



European Strategy Forum
on Research Infrastructures

ESFRI Stakeholder Engagement

December 2023

ESFRI

ESFRI STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report outlines the key strategic orientations and objectives of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI), detailing strategic orientations and reporting on implementing the stakeholder activities post-2021.

The ESFRI Report on stakeholder engagement seeks to:

1. Identify key stakeholders.
2. Elaborate on the key activities which enable increased stakeholder engagement with ESFRI.
3. Report on the implementation of these activities.

The overarching goals include enhancing the quality of ESFRI and Research Infrastructure (RI) outputs, establishing trust among actors, ensuring integration within the R&I ecosystem, and legitimising ESFRI processes.

The stakeholders encompass various entities affected by ESFRI's operations, including RIs, academic institutions and other research entities, R&I-intensive businesses, individual researchers, funding bodies, policy-makers, and the general public.

Key action areas identified by this ESFRI Report include:

1. Involving stakeholders in ESFRI's work.
2. Establishing the ESFRI Stakeholders Forum and Meetup.
3. Hosting ESFRI events such as Exchange of Experience and Information Workshops.
4. Collaborating with specific communities like EOOSC, e-IRG and Technology Infrastructures.
5. Promoting increased transparency by publishing meeting agendas, minutes and ESFRI reports.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2021, the new ERA is implemented through the ERA Policy Agenda¹, composed of ERA actions. Action 8 is particularly relevant for RIs, as it specifically addresses the field of RIs, and lists, among its activities, *'increased cooperation between research infrastructures, e-infrastructures and stakeholders, including through EOOSC'*. It thus promotes the engagement of ESFRI, as well as of RIs and their umbrella organisations, with a broad range of research and innovation stakeholders. For this activity to be strategically led, it should include, as one of its initial steps, the formulation of strategic orientations. A key element of this activity should be the adoption and implementation of an ESFRI Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. This should include, among others, the launch of the ESFRI Stakeholder Forum, the development of ESFRI's activities together with stakeholders, a plan for their consequent implementation, implementation, and reporting.

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf

Since the adoption of ERA Action 8, ESFRI has proceeded with the implementation of many stakeholder activities. Based on the experiences, the present document outlines the main strategic directions and objectives and reports on their implementation.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this ESFRI Report are to:

1. Identify key stakeholders.
2. Elaborate on the key activities which enable increased stakeholder engagement with ESFRI.
3. Report on the implementation of activities.

The ultimate aims of improved stakeholder engagement are a higher quality of outputs of ESFRI and R&Is, an increased level of trust between the actors, improved embeddedness in the R&I ecosystem, and increased ownership of the results and legitimacy of ESFRI's processes.

3. ESFRI STAKEHOLDERS

ESFRI Stakeholders are the individuals, networks and organisations affected by the activities of ESFRI and/or RIs. They include RIs and their umbrella organisations, universities and other higher education institutions, research and technology performing organisations, R&I-intensive businesses, including SMEs, actors in the innovation ecosystem, individual researchers and innovators, including those at early- and middle stages of their careers, R&I-funding organisations, academies of sciences, national and regional authorities and funding bodies, citizens and society at large. Depending on the activities, national and regional authorities and funding bodies may also be considered stakeholders of ESFRI and the RIs.

Specific stakeholder communities are defined as those closely linked to the RIs, such as EOSC, e-Infrastructure Reflection Group and Technology Infrastructures (TIs).

4. ELEMENTS OF ESFRI'S STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Following the ESFRI White Paper², Council Conclusions³, ERA Action 8 and the activities and approaches implemented by ESFRI since 2022, the following priority areas for action can be identified:

1. Involvement of stakeholders in the work of ESFRI (ESFRI meetings and ESFRI Reports).
2. ESFRI events and activities engaging ESFRI Stakeholders:
 - a. ESFRI Stakeholder Forum and Stakeholders Meetup.
 - b. Other ESFRI events (e.g. Exchange of Experience Workshops, Information Workshops).
 - c. Cooperation with specific communities.
3. Increased transparency.

² <https://www.esfri.eu/esfri-white-paper>

³ Council conclusions on the Future governance of the European Research Area, Brussels, 26 November 2021

In the following sections of the report, these elements are elaborated, and accompanied by the overview of activities on the topic in the 2022–2023 period.

