



# **BuildInterest**

## **Deliverable 2.3**

# **Guide to set-up and run a stakeholder platform**

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

This report aims to provide practical steps and considerations for setting up and running a stakeholder platform. We hope and believe that this report provides valuable insights for people and organisations interested in stakeholder platforms and in particular for those that consider starting one.

Over the last years, there has been a mushrooming of stakeholder platforms on the European level<sup>1</sup>. Particularly in the field of sustainability, these platforms are increasingly popular as a means to enable stakeholders to “interact to improve mutual understanding, create trust, define roles and engage in joint action”<sup>2</sup>.

The EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation (FP7, Horizon 2020) also funded numerous stakeholder platforms over the last years<sup>3</sup>, including the BuildInterest project that forms the basis for this guide. In our experience with establishing and running several stakeholder platforms, we encountered a lack of common understanding exists on what exactly a stakeholder platform is and a lack of proper guidance on how to set-up and run such a platform.

This report aims to fill this gap, building on our own experience; first and foremost the BuildInterest project (see text box below). Because, with the right mindset and tools, stakeholder platforms can be a powerful instrument to unlock people’s potential to cooperate and innovate for social and environmental good<sup>4</sup>.

Each stakeholder platform is unique in its goal, scope, objectives, participants, resources, and so on. This report aims to be applicable to a broad range of platforms but cannot provide a single guideline that fits all. We want to start here with the disclaimer that not all of the points and suggestions below may apply to your platform.

To make the steps and considerations more concrete and tangible, we have illustrated many of the topics throughout this report with examples from our experience with setting up and running three parallel stakeholder platforms in our project BuildInterest.

### Example: BuildInterest

“BuildInterest is an EU funded project that successfully established three stakeholder platforms, in The Netherlands, Italy and France.

These platforms establish dialogue and cooperation between the financial and building sectors in order to increase sustainable energy investments in buildings.”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest project coordinator*

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of such platforms on the European level include: European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP); Multi-stakeholder platform on Sustainable Development Goals; EU Smart Cities Stakeholder Platform (SCSP)

<sup>2</sup> Thiele et al., 2011, Multi-stakeholder platforms for linking small farmers to value chains

<sup>3</sup> E.g. BuildInterest, Enerinvest, Sefipa, Saltgae, NewInnonet, CRMInnonet

<sup>4</sup> Hemmati, M., 2012, Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict 328 pages, Taylor and Francis, 27/04/2012



## 1.2 About stakeholder platforms

### 1.2.1 Definition

There is no common definition for what a stakeholder platform is. What we call stakeholder platforms is also referred to as a stakeholder -process, -partnership, -dialogue, -forum, -roundtable and -network.

Our understanding of a platform is close to the definitions of Thiele *et al.* (2011) and Brouwer *et al* (2016):

*...a space of interaction between different stakeholders who share a resource or common interest and interact to improve their mutual understanding, create trust, learn, reach consensus over priorities, define roles, and engage in joint action*

Thiele *et al.* (2011)<sup>5</sup>

*...a semi-structured process that helps people to work together on a common problem over a shorter or longer time*

Brouwer *et al* (2016)<sup>6</sup>

#### Example: BuildInterest objective

*“to structurally reduce uncertainty and increase trust in investments in sustainable energy in buildings by establishing a dialogue and cooperation between the financial and building sectors”*

In literature, stakeholder platforms are often referred to as MSPs, which is short for either Multi Stakeholder Platform, Multi Stakeholder Partnership or Multi Stakeholder Process.

A stakeholder in turn is defined as "any identifiable group or individual who can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives or who is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives" (Freeman and Reed, 1983: 91<sup>7</sup>).

#### Example: what is a stakeholder platform?

“Our experience in setting up stakeholder platforms has taught us the importance of a common understanding of what a platform is. Even after months into the project, we still encountered misunderstandings due to different perceptions of the concept.

A stakeholder platform was seen by some as a place for matchmaking (in our case between the finance and building sectors), a place for knowledge sharing or a place for cooperation. In the end, we found that a stakeholder platform can be all of these.”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest project coordinator*

<sup>5</sup> Thiele *et al.*, 2011, Multi-stakeholder platforms for linking small farmers to value chains

<sup>6</sup> Brouwer, H. *et al.*, 2016, The MSP Guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, Wageningen: Wageningen University and Research, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing,

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, R. Edward, Reed, David L. (1983) Stockholders and Stakeholders: A New Perspective on Corporate Governance, California Management Review (pre-1986); Spring 1983; 25, 000003; ABI/INFORM Global pg. 88



## 1.2.2 Purpose

### Function

The growing popularity of stakeholder platforms has been explained from our increasingly complex and interconnected world. This asks for collaboration and partnerships between interest groups spanning the boundaries of business, government, civil society, and science<sup>8</sup>. By collaborating in platforms, stakeholders can reach goals that would be unattainable if each participating sector worked alone. A successful platform can also help to build larger coalitions and thus create political power and advantage. They are designed to put people at the centre of decision-finding, decision-making and implementation. Stakeholder platforms serve to build trust and can provide a basis for dealing with other complicated issues in the future<sup>9</sup>.

