

HOW TO BE A BIOBOOSTER!

Hackathon Handbook



BioBoosters
network

Interreg
Baltic Sea Region



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CIRCULAR ECONOMY



BioBoosters

WELCOME TO THE BIOBOOSTERS HANDBOOK

How to be a BioBooster — Hackathon Handbook

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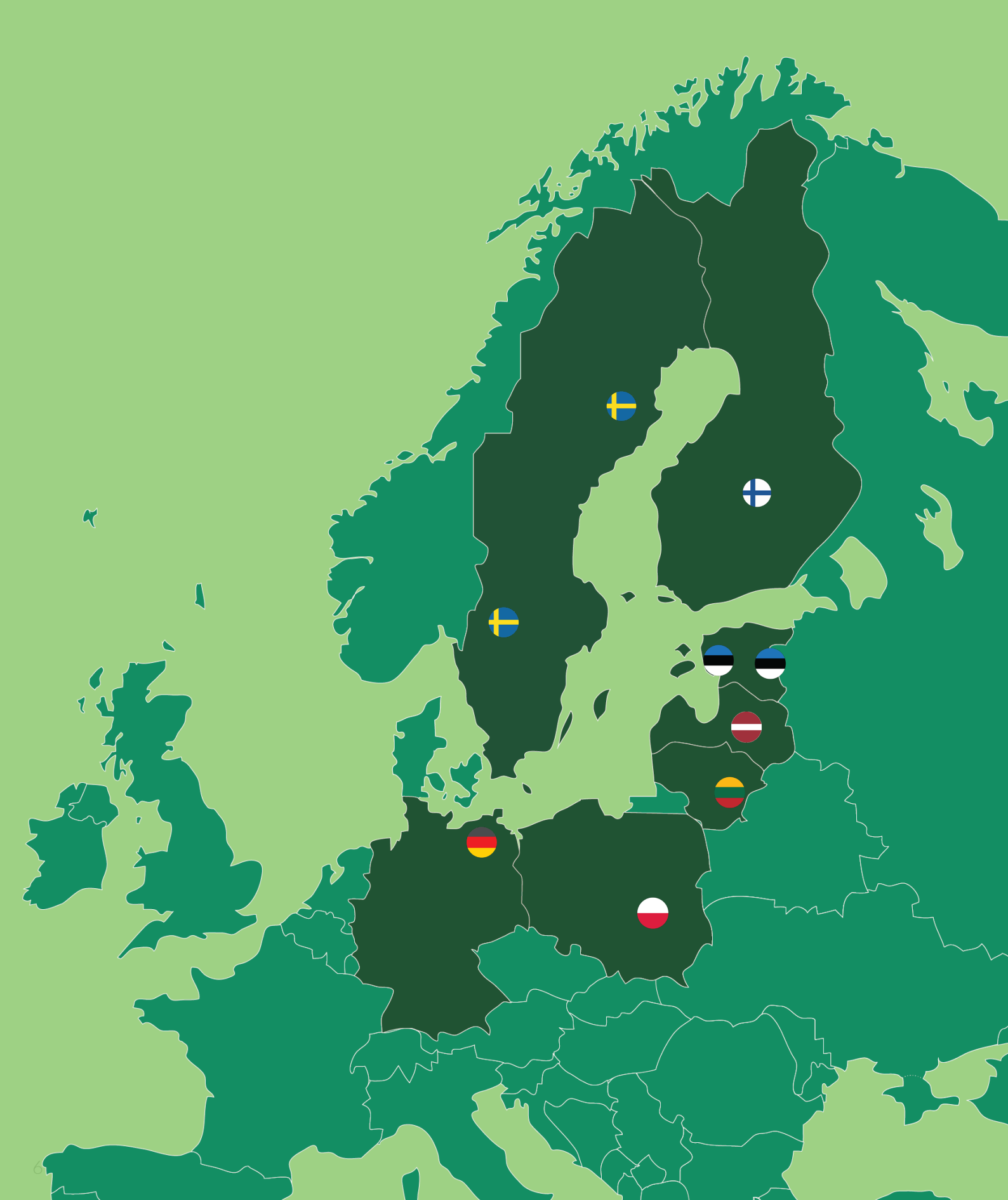
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WE ARE BIOBOOSTERS

This handbook has been developed through collaborative design by the BioBoosters network. Its writing process has drawn on a continuous co-creation dialogue within the network, shaped over the course of 18 jointly organised hackathons. The insights presented here have been validated by an international team of experienced hackathon organisers.

The BioBoosters network brings together members from across the Baltic Sea Region, representing diverse innovation hubs – cluster organisations, science and business parks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), higher education institutions and regional development organisations. Acting as connectors within their regional innovation systems, the members focus on the bioeconomy. As such, these innovation hubs work to bridge academia, research and business, boosting competitiveness and driving the green transition of bioeconomy sectors.

ORGANISERS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS HANDBOOK

-  Jamk University of Applied Sciences, Central Finland
-  The Paper Province Economic Association, Värmland Region, Sweden
-  BioFuel Region BFR AB, Västerbotten Region, Sweden
-  Vidzeme Planning Region, Vidzeme Region, Latvia
-  Estonian University of Life Sciences, Tartu, Estonia
-  Pärnu County Development Centre, Pärnu, Estonia
-  WITENO GmbH, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Germany
-  Foundation for Education and Social Dialogue “PRO CIVIS”, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship, Poland
-  Sunrise Tech Park, Vilnius, Lithuania

For further evidence of the application potential, impact and effectiveness of the BioBoosters Hackathon, please see the publication Boosting Circular Transition – Insights of the BioBoosters, which elaborates on the findings of the pilot evaluation.

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

The BioBoosters network offers a challenge-driven hackathon concept with proven business impact and international reach. The hackathon helps to drive business transition and address sectoral challenges by:

- Bridging business with academia and research.
- Connecting cross-sectoral and international experts.
- Unboxing out-of-the-box ideas.
- Initiating innovation partnerships.

This handbook provides a step-by-step guide for organising a hackathon and planning the communication tasks related to the hackathon. To give targeted advice, it is divided into an Organisers' Guide and a Communicator's Guide.

THE HANDBOOK CAN BE USED FOR

- **Training and initiating a new hackathon organiser or organising team member.**
It offers step-by-step guidance on organising a hackathon, addressing common concerns and providing advice on risk management. In addition, it shares best practices for creating added value for participants and making the most of your time together.
- **Explaining and visualising the process, as well as the organisers' role and contribution, to support resourcing.**
It details the hackathon process and the tasks involved for organisers at each step. A clear account of the organiser's contribution and role can be used for planning resourcing and outlining the responsibilities of co-organisers.
- **Inspiration for developing impactful open innovation processes and events.**
It offers insights and lessons from an exceptionally extensive piloting programme carried out through international co-operation.

Feel free to apply this know-how to the development of impactful open innovation processes that support industry transition and facilitate the initiation of innovation partnerships.

THE HACKATHON

The BioBoosters Hackathon is impactful, international and driven by industry needs. Hackathons are commonly used as open innovation platforms for generating and developing ideas to tackle a real-world challenge. They can activate stakeholders in shared discussions to address wicked societal problems or support business transition. Companies can use hackathons to generate new ideas, boost competitiveness or address operational challenges.

Hackathons also help connect cross-sectoral experts, bridging business with academia and research. For participants – for example, students – taking part can build capacity in creativity, design-thinking, teamworking and pitching ideas.

Hackathons are fun and effective in connecting people, sparking ideas and giving visibility to sustainability agendas. There are many types of hackathons and innovation competitions, typically starting with a challenge and ending with the announcement of a winner. The word 'hackathon' might often bring to mind coding, ideation or student-driven projects. The BioBoosters Hackathon can include all these – but it also has unique features that characterise our model.

At the heart of the BioBoosters hackathon is the aim to launch business-driven innovation co-operation between a challenge provider company and one or more winners. This core objective shapes the entire process design and involvement of participants. Every unique feature of the BioBoosters Hackathon is designed to support the establishment of an innovation partnership.

BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS FOCUS

The hackathon is focused on connecting partners with challenge providers. In the open hackathon invitation, the challenge provider company makes an explicit co-operation offer to the solution provider teams joining the process. The solution providers are expected to respond with a solution concept and co-operation proposal that can be put into practice. Therefore, most solution provider teams are companies. To support the launch of co-operation, the teams are free to define their own team composition. To encourage company participation in the open innovation process, the solution development phase is carried out under a non-disclosure agreement (NDA).

EXTENDED SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT

Mentoring support and dialogue with the challenge provider are available to solution provider teams three to four weeks before the Hackathon Days. During this extended period, the teams have time to prepare their co-operation offer. This allows for team building, data application and the preliminary tailoring or testing of a solution.

BIOBOOSTERS NETWORK SUPPORT

When organising a hackathon with the BioBoosters network, an organiser can benefit from its communication channels and resources to reach an international innovation community focusing on the circular bioeconomy. This is an invaluable asset for connecting with the right solution provider teams and mentors around the world. Such an open innovation dialogue can boost the impact of your hackathon for all participants.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Organisers are typically connectors within regional innovation systems, operating as innovation intermediaries and brokers. They can be, for example, cluster organisations, research-based innovation hubs, science and business parks, business support organisations, incubators, sectoral NGOs or regional development organisations.

The organiser is the main owner of the hackathon process, guiding all participants through the open innovation journey.

VALUE PROPOSITION

For an organiser, the hackathon is a tool for supporting regional businesses and for initiating business-driven research, development and innovation (RDI) co-operation, helping client companies to advance their green transition.

Working with the BioBoosters network, organisers benefit from:

- Recognition through a high-profile hackathon brand with a proven service model and strong references.
- Visibility via communication platforms that connect an international, cross-sectoral innovation community.

- Access to experienced co-organisers and mentors.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The organiser must have the capacity and motivation to:

- Manage the hackathon flow, guiding participants through the open innovation process and ensuring that time is used efficiently and value is created for all.
- Provide a skilled team to run the hackathon and related communication tasks. The team should cover project coordination, hybrid and online event hosting and facilitation, marketing and media relations, direct outreach and social media content creation.
- Actively identify and connect with challenge providers, solution providers and mentors, maintaining a strong profile as a connector and an innovation intermediary.
- Provide digital meeting platforms, online registration and survey tools, and equipment for hosting hybrid and online events.
- Maintain a website and communication channels to market the hackathon, give visibility to participants and showcase results.



Teksika Hackathon, photographer Agne Popiere



AdFis Hackathon, photographer Marten Kählert

CHALLENGE PROVIDERS

Challenge providers are companies looking for partners to help solve a challenge. They are prepared to apply open innovation as a means to identify and assess potential solutions. They seek tangible co-operation to address their challenge and are ready to invest in developing a solution.

VALUE PROPOSITION

Challenge providers can fast-track their sustainability or growth mission with innovative solutions and with new business and RDI partners. Through the BioBoosters Hackathon, challenge providers gain:

- Opportunities to launch partnerships that support their sustainability mission.
- A targeted, guided and efficient process

for discovering solutions and potential partners.

- Out-of-the-box ideas and fresh perspectives on their challenge.
- Expert know-how and support in evaluating and developing ideas.
- Positive visibility for their sustainability mission and employer brand.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A challenge provider must have a genuine commitment to solving a challenge through innovation co-operation with companies or, for example, research groups. They should also have the capacity and motivation to:

- Make a concrete co-operation offer to the winning team to support the commercialisation of the innovation.
- Describe the challenge and provide the necessary information for preparing a hackathon invitation. This includes helping to define target groups for active scouting of solutions providers and

setting guidelines for mentor engagement.

- Promote the hackathon invitation through their own channels and present the challenge in a launch webinar.
- Participate in mentoring by providing three to five specialists. These experts provide information and guidance to help solution provider teams make a co-operation offer and tailor their solution to the challenge provider's needs.
- Appoint a jury to assess the finalists and select the winner or in some cases winners.



Toksika Hackathon, photographer Agne Popiere

SOLUTION PROVIDER TEAMS

Solution provider teams are expected to present an idea for addressing the presented challenge. They can be SMEs or startups, large companies, research groups, business-research co-operation teams, student teams, private innovators or other organisations, such as NGOs. Teams are free to select their members; however, having experts who can meet all the evaluation criteria is recommended.



VALUE PROPOSITION

Solution provider teams can benefit from professional mentoring, dialogue with a potential client and potential RDI partnerships to bring their solutions to new markets. Through the BioBoosters hackathon, solution providers gain the opportunity to:

- Validate a business idea with direct feedback from a potential client.
- Establish connections and network with other companies and specialists.
- Apply expert know-how and receive support for idea testing and commercialisation.
- Get international recognition and visibility.
- Launch partnerships to commercialise a solution and access new markets.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Solution providers are selected based on applications submitted to the open call for solutions. The challenge provider chooses the teams according to the requirements and evaluation criteria outlined in the hackathon invitation. A solution provider team must have the capacity and motivation to:

- Submit their solution idea and team composition in an online application to the open call and agree to the hackathon rules.
- Sign the non-disclosure agreement (NDA) and comply with the hackathon rules.
- Publicly acknowledge their participation in the hackathon and provide a brief outline of their solution idea.
- Participate in the kick-off event and Hackathon Days to present their solution idea to the challenge provider.
- Use mentoring support and dialogue with the challenge provider to develop a co-operation proposal and tailor the solution to the challenge provider's needs.
- Begin co-operation with the challenge provider after the hackathon, in line with the offer made to the winning team.

MENTORS

A mentor encourages the team and helps highlight its strengths, while not hesitating to ask difficult (or seemingly simple) questions. Mentors offer their connections, know-how and lessons learned for the benefit of the team. As a group of external experts, they support solution provider teams in preparing the best possible co-operation offer for the challenge provider and in recognizing the full potential of their ideas.



Karlstads Energi Hackathon, photographer Malin Hildén

Mentors may come from industry, research or policy backgrounds. They can represent potential clients or stakeholders of the targeted innovations. Their expertise may include the subject matter of the challenge, business development, funding, innovation processes or services. They can also provide pitching expertise.

VALUE PROPOSITION

Mentors can expand their networks and make a tangible impact on the green transition of businesses. Alongside a learning opportunity, mentors gain validation and visibility for their expertise. Through the BioBoosters hackathon, mentors gain the opportunity to:

- Support the green transition and foster innovative business growth.
- Learn from real-life business cases on circular economy transition.
- Build networks and establish business connections.
- Promote their professional know-how.
- Explore opportunities to join business-driven RDI co-operations that advance the green transition.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Mentors are expected to possess:

- Expertise in the challenge topic, funding, business development or pitching.
- An open mind and a willingness to share knowledge and learn.
- Enthusiasm for the subject or the process.
- Respect for the non-disclosure agreement and hackathon rules.

