA

04

CHAPTER · FOUR

From student councils to European democratic processes

The project's final exchange focused on EU institutions and democratic processes, and produced the strongest single block of reusable material in the whole project: an institutions workshop, a Parliament simulation, a funding exercise, and a brainstorm-charter-debate sequence.



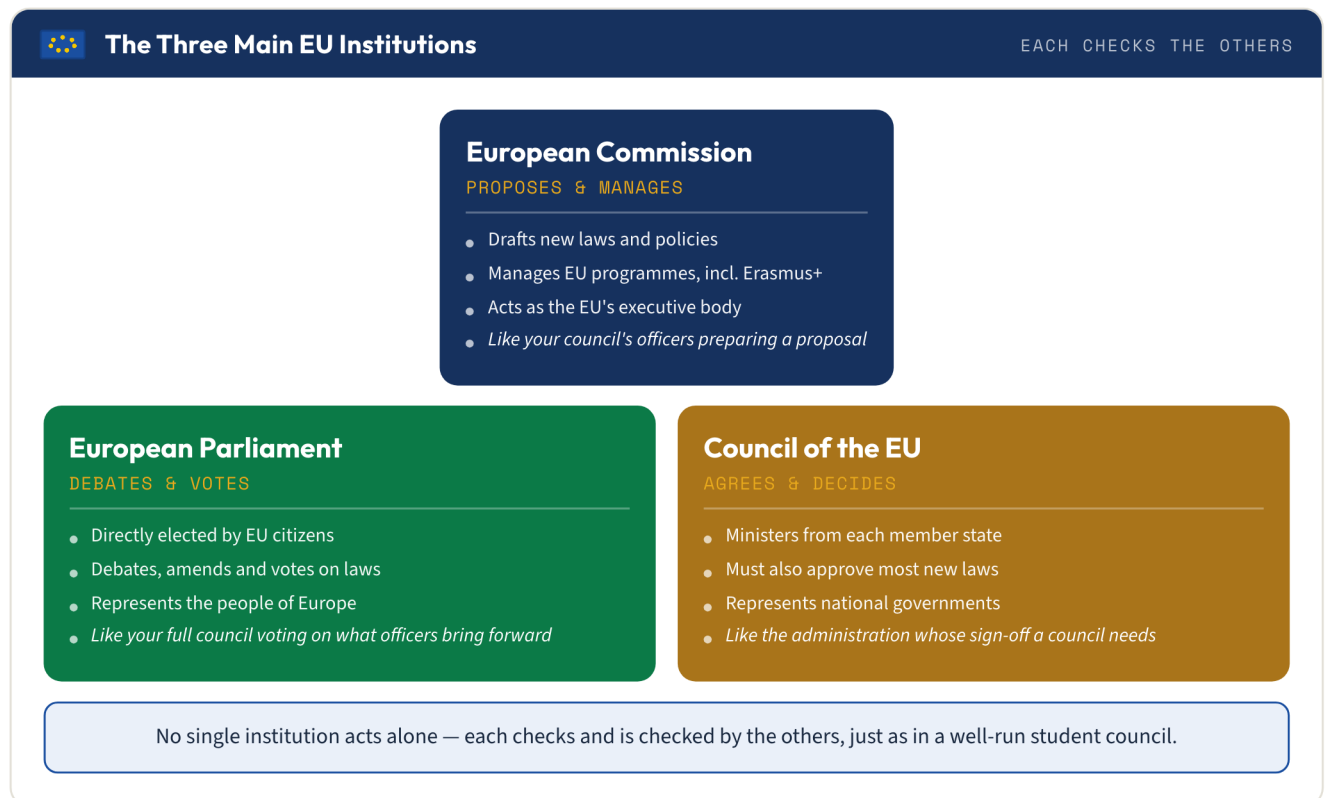
· GROUNDED IN THE ROMANIAN MOBILITY EXCHANGE ·

CHAPTER 4 · EUROPEAN PROCESSES

How the EU's three institutions work

Three institutions do most of the EU's day-to-day work. No single institution acts alone; each checks and is checked by the others — and each has a direct parallel in a well-run student council.

The European Commission proposes new laws and policies and manages EU programmes — including Erasmus+, which funded this project. The European Parliament, directly elected by citizens across all member states, debates, amends, and votes on those proposals. The Council of the European Union, made up of ministers from each member state's national government, must also agree before most new laws take effect.



Running your own European Parliament simulation

The Romanian mobility's European Parliament simulation can be replicated in a single afternoon. What matters most is the reflection stage at the end — asking what made coalitions form or fail is usually where the most lasting learning happens, more than the vote itself.



FIGURE Print one Role Card (Support Material 10) per participant before you begin.