Multi-stakeholder platforms were first proposed in the context of natural resource management, where stakeholders share a common-pool resource, such as access to water in a river basin, and the platform contributes to the collective management of the resource<sup>10</sup>.

The use of platforms in the context of value chains is less frequent than in resource management. Such platforms bring together a range of stakeholders to design solutions to problems along the value chain<sup>11</sup>. In a value chain, a platform can perform three different but interlinked functions<sup>12</sup>. It can:

- create a space for learning and joint innovation
- perform a governance function within the value chain to improve coordination of business activities by actors and reduce transaction costs
- perform advocacy functions to secure policy change or influence

#### Example: platform functions

“The BuildInterest platforms are pioneers in the field of value chain platforms. In our experience, a stakeholder platform is an excellent tool to serve each of these three purposes. Including, to our surprise, the third bullet.

We noticed that in each of our three countries, the stakeholder platform opened doors at high policy levels. Possibly because we can provide policy makers with a clear support base for a policy measure that emerges from a representative group of stakeholders.”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest Project Coordinator*

Stakeholder Platforms are found in various sectors and with different purposes. Stakeholder Platforms are increasingly used in for instance development aid, sustainable development and the environmental

<sup>8</sup> Brouwer, H. et al., 2016, The MSP Guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, Wageningen: Wageningen University and Research, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing,

<sup>9</sup> Hemmati, M., 2012, Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict 328 pages, Taylor and Francis, 27/04/2012

<sup>10</sup> Röling, N., 2002, Beyond the aggregation of individual preferences: moving from multiple to distributed cognition in resource dilemmas. Royal Van Gorcum B.V., Assen, The Netherlands, p. 25-47

<sup>11</sup> Birachi, E. et al., 2013, Innovation platforms practice brief 6, November 2013

<sup>12</sup> Thiele et al., 2011, Multi-stakeholder platforms for linking small farmers to value chains



sector. They aim to create space where communication can take place that will help to bring about agreement so that concrete action can bring about change<sup>13</sup>.

### Advantages

Stakeholder platforms have proven to be particularly useful tools to<sup>14</sup>:

- Open the space for stakeholder interaction
- Inform stakeholders
- Improve the understanding of stakeholders
- Open up a closed process
- Generate stakeholder involvement
- Generate commitment
- Inform and impact a policy-making process
- Produce information from an independent source
- Develop recommendations and guidelines for future decision-making
- Create mutual benefits (win–win rather than win–lose solutions)
- Engage in joint action towards the mutually agreed goal

#### Example: Rationale for the BuildInterest financing platform

“One of the main barriers to financing energy efficiency in buildings is that the finance and building sector do not understand each other.

BuildInterest was primarily established to open up the dialogue between these two sectors (finance and building), to generate commitment for the common goal of an energy efficient building stock and ultimately to engage in joint action towards that goal.”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest Project Coordinator*

### Limitations

Although stakeholder platforms can be helpful in many situations, they are not the mechanism of choice for all situations or problems, not even for all those that need stakeholder participation. An essential prerequisite is the presence of at least one common goal, or at least a reasonable probability that one such goal will emerge as a result of the process. Running a platform requires patience, time, and commitment.

Brouwer et al (2016) summarised the advantages and limitations of stakeholder platforms, as presented in the textbox below.

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<sup>13</sup> Hemmati, M., 2012, Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict 328 pages, Taylor and Francis, 27/04/2012

<sup>14</sup> Hemmati, M., 2012, Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict 328 pages, Taylor and Francis, 27/04/2012



**Advantages**

- Can address a more complex issue than you can tackle alone
- Partners can access complementary skills and resources from each other
- Results will have broader ownership (more sustainable)
- Learning and collaboration increases chance of systemic change

**Limitations**

- Requires time and resources to design and implement properly
- Can only work if there is sufficient representation from stakeholders
- Will often not deliver short-term success: patience is required
- Not easy to find funding for processes that are relatively open-ended and the topics of which may evolve over time

*Source: Brouwer et al (2016)*



## 2. Set-up a stakeholder platform

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### 2.1 Ex ante evaluation

The ex-ante evaluation of the platform is meant to form the basis for a go/no go decision for the initiation. During the ex-ante evaluation, you assess if an intervention by means of a platform is necessary and opportune. In an ex-ante evaluation you try to answer the following questions:

#### Can sufficient impact be expected from a stakeholder platform?

Running a stakeholder platform is a time- and resource intensive process. You want to make sure that these costs are justified by significant impact potential. This is not easy to determine (see also chapter 3.3 of this guideline) but an educated guess gives you at least an indication. This is particularly important if you have to convince an organisation to fund the platform.

The key question to be answered is whether you will be able to engage the key stakeholders, and whether there is a chance of fruitful dialogue between them.

#### Is a Stakeholder Platform the best solution to solve the problem?

Even if a stakeholder platform is expected to have a positive impact on the problem, it might not be the best solution imaginable. Have other solutions been tried in the past? Before initiating a platform you want to make sure that you have also explored other (cheaper?) potential solutions that could (help to) solve the problem.

#### Are you in a position to facilitate the platform?

If both previous questions return a positive answer, you should ask yourself whether you are in a good position to initiate and facilitate the platform. The key consideration here is whether you are perceived as a legitimate and neutral player in the field. Neutrality is particularly important if the purpose of the platform is to find consensus.

