



EIP-AGRI Workshop 'Operational Groups: first experiences'

First experiences and recommendations around setting up Operational Groups (OGs)

How do you bring the right partners together around a project idea?

- ▶ A highly relevant idea, coming from a practical need, is the key to a successful partnership.
- ▶ The idea should be understood in the same way by all (farmers, researchers etc.).
- ▶ Ensure a bottom-up approach as much as possible with project ideas originating from farmers.
- ▶ The right partners are those with the right knowledge and the motivation to participate.
- ▶ Reaching out to new partners is easier when you have a strong core group who already know one another.
- ▶ OGs can work with people from outside of their core partner group (eg. contracted key experts).
- ▶ Different groups have different cooperation cultures, attracting some relevant partners may be difficult.
- ▶ Innovation brokers/support services play a key role in connecting and bringing partners together.
- ▶ Consult with your Managing Authority to get informal feedback on your project proposal.

How do you appoint the lead partner?

- ▶ Farmers should ideally be the lead partners, this helps with promotion, dissemination and uptake of results.
- ▶ It is important that the lead partner has motivation and enthusiasm as well as leadership qualities.
- ▶ It is not necessary for the lead partner to also be the project administrator/coordinator.

"It is challenging, like building a house. We have to work step-by-step and put everything in the right place at the right time. This inevitably takes some time, but our goal is to ensure the long-term success of the EIP-AGRI with a clear focus on farmers as the key players in OG partnerships"

- Giorgio Trentin from the Managing Authority in Veneto Region about supporting Operational Groups -

How do you encourage a 'healthy' partnership?

- ▶ A good partnership agreement! Ensure transparency and fair project management procedures.
- ▶ Take care to avoid creating additional administrative burden for the partners.
- ▶ Building trust between partners is essential, but be patient - it takes time.
- ▶ Manage expectations- encourage partners to be realistic, explain that results will not be immediate.
- ▶ Ensure 'co-ownership' of the project by involving all partners as fully as possible, this needs time!
- ▶ An innovation broker and/or a facilitator can help organise effective interaction between partners.
- ▶ Internal communication and innovative moderating techniques: ensure a clear, common understanding.
- ▶ Frequent interaction between partners: keep the partners focussed and committed.
- ▶ Farmers - researcher communication: someone with experience of both can "translate" if necessary.

How do you convert the project idea into a project proposal?

- ▶ Allow time for project preparation, careful thought is needed in order to formulate things clearly.
- ▶ If necessary, seek professional assistance from a specialist adviser/innovation support service.RDP Managing Authorities set rules and guidelines; ask if things are not clear or logical for you.
- ▶ Consult and maintain a positive dialogue with the RDP Managing Authority.

What practical problems/challenges have Operational Groups faced so far?

- ▶ **Timing:** Focus on farmers- hold meetings on their farms, avoid busy periods in the farming calendar.
- ▶ **Project management:** Follow your project plan, organise all activities in advance, give regular feedback
- ▶ **Motivation of partners:** Keep all partners engaged, they should feel their contribution is important.
- ▶ **Pressure on project coordinator:** They need encouragement, motivation and support too.
- ▶ **Misunderstandings or potential conflict:** Mediating between the partners is key.

More information

Workshop webpage	Operational Groups video	EIP-AGRI brochures on Operational Groups and Innovation Support Services
Workshop report	Inspirational ideas: Improving chicken value chains and Innovation brokerage	OG section on the EIP-AGRI website

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