Intellectual Output 1
The essential guide to developing a Regional Food Incubator Partnership

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1. Introduction & Background

The Food Incubators Transforming Regions project seeks to forge an effective and replicable model to provide the learning and strategic structure to develop food kitchens and incubators as enterprise, training and support drivers at regional level.

In the context of the Food Incubators Transforming Regions (FITR) project, this guide serves as a toolkit on how to develop a Regional Food Incubator Partnership. The project rationale is clear, while there are many VET responses for food entrepreneurs and SMEs, there is no VET in the theme of training tools for developing regional infrastructure and support structures that will stimulate food economies.

To be very clear and to avoid confusion, this guide facilitates and supports the establishment and running of a Regional Partnership, not directly the Food Incubator itself (that will be the focus of our innovative training programme to be launched in Autumn 2016).

This guide enables the formation of Regional Partnerships which bring together the participating stakeholders interested in setting up a Food Incubator (also called a kitchen incubator or a culinary incubator) in their region.
Background
Over the past five years a significant number of kitchen incubators have opened, especially in the United States; from virtually no food incubators to probably more than 200. From a low base, food incubators are gaining popularity in Europe. Expanding interest in food incubators is not surprising considering recent trends and the economic potential in the culinary industry. Across all EU nations, speciality and artisan food products are gaining market share and a new generation of savvy food entrepreneurs are emerging. With the booming interest in local and artisan food, the demand for food production space has exploded over the past decade, creating the demand that has bred new food incubators. It is clear that there is much more interest in local food production and culinary entrepreneurship than there was even a decade ago. This new demand is creating the impetus for incubators solutions as economic drivers and employment creators at a regional level.

What are Food Incubators?
Food incubators are dedicated food grade production units. They also include the shared use commercial kitchen business model that culinary entrepreneurs can rent by the hour or block of time in order to commercially produce food products. Their availability makes it financially feasible for small and home-based food businesses to take advantage of a professional and licensed kitchen facility to develop and grow local enterprises without the onus capital investment of their own production kitchen.

The need for food incubators stems from the fact that in many places it is illegal to run a food business out of a home/domestic kitchen. In many jurisdictions food products may only be prepared for wholesale or retail in a commercial kitchen that is licensed by the proper local or state regulatory agencies. Even in areas where certain products may be legally produced from home (per cottage food laws), many products still require a licensed facility depending on their risk categorisation. In addition, when home-based food businesses grow, the residential kitchen is often no longer appropriate to accommodate large scale production with quality control and safety standards required to mass market products to consumers.

In many cases, entrepreneurs who need licensed commercial kitchens do not have enough capital to invest in their own commercial kitchen and cannot develop their full potential. Kitchen incubators are notoriously expensive to develop (second only to the healthcare manufacturing environment). Entrepreneurs are often very creative and rent space from a restaurant after hours, use a church basement kitchen, or seek any other type of kitchens that may be available. Often these facilities are not ideal due to a lack of flexibility of when the space is available, inconsistent access, expense, and a lack of adequate equipment. Kitchen incubators/accelerators and shared-use kitchens seek to fill this gap and provide facilities for these entrepreneurs.

The true goal of food incubators should be to lower the barriers to entry and teach foodpreneurs what they need to know.
Food businesses are among the riskiest forms of enterprise not least because of the high levels of innovation needed to succeed in the marketplace and the high capital set up costs. At the same time, many people want to start a food business based on their passion for food. To help determine the goal of the food incubator, it is important to set out the different types:

• a food incubator offering independent food production units to start up or growing businesses  
• a shared use incubator kitchen where established small businesses can cut their operating costs  
• an accelerator training programme for people looking to change careers by becoming a foodpreneur  
• a combination of the above e.g. a shared use community kitchen which can be used for start-up food enterprises and for training provision for the food and catering sector. A shared use community kitchen is an important component within the offering of a food incubator and will provide valuable rental income.

The concept of establishing multi tenant food incubators has been enthusiastically progressed in the United States. Local communities and municipalities play a leading role in setting up commercial kitchens as part of their local economic development strategy.

Where food incubators provide a shared use kitchen, they offer two important benefits to start-up and existing food businesses:

**Firstly:**
The construction and equipping of a shared use production kitchen provides entrepreneurs with time-share access to production facilities and the opportunity to start and expand specialty food and catering businesses without the prohibitive cost of building their own commercial kitchen.

**Secondly:**
Such facilities offer a true “incubator approach”, offering start up food entrepreneurs access to business support services & training and technical assistance through the provision of food technologist (if resources permit) or by linking up with a third level institute or government agency who will then provide this technical assistance to the food enterprise tenants on a third party basis - essential ingredients to the success and growth of any start-up business.

Research shows that established food incubators have also benefited their host communities by:

• Creating the employment opportunities that accompany successful small food business start-up and growth strategies.

