ERIC Forum 2

Stakeholder engagement plan for implementing the recommendations of the EGERIC and OECD reports

Work Package 4 Deliverable 4.2

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Description of deliverable	This deliverable presents a Stakeholder Engagement Plan, a strategic framework for fostering collaboration between ERICs and key stakeholders with the aim to implement recommendations that will strengthen the ERICs and reinforce their position within the ERA.

Executive summary

ERICs play a pivotal role in advancing scientific excellence, fostering cross-border collaboration, and addressing global challenges. As key enablers within the European Research Area, ERICs provide cutting-edge facilities and expertise that drive innovation and socio-economic development. However, they face persistent challenges, including financial constraints, governance complexities, sustainability concerns, and human resources issues.

Expert reports (OECD, EGERIC, and the ERIC Forum policy brief) along with some project deliverables (D7.1, D12.1, and D14.1), have provided key recommendations to address these challenges, which have been consolidated into five core areas:

- Governance & Strategic Development – Strengthening ERIC governance, aligning operations with European research priorities, and securing sustainable funding.
- Stakeholder Engagement & Impact – Maximising ERICs' societal and economic contributions.
- International Collaboration – Enhancing global partnerships to extend ERICs' influence and reach.
- User Access & Data Management – Improving accessibility to infrastructure, research services, and data management practices.
- Human Resources Development – Addressing mobility and employment challenges while building a skilled workforce.

Building on these insights and recognising the need for a multi-stakeholder approach, we have categorised stakeholders into six major groups (Policy and Funding Authorities, Research Communities, Research Institutions and Umbrella Organisations, International Organisations, Industry, and Individuals) to facilitate the creation of tailored engagement strategies for each topic or recommendation. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan provides a structured approach to engaging relevant stakeholders while ensuring a collaborative and inclusive process for implementing improvements to RIs. Additionally, aligning stakeholders around common goals and fostering coordinated action will help address challenges, capitalise on opportunities, align efforts with European research priorities and identify areas where we are collectively stronger as a group.

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List of acronyms

ERIC	European Research Infrastructure Consortium
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
ERA	European Research Area
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
RI	Research Infrastructure
ExBo	Executive Board
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
EGERIC	Expert Group tasked by the Commission to assess the implementation of the ERIC Regulation
VAT	Value added tax
ESFRI	European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures
EIRO	European Intergovernmental Research Organisation
GSO	Group of Senior Officials
ICRI	International Conference on Research Infrastructures

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving scientific and technological landscape, Research Infrastructures (RIs) play a critical role in advancing European and global research. Among these, the European Research Infrastructure Consortia (ERICs) stand out as key enablers of cross-border collaboration, providing cutting-edge facilities, expertise, and services that drive scientific excellence, technological innovation, and socio-economic development. Represented by the ERIC Forum, these consortia have been recognized as key assets in the European Research Area (ERA), influencing policy, fostering cooperation, and addressing global challenges through world-class research.

The ERIC Forum 2 project, building upon the successes of its predecessor (2019-2022)[1], aims to enhance coordination, governance, and impact across ERICs by promoting collaboration, supporting the implementation of the ERIC Regulation and associated services, and further integrating ERICs into the ERA and strengthening the ERIC Forum's contribution to research policies. This multidisciplinary consortium includes all recognized ERICs, both multi-sited and single-sited, representing five science clusters (Energy, Environment, Health and Food, Physical Sciences and Engineering, Social and Cultural Innovation)[2]. The project is structured around four thematic pillars: 1) Monitoring and Reporting, 2) Strengthening European RI policy and international cooperation, 3) Implementing the ERIC Regulation, enhancing capacities and identifying potential shared resources, and 4) Coordinating the project, the ERIC Forum Executive Board (ExBo) secretariat, and communication efforts.

The activities undertaken in this project will yield specific outcomes for three key target groups: the current and prospective ERICs, aimed at increasing their understanding and proposing solutions for critical aspects of ERIC Regulation implementation; policymakers and stakeholders, through the establishment and management of a new monitoring and reporting platform that provides easy access to updated and consolidated data about the ERICs, thereby reinforcing their role in European science policy; and users, as the project will explore the sustainability and open access of services, while addressing challenges related to the commercial aspects of service provision.