#### Example: BuildInterest project proposal

“The BuildInterest project is an EU funded Horizon 2020 project. The project proposal to apply for this funding is in essence an elaborate ex-ante evaluation of the proposed stakeholder platform(s). The proposal includes an impact assessment and motivation for the involvement of the project partners, including the facilitators.”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest Project Coordinator*

#### Go/no go

This is the moment, based on the outcome of the analysis, to decide whether or not you are going to initiate the platform.



The result could also be that there is sufficient basis to start a stakeholder platform, but it is not the right time (yet). Maybe you need to do more groundwork to convince others it is worth their effort, or there is still too much volatility and lack of trust for collaboration to be possible. Maybe the resources are simply not available at the present time, and you need to do more work to secure funding.

## 2.2 Baseline Analysis

The baseline analysis serves as the basis for the start of a platform. The analysis contains at least the following elements<sup>15</sup>:

- identification of analysis of the common problem
- analysis of the stakeholders and their willingness to reach an agreement
- assessment of on-going negotiation processes
- analysis of reasons for failing to solve the problem so far

These elements will be further addressed below.

### Identification of the problem

The baseline analysis starts with the identification and description of the problem that the platform should solve. The problem should be analysed trying to clearly identify the points of disagreement among stakeholders.

It may help to put this problem analysis in a broader context by sketching the framework in which the problem is embedded.

#### Example: Market analysis

“Carrying out an analysis of the French sustainable building market was necessary to gain a better understanding of its characteristics; we could not set up a platform that offers solutions to the relevant issues in an adequate manner without thorough insights on how the market works.

Overall, the analysis shed light on market trends, current and future risks related investment in the real estate market and obstacles to energy efficiency renovation.

Last but not the least, the organization of the platform was impacted by the results of the market analysis insofar as the selection and then implementation of the practical solutions for the second year were based on issues that needed to be addressed. For instance:

- Fostering a community of all stakeholders is one way to tackle market fragmentation and lack of dialogue between players
- A renovation pilot project was initiated to prove to private individuals that effective energy efficient renovation can be affordable”

*Gilles Le Cocquen, French financing platform Coordinator*

<sup>15</sup> Faysse, N., Cossio, V., Ampuero, R., Quiroz, F. and Paz, B., 2006, A Methodology for intervention in the design and evaluation of a short-term Multi-Stakeholder Platform. Research Report N° 4. Cochabamba, Bolivia: NEGOWAT Project



## Analysis of the stakeholders

The basis of stakeholder platform is connecting stakeholders. Key for every stakeholder platform is therefore to establish a thorough overview of the relevant stakeholders and how they relate to the subject at hand. This will determine who you should invite for your platform.

To carry out a stakeholder analysis, it is recommended to take into account the following aspects<sup>16</sup>:

- Basic data (number of stakeholders, activities)
- Their vision of the problem (often stakeholders do not initially share a common definition of the problem)
- Their role and influence
- Their interests
  - Possible differences between interests and officially taken positions
  - Possible differences between the interests of the group as a whole and the individual interests of its leaders and representatives
- Willingness to contribute to the platform
- The relationship they have with other organisations and stakeholders.
- Their history in relation to the subject

The answers to these questions determine how you should frame your platform in order to get the stakeholder support that you need.

### Example: Stakeholder analyses

“BuildInterest is a bottom-up project, which means that we determine together with our stakeholder what the focus of the financing platform should be. This requires careful selection and early involvement of the stakeholders in the process. The Stakeholder Analysis thus forms the very basis of a Stakeholder Platform and is arguably the most important step in its development”

*Marc Schouten, BuildInterest Stakeholder Analysis Expert*

The outcome of this analysis determines which stakeholders should be invited and in what role. It can help, particularly for larger platforms, to clearly distinguish between type of roles. Brouwer et al (2016) differentiates between platform “members” who are the core actors who make up the platform; “partners” who interact with the platform, contribute to defining its objectives and share information and other resources; and “clients” and “providers” who may receive goods or services from the platform or provide them on a commercial basis. In practice these categories may be somewhat blurred and some “members” may be more passive than “partners”.<sup>17</sup>

## Assessment of existing platforms or fora

There may be existing platforms, fora or networks in the field of interest. It is worthwhile to explore whether such bodies of dialogue already exist. An assessment of their purpose and activities helps to determine how your platform should relate to these existing initiatives. There may be synergies that could strengthen your platform.

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<sup>16</sup> Faysse, N., Cossio, V., Ampuero, R., Quiroz, F. and Paz, B., 2006, A Methodology for intervention in the design and evaluation of a short-term Multi-Stakeholder Platform. Research Report N° 4. Cochabamba, Bolivia: NEGOWAT Project

<sup>17</sup> Brouwer, H. et al., 2016, The MSP Guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, Wageningen University and Research, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing,



### Example: connecting to existing platforms

“By connecting to existing platforms for the same stakeholder group it was easy to connect to the stakeholders we wanted to engage in the platform. It also made sure that our topics and objectives were not in conflict with other platforms and we were creating an additional value to the stakeholders and existing platforms. This made our platform relevant to the entire network and therefore gave it a base for its existence.”

