



ENRD Coordination Committee

Focus Group on

Knowledge Transfer & Innovation

**Towards Successful Innovation
Brokerage:
*Insights from the
2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes***

FINAL DRAFT

September 2013

Funded by the



ENRD *Connecting Rural Europe*
<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>

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List of acronyms

AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EIP-AGRI	European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity & Sustainability
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
ETP	European Technology Platform
EU	European Union
FAS	Farm Advisory System
FG	Focus Group
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KT&I	Knowledge Transfer & Innovation
MA	Managing Authority
LAG	Local Action Group
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
MS	Member State
NRNs	National Rural Networks
RD	Rural Development
R&D	Research and Development
RDP(s)	Rural Development Programme(s)
TNC	Transnational Co-operation

1. Introduction

The reports "**Recommendations for EIP Operational Groups¹**" and "**Successful Innovation Brokerage**" present the findings of the second working phase of the Focus Group (FG) on Knowledge Transfer & Innovation, (February to June 2013).

The FG was established in June 2012 under the Coordination Committee of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). Its objective is to look into current rural development practices in order to draw lessons for improving the future generation of RDPs (2014-2020). During the first phase of the FG activities that were concluded in December 2012, the investigation focused on how the Member States have been supporting Knowledge Transfer and Innovation through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The evidence gathered by the FG from relevant practices across the EU contributed to identify a series of possible intervention areas and practical suggestions for current and future RDPs. The outcomes of this investigation are summarized in the **FG's Phase 1 Report²**.

The second phase of the FG analytical work focused on the collection and comprehensive analysis of study material on actors involved in innovation in view of learning how to best support EIP **Operational Groups** and **innovation brokering** activities under the rural development programmes in the context of the new EIP. Building on the evidence and experiences collected during Phase one, as well as on additional information and study material provided by the FG members, the analytical work aimed at providing practical recommendations through:

- identifying current examples of multi-actor projects that demonstrate features similar to the future Operational Groups; collecting study material on innovation support activities which may contribute to the understanding of the innovation brokering process;
- capturing and illustrating possible pitfalls and good practices from current experiences of implementing multi-actor projects and providing an insight of the different stages of the innovation brokering process;
- extracting lessons learnt relevant for the successful operation of the future EIP Operational Groups and identifying criticalities and main factors for successful innovation brokerage.

The report on **Successful Innovation Brokerage** commences by introducing the methodological basis for the analytical work (section 2). Basic concepts on innovation brokerage and working definitions are provided in section 3. The following section presents the main findings of the analysis conducted. It also summarises the most common success factors and enabling conditions that underpin the success of the innovation brokering process (section 4). Finally, some insights are provided on how RDP Managing Authorities and National Rural Networks consider fostering innovation and supporting innovation brokering activities in 2014-2020 (Annex 1).

¹ The report on *Recommendations for EIP Operational Groups* is available on the ENRD website.

http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/research-and-innovation-gateway-development/en/research-and-innovation-gateway-development_en.cfm

² KT&I Focus Group Phase 1 Report - http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=B16BBB7D-ACD0-6C6C-2AAE-94E5AD789E16

2. Methodology

In this strand of the FG's work a number of steps were followed to respond to the research issues as identified in section 1. Initially, a review of the latest EC official documentation was conducted in order to collate the most relevant information on innovation brokerage in the context of the agricultural EIP. The main sources of information included the legal proposal for the next programming period (2014-2020) rural development regulation³, the European Commission's Communication on the agricultural EIP⁴, the draft EC guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the agricultural EIP⁵, as well as other information made available from DG Agriculture and Rural Development on the topic⁶. This exercise allowed the FG to map the objectives and main steps of the innovation brokering process in the context of the interactive innovation model that the agricultural EIP is promoting.

To identify how innovation brokerage can be supported under the rural development programmes, two types of activities were undertaken. Firstly, study material on innovation support activities were provided by the Focus Group members and secondly, a face-to-face meeting of the FG members was held for distilling and elaborating the initial findings of the analysis.

A semi structured questionnaire was developed to facilitate the collection of relevant information from actors involved in supporting innovation, research and development as well as knowledge transfer, primarily but not exclusively in agriculture. Their practical experience in supporting innovation as well as their working methods was used to discuss the components of the innovation brokering process. Their views and suggestions were also helpful to derive relevant lessons and recommendations for successful innovation brokerage, consider what works well and less well, and what the necessary skillset of a successful innovation broker is (See Annex 2).

The methods used for collecting relevant evidence and discussing results have been participatory in nature and relied on the input and engagement of the FG members. It should be stressed, therefore, that the findings and recommendations reflect the views and experiences of the FG, building upon the available information at the time of the collection. The collection exercise and the various ways in which the innovation brokering concept had been interpreted in the questionnaires, revealed a clear need for thorough clarification of the essence of the brokering process.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com627/627_en.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/com2012-79_en.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/draft-eip-guidelines_en.pdf

⁶ <http://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2013/2629/OpportunitiesEuropeanInnovationPartnership.pdf>

3. Background information

The operational objectives of the agricultural EIP include successful bridge-building and achieving synergies through **fostering exchange between research and practice**. Its implementation will be channelled through **Operational Groups** as key acting entities, involving actors such as farmers, scientists, advisers, NGOs, and/or enterprises etc. Operational Groups will be established in order to carry out projects aimed at testing and applying innovative practices, technologies, processes and products. They will constitute themselves on the initiative of the interested actors, therefore relying on a bottom-up approach.

However, **single actors may have difficulties in finding partners** and getting started in the process of setting up of an Operational Group and an innovative project. According to L. Klerkx and C. Lewis (2009)⁷ the formation and functioning of innovation networks and systems can be problematic due to the existence of several gaps. With regard to the nature of these gaps, there can be identified cognitive gaps in which actors from different institutional backgrounds may have too much cognitive distance to adequately learn together, or have different norms, values and incentive systems which hinder effective communication. Information gaps may also be present as actors are usually inadequately informed about possible cooperation partners and what these can offer. Managerial gaps can also hinder the process as actors may be unable to acquire and successfully implement new knowledge and technology.

