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INSPIRING ERA Exchange

guidelines



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Planning a successful INSPIRING ERA Exchange event

The purpose of these guidelines is to outline the necessary steps for organizing a successful INSPIRING ERA Exchange (IEE) event, with the aim of such events being to facilitate mutual learning on the ERA Policy Agenda. The guidelines provide insight into the preparatory work required for setting up such events, covering aspects like event planning and post-event activities, including reporting and follow-up steps.

In the guidelines we distinguish three main parts of the process of organising successful IEE events: conceptualizing stage, planning & implementing stage, and reporting & follow-up stage.



The guidelines have been developed by the INSPIRING ERA consortium could be used as a toolkit by those who are planning an IEE event on the ERA Policy Agenda¹ and ERA Actions.

Conceptualizing stage

The conceptualizing stage is an important stage before starting the planning and implementation phase of the event. This phase includes a few key steps, that should be taken into consideration before starting the next stage (planning and implementation). Such steps include figuring out whether the concept of the IEE is suitable for your event, identifying event objectives and expected outcomes (results), target groups, methods to be used and setting out an event timeline.

Step 1. Is an IEE the right format for your event?

The IEE's purpose is to provide support for the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda by fostering a culture of mutual learning and sharing experiences across member states (MS), associated countries (AC), stakeholder organizations (SHO), European Commission (EC) and relevant action-oriented communities. The support for the current ERA Policy Agenda will be provided in the form of events facilitating mutual learning and sharing experiences from the implementation of selected actions. The aim of an IEE is to facilitate the flow of information, experiences and lessons learned, as well as the identification of good/ bad practice and success factors, around a specific ERA topic of interest to several countries. An IEE is aimed at mutual learning experience and to foster conversations that lead to action while prioritizing a specific ERA action.

These events are called INSPIRING ERA Exchanges and are set to be organised on-site in various locations to attract different groups of stakeholders. These events are planned to be interactive and encourage discussions in groups and will focus on one specific ERA Action (topic) at a time.

Step 2. Identify the main topic and expected results

A key factor that impacts the effectiveness of the IEE is that the chosen topics need to be sufficiently precise and concrete, to enable focused discussions with strong practical relevance for the participants. Given the broad spectrum of topics addressed in the ERA Policy Agenda, some prioritisation needs to be done. As the current ERA Policy Agenda has 20 actions in 4 priority areas, its crucial to identify on which action the IEE event is going to be focused on. The INSPIRING ERA consortium is focusing its attention on three ERA Actions for 2022-24: Reform of Research Assessment (action 3), Research Careers and Mobility (action 4), Bringing Science Closer to Citizens (action 14), while in the upcoming year the focus will shift to other actions.

¹ European Commission. European Research Area Policy Agenda - Overview of Actions for the Period 2023-2024. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf



It is valuable to verify the pre-selected topic (ERA action) with a 3rd party, a potential expert on the topic. The primary point of interest naturally lies with the European Commission, ERA Forum members; however, it is essential to broaden this scope by engaging external stakeholders. These may include institutions or organizations such as public agencies, as well as expert entities or individuals, such as representatives from European Commission or national experts specializing in specific topics, or other stakeholders identified by the consortia. An exploratory meeting with the third-party experts is useful to make sure that the chosen topic responds to the real needs and may provide some concrete solutions. Furthermore, given the expertise and already established network, the third party can be invited to collaborate throughout the entire preparation and organization of the IEE.

After the main topic is determined, it is recommended to split it into relevant questions and (or) challenges to be addressed by the IEE. Consider questions related to the challenges, established good practices and solutions in ERA Policy Agenda implementation. While considering further questions for the IEE event, it's recommended to think about expected results or the impact that the IEE should have. This will help to formulate more action-oriented questions. By defining expected results accurately, organizers can ultimately deliver impactful events that fulfil the intended objectives. Therefore, the results of the IEE event are recommended to aim for tangible impacts, such as gathering insights for policy development, identifying and solving challenges, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, etc.

