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FoodPathS' Guidelines

for organizing and facilitating Mirror Groups

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Why these guidelines? Why now?

Partnerships are not able to include all the diverse voices and perspectives needed to transform our food systems in a just/fair and inclusive manner. They are often constrained by time, funding, or a limit on the number of organizations that can participate. Mirror groups bring relevant additional organizations and stakeholder groups to the discussion table and their ideas into decision making processes. They help ensure that the transition to a sustainable food system is participatory, inclusive, and responsive to various actors' needs and inputs. These guidelines introduce key concepts, methods, and attitudes needed to establish and facilitate mirror groups. This document provides a roadmap, but to ultimately get to your desired destination, you must experiment, learn, and adapt these resources to fit your specific context and needs.

These guidelines are being published to support the development of inclusive partnerships. They are intended to share learning from the FOODPathS project and SCAR Food System Strategic Working Group about organising and mobilizing mirror groups to create more inclusive and impactful partnerships.

What is a Mirror Group?

A mirror group brings together organizations and initiatives that are not directly involved in a partnership but may be impacted by it and/or have valuable related experience to contribute. These *mirror group* participants learn about and reflect on the work happening in the partnership to provide useful input and recommendations to ensure that activities and decision making are as inclusive and impactful as possible.

At national level, the mirror group bring together national and regional stakeholders to reflect and support the activities of the partnership or European initiative and serves as a bridge between the national stakeholders and this EU initiative/Partnership.

After participating in a mirror group, it is possible that participants may become more directly involved in partnership activities, when no conflict of interests arise.

Why are Mirror Groups needed?

Many European partnerships have a requirement in place for member state representatives in the partnership to liaise with national level actors. Mirror groups are one methodology to support their involvement. Mirror groups can also help reach organisations and networks not represented in a partnership, but who are impacted by their work and have value to contribute.

Mirror groups help to:

- Include perspectives that are needed but missing.
- Recognize and reconcile different organizational backgrounds and agendas.
- Understand how to collaborate effectively.
- Share ideas, establish a common language, and agree on a common basis for advancing a systems approach to sustainable food system (SFS) transformation.
- Communicate reflections, opinions, questions and suggestions from networks-of-networks and local, regional, national, and global levels to central organising structures in a consortia (such as steering committees, advisory, or executive boards)
- Help build a broad, well-informed, community supporting the partnership
- Bring information out from within the structures of the partnership to other organisations impacted by their work e.g. member state ministries
- Facilitate the exchange between the actors across scales (local, regional, national EU-wide, global) and the EU initiative/partnership

Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for anyone interested in setting up a mirror group for their partnership, especially partners of the FutureFoodS Partnership. For example, an important question from FutureFoodS is regarding the setup of mirror groups at the national level. How will the Mirror Groups that the EU Partnership set up align and work with the mirror groups that are organised by partners on the national level?

General Mirror Group Guidelines for Inclusive Partnerships

How to set up Mirror Groups

The FOODPathS project recommends nominating a group of 2 to 3 individuals from the core team of the partnership, with support from the partnership's communications team to organise and facilitate the mirror groups following the steps below.

STEP 1

Develop a concept note

A concept note establishes a shared understanding for the purpose, organization, and facilitation of a mirror group(s). It ensures an efficient use of time and establishes roles and responsibilities. It clarifies how the mirror group connects to a partnership's objectives, the methodology for selecting mirror group participants, a timeline and expected outcomes. Part of developing the concept note is also determining roles and responsibilities (who is convening the group, who is facilitating the group(s), and who is participating in the group)

See Annex 1 for a Template.

Developing the concept note will help you:

- **Establish the team** who will be organising and facilitating the Mirror Group.
- **Clearly define the objectives** for the Mirror Groups, aligned with the partnership's aims, needs, and expected outcomes.
- **Identify short and long-term goals** for the group
- **Identify potential Mirror Group participants**
  - Is the invitation to the ministry or organization or to an individual?
  - Which organisations, NGOs, private sectors businesses, research institutes, universities and ministries should be invited?
- **Define the roles and expectations** of mirror group participants:
  - If a participant cannot attend a meeting, can they send a substitute?
  - Will there be work to do outside of the meetings?
- **Choose communication tools** (e.g. Sharepoint, email, online meeting tools)

The Concept Notes should contain the following *See Annex 1 for a Template.*

1. Set objectives and a timeline for the mirror groups

- Clearly define the objectives for **working with Mirror Groups**, aligned with the partnership's aims, needs, and expected outcomes. Make sure meetings take place with adequate time to incorporate the input into final decisions or actions.

2. Identify relevant participants

- Identify participants from sectors relevant to your area of focus, such as government, civic society, research, private, and/or industry.
- Involve partners in identifying potential participants, determine if substitute participants from within the same organization are acceptable or not
- Input them into a spreadsheet with additional information about the organization, type, focus area. See Annex 2 for a template.

3. Be clear about what the partnership can offer participants

- Think about participants' needs and ways to facilitate their participation, especially if you are considering involving vulnerable and underrepresented groups. Are you able to provide financial honorariums? Organizational representation on a website? Travel support for in-person events.
- Be transparent and realistic about how you will be using the outcomes of the mirror group discussions.