*Esther Ruijgvoorn, Dutch financing platform Coordinator*

### Analysis of the reasons for failing to reach an agreement

Clearly, if there is a need for a stakeholder platform, the stakeholders until now failed to find a solution to the problem. The underlying reasons may hold implications for the design of your platform, or even the chances of finding a solution in the first place. In this step we want to find out why a fruitful stakeholder dialogue has failed to emerge until now. Reasons may include<sup>18</sup>:

- Lack of information/awareness
- Lack of willingness of some stakeholders to discuss
- Failure to achieve a consensus regarding the process design for stakeholder dialogue

### Example: barriers to dialogue in Italy

“In the Italian platform, dialogue with market operators has highlighted the difficulty of individuals to see the renovation issue from the point of view of other operators and go beyond their own reference framework, in terms of knowledge, language and practice. Vertical roles in the energy efficiency value chain hindered a mutual understanding between individuals, preventing them from integrating visions, acquiring higher awareness and integrating competences.”

*Teresa Bagnoli, Italian financing platform Coordinator*

## 2.3 Initiation & Design

Carefully designing the platform is crucial to avoid failure and making the problem worse.

*Failure can result in stakeholders walking away from dialogue, the inability of a group to make decisions or the lack of implementation of the decisions reached. After a failed attempt to carry out an MSP, the situation might be worse than before – entering the process raises stakeholders’ expectations. Failure might increase conflict and distrust, confirm stereotypical views and diminish the ability and readiness to listen or collaborate. In other words, an unsatisfactory process can be a step back rather than forward.*

Source: Hemmati (2002)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Warner, J., 2005, Multi-stakeholder platforms: integrating society in water resource management? Ambient. soc. [online]. 2005, vol.8, n.2, pp.4-28. ISSN 1414-753X

<sup>19</sup> Hemmati et al., 2002, Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability. Beyond Deadlock and Conflict. London: Earthscan Publications. Chicago (Author-Date, 15th ed.)



## Ensure stakeholder support and representation

It is key to involve stakeholders already in the design phase to achieve the best design, commitment to the process, credibility, legitimacy and trust. This avoids confusion over the process later on, which tends to increase distrust. As a golden rule, the earlier people are consulted, listened to, and given a chance to contribute, the more likely they are to be supportive<sup>20</sup>.

Engaging the stakeholders starts with convincing them that they have an interest to join. These interests should have become apparent from the stakeholder analysis, but they may not always be obvious to the stakeholders themselves. Stakeholders will only be interested in and motivated to engage in the platform if they understand why it would be useful and how it would benefit their interests.

A good strategy is to find the most active stakeholders in a certain group and engage them first: once you have a few very committed stakeholders, it will be easier to start a dialogue with the most reluctant ones

Developing a feeling of involvement and trust is key in the early stages. This can be done through informal discussions in smaller groups or on a bilateral basis.

The stakeholder analysis forms the basis for the decision which stakeholders to involve and to what degree. Consider whether a balanced representation is required for the legitimacy of any statements or decisions following from the process. There should also be a strategy for the stakeholders who have no interest or for any other reason are not represented in the platform. If a balanced representation is required, their interests may have to be represented by other stakeholders.

It can be very important to have respected leaders from all the different stakeholder groups showing their support for the initiative. As soon as one stakeholder group perceives the process as being hijacked by another group, legitimacy will collapse<sup>21</sup>.

Try to understand if and when to involve stakeholders operating locally, nationally or internationally, how each level is influencing the other and may impact on the functioning of the platform

## Defining the objective and scope

The next step is to clearly define the objective and scope of the platform, together with the stakeholders that joined in the previous step.

The variety in platform types identified in chapter 1 mostly relates to the different type of objectives. The aim of a platform can for instance be to reach consensus, to exchange knowledge or to jointly find (innovative) solutions to a shared problem. The questions to be addressed and the goals of the process need to be very clear to all the participants and agreed by them.

The formulation and framing of the objective can have important implications for the process. Instead of framing a certain issue as a problem it could be presented as an opportunity to be explored together. This has proven to be a stronger driver for innovation, since problem-driven processes do not unlock creativity and inspiration. For platforms to achieve deeper, transformational change, they should start with the ambitions of stakeholders rather than with problems<sup>22</sup>.

When you defined and clarified your targets, select a few simple messages to communicate your objectives and engagement rules.

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<sup>20</sup> Brouwer, H. et al., 2016, The MSP Guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, Wageningen University and Research, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



Clearly defining the scope is important to give the stakeholders some understanding of how broad or narrow the agenda will be. The scope will likely evolve over time, but there should at least be agreement over the initial scope.

#### **Example: Scope creep**

“BuildInterest was designed to work with stakeholders towards developing and replicating concrete financing solutions to enable energy investments in buildings.

During the process of exploring solutions, it became evident that the solutions suggested by our stakeholders in each of the three platforms were not only much more ambitious than we expected, but consequently also had a more long-term perspective than anticipated.

This led us to broaden the project scope, both in terms of content and in time. This flexibility allowed us to greatly increase our impact on the market.”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest Project Coordinator*

## **Governance of the Platform**

### **Governance Structure**

How is the platform organised and governed, and by whom? A clear definition of the governance structure is not only important for practical purposes but also to build and maintain trust from stakeholders.

