



D2.2 Report and evaluation of impact and challenges

Project: Boosting innovation agencies for bioeconomy value chains

Acronym: BIO-Boost



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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full name
PC	Project Coordinator
PC	European Commission
KAM	Key Account Management
UNI	Fundacja Unimos (UNIMOS Foundation)
LIC	Viesoji Istaiga Lietuvos Inovaciju Centras (Lithuanian Innovation Center)
FBCD	Food Bio Cluster Denmark
ITC	Inovacijsko Tehnoloski Grozd Murska Sobota
ONT	Asociación Clúster Granada Plaza Tecnológica y Biotecnológica - onTech Innovation
B4C	Bioeconomy for Change
PIC Network	Plant InterCluster Network
NCBR	Narodowe Centrum Badań i Rozwoju (National Centre for Research Development)
CLIC	CLIC Innovation OY
DIH	Digital Innovation Hub
EDIH	European Digital Innovation Hub
COSME	COSME
H2020	Horizon 2020
WP	Work Package
HE	Horizon Europe
RIA	Research and Innovation Action
RTO	Research and Technology Organization
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
EU	European Union

Executive Summary

The BIO-Boost project aims to boost innovation agencies for bioeconomy value chains. This goal will be achieved by interconnecting European innovation ecosystems and increasing the latent potential of the participating innovation agencies, to learn from leading innovator regions, and to cement this knowledge and experience in the organizations. The project focuses also on building and expanding networks, expanding the cooperation and enlarging the participation of more diverse innovation stakeholders and territories to existing successful initiatives in the field of bioeconomy.

The present deliverable Report and evaluation of impact from challenges has been prepared within the **WP2 Challenges**, which aims to boost interconnections between and across innovation ecosystems working together to address specific bioeconomy challenges faced by industry, and to build cooperations between innovation ecosystem actors. The report will provide quantitative evaluations of the challenge event targets, and qualitative assessment from questionnaires created prior to the events as well as ex-post evaluations, which can be used to feed into future policymaking.

1 Background

1.1 Project Concept

Funded under the call HORIZON-EIE-2022-CONNECT-01-01, the BIO-Boost project is an ambitious, multidisciplinary and collaborative European initiative dedicated to enhancing innovation agencies for bioeconomy value chains. BIO-Boost runs from February 2023 to January 2025 and will work along the entire agriculture, bioresources and food value chains (known as bioeconomy) - a key European focus, vital for future prosperity and sustainability.

Project activities will benefit society in terms of green, digital and social transition, while ensuring economic development across Europe, narrowing the digital and bioeconomy divides. BIO-Boost involves activities such as peer-to-peer learning, study visits, and staff exchanges, to strengthen ties within the partnership and with the wider regional innovation ecosystems. These ties will be further solidified through hackathons (160 organizations involved), direct SME support on innovation management (24 cross border KAM cases), and assistance to SMEs that are looking for financing for innovation projects. Over 450 SMEs will be connected to the project, which will also cooperate with 20 other innovation ecosystems.

1.1.2. Project objectives

The overall objectives of the BIO-Boost project are to increase the latent potential of the participating innovation agencies, to learn from leading innovator regions, and to cement this knowledge and experience in the organizations, building and expanding networks, expanding the cooperation and enlarging the participation of more diverse innovation stakeholders and territories to existing successful initiatives in the bioeconomy, including agri-food, forestry, bio-based chemicals, materials and products, and bioenergy.

1.1.3 Project partners

BIO-Boost project is implemented by a multidisciplinary partnership of eight partners from seven European countries. Together, BIO-Boost partners represent over 1835 European innovation actors, including SMEs, start-ups, RTO, public bodies and other ecosystem stakeholders that will be engaged in the BIO-Boost activities.

