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ECOFOODCYCLE

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D.3.3.1 Manual for organizing hackathons

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Reducing Food Waste and its Environmental Footprint through Sustainable Food Systems

D.3.3.1 Manual for organizing hackathons

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Organization of food waste hackathon

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1. Introduction

Food waste represents one of the most pressing environmental, social and economic challenges affecting contemporary food systems. Approximately one third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted each year, resulting in significant greenhouse gas emissions, inefficient use of natural resources, economic losses across the supply chain and negative social impacts. Addressing food waste therefore requires a systemic, cross-sectoral and participatory approach involving public authorities, businesses, educational institutions, civil society and citizens.

The ECOFOODCYCLE project – *Reducing Food Waste and its Environmental Footprint through Sustainable Food Systems*, implemented under the Interreg Italy–Croatia 2021–2027 Programme, aims to reduce food waste and its environmental impact by strengthening capacities, raising awareness and fostering innovative solutions across the Adriatic area. Within this context, hackathons are recognised as an effective tool for engaging stakeholders, stimulating innovation and co-creating practical solutions to concrete food waste challenges.

A food waste hackathon is an intensive, time-limited collaborative event that brings together participants with diverse backgrounds—such as students, young professionals, entrepreneurs, researchers, food system actors and public sector representatives—to work in multidisciplinary teams on defined challenges related to food waste prevention and management. Through teamwork, mentoring and structured facilitation, participants develop ideas, concepts or prototypes that can contribute to more sustainable and circular

food systems. In this manual, the term 'hackathon' refers specifically to such structured, solution-oriented collaborative events.

This manual provides a practical framework for organising hackathons within the ECOFOODCYCLE project, covering all key phases of the process—from initial planning and preparation, through implementation, to post-event follow-up and evaluation.

The manual is designed to:

- ensure a coherent and harmonised approach to the organisation of hackathons across partner regions;
- support the delivery of high-quality, inclusive and impactful events aligned with project objectives;
- facilitate the development of innovative and feasible solutions to food waste challenges;
- strengthen cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange.

While primarily intended for project partners, the manual may also be useful for local authorities, educational institutions, development agencies and other stakeholders interested in organising participatory innovation events focused on food systems and sustainability.

By applying this guidance, organisers will be better equipped to design and implement hackathons that contribute to concrete actions, pilot initiatives and long-term solutions for more sustainable and circular food systems, while strengthening collaboration and knowledge exchange across regions

2. Defining the Hackathon Focus and Scope

This ensures that hackathon activities are not isolated events, but contribute directly to addressing identified challenges and supporting project objectives. A clearly defined focus and scope help ensure that hackathon outcomes are relevant, applicable and aligned with project objectives. Hackathon topics should build on key challenges identified through project activities, such as food waste audits, pilot actions and stakeholder consultations at local and regional levels. Available data, insights and stakeholder input should be used to prioritise issues with practical relevance and potential for further development. Priority areas may include food waste prevention across the entire value chain—from primary production and distribution to hospitality, tourism and final consumption. Additional focus areas may include inefficiencies in supply chains, redistribution and reuse of surplus food, behavioural change, and the use of digital tools for monitoring and managing food waste.

2.1. Defining Hackathon Objectives

Hackathon objectives should be clearly defined and aligned with expected project results. It is important that they are directly linked to concrete food waste challenges identified through project activities. In practice, hackathon objectives should focus on developing concrete and applicable solutions that address clearly defined problems. This includes not only generating ideas, but also developing them into concepts, prototypes or proposals for implementation. Objectives should also encourage the involvement of relevant stakeholders and the identification of solutions with potential for further development within project

activities, such as pilot actions, real-life testing or further refinement. It is important that objectives are realistically defined in relation to the duration and format of the hackathon. Participants are not expected to deliver fully developed solutions, but rather clearly structured proposals that can be further developed and potentially implemented.