Depending on the size or complexity of the platform the governance structure could be simple or more elaborate. Platforms often install a steering group to define priority actions and typically also serve as ultimate decision making body. Steering groups typically include representatives from several stakeholder groups to lend them legitimacy.

#### **Example: Build Lab Steering Committee**

“The Steering Committee is a multi-sector group that provides to BUILD LAB for a strategic lead, helping define priority issues to work on. The great value of having a Steering Committee group is to separate the strategic level from the operative one, avoiding objectives misalignment. In order to work profitably, it is advised to compose it as a balanced group in terms of expertise, by involving technical, financial and regulatory levels and have at the table even the public authority that is in charge of the policy framework definition.”

*Teresa Bagnoli, Italian financing platform Coordinator*



### Process

Participating stakeholders need to agree on the process to be followed within the platform. What is expected from the different stakeholders? What meetings and activities will be held and when? What sort of time commitment will be required?

Procedures that need to be agreed by the participants include the procedures of preparation, communication, the ground rules for meetings, issues around confidentiality, decision-making, reporting, documentation and fund-raising.<sup>23</sup>

There are several ways to structure the meetings themselves, such as an open discussion or reacting on statements and reports. One option is not better than the other. The preferred form depends on the size of the group, aim of the meeting, knowledge level of participants and personal preferences.

Dialogue can be facilitated in a single large group or several dedicated smaller groups. Parallel sessions may be required for certain stakeholders. Some stakeholders may be particularly reluctant to join the dialogue, or a certain stakeholder group may be in need of more information or knowledge.

Some tools may facilitate the discussion. This can be a set of rules of debate, or an invitation to participants to prepare background papers before the sessions

### Facilitator

A key role in the platform governance is that of facilitator, the day to day lead of the platform. The position of this facilitator has to be clear to all. Stakeholders will wonder under what auspices or authority the platform is being established. Is it linked to a formal government process? Is it a voluntary process by the stakeholders? Is there any legal backing? What are the decision-making powers?<sup>24</sup>

For the facilitator, it is important to know how he is perceived by the stakeholders. Is the facilitator seen as neutral and legitimate? Do you, as a facilitator, wish to be seen as neutral? Should you frame or position yourself in a certain way?

#### Example: European aspect of BuildInterest

“The European connection of the Dutch platform created a new perspective on the way we look at financing and energy efficiency in the Netherlands. The position of the platform as a facilitator to other European knowledge platforms and their stakeholders made it relevant for me to actively engage in the project.”

*Bert Deen, Dynamis taxaties (BuildInterest NL platform member)*

Consider also what your role should be as facilitator. Do you merely want to facilitate the discussion and channel the stakeholders’ ideas or do you also intend to propose ideas and potential solutions. And, in case you wish to be neutral, consider whether proposing ideas does not lead to conflict with that neutrality.

The facilitator typically has the overall lead in the organisation of the platform, but it may be useful to delegate some responsibilities to other participating stakeholders. Not primarily to decrease the workload of the facilitator, but mainly to get the stakeholders committed to the process. These leading stakeholders must of course be seen as legitimate.

<sup>23</sup> Brouwer, H. et al., 2016, The MSP Guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, WUR, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



### Example: Facilitation in Italian platform BUILD LAB

“The Italian platform BUILD LAB can be considered as a laboratory created with the legitimization of the regional authority, that supplies assistance to a group of organizations that are proposing pilot projects to be evaluated, issues to be analysed or strategies to be implemented and replicated. Within this context the participating organizations are encouraged to act proactively, but through the mediation and management of a third-party subject. In the case of BUILD LAB this was financial consultancy Nomisma, who have the expertise and therefore credibility to technically help the working groups integrating experiences and delivering results.”

*Teresa Bagnoli, Italian financing platform Coordinator*

### Type of actions required

This phase builds on the baseline analysis. The type of actions required depend on the nature of the problems identified in the baseline analysis. If there is for instance a lack of information or awareness among the stakeholders, a communication campaign may be needed.

There may also be a need to improve the stakeholders' understanding of the problem and of other stakeholders' points of view.

An important consideration is whether the platform will be primarily aimed at facilitating dialogue or also at joint action. Once you have key stakeholders gathered around the table and they have agreed on the way forward with a certain issue, this momentum can be perfect for collaborative action towards the commonly agreed goal and/or pathway. The perspective of joint action can also draw in stakeholders that have become tired of just talking.

### Example: Action oriented platform in The Netherlands

“When reaching out to the stakeholders in the first period of the project, we found that people were not interested in ‘another discussion platform’, but wanted to see actions with projected results. By changing the dialogue from ‘what do you think?’ to ‘how would you approach?’, the platform and stakeholders became action oriented. This led to a better definition of the way the platform could be shaped to fit the need of the stakeholders.”

*Esther Ruijgvoorn, Dutch financing platform Coordinator*

### Align with existing platforms

In the baseline analysis we may have also identified existing platforms or bodies. It can be opportune to join forces. Maybe initiatives have already been started on similar issues with the same stakeholder groups, in which case you may find it better to align with these existing structures if possible. Monitor which initiatives are taking place in your region/country and try to understand if a match or collaboration can be established: the stronger the network, the easier would be the start-up of the platform. Make sure that you show the added value that your platform brings in comparison to already existing initiatives



### Example: French platform synergies

“The French platform facilitator Bpifrance already owned a platform dedicated to matching companies and investors, called EuroQuity. The integration of the French BuildInterest community within the EuroQuity platform was a win-win. After all, Bpifrance is a bank dedicated to innovative companies, EuroQuity is all about matchmaking companies with investors and BuildInterest is meant to foster investment in the energy efficiency building/renovation sector. Not only did building the online platform into EuroQuity ensure a quicker exposure to the public, but the platform also benefitted from EuroQuity’s success with companies.”

