

# BLUE



## Result 3 Networking Guide

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# Table of content

Introduction	4
Background of the BLUE-C Project	4
The Regional BLUE-C Network Guide	4
The BLUE-C regional network	5
What exactly is a “Regional Network”?	5
The need for a “BLUE-C Network”	5
BLUE-C network members	5
How to start a new regional network	6
Expected impact	7
Step 1. Preparation material	7
Defining the network’s purpose and objectives	7
Expectation setting	8
Defining other necessary information	9
Step 2. Identifying stakeholders	9
Defining stakeholders	9
Stakeholder analysis	10
Step 3. Communication campaign	11
What to communicate	12
How to communicate	12
Step 4. Establish the first meeting	13
Preparation	13
Kick-off	14
Step 5. Co-creation	16
Topics to discuss	16
Review the made agreements	17
Step 6. Establish a communication protocol	17
Topics to discuss	17
Review the made agreements	18
Tips and tricks	18
Step 7. Follow-up	19
Gather feedback	19
Recap of the first meeting	19
Assuring continuity	20
Impact of the BLUE-C Network	20

# Introduction

## *Background of the BLUE-C Project*

“Maritime renewable energy, food from the sea, sustainable coastal and maritime tourism, the blue bio-economy and many other activities constituting the blue economy will help us come out of this crisis stronger, healthier, more resilient and more sustainable. We are doing everything we can to cushion the impact of the lockdown, protect the jobs in the blue economy and the wellbeing of our coastal communities, while retaining our environmental ambitions.”

We are the BLUE-C partnership, and we aim to enhance sustainability and competitiveness of the blue economy. We will do this by promoting collaboration and connections across our coastal communities, by growing digital competences and by sharing best practices on coastal and maritime tourism.

The BLUE-C's objectives are:

- Amplifying the importance of sustainability & social responsibility in the blue economy
- Reduce environmental impact of coastal and maritime tourism
- Highlight the value of digital readiness and online visibility to grow the blue economy
- Grow and develop digital competences as we move towards recovery and resilience
- Strengthen competitiveness among micro entrepreneurs using the 3Cs
- Establish and build strong collaborating coastal community clusters

We have started off with a strong international partnership across 6 countries and we are all advocating for coastal communities and micro entrepreneurs. As part of the project plan each partner has committed to organise local focus sessions that will be the space to gather the opinions, experiences, and ideas from our target group and asking what really matters. The findings from these will form the basis of the BLUE-C learning programme, BLUE-C platform, and the BLUE-C regional network.

BLUE-C will deliver 3 main results;

1. BLUE-C Skill Framework & Best Practices
2. BLUE-C Learning Programme & Platform
3. Establishing a Regional BLUE-C Network

During the project's lifetime, different regional BLUE-C networks in each partners' country were established and documented in this guide. The BLUE-C Network Guide will be a reflection of both positive and poor practices, and contains a step-by-step guide to the approach on how to form a regional BLUE-C network, mirroring and choosing the best approaches in how partners established the BLUE-C consortium.

## *The Regional BLUE-C Network Guide*

*This document is developed for interested parties that would like to establish a regional BLUE-C Network. This guide contains 7 steps in order to create a foundation for a new BLUE-C Network. Through research and consultation with experts, this guide is developed and subsequently put into practice by setting up the regional networks in each of the BLUE-C Consortium countries. The outputs of the research to the practical experiences are included.*



# The BLUE-C regional network

## *What exactly is a “Regional Network”?*

Creating a network means we’re starting a process of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship in which people with a common profession or special interest exchange information and ideas. The process often starts with a single point of common ground. There are many advantages to creating a network, meeting new contacts, staying current, problem solving. However the main importance of a network is to provide opportunities and gaining valuable knowledge.

Being able to discuss certain matters with entrepreneurs from the same industry gives people the chance to share and gain information, ideas and also experiences. Moreover, it gives the opportunity to learn to see things from a different perspective. Which is exactly why BLUE-C aims for a network, a strong alliance to encourage Blue Growth through Co-creation, Co-design and Co-work.

Working together within the network is more effective when the stakeholders are located in the same area. This not only makes the network more approachable, but it is also more likely the collaboration will be stronger and closer, which is necessary to establish a network that increases the impact, stimulates innovation and reaches short- and long-term goals.

Within the BLUE-C Network, the aim is to develop a great know-how in maritime activities, strengthen different sectors within the local area and support prospective entrepreneurs through engagement and collaboration. The BLUE-Network will be a place where entrepreneurs can share their knowledge and experiences and develop new ideas which can support existing businesses.

## *The need for a “BLUE-C Network”*

Maritime and coastal tourism are vital sectors of the economy in many countries and it is a sector that keeps on growing. By promoting conservation and sustainable use of the marine environments and species, generating income for the local community and maintaining and respecting the local culture, tradition and heritage, sustainable tourism can be part of the blue economy. Therefore it is essential for micro enterprises to gather and share, connect and join forces to increase this sustainability potential in their local communities. When micro enterprises in maritime and coastal tourism share their knowledge, ideas and experiences and work together they will be able to enhance sustainability and competitiveness of the blue economy.