2.2. Target Groups and Participant Profiles

A diverse and well-balanced group of participants is key to ensuring multidisciplinary collaboration and high-quality results. The hackathon should involve participants with complementary skills and expertise relevant to food systems and sustainability challenges. Typical participants include students and young professionals, representatives of the hospitality and food sector, entrepreneurs and SMEs, researchers and sustainability experts, as well as representatives of public authorities and civil society organisations. Particular attention should be given to ensuring a balanced mix of skills and perspectives within teams. Where relevant, organisers may also involve the wider local community to ensure that developed solutions reflect local needs and context. The hackathon also creates an opportunity for knowledge exchange between participants from different sectors and levels of experience, supporting collaboration, mutual learning and the development of innovative solutions. This interaction between different profiles supports the transfer of knowledge, encourages new perspectives and strengthens the relevance of developed solutions. Hackathons are typically organised as medium-scale events, involving approximately 20 to 30 participants, with a minimum of around 15 and a maximum of up to 40 participants, depending on available resources and organisational capacity. Participants are usually

organised into three to six teams, with three to six members per team, ensuring balanced teamwork and the integration of diverse skills and perspectives.

2.3. Defining Thematic Focus

The hackathon should be structured around a clearly defined thematic focus or a set of challenge tracks aligned with project priorities and local needs. In practice, this involves translating broader themes into clearly structured and actionable challenges that guide participants' work. Rather than using general topics, challenges should reflect concrete situations—for example reducing food waste in restaurants during peak tourist seasons, improving redistribution of surplus food at the local level or applying digital tools to monitor food waste in business operations. When defining the thematic focus, local specificities—such as tourism intensity, rural characteristics or supply chain constraints—should be taken into account. This supports the development of solutions that are both innovative and applicable in real-life conditions. Themes and challenges should be communicated clearly to participants in advance, together with basic contextual information. Preparatory materials may include short problem descriptions, selected data or examples of existing practices, enabling participants to better understand the challenges and prepare for the event.

2.4. Expected Outputs

Clearly defined outputs help guide participants and ensure consistency in the evaluation process. Participants should be encouraged to develop solutions that are relevant to the identified challenges and applicable within the project context. Expected outputs may



include concepts, prototypes, service or business models, proposals for pilot implementation, or awareness-raising initiatives. It is important to emphasise that the goal of the hackathon is not to produce fully developed solutions, but rather well-structured proposals that can be further developed and implemented. A key added value of the hackathon lies in collaborative work between participants from different backgrounds and areas of expertise. Through teamwork and the exchange of ideas, participants are able to develop more innovative and higher-quality solutions. This collective effort often results in solutions with greater potential for further development and real impact. Typically, a hackathon may result in four to six developed solution concepts or prototypes, depending on the number of teams and the scope of the challenges.

3. Planning and Preparation: Assembling Your Team and Resources

Effective planning and preparation are essential for the successful organisation and delivery of a hackathon. The overall quality of the event largely depends on this phase, as well-established organisational and operational foundations enable smooth implementation and allow participants to focus on developing solutions. A well-prepared framework reduces uncertainty, improves coordination and ensures that all key elements of the hackathon are aligned in advance.

This phase includes establishing the organising structure, engaging relevant stakeholders, allocating resources and defining key logistical and operational elements in a coordinated

manner. It also involves timely decision-making regarding the thematic focus, target groups, format and overall scope of the hackathon.

3.1. Establishing the Organising Team

Hackathon organisation builds on the existing capacities of project partners, particularly in areas such as coordination, administration and communication. In practice, many organisational tasks can be covered through internal resources. Depending on the scope and complexity of the event, external experts can be engaged to strengthen implementation quality. This may include facilitation, mentoring, technical support or support in evaluation. The organising team should ensure that all key functions are covered, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Recommended roles include:

- **Hackathon Coordinator**

  Responsible for overall coordination, timeline management and alignment with project objectives.
- **Logistics and Operations Coordinator**

  Manages venue arrangements, technical setup and operational aspects of the event.
- **Content and Challenge Lead**

  Oversees the definition of challenges and coordination with mentors and experts.
- **Participant and Communication Coordinator**

  Handles participant recruitment, communication and outreach activities.

- **Mentor and Jury Liaison**

  Coordinates mentors and jury members, including scheduling and support during evaluation.

In smaller teams, roles may be combined; however, responsibilities should remain clearly defined and agreed in advance. Clear role distribution and internal coordination are essential for efficient decision-making and for avoiding overlaps during both preparation and implementation phases.