*Gilles Le Cocquen, French financing platform Coordinator*

### Definition of the topics

Before the platform can be launched, there should at least be a rough outline of the topics to be discussed, including the sequence of those topics, to give the stakeholders an idea of what they can expect.

### Example: Sequence of the topics

“The BuildInterest project started with a joint analysis of the barriers to energy efficiency financing in the building sector. This was followed by identifying and selecting solutions, and finally jointly developing and implementing those solutions.

The prospect of joint cooperation convinced some stakeholders to also join the earlier stages, even though they were initially reluctant to do so.”

*Roel van der Veen, BuildInterest Roadmap Coordinator*

## Documenting

Throughout this guideline we have stressed the importance of having stakeholder support for decisions concerning the aim of the platform, the process to be followed etc. Once consensus has been reached on all these elements you can put all these decisions on paper and have the stakeholders sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This document then serves as the basis for the cooperative work. The MOU can include the following components<sup>25</sup>:

- Specific activities that are to be jointly undertaken.
- Respective roles and responsibilities of MSP group members.
- Responsibilities of facilitators and other positions within the MSP group.
- Types of information to be shared and standards for sharing of information, including agreements on confidentiality.
- Time-frame for completing each phase of the work.
- Methods for group decision-making and conflict resolution.
- How outcomes of the MSP will be integrated into the official decision-making processes.

<sup>25</sup> Hemmati, M., 2012, Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict 328 pages, Taylor and Francis, 27/04/2012



- Resources to be provided by each member of the MSP group.

According to Hemmati (2012), platforms should not only publish their discussions and outcomes but also keep records of their design. Information should be made available on who initiated the process and who was involved at a specific time, on the issues and questions, and on which mechanisms were employed to identify stakeholders, issues, objectives, rules and procedures, and so on<sup>26</sup>. You can develop a roadmap with stakeholders that shows the end goal and proposes several complementary pathways that can help the Stakeholder Platform move towards that goal. Detailed choices on which pathway to use will be made later, based on feedback and testing<sup>27</sup>.

#### Example: Recording the design

“We decided to record most of our activities in Roadmaps, one for each of the three stakeholder platforms. This makes our process transparent, not only for the platform members but also for the external stakeholders. It enables all stakeholders to inform themselves of the activities and decisions in the platform, even if they were not involved in that particular step. The forward looking sections helped stakeholders to prepare and anticipate the next steps.”

*Roel van der Veen, BuildInterest Roadmap Coordinator*

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<sup>26</sup> Hemmati, M., 2012, Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict 328 pages, Taylor and Francis, 27/04/2012

<sup>27</sup> Brouwer, H. et al., 2016, The MSP Guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, WUR, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing



## 3. Run a stakeholder platform

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### 3.1 Facilitating Stakeholder Dialogue

#### Facilitation

The facilitator is the central actor in the stakeholder platform, this is the person or organisation that facilitates and enables the dialogue. Susskind and Cruikshank (1987) differentiate between facilitation, where the organisation supports the process (e.g. organises the meetings), but does not give any proposal to improve the search for a commonly agreed solution; and mediation, where the organization puts proposals on the table as an inputs for the discussion<sup>28</sup>. Here, we refer to both roles as ‘facilitation’.

The facilitator connects the stakeholders within the platform but also reaches out and connects to the outside world. Often, the facilitator is also the initiator of the platform.

The roles and tasks of the facilitator include:

- Bring actors together
- Create a sense of urgency
- Spur interaction
- Moderate
- Manage differences
- Engage in mutual learning
- Get stakeholders to collaborate
- Stimulate actors to think outside the box
- Catalyse the process
- Obtain (political) support

#### Example: Facilitation in the Dutch BuildInterest platform

“The Dutch BuildInterest platform is an action oriented platform, focused on facilitating action and results. By connecting stakeholders we create dialogue and support sharing new knowledge and ideas. A practical example is our working group on the valuation of energy efficiency measures in buildings. We started with plenary events where people could learn about this specific topic and we have evolved to a dedicated workshop group researching the way valuation of energy efficiency measures can be standardised, supported by a university, the Dutch National Bank and RICS. We went from facilitating the sharing knowledge to facilitating the creating knowledge and will facilitate the engagement of stakeholders as well on this and other topics.”

*Esther Ruijgvoorn, Dutch financing platform Coordinator*

An effective and respected facilitator has a good understanding of the context, is open to new ideas and keen to work in a team<sup>29</sup>. Keywords for the facilitation of the process are a critical and informed analysis, trust, emotional engagement and creativity for when the process is in stalemate.