Step 3. Identify target groups and scope

Once the topic is determined, along with the identification of the target group, the geographical scope - national, regional, global, or other - of the IEE should be determined. IEE's organized within the INSPIRING ERA project have a European, national, and regional dimension. The consortium itself is composed of six partners from six countries, and the ERA Policy Agenda extends across EU member states and associated countries. Depending on the topic, possible target groups may include:

- public local, regional, national, European institutions involved in ERA (public authorities, funding agencies, development agencies, European Commission etc.) policy agenda implementation;
- academia;
- business sector;
- civil society organisations;
- national experts related to ERA topic.

While considering your target audience, please remember that an effective IEE can only accommodate a limited number of participants – Ideally, no more than 40 in total and no more than 8-10 participants for breakout group.

Step 4. Determine event timeline

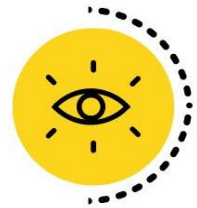
Setting an appropriate timeline is crucial for ensuring smooth coordination and execution of the IEE event, thus its good practice to think about the event timeline in the conceptualizing stage. Start by identifying key milestones and tasks, such as securing a venue, developing the agenda, inviting participants, arranging logistics, and preparing materials. Break down these tasks into actionable steps and allocate realistic timeframes for each, considering factors like lead times for bookings, coordination with stakeholders, and potential delays. Ensure clear communication and coordination among team members, and regularly review and adjust the timeline as needed to accommodate changes and unforeseen circumstances. Before setting out the event date, check calendars of important events related to the chosen topic, consider the possibility of organizing the event back-to-back with other related events and keep in mind the day of the week. By following a structured timeline, event organizers can effectively plan and organize the IEE event, maximizing its impact and success.

INDICATIVE TIMELINE OF INSPIRING ERA EXCHANGE EVENT

MONTH 1

Event conceptualization:

during this time an organizational team should be assembled and the concept of the event drawn.



Planning the event: setting a date, drafting an agenda, selecting venue, listing potential speakers and participants.



MONTH 2

Time to start

communication: send out invitations, publicize event, make the bookings (venue, catering, equipment, etc.), prepare the materials. Make final arrangements and prepare to execute the event.



MONTH 3

Execution and reporting:

after event is successfully executed, the reporting and follow-up stage should begin. Set time for feedback collection and drawing conclusions.



Planning & implementation stage

The planning and implementation stage of the IEE event is a pivotal stage to ensure its success. Thorough planning involves crafting a well-structured agenda, selecting suitable venues and logistical arrangements. It's crucial to strike a balance between the event's duration and its productivity, ensuring ample time for meaningful discussions without overextending schedules. During implementation, adhering to the planned agenda and fostering effective communication among stakeholders are key to a seamless event experience.



Step 1. Assign organizational team

This team will have to facilitate the discussions, ensure that the conversation stays focused on the intended learning objectives, manage time, encourage participation, mediate disagreements, summarize and synthesize, manage the technologies and to constantly adapt to the participants' needs.

During an IEE event, the moderator/facilitator (may be the same person or 2 individuals depending on the size of the event) and rapporteurs for the break-out sessions play a crucial role in facilitating the discussion, ensuring that the event runs smoothly, and fostering an environment conducive to productive and collaborative learning among participants.

IEE may have one or several moderators - one for the plenary session and more for the breakout sessions that will also play the roles of rapporteurs, the persons who gather all the participant's inputs and synthesize them for the plenary wrap-up session.

If you decide to include informal networking activities, a special facilitator would be a great addition to the event's coordination team, due to their experience in creating fast and fun interactions between the participants. On the other hand, if your IEE is a formal one, with a target group of governmental officials and Academia, NCP for a specific or an academia expert would be a better choice.

Step 2. Plan the logistics: date, duration, location

The event date should be carefully chosen. It's best to decide the date and the time first so that the IEE won't coincide with other important events. You may also consider organising the IEE back-to-back with another related event, to ensure the participation and to add value to the main event.