In this context it becomes increasingly important to acknowledge the need for actors whose main function is not transferring knowledge, but specifically **stimulating and facilitating the formation of innovation partnerships**. Howells (2006) defines the **innovation broker** as *“an agent or broker in any aspect of the innovation process between two or more parties. Such intermediary activities include: helping to provide information about potential collaborators; brokering a transaction between two or more parties; acting as a mediator, or go-between bodies or organizations that are already collaborating; and helping find advice, funding and support for the innovation outcomes of such collaborations.”*⁸

The innovation brokering process

In the context of the agricultural EIP, the main task of the innovation broker is to help setting up a multiplicity of Operational Groups around concrete innovation projects. Raising awareness and animating the participation in innovative actions are also key for getting innovation projects up and running. The broker is not necessarily involved in the actual innovation project: his core objective is to help the group in the elaboration of a well-designed project plan. Ideally, innovation brokers should have a good connection to and a thorough understanding of the agricultural world as well as well-developed communication skills for interfacing and animating. An important asset of an innovation broker should be to look cross-sectoral and connect across the existing institutes, disciplines, viewpoints etc.

⁷ L. Klerkx and C. Lewis (2009), Establishment and embedding of innovation brokers at different innovation system levels: Insights from the Dutch agricultural sector, *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 76 (2009) 849–860

⁸ Howells, J. (2006) Intermediation and the role of intermediaries in innovation, *Research Policy*, 35, pp. 715–728

If through the innovation brokering process a good innovation project plan is developed⁹, such a plan will have a better chance of passing a selection process to gain support from whatever funding source.

According to DG AGRI¹⁰, this **selection process for projects** can be based on:

- the relevance of the project for actors and end-users aiming towards a self sustaining innovation (What elements of importance for end-users will the project develop and why would that result in a broadly applied innovation? Which problems/opportunities are tackled?);
- the targeted composition of the partnership in view of co-creation for a particular project objective (Is the composition of the partnership well chosen and involving those key actors which have the necessary different types of knowledge to reach the project objectives and help diffusing its results into practice? Explanation on how the partners will enrich each others' competences);
- the quality and quantity of knowledge exchange and cross-fertilisation potential between different types of knowledge (scientific and practical) (Are sufficient qualitative knowledge exchange activities planned and how will these lead to a well developed result in which the different knowledge sources are merged?);
- demonstrating competences of the partners on state of play in the field of the project's subject; avoiding repetition with existing projects; (concrete evidence on the former experiences of the partners linked to this project's objectives and on possible former projects related to this project);
- easily understandable project summaries with a long-term communication effect to a broad group of possible end-users (including involving the most appropriate actors for such communication and finding the most pertinent communication channels).

The core task of an innovation broker is to make a good interactive innovation project plan. Taking into account the above, the actual **innovation brokering process** constitutes from the following steps:

- discovering innovative ideas;
- connecting different partners from complementary knowledge fields on the subject;
- supporting possible partners to articulate their demands and expectations from the group's innovation project;
- identifying funding for the implementation of the project; and
- helping to prepare the project proposal work plan.

Consequently and in case the project gets funded, the person who did the innovation brokerage could possibly also be involved in the implementation of the project as a facilitator and even in the dissemination of the project results. However, as previously indicated these activities do not constitute the core assignment of the innovation broker.

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/events/madrid-06-2013/van-oost_en.pdf

¹⁰ See Guidelines on Programming for Innovation and the Implementation of the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (<http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/>)

RDP support to innovation brokerage

The significance of innovation brokerage as a function supporting the interactive innovation process has been acknowledged in the new rural development policy. As highlighted in the draft guidelines on programming for innovation, the legal proposal for rural development policy after 2013 provides a number of different options for funding innovation brokering actions under the rural development programmes:

- ✓ Article 55(2) on networking by National Rural Networks (NRNs), refers to fostering of innovation as one of the aims of networking that may be supported via **technical assistance funding**. Accordingly, the general NRNs, or dedicated EIP networking functions under the umbrella of NRNs, could install or contract an innovation brokerage service.
- ✓ Article 36(1)(c) on **co-operation**, could be used by Managing Authorities to support innovation brokerage services in view of fostering the establishment of Operational Groups. In that case, funding could be used for brokerage services to support setting up and preparing project proposals of Operational Groups. Costs for innovation brokers are eligible under Art 36(5)(b).
- ✓ Article 16(1)(b) for supporting the setting up of **advisory services**, can also contribute if especially focused on innovation. Innovation brokerage could be offered by new or a branch of existing advisory services that focus at finding innovative ideas, connecting partners, and providing support for the preparation of project proposals. The draft guidelines also indicate that as effective mediation and innovation brokerage in agriculture is often linked to a good knowledge of the sector, a close connection and interaction with other agricultural services would be useful.

If the project gets funded under the rural development programme, funding for facilitating its implementation can be provided for under Article 36 (5) (c). The innovation broker could also provide organisational support and become the facilitator of the project, but this would not automatically be the case.

4. Analysis – The steps of the innovation brokering process

The following analysis is based on **17 questionnaires** provided by the FG members. The study material includes examples of actors active in research, innovation, development and knowledge transfer. They cover 8 EU Member States, namely Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland and the United Kingdom (Scotland). Two examples from Norway were also provided, where the role of Innovation Broker is also known as a "Competence Broker".

The actors described in the case studies were research institutes or universities (4 case studies), private consultancies or companies (4 case studies), farmers unions (2 case studies), and LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) (2 case studies). Other case studies provided concerned a public body, a local/regional government, a Public Private Partnership, a farm advisory service and a European Technology Platform (ETP).