• Creating food products that celebrate what is unique and best about a community – its local produce, ethnic traditions and creative populace – while keeping a greater percentage of food income circulating in the local economy.

• Providing new markets for local agricultural products and establishing rural-urban links.
For example, the successful food incubator The Food Hub, Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, Republic of Ireland (www.thefoodhub.com) offers the following:

* Provision of quality production facilities for growth orientated food business
* Incubation Units
* Shared Use Community Kitchen
* Onsite training facility for the long term unemployed to gain skills and employment in the hospitality industry
* Industry training – online and classroom based

The mix of value added services provided should be based on the needs of the local businesses and partners as well as on space availability and a robust cost benefit analysis.

While the concept of a shared-use commercial kitchen is not new, the recent batch of kitchen incubators demonstrates diversity and creativity of approaches and models. Where the kitchen incubator can go far beyond the simple shared-use kitchen is in preparing food entrepreneurs for the challenges that exist beyond the stove, freezer or sous-vide cooker.

More than being just rental space, food incubators can offer full-service business assistance whereby participants have access to information and training regarding all aspects of starting a business. They can help would-be entrepreneurs with understanding the food business, navigating licensing and other regulations, and making connection with both suppliers and customers.
A partnership is an agreement to do something together that will benefit all involved, bringing results that could not be achieved by a single partner operating alone, and reducing duplication of efforts. A successful partnership enhances the impact and effectiveness of action through combined and more efficient use of resources; promotes innovation; and is distinguished by a strong commitment from each partner. One key motive for implementing local and regional partnerships is the belief that working together is more effective than working in isolation. Partnerships – an effective way of working together – operate under different local conditions, depending on the detailed nature of the problems, the institutional environment, political factors, experiences and culture.

2. Why form a Regional Partnership?

What are the steps in Food Incubator Partnership Development?

The following are the major steps in the process:

- Planning the process
- Audit and analysis (zero-measurement)
- Resulting in a ‘Business case’
- Establishment of Partnership

The subsequent sections of this document describe each of these steps, suggested actions and tools to be used to develop Regional Food Incubator Partnerships.
3. Planning the process

We recommend the process starts by defining the partnership’s unique ‘VMOSA’

Vision
Mission
Objectives
Strategies
Action Plans.

The first essential step in building a partnership is to ensure that everyone involved knows what the partnership is about, who is doing what, and clarity on the outcomes to be expected. Partnerships are built on mutual need and interdependence. Partners need each other to accomplish a task.

The Partnership needs to develop a long-term strategy if they are to work effectively and have a lasting effect.

VMOSA is a practical planning process that can be used by any organisation or initiative. This comprehensive planning tool can help your partnership by providing a blueprint
3.1 Vision (the dream)

Your vision communicates what your partnership believes are the ideal conditions for your region – how things would look if the issue important to you were perfectly addressed. What task does the partnership wish to accomplish?

*Example: Establish a vibrant food incubator*

3.2 Mission (what and why)

Developing mission statements are the next step in the action planning process. The mission statement should describe what the Food Incubators Partnership is going to do and why it is going to do that. Mission statements are similar to vision statements, but they are more concrete and they are definitely more ‘action-oriented’ than vision statements. While they don’t go into a lot of detail, they start to hint — very broadly — at how your organisation might go about how to accomplish the task. Mission statements are in general concise, outcome-oriented and inclusive.

*Example: Establish a vibrant food incubator which will facilitate 5 food entrepreneurs per week*

3.3 Objectives (how much of what by whom)

Once the Food Incubators Partnership has developed its mission statement, its next step is to develop the specific objectives that are focused on achieving that mission. Objectives refer to specific measurable results for the initiative’s broad goals. A partnership’s objectives generally lay out how much of what will be accomplished by when.

3.4 Strategies (how)

Developing strategies is the fourth step in the VMOSA process. Developing strategies is the essential step between figuring out your objectives and making the changes to reach them. A strategy is a way of describing how you are going to get things done. It is less specific than an action plan (which tells the who-what-when); instead, it tries to broadly answer the question, “How do we get there from here?”

Objectives outline the aims of an initiative — what success would look like in achieving the vision and mission. By contrast, strategies suggest paths to take (and how to move along) on the road to success. That is, strategies help you determine how you will realise your vision and objectives. A good strategy will take into account existing barriers and resources (people, money, power, materials etc.). It will also stay with the overall vision, mission and objectives of the initiative. Strategies should always be formed in advance of taking action, not deciding how to do something after you have done it.