The chosen location should be one easy to reach by most participants. Plan the layout of the venue based on the event format and consider a combination of layouts to accommodate different session types.



When choosing the venue, make sure it has enough rooms to hold both the plenary and the breakout sessions (more about the location requirements is described below in the Set-up the meeting location section). If the budget allows, your IEE should provide a coffee break and lunch for the participants, as well as different event materials such as agendas, program booklets, name badges and notepads. The moderator and the speakers may also receive small gifts.

Make sure that the venue has:

- Audiovisual Equipment - to be tested before the event;
- Internet connectivity - to be tested before the event;
- Accessibility and inclusivity (wheelchair ramps, accessible restrooms etc);
- Dedicated spaces for the breakout activities;
- Registration and welcome area;
- Visual branding and signage;
- Tech support and on-site event team;
- Dedicated space for coffee breaks and lunch.

Step 3. Identify speakers and event facilitators

The speakers from your IEE should be experts on the topic related to the IEE, as well as very good communicators. They can be national experts within public authorities, professors from various universities who research ERA related topics, representatives from citizen science organisations, or experts involved in ERA related projects.

Choosing the speakers and their interventions is a very important step in the organisation of an IEE because it will set-up the entire agenda. There are many cases when a specific date will be chosen upon the availability of the speakers, and the organisation team should do an extensive communication and negotiation work to align the agendas of all the speakers involved. Thus, make sure to identify potential speakers prior to setting the event date. To be better prepared for such cases when the intended speaker is not available for the preferred event date, have at least two more good candidates for the primary speaker.

TIP

For optimal engagement, designate a facilitator and a dedicated rapporteur for every breakout session. This approach guarantees focused leadership during discussions and enables thorough reporting afterward, ensuring that valuable insights are captured and disseminated effectively. Furthermore, it's recommended to engage in preparatory work for facilitators to address specific event needs and topics. Preparation for facilitators and moderators could ensure they are adept at guiding discussions skilfully, fostering deeper engagement and productive outcomes among participants.

Step 4. Agree on the event format and set an agenda

When considering the methods and format for the IEE event, it's essential to keep in mind initial objectives and expected results, particularly how the results from the ERA exchanges will be integrated back into the ERA Forum policy process. The IEE should enable mutual learning, as well as an in-depth exchange of experiences on lessons learned and success factors of different strategies and measures based on the available evidence and collective experience and with an emphasis on policy learning. The IEE could contribute to the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda in terms of strategy development, selection of instruments and initiatives for implementation. Some examples of possible expected IEE event results:



Be exceptionally clear about your objectives. What do you want to happen as a result of the IEE? Do you want people to take action, to make new connections, or to gain new knowledge or perspectives with regard to the respective ERA action? What is the current status quo of implementation of the ERA action? What are concrete achievements and challenges of the ERA actions? Etc.

Along with the objectives, while drafting the event agenda (see [Annex 1](#) for draft agenda), one should also keep in mind the selected main topic and target groups. IEE events should be interactive and encourage discussions in groups in onsite events with varied event formats. Depending on the chosen topic, expected results and target groups, consider following the key formats for your IEE event:

- A plenary session including consortia or ERA presentation, IEE introduction and IEE's theme related interventions/ best practices.

- Breakout groups (learning-exchange sessions) of 6-10 people, all debating the topics of discussion. To allow meaningful discussions, it is crucial to allocate appropriate amount of time for these sessions.
- A plenary/wrap up session where a representative of each group presents the main ideas from the breakout session.

Depending on the target group, the format of the IEE may also include presentations from the experts or informal “ice breaking” activities. In the agenda set time for proper networking: an IEE requires a good atmosphere and some level of trust between participants. In recurring IEEs, the personal connections between participants allow for open discussions on challenges and successes. If an IEE event timeline allows, consider including ice breaker tasks or start with a joint meal before the actual meeting begins - this gives people the opportunity to network and become comfortable with each other.