- **Food & Bio Cluster Denmark (Denmark)** - national cluster organization within food and bioresources in Denmark, with more than 400 members including startups, SMEs, established companies, knowledge institutions, municipalities, regional authorities, investors, and other public institutions;
- **UNIMOS (Poland)** – network organization and coordinator of AgroBioCluster that represents a boutique, purpose-driven constellation of trusted partners that works both physically and digitally to speed up the development of innovations, international expansion, and interconnections across and along Europe and with Latin America.
- **Lithuanian Innovation Centre (LIC)** – organization that consolidates the interests of business, science, politics and society and for more than 25 years has been providing innovation support services to businesses, research and study institutions, Lithuanian business associations, and business support organizations, promoting the development and marketing of new products and integrating the potential of Lithuanian innovation support entities into international value chains.
- **ITC - Innovation Technology Cluster (Slovenia)** - regional technology transfer intermediary, innovation centre, and business support cluster, with interdisciplinary experts having strong international references, a network of institutions, and extensive experience in conducting EU-funded projects and other projects focused on rural development;
- **onTech Innovation (Spain)** – cluster and Digital Innovation Hub gathering almost 800 members and focused on innovation, training, employment, and entrepreneurship in the fields of technology and biotechnology in Spain and the EU;
- **Bioeconomy For Change (France)** - the reference network for the bioeconomy in France, Europe and internationally. It counts with a team of 35 specialists that serve more than 500 members, from upstream agricultural activities through to the commercialisation of finished products;
- **The National Centre for Research and Development (NCBIR -Poland)** - a Polish Centre that works as an executive agency that supports and develops innovative technological and social solutions, creating an ecosystem of knowledge about, and information on, innovation from 2010;
- **CLIC Innovation (Finland)** - non-profit company based on a public-private partnership model. CLIC is aimed at building new services, innovations, and research projects to address systemic sustainability challenges through co-creation processes and tools.

Figure 11: BIO-Boost project partners



The consortium has a strong project portfolio, as well as access to large and important networks, which will facilitate the planned activities, including recruitment of innovation ecosystem partners, and SMEs.

Six of the partners are active clusters, engaged in the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) which gives the opportunity to directly contact other clusters via the platform (including social clusters), and via specific cluster focused events. Two partners - FBCD and LIC- are also strongly anchored in the Enterprise Europe Network, which is the European Commission's official SME network supporting business and innovation, with 600+ organizations representing 60+ countries, including all EU, and neighbouring regions and EU accession countries. Three partners - CLIC, B4C and FBCD - are full members of the Bio-based Industries Consortium (240 industry members - 38 large companies, 44 SMEs, 19 regional clusters that represents an additional 140 SMEs) and 165 associate members, including RTO, universities, European associations and organizations, Technology Platforms (ETPs), public institutions, regional organizations and private banks), which gives access to a huge range of cross-border expertise within the bioeconomy, and multiplication opportunities across the entire European region. Additionally, three partners (ONT, LIC and ITC) have status of Digital Innovation Hubs and EDIH with both geographical and sectoral coverage.

1.2 Introduction to the challenge events

Challenge events are part of the BIO-Boost *WP2 Challenges*, designed to strengthen innovation networks across Europe and address specific industry challenges within the bioeconomy. By implementing a “hands on” approach and connecting diverse innovation actors engaged in already existing successful initiatives and networks, the challenge events (or hackathons) aimed to support the project goal of interconnecting European innovation ecosystems, enlarging the participation of more diverse innovation stakeholders and territories in existing successful initiatives and networks that support innovation deployment in Member States, Associated Countries, at national, regional and/or local level and promoting the deployment and scale-up of innovative solutions.

These events aimed to build connections and foster collaboration at various levels—cluster-to-cluster (C2C), cluster-to-business (C2B), and business-to-business (B2B)—thereby enhancing the European innovation ecosystem through shared learning and cross-border synergies.

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1.2.1 Challenge event objectives and KPIs

Overall, the challenge events aimed to form a demand-driven innovation process, with the objective to boost companies in their transition towards more sustainable bioeconomy solutions, and support new green growth opportunities across Europe, in particular in the widening countries. To reach this goal, the consortium applied various hackathon models operating cross-border, which included presenting or verifying innovative solutions to specific industry challenges.