Moreover, micro enterprises in coastal and maritime tourism are, in many cases, small local businesses that are too busy or distanced from opportunities of collaboration and knowledge exchange. By BLUE-C taking the first step of creating the network, it is more likely that this will increase the approachability and willingness of joining the network.

Through the BLUE-C Network we will support micro entrepreneurs in the coastal and maritime industry in establishing a network in which they will be able to support each other in collaborating and strengthening their positions in the local market. Therefore, the BLUE-C Network aims to meet the regional needs. In other words, the BLUE-C Regional network is the ability to co-work by applying co-creation and co-design through sharing knowledge, ideas and experiences.

## *BLUE-C network members*

Throughout the BLUE-C consortium the formation of the BLUE-C Network will differ per region. Moreover, each network will probably contain a wide variety of participants from different fields. However, all the members will have a connection with either tourism or important stakeholders that also have knowledge on the blue economy or creating awareness locally. In preliminary research the following stakeholders were mentioned to be approached for the network.

Sail rental – boat rental	Sailing boat owners (tall ships/charter ships/etc.	Fishing expedition organisations	Restaurants
Bed & Breakfasts	Hotels	Cafés	Bike rental
Marine clubs	Incubators	Business Associations	Training centres
Federations	Local authorities	VET bodies	HE institutions
Experts in tourism	Social enterprises	Digital enterprises	Tourism offices

Although, these are just examples in order to give an indication of possible stakeholders, every stakeholder that can bring something regarding tourism, blue economy, sustainability etc. to the table can be approached for the network. Moreover, other organisations related to the network objectives can be approached once these are determined in the first network session. These organisations don't necessarily have to become a member of the network, but can provide supporting activities and workshops.

### *How to start a new regional network*

This Networking Guide will help you establish your regional BLUE-C Network step-by-step. Each of the steps will give you some background information, show you the importance of the step and most importantly it will give you some practical tips on how to actually take the step. The guide consists of 7 steps, which are as followed:

#### **Step 1: Preparation material**

Preparation of material that is going to be presented and disseminated to the possible stakeholders. (Presentations on the Objectives & purpose of the network – project). Set the expectations, the advantages and the goals (why do we want the members to gather, common purpose, what's in it for them?) Long term and short term wins

**Step 2: Identify stakeholders.** Here we should focus on the people who will be able to make a difference. Quality over quantity.

#### **Step 3: Communication campaign (invite stakeholders)**

Organise a communication campaign to attract stakeholders using social media posts and email campaigns. A methodology should be drawn to find the most effective ways of attracting potential members.

#### **Step 4: Establish the first face-to-face meeting**

Organise a face-to-face meeting in order for the participants to meet each other, share their ideas, knowledge, experiences and most importantly their thoughts on the building of the network. Present all the appropriate materials prepared in step 1. Also, rules of play and specific objects will be determined. Perhaps, the local key persons can launch the first meeting, with a special interest in the blue economy and sustainability in tourism.

#### **Step 5: Co-creation**

Co-creation activities to define the roadmap towards the realisation of the objectives

#### **Step 6: Establish a communication protocol**

Agree on a communication protocol among all the stakeholders in order to set up regular meetings in the future.

#### **Step 7: Follow-up**

Make the final amendments and discussions regarding the meetings, goals and objectives. Make sure you evaluate previous meetings and make plans for future meetings

## Expected impact

According to the regional BLUE-C Network and its potential members, the purpose and therefore also the impact will be defined. Nevertheless, the project aims for enhancing sustainability and competitiveness and encouraging Blue Growth. This means that the impact of the network is expected to be related to the project's aim. Some of these expected impacts are as followed:

- Regional growth
- Placing a spotlight on the Blue Economy and the need to invest and protect
- Increase in sustainability and sustainable companies
- Better digital resilience for small entrepreneurs
- More resilient tourism, leisure and hospitality sectors
- Increased network
- The network will support local entrepreneurs to embrace 'blue' best practices
- Become more competitive by upskilling their digital competences
- Raise environmental awareness in the region
- Raise awareness of sustainability in tourism among tourists
- Increase in blue initiatives
- Spark ideas for new services and products
- Learning and using new skills, to increase and improve local business strategies
- Higher knowledge in digital skills, which results in a wider reach for organisations applying online marketing-sale methods

## Step 1. Preparation material

Before beginning with anything it is essential to prepare properly, since success comes from preparation. Understanding what you are preparing for is exceptionally important and thus try to start focussing on understanding what the objective and purpose of the network should be. Furthermore, it might be helpful to think of what expectations the possible members need to know and what they would like to know beforehand. By defining the objectives, purpose and expectations of the network it will be more likely for you to engage and connect with the representatives. Through engaging interactions it will be easier to develop a relationship, which is the key of establishing a network.

### *Defining the network's purpose and objectives*

Even though the main aim for the BLUE-C project is to establish a strong alliance to encourage Blue Growth through Co-creation, Co-design and Co-work, the way in how this network will be established, who will join the network and what the specific goals of the network are can differ per regional network. Therefore, it is essential to define the specific objectives and purpose of your network.