3.2. Engaging Stakeholders and Project Partners

The hackathon should function as a collaborative platform that connects diverse stakeholders across the food system and supports the co-creation of practical solutions. Relevant stakeholders may include representatives of the hospitality and food service sector (restaurants, hotels, catering), educational and research institutions, local and regional authorities, organisations working in waste management and sustainability, NGOs and civil society organisations, as well as innovation hubs, incubators and business support organisations. Stakeholders should be actively involved throughout the process—from contributing to the definition of challenges and providing real-life insights, to mentoring participants and engaging in the evaluation of solutions. Such involvement ensures that the hackathon is grounded in real needs and significantly increases the potential for further development and implementation of solutions.

3.3. Budget and Resource Planning

Hackathon planning should be aligned with the available project budget and relevant programme rules. Each partner operates within its own financial framework, and the scope and format of the hackathon should be adapted accordingly. Key resource categories typically include venue and technical equipment, catering and refreshments (preferably based on sustainable and food waste–aware principles), non-financial awards and follow-up support opportunities, communication and promotional materials, as well as external expertise where needed. Where possible, resources can be complemented through in-kind contributions, such as the provision of space, equipment or expert support from local stakeholders. Careful planning and prioritisation of resources are essential to ensure that available funds are used efficiently while maintaining the overall quality of the event.

3.4. Venue

Selecting an appropriate venue is a key aspect of hackathon preparation, as it directly influences collaboration, participant experience and the overall dynamics of the event. The venue should provide sufficient capacity, be easily accessible and offer a clear and functional layout for team work. Reliable internet connectivity, adequate technical infrastructure and necessary equipment are essential preconditions for smooth implementation.

In addition, the venue should support both collaborative work and presentation activities, while ensuring basic comfort for participants throughout the event. A well-organised and flexible space contributes to a productive and engaging working environment.

3.5. Timeline Planning, Coordination and Risk Management

A clearly defined timeline is essential for the effective coordination of all hackathon activities. As a general guideline, local hackathons are recommended to be organised as two- or three-day events, depending on the scope of the challenges, desired level of solution development and available organisational capacity. Shorter formats are suitable for focused idea development and efficient organisation, while extended formats allow for deeper exploration of challenges, more intensive mentoring support and more advanced solution refinement. Preparation typically involves multiple parallel processes, including defining challenges, engaging stakeholders, launching communication activities, selecting participants and organising logistical and technical aspects.

To ensure efficient implementation, it is important to establish clear internal deadlines, maintain regular coordination within the organising team and support timely decision-making. This structured approach helps maintain progress and reduces the risk of delays.

At the same time, hackathon organisation involves potential risks that should be anticipated in advance. Common challenges include low participant interest, last-minute cancellations of key contributors and technical issues. To mitigate these risks, organisers should implement practical measures such as early communication, confirming the availability of key participants and testing technical and logistical elements in advance. Preparing backup options—such as alternative mentors or flexible scheduling—can further strengthen organisational resilience. Maintaining flexibility throughout both preparation and implementation phases allows organisers to respond effectively to unexpected situations and ensures continuity of the event.



4. Designing the Hackathon Experience: Challenges, Data, and Judging Criteria

The design of the hackathon experience plays a central role in shaping participant engagement, the quality of developed solutions and their practical applicability. A well-designed hackathon provides a clear and structured framework for participants, while allowing sufficient flexibility for creativity and innovation. This includes clearly defined challenges, access to relevant and understandable information, appropriate mentoring support and a transparent evaluation framework. These elements should be aligned to ensure that participants are effectively guided throughout the process, while maintaining ownership of their ideas and solutions.

4.1. Defining Challenges

Hackathon challenges should be based on concrete problems identified through project activities, such as food waste audits, pilot actions or stakeholder engagement processes. They should be clearly formulated, understandable to participants with different backgrounds and focused on situations that can realistically be addressed within the timeframe of the hackathon.

In practice, this involves translating broader themes into clearly structured, problem-oriented questions. For example, instead of a general topic such as “food waste reduction”, a challenge can be formulated more precisely, such as: How can food waste be reduced in restaurants during peak tourist seasons?