The material collected indicated the use of different mix of funding sources depending on the actors involved in the different processes. In most of the cases European funds had a significant contribution (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF, EU research funds etc.). Other sources of funding included national,

regional and local funding, private funding (e.g. provided by third parties as donor organisations), and own funding.

The agri-food sector had a predominant role in the majority of the cases. The focus of the activities described in the collected case studies concerned a wide range of themes such as: agro-technology and machinery; fruit-growing and livestock breeding; bio-energy and renewable energy; processing and marketing; bio-technology and genetics; tourism etc. Other broader domains of activity were included, e.g. rural and regional development and sustainable agricultural development.

The study material provided significant information that helped to gain an insight on the activities of actors involved in supporting innovation and the processes they apply, and as such helped to clarify which components of the innovation process are essential. The following parts of the analysis attempt to summarise around the steps in the innovation brokering process and form the basis upon which success factors and enabling conditions were identified.

4.1 Finding innovative ideas

The starting point of the innovation brokering process is the broker to connect with the ground level actors, e.g. farmers, to identify and articulate their needs. In other words, at the very beginning of the brokering process **the new idea has "to find the innovation broker"**. In the majority of the case studies it was stated that ideas about a novelty commonly emerge from discussions between the farmers and the brokers. In both the cases about LAGs in Finland and Greece it was emphasised that it is the continuous co-operation and exchange with local, grass-root stakeholders that makes their problems and needs visible. The broker should build upon a clear understanding of what is innovative and the capacity to discover or "unearth" good ideas. For instance, in the case ASAJA from Spain, a farmers union detected and analysed the problems, studied the general context and helped to define possible solutions. The *eLivingLab* project from Finland pointed out that companies can also bring new ideas and topics "to the table" for discussion with the farmers. The innovation brokers themselves can also identify and propose innovative ideas and solutions based on their experience and understanding of the sector.

Different animating and networking approaches are used for identifying or generating ideas in a participatory way before the actual brokering process ("matchmaking") starts. These can include workshops, networking, brainstorming, exchange platforms (e.g. KATILU dynamic spaces in Spain), web online forums etc. The possibilities are shared with potential partners and refined through discussions in meetings and the local media. Website announcements or on-line discussions are also used as part of the process.

The case study by the University of Oulu in Finland highlighted the need to acknowledge that **only a proportion of initiatives may lead to a new project and eventually to an innovation**. A number of other possible pitfalls were identified that may hamper the innovation process at this stage. An innovation broker could potentially use ideas emerging from group discussions for personal profit. In that sense, there is the risk that an innovation actor if designated as the broker might become a producer of projects that do not necessarily address the actual needs of the farmers or the group. The **targeted analysis of the project plans** should help identify such possible pitfalls during the selection of projects. For instance, emphasis should be given at the relevance for end-users and at the justification of the usefulness of involving specific actors, meaning the targeted

composition of the operational group in view of co-creation. In addition, it was suggested that a meeting between the selecting body and the operational group could potentially help as an “integrity” check.

4.2 Connecting the right partners

In the second step of the process, the innovation broker acts as a “matchmaker” by **helping partners to find each other**. The broker needs to identify suitable partners for the project and bring them together for preliminary discussions in view of a possible collaboration. **Ensuring complementarity and diversity in the composition of the partnership** is deemed very important as explicitly highlighted in the example of the KATILU dynamic spaces in Spain. In this case, it is stated that it is the complementarity and diversity of the partners and the consequent experience and knowledge of other sectors that facilitates hybridization of knowledge and technology.

Nevertheless, not only actors who have complementary competences can be brought together. Even potential antagonistic partners could generate innovative ideas, if convinced to work together. For instance, in the case of the private consultancy Njøs næringsutvikling from Norway, the goal of the innovation process is to increase the value from the fruits and berries sector. From this process it became evident that when whole sectors are targeted there might be concerns from companies that are competitors however this has shown not to be a major problem. Many case studies indicated that in this process it is important for the broker to have the general knowledge and capacity to assess the different competences of each stakeholder, listen to their needs and engage them while helping to overcome the fear of risk.

The LAG ANKA in Greece implements animation in two phases. During the first phase animation is considered part of the participatory planning process. The aim of the animation is to raise the awareness of stakeholders in order to participate to the planning process and contribute to its “vision”. The second phase follows with the promotion of the vision, aiming to involve local stakeholders in order to realise it. As the case study recognises, the identification of possible partners and the preparation of a partnership should not result from proposals imposed through a top-down approach. It needs to be the outcome of a **common agreement fostering genuine ownership among the stakeholders**.

The identification of possible partners can happen in many different ways, often in informal contexts, and even random conversations. Good connections, good working relations and an extensive network with different possible actors, also from outside the sector, are the tools of the innovation broker in this step. The broker can use various occasions such as business seminars, social events, existing clusters, networks as well as participatory approaches to make contacts, and to nurture and promote an innovation culture. Potentially this phase of innovation brokerage process could also profit from the **identification and dissemination among innovation brokers of successful techniques used for finding innovative ideas and partners**.

4.3 Articulate demands and expectations

Face-to-face meetings are considered in most of the cases to be the most effective approach for communicating with possible actors. In the example of the Interface project in Scotland in which

businesses are linked with the research sector, face-to-face brokerage is implemented through regional offices. The regional offices operate impartially and help businesses by promoting suggestions of relevant expertise from across the academic institutions. The example of an individual innovation broker from the Netherlands indicated that the broker needs to engage the local stakeholders and have discussions with many possible partners. At this step, the process of collecting and sharing information for a possible innovation project starts in a participatory way. At the same time, the process still remains “unofficial” in the form of **preliminary discussions with potential partners. The broker is facilitating discussions while “translating” the local needs** for technology, knowledge and innovation into a “language” understood by the research sector and vice versa. In the Netherlands a voucher system has been established through which half day meetings are funded in which farmers can meet the broker face to face and discuss new ideas.