The purpose is a long term achievable and generally broad outcome. This purpose should align with the BLUE-C mission statement and your network's mission statement. This means that your mission statement includes your purpose and could therefore start with the words: "Encouraging Blue Growth through ...". The second part of the mission statement is your exact purpose, thus where you explain why you exist as a network. This needs to be a clear statement, where both people



within the network as people who have never heard of the network know exactly what the network is about.

Once the purpose and mission statement are defined, it is time to define the set of objectives. The objectives are shorter term and should define the measurable actions to take in order to achieve the outcome, the purpose. Multiple objectives will lead to the overall purpose of the network and validate its success. The objectives are, in a way, the guidelines that the network should follow. To make the objectives as effective as possible, you could follow the SMART-criteria. This means each objective should be made **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-bound.

Both the purpose and the objectives are key to establishing the network, you can't have one without the other. However, it is also important to remember that these are not set in stone, they both may also require adjustment as the process goes forward. While building the network, you find out that taken another route might be more helpful, or it is a route that stakeholders rather take, then adjustments might be necessary. Moreover, adjustments can signal that attention is being paid to the regional environment, which is nothing but a good sign.



#### Tip

Maybe another organisation has the same purposes as you do, you can opt for collaboration and define the network and its objectives together. One of the BLUE-C partners, Turku UAS, collaborated for example with the business ombudsman of Sauvo municipality.

Or

Try to add the aspect of strategic destination development. Use a long-term development perspective in the management and development of the destination, by focusing on shared vision and mission with all stakeholders and locals. – Turku UAS

## Expectation setting

When you have laid the foundation of the network, you will have to gather and define the information that the possible stakeholders, who you would like to include in the network, would want to know, specifically what they could expect. Therefore, you will need to set expectations. This is essential to provide clarity, help the stakeholders understand their role and how they fit into the bigger picture. Moreover, it sets the stage for ongoing development opportunities. It is more likely expectation setting will increase the stakeholders' engagement and builds trust between the founders and stakeholders. Setting expectations requires a careful balance, since you don't want to be too vague and neither too specific. You would rather want to provide enough guidance to ensure that stakeholders know what to do, while at the same time allowing them the freedom to take part in their own way with their own ideas and experiences.

When you set the expectations, you will have to start with combining expectations to your stated objectives. Make sure that each of your objectives have at least one corresponding expectation. Additionally, you could add other expectations that are important to your network, such as the culture or ethos within the network. Keep in mind that also the expectations are not set in stone. Remember that your stated expectations will be used to provide a clear picture of the BLUE-C Regional Network. Once you've made a connection with a possible stakeholder, it is important to discuss these expectations. Communicate openly and clearly what your expectations are regarding the network's purpose and objectives, and try to create a dialogue in which the stakeholders are

able to indicate their view on these expectations. Therefore, it is also important to solicit feedback on these expectations. By providing stakeholders with opportunities to give feedback, you can ensure that your expectations are realistic and that your stakeholders feel supported.

Even though, the expectations are not set in stone, it is essential that you are consistent. It is not only important they know what is expected from them, it is also important they understand what they can expect from the network.

### *Defining other necessary information*

Once the purpose, objectives and expectations are defined, you should have a clear picture of what the network should entail and what you would like to achieve, which is the foundation of the preparation material. Besides the purpose, objectives and expectations you could always gather other information you think is necessary to convince possible stakeholders to join the network. Think of advantages that can be achieved both through the network as for the network, and thus what is in it for them and what are the long term and short term wins. Or in other words 'why do people want to join your network?'

When you think you've gathered all the information that the stakeholders need to know and would like to know, make sure to summarize and refine this into something that is easy to present, either on paper (with brochures or leaflets) or via an actual presentation, or rather both. It is important that these look attractive and that the atmosphere of the presentation fits the Network's atmosphere.

## **Step 2. Identifying stakeholders**

In order to establish a network, a mutually beneficial relationship, it is important to identify the right stakeholders that would not only be interested in joining the network, but who would also contribute to the network. The goal is to rather find stakeholders that could play an important role in the BLUE-C Regional Network than to find as many members as possible. However, before knowing which stakeholders would play an important role, it is essential to analyse what different stakeholders there are and what they are able to bring to the network.

### *Defining stakeholders*

Before starting analysing, you should understand the definition of a stakeholder. A stakeholder is someone who has some important connection with something, and therefore is affected by its success or failure, according to Longman dictionary. Because the network aims for a twofold purpose (where the Blue Growth needs to be encouraged and where members should also benefit from the network), it is even more important to find the right stakeholders that would be perfect members of the network. Moreover, these stakeholders need to be involved rather soon in the process of establishing the network, in order for them to contribute and take ownership of the network. Since their knowledge, understanding and experience of and with the community can prove invaluable in helping your process. You also want the process to be regarded as transparent, especially to build trust, which makes involvement from the beginning a necessary step.

Your stated purpose and objectives are an important foundation of determining who all your stakeholders are, because you need to involve them in a way that advances the purpose and objectives. Therefore, try to think of not only the parties that are likely to be directly affected by your network, but also think beyond the obvious. Also try to not only think of those who will be affected by the network, but think also of everyone that has an interest in your objectives. In order to gain the best results, it is recommended to use more than one way to identify stakeholders, by for example, using the following methods:

- Brainstorming.