4. Set meeting objectives and a timeline for organizing each mirror group meeting:

- Clearly define the objectives for each **Mirror Group meeting** and ensure the objectives guide the partnership closer to a solution to a challenge, help identify necessary changes for a more effective and inclusive partnership, and/or provide input at key points in time before final decisions are made and actions taken.

5. Set a timeline

- The time needed for the organization of mirror groups from start to finish can vary. For FOODPathS, concept notes for each meeting were developed at least 2 months in advance and invitations rounds started 1.5 months prior to the event.
- Allow yourself a buffer of 1 month between sending out the invitations to your expected date to account for follow-ups, cancellations, and additional invitation rounds.

STEP 2

Engage the partnership consortium

The group within the partnership who will be organising and facilitating the Mirror Groups should communicate with other Partnership members in order to:

- Meeting with topic leads to understanding when and about what they could benefit from input from 'external' entities. Add this input into the concept note and 'run of show' (Annex 3).
- Request input for and review of the 'background' information pack that will be sent to participants prior to the meeting
- Ask for suggestions for who to invite to the Mirror Group meetings/exchanges

STEP 3

Select participants and set expectations

After setting up the organising group and engaging with the partnership consortium, the organising group needs to make a final selection of mirror group participants, clarify who is coordinating each group, and draft, and send invitations.

- Think about how many people you would like to involve, considering how many facilitators you have available and that breakout groups in meetings should have a maximum of 8 participants for the highest amount of participation. Look at the actors you have identified in step one and take a closer look at their vision, work, target audience, and engagement methods. Think about geography - where are they based?
- Develop criteria and establish a committee for participant screening.
- Find a good balance of actors to prioritize in the first round of invitations, and a list of suitable candidates for a second round.
- It is important that the members are made aware from the start that they must actively participate in order to achieve a constructive out-come and a good meeting.
- Keep track of who is being invited and from which organization in a spreadsheet with additional information about the organisation, type, focus area. See Annex 2 for a template.
    - Cross check, if applicable, with the members of list of the national level SCAR FSWG mirror groups (e.g. SCAR)

STEP 4

Invite participants

Send invitations early - in the context of FOODPathS, this was done 1.5 months prior to a meeting - so that people can confirm attendance or reject the invitation. Allow for a buffer of at least 1 month to account for follow-ups, cancellations, and additional invitation rounds.

- *Tip*: The FOODPathS Mirror Groups took place on Zoom. A registration link to the Zoom Call was sent in the initial invitation email, which helped tracking registrations in real time, while also enabling participants to add the event directly to their calendars.

- Attach to the invitation, a background document providing an overview of the Partnership, its aims and objectives, key topics and participation benefits.
- Where possible, address organizational representatives directly by working with consortium/partners who have a direct connection to an entity you want to invite.
- To achieve a high and positive response rate, it is important to be clear in the invitation. Communicate clearly and transparently about how insights and opinions shared in the meetings will be used and what level of confidentiality is expected

STEP 5

Brief participants prior to the meeting

Ahead of each Mirror Group meeting, send preparation materials. For example, the meeting agenda, more details about the Mirror Group methodology, participation guidelines, and questions that will be discussed in the meeting.

- Attach the background document providing an overview of the partnership, its aims and objectives, key topics and participation benefits.
- Prepare a detailed briefing package to send to participants once they confirm their attendance, explaining in greater detail the methodology, participation guidelines, and questions discussed.

Conditions for Successful Mirror Group Meetings

Set the right conditions for discussion and support processes with effective preparation and strategies by deciding (with input from the partnership consortium) what you would like input on, what questions to ask, and what methodology you will use. Make sure to provide definitions of terms that may vary across countries to ensure understanding.

Organise and Facilitate Mirror Group meetings

When organising the Mirror Group meetings, it is helpful to work with "Run of Show" Document outlining the agenda and responsibilities. See Annex 3 for a template. Clearly define the objectives for each **Mirror Group meeting** and ensure the objectives will be able to inform the solution to a challenge, help identify necessary changes for a more effective and inclusive partnership, and/or provide input at key points in time before final decisions are made and actions taken.

The time needed for the organization of mirror groups from start to finish can vary. For FOODPathS, concept notes for each meeting were developed at least 2 months in advance and invitations rounds started 1.5 months prior to the event.

Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

- The 2 or 3 people from the core partnership team who are responsible for organizing the mirror groups, should look within the partnership consortium to see who can support in facilitating the mirror groups, either as facilitators or notetakers.
- Hold briefing meetings with relevant parties to update them on the envisioned methods, their roles and responsibilities. Clarify questions.
- Create a shared "Run of Show" Document outlining the agenda and responsibilities. See Annex 3 for a template

Establish a Safer* Space

- Set ground rules to create a dynamic where participants feel heard, can listen and learn from one another free of their institutional mandates.
- Encourage participants to leave their titles at the door to foster an open dialogue.
- Start with ice breakers, have breakout groups, and make technical support available to help participants feel more at ease.
- Obtain consent from participants if the meeting is recorded and meeting minutes published with quotes.
- Use tools that are intuitive and easy to use.