Mentors must have the capacity and motivation to:

- Familiarise themselves with the challenge and solution provider teams by attending or watching the recording of the kick-off event.
- Guide the solution provider teams by providing initial feedback and asking clarifying questions before the Hackathon Days.
- Mentor each team for about 30 minutes during the Hackathon Days and provide insights to the challenge provider on the teams' strengths and development areas.

ORGANISER'S GUIDE

The Organiser's Guide follows the process steps of the BioBoosters Hackathon:



Resourcing: Securing funding, building the capacity of the organising team, establishing the process flow and identifying a challenge provider.



Challenge formulation: Collaborating with the challenge provider to define the hackathon invitation, which determines the criteria for solutions and teams and the offer for winners.



Scouting for solutions: Attracting and selecting the solution provider teams and mentors to join the hackathon.



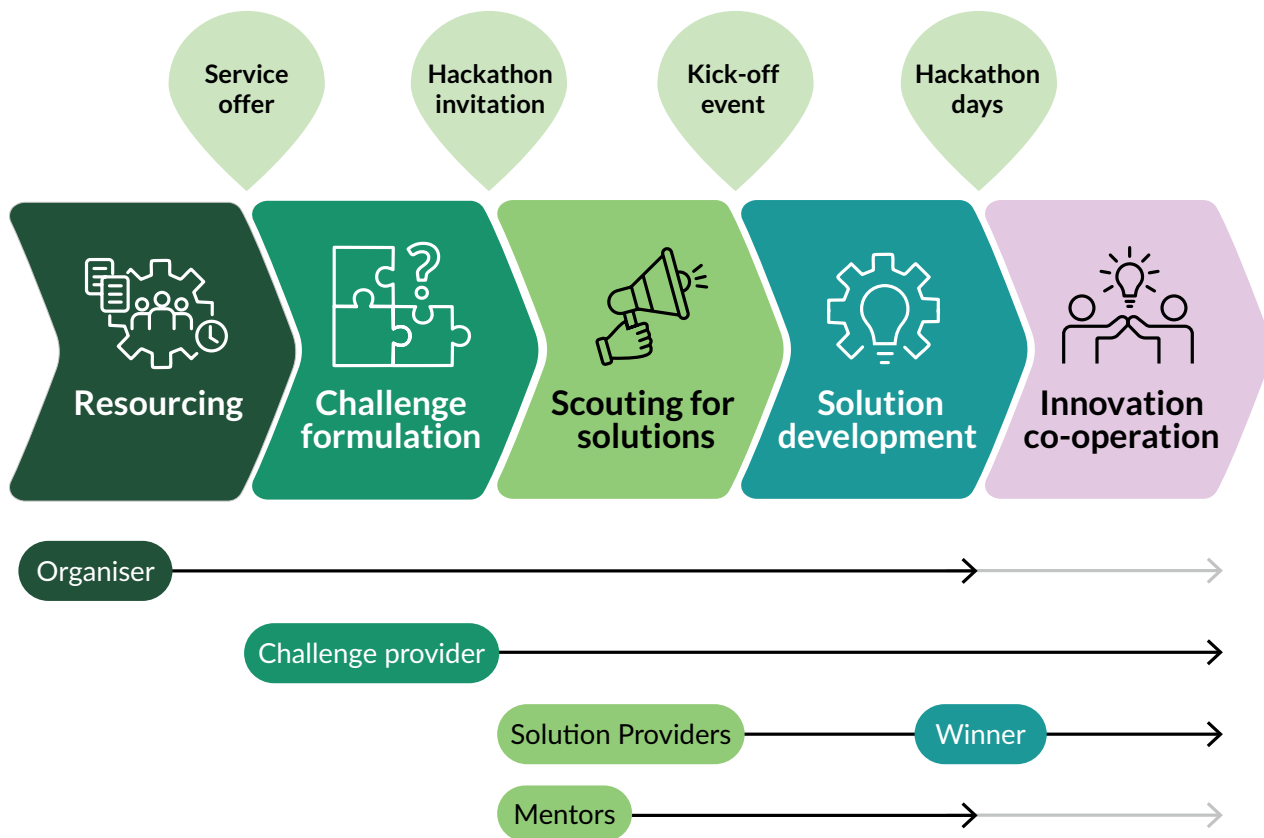
Solution development: Facilitating dialogue between solution provider teams, the challenge provider and mentors, organising the kick-off event and Hackathon Days, which will conclude with pitching, a jury session and the announcement of winners.



Innovation co-operation: Following up on the co-operation established between the challenge provider and the winner, assessing and communicating the impact of the process.

For each process step, this handbook provides:

- Process know-how
- Organiser's tasks
- Insights from experienced organisers



ORGANISER'S GUIDE TO RESOURCING



THE RESOURCING PHASE

The resourcing phase begins when the organiser has made a strategic decision to start running hackathons as part of their service portfolio or, for example, project portfolio activities. This phase focusses on internal capacity-building activities and securing the resources needed to organise the hackathons.

Starting point: Commitment to start organising hackathons.

Organiser's role: Build capacity to implement and manage the hackathon process. Engage networks and initiate discussions. Secure funding for the hackathon process.

Timeframe: Minimum recommended six months; securing funding may require a longer period. Piloting is recommended before full-scale integration into the service portfolio.

Outcome: Skilled organising team with the resources to manage the hackathon process.

Next step: Formulate the challenge with a challenge provider.

CAPACITY BUILDING

To run a successful hackathon, the organiser must secure the right mix of resources – people, funding, facilities and information. This involves not only confirming the budget but also obtaining full management support so that hackathon promotion can begin with confidence.

Beyond securing resources, the organiser should establish a clear, standardised process for delivering the hackathon. When the process is documented and repeatable, it ensures that every participant experiences the same high level of value, regardless of who is on the organising team or how many times the event is held.

TEAM CAPACITY

Once your organisation has committed to hosting a hackathon, one of the first and most critical steps is to secure a skilled, motivated and well-structured organising team. This team drives the process from start to finish, ensuring smooth implementation, strong communication and consistent value delivery for all participants.

Build and lead a team with the right mix of skills, clear responsibilities and adequate time allocation to cover all phases of the hackathon process. Ensure that every team member understands the purpose of the hackathon, the process and their role in creating a positive experience for all stakeholders. The recommended team structure depends on the scale of the hackathon, but the following core roles should always be covered.

CHECKLIST FOR ORGANISING TEAM ROLES

☐ Project manager/coordinator

- Oversees the entire hackathon process from resourcing to follow-up.
- Manages timelines, budget and task allocation.
- Ensures strategic alignment with the organisation's goals.

☐ Communicator/content creator

- Leads all communication activities, including invitations, social media, press releases and marketing materials.
- Maintains brand consistency across all visuals and messages.
- Works closely with the process coordinator to ensure communication aligns with each phase.

☐ Event host/facilitator

- Acts as the public face of the hackathon during live events.
- Keeps the programme engaging and on schedule.
- Facilitates Q&A sessions, networking activities and icebreakers.
- Serves as the contact point for participants and supporting staff.

☐ Technical support/online facilitator

- Ensures smooth technical delivery for hybrid and online events.
- Sets up conference rooms, microphones, cameras and webinar platforms.
- Troubleshoots technical issues in real time.

SYSTEMS, EQUIPMENT AND PLATFORMS

A smooth, professional hackathon relies not only on great ideas and strong networks, but also on the right technical setup. Whether your event is on-site, online or hybrid, your systems and equipment must support clear communication, seamless interaction and reliable delivery from start to finish.

All tools should be easy for participants to access and straightforward for organisers to manage. Where possible, limit the number of platforms to avoid confusion and keep communication centralised. Provide participants with clear instructions and login details well in advance.

CHECKLIST FOR SYSTEMS, EQUIPMENT AND PLATFORMS

- ☐ **Hackathon webpage.** Every hackathon needs a dedicated online hub, whether a standalone website or a prominent section of your organisation's site. It should present the challenge, timeline, rules, registration links and contact information in one easy-to-navigate place.
- ☐ **Social media channels.** Select channels that align with your target audience. Use them for promotion, engagement and sharing results before, during and after the hackathon.
- ☐ **Hybrid event equipment (Hackathon Days)**
 - A conference room that accommodates both in-person and remote participants
 - At least six smaller rooms for mentoring sessions with a conference microphone and camera
 - Quality audio and lighting so all participants can see and hear clearly
- ☐ **Webinar platform licence.** Choose a platform that can support your expected number of participants, offers breakout rooms, and enables Q&A, polls and file sharing.
- ☐ **Registration and survey tools.** Use an online system that makes sign-up easy for participants and simple for organisers to track. Ensure it also supports pre- and post-event surveys for collecting valuable feedback.
- ☐ **Online co-working platform.** An internal communication space is essential for connecting solution provider teams, mentors and challenge providers. Look for features such as:
 - File and data sharing
 - Discussion and chat areas
 - Polls and surveys for evaluation and feedback
 - Private, secure workspaces for teams, mentors and the jury

PROCESS MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

The organiser's role is to establish clear processes, align the hackathon with the organisation's strategy and create a documented framework that allows expertise to be shared across the team and organisation. Process management systems should be in place before entering the challenge formulation phase – ideally 4–6 months before the hackathon – to ensure that internal and external stakeholders are aligned.

For solution providers, especially those representing companies, the management of intellectual property rights (IPR) is essential. IPR issues must be addressed in the process documentation, including the Rules of the Hackathon and non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) signed by participants before the solution development phase.

In the BioBoosters hackathons, the Rules of the Hackathon specify that existing intellectual property rights will not be transferred during the event. Participants retain rights to all material that they make available to a client. The challenge provider may use shared material in their own internal development activities, but a separate agreement must be concluded with the party that created the solution for any further use. Likewise, challenge providers retain the intellectual property rights to the material that they make available during the hackathon. Participants may use this material only within the event.

The NDA agreement requires all members of solution provider teams and mentors to commit to keep confidential any information received from clients or other participants, or otherwise acquired during the hackathon. Confidential information includes ideas, solutions, products, business plans and trade secrets, regardless of format.



CHECKLIST FOR PROCESS MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

☐ Strategic alignment and management support

- Connect the hackathon service to your organisation's mission, vision and strategic goals.
- Establish measurable aims and indicators (e.g., number of participating companies, follow-up projects launched, satisfaction scores).
- Secure management buy-in and put in place a long-term support framework to sustain hackathon activities beyond one-off projects.

☐ Documented and standardised process

- Transfer hackathon know-how from individuals to the whole organisation to reduce reliance on single staff members.
- Develop a process flow with detailed instructions for each phase.
- Capture best practices, lessons learned and recommendations from past hackathons.
- Build in feedback loops after each event to enable continuous improvement.

RULES OF THE HACKATHON

☐ Clearly define and document:

- Intellectual property rights
- Publicity of participation
- Confidentiality requirements
- Prizes and evaluation criteria
- Liability and insurance requirements

☐ Internal coordination tools

- Use a central platform for communication and file-sharing among the organising team.
- Maintain shared calendars with key dates and deadlines.
- Prepare and validate all formal templates (e.g., service agreements, invitations, NDAs) and store them in an easily accessible location.

NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

Networks are among the most valuable assets for a hackathon organiser. From sourcing challenge providers to attracting high-quality solution teams and mentors, the reach and strength of your networks – and your ability to activate them – can directly affect the success of the event.

Start by identifying existing networks: organisational contacts, past participants, project partners and professional associations. Understand each group's value proposition and potential role, and segment them into functional categories:

- Challenge provider prospects
- Innovative startups, SMEs and research groups as potential solution providers
- Mentors and experts
- Media and communication channels
- Policy and advocacy stakeholders

Actively maintain, expand and mobilise your networks before, during and after the hackathon. Identify connectors, influencers and sector specialists who can help you reach your target groups, and invest in nurturing these relationships over time – not only when there is an immediate need.

A strong contact base makes it easier to secure speakers, scout solution teams and engage mentors. Those already familiar with the hackathon model will quickly grasp your needs and act as ambassadors, promoting your open call or introducing you to the right people. Building these relationships takes time and trust: while many form naturally during projects, they should be continuously cultivated after the project ends to keep them active and valuable.

CHECKLIST FOR NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

- ☐ Maintain an up-to-date contact list with clear categories and roles.
- ☐ Identify at least 2–3 strong network partners in each target segment.
- ☐ Establish mutual value propositions with network partners.
- ☐ Agree on communication formats and frequency with core partners.
- ☐ Offer partners visible roles in events or promotional activities.
- ☐ Document all new contacts and lessons learned for use in future hackathons.



CHALLENGE SCOUTING

Challenge scouting is the final step of the resourcing phase and the gateway to launching your hackathon. This is where you identify and secure a challenge provider – the company whose real-world problem will drive the innovation process.

The goal is simple: to find a challenge that is relevant, engaging and capable of attracting the right mix of solution providers and mentors. Ideally, potential solutions should not be on the market, or at least not effectively applied within the challenge provider's sector. In some cases, a market-ready solution might exist but is not introduced in the provider's country, or requires adaptation to fit their specific conditions.

Your value proposition is vital when approaching challenge providers. Results from BioBoosters hackathons illustrate the benefits:

- 98% of challenge providers reported discovering promising solution ideas.
- 98% agreed that the hackathon was an effective way to connect with small-scale innovators and access fresh, out-of-the-box ideas.
- 95% agreed it was a valuable tool for building international RDI and cross-sectoral networks.

Begin discussions with more than one potential challenge provider. Even if you have a clear favourite, circumstances can change, and an alternative ensures your process stays on track. The final selection should be based on two key factors: 1) the company's commitment to active participation, and 2) the suitability of their challenge for an open innovation process.

To identifying strong candidates, look for companies that:

- Have a challenge tied to a genuine business need and are ready to act on the winning idea.
- Are open to collaboration with companies, research groups or other innovators.
- Can commit staff time for mentoring, selection and evaluation.
- Recognise the visibility and branding opportunities the hackathon provides.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD CHALLENGE PROVIDER?