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<sup>28</sup> Susskind, L., Cruikshank, J., 1987. Breaking the impasse: consensual approaches to resolving public disputes. New York: Basic Books, 276 pp

<sup>29</sup> Mann, 2007, Facilitation - An Art, Science, Skill or All Three? Build your expertise in Facilitation



Successful facilitators are described as bridging agents<sup>30</sup>, interlocutors<sup>31</sup>, or innovation brokers<sup>32</sup>. The facilitator should constantly ask himself the following questions:

- Do stakeholders still trust each other?
- Does everyone still share and support the common goal?
- Do I understand all the positions and issues of the different stakeholder groups?
- Are all responsibilities clear to everyone?

### Activities and events

A stakeholder platform uses a medium, or infrastructure, to facilitate the stakeholder dialogue and cooperation. These are typically bigger and smaller events where stakeholders meet and interact. Common forms are workshops, roundtables and conferences. The meeting type of choice depends on the purpose of the meeting and size of the stakeholder group.

Roundtables are typically organised for consensus building. A certain topic is discussed in an informal setting with the aim to come to a common understanding or agreement.

Workshops are typically of a similar size as roundtables but they tend to be more action oriented. They can be multi-stakeholder workshops involving various combinations of relevant stakeholders, or single-stakeholder workshops that enable a single group or sector to prepare for engaging in the platform.

Conferences are bigger events to engage a wider audience. They are typically a combination of a plenary session, with little interaction, and side events such as workshops or roundtables.

It can also be useful to have smaller, dedicated meetings with key people whose support and influence are critical.

Finally, internal meetings are often held to keep the platform running. These include meetings of the steering or advisory group, and meetings within the facilitating organisation.

#### Example: BuildInterest events

“The BuildInterest platforms started with a series of roundtables to define the problem together with our stakeholders. Subsequently, workshops were organised to work on the solutions that were selected in the roundtable sessions. Finally, the results were shared and discussed with stakeholders outside the platform in a series of international events.”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest Project Coordinator*

Below we will shortly address some options to consider in the organisation of such events

#### Chatham House Rule

Meetings about sensitive topics are often held under the Chatham House Rule. The Chatham House Rule reads as follows:

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<sup>30</sup> Manning, S. and Roessler, D., 2014, ‘The Formation of Cross-Sector Development Partnerships: How Bridging Agents Shape Project Agendas and Longer-Term Alliances’, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 123: 527–47.

<sup>31</sup> Fowler, A., 2014, Innovation in institutional collaboration. The role of interlocutors, ISS Working Paper Series / General Series, Volume 584 p. 1- 29

<sup>32</sup> Swaans, K., Cullen, B., Van Rooyen, A. F., Adekunle, A., Ngwenya, H., Lema, Z., & Nederlof, S., 2013, Dealing with critical challenges in African innovation platforms: Lessons for facilitation. *Knowledge Management for Development Journal*, 9(3), 116-135.



*When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed<sup>33</sup>.*

The rule encourages openness and the sharing of information.

### Language

Communication can be a challenge when stakeholders speak different languages, such as in international platforms. English can be a solution, but is often difficult. Some stakeholders have insufficient command of English to engage in discussion, particularly if the discussion becomes detailed and technical. Another solution is simultaneous translation, although this has its own flaws and is rather expensive.

#### Example: bi-lingual conference in Italy

“The organisation of an International Event partly in Italian and partly in English with simultaneous translation, allowed the speakers to deal with the talks in the most comfortable language. The double-language was appreciated both by the audience, who gained the possibility to listen to international speakers, and the speakers who were able to express themselves on this technical topic in the best way and be understood.”

*Laura Maini, Italian Financing Platform  
Communication and External Relations, Brand and Events*

### Capacity-building

A difference in knowledge level between the stakeholders or stakeholder groups may hinder the process. It could result in withdrawal from less knowledgeable people from the process, and they may come to the negotiation table without other stakeholder groups paying attention to their points of view<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, it may be necessary to organise capacity-building events for these stakeholders before the process implementation<sup>35</sup>.

### Online interaction

Nowadays also the possibilities of the internet are increasingly exploited to facilitate stakeholder dialogue. Online fora and platforms offer excellent opportunities for stakeholder interaction and knowledge exchange. A stakeholder platform could even operate exclusively online. This could be particularly interesting for international stakeholder platforms, where physical meetings may be difficult and costly.

### Communication of results

Since not all stakeholders can be involved in the platform, a sound communication strategy is important to reach all stakeholders. You want to make sure that the outcomes and decisions of the planning process are constantly communicated and explained to the wider stakeholder groups because you might lose support if the wider community does not understand why particular decisions have been taken.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-rule>

<sup>34</sup> Edmunds, D., Wollenberg, E., 2001, A Strategic Approach to Multistakeholder Negotiations. Article in Development and Change 32(2):231 - 253 · March 2001

<sup>35</sup> Warner, J., 2007, Multi-stakeholder platforms for integrated water management, edited by Jeroen Warner, Ashgate, 2007, ISBN 978-0-7546-7065 0.



The easiest way to reach a large stakeholder group is to communicate online, through websites and social media.

**Example: BuildInterest communication strategy**

“During the work on the stakeholder analysis, it became evident that in order to foster impact, both within the duration of its EC funded lifecycle as well as for the sustainability of the platforms after the end of the project, the main goal of dissemination should not only be to raise awareness of the project’s results and to stimulate their uptake, but additionally attract as much users as possible to be involved in the BuildInterest activities.

