

4th National Networks Meeting: Networking Hackathon

The 4th National Networks (NN) Meeting: Networking Hackathon served as a catalyst for generating innovative ideas tailored to the needs of NN. Co-hosted by the Lithuanian NN and the EU CAP Network, the event's methodology focused on fostering new collaborations between National Networks.

Participants were grouped into teams for the two-day event based on their topics of interest. Before the meeting, their preferences were gathered through a survey and also through discussions within the different NN clusters. Further details about the methodology are provided in this report and also described in depth in a Handbook.

The afternoon of the second day included several field visits to rural areas in Lithuania. Participants were split into three groups, each visiting a different set of projects. Detailed information about the field visits can be found in the factsheet on the event page.

The Networking Hackathon method

Using the hackathon format, participants worked in teams to develop proposals, which were presented at the end of the meeting. The method was organised in several sessions:

1. Icebreaker – Team introductions and choosing a team name
2. Brainstorming – Sharing initial ideas
3. Classifying and systematising ideas – Identifying the final proposal
4. Development of the proposals – Planning how to implement the proposal
5. Pitch preparation – Rehearsing the presentation before the competition
6. Pitch competition – Final presentations and selection of winners

Each participant was given a Facilitation Handbook, which guided them through the Hackathon. The handbook included details on the format and specific facilitation techniques used throughout the day.

Event Information

Date: 25-26 September 2024

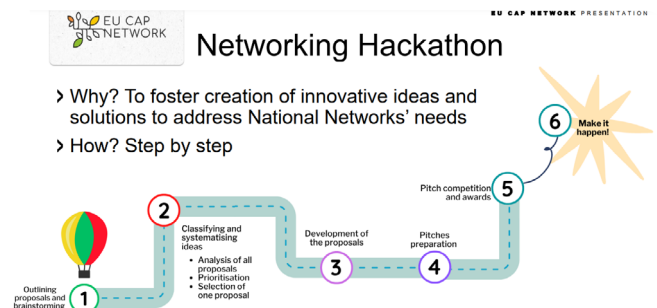
Location: Birštonas, Lithuania

Organisers: The EU CAP Network and the Lithuanian National Network (NN)

Participants: 58 participants from 21 Member States

Outcomes: Creation of seven innovative proposals for enhancing the performance of National Networks' tasks related to 1) Effective communication (two proposals), 2) Enhanced cooperation with other networks, 3) Innovation and AKIS, 4) Evaluation, 5) Simplification, and 6) Young people in rural areas; and providing facilitation and techniques for events.

Web page: [4th National Networks Meeting](#)



- > Why? To foster creation of innovative ideas and solutions to address National Networks' needs
- > How? Step by step

The handbook also included a library of facilitation techniques for stakeholders to use as a resource in their own work, or to replicate the process in the future.

Facilitators from the EU CAP Network guided teams through this methodology to help them achieve the event's goal: presenting a proposal that could enhance National Network (NN) performance in a specific area. Each team, consisting of seven to nine participants, worked on different topics as described below.

Team 1 – Easy CAP Hub

The first team, one of two focused on **efficient communication**, aimed to **enhance rural connectivity by leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to improve accessibility within National Networks. This team proposes the creation of a digital platform called 'Easy CAP Hub' designed to consolidate and streamline information collected from NNs across different countries.



This platform would use AI tools to deliver tailored information quickly, eliminating the need for users to sift through irrelevant data. For more details, please refer to the proposal in [their presentation](#) (generated by AI).

Additional ideas considered included launching a coordinated social media campaign involving all NNs and coordinated by the EU CAP Network, organising a forum for stakeholders on communication, and developing a unified communication strategy for Common Strategic Plans (CSP) aimed at media and journalists.