Recognizing the need for stronger stakeholder engagement, this Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) provides a strategic framework for fostering meaningful collaboration between ERICs and key actors, including policymakers, funding bodies, research communities, industry, and international partners. The SEP seeks to ensure that ERICs remain at the forefront of European and global research efforts by bridging policy and research to align ERICs with European strategic priorities, enhancing coordination among ERICs and their stakeholders to maximize impact, facilitating sustainable funding mechanisms to ensure long-term operations and promoting open access and international collaboration to strengthen Europe's research leadership.

The SEP is informed by a comprehensive analysis of expert recommendations, project deliverables and policy insights. It outlines targeted engagement strategies, identifies key stakeholder groups, and establishes mechanisms for ongoing consultation and collaboration.

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[1] ERIC Forum Implementation Project (2019-2022). https://www.eric-forum.eu/about-the-eric-forum-implementation-project/
[2] https://www.eric-forum.eu/the-eric-landscape/

Purpose of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan

The SEP aims to translate expert recommendations into concrete actions by bringing together and coordinating relevant parties to strategically strengthen ERICs in a collaborative manner. It serves as a roadmap for engaging key stakeholders who are critical to implementing improvements that will reinforce ERICs' position within the ERA. Its key objectives are:

- o Engaging relevant stakeholders to address identified gaps and bottlenecks in the RI value chain.
- o Coordinating efforts to allocate appropriate resources and take necessary steps to enable RIs to fully contribute to the ERA.
- o Establishing a structured approach for involving key stakeholders in the process of strengthening pan-European RI networks.
- o Ensuring a collaborative and inclusive process for implementing improvements to RIs based on expert insights and recommendations.
- o Aligning stakeholders around common goals to enhance the capabilities and impact of European RIs.
- o Facilitating coordinated action among diverse stakeholders to tackle challenges and seize opportunities identified in recent analyses.

The SEP aims to ensure that all relevant parties, including researchers, funders, policymakers, and community members, are not only informed but also actively involved and invested in the development and operation of RIs. Effective engagement enhances access to resources, fosters transparency, and builds trust, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes. Moreover, the SEP provides an opportunity to identify areas where ERICs are strongest as a group, enabling the leveraging of collective expertise and resources while addressing common challenges in a coordinated and synergistic manner.

By implementing this comprehensive SEP, the ERIC Forum 2 project will reinforce ERICs' position as leading European RIs, ensuring they continue to drive scientific discovery, technological advancements, and innovation-driven solutions across the ERA and beyond.

Identification and assessment of challenges

The identification and assessment of challenges for this deliverable, was facilitated by the insights gathered in Milestone 6, "Analysis of Expert Reports on Pitfalls and Opportunities for Strengthening European Research Infrastructures", in addition to five other key project outputs (approved deliverables D7.1, D12.1, and D14.1, and submitted deliverables D5.2 and 11.1). Each of these provided critical information that shaped the development of the plan, ensuring a comprehensive approach to stakeholder engagement.

Analysis of previous reports (EGERIC, OECD, EF Policy Brief)

ERICs are recognised as key assets in addressing global scientific and societal challenges. In this context, valuable expert reports and bottom-up recommendations have been produced outlining the existing gaps in the complex RI value chain and providing key insights on the next steps required to strengthen RIs and allocate the adapted resources required so that they can fully contribute to the ERA. One of the tasks in WP4 was to analyse some of these reports and identify the main bottlenecks to date (MS4.2) to guide the next steps with the relevant

stakeholders for the implementation of the recommendations. This analysis has been used as one of the building blocks to prepare the current deliverable. The reports that were analysed were:

The OECD report from 2020[3], *Optimising the operation and use of national research infrastructures*, was the result of a collaborative effort between Science Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It provides a framework for enhancing the utilisation and operation of national RIs, which are crucial for advancing research across all domains. The report introduces models for portfolio management and user-base optimisation, outlining principles for effective RI management and factors for optimising user bases. The models are adaptable to various national systems and RI operations. Additionally, the report offers policy recommendations and actions for RI portfolio managers and RI managers to improve infrastructure utilization and operation.