4.4 Identifying the source of funding

An important part of the innovation brokering process is also the identification of funding sources. The case studies commonly state that brokers use their knowledge and experience to locate various funding opportunities (EU, national, regional, etc.). Their mission at this phase is to **match the local needs and challenges with the available funding options**. In most of the cases examined, experienced staff is assigned to seek for funding opportunities and provide advice on how to access them. In the French agricultural chambers this task is carried out by the project managers while in the case of Quality Meat Scotland, funding sources are identified using their own knowledge of the funding environment within the United Kingdom and globally.

Web platforms are also a key tool for providing up to date information on funding opportunities as indicated by the case study of the Wine Technological Platform in Spain. In this case, a Web Portal is used as reference information tool for research, development and innovation. The on line platform is continuously updated on existing funding programmes and provides alerts for specific calls, newsletters on current research and development trends and funding opportunities. A particular funding option was described in the case studies of the LAG Päijänne-Leader in Finland and a competence broker from Norway. In these cases, own resources or a small county budget administered by the organisations themselves are used for financing individual innovation projects. The use of that money is approved by the administrative project managers and/or the regional representatives for the Norwegian Research Council.

Very often finding accessing funds is a significant obstacle to be overcome in the innovation brokering process. In the case of the Greek LAG it was suggested that in order to overcome the uncertainty of finding the necessary financial support, the broker should start **considering possible funding resources from the very first stages of the brokering process**. Even when funding is available, difficulties can emerge as a result of bureaucracy and eligibility issues in the EAFRD and other EU funds. The administrative burdens that might come along with the funding rules can also discourage partners from joining the partnership. Therefore it is considered necessary that **funding rules for innovative projects should be kept simple** and with a minimum administrative burden for future partnerships.

4.5 Setting up the project plan & the partnership

The final step of the innovation brokering process concerns the preparation of a sound project plan and the setting up of the partnership. The case of the University of Oulu in Finland underlined that the project idea should generate **win-win situations for all the parties involved**. This would be an important step for achieving appropriate working relationships among the stakeholders. In this phase the broker will be needed to act as a facilitator who organises the process, invites participation and helps the partners to get to know how to work together. The case of the private consultancy Njøs næringsutvikling from Norway underlined the **need for continuous effort in keeping the members active** in this process. Adding to the previous, the LAG Päijänne-Leader from Finland recommended that it is also important that a broker brings or encourages the partners to bring ideas from outside as to show how others have dealt with similar problems.

According to the "KATILU dynamic spaces" from Spain, **transparency** is also crucial. The broker will need to clarify the framework and / or the conditions under which participation and collaboration will take place. This will enable the actors and organizations to decide whether or not to engage as sometimes there are limits, uncertainties, ambiguities etc. to be taken into consideration. According to the farmers' union MTK Häme from Finland, ensuring all partners and actors commitment is crucial.

Nevertheless, as reminded by the example of the Greek LAG, it can also be the case that although the needs are identified during the brokering process, more needs emerge later on along the project's implementation. These unexpected needs can create uncertainty and it is the most risky part of the innovation process. To address this constraint and as identified from the first phase of the FG work, **the innovation broker could promote the adoption of a "step-wise" approach when elaborating the project plan**. A project plan well discussed and thought through before the project starts, with clear milestones and embedded flexibility along the process would reduce the impact of unforeseen changes and minimise the risks along the innovation process.

5. Coordinating the project & communicating the project results (after the brokering process)

In case the project gets funded and if useful, the innovation broker consequently could possibly be involved in the project's implementation. However, this is not the core task of the innovation broker as previously described. Alongside the project and as soon as it ends, the broker may be involved in communicating and spreading the project results. At this stage a very broad range of dissemination activities could be undertaken. Promoting the novelty could be done through farmers' group meetings, advisers meetings, conferences, seminars, trade shows, local awards-winning farmers.

As indicated in the case of the National Research Institute of Animal Production in Poland, training and information actions provided through the RDP measure 111 can be considered for this scope. Apart from physical meetings or field trips, other communication channels may include publications (announcements through local media or newspapers, leaflets, scientific articles etc.), local radio and television broadcasts. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) including websites, social media etc. is becoming a very common tool for disseminating information and novelties to a broad audience that goes beyond the immediate and targeted beneficiaries.

6. Success factors for innovation brokerage

Building upon the previous analysis and specific suggestions provided by the FG, this section makes an attempt to identify the main factors that can explain the successful performance of an innovation broker. First of all the success of innovation brokers builds upon their peculiar set of skills and qualities; these are examined in section 6.1. In addition the performance of the broker depends on the external conditions, lying either in the surrounding professional environment (section 6.2) or in the conditions offered by the wider policy context (section 6.3).

6.1 Necessary skillset of the innovation broker

The analysis of the case studies allowed identifying four sets of qualities which are considered key to the success of an innovation broker. They relate to: i) the knowledge in the specific field; ii) technical skills; iii) what can be referred to as "soft skills", related to the working attitude and style; and iv) the specific working approach.

Knowledge in the specific field (*that can be acquired through learning or experience*)

Knowledge and understanding of innovation processes of course is key. A number of examples point out that the knowledge of and/or hands-on experience in the field or the specific industry may contribute to the success of the innovation broker; for example in fields like farming systems or specific technologies concerning for example, machinery..

Crucially the examples also point out that innovation brokers should be actively involved in knowledge networks in order to have access to the required information and be able to find actors useful in a specific partnership. Connections bring also the benefit of having an overview of the wider context, different realities and key actors, such as interesting firms and suppliers, as well as different funding opportunities.

Technical skills (*that can be acquired through training*)

In several cases the desired skills for an innovation broker are expressed as a rather general "ability in innovation processes". According to the suggestions provided by the case studies it might be of help having a first-hand expertise, for example being directly involved as innovator in business or as business manager.

