

ENRD webinar

18th NRN Meeting

Highlights report

The 18th NRN meeting, co-organised by the Flemish and Walloon Network Support Units (NSU), took the form of a webinar on 22 October 2020.

The meeting focussed on lessons learned for networking from the COVID-19 period, including new practices, particularly digital alternatives, and means for engaging stakeholders.

The event also provided the opportunity to discuss the role of the rural networks in stakeholder engagement activities including those related to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA).

Participants demonstrated and used interactive elements to exchange on these topics. NRNs discussed the ways in which they would be able to use the DG AGRI Workshop Package and the process used for consultations about the LTVRA. They also explained their own methods and new proposals for consulting with stakeholders in response to COVID-19.

Setting the Scene

The meeting was opened with a welcome and introduction to the topics by the Belgian NSU teams from both [Flanders](#) and [Wallonia](#), and Helen Williams from DG AGRI. The aim of the meeting was to respond to NRN requests to address how NSUs have adapted networking approaches and activities to the COVID-19 pandemic and how to integrate those approaches in future networking activities. An update on EU-level rural networking activities was provided by David Lamb and Veronika Korcekova from the [ENRD Contact Point](#), Myles Stiffler from the [ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk](#) and Véronique Rebholtz from the [EIP-AGRI Service Point](#). The format of the meeting was designed to encourage as much interactive exchange as possible between NRNs.

The Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

The LTVRA Workshop Package



[Zelig Peppiette](#), from DG AGRI reminded participants that the LTVRA is an important EU political priority and gave an overview of the LTVRA process and the stakeholder Workshop Package developed by DG AGRI with strong support of ENRD CP. This complements the online public consultation and allows any rural group to download a package of materials to develop a vision based on their own local area and to highlight local examples and stories. She argued that the LTVRA will only be successful if rural voices, rural citizens and rural communities are heard. The consultation and stakeholder engagement activities will be complemented by analytical work and a foresight exercise involving the ENRD [Thematic Group](#). The package of materials will soon be available online in many languages.

Event Information

Date: 22 October 2020

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point and the Flemish and Walloon NSUs

Participants: 71 NRN representatives from 25 Member States

Outcomes: Concrete proposals for future networking practices and for stakeholder involvement in the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/18th-nrn-meeting_en

#Rural2040: Stakeholder Involvement



[Paul Soto](#), from the ENRD Contact Point outlined the potential role of the NRNs in the consultation and stakeholder engagements activities around the Vision, including why, how and when they could get involved. He emphasised that NRNs can help to ensure that the richness and diversity of their rural areas are captured in the Long Term Vision. The Workshop Package is designed for two-hour meetings. Any information and messages from NRN activities should be submitted to the ENRD by 31 January 2021. The work can contribute to the LTVRA conference to be held in March 2021 and can be showcased on the [LTVRA portal](#). It can also feed into an ENRD report which will be made available to the Commission as a contribution to the Communication on the Long Term Vision.

The role of NRNs in the LTVRA

The discussions in breakout groups considered the possible roles for the NRNs in promoting stakeholder involvement in the Rural Vision. Stakeholders were asked about the state of play in their Member State in terms of activities to promote responses to the consultation, their views on using the Workshop Package and to propose ideas for engaging stakeholders. A summary of responses was presented covering these three fields.



State of play

- NRNs have promoted links to the LTVRA consultation through their websites, social media and newsletters;
- Some MS have held virtual or hybrid (a mix of physical and virtual attendance) meetings to disseminate and exchange information;
- Some regional events have been or will be held to capture the diversity of rural areas;
- Discussions so far have particularly sought to engage and inform LAGs, although other stakeholder groups have also been engaged such as MS Steering Groups and NRN partner organisations;
- There is sometimes a lack of awareness among MAs about the consultation process;
- Some NSUs have circulated surveys.



Using the package

- Several NRNs applauded the initiative to develop the Workshop Package – they liked the visual canvas in particular and the driver cards;
- Some NRNs reflected that the time was too short for them to take it up and that they and LAGs were already busy;
- NRNs may need to rely on others as more credible channels for communication in some MS where they may be perceived as too close to the MA;
- Some work may be required to provide facilitation support and for the synthesis of responses;
- The focus should be on key target groups – such as LAGs, scientific institutes and others who are able to organise, support and get others involved.



Engaging stakeholders

- Participants suggested involving other organisations who could host workshops;
- Find a way to standardise the inputs obtained from different contexts while still allowing different rural 'voices' to be heard;
- Some NRNs were considering synthesising responses, and translating the feedback content (five NRNs)
- 17 NRNs indicated that they would undertake web and promotion activities, 13 would act (or try to) as a collection point;
- Four NRNs indicated they would host events, others said that they would try to do so or support local groups, including LAGs, to do so.



Responses to COVID-19: New networking

The afternoon discussions focused on responses to COVID-19 and [Kasia Panfil](#) from the ENRD CP made a presentation of initial responses of how NRNs had adapted. This led to exchanges between NRNs in five breakout groups where participants were encouraged to present their strongest examples and then select the two most interesting as shown in the [diagram](#).

After the report back, a panel made up of the co-hosts - Xavier Delmon from the Walloon NSU and Ariane van den Steen from the Flemish NSU – chose their favourite examples. Ariane selected 'the network process' designed by the Swedish NSU in response to widespread consultation. This is a planned sequence of online processes, steps in networking on specific topics, complemented by digital field visits. Xavier chose the 'Hackathon' approach piloted in Italy, which involved sessions with consultants, young farmers and students over three days to develop new solutions for rural development.

The most popular example selected by vote was '[LEADER TV](#)' in the Netherlands which involved a physical meeting with an online audience of 300 who could ask questions of a panel. There was a request from NRNs to develop a document describing the examples presented.



Conclusions and next steps

The meeting concluded with information about future activities and recommended integrating some of the examples presented into future ENRD actions. Participants liked the title '[Welcome to Our Rural](#)' for the Workshop Package and the local messages and stories that emerge from local discussion. All NRNs were also encouraged to participate in the 2021 [Rural Inspirations Awards](#) (#RIA2021) and to sign up for the forthcoming workshop on [Valorising and Communicating successful projects](#), which will also feature former winners and success stories.