The EGERIC report 2021[4], *Assessment on the implementation of the ERIC regulation*, presents the findings of the Expert Group tasked by the Commission to assess the implementation of the ERIC Regulation, which was established to facilitate the creation and operation of large European RIs. The expert group's mandate included evaluating the regulation's implementation, identifying good practices, challenges, and success stories, and offering recommendations. The findings indicate the successful establishment of 22 ERICs, contributing to scientific excellence and innovation. However, issues like VAT exemptions, financial sustainability, and governance need addressing. The report recommends improving governance, sustainability, and integration of ERICs within the ERA.

Additionally, we also analysed The ERIC Forum policy brief 2020[5], *Funding models for access to ERIC Multinational Transnational Services,* which outlines the significance of ERICs as multinational, intergovernmental organizations designed to enhance scientific excellence across Europe. The brief emphasizes the variability in ERICs' funding needs and the critical role of national and multinational funding bodies, including the European Union (EU), in supporting their operations and projects. It provides recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of ERICs, including ensuring ERICs' eligibility for national funding, promoting cross-border funding, enhancing visibility, simplifying application and financial processes for distributed RIs in Horizon funding, and fostering dialogue between ERICs and funding bodies to identify solutions for sustained operations.

The findings of this analysis were compiled in a milestone report[6], which was completed in August 2024.

ERICs' challenges identified in ERIC Forum 2 project deliverables

A considerable amount of work has already been undertaken by the project to identify challenges and make recommendations on key issues impacting the ERICs (e.g. internationalisation, implementation of the ERIC Regulation, access to ERIC services and employment practices). Recognising that the results of this work not

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[3] OECD/Science Europe (2020), "Optimising the operation and use of national research infrastructures", OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers, No. 91, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/7cc876f7-en.

[4] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Assessment on the implementation of the Eric Regulation, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/747211

[5] ERIC Forum, 'ERIC Forum Policy Brief. Funding Models for Access to ERIC Multinational/ Transnational Services', September 2020, https://www.eric-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ERIC-Forum_Policy-Brief.pdf.

[6] ERIC Forum 2, Milestone report 6. Analysis of Expert Reports on Pitfalls and Opportunities for Strengthening EU Research Infrastructures [unpublished].

only feed into the identification of challenges, but also represent an ongoing effort to engage internal stakeholders, we have also used the following deliverables to inform the SEP:

Approved deliverables:

Deliverable 7.1[7], outlines best practices and recommendations for procedures of engagement, and identifies several barriers to internationalisation faced by ERICs, including:

o Financial Limitations - Insufficient funding hampers international engagement efforts.
o Lack of Legal/Policy Framework - The absence of a comprehensive legal and policy framework limits strategic engagement with third countries.
o Lack of Strategic Mandate - Without a clear strategic mandate, ERICs may struggle to prioritize international partnerships.
o Required Level of Organisational Maturity - Variability in the maturity of ERICs impacts their capacity to engage effectively on an international level.

Addressing these barriers involves targeted engagement with specific stakeholders:

o For Financial Limitations, collaboration with private sector funding sources, international partners, and research ministries in Member Countries is essential to enhance communication and facilitate connections with third countries.
o To address the Lack of Legal/Policy Framework, the EC and ERIC managers must work closely together to establish clear guidelines that support international engagement.
o The Lack of Strategic Mandate can be tackled through initiatives led by the EC to define a cohesive strategic direction for ERICs.
o Improving the Level of Organisational Maturity requires support from ERIC managers, Member Countries' research agencies, and the EC, along with engagement with research agencies and ministries in third countries.

Deliverable 12.1[8], summarizes the operational experiences of the 28 existing ERICs over the past fourteen years. This deliverable shed light on the main issues and challenges encountered during the implementation of the ERIC regulation, emphasizing that adherence to the varying laws of host countries has resulted in disparate interpretations of the regulation. Such discrepancies have hindered Member States and ERIC management from fully leveraging the potential of these RIs.