Communication skills are particularly valuable when the innovation broker is able to effectively communicate to and deal with a range of very different stakeholders including scientists, technicians, manufacturers, farmers. Therefore, the innovation broker will need to understand and use the "language" of different types of stakeholders. This set of skills includes aspects of external communication (e.g. dissemination of information), and internal communication within the partners generating interest in participation and understanding what the partners' needs are.

Facilitation, animation and moderation are recurring concepts that point towards the innovation broker's capacity in facilitating cooperation among very different stakeholders while understanding their different interests. This specific skill may indeed include negotiation capacity in the public and private sectors. Coordination and organisational and management capacities are also mentioned qualities which can underpin the previous ones.

Personality, attitude and style (*not easily acquired through learning or training*)

The examples collected suggest that successful innovation brokers do not just build upon knowledge and technical skills. From experience, a number of "soft skills" also emerged as key to successful operations and therefore should be paid attention to. They can be summarised as follows:

- Real commitment to "change": result and action orientation. The case of the Greek LAG calls this as "spirit of social entrepreneur". Along the same lines, the case from Norway insists that the innovation broker should "see the world from the firm's point of view".
- Creative, positive and pro-active or 'out-of-the-box' thinking. But also critical reflection, vision and direction. Being "able to see simple solutions when faced with complex challenges" (as put by the Scottish example) can be tentatively identified as the key phrase to summarise the concept. Crucial to the above is to inspire a vision for the future and integrate it with short-term actions.
- Special attention is also given to 'autonomy', 'self-motivation', 'empathy', 'listening', social skills and, 'social awareness'. But also to being risk-prone and able to handle uncertainty or anticipating risk itself. Finally an innovation broker should be able to work in an informal and non-bureaucratic way.
- The majority of the case studies insisted on brokers that can be perceived by all stakeholders as being "independent", "neutral" or "impartial". Innovation brokers should not be driven by a vested interest in the process, but by their strong commitment to help setting up a participatory process towards a common goal.

Working approach (*operational procedures increasing the effectiveness of the brokering process*)

Direct communication with stakeholders is key before any successful innovation brokerage according to almost all of the case studies. Face-to-face meetings with the different types of stakeholders e.g. farmers, researchers, advisers are very important as they serve as an open space where everyone can bring his knowledge and discuss about common needs and solutions. Generating spaces for discussion offers to the partners the possibility to exchange experiences, new ways of doing and working and of checking for themselves the value that can bring working in cooperation.

A fundamental element in innovation brokerage is *ensuring transparency* in the innovation process. The partners will need to be well aware in advance of their role and the elements which they will have to take into account during the execution of the project.

Acknowledging the context of different groups of actors is considered as necessity for successful innovation brokering. The Agro-lining Lab project case study from Finland pointed out that the participation of farmers can also be challenging due to the farming year cycle. During high season, there is not much opportunity to get farmers fully engaged since they are caught in their own works. Therefore actions could be done mainly in the period of low farming activity.

Complement networking activities as described above, individual brokering approaches may provide a stronger incentive for setting up and drafting concrete innovation projects proposals. For instance, some farmers will not easily speak in meetings but may nevertheless have creative ideas that deserve to be developed. Often creative farmers' ideas from the grassroots level are not recognised as such yet by the colleagues and peer pressure may work against the development of useful ideas with a

potential for innovation. Also, mainstream interests could hinder innovative front-runners in broad stakeholders' meetings. In order to reach such a group of actors it would be important to develop an appropriate and more individual strategy. For example, to invite them to share experiences of others, use publicity in order to inform them about opportunities and invite them in individual face to face meetings, etc.

Crucially the innovation broker should *drive and not dominate the process*. Initially the broker is the one to drive the initiative and support the formation of the partnership in its first and most 'vulnerable' steps. Gradually the responsibility should be shared by the participants around a commonly supported project plan with clear roles for each actor.

6.2 Enabling working conditions

A second question dealt with in the case studies related to the enabling environment around the innovation broker: what does an innovation broker need as working conditions to be effective and successful? Based on the suggestions coming from the study material, five categories of enabling conditions for good performance of the innovation brokers can be identified.

Some of them are institutional: they relate to the position, the mandate of the innovation broker and, more in general, to the policy framework. Some others relate to conditions enabling the brokerage process itself, like sufficient time and funds and presence among the stakeholders. A third category of conditions relates to the professionalism of the innovation brokers. A fourth issue suggests the need of a leadership that allows and stimulates the growth of an innovation culture within the organisation. Finally some suggestions specifically deal with implementing aspects of the rural development programmes such as, for example, support to transnational cooperation.

The following table summarises these emerging enabling conditions by typology indicating who should be responsible for realising them and including reference to relevant study material from which these suggestions can be drawn (*numbers in the table refer to those used for identifying the case studies in Annex 2 to this document*).

Typology	Enabling conditions	Relevant study material	Who should address it
Institutional	Ensure impartiality and independency.	9, 15	EC; MAs
	Have a clear mandate to act as innovation broker and clarity on targets and possibilities for innovation action.	9, 2, 11	
Procedural	Have time for the process to unfold at its own speed.	2, 13, 9	MAs; Directors and heads of organisations; EIP Networks; NRNs
	Have sufficient sources or flexible funds to immediately address the needs of the actors when arising.	10, 11, 12, 13	

	Ensure local presence of the brokerage service in the midst of (farm) businesses and entrepreneurs with a 'one-stop-shop'.	15	
Professional	Opportunities for training and support and exchange visits. The training should include all aspects of the job.	2, 7, 11	Directors and head of organisations; EIP Networks; NRNs
	Availability of tools for communication, for facilitating work in teams, and for identification of possible relevant partners.	6, 2, 3	
	Being informed: timely updates on rules and regulations of the innovation programmes (MA and NRN and EIP-networks). Access to networks and exchange forums of innovation professionals.	2, 13	
Organisational	Allow sufficient room for creativity and flexibility (for example to interact with partners outside the normal actors in a network).	5, 12	Directors and head of organisations
Operational <i>(related to the implementation of programmes)</i>	Transnational Cooperation is a very important source for innovation.	6	EC; MAs; EIP Networks; NRNs; LAGs
	Funding should offer opportunities for cross-sectoral innovations.	16	
	Funding should be available to support innovation staff within specialist organisations and within SME's. This would help to develop a culture of innovation across the SME-community.	16	
	Consider the possibility to work with innovation vouchers	1	