A few design principles make the simulation work. **Assigning participants a country or political group** to represent — rather than letting them argue their own personal opinions — forces perspective-taking. **Choosing a single, concrete topic with a yes-or-no shape** (a proposed EU-wide rule rather than an open theme) makes the debate land. **Allowing a fixed negotiation period** before formal debate opens acknowledges that most real legislative bargaining happens in the corridors, not the chamber. And **enforcing time limits per speaker**, with a chairperson empowered to cut off overruns, teaches more about democratic process than any lecture could.

Applying for funding — the skills that work at every scale

The funding-application exercise in Romania mirrored, in miniature, what the coordinators of this project had to do to secure the Erasmus+ funding behind this handbook. Whether applying to a real EU programme or simply to the school administration for a project budget, the same building blocks apply: a clear statement of the problem the project addresses; specific, measurable objectives rather than vague aspirations; a realistic timeline; an itemised budget; and a plan for how results will be shared once the project ends. Funders — whether a school principal or a European programme — want to know the impact will outlast the activity itself.

● TRY THIS

Write a mini-proposal.

Pick one initiative the council is already planning. In no more than one page, write: the problem it addresses (one sentence); what you will do and by when; how much it will cost and where the money comes from; and how you will know it worked. Share it with the administration rather than just asking verbally. The practice of writing a structured proposal — even for small things — is exactly the skill that scales up to Erasmus+ applications. (Use the *Mini Funding Proposal Template — Support Material 9.*)

Channels for participation beyond your own school

A student council does not have to be the end of the road for a student interested in democratic participation.

European Youth Parliament

A forum where young people across the continent debate current affairs in a parliamentary format much like the simulation above — at national and international level.

European School Student Union

Represents secondary school students' interests at a European level — analogous to what a student council does within a single school.

Erasmus+

The programme funding this project — supports school partnerships, mobilities, and youth exchanges like the ones that produced this handbook.

DiscoverEU

Offers young people opportunities to travel and learn about other European countries firsthand.

Programme details, eligibility, and application windows change from year to year. A council interested in any of these should check the relevant programme's own website for current rules before planning around them.

A worked exercise sequence: brainstorm — charter — debate

The final sequence from the Romanian mobility moved through three connected stages. Running them as a sequence rather than picking just one stage produces something more useful than any single exercise.

1

Brainstorm

Gather as many possible council activities as the group can generate in a fixed, short window — quantity over quality at this stage, with no idea criticised or ruled out. Aim for at least twenty items in ten minutes.

2

Charter drafting

Sort the brainstormed ideas into common themes. From those themes, draft a short youth charter — a one-page statement, in plain language, of what the group believes a student council and its members owe to their school community. Keep it to a handful of clear commitments. A charter that fits on one page actually gets read and remembered.

3

Debate

Hold a structured debate using the freshly written charter as the standard to argue against — one team arguing that the council has real influence over school life, and a team arguing it largely does not. This stage is deliberately uncomfortable: its purpose is to pressure-test the charter's claims honestly, rather than let the group congratulate itself on having written something aspirational.

Run in sequence, the three stages take roughly half a school day and produce something concrete — a charter — that a council can publish, refer back to, and be held accountable to. They also demonstrate, from the inside, why the EU's own lawmaking process involves proposal, debate, and amendment rather than simply announcing decisions: a commitment that has been tested in argument is a stronger commitment than one that was only ever agreed.

CONCLUSION

Four schools, four countries, one thread

Four schools, four countries, and four short exchanges produced this handbook.

The **Latvian** exchange gave the project its founding definition of a student council and a clean, replicable election model. The **Bulgarian** exchange grounded the project in initiatives and European identity, leaving behind the Initiative Lifecycle and a working framework for tying everyday council projects to the EU's core values. The **Greek** exchange opened the door to the wider community beyond the school gates, in the meeting with the Deputy Mayor of Chios and the University of the Aegean lecture that anchor Chapter 2. The **Romanian** exchange, coming last, benefited from everything learned before it and delivered the richest single block of material in this handbook: the EU institutions workshop, the European Parliament simulation, the funding exercise, and the brainstorm-charter-debate sequence that closes Chapter 4.

A student council is most effective when it is structured clearly, communicates honestly in both directions, and treats its own mistakes — a flawed election rule, a campaign that did not land, a charter that does not survive its own debate — as material to learn from rather than to hide.

THE THREAD RUNNING THROUGH EVERY CHAPTER

That is, after all, exactly what democratic institutions at every scale — from a single classroom to the European Parliament — are supposed to do. We hope the tools in this handbook help your council do the same, and we hope, in turn, that you improve on them.