ICEBREAKER IDEAS

Speed Networking: Set up a series of short one-on-one conversations between participants, each lasting around 2-3 minutes. Provide prompts or discussion topics to guide the conversations. After each round, participants rotate to meet someone new. This activity allows participants to quickly connect with multiple people, fostering networking and rapport-building within the group.

ERA Trivia Quiz: Prepare a set of questions related to the ERA, its history, policies, actions. Divide participants into teams and have them compete to answer the questions. This activity not only serves as an icebreaker but also educates participants about the ERA and encourages teamwork. Award teams.

Get more creative ideas for event games that encourage networking, co-creation, engagement, and mutual learning at: gamestorming.com

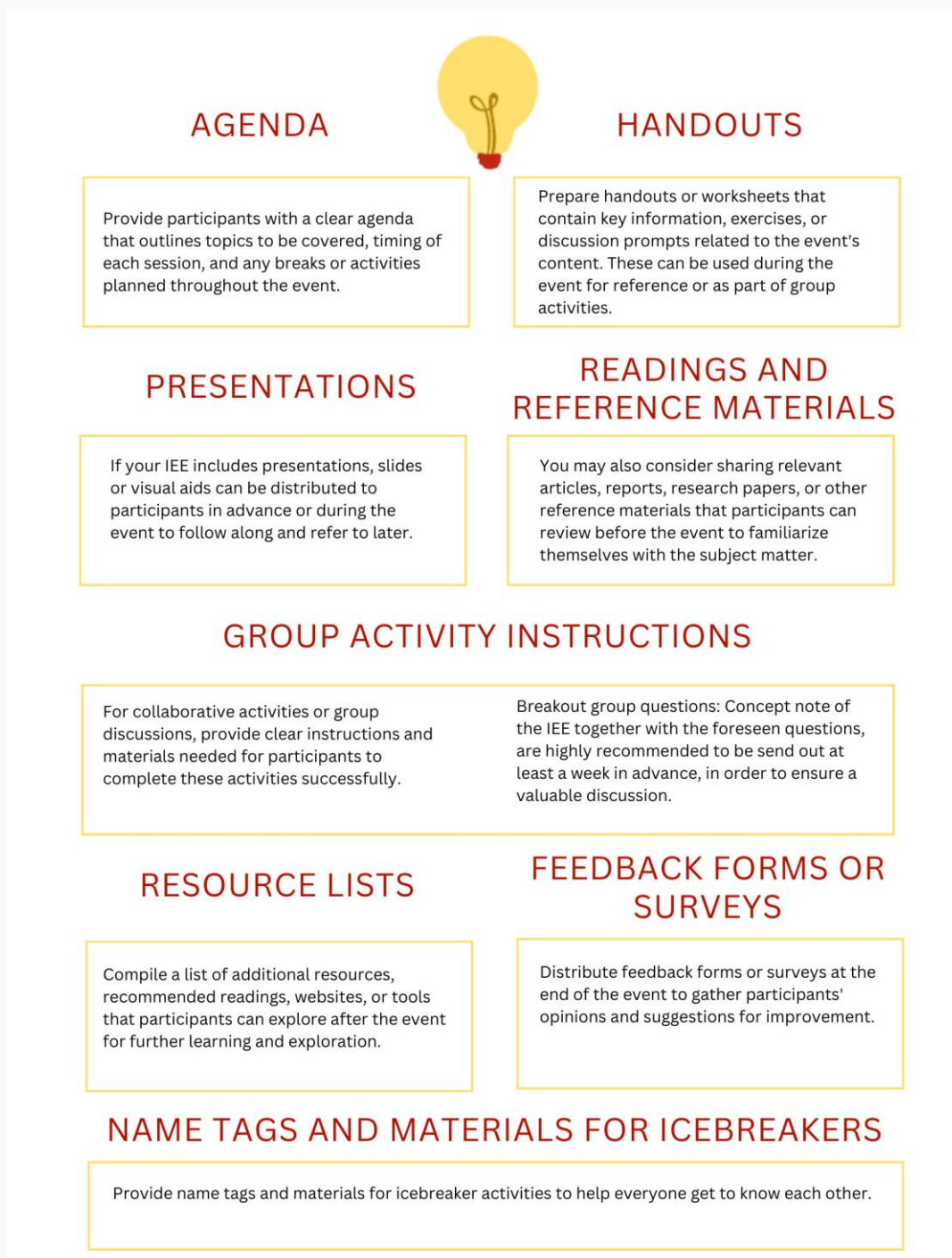
The agenda should include the location, the date and the starting time. It is recommended to maintain flexibility in the agenda to accommodate changes and extended discussions on site. Keynote speeches, presentations, and other activities should be outlined as the main components of the agenda without rigid timelines, allowing for the possibility of longer Q&A sessions and adjustments as needed. In addition, the agenda should include brief details about the speakers and their presentations, the main topic and the questions for the breakout sessions. Don't forget to include informal networking activities, so that the participants would get the most from attending the IEE. Be sure to schedule **health breaks to reduce fatigue**: you could use a timer to show how long is remaining in each session or have someone make an announcement e. g. when there are 5 minutes remaining.