For participating companies, the hackathon events would provide benefits including access to new bioeconomy / sustainable business models and technical solutions for companies to enable them to become more competitive in the future, while the cross-border element allows easier scaling up and transnational co-operation via expansion of networks, market information and relationships. Both organisations and companies would gain access to a wider pool of top expertise and best practices, which contributes to reducing the innovation divide in Europe. The challenge events would also provide a concrete focus area where the BIOBoost partners could cooperate, learn and hone new skills, while developing closer operational networks.

1.2.2 Target groups

The BIO-Boost project's approach to addressing industry challenges is grounded in cross-border and cross-sectoral collaboration. Large companies would set challenges that are tackled by diverse teams composed of SMEs, startups, students, civil society organizations, and various innovation agencies. This mix of participants would ensure that the solutions generated were not only innovative but also aligned with societal needs, values, and expectations.

By involving a wide array of innovative actors, including universities and research and technology organizations (RTOs), BIO-Boost aimed to tap into a rich talent pool and create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning through study visits and staff exchanges under WP1, and intensive collaboration in challenge events under WP2.

The challenge events targeted firstly companies aiming for green growth and circular bio-solutions. These included the so-called **"challengers"** – large, well-established companies working in an international context, and looking to change their business towards greater sustainability. These challenges were addressed by **"challenge solvers"**, including a variety of SME, start-ups, individual innovators, students and others, from different sectors. Challenge solvers were selected from across Europe, from the participating regions, either directly from the partners' own networks and direct contacts, or recruited via implementer networks and contacts. The events were organized by innovation agencies, **"implementers"**, including the organisations in the consortium wanting to improve their services to member companies / clients, as well as other innovation agencies invited to the events as part of the wider exploitation of project results.

2 Overview of the BIO-Boost challenge events

For the BIO-Boost project, the goal was to arrange at least **eight hackathons**, each hosted by a BIO-Boost partner and attracting at least 160 organizations to be involved in challenge events. The format and dynamics of each hackathon were aligned to each of the innovation ecosystem and challenges identified. In total, **235 participants** took part in 8 challenge events organized by the BIO-Boost partners and held across Europe. They were fueled with learnings from study visits, staff exchange and funding webinars that were organized between hackathons. This way, continuous peer-to-peer learning, knowledge exchange between regions, clusters and SMEs was ensured to better interconnect BIO-Boost partners and transfer experiences and practices. As a result, at least 34 bio-based solutions co-ideated and matched with growth opportunities. Eight new complementary, mutually reinforcing and replicable hackathon and multilevel collaboration models were developed and tested. As added value, multiple synergy links and interproject synergies were developed thanks to actionable cross-fertilization with other EU-funded projects and initiatives, such as Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) and Enterprise Europe Network that benefited clusters and participating SMEs. An overview of the results from the challenge events is presented below.

Partner	Date	Location	Format	Area of Challenges / Description	No. of Participants
LIC	24-25.6.2024	Lithuania	Onsite	Organized by LIC in collaboration with Agrifood Lithuania, a cross-company collaboration hackathon, where the representatives from each company played a crucial role in advising on each other's challenges. After presentations of challenges, representatives rotated among the different challenge stations, spending a fixed amount of time at each challenge. This allowed for in-depth discussions and the sharing of expertise across challenges.	20
UNIMOS	29.2.2024	Poland	Onsite	Organized by UNIMOS, the hackathon aimed to bring together like-minded SMEs and passionate individuals will contribute to shaping sustainable solutions in bioeconomy using 8 steps agile methodology while ensuring cross-fertilization and synergy building with complementary EU-projects	27
UNIMOS & NCBR	15.5.2024	Poland	Onsite	Organized by NCBR in collaboration with UNIMOS, the hackathon was aimed at driving bioeconomy innovations through cross-disciplinary and agile collaboration with strong focus on cross-border co-ideation.	43
ITC	13.6.2024	Slovenia	Onsite	Organized by ITC in cooperation with DIH AGRIFOOD and EDIH DIGI-SI, the	17