3.5 Action plan (who will do what by when)

Finally, the Food Incubators Partnership’s Action Plan should be developed to outline in great detail exactly how strategies will be implemented to accomplish the objectives developed earlier in this process. Action steps are developed for each component of the intervention changes to be sought. These include:

- **Action step(s):** What will happen
- **Person(s):** Who will do what
- **Date to be completed:** Timing of each action step
- **Resources required:** Resources and support (both what is needed and what is available)
- **Barriers or resistance, and a plan to overcome them**
- **Collaborators:** Who else should know about this action
4. Audit and analysis
(status quo - existing state of affairs)

After defining the VMOSA of the partnership, the next step is to map and analyse the current situation. This is also called a gap analysis. It is important to find out what is going on in your region in the field of food production and entrepreneurship trends. In order to get a clear image, the analysis is divided into four parts:

1. Identify the region
2. Identify policies and programmes
3. Identify food production space and the available capacity therein
4. Identify stakeholders – who is interested in developing kitchen or food incubators within the defined region.

What you will be doing is a mapping exercise, using secondary sources and personal contacts, to identify your region, current policy and support programmes in relation to creation of food (entrepreneurship) environments, to identify the main stakeholders for food production and consumption and to identify gaps in policy and support for food incubation facilities provision. The purpose of the secondary sources is to identify information which will inform the project and will help to highlight programme gaps. For instance, what information and support is currently not available?

Are there examples of good practice, which could be shared between partners to examine how this might apply in their own region/country? A number of government, research, market and industry reports are constantly developed about food production and consumption and entrepreneurship at regional, national and European level. Online reports, information available through local authorities and business networks are important to be included in the scope of the desk research to ensure that there is a local context to the research.
4.1 Identify the region

The Food Incubators Partnership may be progressed as a regional or national initiative depending on the partnership’s preferences for how they wish to define the region. The regional approach has significant advantages when considering the particular dynamics involved in interface areas within the region. Taking a regional rather than national approach may enable a greater depth of analysis into the issues prevalent in the interface areas within that region and bring more localised focus to design interventions around enterprise and new entrepreneurship development, which will have a positive effect in the region.

With this first step in the analysis, it is important to find relevant information about the region. This is general information about the region with regards to food and entrepreneurship. To analyse your region, you have to find information about:

- Food industry profile to include food production and food consumption
- Food infrastructure availability and deficits
- Entrepreneurial climate
- Start-up culture
- Self-employed culture
- Entrepreneurs in food sector
- Potential barriers in food sector

4.2 Identify policies and programmes

After analysing the region and agreeing the Partnership’s geographical scope, it is now time to identify current policy and support programmes/initiatives in relation to creation of (food) entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, food production, food environment, to identify stakeholders for provision of enterprise support and to identify any gaps in provision. This can be done on both regional and national level. It will be important that consultations in each region are held with a range of stakeholders, including policy makers from government agencies, policy influencers from trade bodies and support providers, local councils, community organisations with underutilised buildings, membership bodies, educational institutions and training providers and with a number of food producers from various food sectors.

Again, there are also a number of government, academic and industry research and market reports in which you will find information about current policies and support programmes/initiatives in relation to food and entrepreneurship. The purpose of the secondary sources is to identify sources of information which are useful and also highlight policy-programme gaps. To analyse policies and programmes, you have to find information about regional/national/EU policy and support programmes/initiatives in relation with:

- food
- food production in the context of food consumption
- food environment
- entrepreneurship
- (food) entrepreneurs
- start-up entrepreneurs
4.3 Identify food incubation space

The importance of taking into account available resources is often underestimated. Surveying existing food production options by the community-owned catering facilities or underutilised commercial facilities can be very helpful. A kitchen in a local university or community building may fit the bill with minimal modifications, at a fraction of the cost of constructing a new building. Likewise, existing food producers may have unused space or restaurants may have significant capacity outside their opening hours—bearing in mind the technical restrictions in terms of product or production risk. Therefore, it is very important to identify the availability of (shared) kitchen space. When doing this, you have to think about and scope out the following considerations:

- What are existing facilities? (Kitchen space / resources)
- By whom is this organised?
- Which parties are involved?
- What is its purpose?
- To what extent is it available?
- What are access barriers / limitations?

Keep in mind that the facility has to be adapted to the region’s specific needs (e.g., is a specialism in meat or dairy or bakery a consideration). Existing facilities might not always be well-suited for the specified need. Bear in mind that enterprise goals will vary depending on whether the kitchen is organised by non-profit organisations, for-profit companies, universities, or state or regional governments or agencies.

4.4 Identify Partnership Stakeholders

Partnership development is very important. Multiple organisations and partners should be involved in the process and feel ownership for the partnership to succeed. Having stakeholders from various backgrounds can help with problem solving, but also enhance networking and making new connections. However, there is something else you need to do first before identifying the stakeholders; identify your own position.

- What kind of organisation are you and what is your interest in developing a food incubator?
- What influence do you have?
- What can you bring to the partnership?
- Etc.