6.3 Enabling conditions offered by the policy environment at National and EU level

The success of innovation brokerage activities is also linked to an enabling policy environment. The FG case studies attempted to identify some of the key policy conditions to be ensured in the future programming period, both generally and at rural development programmes' level. A number of considerations emerged as specific recommendations mostly directed to national authorities, to possibly provide useful **guidance in the design and implementation of future RDPs**:

- Define a clear innovation policy (priorities, targets) at national level and provide timely information to the field about the programme, its priorities and its criteria for eligibility and selection. This should include what the innovators may expect from the public administration. A few good examples may help;

- Ensure clarity about the expectations of innovation brokers in the RDP;
- Support an official mandate for innovation brokers. Ideally, innovation brokerage services would be available already during the time leading up to the call for proposals of innovation projects. For instance, a managing authority could announce a call for proposals (with specific eligibility and selection criteria) in a year's time and ask for expression of interest to provide brokerage services for this call immediately;
- Avoid narrow selection of brokering actors; allow open call for innovation brokers or innovation brokering project proposals;
- Ensure the possibility of co-funding innovation from other programmes like the European Regional Development Fund;
- Consider that there may be a need for legal protection of innovation and innovators, for example concerning registration and use of patents;
- Make clear what level of risk is accepted and how this will be handled in providing support.

A number of other suggestions emerged which relate more to the general policy environment:

- Ensure long-term programmes supporting interactive R&D which can foster the climate for innovations in companies and in farming sub-sectors;
- Build an 'innovation ecosystem' composed by government, social and industry partners, universities and training centres, advanced services (e.g. the Spanish 'Technology Platforms');
- Publicly recognise and award good performance amongst innovation brokers;
- Create a regional-scale support approach (like in the case of the Finnish NRN Network; the Norwegian case also suggests to link it with Research Councils);
- Simplify, be flexible to fit the innovation processes and ensure timely payments.

ANNEX 1 MAs and NRNs tentative survey results on innovation brokerage planning for 2014-2020

In parallel to the collection of case studies, the FG conducted a survey involving RDP Managing Authorities and National Rural Networks. The aim of this investigation was to provide an overview on MAs' and NRNs' state-of-the-art thinking on how to foster innovation in the programming period 2014-2020, and what the possible implications could be according to their current experiences. The results of this exercise are summarised below.

Part A. Plans for innovation brokerage for 2014-2020: RDP Managing Authorities

The collection of case studies on innovation brokers has been accompanied by an enquiry involving RDP Managing Authorities (MAs). The aim of the survey was to retrieve useful information about how those involved in the design of the rural development strategy and programme at national level are paving the way for animating innovative actions, facilitating the emergence of Operational Groups and supporting innovation brokerage actions.

The survey was addressed to all 27 national authorities in charge of rural development policy thanks also to the active involvement of the Focus Group's members. Responses were received from 11 MAs¹¹ (officials responsible for innovation aspects), or one third of the EU MS.

Considering the time in the RDPs programming process and the still open discussions going on at EU and national level about how to include innovation aspects into programmes, the enquiry had an exploratory character. The answers received clearly confirm that the topic of innovation in general and that of innovation brokers in particular are still under discussion at programmes' level with consultations and dedicated working groups being established and a few initial strategic decisions already tabled. Answers also highlight a different progress in preparations, with some MAs currently focusing on the SWOT analysis (and ex-ante evaluation) which – as expected – is considered as preliminary step before moving into decisions about priorities and measures.

From a horizontal reading of the answers received, it emerges that – when available – current experience with the implementation of the RDP measure 124 (cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies in the agriculture and food sector and in the forestry sector) is being valued by MAs in the new programming phase.

This section provides a summary of the findings around the two main questions considered by the survey.

¹¹ Namely: AT, BE - Flanders, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, IE, NL and SE.

A.1 Envisaged options for establishing facilitation instruments providing innovation brokerage services in support to the agricultural EIP

In the majority of cases decisions at this level are not yet been made by MAs. Initial thoughts and proposals though are emerging – with a different degree of confidence – in relation to who (NRNs, advisory services, other bodies, etc.) should be responsible for providing innovation brokerage services within future RDPs, and how. To be noted that the options expressed are not mutually exclusive and that in some cases a combination of possibilities from those offered by the EC's proposal on rural development post 2013 is being considered.

Use of technical assistance budget, namely through **NRNs** is seen as possibility in four cases at least. In the case of EE for example, the MA is planning to undertake discussions with the NRN in order to explore how its Action Plan for 2014-2020 can work in parallel with the new RDP (under finalisation) and actively support RDP implementation, especially on topics like innovation. Central role is also planned for the NRN in CZ where it has been proposed that the network will support the setting-up of EIP Operational Groups.

In the Netherlands the option considered is that the Operational Groups themselves could also take over brokering activities. They could hire facilitators to stimulate their innovation process and setting targets for the OG.

At the same time, a number of MAs (4) have pointed out the possibility for providing innovation brokerage services under **Article 36** of the Commission's proposal in the view of fostering the establishment and the animation of OGs. Under this option costs would be eligible under Art 36 (5) (b). Approaches at this stage of planning might vary: in Belgium-Flanders, for example, under Article 36, brokering would be one of the activities – next to others – that can be covered by the support received by Operational Groups.