- Collecting categories and names from informants in the community
- Consulting with organisations
- Getting more ideas from stakeholders

Moreover, you could use the overview of stakeholders mentioned earlier in this guide (BLUE-C network members, p. 7) as an example or inspiration for brainstorming on your possible stakeholders. Remember that even though the goal is to have quality over quantity, in this phase you are only gathering all the possible stakeholders. In the next step you will divide them into groups and in the end you will choose certain stakeholders. Therefore, it won't be a problem to gather as many different stakeholders you could think of.



### Tip

“It is very important to select the initial members of the network so that they are committed and proactive as this will lay a good foundation on which to work later. This is more important than selecting large organizations that may not be as committed or active. That is the only way for more members to want to take part.”- EOLAS

## Stakeholder analysis

Once you've identified multiple stakeholders, it is time to analyse these stakeholders in order to choose who you would want, and who you need in your network and thus the ones that you need to approach. To create a list or an overview of all the possible stakeholders you have found, it might be helpful to divide the stakeholders in certain groups. This can be done with stakeholder mapping. There are many different ways to divide the stakeholders, therefore it is important to determine what important factors of stakeholders that you will consider. Such criteria can be for example:

- Knowledge; What knowledge or expertise can the stakeholder bring into the network regarding the network's purpose and objectives?
- Experience; What experiences can the stakeholder bring into the network regarding the network's purpose and objectives?
- Interest; How positively interested is the stakeholder in the network's purpose and objectives?
- Influence; How much influence does the stakeholder have in the community?
- Involvement; How involved is the stakeholder willing to be in the network?

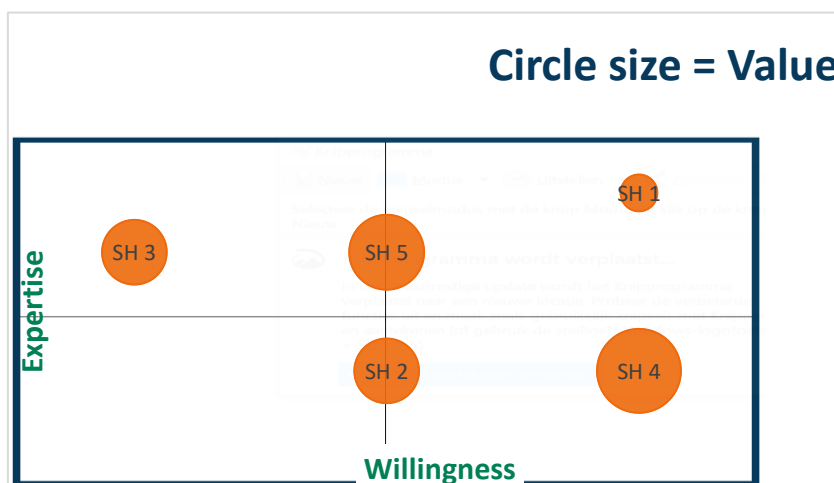
Rate each of the stakeholders according to the above mentioned criteria, make sure you have a clear picture and understanding of the stakeholder. It might be helpful to write short descriptions with each of the criteria, before actually rating them. Subsequently, you can rate the stakeholders by assigning value to them in the table below (see also annex I). You can assign the stakeholders by valuing them with: low, medium or high.

	Expertise		Willingness	Value	
	Knowledge	Experience	Interest	Influence	Involvement
Stakeholder 1	High	High	High	Low	Low
Stakeholder 2	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	High
Stakeholder 3	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Medium
Stakeholder 4	Medium	Low	High	High	High
Stakeholder 5	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High

Table 1. Example of the Stakeholder Table

When you have rated the stakeholders, you will need to create an overview, in which it is clearly visible where the stakeholders stand on the basis of your criteria and thus which stakeholders are best to approach for your network. This overview can be visualised in a “Stakeholder Mapping Quadrant”.

The Stakeholder Mapping Quadrant shows exactly where stakeholders stand regarding to your network. The stakeholders that come up in the upper-right corner and have the biggest circles are the ones you definitely would like to approach for your network. Stakeholders in other areas of the quadrant need to be considered according to what is most important to you and the network. Though, a variety of stakeholders with different experiences, knowledge or influence might also be helpful for the network’s purpose. As long as you keep the network’s purpose and objectives in mind when considering the different stakeholders. Check whether you have captured the most relevant parties and create a list with these stakeholders to be involved in the BLUE-C Regional Network. These relevant stakeholders are from now on the network’s potential members.



Graph 1: The Stakeholder Mapping Quadrant



**Tip**

“It might not always be possible to carry out a very in-depth analysis in rather small areas. In those cases, it is also possible to involve everyone who is interested and ready to commit to the network, as too much selection can even cause discord in a small community.” – Turku UAS

### Step 3. Communication campaign

Once the parties that you’d like to involve in the network are identified, it is time to attract, approach and invite these parties to become a part of the BLUE-C Network. This will be the first step to actually build the relationship, and thus communication is key in this phase. Communication is essential and useful at all points of the network’s development and is an ongoing process. However, for now, you will have to focus on getting the word out about the BLUE-C network and how to attract the stakeholders in becoming BLUE-C Network members.