Team 2 - AgriSpace

The **second group on efficient communication's** proposal suggests creating a new online platform to facilitate information exchange between stakeholders on policy and communication. This group developed the idea for a mobile app called **'AgriSpace,' a chat-based tool**. The app's target audience includes NNs, farmers, advisors, researchers, and local action groups (LAGs), with different chat rooms organised by topic and available in multiple languages.



Potential topics could include a newsroom, event calendars, project failures, and success stories. The app would be designed, developed, and tested over the next year by NNs and promoted by the EU CAP Network, with a planned launch by the end of 2025.

The main aim of this group was to find a more efficient and digital way for NNs to communicate. In addition to the digital platform, it explored ideas such as promoting more in-person meetings and creating a 'bad practices' database. The group was particularly drawn to the database idea, inspired by Estonia's 'Rural Talks' podcast, which highlights mistakes and lessons learned from various projects. However, participants struggled to find a practical way to implement this database.

Team 3 - MaxNET

The team working on **enhanced cooperation with other networks** proposed **'MaxNET,' a moderated matchmaking and exchange initiative that culminates in an award**. The goal is to harness the collective knowledge of National Networks by pairing the participants with questions with those who have solutions. Key elements include addressing the concerns of Member States, a structured moderation process, gathering and filtering issues, and involving the EU CAP Network in planning solutions. The process will be documented, and communication channels will be tailored to the specific needs of each NN. This initiative aims to create a more organised and effective way to tap into the expertise and wisdom of the Member States.

The process involved matching the concerns of Member States, using the mechanism of regional networking clusters as the basis for exchanges about these concerns. The exchange could be via email, good practice, an online meeting or even a physical exchange where relevant. The emphasis would be on identifying and providing the exchanges between the right networking partners and on recording the process and outcome.

The team also explored the idea of an exchange 'relay' between Member States to encourage more in-person exchanges and learning from past failures during a dedicated event.





Team 4 - Not Another New Digital Platform

The **innovation and AKIS team** proposed creating a new framework of collaboration by organising a **Digital platform fair**. This annual event would allow National Networks to share best practices in digital platform development, showcase innovative solutions from existing platforms, exchange experiences with emerging technologies (such as Artificial Intelligence), and collaborate to create new tools for digital networking.

To implement this proposal, the team suggested several next steps: conducting a survey to map out needs of NNs, forming a working group of early adopters to plan the event, and hosting the first Digital Platform Fair in 2025.

During the brainstorming session, the team also explored additional ideas, such as organising a 'Farmers' Day' in schools to attract young people, sharing success stories on enhancing AKIS advisors' capacities, and creating specialised networks focused on specific innovation topics.

This final proposal also integrated initial ideas from the brainstorming session, such as organising events to help stakeholders better understand the evaluation process and identify effective communication strategies for presenting results. Additionally, the original proposal included capacity-building events for local stakeholders, simplifying CAP evaluation concepts, and gathering their feedback to make evaluations more relevant and meaningful.



We live in a digital world, so National Networks need to take a digital leap. This framework will provide the tools needed to do it.

- Not Another New Digital Platform, 2024



Team 6 - Making the CAP simple again!

The team focused on **simplification** proposed a two-stage approach to **strengthen stakeholder engagement and promote the sharing of simple solutions across multiple Member States, namely:**

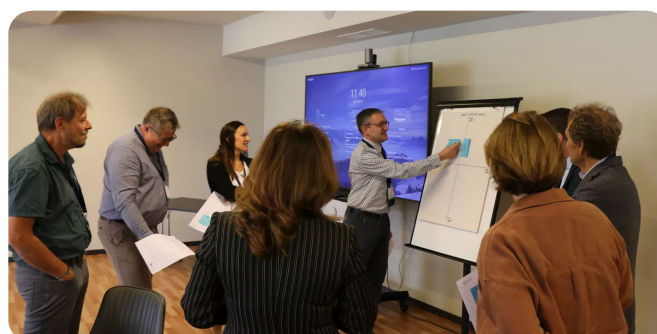
1. Establish national channels to collect complaints and questions from stakeholders. For this NN will consult with the national Monitoring Committees first to address the right stakeholders.
2. Create a digital platform hosted by the EU CAP Network for NNs to share knowledge, challenges, and, most importantly, solutions.