4.1. Involvement of Stakeholders in the Work of ESFRI

Involvement in ESFRI Meetings

Following the Council Conclusions⁴, ERA Forum acts as the body entrusted with ERA implementation. Representative organisations, relevant at the EU level of the seven types⁵ of stakeholders, sit as observers in ERA Forum meetings. As the Council stressed that ESFRI should take into account the renewed approach to ERA governance, the delegations were asked⁶ to express their opinion about whether they think that:

1. the extent of current activities is appropriate; the involvement of the stakeholders in the work of ESFRI is not needed;
2. inclusion of stakeholders in the ESFRI drafting groups, or some parts of ESFRI meetings, on a case-by-case basis, may be of added value, and
3. stakeholders can take part in the ESFRI meetings regularly as observers (ERA Forum approach).

ESFRI delegates were largely supportive of the involvement of stakeholders in ESFRI meetings as in the ESFRI drafting groups or some parts of ESFRI meetings, on a case-by-case basis (88% out of 36 responses), with the rest of the opinions equally spread among the other two responses. Including stakeholders on a case-by-case basis requires a decision by ESFRI before each meeting on which agenda points should be open to stakeholders.

Implementation: So far, the Forum has not involved stakeholder organisations in the work of ESFRI as observers, e.g. in the agenda points dealing with the implementation of the Work Plan.

Involvement in Meetings as Guests

In addition to the observer status in ESFRI, stakeholders can be involved in ESFRI meetings as guests, contributing to various aspects relevant to ESFRI.

Implementation: Open sessions were introduced to the ESFRI forum meetings in 2021. These showcase the work of the RIs in the different domains of ESFRI. In addition, since 2022, RIs were invited to highlight the issues related to the energy and supply challenges, as well as a proposal for an ERA Action. An open session on Research Infrastructures and Big Data was held at the 80th ESFRI Forum Plenary in June 2022 online (with guests from PIC consortium, LEAPS, Square Kilometer Array Observatory; SoBigData, EBrains, and SLICES and CNR). At the 81st ESFRI Forum Plenary in October 2022 in Brno (CZ), two external speakers (prof. Leonid Rivkin, LEAPS Chair from the Paul Scherrer Institut, and prof. dr. Ralf Röhlsberger from Helmholtz Institut

⁴ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15429-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

⁵ Universities and other higher education institutions, research and technology performing organisations, R&I-intensive businesses, including SMEs, individual researchers and innovators, including at early- and middle stages of their /careers/, research infrastructures, R&I-funding organisations and academies of sciences.

⁶ 82nd Forum meeting, 12-13 December 2022.

Jena and Friedrich-Schiller Universität Jena) presented the issues RIs were facing following the Russian aggression on Ukraine in terms of power consumption and materials and equipment supply. Regarding LEAPS, the need for stabilising the cost of energy supply at affordable and predictable levels was particularly emphasised as RIs need long-term planning. The representative of the Mössbauer spectroscopy community additionally highlighted the restrictions on isotopes even with a stable supply. It was thus suggested to establish a supply chain in the European economic area. At the 86th ESFRI Forum Plenary in September 2023 in Tenerife (ES), a presentation of CIEMAT proposal for a new ERA action was given by external presenter José Manuel Pérez, Head of Department of Technology, CIEMAT.

Involvement in the Preparation of ESFRI Reports

In addition to stakeholder consultations on various topics from the ESFRI Work Plan 2022-2023 through questionnaires and workshops, stakeholders can be actively involved in preparing the ESFRI reports.

Implementation: Stakeholders have been members of the drafting group on Energy and Supply Challenges⁷.

4.2 ESFRI Events and Activities Engaging ESFRI Stakeholders

4.2.1 ESFRI Stakeholder Forum Stakeholders Meetup

The **ESFRI Stakeholder Forum** is a platform to attract stakeholders, raise awareness across the RI ecosystem, and facilitate cooperation and mutual learning for new and improved RI services and their enhanced use by various communities.

Implementation: In 2021, the stakeholders were invited to register as ESFRI stakeholders on the ESFRI Stakeholders Forum platform. 360 registrations have been received, coming from all Stakeholder groups. ESFRI has also actively attracted several representatives from specific important organisations deemed necessary to be included in the Forum (and that had not already registered themselves). The ESFRI Stakeholders Forum was launched on 24 March 2022.⁸ Since then, a section for stakeholders has been included on the ESFRI webpage and developed into an information source for stakeholders, with ESFRI news and videos.

The main objectives of the **ESFRI Stakeholder Forum Meetup** are to create a structured, constructive two-way communication channel with a broad community of stakeholders, to promote better integration of the RIs in related communities and to contribute to improved services of the RIs.

The event is organised in close cooperation with the stakeholders, who are consulted on the topics included in the agenda and can be part of the organising committee.⁹ Typically, the stakeholders beyond the RIs and the related policy community should also be involved, such as technology infrastructures, stakeholders from the domain of higher education, from across the research and innovation ecosystem, etc.