The deliverable outlined the common challenges faced by the ERICs, along with the relevant parties that should be engaged to address these challenges. These include:

o Governance and Organizational Matters - These issues necessitate engagement with the European Commission (EC) and ERIC managers to ensure effective governance frameworks are established and maintained.

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[7] ERIC Forum 2, Deliverable D7.1 "Best Practices and Recommendations for Procedures of Engagement with Third Countries" [unpublished].
[8] ERIC Forum 2, Deliverable D12.1 "Recommendations on how to address the challenges related to the ERIC Regulation and its implementation for the relevant WPs of ERIC Forum 2" [unpublished].

- o Financial Sustainability - Addressing financial sustainability requires collaboration with Member States, funding bodies, and international partners to secure stable financial support for ERIC activities.
- o Varying National Laws and Contexts - This challenge demands alignment between the EC and Member States to streamline ERIC recognition processes across different jurisdictions.
- o Implementation of VAT Exemptions - Engagement with the EC and Member States is crucial to facilitate the successful implementation of VAT exemptions for ERICs.
- o Limited Non-Economic Activities - The EC and Member States must work together to expand the scope of activities that ERICs can undertake.
- o Mobility and Employment of Highly Skilled Personnel - Collaboration between the EC, Member States, and ERIC managers is essential to enhance mobility and employment conditions for skilled staff within ERICs.
- o Internationalisation - This area requires active engagement with international partners and relevant ministries to promote global collaboration and integration.

Deliverable 14.1[9], sets out the objectives, key messages, stakeholders, main channels and timeline for communication activities. Providing a framework for developing the project identity and offering a comprehensive guide to effective communication. This deliverable was used to feed into the engagement plan.

Submitted deliverables:

Deliverable 5.2[10], provides a status update and recommendations for improving transnational and virtual access to ERIC services in alignment with the European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures. Based on a survey where 25 ERICs provided their responses, this deliverable highlight key findings identified Key challenges associated with access modalities and provision. Challenges include:

- o Funding constraints and inconsistent funding cycles hinder sustainable access.
- o Complex application and selection processes create administrative burdens and delays.
- o Limited awareness of available access options reduces uptake.
- o Capacity limitations for both remote and physical access restrict broader usage.

To address these issues, and achieve sustainable funding levels to maintain resilient and competitive RI services, a number or recommendations are proposed:

- o Secure sustainable funding models to ensure long-term, stable access.
- o Simplify administrative processes to reduce burdens on stakeholders and improve efficiency.
- o Increase investment in capacity-building and training for access management and findability of services.
- o Enhance virtual access capabilities, including data interoperability and support systems.
- o Improve visibility and user engagement to boost participation.
- o Ensure flexible and streamlined funding within EU Framework Programmes.
- o Integrate access funding across all Pillars of the EU Framework Programmes.

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[9] ERIC Forum 2, Deliverable D14.1 "Updated ERIC Forum Communications Strategy" [unpublished].
[10] ERIC Forum 2, Deliverable 5.2 "Recommendations for the revision of the European Charter of Access to Research Infrastructures" [unpublished].

Deliverable 11.1[11], presents a comprehensive overview of the current state of employment practices across international organizations and ERICs. Key challenges highlighted in the deliverable are:

- o Diverse and fragmented employment conditions caused by the adoption of solutions based on national legislation, collective bargaining agreements (national or regional), internal regulations or a combination of these.
- o Lack of a European-level employment reference framework, forcing ERICs to develop individual solutions.
- o Heterogeneous adoption of grading schemes and uncertain professional career paths and growth opportunities, leading to restricted mobility between ERICs and other RIs.
- o Due to the above, low capacity of attraction and retention of personnel by ERICs.

It is therefore recognised the need of developing a common employment framework for ERICs, which can serve as a reference for new ERICs to establish competitive employment policies. Moreover, such framework can enable ERICs to self-assess their attractiveness and address gaps, foster organizational convergence between ERICs and serve to engage relevant stakeholders to prepare for potential legislative developments.