TEAR-OUT TOOLKIT

Support materials

Ten practical, fillable tools — short enough to print, photocopy, fill in by hand, or paste into a shared document as-is. Each is self-contained on its own page and colour-coded to the chapter it puts into practice. Tear out or photocopy along the dashed line.

10 TOOLS · GROUPED BY CHAPTER



Election checklist



CHECKLIST · TICK BEFORE, DURING & AFTER

Run through this list before, during, and after any council election.

☐

Open positions and candidacy rules announced and published in writing, with a fixed date.

☐

Candidates have presented themselves to their year group or the whole school.

☐

Voter eligibility is clear and was communicated in advance.

☐

An electoral committee of students and a supervising teacher is in place to count votes and oversee the process.

☐

Results announcement date is fixed and known in advance.

☐

Newly elected members have a first meeting scheduled to divide responsibilities.

☐

A process exists for replacing a member who does not fulfil their duties.



Council structure planning worksheet

 FILLABLE TABLE · ONE ROW PER ROLE

Use this alongside the structure comparison in Chapter 1 to design your own council's line-up. Fill in one row per role; add or remove rows freely.

Position	Filled by (name)	How chosen	Main responsibility



Meeting agenda & minutes template

HEADER FIELDS + FILLABLE TABLE

A repeatable one-page format for every council meeting — fill in the header, work down the table, and read back the decisions column before closing.

Date		Chair	
Minute-taker		Attendees	

Agenda item	Time	Decision made	Owner	Deadline



Four fields of responsibility planning grid

 FILLABLE TABLE · USE ONCE A TERM

Use this once a term to make sure the council's attention is spread across all four fields from Chapter 2, not concentrated in just one or two.

Field of responsibility	Current initiative	Owner	Next review date
School life & well-being			
Representation & policy			
Project management			
Community & external relations			



Inclusion & outreach tracker



TRACKER · TICK EACH ACTION AS IT HAPPENS

A running record for the inclusion work described in Chapter 2. Tick off each action as it happens, and add the council's own ideas in the blank rows.

Action	Planned date	Owner	Done?
Translate a key announcement for non-native speakers			☐
Personally invite 3 students who have never taken part			☐
Accessibility check before the next event			☐
Contact one local or community partner organisation			☐
Create one new low-commitment on-ramp role			☐
			☐
			☐



Idea-to-Action project template



WORKSHEET · FILL IN TOGETHER AS A GROUP

Fill this in together before committing council time to any new idea. The six fields take about twenty minutes to complete honestly.

1 Goal — what are we trying to achieve? (one sentence)

2 Steps — list 3–5 concrete actions needed

3 Owner of each step — name a person, not just a role, for each step

4 Deadline & one checkpoint — finish date, and a midpoint check-in date

5 Estimated cost & funding source — how much, and where the money comes from

6 How you will know it worked — our measure of success



Initiative budget tracker

 FILLABLE TABLE · ALWAYS INCLUDE A CONTINGENCY LINE

List every expected cost and every expected source of funding before starting. Always include a contingency line — the first estimate is almost always optimistic.

[illegible]



EU institutions cheat sheet

 REFERENCE CARD · KEEP ALONGSIDE THE SIMULATION

A one-page reference to the three institutions covered in Chapter 4 — and the student-council parallel for each. Hand one to every participant before running the European Parliament simulation (Tool 10).

European Commission · Proposes & manages

· Drafts new laws and policies · Manages EU programmes, incl. Erasmus+ · Acts as the EU's executive body

Council parallel: like your council's officers preparing a proposal.

European Parliament · Debates & votes

· Directly elected by EU citizens · Debates, amends and votes on laws · Represents the people of Europe

Council parallel: like your full council voting on what officers bring forward.

Council of the EU · Agrees & decides

· Ministers from each member state · Must also approve most new laws · Represents national governments

Council parallel: like the administration whose sign-off a council needs.

No single institution acts alone — each checks and is checked by the others, just as in a well-run student council.



Mini funding proposal template

 FILLABLE FORM · SCALES UP TO ERASMUS+

A one-page proposal format that scales from a small school request up to a real Erasmus+ application — the building blocks are the same.

Problem statement	
Objectives	
Timeline	
Budget summary	
Dissemination plan	

Funders — whether a school principal or a European programme — want to know the impact will outlast the activity itself.



European Parliament simulation role card

 ROLE CARD · PRINT ONE PER PARTICIPANT

Print one card per participant before running the simulation described in Chapter 4 (see also the six-step flow on page 27).

Delegate Role Card		EP SIMULATION
Country / political group		
Position on the topic		
Two key arguments	1. _____ 2. _____	
Possible allies		
Open question for the debate		

Tip: assign each participant a country or political group rather than letting them argue their own personal opinions — it forces perspective-taking, the whole point of the exercise.