⁷ Kolar, Jana, Brečko, Barbara, Campana, Pierluigi, Chamberlain, Martyn, Daillant, Jean, Harrison, Andrew, Keppler, Antje, Lévai, Péter, Martins, René, Plaskan, Jure, Weeks, Allen, & Wosnitza, Joachim. (2023). ESFRI Report on Energy and Supply Challenges of Research Infrastructures. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8123921>

⁸ <https://www.esfri.eu/esfri-events/high-level-launch-stakeholder-forum>

⁹ FI21-75-08 Stakeholder engagement strategy - draft

Implementation: The first Meetup organised on 15 September 2022 in Brussels¹⁰ focused on the good practices and bottlenecks hindering the enhanced use of RI services or delivery. The second Meetup took place on 27 September 2023 in Tenerife, with discussions focusing on access, funding, and cooperation with industry.¹¹

4.2.2 Other ESFRI Events

In addition to the ESFRI Stakeholder Meetup, ESFRI should engage with stakeholders through various formats. The currently used formats and their purpose are the following: Exchange of Experience Workshops and Information Workshops.

Exchange of Experience Workshops

The objective of these events is to exchange views with the participants through direct interaction with them. The stakeholders involved are almost exclusively RIs and policymakers. The workshops are limited in size (60–100 people) to enable the use of interactive methods. The topics are selected through a top-down approach. Past events included workshops on funding, KPIs, EOSC, etc.

Implementation:

- Exchange of Experience Workshop: **Effective Use of Horizon Europe – Preparatory Phase and Individual Support Funding** (15 November 2021, online).
- 3rd EOSC-ESFRI Workshop on RIs and EOSC - **What does EOSC bring to RI users?** (25–26 January 2022, online).

Information Workshops

The objective of these events is to transmit information to the ESFRI stakeholders, mainly RIs, and collect opinions on a particular topic, such as e.g. draft ESFRI reports, monitoring and roadmapping process.

Implementation:

- **R&I Needs Of Research Infrastructures**, Joint Commission–ESFRI Workshop (30–31 March 2022, online).
- ESFRI Workshop on **Monitoring of Landmarks** (5 April 2022, online).
- ESFRI Workshop on **Landscape Analysis** (28 April 2022, online).
- ESFRI Kick-off Workshop on **Monitoring of Landmarks** (16 September 2022, Brussels).
- **RI Funding Questionnaires** Workshop (16 February 2023, online).
- Workshop on **ESFRI’s Approach to RI Impact Assessment** (30 May 2023, online).
- Workshop Discussing the **Results of the Questionnaire on RI Funding** (23 June 2023, online).

¹⁰ <https://www.esfri.eu/esfri-events/1st-esfri-shf-meetup>

¹¹ <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8436373>

4.2.3 Cooperation with Specific Communities

Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe¹² stressed the need for the RIs to better exploit their integrative function in the knowledge and innovation ecosystem. It particularly outlined the connection to the European Open Science Cloud and improved connections and interaction with technology infrastructures and industry to increase RIs' impact. To deliver on this, ESFRI should engage with specific communities as the needs arise.

Implementation: A joint ESFRI-EOSC Task Force was set up in June 2023 as a structured interface between the ESFRI Forum and the EOSC Steering Board beyond the current ad hoc cooperation and following the conclusion of the work of the ESFRI task force on EOSC. It aims to align collective interests and facilitate an integrated ecosystem of RIs that would feed into a dynamic EOSC federation as a key contribution to a 'web of FAIR data and services for science'. Furthermore, ESFRI's cooperation with the e-Infrastructures Reflection Group has increased through mutual observer status in the meetings. Cooperation with industry was a focus of the dedicated drafting group and was discussed during the Stakeholders Forum Meetup in 2023.

4.3 Increased Transparency

ESFRI is an EC expert group composed of national delegates and the representative of the EC, charged with coherent policy-making in the field of RIs. As a body acting in the public domain, it has to be transparent in its activities. Currently, neither the agendas, minutes, nor all of the adopted ESFRI documents are publicly available, which can have negative impact on the engagement of stakeholders, among others. It is important that ESFRI's activities, policies and practices are communicated openly and understandably, further enhancing its impact.

ESFRI therefore commits itself to publishing the agendas and the minutes of the meetings¹³ and adopted documents and briefs.¹⁴ Furthermore, non-session of ESFRI should continue to be used when appropriate.

¹² COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION (EU) 2021/2122 of 26 November 2021 on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe

¹³ The level of detail should be appropriate for dissemination and anonymized. See, for example, the report of the ERIC committee meetings,

<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/comitology-register/screen/committees/C37900/consult?lang=en>

¹⁴ <https://zenodo.org/communities/esfri?q=&l=list&p=1&s=10&sort=newest>