Together with the agenda you could also prepare a topic paper, related to the main theme of discussion. The topic paper together with foreseen discussion questions should be sent with the invitation so the participants know beforehand what is expected of them. A document with all the logistic aspects (where in the location, how to reach it, main contact for organisational aspects) should also be prepared.

Finally, don't forget to ask for confirmation of their participation e.g. using a registration form. If you plan to take photos and record the session, you should also prepare GDPR forms for the participants (they could be included in the registration forms).

Step 5. Prepare event materials

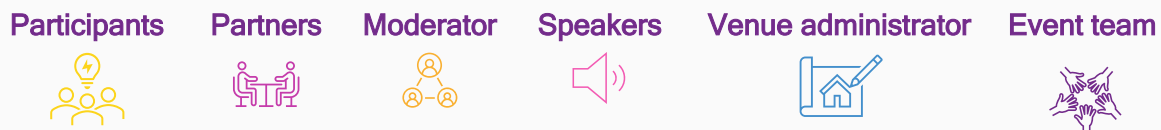
The materials distributed in an IEE should support the main topic, the learning objectives and enhance participants' understanding of the topics being discussed. The specific material you distribute will depend on the nature of the event, the subject matter and the format of the event. Some of the materials that may be disseminated may include:



It's important to tailor the materials to the specific goals and structure of IEE, ensuring that they enhance the learning experience and facilitate meaningful discussions and interactions among participants on an ERA action. Additionally, consider the preferences and needs of your audience when selecting and distributing materials.

Step 6. Communicate

Communication is essential before, during and after the IEE. You and your team should constantly and proactively keep all the communication channels open to all the actors involved in setting up the event:



In addition to clear communication between all actors involved in the IEE, dissemination of information should be also considered while thinking of your communication strategies. Your communication and dissemination strategy depends on your target audience. It is better to start the promotion **at least** a month or two before the event and right after you have settled the topic, location and timing. Develop engaging and informative content that highlights the significance of the IEE and its relevance to ERA Policy Agenda and craft clear and concise messages that resonate with your target audience: use visually appealing graphics, videos and infographics to convey key messages and attract attention. Visual content tends to be more shareable on social media. You may use a variety of communication channels to reach your audience effectively:

Website: Create a dedicated event webpage with detailed information, registration instructions, and updates.

Social Media: Use platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to share event announcements, teasers, and updates. Create event-specific hashtags for easy tracking.

Email Marketing: Send personalized invitations and updates to your email list. Use visually appealing templates and compelling content. If applicable, ask to extend the invitation to recipients' respective networks.

Newsletters: Prepare press releases, including newsletters, and distribute them to relevant media outlets and industry publications.

Collaboration: Collaborate with other EU projects, and relevant organizations to co-promote the event and reach a broader audience.