All these documents were analysed to extract key recommendations along with the challenges hindering their implementation. Several recommendations were recurring across multiple documents, often addressing the same or similar topics. To facilitate understanding and provide a comprehensive overview of the issues to be addressed, these recommendations have been consolidated into five overarching categories (Figure 1).

- Governance and Strategic Development, which includes all recommendations related to high-level planning, resource management, and evaluation to ensure ERICs align with European (and national) research priorities and operate efficiently.
- Stakeholder Engagement and Impact: which includes the recommendations to maximise the broader impact of ERICs on society and the economy
- International Collaborations: to address the global aspects of ERICs, focusing on international partnerships
- User Access and Data Management: to improve user access to ERICs and their data, as well as maximizing the potential of the infrastructure.
- Human Resources Development: to develop and maintain a skilled and diverse workforce for ERICs

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- Improve training opportunities
- Enhance mobility and diversity of staff
- Increase attractiveness/competitiveness for talented staff

- Strategic Planning and Road-mapping
- Resource allocation and flexibility
- Performance monitoring and evaluation
- Support full implementation of RI/ERIC potential

- Data access and standardisation
- Clear access mechanisms and optimise user-base

- Enhancing socio-economic impact
- Strategic communication and Stakeholder Engagement

- Attractiveness to third countries and international organisations
- International networking and collaboration

Human Resources Development

Governance and Strategic Development

Aggregated Recommendations

User Access and Data Management

Stakeholder Engagement and Impact

International Collaboration

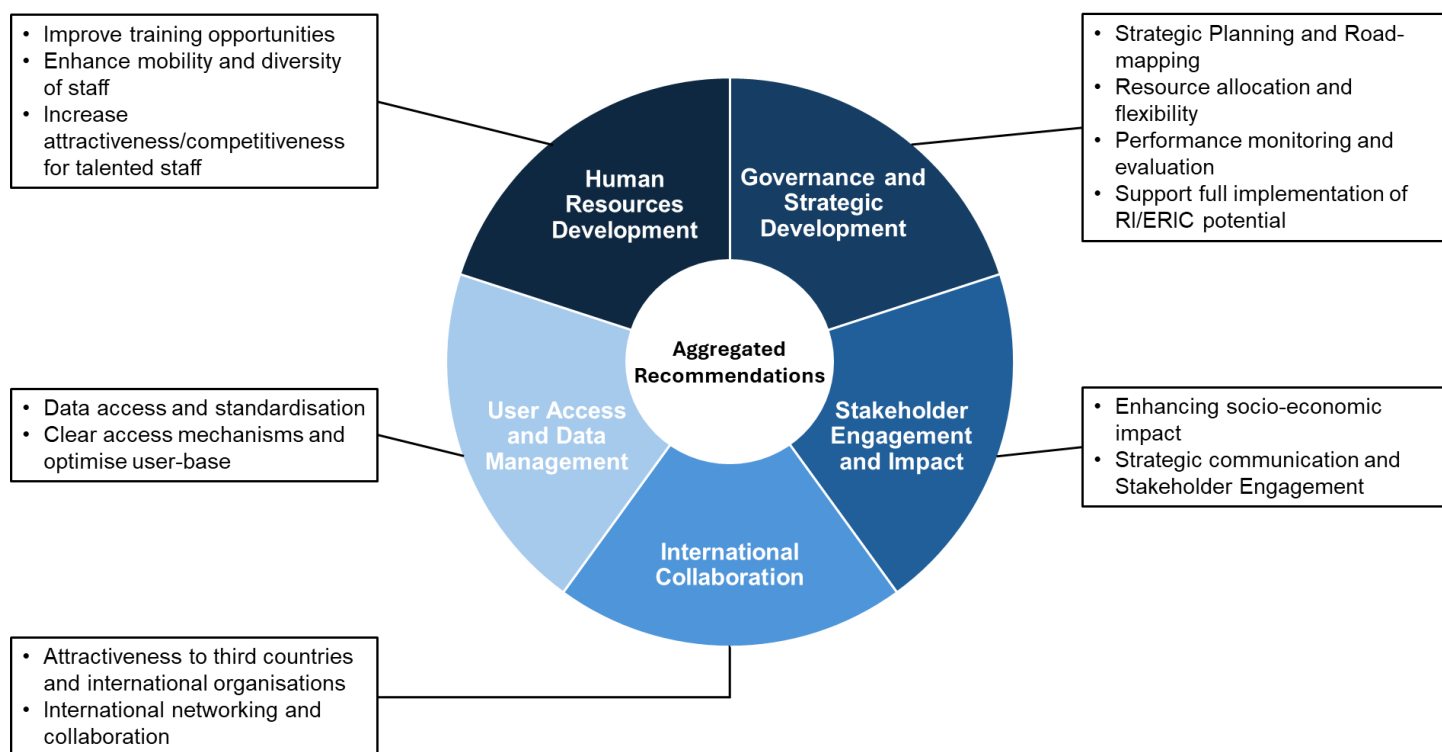*Figure 1. Aggregated recommendations extracted from experts reports and project deliverables*