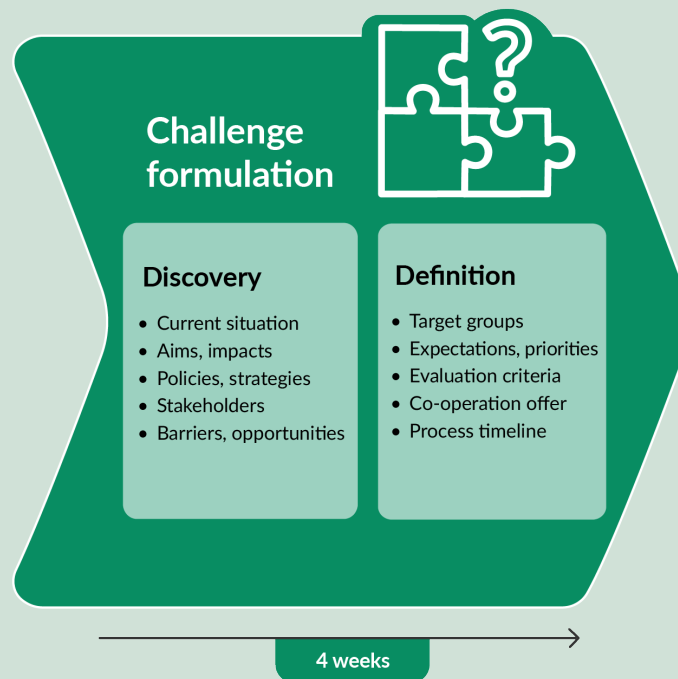


TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER:

The success of the Fibenol Hackathon stemmed largely from the company's own attitude. Fibenol is dedicated to innovative, research-based sustainable solutions that make use of local resources and create higher value at the local level. The company was open to dialogue, presented its challenge during both the launch webinar and the kick-off, and actively contributed as mentors and jury members during the Hackathon Days at the Estonian University of Life Sciences. Most importantly, Fibenol opened their demo plant in Imavere to all participants, offering a full process tour and an in-depth explanation of their challenge on-site.

—Katrin Kepp, Estonian University of Life Sciences

ORGANISER'S GUIDE TO CHALLENGE FORMULATION



THE CHALLENGE FORMULATION

The challenge formulation phase begins once the challenge provider has been confirmed. It requires close dialogue between the organiser and the provider to finalise a service agreement and prepare the hackathon invitation.

Starting point: Identified challenge provider.

Organiser's role: Explore the potential related to the challenge.
Formulate the hackathon invitation based on the provider's needs.
Plan for active scouting.

Timeframe: Typically ranges from two weeks to two months.

Outcome: A completed hackathon invitation and signed service agreement with the challenge provider.

Next step: Launch a webinar to open the call for solutions.

SERVICE AGREEMENTS WITH A CHALLENGE PROVIDER

A service agreement between the organiser and the challenge provider clarifies roles, responsibilities, timelines and the challenge to be addressed. For the process to run smoothly, the provider must be fully committed and aware of the staff engagement and resource requirements at each phase.

The service agreement should be discussed in detail with the provider's representatives. Allow sufficient time for deliberation – often several weeks, or even months. Approval can be particularly time-consuming in large enterprises due to internal procedures, and in publicly owned companies where implications for procurement must be considered in advance of the hackathon.

The agreement confirms roles and responsibilities (as detailed in the 'Participants' chapter) and should also define responsibilities for costs and resources. Cost-sharing arrangements should specify whether the challenge provider will cover, for example:

- Venue and studio setup for the launch webinar, kick-off event and Hackathon Days
- Catering, including lunch, dinner and coffee, during the Hackathon Days
- Paid advertising in social media and other channels (optional)
- Media services, such as photography or video production (optional)
- Evening programme during the Hackathon Days (optional)
- Compensation for travel and accommodation for mentors and solution providers (optional)

Depending on the funding sources, the hackathon invitation may be annexed to the service agreement if available. In practice:

- With private funding (for example, when the provider has procured the hackathon service), tasks related to challenge formulation are typically carried out after signing the service agreement, as part of the paid service.
- With public funding (for example, as part of an EU-funded development project), the service agreement is typically signed after the hackathon invitation has been finalised.

CHECKLIST FOR SERVICE AGREEMENT CONTENT

- ☐ Parties to the agreement
- ☐ Challenge agreed for the hackathon
- ☐ Process implementation dates
- ☐ Duties and responsibilities of the challenge provider, including time and cost
- ☐ Confidentiality and intellectual property rights
- ☐ Conditions for suspension of the agreement
- ☐ Dispute resolution
- ☐ Annex: Rules of the Hackathon



Photo: Unsplash

CHALLENGE DISCOVERY AND DEFINITION

The challenge formulation forms the foundation of the entire hackathon process. It is essential that the challenge addresses a genuine need prioritised by the challenge provider company. Exploring the challenge helps define target groups, map potential solutions, identify required mentor expertise and create a compelling storyline for the hackathon invitation.

Do not underestimate the time required for dialogue with the challenge provider – this investment pays off later in the process. From the outset, it is important to foster engagement and internal ownership of the process within the provider's organisation by involving key personnel in discussions.

Consultations with specialists can complement these discussions, providing insight into the wider industry context, including relevant policy changes. It is recommended to involve policy, research and advocacy stakeholders early on during the challenge formulation phase. This approach:

- Provides a framework for the challenge
- Highlights wider market opportunities for solution providers
- Helps identify potential target groups for the open call
- Supports the selection of speakers for the launch webinar
- Encourages stakeholder participation as mentors



WHY IT PAYS OFF TO INVEST IN CHALLENGE FORMULATION



TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER:

One thing we have learned in our hackathons is that the process of formulating and refining the challenge with the provider company can act as a catalyst for understanding their own production or processes. It may inspire changes, refinements, collaborations or new ways of organising – a valuable outcome that complements the actual solutions they receive.

— Eva Fridman, BioFuel Region

CHALLENGE SCOPE

The organiser's role is to guide the challenge provider in defining the scope of the challenge. As an organiser, be curious and explore the root causes: why the challenge has not yet been solved, what impacts it has on the company and whether any ideas have been previously tested. Investigate whether other companies face similar challenges, and discuss expectations and limitations for potential solutions in detail with the provider.

When guiding the challenge provider, make sure the challenge scope is broad enough to address the root causes. This prevents partial optimisation, where a solution improves one aspect (for example, reducing CO2 emissions) but creates negative trade-offs elsewhere (for example, habitat loss). Partial optimisation can also lead to operational challenges or unforeseen investment needs – for example, introducing a digital solution often requires a broader re-thinking of data flow and management across the organisation and supply chain.

Narrowly scoped challenges (for example, a pre-defined product or service need) can also work well in a hackathon. They are easier to communicate, attract target groups quickly and often yield relevant solutions. However, narrow challenges may limit the benefits of open innovation, as solution provider teams might be direct competitors or come from similar areas of expertise.

Based on experience in the BioBoosters network, the hackathon process works with a wide range of challenges: with large enterprises and SMEs, targeting both lower and higher technology readiness levels (TRLs), and addressing both simple and complex problems. The key is to define a clear co-operation offer for potential solution providers and communicate the significance of the challenge, including the potential market for the solution.

It is essential to understand the co-operation opportunities the challenge provider is open to exploring. The scope of the challenge should be clear in terms of both what the provider is seeking and what is out of scope. Consider questions such as:

- Are they willing to collaborate with research teams working at low TRLs?
- Would they work with a student team?
- Do they have capacity for international co-operation?
- Are any ideas 'out-of-bounds'? Are certain technologies or approaches excluded?

HOW TO APPROACH A COMPLEX CHALLENGE



TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER:

Real-world challenges are often complex, with various sustainability or business trade-offs between different solution paths. Focusing on a single aspect of a challenge can limit learning opportunities in the open innovation process and lead to partial optimisation, producing solutions that do not offer a holistic, integrated approach to circular or digital transitions.

Of course, a more focused challenge is easier to manage: communication, target groups, offers and evaluation are clearer. It's easier to manage the whole process flow, engage participants and communicate with them. It is important to explain this to the challenge provider when preparing the challenge definition. For complex challenges, practical limitations need to be communicated clearly to the teams during the process. This may require more engagement and extensive dialogue with the teams during the development phase, and the challenge provider should be aware that they will likely need to more actively support the teams during the development phase.

— Anna Aalto, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Discussions about the challenge scope and the challenge provider's expectations naturally lead to defining the evaluation criteria. These criteria should reflect all requirements that the solution concept and co-operation proposal need to meet. We recommend focusing on four to six criteria, avoiding excessive detail to leave room for out-of-the-box ideas and learning. Make sure that each criterion is clearly explained in practical terms.

When defining evaluation criteria, consider discussing the following aspects with the challenge provider:

Feasibility criteria

- Technical and operational requirements
- Legislative compliance

Impact criteria

- Emission reduction
- Circularity
- Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

Viability criteria

- Profitability
- Scalability

EXAMPLE OF EVALUATION CRITERIA

Piesta Hackathon: Sustainable Use of Apple Pomace:

1. **Innovation and creativity** – Does it introduce new approaches, technologies or ideas to valorise apple pomace? Does it address key challenges (for example, transportation costs, separation efficiency) in an innovative and scalable manner?
2. **Practical feasibility and scalability** – Can the proposed solution be realistically implemented using current or near-term technologies? Does it align with the scale and capabilities of Piesta and similar small producers?
3. **Financial viability and sustainability** – Is the solution financially sustainable for Piesta and other regional producers? Does the business model demonstrate a clear path to cost reduction, revenue generation or both?
4. **Collaborative potential** – Does the solution encourage regional collaboration among similar producers? Are there mechanisms or strategies for pooling resources and maximising impact?
5. **Regulatory compliance** – Does the solution meet all applicable regulatory requirements in Estonia?

HACKATHON INVITATION

The hackathon invitation marks the start of external communication and marketing to attract solution providers and mentors. It should contain all the information a solution provider team needs to decide whether to apply.

In practice, the invitation is typically a PDF document that can be sent directly to potential solution providers and mentors. It serves as the official reference for the hackathon, covering everything from timelines to evaluation criteria, and can also be adapted for the hackathon webpage to support online communication efforts.

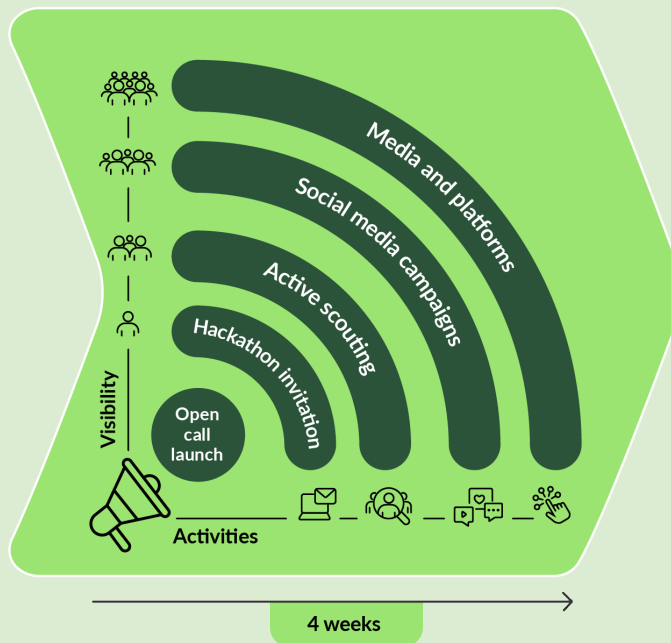
CHECKLIST FOR HACKATHON INVITATION CONTENT

- ☐ Hackathon name and slogan (marketing-oriented challenge title)
- ☐ Teaser of the prize for the winner
- ☐ Link to the registration form for solution providers
- ☐ Link to the Rules of the Hackathon
- ☐ Challenge description
- ☐ Target groups
- ☐ Evaluation criteria
- ☐ Offer for the teams and winner
- ☐ Timetable with key dates and times
- ☐ Contact persons with information
- ☐ Challenge provider information
- ☐ Organiser information (including co-organisers)
- ☐ Keywords and hashtags

CHECKLIST FOR COMPLETING THE INVITATION

- ☐ **Be prepared.** Ensure readiness for the first meeting with the challenge provider (see Resourcing). Introduce the rules of participation, service agreement and NDA. Be clear about expectations for cost coverage, including travel, venue and catering.
- ☐ **Have regular meetings and communication.** Schedule regular check-ins with the challenge provider, for example, weekly 15–30-minute meetings, to manage the process smoothly.
- ☐ **Ensure commitment and communicate expectations clearly.** Secure the provider's commitment and clarify process requirements. Retain ownership of the open innovation process to provide it as a service, allowing the provider to focus on the challenge and collaboration with teams and mentors.
- ☐ **Set process dates early.** Confirm dates for the launch webinar, kick-off, team selection, jury and mentor briefing, and Hackathon Days. Account for seasonal business requirements and holiday periods for target groups.
- ☐ **Confirm staff engagement at the challenge provider company.** Ensure that a contact person is appointed and presentations are prepared for the launch webinar and kick-off. Verify that jury members and mentors are assigned, and involve marketing staff to support the open call for solutions and results dissemination.
- ☐ **Know what you are offering.** Use the hackathon invitation as your key reference for scouting dialogues with potential solution providers and mentors. Be ready to answer questions about the planned co-operation with the winning team, evaluation priorities and provider expectations.
- ☐ **Double-check the invitation.** Have a third party review the challenge definition and invitation to ensure clarity and accuracy.

ORGANISER'S GUIDE TO SCOUTING FOR SOLUTIONS



SCOUTING FOR SOLUTIONS

Scouting for solutions involves both managing the open call for solutions and actively seeking out potential solution provider teams and mentors. This phase relies on close collaboration between organisers and communicators, as well as the active engagement of partners and networks.

Strong networks are a real asset here – the broader your reach, the stronger the pool of participants you can attract.

Starting point: Hackathon invitation.

Organiser's role: Manage registrations for the open call for solutions.
Directly contact solution provider teams and mentors.
Coordinate closely with communicator and network partners.

Timeframe: 4–5 weeks.

Outcome: Selected solution provider teams and selected mentors.

Next step: Arrange a kick-off event bringing all participants together to begin the solution development phase.




Toksika Hackathon, Photographer Agne Popiere



Photo: Paper Province

ACTIVE SCOUTING

For the hackathon to succeed, it is vital to identify and attract solution provider teams who are ready to share and develop their ideas, as well as co-operation proposals for the challenge provider. Aim to attract at least ten solution provider teams, ensuring that all identified target groups are represented, so the challenge provider has a strong pool to choose from.



Invest in active scouting! In the Bio-Boosters hackathon pilot, 79% of the 246 applicants were reached through this method.

Direct outreach to shortlisted potential solution providers, known as active scouting, is the most effective way of generating applications for the open call. The active scouting task can begin as soon as the challenge is formulated, but it typically accelerates after the launch webinar and continues until the open call closes.

It pays to invest in this task and to plan it carefully. Active scouting works best when the message comes from a trusted source. Consider recruiting support from connectors relevant to the target groups, who can share your invitation within their own networks. Whether you manage active scouting with internal resources only or with partner support, be sure to reserve time and space in the contact person's calendar for this task.

And remember – don't be shy! What you are offering is a proven process for creating co-operation and business opportunities for innovative solution providers.

YOUR SELLING POINTS FOR ATTRACTING SOLUTION PROVIDER TEAMS

Survey responses from 160 participants highlight the value of participation:

- 95% of solution providers reported gaining valuable know-how from mentoring.
- 93% agreed that the BioBoosters hackathon is an effective tool for validating a business idea or proof-of-concept.
- 94% agreed that the hackathon is a good way to build partnerships for idea testing and commercialisation.
- 95% agreed that the hackathon provides visibility for their team's expertise.