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				hackathon focused on bioeconomy innovations addressing topics such as food security and digital technologies.	
FBCD	8.10.2024	Denmark	Onsite	Organized by FBCD, the hackathon was designed to ignite challenge-driven solutions for current systemic challenges and initiate thematic projects for a sustainable future.	13
CLIC	14-28.5.2024	Finland	Online	Supported by the CLIC ProjectBooster process, three pitching sessions focused on creating innovations to solve current systemic challenges and initiate thematic ideations for new projects within circular economy, bioeconomy and energy sectors.	59
ONT	20-22.11.2024	Spain	Onsite	Organized by onTech Innovation and launched during the II Artificial Intelligence Congress in Granada as well as the IES Albayzin Institute, this hackathon aimed to power synergistic bioeconomy innovations through AI-powered solutions and interdisciplinary collaboration.	25
B4C	29-30.11.2024	France	Onsite	Organised by the incubator Quest For Change and supported by B4C, the BioEcocamp hackathon aimed at fostering innovation projects on bioeconomy sectors with start-ups and students in these fields (bio-based alternatives to chemicals, wine industry and agriculture)	31

Table 11: Overview of the challenge events within the BIO-Boost project.

3 Expectations of participants for the challenge events

Before the challenge events, participants were asked to evaluate their expectations for the hackathons. Further, solution providers were asked to specify which challenges or topic they planned to address during the event. To assess this, an ex-ante questionnaire was used. The ex-ante survey gained 58 responses in total, and the gathered expectations are presented below.

What do you hope to achieve from the challenge event?

The responses to this question were grouped by five major themes, with the most common responses being Networking and Collaboration, Research and Innovation, Knowledge Exchange, and Business and Funding Opportunities:

1. Networking and Collaboration:

Several responders hoped to expand their network by connecting with potential collaborators and partners. This included meeting new contacts, engaging in meaningful exchanges, and identifying opportunities for future collaborations.

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2. Research and Innovation:

Several responders looked forward to hearing innovative research ideas and new approaches to the challenges. This included interest in creative solutions that could emerge, as well as learning from other participants' perspectives and experiences.

3. Knowledge Exchange and Learning:

Several responders aimed to broaden their knowledge in relevant areas, particularly related to new products, operational models, and market development. Responders expected to gain insights into the latest trends and findings through interactions with experts and students.

4. Business and Funding Opportunities:

Several responders hoped to discover potential funding opportunities, explore avenues for product and market development, and gather suggestions for new products or services that could be further developed within collaborative settings.

5. Building Partnerships and Exploring Projects:

Several responders saw the event as an opportunity to join a consortium, share ideas, and initiate new projects.

Which industry challenge in particular will you address during the challenge event?

The most common industry challenges that participants planned to address included:

1. Recycled Fiber Innovation
2. Energy
3. Circular Economy
4. Metabolites
5. Bioeconomy and Bacteria
6. Inter-Institutional and Cross-Sectoral Cooperation
7. Good Practices and Institutional Cooperation
8. Agriculture and Forestry, Food, Feed, and Nutrition
9. Aquaculture and Algae
10. Waste and Byproduct Management
11. Automation and AI
12. Process Development
13. Technology Development

4 Feedback from participants on the challenge events

After the challenge events, participants were asked to identify their role in the hackathon, review their hackathon experience and provide additional feedback to the organizers. The ex-post questionnaire sent to the participants gained 84 responses in total, and based on the responses, the following results were gathered.

Types of participating organizations (ranked in order of frequency):

1. SME/startup – 50%
2. Research organization – 26.3%
3. Cluster organization – 7.9%
4. Business support institution – 7.9%
5. Research institution – 7.9%

Most frequent role of organization in the challenge event:

1. Challenge solvers – 52%
2. Challenge provider – 18.1%
3. Organizer – 14.5%
4. Mentor/external expert – 7.2%
5. Other – 7.2%

How would you describe your challenge event experience in 3 words?

Figure 2: Word cloud based on the challenge event feedback.



What was the biggest benefit, lesson or new insight from your participation in the challenge event?