The BLUE-C Communication campaign begins with identifying *what* you would like to communicate and *how* you would communicate to the potential members.

## What to communicate

The message that you will send needs to be clear, precise and attractive. What you might want to say in the message depends on what you are trying to accomplish with the communication strategy. Therefore, it is essential to identify the purpose of communication before actually writing the content. In the first and foremost place, you need to *recruit members for the BLUE-C Network*. However, it is also important to *become known or better known within the community*. And another purpose of the communication, which might be helpful in this phase, but will become more important once the network is established, is *educating the public about the issue the network addresses*. Keep those three purposes in mind when creating the message to the BLUE-C potential members.

The next step is creating the content of the message. The purpose and objectives of the BLUE-C Network obviously need to be stated clearly in the message, no matter which channel will be used. Moreover, the scope, advantages and expectations of the network and the role of the potential member should be highlighted in the message.

Some tips to write a strong and clear message are:

- Decide your structure – This means that you should create a way to best organise the information you want to tell in the message.
- Write simply – make sure the text is easy to read and easy to understand. Try to “pull” the reader through the text in a logical order.
- Use active voice – This tends to make the writing more engaging and immediate for the reader. Try to do this by sticking to basic simple sentence structure for the most part.
- Use precise verbs – This helps the reader create a clearer mental image of your given information.
- Mood of your message – Consider what emotions you want to appeal to.
- Proofread your work – Let someone else read your text and see if the text was indeed clearly and understandable, and check whether the message came across.

Also keep in mind that using different communication channels, may ask for different approaches to writing and presenting your message.

## How to communicate

Depending on the stakeholders that you’ve selected, you will have to choose the communication channels. You will have to reach the potential members by placing your message where they will see it. Since you are asking for an engagement, a relationship, a long-term process, it is recommended to invite the potential members personally. This could be either via email, telephone or a physical invitation. Make sure to select the right methodology in introducing yourself and the network according to the potential member, where one might prefer email, others rather meet people in person. Moreover, consider the right tone of voice, formal or informal.

Even though you might be using different approaches in communication per potential member, it is important to have a list ready with the subjects you need to include in each of your conversations. As mentioned above in ‘what to communicate’, you should at least include the following topics:

- Purpose and objectives of the BLUE-C Network
- Scope, advantages and expectations of the Network
- The Network’s process and the role of the potential member
- Logistical and practical information regarding the network’s process

To make sure you give the same information to all potential members, it might be helpful to prepare templates. You could, for example, create presentations to share with the potential members. This is a nice way to already give an impression of the network, especially when you use the BLUE-C Network's image, colours and layout.

Furthermore, when you choose to send emails to certain potential members, it might be helpful to also prepare a template for this email. Or you could create a brochure which you can handout when you meet the potential members in person and which you can attach to the email when inviting them via email. Again, the brochure idea is a nice way to already show the potential members a first impression of the Network.

Keep in mind that when you create the templates for reaching out to the potential members and inviting them to join the BLUE-C Network, you stay personal towards the stakeholders and therefore, you should adapt each template to the stakeholder.

Once the potential members are enthusiastic and willing to join the network, you can send them some background information about the network. This background information can be standardised and thus visualised in an infographic, brochure, presentation or other visual attractive tools.



#### Tip

You can choose to launch a series of industry-specific events for sectoral businesses operating in the blue economy. One of the BLUE-C partners, Inishowen Development Partnership, for example, launched the INBusiness initiative, with each event having different topics to discuss.

## Step 4. Establish the first meeting

You have successfully attracted members in joining the BLUE-C Network. Great job! Now it is time to introduce everyone to each other and organise the first gathering with a kick-off of the network. In order to create a strong foundation for the network, this is an essential meeting. Therefore, this chapter will include steps, tasks and tips to make this kick-off not only a good one but also a memorable one.

In addition to this, different approaches to the first meeting will be taken into account. The ideal situation for the first meeting would be to organise this face-to-face. However, this might be difficult to organise in a more extensive region and with busy members. For that matter, we also take situations into account with either smaller groups in different locations or online meetings. Remember that you are also able to combine different approaches to either the entire network or to just the first meeting.

As long as the network represents the community in the best way possible, the members are feeling committed, and everyone will work towards the same goal, the approach of communication and meetings is not important.

### *Preparation*

As mentioned before, success comes from preparation. Moreover, the kick-off is meant to make the members even more enthusiastic than they probably are already. Therefore, you shouldn't use the first meeting, in which the members will meet each other for the first time, as an informative

session. When you think you need to share necessary background information, send this beforehand, as mentioned in step 3. The kick off should involve the team, introducing both the individual members as the network and what the network will entail.

Decide what activities or elements you want to include in the first meeting and set a time frame. This time frame is meant for the agenda, so you can prepare the members in the sense of what they can expect. It is recommended to start the meeting off with an icebreaker activity or invite a key speaker. Furthermore, you will have to discuss the network's rules of play with the members. Lastly, you will need to leave time for possible questions. Thus, to shortly structure a general agenda, you should make time for at least:

- Introduction
- A kick-off activity
- The discussion on the network's rules of play
- Possible questions

When you think it's better for the organisations in your region to organise the first meeting in different smaller groups or online, you should go for it. There are many ways to still make the kick-off fun and engaging. Either way, sending out an agenda beforehand is recommended, in order to let the members know what they can expect.