Challenges may address different stages of the food system, including primary production, distribution and consumption. Examples include:

- reducing food losses in primary production;
- improving connections between producers and markets;
- optimising procurement and menu planning in restaurants;
- improving buffet management in hotels;
- developing simple tools for monitoring food waste in businesses;
- improving redistribution of surplus food at the local level;
- encouraging behavioural change among consumers.

Each challenge should include a short description of the problem, relevant context, target group or sector and the expected type of output. Challenges should remain open enough to encourage creativity, while being sufficiently structured to guide participants towards feasible and applicable solutions.

The level of detail and formulation of challenges can be further refined once the main theme of the cross-border hackathon is defined, ensuring alignment with local priorities and project activities.

4.2. Providing Data and Supporting Resources

Providing relevant background information can significantly support participants in understanding the challenge and developing informed solutions. At the same time, it is important to maintain a balanced approach and avoid overloading participants with excessive data. Participants may be supported with selected materials such as summaries of



project findings, key insights from stakeholder engagement, examples of existing practices or concise descriptions of the problem context. Where detailed data is not available, simple and clearly structured briefing materials are sufficient. The objective is to provide participants with enough context to begin their work effectively, while leaving space for their own interpretation, creativity and problem-solving approaches.

4.3. Ensuring Effective Mentoring

Mentoring is an important support mechanism within the hackathon, helping participants better understand challenges, refine their ideas and assess the feasibility of their solutions. Mentors should be selected based on their expertise and relevance to the hackathon themes and may include professionals from the hospitality and food sector, sustainability and waste management experts, business development professionals, as well as representatives of public institutions or academia. Their role is to provide guidance, share practical insights and support teams in structuring their work, without taking ownership of the solutions. Depending on the format of the event, mentors may be assigned to specific teams or interact with multiple teams, ensuring that all participants have access to relevant expertise.

4.4. Defining Judging Criteria

Clear and well-communicated judging criteria are essential for ensuring a transparent and consistent evaluation process. Participants should be informed about the criteria at the beginning of the hackathon.

A simple scoring scale (e.g. 1–5) is recommended to ensure consistency.



Evaluation criteria typically include relevance and impact, innovation, feasibility, transferability and quality of presentation.

Below is an example of a more detailed elaboration of the criteria:

- **Relevance and Impact**

This criterion assesses how well the solution addresses the defined challenge and its potential contribution to reducing food waste. It also considers the expected environmental, social or economic impact.

Evaluation aspects may include:

- clarity of problem understanding;
- alignment with the needs of the target group or sector;
- potential to reduce food waste;
- clarity of expected impact.

Scoring example:

- 1 point – weak connection to the challenge, unclear or minimal impact
- 3 points – relevant solution with some potential impact, but not fully developed
- 5 points – directly addresses the challenge, clearly defined target group and strong potential impact

- **Innovation and Creativity**

This criterion evaluates the originality of the idea and the approach to solving the problem. Innovation may include new ideas, new combinations of existing approaches, or applying known solutions in a new context.

Evaluation aspects may include:



- originality of the concept;
- added value compared to existing solutions;
- creativity in approach or design.

Scoring example:

- 1 point – generic idea with little or no innovation
- 3 points – some innovative elements, but largely based on existing approaches
- 5 points – highly original and creative solution with clear added value
- **Feasibility**

This criterion assesses how realistic and implementable the solution is in real-life conditions, considering technical, organisational and basic economic aspects.

Evaluation aspects may include:

- technical feasibility;
- required resources and conditions;
- clarity of implementation pathway;
- consideration of real-world constraints.

Scoring example:

- 1 point – unclear or unrealistic solution
- 3 points – partially feasible but requires further development
- 5 points – clearly explained, realistic and implementable solution

- **Transferability and Wider Application**

This criterion evaluates the potential of the solution to be applied beyond the initial context, including in other regions, sectors or similar situations.

Evaluation aspects may include:

- potential for replication in other contexts;
- flexibility and adaptability of the solution;
- relevance beyond the local level, including cross-border applicability.

Scoring example:

- 1 point – very context-specific, difficult to apply elsewhere
- 3 points – some potential for adaptation, but with limitations
- 5 points – easily transferable and applicable in different contexts

- **Quality of Presentation**

This criterion assesses how clearly and convincingly the team presents its solution, including the structure, clarity and overall communication.