Advance access to resources and briefing materials

- Provide participants with the necessary resources two weeks in advance, including background information, preparatory materials and briefing packages.

- If you will be working in breakout groups focused on select topics, give participants information in advance.

Time Management

- Manage time effectively during the meeting to ensure all topics are covered and discussions are productive.

Documenting the Mirror Group Meeting (s)

How to document input from Mirror Groups

- Provide notetakers with a word document template capture discussion point.
- Document discussions, decisions, and feedback thoroughly. Use various tools like meeting minutes, online collaborative tools (Miro boards, Google Docs, Mural etc.) recordings, and summary reports to capture the outcomes.
- Share the outcomes with all participants and stakeholders to ensure transparency and continuous improvement.

Follow up with participants

Encourage and welcome participants to share relevant new thoughts, ideas and criticism' that might have arisen after the event itself. This helps in continuously improving propositions and actions.

- Send out a feedback survey following the meeting to gather participants impressions and suggestions for improvement
- Once notes are consolidated, share outcomes with participants, indicating how they will be used going forward.
- Share information with them about the partnership's activities that are relevant to them (e.g. a thematically interesting event, publications etc.). This encourages continued engagement and fosters a deeper understanding of the partnership.

Integrate input back into partnership

- Share outcomes from the mirror group with your wider consortium and the public as appropriate. Share meeting minutes via email, upload them onto shared data platforms (e.g. Google or SharePoint), share relevant information via social media and publish summaries on the partnership website.

Annex 1 – Mirror Group Concept Note and Work Plan

Overview

Partners and Roles

- Organizers:
- Presenters:
- Tech and logistics:
- Breakout room facilitators and note takers:
- Event host:

Concept Note

Context	
Objective	
Approach	
Mirror Group Participants	Spreadsheet of possible invitees
Participation Benefits	
Meeting Facilitation/ Methodology/Agenda	
Output	
Timeline	
Next Steps	

Selection and Invitation Process

Task	Description
Invitee Management	Spreadsheet
Selection Process	
Invitations	
Meeting Link	
Presentation	
Timeline of Invitation Process	
Next Steps	

Draft Invitation Email

Draft 1-Pager

Annex 2 – Mirror Group Participant Identification, Selection and Invitation Tracking

Download the Excel template by clicking the icon below (or the link).

Annex 2_Mirror
Group Participant Ide

https://www.foodpaths.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Annex-2_Mirror-Group-Participant-Identification-Selection-and-Invitation-Tracking.xlsx

Annex 3 – Mirror Group Run of Show

[Length]

[Starting Time – Ending Time]

[Date, Year]

[Meeting Link]

Time (CET)	Agenda Item Responsible person	Description Note Taker	Logistics Responsible person
9:30 (10´)	**Welcome and Agenda Overview** Responsible person		**Share slides** Responsible person **Chat monitor** Responsible person
9.40 (10´)	**Icebreaker** Responsible person		**Chat monitor** Responsible person
9.50 (15`)	**Introduction to FoodPathS** Responsible person		**Share slides** Responsible person **Chat monitor** Responsible person
10.05 (5`)	**Introduction to breakout room 1** Responsible person		**Chat monitor** Responsible person **Assign breakout rooms** Responsible person
Breakout Room 1 Please download a copy of this notes template and send it to X (xxx@xxx.org) after the meeting.			
10.10 (30`)	**Breakout Room 1** 5' introduce each other 5' silent answer questions 5' add information to the sticky notes 15' discussion	**1.**	*Facilitator/* Note Taker
		2.	*Facilitator/* Note Taker
		3.	*Facilitator/* Note Taker
		4.	*Facilitator/* Note Taker
		5.	*Facilitator/* Note Taker

Short Break of 5 Minutes			
Re-gather and share-back 1			
10.45 **(20´)**	**Report back to the whole group** **Facilitator**		
11.05 **(10`)**	**Introduction to Breakout Room 2 Topic** **Responsible person**		**Share slides** **Responsible person** **Chat monitor** **Responsible person**
Breakout Room 2 Same break out groups as before			
11.15 **(25´)**	**Breakout Room 2** **Facilitators/ Notetakers**	**1.**	***Facilitator/*** **Note Taker**
		2.	***Facilitator/*** **Note Taker**
		3.	***Facilitator/*** **Note Taker**
		4.	***Facilitator/*** **Note Taker**
		5.	***Facilitator/*** **Note Taker**
Re-gather and share-back 2			
11.40 **(20´)**	**Wrap Up** **Responsible person**		**Share slides** **Responsible person** **Chat monitor** **Responsible person**

Breakout Rooms

Please download a copy of the meeting note template and modify your downloaded version and send us the notes after the meeting.

Topic	Questions	Facilitator	Notes

Please stay in the meeting room for a brief debrief.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Person Responsible
Moderator/Facilitator	
Zoom Logistics	
Time keeper + Screen sharer	
Plenary Notes takes	
Plenary Chat Monitor	