#### Tip

“Hosting a masterclass in an interested topic was instrumental in encouraging the participation in the initial meeting – meetings need to have a strong purpose.”- IDP

## Kick-off

To start the meeting off, you will need to organise something that will get everyone in the right mood, energy and excitement for the meeting. It is all about the first impression, which makes the kick-off quite essential. It is recommended to kick the meeting off with an icebreaker activity in which the members will get to know each other, get them inspired by the network and make them feel proud of becoming a part of the network. There are different options to choose from regarding the kick-off. As mentioned before, you could choose to do an icebreaker activity or invite a key speaker, or you could think of something creative yourself.

There are many different icebreaker activities to find on the internet, hereby a few examples for both face-to-face meetings as online ones. All activities can be done in rather bigger groups as in smaller groups. Keep in mind though, that when you organise such an activity in a bigger group, you will probably need more time and the other way around:

Face-to-face meeting:

- **People Bingo**; prepare bingo cards, each one different of course, with personal/general traits (depending on how well you know your members), such as ‘rather drinks tea instead of coffee’, ‘drives a hybrid’, ‘has 2 dogs’ etc. Each member receives a bingo card and the group will have to mingle for a certain amount of time. During the time they have to introduce themselves to each other and find the people who match the traits on their card. They must put the person's name in the corresponding box and when all boxes are crossed the person will need to yell ‘BINGO’, and the game ends, or the game ends when the time is up. Afterwards, you could choose to go through all the traits or ask the members to introduce

themselves and share an interesting trait they learned about someone else, depending on how much time is left.

- **Random Request;** Prepare a list of assignments and challenges, which the members can do in smaller groups, think of questions regarding the BLUE-C topic, drawing the BLUE-C logo, a riddle they need to solve, finding something in the building or area and let them take a selfie with it etc., and attach points to each question/assignment. Divide the group in smaller groups, and give them a certain amount of time to execute the assignments and answer the questions. When the time is up, you can discuss the assignments and questions and see who is the winner.
- **Tic, Tac, Toe;** Prepare the tic tac toe template of the nine squares and leave it empty. Pick a theme for the game, this could be hobbies, again personality traits or maybe something to do with the network. Next, ask each member to fill the nine squares with specific things on that certain theme. Let the group mingle for a certain amount of time. They will have to share their grids, and when two teammates have the same thing in one of the squares, they have to initial each other's grids. The first member to get three boxes in a row, wins the exercise.

Online meeting:

- **Re-Name Game;** Ask each person to write his/her name on a shared document and attach an adjective that only describes a dominant characteristic, but also starts with the same letter of his/her name e.g. generous Gary, dapper Dave or magnificent Mandy. When everyone has written their name down, you can go around the group and ask each person to state their 'Re-Name'.
- **Two truths and a lie;** Ask everyone to write down three statements about themselves in a shared document. Two of these statements need to be true and the other one is a lie. When everyone has written down their statements, you can go around the group. At each person's turn, the group has to add a dot as a vote to the statement they think is a lie. Once everyone has voted, you can see on the basis of the amount of dots what the group thinks is the lie. Let the person, whose statements are shown, reveal the correct answer.
- **Association Introduction;** When you are in a smaller group, this is a great activity. It starts with one team member who will introduce him/herself with a name and maybe their organisation or place of the organisation. The next person will introduce participant number one, adding a conspicuous physical attribute before introducing him/herself. It is important to only use neutral opinions, such as hair colour, clothing, glasses etc. For example: Member no. 1: My name is Jenny and I own a tourist shop. Member no. 2: The blonde is Jenny and she owns a tourist shop, and I am David and I am a fisherman. Member no. 3: The blond is Jenny and she owns a tourist shop. The man with the moustache is David and he is a fisherman, and I am Sarah and I have a boat rental company. Etc. As other members introduce you, you will have to wave your hand, so people keep being reminded of who is who.

Furthermore, it is essential to be prepared for questions that might be asked. Considering all the questions that might be asked beforehand, helps you in brainstorming about the topics that you need to discuss during the rules of play, which we will elaborate on in the next chapter. Moreover, you might come across information that is better to be shared beforehand. Both situations will help in making the first meeting as streamlined as possible.

Even though you will be trying to filter the questions beforehand, you still need to leave enough time for the members to ask any questions they might have. At the end, you would want everyone to leave the first meeting on the same page, working towards the same goals and ready to get started.



Lastly, it is important to arrange an extra person to attend the meeting/event for taking notes. Especially the agreements that will be made during the discussion on the Co-creation part and the communication protocol are important to be noted, since these will need to be clear to keep everyone on the same page.

## Step 5. Co-creation

The network cannot work without the members, therefore it is important that the members are involved in the network. To stimulate their involvement, it is important to co-create the network further together, moreover co-creation is one of the key principles of the BLUE-C Network.

Even though you have already set the foundation of the BLUE-C Network, the rules of play need to be decided on together. This is an important topic to discuss during the first meeting, especially to make sure that at the end of the meeting everyone is on the same page and everyone wants to work towards the same goal.