Evaluation aspects may include:

- clarity and structure of the presentation;
- ability to explain the problem and solution;
- persuasiveness and coherence.

Scoring example:

- 1 point – unclear and poorly structured presentation
- 3 points – understandable but lacking clarity or structure
- 5 points – clear, well-structured and highly convincing presentation



Each jury member may assign scores from 1 to 5 for each criterion, after which the scores can be summed or averaged. If needed, certain criteria (such as relevance and feasibility) can be given greater weight, depending on the priorities of the hackathon. A structured evaluation framework helps ensure consistency in judging, supports participants in developing more focused solutions, and contributes to the overall transparency and credibility of the hackathon process.

4.5. Selecting the Jury

The composition of the jury is important for ensuring a balanced and credible evaluation process. It is recommended to appoint a relatively small but diverse group of jury members, typically between three and five individuals. This range provides a balance between including different perspectives and maintaining an efficient decision-making process. Jury members should represent complementary areas of expertise relevant to the hackathon themes, including the food sector, sustainability, business and public institutions. This ensures that solutions are assessed from multiple perspectives, including practical applicability, innovation potential and alignment with real-world conditions. It is recommended that jury members first assess solutions independently, followed by a joint discussion. This approach supports objectivity, reduces potential bias and contributes to a more consistent evaluation process. Providing concise and constructive feedback to participants further enhances the overall value of the hackathon experience and supports the continued development of ideas.

5. Recruiting Participants: Communication, Outreach and Visibility

The success of a hackathon depends on the ability to attract motivated and relevant participants who bring diverse perspectives, knowledge and experience to the problem-solving process. Well-designed communication and targeted outreach are therefore essential for ensuring a balanced and engaged group of participants, as well as for supporting high-quality collaboration and outcomes. Communication activities should go beyond the mere dissemination of information. They play a key role in engaging stakeholders, raising interest and positioning the hackathon as a meaningful initiative addressing concrete food waste challenges. At the same time, hackathon promotion contributes to strengthening the visibility of the ECOFOODCYCLE project, its objectives and its results at both local and cross-border levels. A balanced approach that combines promotion, engagement and clear information-sharing supports not only the success of the hackathon itself, but also the broader impact of the project.

5.1. Developing Communication and Promotional Materials

A clear and engaging presentation of the hackathon is the foundation of all communication activities. Messages should be concise, easy to understand and tailored to different target groups. Communication should highlight the purpose of the hackathon, its connection to food waste reduction and its link to the ECOFOODCYCLE project. It is also important to emphasise the opportunity to work on real-life challenges, contribute to practical solutions



and benefit from participation through learning, mentoring, networking and further development opportunities. All communication materials should include essential practical information, such as the date, location, duration, application process and expected participant profile, along with a clear reference to the project and its funding programme. Each project partner should ensure that key information about the hackathon is published on their institutional websites. At the same time, the project communication partner should support overall visibility through the official project website and social media channels, ensuring consistent and coordinated dissemination of information.

5.2. Communication Channels, Outreach and Inclusion

Promotion should be carried out through a combination of communication channels tailored to the defined target groups. Online platforms and social media play a key role in reaching a wider audience, particularly students, young professionals and start-up communities. Targeted communication approaches can be used to reach specific groups more effectively. Professional networks and sector-specific platforms can support outreach to experts, while social media campaigns can increase visibility among younger audiences. Existing project networks, partner organisations and institutional channels should be actively used to disseminate information and ensure coordinated visibility. In addition to digital communication, cooperation with local media and organisations can further strengthen outreach efforts. Informing local media through announcements or press releases can increase visibility and credibility, while collaboration with universities, business associations and civil society organisations can facilitate access to relevant participant groups. To ensure

diversity and inclusiveness, outreach activities should include targeted approaches towards specific groups. Where possible, additional measures may be considered to facilitate participation, particularly for underrepresented groups. Through all communication and outreach activities, the hackathon also serves as a tool for promoting the project, its objectives and its results.