We decided that strong engagement of relevant stakeholders throughout Europe will ensure the successful implementation and international aspect of the project, bringing more benefits for all relevant sides and creating mass effect on a highly-discussed topic. Therefore, it was important to achieve higher connections between the national platforms and use a communication strategy reaching out to a large number of stakeholders not involved directly in the work of the platforms. Thus, building upon the already established national contacts, the communication strategy adds relevant international stakeholders for increase of visibility and replication.”

*Youssef Sabbah, BuildInterest Communication Manager*

It is a good idea to brand your platform, in order to be recognisable for your stakeholders.

## Resources

A practical consideration is securing resources for the platform, in terms of finance and human resources. Funding will be needed for the platform’s own activities, as well as for the participation costs of the stakeholders.

For the sake of transparency, it helps to publish the sources of your funding. In general, a platform funded with public money is more likely to be perceived as neutral.

As discussed before, a platform can be temporary (until the aim is reached) or permanent. In the last situation, it is important to secure long-term funding. A membership fee could enable a platform to sustain itself.

**Example: Ensuring long-term funding for the 3 BuildInterest platforms**

“The three BuildInterest platforms were funded by the European Commission for a period of 2 years. To ensure continuity, three facilitators were selected in the design phase with a clear interest in the continuation of the platforms. This resulted in three platforms that have secured resources for independent continuation in the coming years, even after the end of the EC funding .”

*Marco Bakker, BuildInterest project coordinator*



## 3.2 Collaborative Action

Stakeholder platforms are often criticised for talking too much and acting too little. Yet, they are often in a unique position to get things done. Key stakeholders are around the table and may have agreed on the way forward with a certain issue. This momentum can be perfect for collaborative action towards the commonly agreed goal and/or pathway.

Collaborative action requires a different approach than mere dialogue.

### Develop action plans

To structure the collaborative action, it helps to develop action plans. These plans detail basically who is going to do what, when, and how. The action plans are typically improved and updated on the go.

### Secure resources and support

Collaborative action tends to be more resource intensive than dialogue. The required resources for the facilitator may be comparable but carrying out projects within the scope of the platform means that stakeholder groups may need to commit resources, or there may be an opportunity to obtain funding from third parties. Moving to the collaborative action phase will often mean you need to mobilise support<sup>36</sup>. Open your platform only when you are ready: if you want to work with a large community, be certain you are able and have the capacity to listen to a great number of issues, collect contributions and respond quickly. Keep enough human resources on the development and then animation of the platform; if you lose focus on the activities because too few people work on it, your stakeholders will lose interest too

### Maintain stakeholder commitment

As the roles of stakeholders change, so may their commitment. Initiating a stakeholder platform and participating in a dialogue asks for a different set of competences than engaging in collaborative action. This means that stakeholders may not feel comfortable anymore with their role. New people could come on board, who lack much of the knowledge from the earlier phases of the platform. This need not be a problem, the opportunity to obtain new knowledge, skills, and networks can be a key incentive for stakeholders to remain active. To maintain stakeholder commitment, it is good to be aware of the motivation of stakeholders to be engaged and to make sure that they still feel comfortable in their role. Select a few stakeholders to move forward on some specific initiatives within the platform; it is not possible to involve all players in all activities at all times once you reach a critical size.

#### Example: Stakeholder involvement in Italy

“The Italian platform BUILD LAB has created an environment that helps energy efficiency operators to work collaboratively and to find systemic solutions. While the individual organisations are stimulated to actively and independently adopt our platform’s tools and guidelines, at the same time BUILD LAB continues to operate as an independent platform that supports the public authority in increasing the effectiveness of the regulatory framework to foster the BUILD LAB tools and objectives.”

*Serena Maioli, Italian financing platform manager*

<sup>36</sup> Brouwer, H. et al., 2016, The MSP Guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, WUR, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing



### 3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

The organisation that initiated and the organisation(s) that fund the stakeholder platform will be interested to know whether it actually delivers the desired results. Monitoring and evaluation are therefore important to maintain or even increase support for the platform.

At the core of any evaluation are the key questions of impact, relevance, sustainability, effectiveness, and efficiency. In order to put a measure on these, you want to define indicators or KPIs.

To streamline the monitoring and evaluation activities, it helps to develop a methodology in an early stage of the platform. That allows you to record and collect the right information and data along the way, which can be much more efficient than finding out afterwards that you need data which was never recorded in the first place.

Finally, if the platform is ongoing, naturally you want to make sure to act on your findings.

#### **Example: BuildInterest Impact Assessment**

“The monitoring of a platform is a crucial activity to maintain stakeholder commitment by showing the platform results. In the case of BuildInterest, monitoring the platforms’ impact was also necessary to justify the European Commission funding.”

*Paul van den Oosterkamp, BuildInterest Impact Manager*



## 4. Concluding remarks

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We conclude this guideline with a few key recommendations, based on our experience with setting up and running stakeholder platforms over the past 2 years:

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to the wide variety of stakeholder platforms out there, so apply the methodology in this guideline with flexibility
- Have patience, aligning opposing views or interests of stakeholders can be a slow and difficult process
- Keep your stakeholders engaged and motivated, without them there is no platform



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