Depending on how you will work within the network, in smaller groups, in one big group or online, you will have to make agreements that suit your network the best. If you will organise your meetings in multiple smaller groups, consider what agreements should be made within the each group and what agreements (if there are any) should be made for all of the groups. Because when the different groups will still have to work together, a general rules of play for all groups might be helpful.

### *Topics to discuss*

Since you have already shared your part of the purpose, objectives and expectations of the network beforehand, through the invitation and possible extra background information you have given, it is now time for the members to share their ideas, good practices and input. As mentioned in the previous chapter, you need to make time for the discussion on the network's rules of play. Therefore, it is important to start off with the members sharing their ideas, expectations and thoughts on building the network. When during the introduction or the icebreaker activity the personal introductions haven't taken place, it might be helpful to also let the members share their knowledge and experience. That way members can also estimate their expectations of other members and get an idea of what responsibilities would suit which member the best. Moreover, it would also give the members an idea of the type of network they would want to build.

To make sure this discussion will take place in a streamlined and efficient way, it is recommended to create a structure of the topics you'd like to discuss. Present them beforehand, possibly add it to the agenda that you send in advance, so that when members have a suggestion to add, it can also be included in the discussion.

Topics you might want to consider are, for example:

- The members' ideas of the network and what it entails
- The network's purpose and objectives and especially how to reach those
- How to make decisions
- When will the network be a success
- What will be the action plan
- Division of responsibilities



Even though it is good to have certain topics ready to discuss, it is also good to give the freedom to the stakeholders. They most likely are ready to exchange ideas and share their experiences. This could easily lead to new ideas or a new innovative purpose for the network. – BDF

Whenever you have finished discussing a certain topic and everyone has agreed on certain agreements, try to close the topic off with a conclusion on what the agreements will be of that certain topic. When there is still a little confusion, you might filter that out by doing this. Moreover, it will help in creating a clear picture of the agreement and the topic, which will help again in making sure everyone is on the page.

If you have chosen to organise the network in multiple smaller groups, it is important that despite the network being formed among different groups it also forms some kind of unity. Therefore, it is essential to consider topics that need to be agreed on throughout the groups. Such topics could be for example, network's purpose and objectives and when will the network be a success. Moreover, when the participants agree on a topic within a certain group, it doesn't necessarily mean the other groups will agree upon those topics as well. Thus, it is important to explain beforehand that final agreements, on only the unity topics, will be made after all groups have gathered.

### *Review the made agreements*

Remember that the agreements you make during the first face-to-face-meeting are important to hold on to, but that they are not set in stone. You could rather think of these agreements as a starting point, this is where building the network and the relationships begins. When you actually start working together, you might find out some things do not work as smoothly as expected, or you are running into other problems. This will be the time to be flexible and take the time to review your agreements, ask for perceptions on the agreements and adapt them where necessary.

## **Step 6. Establish a communication protocol**

Once everyone knows what is expected from them and from the network, it is also important to discuss and decide how to communicate within the network. Make sure everyone is on the same page right now, and even more important is to make everyone stay on the same page. Moreover, you would want to build the relationship within the network and improve everyone's engagement in the network. Since the internal interaction among the network members is essential, they should have a say in how they want to stay in touch and thus is communication also an essential topic that needs to be discussed.

### *Topics to discuss*

Good communication brings people together and keeps people together, which is the exact reason why you should leave enough time to discuss this thoroughly. Therefore, it is recommended to discuss the communication protocol also during the first meeting. Communication is a broad definition, therefore it is important to inform the members that the agreements made in the communication protocol is all about the internal communication, as mentioned before, the internal interaction among the network members.

Despite this, there are still many things to consider regarding internal communication. To give an idea of topics to discuss, we have prepared a few questions which you could use to start the discussion:

- What communication tools are we going to use?
- What information do we need to share?
- Is this information stored in the same communication tool, or is it stored somewhere else?
- How regular are we going to meet?
- Are we going to meet face-to-face each time, or also online?

When your network exists of multiple smaller groups, the questions above can be asked regarding to both the separate smaller groups, as the group as a whole. The network as a whole needs to have a certain basis, where the general communication and information can be shared and where this also can be stored.

Again, make sure to close the topic off with a conclusion where you summarize the agreements and make sure this is written down clearly in the minutes.

Lastly, it is recommended to immediately discuss a date for a next meeting. It is often easier to discuss dates when you are already together. Remember, meetings can be blended either online or face-to-face meetings, in one big group or rather smaller ones.

### *Review the made agreements*

When you build a new network, you are also establishing a rhythm both in communication within the network as in the BLUE-C Network itself. This means that as time and meetings pass by, some agreements might not work that well. In order to keep the communication effective and streamlined, you should review the communication protocol regularly. Ask around how the network members feel about the protocol, and whether they think some things need change. This is also a nice topic to discuss during bilateral meetings.

Keep in mind that the communication protocol is a living document and not set in stone, when change is necessary the protocol needs to be adapted. Therefore, the communication protocol evolves as the network will evolve as well.