CHECKLIST: GOOD PRACTICES FOR ACTIVE SCOUTING

- ☐ **Build your list.** Compile potential solution providers from each identified target group and expertise area. Start with your organisation's networks, then extend the list using search engines, AI tools, sector-specific networks, platforms and LinkedIn. Where possible, collect full contact details (name, phone, email). Expand your list in dialogue with the challenge provider, scouting partners and mentors.
- ☐ **Review and assign contacts.** Go through the list with the challenge provider and any scouting partners to decide who should approach whom. If feasible, assign contacts based on existing relationships.
- ☐ **Start with a light touch.** Use a simple request to open the conversation and avoid early refusals. Examples include inviting someone to the launch webinar or asking for a 15-minute call to explore their expertise in relation to the challenge. With research organisations, you can frame the discussion as an opportunity to learn more about the field.
- ☐ **Favour calls and meetings.** Aim for phone or online conversations to boost engagement. Use them to deepen your subject knowledge, build rapport and better understand what might motivate or concern the solution providers in this challenge. This insight will also strengthen future outreach.
- ☐ **Use events as platforms.** Target webinars, trade fairs and other events related to the challenge. These provide opportunities to connect with multiple potential solution providers at once, especially where face-to-face dialogue is possible.
- ☐ **Craft clear, concise messages.** Make sure your outreach highlights the hackathon's sell-ing points at the start, with easy access to practical details. Most people do not read long messages in full.
- ☐ **Tailor your approach.** Adapt messages to different target groups. For companies, emphasise commercial co-operation opportunities; for research groups, highlight potential pilot studies supported by the challenge provider. Try to link your outreach closely to the hackathon invitation.
- ☐ **Coordinate internally.** Assign contacts to specific team members to avoid duplication. Document feedback from the solution providers for follow-up and to refine your approach based on lessons learned. Keep your team promptly updated on submitted applications.
- ☐ **Reserve time for responsiveness.** Protect time in your calendar to flexibly handle meetings and enquiries. Plan around holidays and competing tasks to stay available for conversations with potential solution providers.
- ☐ **Start early and follow up.** Initiate contact as soon as possible, giving providers time to build their teams and prepare proposals. Follow up regularly to address questions or concerns. With large organisations (such as national research institutions or universities), expect to contact several people before reaching the right one.

ENGAGING MENTORS

Mentors are a valuable asset for solution providers, challenge providers and organisers alike. Drawing on cross-sectoral backgrounds and diverse knowledge areas, mentors bring fresh perspectives ranging from technical and scientific expertise to business development, co-operation proposals and pitching skills.

Mentors typically participate without monetary compensation. Their motivation – and often their available resources – stems from opportunities for knowledge building and networking that benefit their own work and organisation. The idea is to encourage open innovation dialogue, where all participants contribute based on their interest in the topic and their own agendas for tackling the challenge. This approach also allows more mentors to be involved, ensuring that a variety of viewpoints are represented. Even if funding occasionally allows for compensation, it is advisable to maintain a consistent approach within and across hackathons. In other words, do not offer compensation to some mentors while expecting others to contribute voluntarily.

The mentor pool should reflect the expertise areas identified as important through the evaluation criteria, while also addressing the needs of the target groups – especially where they might lack experience. For example:

- International teams may benefit from mentors who can explain the operating environment in the target country.
- Cross-sectoral teams may need guidance to better understand a new target market.
- Academic and research teams often require support to effectively align their solutions with industry needs.

As several mentors are usually provided by the challenge provider (and potentially also by the organiser or co-organisers), the number of external mentors required may vary between 4 and 8. Identify suitable candidates in dialogue with the challenge provider and industry specialists interviewed during the challenge formulation phase. Depending on the numbers, mentoring can be organised individually, in pairs or in teams of three to four mentors.

YOUR SELLING POINTS FOR ATTRACTING MENTORS

Survey responses from 113 mentors highlight the value of participation:

- 88% of mentors agreed that they were able to make an impact on the innovation journey of participating teams.

- 86% agreed that they gained insights into the real-world application of circular economy business models.
- 81% agreed that they increased the visibility and validation of their professional expertise.
- 73–75% agreed that they grew their business, international and cross-sectoral networks.

CHECKLIST FOR ENGAGING MENTORS

- ☐ Begin scouting for mentors as soon as possible.
- ☐ Confirm several mentors from the challenge providers' team and, if feasible, from your own organisation.
- ☐ Consult with the challenge provider and industry specialists to refine your search for mentors.
- ☐ Reach out through your existing contacts to identify strong candidates.
- ☐ Ensure representation across diverse knowledge areas and competencies, especially those that address gaps in the targeted solution provider teams.
- ☐ Try to involve both experienced mentors who can support pitching and proposal development, and newer mentors who bring specialised subject matter expertise.



TEAM SELECTION

In the BioBoosters hackathons, an average of 14 solution provider teams apply, of which 7 are selected to take part.

The team selection meeting is scheduled in advance when the service agreement is signed. It is attended by both the challenge provider and the organiser. The organiser plays a guiding role, supporting the challenge provider in decision-making and weighing the merits of each proposal. Selection is based on the evaluation criteria set out in the hackathon invitation. The final decision rests with the challenge provider.

For a smooth process, it is recommended to select 5–6 solution provider teams. However, as dropouts are always possible, selecting 6–7 teams in total is advisable. This typically ensures that 3–5 teams remain active and present during the Hackathon Days.

Directly after the selection meeting, the organiser informs all applicants of the outcome. Selected teams are sent an NDA, which must be completed before the kick-off. Depending on their expertise and background, applicants who are rejected can also serve as a valuable pool of potential mentors.



Toksika Hackathon, photographer Agne Popiere

COMMUNICATING TO REJECTED TEAMS



TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER:

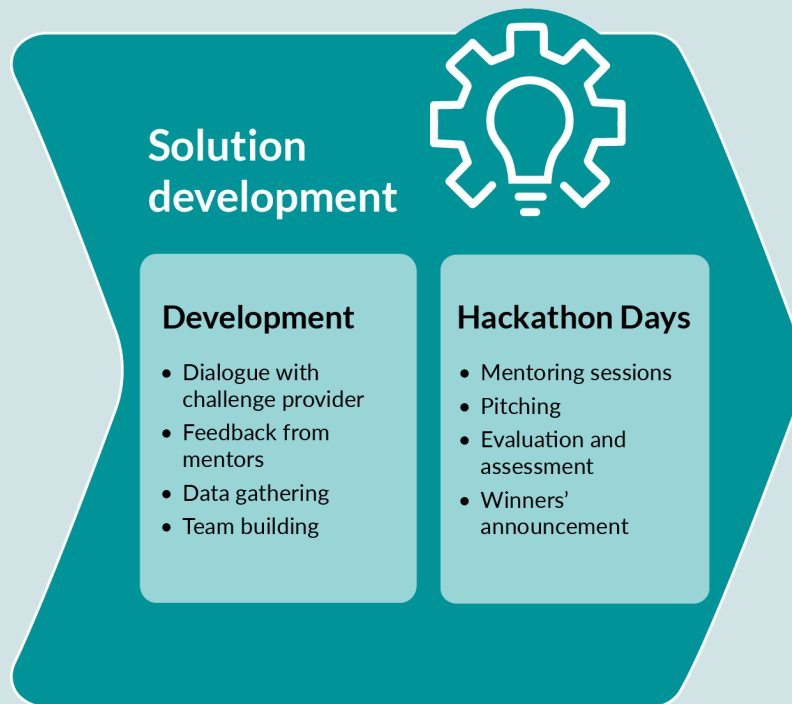
If solution provider applicants come from your networks, they may feel offended if they are not selected. This can have negative consequences for future projects. This should be discussed openly in advance with the solution providers, and you should consider what alternatives exist if they are not chosen. We also offered to hold short follow-up discussions with the teams that were not selected. This was well received by some of the rejected teams, although the majority did not take up the offer.

—Gudrun Mernitz, WITENO GmbH

CHECKLIST FOR TEAM SELECTION

- ☐ **Pre-book the meeting.** Confirm the team selection meeting date in advance and send invitations to all relevant challenge provider representatives.
- ☐ **Prepare application materials.** Be ready to present the applications clearly. If there are many, group them to make the review more manageable.
- ☐ **Guide the discussion.** Support the challenge provider by suggesting different ways to involve teams. For example, teams with strong expertise but weaker or less relevant ideas may be valuable as mentors – particularly those with research or advocacy backgrounds.
- ☐ **Have templates ready.** Prepare both acceptance and rejection letters in advance, aligned with the timeframe in the hackathon invitation. Acceptance letters should include the NDA and the kick-off invitation.
- ☐ **Confirm receipt.** Ensure all teams, accepted and rejected, have actually received your communication. For accepted teams, prompt contact is crucial for kick-off preparations. Remember that your email address may be unfamiliar to recipients, so follow up if needed.

ORGANISER'S GUIDE TO SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT



SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT

Solution development takes place through open innovation dialogue, bringing together the solution provider teams, challenge providers and mentors.

The organiser's main role is to facilitate this process – providing clear steps and structure so that participants can focus on solving the challenge.

Starting point: Solution provider teams and mentors have been selected.

Organiser's role: Facilitate and guide the open innovation dialogue between solution provider teams, challenge provider and mentors, from idea development until the final selection of the winner. Host events.

Timeframe: 3–4 weeks.

Outcome: Solution provider teams refine and tailor their ideas with mentoring support to meet the needs of the challenge provider, and to deliver a co-operation proposal to the challenge provider.

Challenge provider (jury) selects the winning team and proposal.

Next step: Launch the innovation partnership.

KICK-OFF EVENT

A kick-off event marks the official start of the development phase and is hosted by the organiser. It brings together the challenge provider, selected solution provider teams and mentors for the first time.

Up to this point, the only information available about the teams' ideas comes from the brief descriptions in their application. The kick-off offers an opportunity for the solution provider teams to explain their ideas in more detail, sparking dialogue with the challenge provider and mentors. The challenge provider, in turn, gives a deeper presentation of the challenge. As this is a closed event, the challenge provider may also share more detailed information about their processes than was possible in the public launch webinar.

The event – and the initial interactions it enables – helps solution provider teams understand what to focus on when developing their ideas and co-operation proposal ahead of the Hackathon Days. It also gives them valuable insight into each other's ideas. In some cases, this may even reveal potential synergies, leading to collaborations that create stronger solutions than originally envisioned.

INVITATIONS

When contacting the selected solution provider teams, the organiser sends invitations to the kick-off event along with the NDA forms. The teams are instructed to complete the following tasks in preparation for the kick-off:

- Confirm all team members participating in the hackathon to ensure that NDAs are delivered and that members can be added to the hackathon's internal communication platforms.
- Submit signed NDAs for all team members.
- Prepare a 5–8-minute presentation introducing the team and their solution idea, and be ready to answer questions from the challenge provider and mentors. Adjust the presentation length based on the event schedule. Consider asking the teams to submit their presentations in advance to avoid technical issues.
- Confirm the official team name, provide logos if available, and approve a one-sentence idea description for public use.

The organiser provides the webinar link for the kick-off event, ensuring restricted access for hackathon participants who have signed the NDA. Send the link only after receiving the completed NDAs.

Mentors are also required to sign an NDA before the kick-off and confirm their expertise profile to be shared with the solution provider teams.

PROGRAMME

For an online kick-off event, the preferred length is up to 1.5 hours. If there are many teams and the programme approaches 2 hours, a short break is recommended. Alternatively, you can adjust the presentation time for each team to manage the event length.

As the organiser, it is important to lead the event with a clear structure and manage time effectively. Prepare thoroughly and involve several people in running the event. We recommend a team of at least three organisers, each with assigned roles:

Moderator and timekeeper: Hosts the event, facilitates Q&A and keeps the programme on schedule.

Technical support: Manages access to the meeting room, assists presenters and participants with potential technical issues.

Chat manager: Monitors the chat, responds to questions, and shares relevant links and information at appropriate points. The moderator or chat manager can also prepare ice-breaking questions if the Q&A segments are slow to engage.

Before the event starts, make sure you have a suitable setup for running the webinar or hybrid event. Test with presenters in advance to minimise technical issues. Stay a few steps ahead of the participants and be ready to provide all practical details for the Hackathon Days.

You might consider inviting the challenge provider to join your studio for a joint presentation during the live stream. This can be valuable, but is not necessary for success. Note that multiple presenters in the studio may increase technical requirements.

THE PROGRAMME TYPICALLY INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING SEGMENTS:

- **Pre-event test run:** Time for presenters to test their setup
- **5–10 min:** Welcome and introduction to the agenda by the host (organiser)
- **10–20 min:** Presentation of the challenge, evaluation criteria and expectations by the challenge provider (one or more representatives), including operational details and available data
- **10 min:** Q&A moderated by the host
- **5–8 min per team:** Solution provider team introductions and concept presentations, followed by 5–7 min. Q&A per team
- **15–20 min:** Guidance on how to prepare for the Hackathon Days by the host (organiser)
- **Closing:** Wrap-up and next steps



BOOSTING CIRCULAR TRANSITION

Duration: 2023/01-2025/12
Total budget: 2 790 000 €
EU funding: 2 230 000 €



- 18 Business driven Hackathons will validate up to 70 solutions to circular transition challenges
- 20 R&D and business co-operation initiated
- 500 specialists brought together to drive the circular transition of the bioeconomy in the Baltic Sea Region

bb Bio Boosters

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CHECKLIST FOR STUDIO SETUP ESSENTIALS

- ☐ Audio
- ☐ Lighting
- ☐ Cameras
- ☐ Background (consider featuring the brand)
- ☐ Space for the organising team to manage their roles

CHECKLIST OF INFORMATION TO SHARE AT THE KICK-OFF

- ☐ **Practical arrangements.** Provide instructions for the Hackathon Days, including travel compensation procedures (if applicable), and required documentation.
- ☐ **Programme overview.** Share the Hackathon Days schedule. If the full programme is not confirmed, provide start and end times as well as location details to help participants plan their travel.
- ☐ **Participant registration.** Open registration for on-site and online participants, including any dietary restrictions and travel plans. This also helps you to manage group bookings for hotels or transport if needed.
- ☐ **Communication platform.** Set up a simple, centralised platform for all participant communication. Introduce the platform at the kick-off and avoid using multiple tools in order to simplify updates and management.

DEVELOPMENT

The 2–4-week phase between the kick-off event and the Hackathon Days is dedicated to solution provider teams refining their ideas and defining their co-operation proposals.

During this phase, participant activity levels may vary, as each team works according to their own interests and schedules. The organiser plays a key role in facilitating and encouraging interaction. It is vital to engage mentors early, providing initial feedback to the solution provider teams before the Hackathon Days. This helps the teams to address potential problem areas in their proposals, collect necessary data and strengthen their team dynamics.