1. Networking and Collaboration

A majority of participants highlighted the opportunity to network and collaborate as the most significant benefit of the BIO-Boost challenge events. They valued connecting with diverse stakeholders, including potential partners, mentors, and industry experts. These interactions facilitated knowledge exchange, problem-solving, and the formation of partnerships for future projects. The challenge events' ability to bring together individuals from different fields was particularly appreciated for fostering holistic approaches to addressing the identified challenges.

2. Knowledge Sharing and Learning

Participants praised the event for providing new knowledge and perspectives on topics such as the bioeconomy, circular economy, and innovative waste processing. The hands-on workshops, case studies, and discussions offered practical insights to many participants.

3. Idea Generation and Innovation

The events served as a platform for brainstorming and refining ideas. Participants appreciated the structured ideation sessions and feedback from peers and mentors, which helped shape innovative concepts. Many noted that the discussions and collaborative problem-solving sessions sparked new ideas for product development, research directions, and market applications.

4. Industry and Market Insights

Gaining insights into industry needs, market dynamics, and commercialization opportunities was another major benefit. Participants noted that these learnings were instrumental in aligning their projects with real-world demands and improving strategic planning. Specific

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examples, such as innovations in keratin production and methods for waste reuse, showcased the practical applications discussed during the challenge events.

5. Skills Development and Confidence Building

The challenge events provided valuable opportunities for participants to enhance their skills, particularly in presentation and pitching. Structured pre-pitch sessions and feedback mechanisms helped improve confidence, presentation abilities, and the overall quality of research outputs. Many participants found these activities to be crucial for their personal and professional development.

6. Event Structure and Facilitation

The organization of the event, including interactive sessions like table discussions and workshops, was well-received. Participants commended these formats for encouraging collaboration and fostering productive dialogue. The innovative approaches used in the event were seen as effective in driving engagement and generating new ideas.

What type of activities would you want to take part in as a BIO-Boost challenge event alumni?

1. Thematic Meetups

The most frequent suggestion among participants was similar thematic meetups, which would provide opportunities to evaluate progress, share experiences, and gain new knowledge on specific topics.

2. Newsletters

The participants also suggested to partake in newsletters focused on innovation, best practices, and participant experiences were also widely requested. This medium was seen as a convenient way to stay informed about developments, disseminate success stories, and share valuable insights among alumni.

3. Webinars on Funding Opportunities

Webinars exploring funding opportunities were highlighted as a key interest. These sessions would support alumni by providing practical information on securing resources for their projects and initiatives, making them a valuable addition within future projects.

4. Individual Advisory and Consultancy

Several participants emphasized the value of individual advisory services, including one-on-one consultations and speed-coaching sessions. These personalized opportunities for feedback and guidance would allow participants to refine their ideas and address specific challenges.

5. Matchmaking and Networking Opportunities

Alumni expressed interest in activities that facilitate individual matchmaking with mentors or potential collaborators. These targeted networking efforts could strengthen partnerships and foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

6. Skill Development Workshops

Speed-coaching or training opportunities focusing on practical skills were also mentioned as desirable. Participants highlighted the value of these sessions in enhancing their professional capabilities and effectively applying their knowledge to real-world challenges.

Please indicate your overall satisfaction with the Challenge Event?

Rating	Percentage
5 (Very satisfied)	69.5%
4 (Satisfied)	22.0%
3 (Neutral)	1.2%

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2 (Not satisfied)	1.2%
1 (Very unsatisfied)	0%

Table 2: Satisfaction rating of participants on the BIO-Boost project challenge events.

Would you like to participate in the BIO-Boost activities more and receive information about further project activities and cooperation, business & innovation opportunities?

Response	Percentage
Yes	95.7%
No	2.9%
Ambiguous/Missing	1.4%

Table 3: BIO-Boost project challenge event participants open to participate in future activities

5 Evaluation of challenge events' impact on participants

5.1 Evaluation of feedback from the challenge events

The participant feedback from the BIO-Boost Project challenge events reflects a resounding success in several key areas. Based on the ex-ante expectations and the ex-post feedback from the BIO-Boost Project challenge events, the events overall matched and, in many cases, exceeded participants' expectations. Firstly, the high level of positive responses, with 95.7% of participants expressing their satisfaction, underscores the overall effectiveness of the event. Such a high approval rate indicates that the event succeeded in meeting or exceeding attendee expectations, creating a strong foundation for future engagement.