Each of these categories includes several sub-categories, with each sub-category encompassing a set of key recommendations highlighted in the reports and deliverables. Further details are provided in Table 1, where additionally, identified challenges that need to be addressed to implement these recommendations are presented.

Table 1. Recommendations and challenges for implementation

Recommendations	Identified challenges for implementing recommendations
Governance and Strategic Development: high-level planning, resource management, and evaluation to ensure ERICs align with European (and national) research priorities and operate efficiently	
Strategic Planning and Road-mapping • Conduct regular reviews and road-mapping processes that integrate both bottom-up and top-down inputs • Develop forward plans that align RI needs with national research and innovation strategies • Engage the research community and other stakeholders in these processes	• Addressing the limitations of a one-size-fits-all model across diverse systems and RI types. • The complexity of tailoring strategic recommendations to fit varied national contexts and types of RIs.
Resource Allocation and Flexibility • Implement transparent and flexible budgetary mechanisms that can adapt to changing priorities • Allocate resources strategically to ensure RIs are adequately funded, while ensuring transparency and fairness	• Managing investment trade-offs between developing new RIs and maintaining/upgrading existing ones to avoid neglect, while ensuring flexibility and transparency in funding allocations. • Establishing and applying criteria such as scientific excellence, strategic relevance, innovation potential, and collaboration capacity for prioritizing RIs. • Ensuring funding aligns with RIs critical for advancing scientific knowledge, driving innovation, and addressing societal challenges.
Performance monitoring and evaluation • Develop and implement continuous performance monitoring systems to track the effectiveness and impact of RIs • Implement strategies to quickly identify and address underperformance in RIs • Encourage the sharing of best practices and performance-related insights among RI managers and stakeholders and involve relevant stakeholders in the performance evaluation process to ensure comprehensive and relevant assessments	• Developing accurate and meaningful performance metrics that reflect the diverse activities and impacts of RIs. • Ensuring transparency in performance reporting while maintaining confidentiality where necessary. • Allocating sufficient resources and building capacity for effective performance monitoring and evaluation. • Promptly identifying underperforming RIs and implementing timely interventions or improvements. • Maintaining a system that encourages accountability and supports continuous enhancement of RI effectiveness.
Support full implementation of RI/ERIC potential • Develop and implement policies that fully support the operation and growth of RIs/ERICs and strengthen collaborations to maximize the potential and impact of RIs/ERICs	• Ensuring continuous and sufficient financial support, including national funding that supports nodes activities and their capacity to serve the national research communities • Overcoming institutional resistance

• Ensure adequate and sustained funding of RIs/ERICs through national and EU funding mechanisms to enable RIs/ERICs to achieve their strategic goals and maintain operations • Improve access mechanisms and actively engage a diverse user base to optimize the utilization of RIs/ERICs	• Continuously maintaining high standards of research and fostering innovation within RIs/ERICs.