When you have figured out your own position, you can decide what kind of stakeholders you need. The tool to be used for identifying your stakeholders follows in Stakeholder Mapping (section 5).
5. Stakeholder Mapping

Mapping is a vital step to understanding who your key stakeholders are, where they come from and what they are looking for in relationship to the development of food incubation facilities. Mapping can be broken into four phases:

1. Identifying: listing relevant groups, organisations and people that have a specific mandate or interest in developing food incubation facilities

2. Analysing: understanding stakeholder perspectives and interests

3. Mapping: visualising relationships to objectives and other stakeholders

4. Prioritising: ranking stakeholder relevance and identifying issues
The first step in the mapping process is to understand that there is no magic list of stakeholders. The final list will depend on your business, its impacts and your current engagement objectives – as a result your partnership listing should not remain static. This list should change as the environment around you evolves and as stakeholders themselves make decisions or change their opinions. Brainstorm a list of stakeholders without screening, including everyone who has an interest in your objectives today and who may have one tomorrow. Where possible, identify individuals. Use the following list to help you brainstorm:

- Government (e.g. public authorities, and local policymakers; regulators; opinion leaders; business and SME funding support bodies)
- Civil society organisations (e.g. NGOs, faith-based organisations, labour unions)
- Food entrepreneurs – emerging and growing
- Property owners and investors
- Industry associations
- VET and HEI
- Food safety authorities (e.g. environmental health officers)
- Media
- Community (e.g. Chambers of Commerce and special agri food interest groups)
- Environment (e.g. advocates and NGOs)

5.1 Analysing and Mapping

Once you have identified a list of stakeholders, it is useful to do further analysis to better understand their relevance and the perspective they offer, to understand their relationship to the issue of food incubators and each other, and to prioritise based on their relative usefulness for this engagement. A list of criteria can help you analyse each identified stakeholder:

- Contribution (value): Does the stakeholder have information and expertise on the issue that could be helpful to the partnership?
- Willingness to engage: How willing is the stakeholder to engage?
- Influence: How much influence does the stakeholder have? (You will need to clarify “who” they influence, e.g. companies, funders, potential tenants etc.)
- Necessity of involvement: Is this someone who could derail the process if they were not included in the engagement?
Use these five criteria to create and populate a chart with short descriptions of how stakeholders fulfil them. Assign values (low, medium or high) to these stakeholders. This first data set will help you decide which stakeholders to engage. See example that follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Legitimacy</th>
<th>Willingness to Engage</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Necessity of Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SH1</td>
<td>High: Knowledge in X issue is of value to the company</td>
<td>High: Directly affected by our company’s activity</td>
<td>High: Proactive group that is already engaging</td>
<td>Low: Relatively unknown group</td>
<td>Low: Not an outspoken stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH2</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH3</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH4</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH5</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOOL: Template for analysing your stakeholders

Mapping stakeholders is a visual exercise and analysis tool that you can use to further determine which stakeholders are most useful to engage with. Mapping allows you to see where stakeholders stand when evaluated by the same key criteria and compared to each other and helps you visualise the often complex interplay of issues and relationships created in the criteria chart above.

Draw a map to identify key stakeholders:

1. Draw a quadrant using two axes labelled “Low” to “High”
2. Add “Expertise,” “Willingness,” and “Value” to the criteria chart as above
3. Assign “Expertise” to the Y-axis and “Willingness” to the X-axis
4. Discuss and debate where each stakeholder falls
5. Plot the stakeholders on the grid
6. Use small, medium and large circle sizes to denote their “Value”
7. To illustrate relationships, use arrows to depict “Influence”

Consider quadrants, circle size, and influence arrows when prioritising.

NOTE: This is just an illustrative mapping example, and your approach may vary depending on your needs: You may need to use more or less criteria in Analysis depending on the mix of your stakeholder list; more ambitious objectives may require a more strategic, detailed Mapping; and your process may be influenced by outside variables such as tools and frameworks already in place at your company. Look closely at your needs and decide whether this example will work for you as is.
5.2 Prioritising stakeholders and identifying issues

It is not practical and usually not necessary to engage with all stakeholder groups with the same level of intensity all of the time. Being strategic and clear about whom you are engaging with and why, before jumping in, can help save both time and money.

Look closely at stakeholder mapping and decide whether they are aligned to your Partnership objectives. Combined with your criteria chart and mapping, rank your stakeholders into a prioritized engagement list. You should now have captured the most relevant organizations to be involved as the most relevant stakeholders.

5.3 Have You Developed the “Right” List?

The key is not to agonize over whether your stakeholder list is “right.” By working through the key steps in the mapping process you will have created a robust, relevant, prioritized stakeholder list—but it will change over time. Instead, focus on whether your list will help you further prepare for your engagement activities.