In the BioBoosters Hackathon pilots, Howspace was used as the internal communication platform. A tailored workspace template is available for BioBoosters network members to use in any hackathon to support interaction, communication, data collection and sharing, as well as mentoring and evaluation from the kick-off to the Hackathon Days. The platform has proven to be intuitive, supportive of organiser's facilitation tasks and engaging for participants. While platform activity varies between hackathons, the platform has played a central role during the solution development phase – especially when many participants work online.



Targi Kielce Hackathon, photographer Kateryna Radkovierts



Toksika Hackathon, photographer Agne Popiere

CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATING THE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

- ☐ **Assign a contact person.** Assign a single point of contact for all hackathon participants who can respond promptly to questions and opportunities during preparation for the Hackathon Days.
- ☐ **Monitor the internal platform.** Regularly follow activity on the communication platform. Respond quickly to questions and make sure information reaches the relevant people. Manage tagging and notifications so that challenge providers receive questions directed to them and solution provider teams know their questions are being addressed.
- ☐ **Activate dialogue.** Use timely reminders and notifications to prompt participants about required actions and to share new information.
- ☐ **Engage mentors.** Invite mentors to the kick-off, and provide a recording for those who cannot attend. Ask mentors to share their first impressions and questions with solution providers after the kick-off. Make sure the mentors understand their roles and expected contributions before and during the Hackathon Days. Direct communication with mentors is encouraged.
- ☐ **Lead by example.** Confirm that a few mentors will promptly share their first impressions on the shared communication platform after the kick-off, encouraging others to do the same.
- ☐ **Mentors' info webinar.** Organise a short webinar before the Hackathon Days for mentors to get to know each other. Introduce the flow of the Hackathon Days, outline mentors' roles and provide an opportunity for them to introduce themselves. Share the planned mentor rotation for the Hackathon Days.

ACTIVATING THE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE BEFORE HACKATHON DAYS

TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTERS ORGANISER

As the organiser, it is recommended to actively engage the mentors so they take the time to understand the submitted and selected proposals. If possible, organise two meetings with mentors before the Hackathon Days: 1) a more formal meeting just after the kick-off, explaining the mentors' role, and 2) a less formal meeting around one week before the Hackathon Days, to support preparation and strengthen mentors' engagement.

—Artur Sobolewski, Pro Civis Foundation

RUNNING A MENTORS' WEBINAR

TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER

In the mentors' info session, you can give more guidance about how the mentoring will be done in practice (for example, in pairs, 30-minute slots, all mentors meeting with all teams). Focus on encouraging the mentors and building confidence, especially for new mentors who may doubt whether they can add value to the solution providers if they are not subject-matter experts. It's important to explain that the solution provider teams need different kinds of support to develop their ideas – business modelling, pitching guidance and more – not just technical expertise. Transforming an idea into a commercial innovation requires diverse know-how.

—Eija Iso-Ahola, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

HACKATHON DAYS

The Hackathon Days are the core event of the open innovation process, bringing together the challenge provider, solution provider teams and mentors to work on the presented challenge.

These days offer a dynamic, fun learning and networking experience. Running from lunchtime to lunchtime, the event lasts approximately 24 hours. This format simplifies travel arrangements and gives solution provider teams maximum time to network, collaborate and refine their pitch presentations. The Hackathon Days are typically the only live event during the hackathon process where participants get the chance to interact more informally.

On-site participation is preferred to maximise the benefits of networking and co-learning. If feasible, organisers are encouraged to support on-site participation through partial compensation of travel costs. However, participants can also join online. Online participation may be the only practical option for certain specialist mentors and can allow larger teams to adopt a hybrid format to reduce travel costs. Offering an online option also makes it possible for teams from more distant countries to take part the open call for solutions.

13-14 MARCH 2025
Tartu, Estonia



PREPARATION

The organiser holds primary responsibility for planning the programme and practical arrangements for the Hackathon Days. Depending on the service agreement, the challenge provider might also take an active hosting role, especially if the venue is on the company's premises. Depending on the funding source, the challenge provider may cover costs such as catering for the event.

After the date and venue for the Hackathon Days are determined, they are communicated in the invitation. Preliminary bookings for catering, venue, accommodation and external service providers (such as photographer, moderator or video production) can be made during the challenge formulation phase. However, final preparations are usually completed in the 1–2 weeks before the Hackathon Days, once the exact number of on-site and online participants is known following the kick-off event and registration. The organiser can also set a maximum number of on-site participants in advance to calculate budget.

The venue should include one conference room for approximately 30–40 people, as well as several smaller rooms for mentoring sessions. Each solution provider team will need a dedicated room on the first day for mentor meetings and pitch preparation.

To accommodate online mentors and solution provider teams, these rooms should be equipped with cameras and microphones. In some cases, participants may use their own laptops, such as when a team member is joining remotely but not actively participating in discussions during mentoring sessions. Note that no discussions should be recorded or disseminated.

When planning mentoring sessions, divide the mentors into thematic groups to ensure focused discussions. Suggested themes include technical know-how, industry (or legal/policy) expertise, business model development and pitching guidance. Thematic grouping enhances networking opportunities for mentors and provides consistent feedback to the solution provider teams. It also prevents repeated discussion of the same issues or conflicting guidance from different mentors.

It often makes sense to separate challenge provider mentors into different groups from external mentors. This gives the challenge provider (and jury) multiple perspectives from the mentoring sessions. When challenge provider representatives mentor alongside external experts, the jury gains deeper insight into the solutions beyond the pitch presentations.

Be well-prepared and involve several team members in managing the event. Clearly define roles and responsibilities to avoid overlapping duties. For example, if a specialist is mentoring, they should not have any other role on the first Hackathon Day.

CHECKLIST FOR HACKATHON DAYS PREPARATION

- ☐ **Participant registration:** Set up and monitor registration for participants.
- ☐ **Define organising team roles:**
 - Moderator: Ensures smooth programme flow, facilitates networking and interaction.
 - Technical support: Manages online meeting rooms and chat for remote participants.
 - Contact person: Guides participants, manages late arrivals and resolves any issues.
 - Host: Oversees practicalities, including venue, catering, travel, gifts and diplomas.
 - Communicator: Creates social media content, interviews, press releases, etc.
- ☐ **Scheduling:**
 - Prepare and share a detailed Hackathon Days programme.
 - Prepare and share the mentor session schedule, including rotation for mentors to meet all solution provider teams.
- ☐ **Evaluation preparation:** Prepare mentor evaluation surveys for the jury.
- ☐ **Catering and networking:** Reserve coffee, lunch and dinner. Consider including networking activities in the programme.
- ☐ **Travel and accommodation:** Manage bookings and any compensation arrangements if relevant.
- ☐ **Venue setup:**
 - Reserve meeting rooms with web-conferencing equipment for all teams (Day 1).
 - Book a hybrid event room for all participants (both days).
 - Reserve a room for the jury session (Day 2).
 - Set up the venue to showcase branding and encourage social media content creation.
- ☐ **Participant materials:** Prepare certificates, gifts, and participant surveys to evaluate the hackathon experience for future improvements.

GOOD HOSTING AND MODERATING SUPPORT NETWORKING

TIPS FROM BIOBOOSTER ORGANISERS

An experienced and energetic moderator for the Hackathon Days made the event lively and engaging for both teams and mentors. Having a short session on pitching tips during the Hackathon Day helped the teams to deliver clear, concise presentations and stay within the time limits set for their pitches.

—Svea Uusen, Pärnu County Development Centre

One of the key improvements this time was the addition of a pitching training session to the agenda. Our event host is an excellent trainer and led a high-quality session for all teams. We also included dedicated free time in the schedule for teams to further develop their ideas and prepare specific questions to ask during the next mentoring round with new mentors. Before the hackathon started, we prepared mentor introductions along with their areas of expertise. This gave teams a clearer overview of who would be mentoring them and in which topics they could provide guidance.

—Lili Veesaar, Estonian University of Life Sciences

This hackathon we added a meeting for mentors and the jury during the first Hackathon Day. In contrast, our first hackathon, jury members only received mentor feedback through a digital survey, leaving some questions unanswered. This time, the survey was retained but served as a guide for further discussions about each team's potential for success, based on both their solutions and team dynamics. Since the mentors are experienced business and innovation advisers, their feedback was highly valued.

—Malin Hildén, Paper Province

Even if it is not the preferred format, do not be afraid to organise a hybrid event. In our hackathon pilot, the most suitable solution was created by a team working entirely online.

—Inguna Kucina, Vidzeme Planning Region

Have one person manage online participants throughout the hybrid event. Plan how to integrate them effectively into the event. Make sure they can see the speakers, encourage questions in the chat and manage the chat actively. Provide more breaks and intermediary time for the online participants, try to make them feel included and give tips on what to do during waiting periods. For example, displaying the winner's announcement slides with team names is helpful when participants might struggle to catch information due to accents or poor connections.

—Anna Aalto, Jamk University of Applied Sciences



AdFis Hackathon, Photographer Marten Kählert



Piesta Hackathon, photographer: Kristi Kuusmik-Orav



Karlstads Energi Hackathon, Photographer Malin Hildén



Piesta Hackathon, photographer: Kristi Kuusmik-Orav



Cosun Beet Hackathon, Photographer Cosun Beet Company

HACKATHON DAY I : MENTORING AND NETWORKING

The first day of the hackathon focusses on mentoring and networking. A typical structure is as follows:

- Arrival and lunch
- Welcome, agenda presentation, icebreaking activities to get to know each other
- Mentoring sessions (with coffee break)
- Teams' working time, mentors provide feedback to jury
- Dinner and networking activities

During mentoring sessions, mentors rotate between solution provider teams individually, in pairs or in groups, depending on the number of mentors and teams. Each team typically has an approximately 30-minute timeslot with each mentor pair or group. Because the mentors are directly and indirectly involved in evaluating the teams, it is important that each team receives equal time with each mentor group.

Ensure a clear structure and timetable for mentoring sessions, including adequate transition times and breaks. Consider including a slot for teams to work on their pitch presentations based on mentors' feedback. As an organiser, stand by to guide mentors in following the timetable. Help them locate team rooms and manage time.

Before mentoring begins, allocate time for icebreaking and initiating interaction among participants. Build excitement and walk participants through the Hackathon Days schedule. Introducing the participants and clarifying the mentors' expertise helps make the mentoring sessions more effective.

After the mentoring sessions, provide teams time to refine their pitch presentations and reflect on the feedback they received. Meanwhile, mentors and the challenge provider (jury) can discuss impressions of each solution based on the evaluation criteria. Alternatively, mentor feedback can be collected digitally, for example, through a survey. Finally, dinner and networking encourage participants to continue discussions and foster informal interactions, supporting relationship-building. Networking activities are recommended to be relaxed and informal, such as sightseeing or a walking tour.



MENTOR SESSIONS

TUESDAY, 3 DECEMBER

	Nordic Surface	Nalforenk	Raselo
Room:	Managem	T-Lab	Estroden
13.30-13.50	2	1	3
14.00-14.20	1	3	4
14.30-14.50	3	4	2
15.30-15.40	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee
15.40-16.00	4	2	
17.00			
18.00	Dinner	Dinner	



Karlstads Energi Hackathon, photographer Fredrik Karlsson

HACKATHON DAY 2 : PITCHING AND WINNERS' ANNOUNCEMENT

The second day of the hackathon is the final one, focused on pitching. All teams present their solutions and co-operation proposals. The pitching session is open to all hackathon participants, in line with the NDA.

A typical structure for the day is:

- Arrival and coffee
- Welcome, agenda presentation, icebreaking activities to calm nerves
- Pitching session
- Jury deliberation
- Winners' announcement
- Lunch and departures

In BioBoosters hackathons, solution provider teams are allocated 5–6 minutes for their pitch, followed by 4–5 minutes for questions from the jury and audience. Track the time carefully to ensure fairness. After all teams have presented, allow the jury time to deliberate and select one or more winners. Multiple winners are possible; the final decision depends on the challenge provider's needs and what they consider most beneficial for addressing the challenge.

When announcing the winners, the jury should clearly justify their decision. Afterwards, take time to celebrate – not just the winning team but all participants who contributed.

Before the participants go home, ask them to complete a feedback survey on their hackathon experience. A convenient moment for this is while the jury is deliberating. Use the survey to gather insights, such as: Did the challenge provider feel supported? Did the process meet their expectations? What did the solution providers gain – new knowledge, useful contacts, a better understanding of their ideas? This feedback helps you improve future hackathons.

Finally, the challenge provider and winning solution provider can begin their collaboration to develop the solution. This is the moment when you as an organiser typically step aside, although you can facilitate by arranging an initial follow-up meeting to help them get started.

TIPS FROM THE PRO CIVIS FOUNDATION AFTER A PERFECT NET PROMOTER SCORE IN THE REFAL HACKATHON

The hackathon is an intensive and at times exhausting experience. People are immersed in a unique 'hackathon bubble', fully focused on one challenge. Some participants were pushed outside their comfort zones, but thanks to the continuous support of the structured environment – mentoring sessions, interviews, pitching – everyone understood their role and the common goal. Hard work that makes sense: that's the best hackathon formula.

Availability and openness are key. We had set up a WhatsApp group in advance for participants (teams, mentors and organisers) to stay connected. People used it actively – sometimes texting the whole group, sometimes reaching out to me directly. I think it was important to have a responsive, 'live' contact from the organisers' team who could answer questions, verify travel tickets, bookings, etc. The transition from the virtual world (application survey, launch webinar, kick-off) to the real-world event should be as smooth as possible. It's worth dedicating extra time to preparations so that participants feel that everything is ready for them.

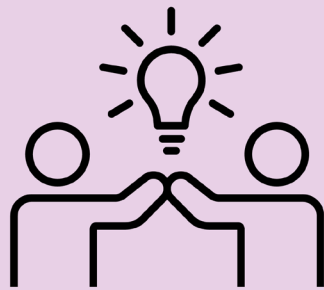
The venue of the hackathon matters too. We were really lucky that REFAL agreed to host this event at their facility. Our team prepared the space carefully, and the outcome was amazing. It gave participants a tangible connection to the challenge provider and the problem itself. The value wasn't in the comfort of the venue – the unusual spaces created a special atmosphere that fit the event. During the evening programme, participants also had time to interact informally, helping everyone to get to know each other better.

—Damian Kuznowicz, PRO CIVIS Foundation



REFAL Hackathon, photographer Jean-Pierre Kisielewski

ORGANISER'S GUIDE TO INNOVATION CO-OPERATION



**Innovation
co-operation**

ORGANISER'S GUIDE TO INNOVATION CO-OPERATION

The innovation co-operation phase begins when the challenge provider and the winning solution provider enter negotiations after the hackathon.