Registration form

It is important to have balanced participant group. To achieve this, consider creating a registration form that captures important details like attendees' knowledge of the topic and affiliations to country and institution(s). Tailoring the event content based on this information fosters a diverse and engaged attendee base. Thoughtful registration procedures enable organizers to understand their audience better and deliver a more impactful event experience. Furthermore, ensure that the registration form includes provisions for capturing GDPR information.

If you organise the IEE in collaboration with a 3rd party, you should ask the organisation and/or the keynote speaker to extend the invitation to its network of communication channels, so the message may have a broader distribution. Don't forget to send regular reminders to the registered participants about the event, share updates, and provide logistical information to keep them engaged and informed.

Reporting & follow-up stage

The reporting & follow-up stage consists of three steps needed to be taken to conclude the IEE effectively and efficiently. First is gathering feedback from the participants, second - reporting on the IEE, and lastly - sharing the conclusions and lessons learned.

Step 1. Collect feedback and send thank you letters to the participants

A thank you letter is a thoughtful gesture appreciated by participants. It confirms their time was valued. Ensure that you send these letters promptly after the event, including copies of presentations, general IEE conclusions, pictures, and, if applicable, a feedback survey link.

Creating a feedback survey for an IEE can provide valuable insights from participants. The feedback helps organizers understand what worked well and where improvements can be made for future events. Surveys can be distributed during the event or online through platforms like Microsoft Forms, Google Forms, etc.



It is highly advisable to gather feedback, or at least initial impressions, of the event immediately after its conclusion, ideally while participants are still present. This not only ensures active engagement but also maximizes the number of responses you can collect.

Before creating the survey, clarify its goals. Determine which aspects of the IEE you want to assess and what information you aim to gather from participants. Common objectives include evaluating overall satisfaction, session effectiveness, and gathering suggestions for future IEE topics.

Step 2. Prepare the report

Writing a report for an IEE is important as it does more than just document event activities. It also helps share knowledge, keeps things transparent, aids decision-making, and guides future actions. This report (see [Annex 2](#) for draft structure) is key for the ongoing success of ERA policy implementation and ensures that the impact of these events lasts. Drafting a report on an IEE related to ERA policy requires a structured and thorough approach to capture the event's goals, proceedings, key insights, and recommendations effectively. The report of an IEE event should include the following components:

- **Executive summary:** brief overview of the IEE event, key objectives and results, major findings, and recommendations.
- **IEE event overview:** description of an event, details about the venue, number of participants, any unique features, **event objectives and agenda**, organizing institution/organization.
- **Methodology:** explanation of the approach used to conduct the IEE event, details on how sessions were structured and facilitated, methods for gathering insights and feedback.

- **Key highlights and takeaways:** summary of major insights gained during the event, highlighted discussions, breakthroughs, or notable moments, takeaways for participants and stakeholders.
- **Session summaries:** summaries of each major session conducted during the event, key discussion points, findings and notable recommendations emerging.
- **Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned:** overall conclusions drawn from the event, summary of the event's impact and significance, identified recommendations based on the results of the IEE event, lessons learned from the event's execution and participant feedback, next steps or future considerations.

The report's findings and recommendations can influence policy direction and the allocation of resources. Policymakers and stakeholders can use IEE reports as references to inform decision-making processes related to the ERA Policy Agenda and its implementation. The report could serve as a knowledge transfer tool, allowing individuals who did not attend the event to benefit from the information and discussions that took place thus broadening the reach of the event's impact.



Furthermore, reporting on the event is a valuable learning tool for future exchanges for the organizers. By reflecting on the successes and challenges encountered, internal reporting fosters continuous improvement and refinement of event planning strategies. If necessary, an internal report detailing the event can be compiled, with a specific focus on providing insightful suggestions and adjustments tailored for enhancing future IEE events.

Step 3. Disseminate the conclusions

Making the conclusions of the IEE public is recommended as it demonstrates transparency in the process. By doing so, organizers are held accountable for their efforts, decisions, and outcomes, allowing stakeholders to review and assess the event's proceedings.