Team 5 - Evaluation BeeZZZZ

The **evaluation team's** proposal focused on attractive communication of evaluation results that demonstrate the effectiveness of the CAP. This evolved into a **'Roadmap and Toolbox'** for National Networks, aimed at guiding how to involve stakeholders in CAP evaluations and communicate the results in an engaging and impactful way.

The roadmap's development involves several key steps: first of all engaging the existing NN thematic cluster on monitoring and evaluation to attract interested participants, and next, forming a team by identifying the necessary skills within their organisations. From there, the team will draft a stakeholder involvement roadmap, outlining stages of the evaluation cycle, objectives, tools, and the key actors involved. A broader brainstorming session will then be organised to refine the roadmap and incorporate examples of good and bad practices.

During the brainstorming session, other ideas were explored, such as creating an online library to share case studies, organising dialogues and meetings with EU auditors for quick responses to common questions, and involving stakeholders in the development of new CAP plans.





Team 7 - Rural Juvenile Ideas Keep Us Jumping

The **rural youth team's** proposal emphasised the importance of engaging young people to promote rural areas as a place to live, work and thrive. In doing so, young people will be central in the approach – for example, **youth ambassadors (or influencers)** will be approached by NNs to showcase a viable way of living in rural areas. These ambassadors will help co-design future NN activities, such as events, partnerships, and the identification of best practices. A national-level campaign led by NNs would expand into an EU-wide initiative, using positive, youth-friendly language and popular online platforms, supported by influencers.

Other proposals discussed during the day included organising a rural youth roadshow with expert involvement, awarding a special 'GenZ' or 'Youth-Friendly' label to villages with outstanding youth-focused initiatives (similar to the Smart Villages Initiative), and inviting young people to discuss their needs in depth. These discussions would lead to the development and field testing of products (such as events and tools), while also supporting youth-led actions.



Winners, outcomes and actions

Although all proposals were strong contenders, only two teams became winners at the 4th NN Meeting. The first winner was chosen by the audience through a popular vote, where each participant could vote on one proposal. After much anticipation, results showed that the proposal from the Rural Youth's team proposal of Rural Youth Ambassadors was the clear favourite.

The second winner was chosen by the jury, composed of representatives from the Lithuanian NN, DG AGRI, and the EU CAP Network. The jury, after a challenging internal discussion, awarded the team working on Innovation and AKIS for their new framework of collaboration: a Digital platform fair.

The decision was based on key criteria including ownership, feasibility, innovation, and transferability.

NN left the meeting not only with refined ideas and tasks to develop their proposals, but also with resources to enhance their facilitation and event design methods. The Workbook for participants, produced by the EU CAP Network and provided to participants during the meeting, offered a practical overview of different techniques for ice breaking, brainstorming and energising, as well as methods for harvesting ideas and closing a meeting in a way that leaves a long-lasting positive impression on the participants. The handbook also includes the methodology for the National Networks Hackathon, which will be helpful for other stakeholders interested in adopting a similar approach.

The EU CAP Network will support the continuation and implementation of these proposals, with a particular focus on digital platforms, recognising the essential role of NNs in advancing these initiatives. Additionally, the EU CAP Network will address specific needs highlighted during the event, including organising the wide range of information and resources to enhance accessibility for NNs and other stakeholders.

While there were two winning teams, the meeting generated many other valuable proposals aimed at improving the performance of NN's tasks. These proposals will be further developed by participants, the EU CAP Network and other relevant stakeholders. At the 5th NN Meeting, co-hosted by the Greek NN and foreseen for March 2025, there will be an opportunity to share progress and to follow up on these ideas.