From the organiser's perspective, this phase consists of following up to support the co-operation launch and showcasing the hackathon's impact. In addition, it is valuable to analyse the feedback and results to strengthen the case for running new hackathons.

Starting point: Winner's announcement

Organiser's role: Follow up on the impact and co-operation
Gather feedback and results

Timeframe: Can vary greatly, from 6 months to more than 2 years

Outcome: Research, development and innovation project
Commercialised product or service
Implemented process innovation
Investment

FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

Every hackathon is a learning experience – use these lessons to strengthen your team's capacity to organise impactful hackathons in the future.

Hackathon organisers should aim for continuous improvement by reviewing both participant feedback and the key performance indicators agreed with management. Debrief with your organising team to analyse survey results, observations and lessons learned, and turn them into concrete improvements.

To collect useful feedback, include a short survey as part of the Day 2 programme. Keep the questions few and focused to ensure a high response rate. Design your survey so that it can be repeated in future hackathons, allowing you to track changes and compare results.

It is also good practice to follow up after the hackathon with the challenge provider – and, if feasible, with solution provider teams and mentors. These conversations can provide deeper insights into the event's benefits and reveal opportunities for further co-operation. They also help strengthen long-term engagement in your network.

CHECKLIST FOR FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

- ☐ Run a simple, repeatable feedback survey during the Hackathon Days.
- ☐ Hold follow-up discussions with the challenge provider (and other alumni) to capture hackathon impact and explore future co-operation.
- ☐ Debrief with your organising team to support learning and capacity building.
- ☐ Collect data on key performance indicators for management to inform future resourcing.

CO-CREATION WORKSHOPS CAN HELP SMOOTH THE LAUNCH

TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER

It is commonly observed – and confirmed by hackathon participants – that once the facilitated innovation process ends, momentum tends to slow. Even though hackathon ideas are needs-driven, their further development can stall under everyday demands. Without dedicated time for continued collaboration with solution teams, promising partnerships risk fading. Challenges such as communication gaps between client and solution teams, limited understanding of each other's domains, skill mismatches and resource constraints can also impede progress. That's why building shared commitment and moving ideas into action requires time and dialogue.

To address this, the Jamk University of Applied Sciences piloted a co-creation workshop offering tools and insights to support the launch of post-hackathon co-operation. The workshop focusses on making joint decisions needed for the first concrete steps: turning the idea into a testing plan, identifying knowledge gaps and preparing for implementation.

—Anna Aalto, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE

The Communicator's Guide is an important complement to the Organiser's guide. It follows the five process steps of the BioBoosters hackathon



Resourcing: Communicating a service offer to attract challenge providers and mapping available communication resources.



Challenge formulation: Developing a communication plan and designing marketing materials to engage solution providers and mentors.



Scouting for solutions: Implementing the communication plan to recruit solution provider teams and mentors for the hackathon.



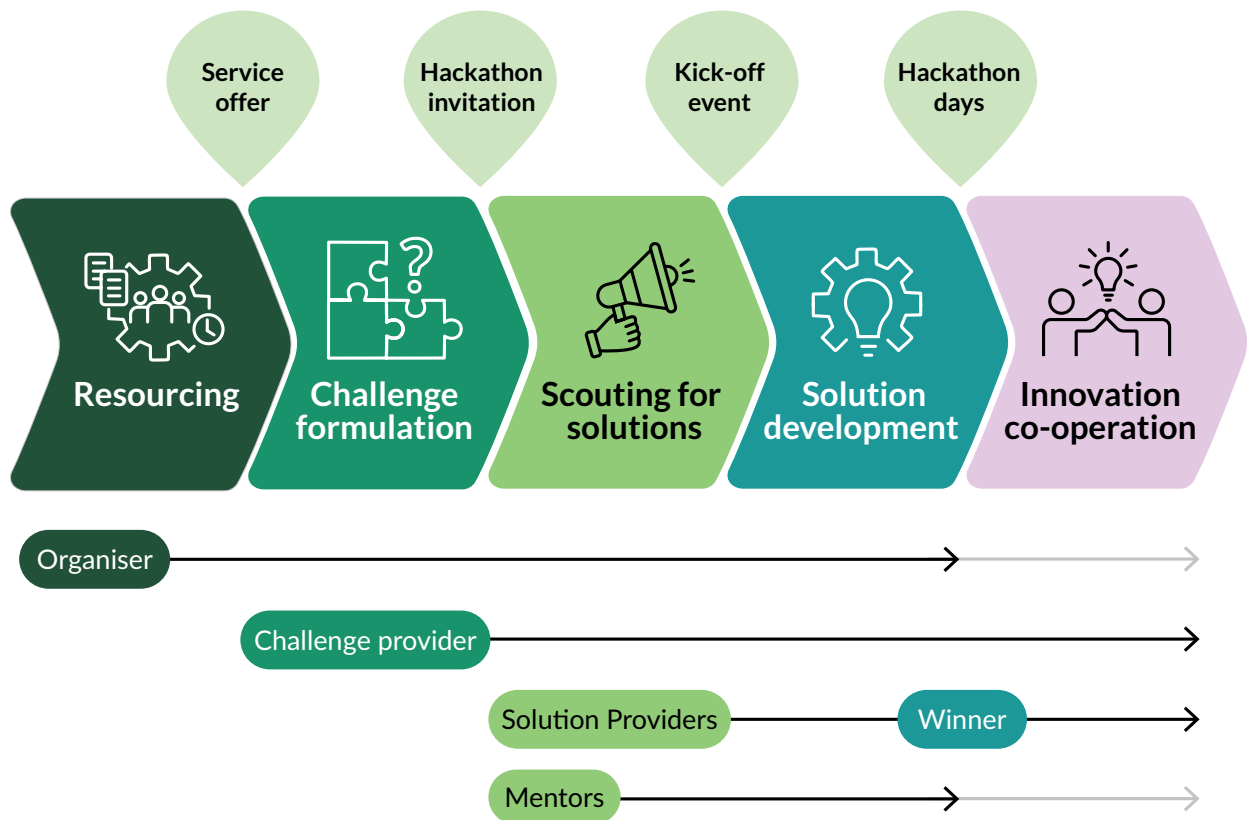
Solution development: Ensuring visibility for participating teams, mentors and winners, while highlighting the impact of the process.



Innovation co-operation: Gathering and sharing a reference story to capture outcomes and lessons learned.

For each process step, this handbook provides:

- Process know-how
- Organiser's tasks
- Insights from experienced organisers



COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE TO RESOURCING



THE RESOURCING PHASE

The resourcing phase begins once the organiser has made a strategic decision to include hackathons in their service or project portfolio.

At this stage, communicators play a key role in creating the resources to first attract challenge providers and then prepare a hackathon communication toolkit for the open call for solutions.

Starting point: A commitment to organise hackathons.

Organiser's role: Develop the resources for marketing the hackathon process to target groups.

Timeframe: Minimum of six months recommended.

Outcome: A branded hackathon process and inventory of communication channels .

Next step: Apply these resources to a specific hackathon.

BRANDING THE HACKATHON

Effective communication is essential to a successful hackathon. It goes beyond reaching potential participants – it is about building engagement, creating visibility and strengthening credibility throughout the entire process. If you can rely on an established brand, a lot of the groundwork has already been done. By leveraging the BioBoosters brand, you can kick-start your communication campaign with clarity, consistency and impact across all target groups.

When starting from the ground up, we recommend establishing a brand guide. This will ensure coherence in all communication activities, from social media posts to event slide decks and more.

DETERMINING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND NETWORKS

As a part of the resourcing phase, organisers should create an inventory of communication channels that can help reach the hackathon's target groups. This inventory should include:

- Channels where the organiser or their network partners have direct content creation rights.
- External media and platforms where partners can propose or share content.
- The inventory serves as a foundation for planning and executing effective hackathon communication campaigns.

CHECKLIST FOR HACKATHON BRANDING

- ☐ **Name and key concepts:** Define the names of both the hackathon process and individual hackathons.
- ☐ **Story:** Craft a clear narrative about the evolution and purpose of the hackathon process.
- ☐ **Visual elements:** Select logos, colour palettes, typography, images and design icons that consistently represent the brand.
- ☐ **Communication style:** Define the style and tone of voice to ensure consistent messaging that reinforces the brand identity.
- ☐ **Value propositions for target groups:** Highlight benefits tailored to different target groups, supported by experiences, testimonials and reference stories.

For the business sector: 'business opportunity', 'innovation competition' or 'innovation partner search'

For the research sector: 'Open innovation dialogue', 'innovation competition' or 'idea development process'

EXPLAINING THE HACKATHON MODEL

TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER

Prior experiences and misconceptions about hackathons can present real challenges for communication, especially when scouting for solutions. Expectations vary widely from country to country, and you may find yourself struggling to explain the process over and over. There is no single quick fix – whatever you call it, you will have to explain it clearly.

Consistency is key. The BioBoosters hackathon is unique and increasingly recognised within bio- and circular economy networks. With over 200 participating organisations involved in international pilots, awareness and brand recognition are growing steadily. As the number of BioBoosters hackathons increases, more teams and mentors will arrive already familiar with the process requirements and value proposition. Still, because each challenge is different, organisers always also need to do our best to reach out to new participants to expand the open innovation dialogue.

Importantly, explaining the hackathon is your chance to convince teams and mentors that the process is the right fit for them. Selling an open innovation process requires deep understanding of your target groups – but the BioBoosters model offers tested value propositions that resonate with both mentors and solution providers.

COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE TO CHALLENGE FORMULATION



CHALLENGE FORMULATION

Successful challenge formulation relies on planning your communication from start to finish. A well-designed strategy will help you reach the right audiences through the right channels – whether the goal is to attract participants, engage mentors or spark interest in the challenge at hand. Different target groups use different platforms, so it is essential to identify where your audience is and tailor messages accordingly.

Starting point: Brand guide and inventory of communication channels.

Organiser's role: Apply visual elements, communication style and value propositions of the hackathon brand to design marketing materials for the open call for solution.

Develop a hackathon communication campaign plan that details tasks and use of available resources, including accessible communication channels.

Timeframe: Varies widely, but typically from two weeks to two months.

Outcome: Hackathon communication campaign plan with marketing materials. Hackathon webpage.

Next step: Launch a webinar for the open call for solutions.

COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN PLAN FOR THE OPEN CALL FOR SOLUTIONS

The inventory of communication channels is a starting point for planning the hackathon communication campaign. Beyond your standard list of channels, consider expanding to include those of the challenge provider, co-organisers and connected mentors to maximise reach. Determine target-group-relevant platforms, events and channels to ensure communications are tailored and effective. Engage with media outlets that are relevant to the target groups – and with media in general – to boost visibility of the open call and highlight the mission of the challenge provider.

The communication campaign plan includes weekly communication activities with clear specifications.

- Channels
- Target groups
- Messages and focus points tailored to each channel and adjusted weekly
- Communication materials to be used
- Assigned responsibilities
- Publication dates
- Paid marketing, follow-up measures to adjust the parameters of the ads to boost impact

To ensure a smooth campaign launch, prepare the main marketing materials and resources in advance so they are ready for the launch webinar.

CHECKLIST FOR HACKATHON MARKETING MATERIALS

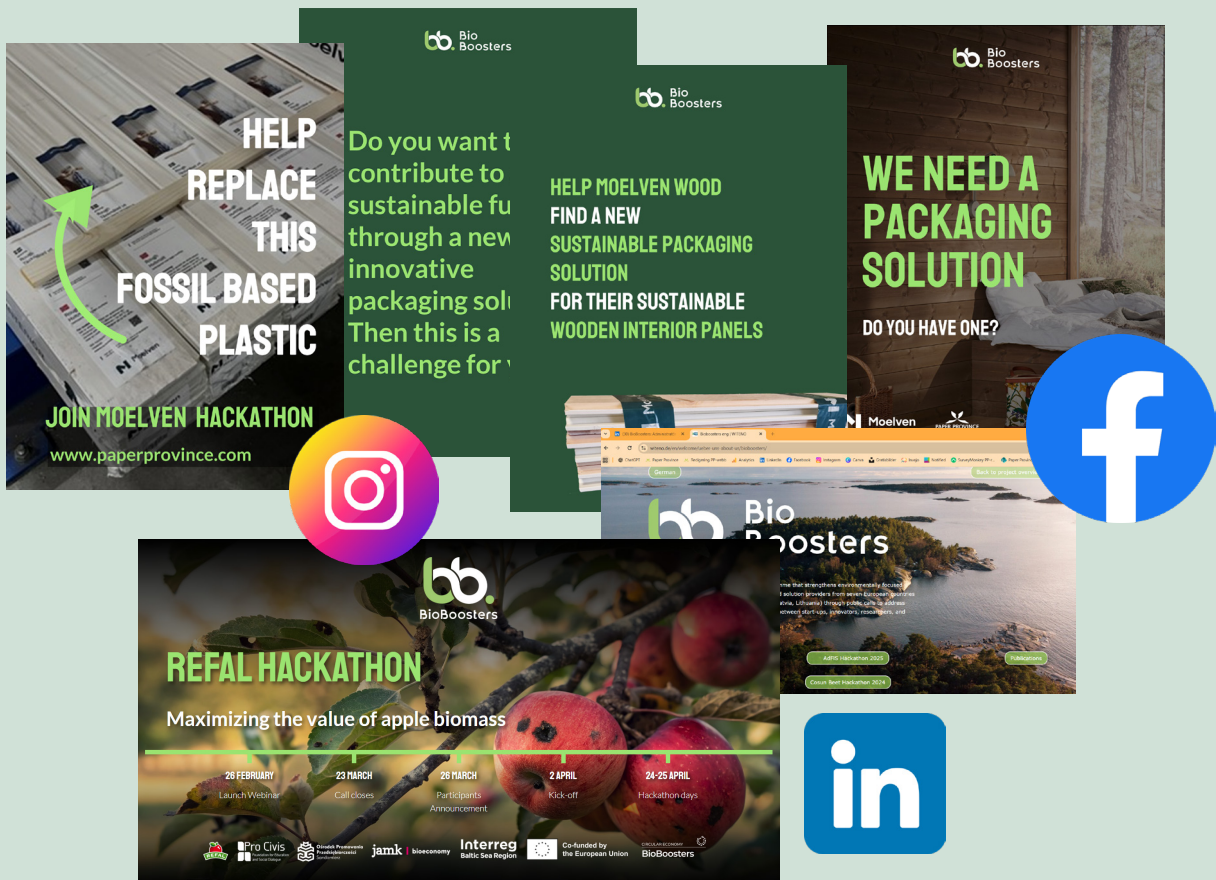
- ☐ Hackathon invitation
- ☐ Hackathon homepage
- ☐ Selection of marketing images for social media posts and websites
- ☐ Press release
- ☐ Video content (optional)

CREATING CONTENT

TIP FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER

“People do not read – keep communication as short and direct as possible (easier said than done, we know).