Secondly, networking and collaboration were highlighted as the most valued aspects of the event. The structured opportunities for skill development and market understanding were particularly appreciated, suggesting that the event was well-designed to foster meaningful connections and professional growth. This focus on networking not only facilitated the exchange of ideas but also laid the groundwork for potential future collaborations.

Moreover, the events were praised for their role in fostering innovation and providing a platform for knowledge sharing. Participants noted the value of the discussions and the innovative approaches presented. These successes suggest that the BIO-Boost Project challenge events were a valuable forum for industry professionals. By building on these strengths and addressing areas for improvement, future events are poised to deliver even greater impact and relevance to participants.

5.2 Challenges and suggestions for improvement

Despite the numerous successes, several challenges emerged from the BIO-Boost Project challenge events. Some participants noted a gap between their specific needs and the solutions provided, highlighting this as a key area for future improvement. The pitches, though innovative and broad, were occasionally too abstract or theoretical, limiting their immediate applicability for some attendees. This disconnect suggests that while the event excelled in fostering discussions and innovation, it did not fully deliver concrete, actionable solutions that participants were seeking. To address these challenges, several improvements were suggested by the participants:

5.2.1 Improved pre-event preparation

One suggestion was to enhance pre-event preparation. Providing a brief summary of pitches in advance could save time and improve focus during presentations. Flexible slide templates or handouts were also proposed as tools to improve the clarity and engagement of pitch materials. Increasing

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participation from research backgrounds, particularly in mentorship roles, was also suggested to enrich the event's collaborative aspects.

5.2.2 Improved Interaction and Communication

Several attendees highlighted the importance of enhancing participant interaction, suggesting that physical meetings are more efficient for communication and pitching compared to virtual events. They recommended creating opportunities for a two-way dialogue, allowing presenters to ask companies specific questions to better understand their interests and needs. Introducing time for open discussions among participants was proposed to promote collaboration and a deeper exchange of ideas. Additionally, introducing immediate feedback or grading from industry partners was suggested as a way to provide participants with actionable insights to refine their ideas.

5.2.3 Enhanced Structure and Content

Participants offered ideas to refine the event's format and focus areas. A recurring recommendation was to tailor the event format more closely to the needs of specific industry sectors, fostering more in-depth discussions, and increasing engagement during the hackathons. Participants also suggested more diverse and structured matchmaking sessions, including actors from the same value chain to collaboratively address specific challenges. Lengthier presentations or alternative methods to convey complex R&D concepts were also proposed to provide greater value compared to the existing pitch format. To enrich the event's knowledge base, technological and expert-focused lectures were also proposed.

By implementing these suggestions, future events could better meet participant needs, fostering even more effective networking, knowledge sharing, and innovation.

6 Conclusion

The BIO-Boost Project challenge events had an overall positive impact on participants, driving innovation and fostering a collaborative spirit among diverse stakeholders. These events provided a platform for individuals and organizations to showcase their ideas, receive constructive feedback, and connect with potential partners. The opportunity to pitch innovative solutions in a competitive yet supportive environment encouraged participants to refine their concepts and think more strategically about their implementation.

Participants reported gaining valuable insights from industry experts and peers, which helped them to better understand market needs and technological trends. The events also facilitated the formation of new partnerships, as attendees were able to identify synergies and explore collaborative opportunities. The exposure to a wide range of perspectives and expertise was instrumental in broadening participants' horizons and enhancing their problem-solving capabilities.

Furthermore, the challenge events served as a catalyst for personal and professional growth. Participants noted improvements in their presentation skills, increased confidence in their ideas, and a deeper appreciation for the importance of clear and effective communication. The constructive criticism and suggestions received during the events helped them to identify areas for improvement and to develop more robust and viable solutions.



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