Answer the following questions to see if you are ready to move on:

- Is our list focused on relevant stakeholders who are important to our current and future efforts?
- Do we have a good understanding of where stakeholders are coming from, what they may want, whether they would be interested in engaging with our Food Incubators Partnership, and why? What are the issues for these priority stakeholders?
- How can we further understand and qualify these stakeholders? Through discussions with internal colleagues? Reading reference reports? Finding specific blogs or Twitter accounts to follow?
- Have we given thought to what type of resources (expertise, people, and budget) we need to support our Food Incubators Partnership action plan?
A successful partnership enhances the impact and effectiveness of action through combined and more efficient use of resources; promotes innovation; and is distinguished by a strong commitment from each partner. One key motive for implementing regional partnerships is the belief that working together is more effective than working in isolation. Partnerships – an effective way of working together – operate under different regional conditions, depending on the detailed nature of the need and opportunity for food incubation, the institutional environment, political factors, experiences and culture.

Of particular importance, regional partnerships provide a mechanism for like minded organisations, in particular, to work together and adapt their policies to respond to the needs of food entrepreneurs and the regional economy.

6. The “Business Case”

A partnership is an agreement to do something together that will benefit all involved, bringing results that could not be achieved by a single partner operating alone, and reducing duplication of efforts.
6.1 Bringing together the partnership

Partnership development is an ongoing process commencing with the formation of the group, clarifying its purpose and monitoring its activities, leading to the achievement of agreed goals. For the regional Food Incubator Partnership, you bring together all relevant actors within a region that can contribute the shared mission of establishing a food incubator. This is not as easy as it sounds!!!

As each region and country has a different dynamic, different approaches are used to get stakeholders involved. You need to consider and highlight:

1) What is in it for them? How will these organisation benefit from their time commitment to a Food Incubators Partnership?
2) Be very clear about what you expect from them. At the very least, you require their commitment to attend 4-5 meetings over a 12 month period and contribute to the development of a Regional Action Plan for the development of a Food Incubator.

Methodologies that work..

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you know your stakeholder ...</th>
<th>If you do not know your stakeholder ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firstly, make personal contact by telephone or by email to explain the project, why they should be involved and ask for their support in coming to an introductory meeting. You are using your personal connection to illicit their involvement – this is very effective. This is also a useful opportunity to ask stakeholders how they feel about establishing a Food Incubators Partnership.</td>
<td>Make sure to get the correct person with their title and issue formal letter of invitation – sent by post. Personalise this letter to ensure that they are clear as to why they are being invited to attend and how they can benefit from their involvement. If they are not available, ask them to refer the invitation to a colleague.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondly, issue a formal letter of invitation. So few of us receive postal correspondence that a well worded and compelling letter of invitation will stand out. Include a well worded description of the project highlighting the regional impact that Food Incubators can have.</td>
<td>Include a well worded description of the project highlighting the regional impact that Food Incubators can have. Your letter call to action is to invite them to an Introductory Meeting and Information Workshop of the Food Incubators Transforming Regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your letter call to action is to invite them to an Introductory Meeting and Information Workshop of the Food Incubators Transforming Regions.</td>
<td>Use our template provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use our template provided.</td>
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</table>
A partnership is likely to be ineffective if:

- Partners do not share the same values and interests. This can make agreements on partnership goals difficult.
- There is no sharing of risk, responsibility, accountability or benefits.
- The inequalities in partners’ resources and expertise determine their relative influence in the partnership’s decision making.
- One person or partner has all the power and/or drives the process.
- There is a hidden motivation which is not declared to all partners.
- The partnership was established just to “keep up appearances”.
- Partners are not chosen carefully, particularly if it is difficult to “de-partner”.

Some relevant partnership characteristics are:

- The partners show determination and accept the practicalities of their responsibilities.
- There is a strong sense of ownership.
- Agreements are based on identifiable responsibilities, joint rights and obligations, and are signed by all relevant partners - refer to our Action Plan.
- The partnership takes an inclusive approach (relevant actors are involved in planning and implementation).
- Strong commitment from each of the partners is reflected in the fact that all partner organisations are equally present and, where possible, represented by experienced persons who have influence within their organisation.
- Responsibilities and the nature of cooperation are clarified.
- The coordinators of the partnership are nominated by the partners.
- Rules of conduct (e.g. good communication between actors, regular attendance of meetings, continuity of personnel, regular transfer of information among the partners) are adhered to by the partners.
- Resources, knowledge, know-how and ideas are shared within the partnership.
- Equal opportunities within the partnership are secured (partnerships will not necessarily succeed if one or a small number of the partners are perceived as dominant).
- Adequate financial and human resources are available for implementation.
- The partnership should be able to lever funding from a range of sources.
- If appropriate, there is a firm foundation of good practice in financial controls, accounting procedures, human resource management, etc.
- Resources and energy are devoted to monitoring and evaluation, on the basis of realistic performance targets which are clearly defined.
Our Food Incubators Transforming Regions project is advancing 4 Regional Partnerships as part of our Erasmus + Strategic Partnership project – find out more on www.foodincubators.com

i) The Armagh, Craigavon, Banbridge region in Northern Ireland, UK
ii) Roscommon, Ireland
iii) Friesland, The Netherlands
iv) Nitra, Slovakia

Learning from these partnerships...