– Damian Kuznowicz, PRO CIVIS Foundation



HACKATHON INVITATION

The communicator plays a key supportive role in designing the hackathon invitation and ensuring that all communication materials follow the brand guidelines. The invitation acts as the foundation of the communication campaign. It brings together the most important details in a clear and engaging way, including:

- Name, slogan and teaser
- Call to action and value proposition for target groups
- Clear identification of target groups
- Keywords and hashtags to highlight expertise and potential innovative solutions
- Partners and logos
- Main marketing image

Design the hackathon invitation as a branded document that can be published on the hackathon webpage, used as a reference for active scouting and outreach, and shared with participants as a guide throughout the hackathon process.

To maximise its impact, combine technical information with a marketing angle using a teaser and a slogan. The teaser is a short, engaging description that frames the open call for solutions and highlights the opportunity for the winning team. The slogan is a concise, memorable tagline that captures the essence of the open call in just a few words. Examples from BioBoosters include:

- Holmen Hackathon – Ash to Assets
- Fibenol Hackathon – Wood to Food
- REFAL Hackathon – Maximizing the value of apple biomass
- Moelven Hackathon – Sustainable packaging for sustainable wood
- Aloja Starkelsen Hackathon – CMMS system improvements

As the communicator, support the organiser in defining the target groups by identifying keywords linked to potential solutions and the expertise needed. Make sure that all essential information for targeting communication activities is gathered through discussions with the challenge provider. For example, creating a list of potential solution providers together with the challenge provider will help shape advertising, communication content and channel selection. At the same time, look beyond the obvious choices and encourage the challenge provider to explore a wider range of possibilities – including out-of-the-box solutions.

HACKATHON WEBPAGE

The hackathon webpage, that the organiser set up on their own site, is the central hub for all information contained in the hackathon invitation. It should be up and running when the campaign launches and kept regularly updated. All key materials must be easy to locate, with particular emphasis on the registration link for solution providers and the deadlines for submitting applications.

The webpage is the main destination for all campaign traffic. Ensure effective search engine optimisation in every language used. You can promote the hackathon across relevant networks, platforms, channels and newsletters, using banners and teasers that drive interested audiences directly to the webpage for further details.

MARKETING IMAGES & VIDEO CONTENT

Prepare a selection of marketing images for social media posts, presentations and websites. Use one main photo consistently to boost recognition across social media and communication activities. Choose this image in dialogue with the challenge provider, and make sure you have the necessary rights for dissemination.

The marketing images should include relevant logos along with the hackathon name and slogan. Choose a visual that captures attention but still allows space for text without appearing cluttered. Design in line with the brand guide and aim for a professional look.

Consider producing a challenge announcement video to promote the open call for solutions. A brief video can help explain a complex technical challenge and be used both in active scouting and social media promotion. A professional video can also serve as a reference and summary of key in-formation throughout the hackathon process. However, weigh the cost-benefit, as video production can be a significant investment of time and marketing budget. For a simpler, low-cost option, a statement from the challenge provider's representative outlining what the company is looking for can be highly effective.



PRESS RELEASE

Use the press release to attract media attention. Ideally, it should be issued about a week before the launch webinar (or at latest, on the day of the webinar) to maximise news value and allow time to invite media to the webinar. Distribution is often more effective if handled by the challenge provider, as this usually draws greater media interest. Collaborate with their communication staff to increase the chances of coverage in newspapers, radio and other digital channels both regionally and nationally.

A press release also provides a solid foundation for writing news, short articles, blog posts and social media content. It helps all your co-organising partners to easily share the story through their own networks. Include quotations from the challenge provider explaining what they are looking for, what they are offering and why the challenge is important.

LAUNCH WEBINAR PROMOTION

The launch webinar is your opportunity to test-run the communication campaign for the open call for solutions. Ideally, promotion should begin four weeks in advance. Since the target groups are the same as those for the hackathon invitation, this period also extends the overall marketing window for the open call. Promoting the launch webinar gives you a chance to test your marketing approach and discover more channels and platforms. The webinar registration list will show which target groups have been successfully reached. If some are underrepresented, you can adjust the campaign with more targeted activities to engage them.

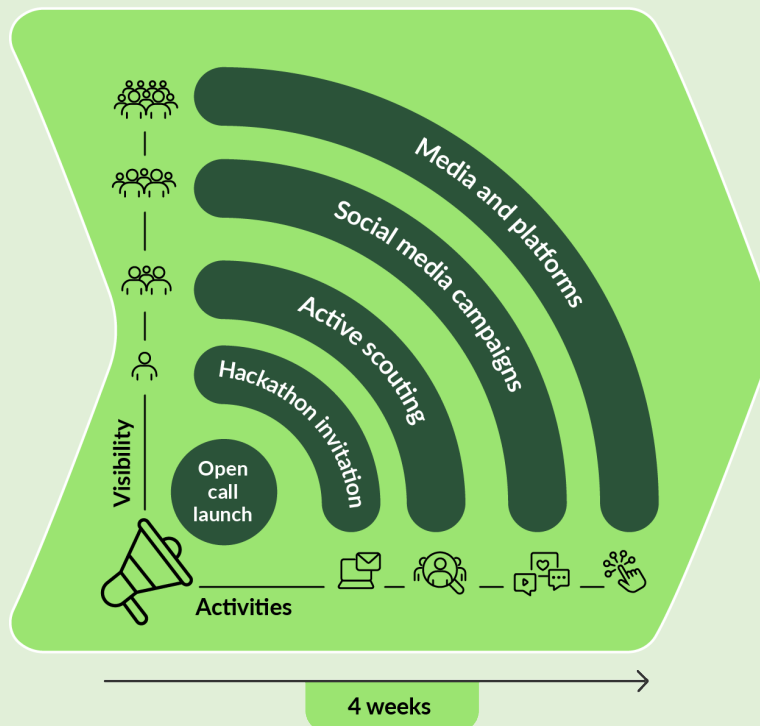
Always require registration for the launch webinar. The collected contact details can be used later for direct marketing and active scouting related to the open call for solutions.

The next chapter will provide more details about the launch webinar.

CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING THE LAUNCH WEBINAR

- ☐ **Design the programme.** Develop the agenda in consultation with the challenge provider and thematic specialists to ensure relevance for target groups.
- ☐ **Set up an event webpage** with a registration link, agenda, programme and speaker details. This page can be linked to multiple websites and promoted with a teaser, but keeping all information in one place makes updates easier. Incorporate hackathon visuals and the slogan in the marketing, and provide a link to the hackathon webpage for further details. Include a registration question asking whether participants agree to receive hackathon updates.
- ☐ **Link the event to relevant channels and platforms.** Support the event webpage with, for example a LinkedIn event page and announcements on the websites of co-organisers, network partners and the challenge provider. On LinkedIn, tag the speakers and companies involved to increase reach and visibility.
- ☐ **Manage registration.** Monitor which target groups are signing up and use this data to guide communication and active scouting activities.
- ☐ **Reserve a suitable studio** or webinar room for hosting the event.
- ☐ **Create and distribute the event link.** Send the link with a calendar invitation to all registered participants in advance.
- ☐ **Prepare speakers and presentations.** Support the challenge provider and experts with their content. Ensure that the challenge announcement in particular is clear and informative.
- ☐ **Assign event roles** such as technical support, chat moderator and event host.
- ☐ **Test-run the webinar** if you are unfamiliar with the setup or working in a new environment.

COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE TO SCOUTING FOR SOLUTIONS



SCOUTING FOR SOLUTIONS

Now it is the time to put your hackathon communication plan into action and attract applications to the open call for solutions. Communication is essential for bringing in out-of-the-box ideas from unexpected teams. It also plays a key role in raising the profile of the open call and persuading solution provider teams and mentors reached through active scouting that the hackathon is worth their time.

Collaborate with the active scouting team to refine the messages used in social media campaigns, if needed. Direct conversations with solution provider candidates often reveal valuable insights into what motivates and interests the target group. Monitor visibility, engagement and traffic to your application form. Be prepared to boost communication efforts if the response is weaker than expected.

Starting point: Marketing materials and a communication plan for the open call for solutions.

Communicator's role: Implement the communication campaign plan.
Create and publish content in the identified channels.
Share marketing materials with partners and external outlets.

Timeframe: 4–5 weeks.

Outcome: Selected solution provider teams.

Next step: Collect information on the solution provider teams and mentors for visibility and promotion.

LAUNCH WEBINAR

A launch webinar is an effective way to attract solution providers: in the BioBoosters pilot, 25% of applicants and 37% of selected solution provider teams had taken part in the launch webinar.

The hackathon communication campaign for the open call to find solutions should begin with a launch webinar marking the official opening of the call. Its purpose is to generate momentum and visibility. The webinar is targeted to potential solution providers, mentors and connectors, who can promote the invitation within their networks.

The highlight of the programme is the official opening of the call for solutions, presented by the challenge provider. This presentation is complemented by an introduction of the hackathon process and its value proposition, presented by the organiser. To add depth and context, industry and research specialists can be invited to introduce potential solutions or present related opportunities such as funding options or successful pilot stories.

The launch webinar is a digital event lasting around 90 minutes and is hosted by the organiser. When planning the programme, consult the challenge provider and thematic specialists (such as mentors) to ensure it is engaging and relevant for the target groups.

Before the event starts, make sure you have a suitable setup for hosting the webinar or hybrid event. Test with presenters in advance to minimise technical errors. A professional impression depends on both strong content and a polished visual setup.

During the webinar, consider inviting the challenge provider to present alongside you during the live stream. Keep in mind, however, that multiple presenters in the studio will increase the space and technical requirements.

LAUNCH WEBINAR PROGRAMME

The launch webinar programme typically includes the following presentations and segments:

- Pre-event test run: Time for presenters to test their setup
- 5–10 min: Welcome and introduction to the agenda by the host (organiser)
- 1–2 thematic presentations to support the challenge presentation

- 10–20 min: Presentation of the challenge, evaluation criteria and expectations by the challenge provider (one or more representatives)
- 10 min: Q&A moderated by the host
- 15–20 min: Guidance on the BioBoosters hackathon process and value proposition to the solution providers, presented by the organiser
- Closing: Wrap-up and next steps

As a communicator, the launch webinar is an opportunity to learn about the interests, priorities and language of your target groups. Inviting industry and research representatives to share their perspectives on the challenge helps to highlight opportunities for the solution provider teams. Capturing key insights and memorable statements from the webinar can provide excellent material for social media posts over the course of the hackathon communication campaign.

We recommend that you record the event. A recording can be shared with potential solution providers who were unable to attend live or who are contacted later through active scouting.

CHECKLIST: KEY ROLES FOR A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH WEBINAR

- ☐ **Moderator and timekeeper:** Hosts the event, facilitates Q&A sessions and keeps the programme on schedule.
- ☐ **Technical support:** Manages access to the meeting room, assists presenters and participants with potential technical issues and ensures that the event is recorded.
- ☐ **Chat manager:** Monitors the chat, responds to questions and shares relevant links and information at appropriate points. The chat manager can also prepare ice-breaking questions if the Q&A segments are slow to engage.

CHECKLIST FOR STUDIO SETUP ESSENTIALS

- ☐ Audio
- ☐ Lighting
- ☐ Cameras
- ☐ Background (consider featuring the brand)
- ☐ Space for the organising team to manage their roles

HOW TO ORGANISE A LAUNCH WEBINAR

TIPS FROM BIOBOOSTER ORGANISERS

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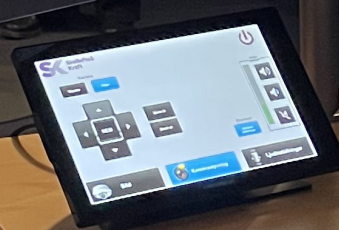
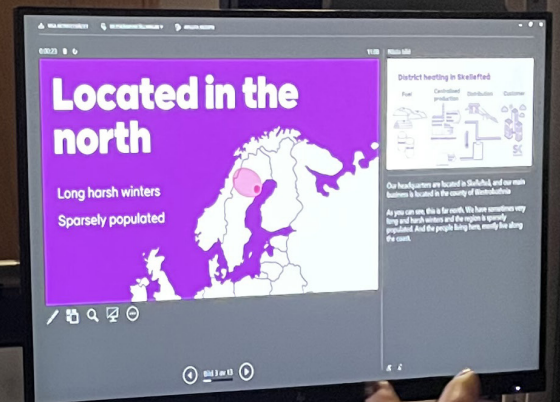
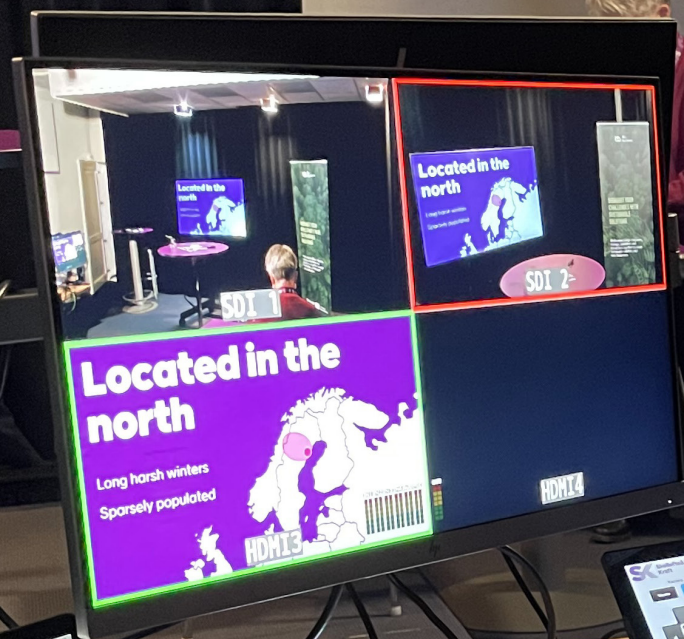
We had a rehearsal for the launch webinar. That was really useful because some technical problems came up during the test run, and it helped us to better plan the actual event. We also gave tips to the experts and presenters on how to improve their presentations. Finally, we asked them to record their presentations in advance. That way, if anyone got sick, we could play the recording without changing the agenda.

—Damian Kuznowicz, PRo CIVIS Foundation

”

It's helpful to list the key points of the webinar topic and try to highlight them during transitions – in other words, to identify and highlight the takeaway messages. When there are several key speakers, the main message can sometimes get lost. Afterwards, we can share a synopsis of the launch webinar – insights, key statements, figures from presenters about the call – for the communicators and organisers to use in campaign and active scouting activities.