5.3. Registration and Participant Communication

A clear and accessible registration process is essential for ensuring a smooth participant experience. Application forms should collect relevant information on participants' background, skills and motivation, while remaining simple and user-friendly. Following the selection process, participants should receive timely and structured communication, including detailed information on the agenda, challenges, logistical arrangements and expectations. Providing a concise set of frequently asked questions (FAQ) or similar guidance can help address common uncertainties and support participants in preparing for the event.

6. Mentors, Workshops, and Logistical Support

Providing appropriate support to participants during the hackathon is essential for ensuring a productive, structured and engaging working environment. The quality of this support directly influences participant experience, team collaboration and the overall quality of developed solutions. This support should be understood as a combination of mentoring, targeted learning inputs and well-organised logistical conditions, all of which enable participants to work efficiently and focus on developing practical and applicable solutions.

Mentors play a central role in guiding participants throughout the hackathon process. They support teams in understanding the challenges, refining ideas and assessing the feasibility of proposed solutions. As a general recommendation, one mentor may support one to two teams, ensuring that all participants have access to guidance while maintaining a manageable level of engagement. Mentors should be selected based on their expertise and relevance to the hackathon themes and may include professionals from the hospitality and food sector, sustainability and waste management experts, business development professionals, as well as representatives of public institutions or academia.

In addition to technical knowledge, it is important that mentors are available during the event and willing to actively engage with participants. Their role is to provide guidance and share practical insights, while allowing teams to maintain ownership of their ideas. Depending on the format of the event, mentors may be assigned to specific teams or interact with multiple teams, ensuring that all participants have access to relevant expertise. Short workshops or introductory sessions can further support participants, particularly when addressing complex or interdisciplinary challenges. These sessions should be practical, concise and aligned with the needs of the hackathon. Topics may include problem definition, design thinking, solution development, business modelling or presentation skills.

It is important to ensure that participants with different levels of experience are able to engage effectively. Providing simple tools, practical examples and clear guidance can support less experienced participants and contribute to more balanced teamwork. Workshops should be carefully integrated into the programme so that they enhance, rather than interrupt, the working process.



Adequate logistical conditions are equally important for enabling continuous and efficient work. Participants should be provided with a functional and supportive working environment that facilitates teamwork, communication and concentration. This includes reliable internet access, basic technical infrastructure and sufficient workspace for teams.

Attention should also be given to participant comfort, including the provision of food and refreshments during the event. Where possible, logistical arrangements should reflect the sustainability principles promoted by the ECOFOODCYCLE project, for example by engaging local providers and minimising food waste. Continuous communication and accessible support throughout the event are essential for maintaining a smooth and efficient process. Participants should have access to clear information and a designated contact person responsible for addressing questions and resolving potential issues. Regular check-ins and updates can help teams stay on track and manage their time effectively. A balanced approach that combines structured support with sufficient autonomy enables participants to work independently while benefiting from guidance, resulting in a more productive and positive hackathon experience.

7. The Hackathon Event: Day-of Coordination and Execution

The successful implementation of a hackathon depends on effective coordination and a clear structure of activities during the event itself. A well-managed process enables participants to focus on developing their solutions, while ensuring that all planned elements are delivered efficiently and within the defined timeframe. All logistical and technical preparations should be completed prior to the arrival of participants. This includes setting up designated areas

for team work, mentoring sessions, presentations and participant support. A clear spatial layout and simple visual guidance help participants navigate the venue efficiently and make effective use of available resources. Technical elements such as internet connectivity, presentation equipment and other infrastructure should be tested in advance to minimise potential disruptions. The opening session should be concise, structured and engaging, as it sets the tone for the entire event. Participants should be introduced to the objectives, agenda, rules and expectations, as well as provided with an overview of the challenges, available resources and evaluation criteria. Where appropriate, short interactive elements can be included to support networking and foster a collaborative atmosphere. During the hackathon, participants should be encouraged to organise their work effectively within teams, distribute tasks and make use of available support. The organising team should remain visible and accessible throughout the event, providing guidance where needed and facilitating communication between participants and mentors. Clear communication channels should be established to ensure that participants can easily access support. A designated contact person should be available to respond to questions and address any issues. Periodic check-ins and brief updates can help teams stay on track and manage their time effectively. Time management is essential for keeping the hackathon on schedule. The event should follow a clearly defined programme with key milestones, including mentoring sessions, intermediate check-ins and final presentations. Participants should be regularly informed about the remaining time and upcoming deadlines, enabling them to prioritise tasks and organise their work accordingly. Particular attention should be given to the final phase of the hackathon, when teams prepare and deliver their presentations. Ensuring



adherence to the schedule at this stage is critical for the smooth execution of the evaluation process. A structured and efficiently managed implementation contributes to a positive participant experience and supports the development of high-quality and applicable solutions.