- It is very important to consult with the relevant State Agencies at the beginning of the planning process. For example, in relation to Irish (Roscommon) Food Incubators Partnership, they have involved the local Authority Roscommon County Council through their Local Enterprise Office and the Community & Enterprise Department. Other key players are the Local Education Training Board and HEI and VET representatives in the region. The partnership is working to engage and broker the respective agency’s support in terms of both monetary and non-monetary support in both the short, medium and long term.

- Engagement with third level institutes
Third level Institutes should be pleased to co-operate with the food incubator in referring companies and individuals who have used their product development services to develop new food products to progress same to full production within the new shared use food incubation Knowledge transfer is vitally important so should be encouraged from the outset. Consultations should examine how the proposed food incubations facilities will complement the works of the HEI in terms of various synergies and co-operative ventures. The results of these consultations should be written up and letters of support should be obtained from the third level Institutes.

6.2 Get Started - host an exceptional first Meeting!
Given this is a food project, it is appropriate to include a food element to the first meeting. Perhaps host the meeting in an interesting location? Perhaps meet with food entrepreneurs who present their products while explaining their production space challenges? Setting the scene will make it much easier to explain the project concept. The meeting instigator should provide a very robust overview of the Food Incubators concept, its potential and the mechanics of how the Regional Food Incubators Partnership will work. While the first meeting may be informal in its tone, it is important that progress is achieved as outlined in previous sections and concentrating on:-

- Define your geographical region – where will your Partnership apply itself?
- How else should be involved? Your Partnership members can use their networks to identify and gain buy-in from other relevant stakeholders.
- Agree the communication channels for the Partnership – this would include setting up a project Dropbox or other file sharing system, email and text alert messaging groups etc
- Agree initial roles within the Partnership and appoint a Chairperson and Secretary.

Do not forget - Capture the event
Make sure to get a creative photograph of this first meeting and develop a press release to send to local press. Make specific mention of the stakeholder organisations involved in the Partnership.
6.3 Follow up Meetings

Meeting 2 - Defining the Vision and Research Phase

You may already have a clear idea of the reasons why there is a need to develop a food incubator in your region. Your second Regional Food Incubators Partnership meeting should be use to explore and agree what the shared vision is for the Partnership. As we highlighted earlier, in order to articulate the challenges and opportunities to others and encourage their support, it is important that you clarify a strong vision; check there is sufficient support for this vision and understand your project’s unique potential attributes. This can be done by holding a facilitated workshop or informal forum event.

Meeting 3 - Identification of Best Practice

Which type of kitchen incubator would suit your Partnership best? A centralised, a decentralised or a mobile one perhaps? Research of successful kitchen incubators might help you decide what fits your regional circumstances and your Partnership. In August, 2013 Ecoconsult Solutions conducted a survey among food incubators. Their report details multiple types of incubator models and the challenges they face. Chief among them is the fact that food incubators’ fortunes are tied closely to the success of their member entrepreneurs whose challenges include a lack of business experience common among many food entrepreneurs. Other challenges faced by incubators include issues related to facility costs, design and scheduling, attraction of high-quality entrepreneurs, and regulatory compliance issues.

FoodLab Detroit’s ([https://foodlabdetroit.com/](https://foodlabdetroit.com/)) new Detroit Kitchen Connect program ([https://detroitkitchenconnect.com/](https://detroitkitchenconnect.com/)) is experimenting with an innovative new model for kitchen incubation that drastically reduces the cost of operation by taking advantage of existing resources while strengthening connections between food entrepreneurs and the local communities they serve. This “distributed incubator” model creates an Airbnb-like system for kitchen incubation by connecting underutilized kitchens throughout the community with food entrepreneurs, taking advantage of infrastructure already in place.

Meeting 4 - Bring The Research Phase To Life

With the new and valuable information compiled by the Partnership, it is important to make the findings available in an accessible format. Not only will the research be included in the Regional Food Incubators Partnership Action Plan, it has great resonance at national and EU level as there is scant information source available.
Establishing a workable financial model needs to be addressed from the outset. The 2013 Ecoconsult Solutions survey reported that 31 percent of food incubators were making money, 53 percent were breaking even and 16 percent were losing money. The main costs of operating a food kitchen incubator include the cost of the brick-and-mortar facility, regulatory fees, utilities, education and administration.

A lack of information in the region about the availability of such spaces makes it hard for entrepreneurs to find them. And many commercial kitchen spaces are reluctant to share their spaces because the extra use drives up utility costs.
**Step One: Understand the Nature of the Demand**

We suggest:

- Surveying a network of food businesses and potential food entrepreneurs within a 60km radius of the proposed area to determine:
  - how many kitchen hours per week are needed by each business,
  - the types of equipment needed,
  - types of products that would be produced,
  - the entrepreneurs’ ability to pay rent.