### *Tips and tricks*

Besides the agreements that you make within the BLUE-C Network, it is also good to know that for certain messages it is recommended to use certain mediums. The tips given here, are mainly recommendations, but you can also consider them to discuss during the meeting.

- Use a chat tool for:
  - o Short communication
  - o Communication in the moment
  - o When you want a quick and easy response
- Use email for:
  - o Long-form messages, such as explaining something
  - o Shorter forms of communication that do not need an immediate response
- Use personal interaction for:
  - o More complex messages
  - o When you require interaction or immediate response
  - o When there might be an emotional element
  - o When there might be conflict
  - o When you require extensive brainstorming or collaboration

Some great tools that can be used for the network's communication and/or information sharing/storing, and that also can be used both directly as asynchronously are:

- WhatsApp groups
- Telegram groups
- Teams groups
- Slack

- Google tools, such as Gmail, Google Drive and Google Meet
- Etc.

## Step 7. Follow-up

Even though after all the preparation work, it might feel as if this first meeting was the event you were working towards. Though, this is just the beginning. This is where the actual building of relationships, working together towards a common purpose and creating an impact begins. To ensure that the success, enthusiasm and motivation stays and maybe even grows after the first face-to-face meeting, you have to ensure follow-up on this meeting.



**Tip**

“Reconnect – It important to constantly reconnect with the members and to keep all informed.”  
- IDP

### *Gather feedback*

After you have finalised your successful first face-to-face meeting, it is essential to learn how successful this was to your members. This means you will have to gather feedback about the kick off. How did the members experience the first meeting? Have they become even more enthusiastic after the meeting? What did they think was successful and what things could be improved? Are there still things that are not entirely clear to them?

Depending on what you think is best and the situation, you could decide to either gather the feedback personally or send a feedback form around afterwards. When you choose to send a feedback form afterwards, there are some important factors to take into account.

- To make sure everyone will actually fill the form without taking it too much time for them, ensure it is a short and to the point survey.
- In order to increase the honesty of the members, the survey should be filled in anonymously.
- When you are seeking for valuable outcomes of the feedback, it is recommended to ask open questions. You could ask for example, what needs to be included next time, what did you miss, what can be improved next time, etc.

When you have received valuable feedback, you should analyse the information and think of how to improve the next meeting. By gathering feedback, you are able to improve on your strategies each and every meeting you will organise.

### *Recap of the first meeting*

Another important follow-up action is sending the minutes of meeting to the members. Make this a structured and summarised document, where the important agreements and action points are also clearly stated. Everyone should be able to find the agreements and their responsibilities as easily as possible.

Together with the minutes you could send a short evaluation form on the kick-off meeting, as mentioned above. When you've agreed on a date for the next meeting, you could already send out an invitation. When you weren't able to agree on a date yet, make sure to send out a *doodle* or

something similar. Furthermore, you could clearly outline the next steps and action points with the corresponding responsible persons to be taken before the next meeting.

Lastly, when you've agreed on a certain communication tool or platform to be used internally, you should make a team folder and add all the members to this folder, whether this will be Microsoft Teams, Google Drive, Slack or something else.

### *Assuring continuity*

As mentioned before, we have now only finished the beginning. In order to actually build the network and the relationships, it is important to assure sustainability of the BLUE-C Regional Network. Whether the follow-up meetings will be face-to-face, online or in bigger groups or smaller ones or even bilateral. In order to assure continuity in your network, you could use the following tips:

- Ensure regular meetings. You have decided on a certain amount of meetings, make sure to also organise these meetings.
- Consider organising other types of meetings for a change. For example, consider inviting a guest speaker or an expert in the Blue Economy. This could not only assure commitment of your existing members, but it could also attract new members.
- Ensure that everyone feels valuable to the network. Take decisions together and let people work together. Or challenge one another in taking the next step and make them feel responsible for certain tasks.
- Ensure frequent communication. Try to ask in between how certain tasks are progressing, or just how some members are doing.

Lastly, remember that commitment is something that grows steadily and in a natural way. Thus be patient, it will come.

And let the members remember the following: if you help others succeed, it will help you succeed eventually as well.

## Impact of the BLUE-C Network

The BLUE-C Regional Networks have proven to be successful in each of the BLUE-C partner countries. Participants valued coming together, exchanging ideas and discuss opportunities. Throughout the three network meetings that have taken place among each of the networks, it is difficult to measure real impact. Though the enthusiasm and will to continue the networks already prove the value and possible impact the regional networks can make.

The networks in each of the partner countries have shown that co-design that is organised in a cross-sectorial way, already adds value to the network itself as well as strengthening the local area. Moreover, the three organised network meetings have proven that co-work and co-creation are on the minds of many of the participants, though it might need more time. Once that will happen, the BLUE-C consortium is highly positive in the BLUE-C networks making impact among the members themselves, as well as their region.

Therefore, we would like to emphasize the importance of bringing organisations of different sectors together, let them exchange ideas, share experiences and learn how they can strengthen their own businesses, but also their region through co-work, co-design and co-creation.

“Creating a Public & Private network makes it potentially easier to achieve a common goal. In this way, the perspective of the individual company becomes broader and helps the development of the whole region at a strategic level.”

- Turku UAS