8. Judging and Awards: Recognizing Innovation

The evaluation of hackathon results represents a key stage of the process, as it determines which solutions will be recognised and further supported within the project framework. A clear, transparent and well-structured evaluation approach is essential for ensuring credibility, consistency and alignment with project objectives.

The judging process should be defined and communicated in advance to both participants and jury members. This includes the evaluation criteria, scoring approach and overall structure of the assessment. Jury members should be provided with clear guidance to ensure a shared understanding of expectations and priorities, contributing to a consistent and balanced evaluation.

Final presentations should be organised in a structured manner, with clearly defined time limits, a standardised format and appropriate technical support, ensuring equal conditions for all teams. A consistent evaluation approach is recommended, whereby jury members first assess each solution independently, followed by a joint discussion. This method supports objectivity, reduces potential bias and enables a more comprehensive comparison of solutions.

Clear documentation of scores and evaluation outcomes further strengthens transparency and accountability, while also supporting internal reporting and future learning.

The awards phase should focus on recognising participant effort, innovation and the potential for further development, rather than financial rewards. Recognition may take different forms, including mentoring opportunities, further development within project activities, increased visibility through project communication channels and connections with relevant stakeholders.

The hackathon should be understood as part of a broader process. In this context, selected teams from local hackathons may be invited to participate in a cross-border hackathon, where they can further develop their solutions, exchange experiences and collaborate with participants from other regions.

The award ceremony should be organised in a professional and inclusive manner, clearly communicating the rationale behind the selection of winning solutions, while acknowledging the contribution of all participants.

Providing constructive feedback is an integral part of the hackathon experience. Feedback should highlight strengths and identify areas for improvement, supporting participants in further developing their ideas. Even when solutions are not selected as winners, meaningful feedback helps maintain motivation and reinforces the collaborative and learning-oriented nature of the hackathon.



9. Post-Hackathon: Follow-Up, Evaluation, and Impact Measurement

Although a hackathon is a time-limited event, its overall value depends on the activities that follow. A structured post-hackathon phase is essential for capturing results, evaluating the quality of implementation and supporting the further development of solutions. Within the project context, this phase also plays an important role in linking hackathon outcomes with ongoing activities, enabling knowledge exchange and strengthening the overall impact of the initiative. A systematic approach to follow-up contributes to learning, improves future implementation and increases the long-term value of hackathon results.

9.1. Evaluation and Feedback

The evaluation of the hackathon should cover both organisational aspects and the overall participant experience. Feedback should be collected from participants, mentors and jury members shortly after the event, while impressions are still fresh. This can be done through a structured online questionnaire addressing key aspects such as clarity of challenges, quality of mentoring, organisation of the event, communication and overall satisfaction. In addition to quantitative feedback, it is useful to collect qualitative insights through follow-up discussions with selected participants or mentors. Alongside feedback, organisers should collect key indicators of the event, including the number and profile of participants, number of teams, type and number of developed solutions, and the level of stakeholder involvement. Visibility indicators, such as media coverage and online engagement, may also be taken into

account. These data provide a basis for internal evaluation, reporting and the improvement of future hackathon activities.