The option concerning the support to **advisory services** with a particular focus on innovation was not further explored by respondents. However, it was recognised that integration of innovation brokerage initiatives within FAS is something to be looked at in future programming, in particular now that the innovation measures are covered in the minimum scope of the Farm Advisory System (FAS)¹².

A.2 Possible constraints and ways forward

On the basis of current experiences and the future policy scenario MAs were also asked to indicate possible emerging constraints in animating innovative actions and Operational Groups within future RDPs.

A number of constraints were identified among which three categories appear to be of general concern.

EU **State Aid rules** on research and development are perceived in several cases to provide a too rigid framework for allowing an adequate support to innovation action in the current programming

¹² Horizontal CAP regulation compromise

period. This caused support provided under measure 124 to be relatively small and insufficient to achieve expected objectives. It also delayed implementation of the measure for the need of having separate approval of state aid notifications.

In a number of ways the 'multi-actor' and 'multi-fund' dimension of innovative actions – including innovation brokerage – emerged from respondents' concern about **coordination** of policies, projects, administrations and main players (particularly farmers). RDP managers acknowledge that innovation involves multiple actors under possibly different support instruments so that the issues of possible double funding and effective coordination of the AKIS system and on-the-ground initiatives arise. This consideration opens up also to another set of constraints related to administrative capacity and particularly to resources within national or regional authorities in charge with 'rural innovation'.

A need expressed at national level is therefore the coordination of the different bodies that are tasked with providing innovation services (generally and not only in the agricultural sector) in order to avoid overlapping and achieve synergies and complementarities in the field of innovation related to agriculture. For this reason, discussions should take place amongst these authorities.

In the attempt to find a solution to the coordination issue at national/regional level, it is felt that more **information and guidance** should come from the EU about what is possible to achieve under different funds and, the contribution of each fund (other than EAFRD) to realising the EIP. More in general, information provision is seen as highly needed both at a general level about the EIP concept and targeted towards the agricultural sector about the possibilities and benefits of cooperation and innovation. Several EIP stakeholders' events have already taken place in Member States and others planned. In June 2013 a seminar dedicated to rural development programming for innovation was organised by DG AGRI and the EIP Service Point. Rural development programming authorities and the Focus Group KT&I were invited, information was given and discussions on various approaches for innovation programming held¹³. Innovation animation could improve the level of preparedness of the agricultural sector and innovation brokering may stimulate cooperation among farmers where this is slow to take-off.

A number of other issues were pointed out in a less articulated way, which however deserves consideration for further reflection. These include: the difficulty to monitor the "quality" of innovation brokerage activities; the long term sustainability of such initiatives and the need to drift away from a "project" approach which implies short duration, temporary staff and significant administrative burden; the need to further promote the participation of the end-users in order to stimulate applied research and innovations; and promote clustering of innovation activities in order to achieve better coordination at local, national and transnational level.

¹³ Information can be found on http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/events/index_en.htm

Part B. Plans for innovation brokerage for 2014-2020: National Rural Networks

NRNs have a central role in bringing together actors involved in rural development. NRNs, or dedicated EIP networking functions under the umbrella of NRNs, may work on gathering and disseminating information, animating discussions, screening and reporting on research results, facilitating the sharing of information on good practices, as well as bringing together innovation actors in focus groups, seminars, and workshops in order to bridge the gap between research and practice. The draft EC guidelines on programming for innovation clearly state that the NRNs could also install or contract a service that assumes the concrete function of innovation brokerage for EIP Operational Groups, bringing together a group of actors around a concrete common project proposal.

In this context, a specific questionnaire was developed and addressed to the National Rural Networks. The aim was to gather information about how the NRNs foresee their role in fostering innovation in the next programming period (2014-2020) and what will be the possible implications according to their current experience. With the support of the FG members responses were received from 12 NRNs¹⁴ and the findings are summarised in the following sections.

B.1 Envisaged role of NRNs for fostering innovation in the future period (2014-2020)

On the question whether an 'innovation task' should be set up within the future National Rural Network, in the majority of the responses (10 NRNs) it was confirmed that either this option is already considered or that it would be an advantageous approach. The Estonian NRN indicated that they have already been supporting innovation conducive activities and this should be further reinforced in the future. Setting up an innovation task within the future NRN would also profit from the fact that NRNs are in contact with farmers' representatives, according to the Maltese reply. These representatives are trusted by the farmers and can relay the message for innovation and encourage them to co-operate with academics for creating innovative projects. Moreover, due to the small size of the farming sector in Malta assigning the innovation task to the future NRN appears to be the only option. In the case of the Czech NRN, it is considered to set-up a specific thematic working group within the NRN that will be dedicated to innovation and the EIP. The Slovakian NRN suggested that a minimum of two people within the NRN should be assigned with the innovation topic. On the other hand, the German NRN considers that setting up the "innovation task" within the NRN is in contradiction with the bottom-up approach for supporting innovation.

The questionnaire also attempted to investigate current views on whether NRNs would be suitable to undertake concrete innovation brokering activities. From the responses received a tension emerged between NRNs that provide the function of 'innovation brokers' (5 NRNs¹⁵) or act as 'information brokers' (6 NRNs¹⁶).

The first cluster suggested that the NRNs could operate as the "middle man" or the "mediator" that will articulate the emerging needs, match them with the available expertise and provide support for

¹⁴ BE - Flanders, CY, CZ, EE, ES, DE, EL, MT, NL, PL, SK and SE.

¹⁵ CY, CZ, ES, MT, NL

¹⁶ BE - Flanders, DE, GR, PL, SK, SE

finding suitable partners. According to the Spanish NRN, Technical Assistance budget could be used so that the NRN will operate a pool of innovating brokers and through them, the brokers would get in contact with innovation actors.

A second group of NRNs however consider 'information brokering' as the most appropriate role for the networks. In this case it is suggested that NRNs should focus on the exchange of information to interested parties (researchers, farmers, entrepreneurs etc.) by: collecting and disseminating information about the needs or problems that need new solutions; disseminating research results; providing the potential stakeholders with web tools for exchanging ideas, data and best practices through web bases, conferences etc.