You will never get it perfectly but it’s important to understand the demand before anything else.

**Step Two: Find your Champion**

It is our belief that successful food incubators are embedded in their community and that wider community and food community must support the food incubator if it is to be a success. Support is garnered with good planning, constant communication, thoughtful decision-making, and persistent follow-up – all the functions of our Partnership approach outlined in this toolkit. Where a host community has been identified by the Partnership, an entity be they public or private, the following flow chart illustrates the necessary thinking.
Step Three: Understand the Nature of the Supply

Once the nature of the demand is understood, the next step is to understand the needs and expectations of potential commercial kitchens. If you are interested in keeping costs low for entrepreneurs, you should quickly rule out commercial kitchen spaces who are seeking to return a profit on kitchen rentals, instead deciding to work as social enterprise whose mission was consistent with the desire to build up the local food enterprise community.

Step Four: Develop a Workable Financial Model

Though your research, establish is there enough “paying” demand that could support a new self-contained food incubator? If so, look to begin rising funds and planning along the lines described in the following sections. If the interest is insufficient to generate enough facility rent to cover the cost of a new facility, then look to sources of subsidy, consider renting an existing operation (such as a school or restaurant kitchen), or decide not to pursue the food incubation idea at all.

Be they non commercial or semi commercial, kitchen incubators need to recover costs. A sound financial model takes into account utility costs, administration costs, grant subsidies, rental fees, and the expected number of tenants per kitchen. The overall financial model and monthly budget should be both affordable for the entrepreneurs while at the very covering the costs of participating incubators. Monetary support can come from personal investment in the facility, as well as from fund raisers and donation of buildings. In-kind contributions can be time and the more people are willing to invest in their food incubator, the more they will take real ownership in it.

Step Five: Technical Specification

How many incubation units are needed and what is the required specification of these units? Some key and practical considerations:-

- **Lease/Purchase scenario** The host promoter need to undertake an analysis exercise of the proposed rental expenditure versus an outright purchase or a conditional purchase option. Ireland has successfully used social finance as the best scenario in terms of securing finance. Outright ownership either through existing ownership or by a donation of a building is the best possible scenario, if this is not possible then the Community needs to secure the longest possible lease as this will maximize funding packages available for the provision of a shared use food incubator.

- **Technical Team** The host promoter needs to have an Architect, Engineer and Food Technologist on board who have successful experience in capital construction provision within the food sector.

- **Planning Permission** From inception of the concept to provide a food incubator the host promoter needs to consult and engage with the relevant Public Authority at all relevant levels. If an existing building is being redeveloped for use as a shared use food incubator the change of use may apply or not as the building has food production planning status. A letter needs are to be obtained from the relevant Local Authority to clarify if minor modifications will be allowed under existing planning.
Step Six: Establish a Workflow

Managing day-to-day operations of a food incubator should be well structured. Our Food Incubators training programme will address this issue in great detail (available Autumn 2016).

Step Seven: Develop & Provide Incubation Support Services

A true food incubator system does more than just connect entrepreneurs with kitchen spaces. It should design and delivers education programmes to participants, including workshops and information on sourcing, financial management, business plan development, and securing capital. Shared purchasing, logistics and distribution systems should also be explored. In addition, offering mentoring programmes could also be very beneficial. Mentoring is a globally well-known tool for businesses to guide people to their success. Finally, a kitchen incubator system could also connect entrepreneurs with local suppliers and customers.

A word of caution - for a food incubator to have a significant chance of success, the partnership and the host community must be willing to provide continuous support for the effort over the long term, at least 10–15 years. This is not for the faint hearted! While public testimonials for the facility are important, they cannot replace the real value of both monetary and voluntary contribution from the long term support of the Partnership stakeholders. As food grade infrastructure is expensive, it is likely that the development of the food incubator will happen in a phased way. To greatly improve the chances of success of the food incubation the chosen host should have a history of food production or have members of the management committee who have expertise in food production or food enterprise.
Communication has both an internal and external role. Regarding the former, it is crucial to the functioning of a partnership to ensure that there are clear information flows among partners, between the partnership manager and the their own staff, and among partners themselves (and any structures in which they participate, e.g. the board of directors). This will help the partners to understand how their alliance really functions, the constraints under which it operates, and the respective roles of the other partners, organisations and people involved. To make a partnership inclusive it is important that all voices within it are heard. This both requires and guarantees a balance of influence, mutual respect and care in the organisation. Good communication will facilitate meetings, decisions and interactions between partners. One should not forget that the partners have to play a two-way communication role, acting as the link points between the organisations they represent and the partnership itself.