9.2. Impact, Follow-Up and Knowledge Sharing

Assessing the impact of the hackathon involves looking beyond the event itself and considering the further development of selected solutions. A simple and consistent follow-up approach can provide valuable insight into the practical applicability of outcomes. Organisers may maintain contact with selected teams and follow up after a defined period in order to assess whether ideas have been further developed. Where relevant, teams can be connected with ongoing project activities, stakeholders or initiatives that support testing and implementation. At the same time, it is important to ensure systematic documentation of the hackathon. This includes the description of challenges, an overview of participants, a summary of developed solutions and the key outcomes of the event. These elements can be compiled into a concise report or case study, supported by visual materials. Sharing this information within the partnership supports knowledge exchange and contributes to improving future activities. It also strengthens the visibility of results and highlights the role of the hackathon as a tool for generating practical and applicable solutions. Recognising the contribution of all participants, mentors and stakeholders is also an important part of the follow-up process. This may include follow-up communication, certificates or continued engagement through future activities.

10. Sustaining the Momentum: Supporting Winning Teams and Scaling Solutions

Hackathons should not be viewed as standalone events, but as part of a broader process aimed at developing and advancing solutions that address food waste challenges. Ensuring continuity after the event is essential for maximising the value of hackathon outcomes and strengthening their contribution to project objectives. Following the hackathon, selected teams should be encouraged and supported in further developing their ideas. This support does not need to be highly formalised, but should provide access to relevant knowledge, guidance and networks that help move solutions beyond the initial concept stage. Continued engagement with mentors and stakeholders involved in the hackathon can play an important role in this process, particularly in refining ideas, validating assumptions and assessing feasibility. Maintaining these connections supports a more gradual and realistic development of solutions. Where possible, promising solutions should be linked to ongoing project activities. This may include pilot actions, stakeholder initiatives or other relevant processes that enable testing and further development in real-life conditions. Even relatively simple forms of support—such as facilitating contacts, providing targeted feedback or ensuring visibility—can significantly contribute to the progression of ideas.

Establishing connections between teams and relevant stakeholders further strengthens the long-term viability of solutions. This may involve engagement with actors from the food sector, public institutions, research organisations or sustainability-focused initiatives. Opportunities for presenting solutions in different contexts—such as project meetings,



thematic events or stakeholder workshops—can provide additional feedback and support further refinement.

Promoting hackathon results is also an important element of sustaining momentum. Highlighting selected solutions through project communication channels contributes to their visibility and recognises the efforts of participants. Sharing examples of further development helps demonstrate the practical value of hackathon activities and supports broader awareness of food waste challenges and solutions.

By maintaining a consistent but proportionate follow-up approach, organisers can support the continued development of ideas while avoiding unnecessary administrative burden, ensuring that hackathon outcomes remain connected to the broader objectives of the project.

11. Legal and Ethical Considerations

The organisation of hackathons within the ECOFOODCYCLE framework should take into account key legal and ethical aspects in order to ensure a transparent, responsible and compliant implementation of the event. Addressing these elements in advance helps protect both organisers and participants, while contributing to the credibility and quality of the hackathon.

One of the key aspects relates to intellectual property rights. Clear and transparent rules should be defined and communicated to participants prior to the event. As a general principle, participants retain ownership of the solutions they develop during the hackathon. At the same time, participants should agree that project partners may use, present and



promote these solutions for non-commercial purposes within the project framework. These conditions should be clearly outlined in the hackathon rules and presented at the beginning of the event.

Data protection and privacy must also be ensured throughout the organisation and implementation of the hackathon. This includes the collection and processing of participant data during registration, communication and event documentation. Organisers should ensure that all data is handled in accordance with applicable regulations, and that participants are informed about how their data will be used. Where relevant, consent should be obtained for the use of photographs, recordings or other materials generated during the event.

Given the thematic focus of the hackathon, particular attention should be paid to ethical considerations related to food waste. This includes responsible handling of food, respect for food safety standards and alignment with applicable regulations and good practices. If the hackathon includes activities involving food preparation, redistribution or the use of surplus food, organisers should ensure that these are carried out in cooperation with relevant stakeholders and in accordance with appropriate safety and hygiene standards.

More broadly, organisers should ensure that the hackathon is conducted in an inclusive, respectful and collaborative environment. Participants should be informed about expected standards of behaviour, including principles of respectful communication, equal participation and non-discrimination. Establishing a positive and safe working environment contributes to the overall quality of the event and supports effective collaboration among participants.

By addressing legal and ethical considerations in a clear and practical manner, organisers create a reliable framework for the implementation of the hackathon, while ensuring that all activities are aligned with both project objectives and broader regulatory requirements.