The questionnaire investigated also the possibility for NRNs to establish or contract one or more specific services for assuming the role of innovation brokerage. Four NRNs (BE, CY, CZ and GR) categorically confirmed that they are not considering that option. In the case of Flanders, it was commented that they would prefer to cooperate with existing organizations/networks like the Platform for Agricultural Research, experimental stations, innovation brokers (e.g. Innovation Support Centre). These organizations could get funding through the support measures aimed at establishing Operational Groups. For the Greek NRN there is no prerequisite at national level for the NRN to play the role of innovation broker. In addition there is also no provision for sufficient human and financial resources serving that purpose. Furthermore, the staff should receive appropriate training to support its new role. Training of staff is an issue also for the Slovakian NRN as they envisage the possibility of undertaking this task themselves subject to receiving appropriate training first.

In the cases of the Maltese and the Dutch networks the option of possible new contracts for the purpose of supporting innovation brokering is being considered. In Malta, the NRN considers the possibility to engage an experienced expert/consultant on the basis of a temporary contract to coordinate innovation brokerage within its structure. In the Netherlands where the NRN is already composed by 5 independent consultancy firms with operating expertise in the field of agriculture and rural development, an additional partner with more specific expertise in innovation brokering is seen as a possibility.

On the basis of these considerations, NRNs point out at certain needs and recommendations, related to the successful implementation of the proposed role on supporting innovation:

NRNs needs	NRNs recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adequate human and financial resources. ▪ Appropriate training for the staff. ▪ Strong need of specific definition in the legislation for the figure of Innovation Broker. The legislation should point out the requirements, the necessary conditions and characteristics to develop the activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The figure of innovation broker should be mandatory for the development of pilot projects. ○ The innovation supporting activity should be considered throughout the lifetime of innovation projects.

B.2 Other structures providing brokering services

Most of the responses (8 NRNs) consider that the function of innovation brokering should be organised by a single coordinating body at national level, namely the future NRNs. According to the Cypriot NRN, research bodies could not take the lead on that role since innovation brokering needs to be unbiased and in this case the researchers are part of the funded stakeholders, therefore the NRNs would be more suitable. However, the role/tasks of the NRNs should be specified precisely first. The Estonian NRN commented that even the activity would fit perfectly with the NRN's profile, advisory services would have an advantage in terms of specific knowledge and contacts with the relevant actors. The Dutch NRN provided an example of an innovation network supported at national level (Networking in Animal Husbandry) in which the Wageningen University – as an agricultural knowledge institution – has the coordinating role and the beneficiaries are exclusively farmers. In this case, innovation projects are selected and funded via tender procedures. The role of broker for these networks is mainly played by individual consultants and/or knowledge centres.

B.3 Constraints in supporting innovation through brokering at National and EU level

In the analysis of the constraints, three categories could be identified in relation to: i) the innovation processes; ii) the RD Programming and; iii) the brokering bodies.

On the process, many of the respondents expressed concerns about the **low awareness** among the potential actors about the notion of innovation, insufficient information on what can be supported and the possibilities offered. Some responses considered that innovation brokering will also have to confront the **low willingness to take risk** and **slow reaction to changes**. Indicatively, as the Maltese NRN pointed out, the aging farming population may hinder the drive for innovation. Innovation might also be not a priority as long as farmers may still need to cover basic needs such compliance to requirements and standards, according to the Slovakian response. **Lack of trust** between partners due to cultural differences may be another obstacle to be overcome as well. A possible way forward would be that MAs or NRNs should support brokering with a strong organisational support service and good communication.

Implementing **academic knowledge in practice** might also constitute a challenge for innovation brokers. In the case of the Netherlands a certain reservation has been observed in the rural community about the researchers' role, as if development only begins when research enters the scene. However, the EIP is considered to be very supportive in this direction.

The responses also indicated that there is uncertainty on how to set up a clear framework for the role of Managing Authorities, Innovation Brokers and Organisational Groups, while ensuring sufficient flexibility. In addition, there is no clarity on the risks to be assumed by the Management Authorities, in case of the expected results are not achieved. In order to tackle these issues suggestions were made to provide guidelines on how to manage innovation projects, and clearly distribute the responsibilities between Operational Groups and Management Authorities.

Also in terms of programming it was pointed out by the Spanish NRN that a wide range of innovation topics could potentially **scatter investments**. In their view, clustering of innovative activities in the programmes would bundle experience and reduce paper work. It was also considered that **pressure**

from businesses might be experienced due to their effort to redirect innovation towards commercial issues. Thus it might be necessary to pay attention to this aspect in the innovation proposals.

Finally a number of issues for consideration were reported concerning the **brokering actors**. Currently NRNs experience **insufficient cooperation with scientists or the AKIS**. The Maltese experience emphasised that innovation brokering should be led by the existing structures that already combine the right mix of expertise and have already gained the trust of farmers (e.g. cooperatives or advisory services). Thus, it should be a priority for MAs and NRNs to strengthen these structures. The NRNs of Flanders and Spain, also remarked the challenge to **monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of innovation brokering** and for which targeted set of indicators should be set up.

B.4 NRN inter-linking researchers and other AKIS actors

Almost all of the NRNs responses were assertive as to their ability or compatibility of their mission to establish linkages with research and other AKIS actors. Respondents particularly emphasised the independent position of the Network and the already existing links to several AKIS actors.

NRNs may have a potential to act as coordinating body for the innovative cooperation networks. For instance, specific NRN meetings may be dedicated to innovation where other stakeholders could be invited. These can include academics and other AKIS actors. The Flemish NRN underlined that the EIP function will make it easier to link up with the broad range of actors in the AKIS. In absence of specialised EIP Networks, NRNs seem to have established some sort of basic cooperation with scientists and researchers and this cooperation could be expanded.