

Thematic Workshops #1

Planning impactful workshops for SPIRE projects



What? – Projects often use workshops to share information with their stakeholders. With over 100 projects now in the SPIRE portfolio, it's important to bear in mind that projects do not exist in isolation. Thematic workshops are designed to build bridges between projects and share information on a common theme rather than being focused on a single project.

Why? – It is much more efficient for stakeholders to attend a workshop run by several projects, than to try and attend multiple events on similar topics. A greater number of stakeholders can also be reached through joint promotion from all the projects involved.

A thematic workshop encourages cross-project learning and can help avoid duplicating tasks.

A well-run interactive event gives projects a chance to find out the opinions of stakeholders, not just present at them. This valuable two-way dialogue can be enhanced by sending out a joint stakeholder survey in advance of the workshop.

A workshop based on a topic, rather than a project, comes across as a more attractive, educational opportunity for attendees, rather than as a sales pitch, making it more likely that they'll attend and engage.

If the planning of the workshop is linked to [Technology Scanning](#), it can be an opportunity to involve experts from outside the SPIRE projects to update on parallel developments and research.

The workshop can help develop relationships between stakeholders on a common topic of interest, leading to future research collaborations.

Who? – Although it may be valid to focus such workshops on the research community, to enhance the impact of projects we recommend targeting industrial end-users and decision-makers, e.g. technical managers.

Where? – With a focus on attracting industry, it can be better to locate workshops close to industry clusters. Involving cluster organisations introduces a 'trusted intermediary', increasing the chance of high attendance. Including a relevant, near-by site visit is also likely to increase interest in the event.

Some collaborative SPIRE thematic workshops have been run as side-events at conferences. This approach allows several projects to have a bigger presence at the event, with costs shared, however unless the workshop is promoted well on the main programme, or scheduled not to clash with popular talks, it can be difficult to compete with the main event for an audience.

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No 767412

Thematic Workshops #2

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Other Issues – If locating close to industry clusters (rather than in Brussels), there might be more attendees who are not so confident speaking English. This can be mitigated by structuring discussions around small groups, some of which could be facilitated in the local language, with key points only presented back in English.

Companies in some sectors tend to be less willing to engage with their competitors, which might make site visits unfeasible. Check well in advance whether hosting at an industrial site will bring any such restrictions.

Cross-project management needs consideration in the organisation of joint workshops, particularly since dissemination plans may have been decided at the beginning of the projects. We recommend making such plans flexible to allow work with other projects, and to use A.SPIRE and the [SPIRE Coordinators Network Group](#) to help.

Format – It is inevitable that workshops will involve presentations, but we recommend putting an emphasis on *communication*, not just dissemination.

Consider including small-group workshop exercises, exploring potential barriers to future exploitation of the innovations; Q&A sessions with researchers and industry partners; interactive poster sessions; and *optional* educational sessions to give more background training to those who are new to the topic.

Don't be afraid of getting young researchers involved. It can be more engaging to hear several different voices, including those actively involved in *learning* within the project, rather than those just keen to demonstrate their many years of expertise! It is also a great experience for early-career researchers to present their work in this setting.

Get industry partners talking about the value that the innovation has brought, or could bring, to them. They may be more likely to talk about the qualitative, subjective aspects of the innovation and be frank about the challenges and limitations encountered, making for a more credible and engaging story for other industrialists in the room.

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