Sharing these conclusions encourages ongoing engagement with stakeholders and promotes dialogue and collaboration among participants and interested parties. This helps sustain the momentum generated by the IEE and may inspire individuals and organizations to act, innovate, and contribute to the objectives of ERA. Additionally, it showcases successful approaches and encourages the adoption of innovative solutions.

Disseminating conclusions also facilitates networking and collaboration among participants and stakeholders, while encouraging citizens to participate in related activities and provide valuable perspectives. This approach enhances the overall impact and effectiveness of the IEE.

The conclusions from the IEE on ERA actions should be shared widely. This includes horizontally, reaching participants, researchers, stakeholders, and the broader public who couldn't attend the event. Additionally, sharing vertically with policymakers and decision-makers is crucial. They can utilize the IEE's findings and recommendations to inform policy development and implementation concerning ERA Policy Agenda.

Annexes

Annex 1. Draft Agenda

INSPIRING ERA Exchange on [specify topic]

[DD MM] 2024

[City, Country]

Agenda

Venue: [venue address, floor, room, etc.]

[weekday], [dd mm] 2024	
Time [time zone]	Description
Start time 00:00	Welcoming coffee for informal networking <i>[add description if needed]</i> <i>[Event room]</i>
End time 00:00	Welcome and overview of the day <i>[add speaker name, title, country, explain IEE objectives and approach]</i> <i>[Event room]</i>
00:00-00:00	<i>Break</i>
Start time 00:00	Plenary discussion on insights and reflections <i>Facilitator: [insert name]</i>
End time 00:00	Breakout session [if needed specify details] <i>Facilitator: [insert name]</i>
	Q&A <i>Facilitator: [insert name]</i>
00:00-00:00	<i>Lunch + networking moment with local participants [insert location]</i>

Start time 00:00	Panel discussion: [specify topic]
	<i>Moderator: [insert name]</i>
End time 00:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Panellist one [insert name & title]</i> • <i>Panellist two [insert name & title]</i> • ...
	Q&A
	<i>Facilitator: [insert name]</i>
	Conclusion on the event
	<i>Facilitator: [insert name]</i>
Start time 00:00	<i>Networking Dinner at [insert location]</i>

Annex 2. Draft Report

INSPIRING ERA Exchange on [specify topic]

[DD MM] 2024

[City, Country]

Report

Organiser:	
Venue:	
Objectives and expected results:	
Attendees:	

Executive summary: brief overview of the IEE event, key objectives and results, major findings, and recommendations.

Methodology: explanation of the approach used to conduct the IEE event, details on how sessions were structured and facilitated, methods for gathering insights and feedback.

Key highlights and takeaways: summary of major insights gained during the event, highlighted discussions, breakthroughs, or notable moments, takeaways for participants and stakeholders.

Session summaries: summaries of each major session conducted during the event, key discussion points, findings and notable recommendations emerging.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned: overall conclusions drawn from the event, summary of the event's impact and significance, identified recommendations based on the outcomes of the IEE event, lessons learned from the event's execution and participant feedback, next steps or future considerations.

Annex 3. Useful resources list for organisation of workshops and other events

RESOURCE NAME	SHORT DESCRIPTION	WHERE TO FIND
Sparks' Handbook	A guideline of innovative formats for participatory activities.	https://www.ecsite.eu/activities-and-services/resources/sparks-handbook-participatory-activities
Gamestorming	Website containing co-creation tools and games for use in workshops, meetings etc.	https://gamestorming.com/
Blossoming Workshops and Seminars	Book written by Birgit Baumann, BusinessMind. The book contains practical tips and tools for trainers and moderators on how to plan and run workshops.	https://www.businessmind.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BusinessMind_eBook_EN.pdf
The Rockefeller Foundation Convening Design Guide	Advice on designing and running events.	https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/the-rockefeller-foundation-convening-design-guide/
Facilitation Training Handbook	A guide to bringing people together for public deliberation, produced by the League of Women Voters, North County San Diego	https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/LWV_FacTrainHndbk_FinaMay2017.pdf



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