The external role of communication is to ensure that the work of the partnership is visible, in order to organise support and funding. First, a communications strategy should be developed – which should be linked to the partnership’s overall strategic plan – and regular action plans deriving from that strategy formulated. Sufficient resources – both time and financial resources – need to be dedicated to communications. Designating a communications/press officer can facilitate this and help those outside the partnership know where to turn for information. Good contacts with local media are crucial, so that they can be approached quickly and effectively when needed. To ensure that the partnership is visible and recognised within its designated area of activity, there should be ongoing, two-way communication with local communities and target groups; a permanent outreach approach can be a key component of a communications strategy. The partnership’s successes should be presented regularly to policy makers. The partnership should be formalised by signing a partnership agreement, which ensures commitment. Bound by this contract, the partners will share a strategy and implement their coordinated action plan for a period determined by the partnership.

Once the partnership is established, a system for monitoring of planned activities is applied including:

- **Routine of partnership** - Are the partnership operations now settled and embedded in the routines of the participating agencies?
- **Maintain linkages** - Preserve, nurture, and expand the relationships that have been forged.
- **Interim reports** - What “proof” and indicators of partnership success are required? How often is feedback provided and what is its quality?
- **Continuity** - Today’s problems come from yesterday’s solutions. Plan early for sustainability and anticipate the unexpected or worst-case scenarios.

**TOOL: A sample Commitment statement**

**TOOL: Communication templates (invitation, PowerPoint, agenda, minutes)**
### Action plan template

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action step</th>
<th>Person(s) responsible</th>
<th>Date to be completed</th>
<th>Resources required</th>
<th>Potential barriers or resistance</th>
<th>Collaborators</th>
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## TOOL: Template for analyzing & Mapping your stakeholders

### Stakeholder Contribution Legitimacy Willingness to Engage Influence Necessity of Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Legitimacy</th>
<th>Willingness to Engage</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Necessity of Involvement</th>
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### Diagram

- **Circle size = value**
- **Expertise**
  - High
  - Low
- **Willingness**
  - Low
  - High
- **Value**
  - Low
  - High
Preamble

1. The members of the Partnership perceive the purposefulness and express their willingness to take action to develop food kitchens and incubators as enterprise, training and support drivers at regional level.

2. Driven by the desire to act, cooperate through information, agreements and joint efforts we will strive to achieve a situation in which there will be an increase in VET in the theme of training tools for developing regional infrastructure and support structures that will stimulate food economies.

1. Subject of the agreement

1. The subject of this agreement is the willingness of establishing the Food Incubation Regional Partnership.

2. The Partnership operates on the principle of local partnership group bringing together entrepreneurs, universities, business environment institutions and local authorities. The Partnership is not a separate organization or a separate entity within the meaning of the law.

2. Objectives of the Partnership

The long term objectives of the Partnership should be:

1. Define according to the objectives of your Partnership (involve them in this process!)

2. Define according to the objectives of your Partnership (involve them in this process!)

3. Define according to the objectives of your Partnership (involve them in this process!)
3. Members

1. A member of the Partnership may be: individuals, companies, legal entities, local governments, institutions of assistance and social integration, labor market institutions and social and economic partners.

2. The Partnership has an open and developing structure; any individual and any entity that identify themselves with the objectives of the Partnership may join it.

3. This letter of intent is informal and is based on good will, commitment and integrity of the participants.

**Declaration of joining the Partnership:**
Herby I declare the will of joining the Food Incubation Regional Partnership

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Institution</th>
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- 30 -
TOOL: Communication templates
Meeting Invitation

Name
Address
Postal code
City
Country

Name
Address
Postal code
City
Country

Subject line: Invitation for ...

Place, date

Dear <insert participant’s title and name>
I would like to invite you to a meeting / teleconference <delete as appropriate> to discuss <describe purpose of the meeting>.

[For a face-to-face meeting:]
The meeting will take place on <insert date>, starting at <insert time> and finishing at <insert time>. It will be held at <insert location and address>. Please can you confirm whether you will be able to attend the meeting by <insert date>.

[For a teleconference:]
The teleconference will take place on <insert date>, starting at <insert time> and finishing at <insert time>. Please dial <insert number and dial in details> to join the call. It would be very helpful if you could confirm whether you are able to participate in the teleconference by <insert date>.

I have enclosed <insert number> additional documents which provide some background information on <insert details>. An agenda will also be sent to you shortly. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

<Insert name>

<Insert position/title in organisation>
Minutes – <name of meeting>

Date: <Insert date>
Meeting venue: <Insert address>

Purpose of meeting
<Insert purpose and main objectives of meeting>

Attendees
<Insert list of attendees>

1. <Insert minutes per agenda item>

TOOL: Powerpoint Invitation Template
See file provided
TOOL: Communication templates
Agenda

AGENDA – <name of meeting>

Date: <Insert date>
Meeting venue: <Insert address>

Purpose of meeting
<Insert purpose and main objectives of meeting>

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<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agenda item</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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