—Anna Aalto, Jamk University of Applied Sciences



COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN ON LINKEDIN

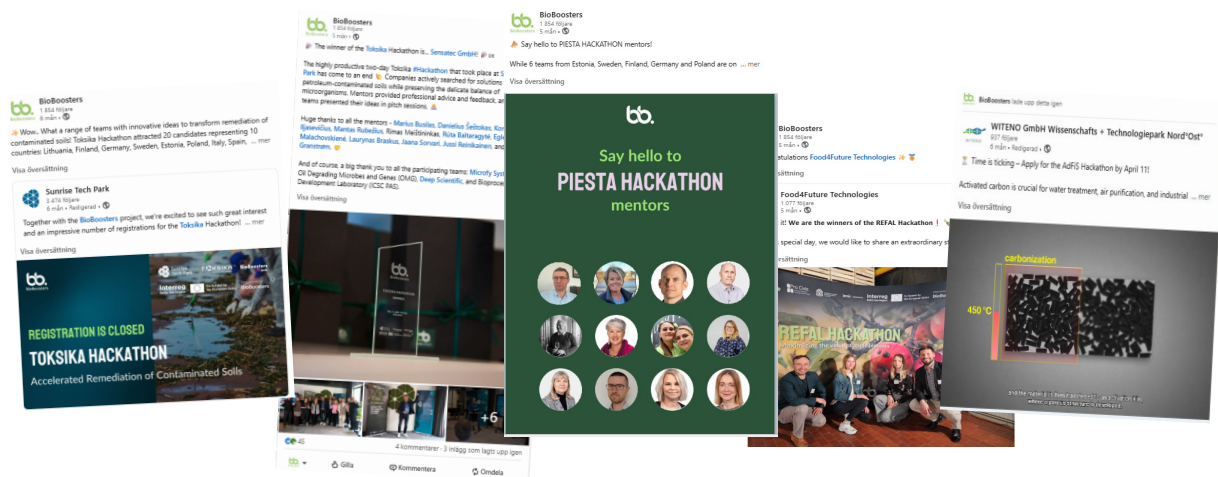
Following your communication plan, we recommend that you create and share content on a weekly basis to promote the open call for solutions. Remember, consistency is key on LinkedIn. Regularly post valuable content, engage with others' posts and build relationships within your professional network. Encourage the challenge provider to post on their own channels; however, if this does not feel natural for them, be prepared to take the lead in content creation.

In BioBoosters hackathons, around 20% of applicants are reached through communication campaigns – mainly via LinkedIn.

To create engaging LinkedIn posts, follow these guidelines:

- in Know your audience.** Define who you are trying to target. Consider their interests, needs and pain points. Tailor your content accordingly so it resonates with them.
- in Use keywords strategically.** Incorporate relevant keywords to increase visibility in search results and attract individuals interested in those topics. Keywords should be defined with the challenge provider during preparation of the hackathon invitation.
- in Tag appropriately.** Tag the challenge provider, solution provider teams, mentors and organisers associated with the hackathon. Organisations can be tagged directly; individuals should only be tagged if the message is specifically about them. You can also tag people in the comments to extend reach. Since LinkedIn's algorithm rewards quick interactions from tagged individuals, it is advisable to let them know in advance.
- in Apply agreed hashtags.** Use hackathon-specific hashtags outlined in the invitation to make it easier for target groups to create and find related content.
- in Open with impact.** Start with an attention-grabbing line. Use strong action verbs, ask thought-provoking questions, or share an intriguing statement to encourage people to click and read further.

- in Include branded visuals.** Incorporate eye-catching images, videos or infographics in your posts. Visuals capture attention and can help convey messages more effectively.
- in Keep it concise.** Aim for posts of around 150–300 words. This makes them easy to skim while still providing substance.
- in Provide value.** Share valuable information, insights or tips that are relevant to your audience. Offering actionable advice or solutions to their problems positions you as an expert and encourages engagement. Note that LinkedIn does not favour posts containing external links that lead users away from the platform, so place such links in the comments instead.
- in Ask questions.** Pose questions related to your content to encourage interaction. Invite opinions, experiences or advice – people are more likely to engage when they feel they can contribute.
- in Encourage engagement.** End your post with a call-to-action (CTA) that encourages readers to like, comment or share. Be specific to guide their actions and make engagement easier.
- in Be conversational and authentic.** Write in a friendly, conversational tone. Show personality and authenticity, as these build trust and foster stronger connections.
- in Engage with comments.** Interaction increases visibility. Once people start engaging with your post, take time to respond and continue the conversation. This shows that you value their input and encourages further dialogue.
- in Consider paid promotion.** To extend reach, explore LinkedIn advertising. Define your target audience carefully and tailor for the chosen ad format to maximise impact.





Toksika Hackathon, photographer Agne Popiera

MANAGING (THE STRESS OF) THE OPEN CALL FOR SOLUTIONS



TIPS FROM A BIOBOOSTER ORGANISER:

The open call for solutions can be a stressful phase for the organiser. Since most applications arrive in the final days, both organisers and challenge providers often start to worry about what to do if the expected flow of applications does not appear. We recommend that you trust your plan, while remaining open to adjustments as new insights emerge.

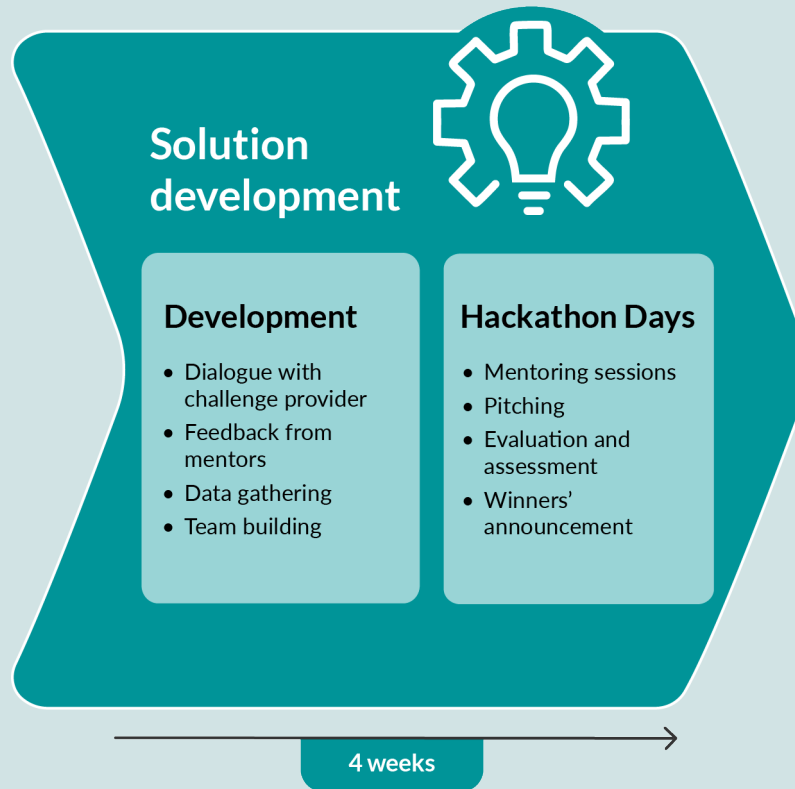
Start strong with your communication campaign and maintain momentum throughout the open call with regular, targeted actions. Prioritise channels that matter most to your audience and find the most direct ways of reaching potential solution providers.

For extra impact, join webinars and events to connect directly with target groups, initiate discussion on social media, contact field specialists to identify target groups and new contacts, and leverage word-of-mouth, networks and hackathon alumni. Whatever approach you choose, execute it as early as possible to give your message time to reach the right people.

The open call is also an opportunity to be creative, expand your network and explore fresh connections. Have faith in the process, stay positive and remember to celebrate every application and lead along the way.

—BioBoosters network

COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE TO SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT



COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE TO SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT

Visibility and promotion are a key part of the value proposition for challenge providers, solution provider teams and mentors. For organisers, they are equally important: showcasing concrete examples and participants' experiences help generate wider interest in the hackathon process.

Starting point: Selected solution provider teams and mentors.

Communicator's role: Boost the visibility and engagement of hackathon participants on LinkedIn (or other selected social media). Promote the immediate results of the Hackathon Days.

Timeframe: 3–5 weeks.

Outcome: Promotion of solution provider teams, promotion of mentors and promotion of winners and communication of final results.

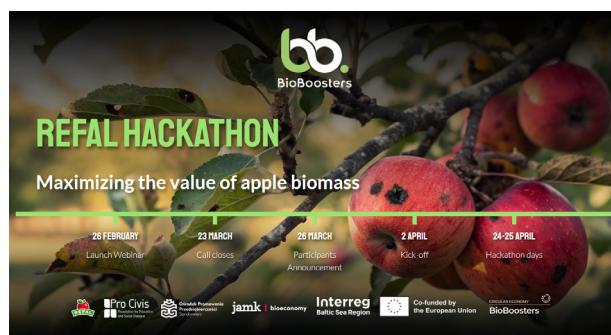
Next step: Leverage results and word-of-mouth to secure funding for future hackathons.

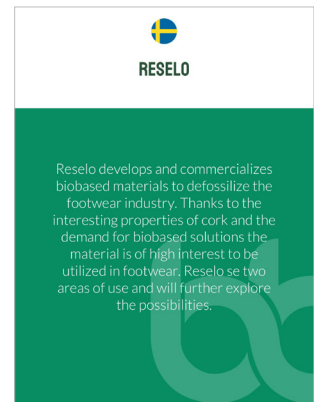
VISIBILITY AND PROMOTION FOR PARTICIPANTS AND RESULTS

Promotional activities during the solution development phase should focus on social media, while also encouraging hackathon participants to share their experiences on-site with their networks. All in all, this phase is vital not only for visibility, but also for sustaining long-term alumni engagement with the organiser's communication channels and platforms.

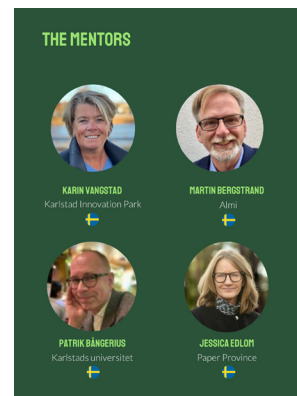
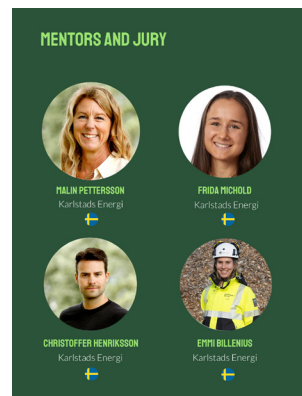
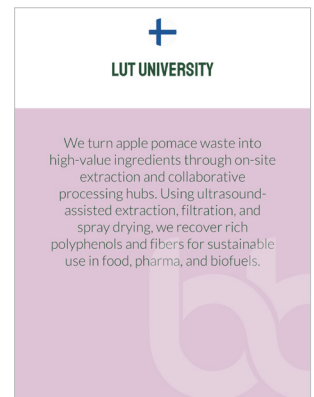
The Rules of the Hackathon and mentoring principles permit the publication of information about participating solution providers and mentors. Since visibility and promotion are part of the value proposition for challenge providers, solution provider teams and mentors, it is important to showcase them. In the weeks leading up to the Hackathon Days, post social media content introducing the solution providers and mentors.

On the Hackathon Days and immediately after, be ready to engage with participants and report results quickly – for example, announcing winners. Plan the content in advance so communication materials can be released without delay. Tag participants for greater reach, but also follow their posts and to interact with them. Provide clear guidance on the use of hashtags, and consider features such as a photo wall to encourage participants to share their own content.





During the course of 18 hackathons, BioBoosters' LinkedIn community grew from zero to more than 1,800 followers – most of them hackathon alumni.



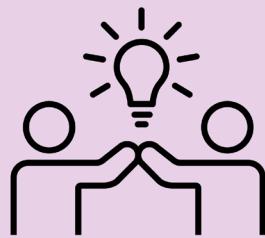


Piesta Hackathon, photographer Kristi Kuusmik-Orav

COMMUNICATOR'S CHECKLIST: WHAT COMMUNICATION CONTENT IS CREATED FOR VISIBILITY AND PROMOTION?

- ☐ **Kick-off day:** Post social media content featuring the solution provider teams (name, country, idea). Tag solution provider team members.
- ☐ **One week before the Hackathon Days:** Post content featuring the mentors (name, organisation, expertise). Tag mentors and their organisations.
- ☐ **Hackathon Days:**
 - Encourage participants to share content about their experiences using the event hashtag, and reshare it through your channels.
 - Use a professional photographer to capture the event. Consider producing an after-movie for greater impact. Get permission to use all photos (for example, via the participant sign-in form).
 - Record interviews with all participant groups, capture the atmosphere in photos and secure an interview with both the challenge provider and winning team after the winner is announced.
- ☐ **End of the Hackathon Days:** Post content featuring the winning team and their solution idea, including jury citations. Share event photos, express appreciation and tag all participants.
- ☐ **1–2 days after the Hackathon Days:** Distribute a press release and news of the results on the organiser's and challenge provider's websites and channels.
- ☐ **2–3 weeks after the Hackathon Days:** Publish interviews or the after-movie on social media as a 'throwback'. Use the channels identified in the communication plan to circulate results more widely.

COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE TO CO-OPERATION



**Innovation
co-operation**

COMMUNICATOR'S GUIDE TO INNOVATION CO-OPERATION

Alumni and impact stories are among the most valuable resources for a communicator looking ahead to future hackathons. Keep track of success stories that originate during the hackathon and be ready to share them.

Starting point: Selected solution provider teams and mentors.

Organiser's role: Foster alumni communication and engagement through the organiser's communication platforms.

Timeframe: Can vary greatly, from 6 months to more than 2 years.

Outcome: Reference stories demonstrating the impact of the hackathon
Hackathon alumni serving as ambassadors.

Next step: Showcase the impact of the hackathon. Use your reference stories to enhance your service offer.

IMPACT STORIES

The end of the Hackathon Days marks the start of innovation co-operation that can lead to investments, job creation, new products entering the markets or improvements in sustainability and competitiveness for the challenge provider. This journey might take several years, but communicators should monitor the progress of the launched partnership.

Communicators should be ready to report impact stories, always linking them back to the hackathon process. Importantly, a hackathon can spark multiple innovation journeys and partnerships. While the story of the winning solution provider and their co-operation with the challenge provider is a natural focus, it is often only one of several success stories worth telling.

BioBoosters has published impact stories – a collection of professional articles highlighting the innovation journeys of hackathon alumni. As an example, please check out 'BioBoosters Impact Review 2024' from <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-830-777-1>.

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

Regardless of the immediate outcome, all alumni are potential ambassadors for the hackathon process. Consider ways to maintain contact with the alumni and leverage opportunities to connect alumni from different hackathons together for networking and learning. Alumni are not only advocates, but a key resource for securing future hackathons and connecting the right people to them.

**LAST BUT
NOT LEAST**

HAVE FUN!



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