Stakeholder Engagement and Impact: to maximise the broader impact of ERICs on society and the economy	
Enhancing socio-economic impact • Strengthening Industry Partnerships to translate research findings into commercial applications • Support the transfer of technology and commercialization of research outcomes to drive economic growth • Increase public awareness and engagement to demonstrate the societal benefits of RIs • Develop programs to train and upskill researchers and technical staff, enhancing the talent pool and economic contribution • Utilize RIs as catalysts for regional economic development and innovation ecosystems	• Obtaining adequate funding to support both primary research goals and broader socio-economic initiatives. • Balancing the research objectives of RIs with commercial interests of industry partners to ensure alignment and mutual benefit. • Developing accurate, meaningful metrics to measure and convey the socio-economic impact of RIs. • Effectively communicating impact to diverse stakeholders, including funders and policymakers, to demonstrate value and justify continued support. • Navigating complex legal and regulatory requirements for technology transfer and commercialization. • Managing intellectual property and compliance challenges to facilitate innovation and commercial partnerships.
Strategic communication and Stakeholder Engagement • Establish a coherent communication strategy to enhance the visibility and understanding of ERICs, focusing on their role in enhancing national capabilities and supporting international collaboration. • Develop and maintain clear, consistent messaging to communicate the value, impact, and success stories of RIs. • Tailor communication strategies to specific stakeholder groups, such as policymakers, industry partners, researchers, and the general public. • Leverage digital and multimedia tools to expand outreach and engage diverse audiences effectively. • Actively involve researchers, RI managers, and other stakeholders in decision-making processes to incorporate their needs and perspectives. • Foster an environment of cooperation and healthy competition among RIs to enhance the quality and efficiency of services.	• Coordinating communication efforts across multiple countries, RIs, and stakeholder groups to ensure clarity and consistency, and demonstrating the impact and value of RIs. • Securing resources for comprehensive, sustained communication efforts that engage and inform stakeholders over time. • Fostering active, two-way engagement with stakeholders, rather than relying solely on information dissemination. • Tailoring communication to reach diverse audiences with varied interests and needs, enhancing stakeholder involvement. • Managing the diverse needs and expectations of different stakeholder groups in a way that is integrated and coherent. • Ensuring contributions from various stakeholders are meaningfully incorporated into strategic planning and operational framework.

• Develop strategies to attract new user communities and ensure inclusive access to RIs, including outreach to underrepresented groups and international researchers.	• Growing the user base of RIs to increase impact without compromising on research quality or infrastructure capacity.

International Collaboration: to address the global aspects of ERICs, focusing on international partnerships	
Attractiveness to third countries and international organisations. International networking • Promote international collaboration and networking to enhance the capabilities and reach of RIs/ERICs. • Establish formal collaboration frameworks to attract and facilitate partnerships with third countries and European, intergovernmental and international organisations. • Provide clear guidelines to joining RIs/ERICs addressing legal constraints, compatibility issues and, streamline access procedures for international researchers and institutions to encourage their use of RIs/ERICs. • Increase international visibility to attract partners and promote wider participation in RIs/ERICs. • Encourage broader application of tax exemptions for in-kind contributions to RI/ERIC nodes by members, facilitated through entities hosting RI/ERIC activities, to support faster growth in these countries. • Ensure that international collaborations deliver mutual benefits and reciprocity to both European RIs/ERICs and their international partners • Promote the exchange of best practices and mutual learning among RI managers and stakeholders to strengthen collaboration.	• Ensuring alignment between international collaborations and national research priorities and agendas. • Managing diverse legal, regulatory, and administrative requirements across countries. • Addressing differences in standards, practices, and operational procedures that complicate collaboration. • Ensuring sufficient funding to support sustainable international collaborations alongside national commitments. • Overcoming language barriers and cultural differences that can impact communication and effective collaboration. • Develop effective communication strategies that ensure clarity and consistency in messaging to international partners, clearly conveying the value and impact of RIs/ERICs to global stakeholders.

User Access and Data Management: to improve user access to ERICs and their data, as well as maximizing the potential of the infrastructure.	
Data access and standardisation • Facilitate access to data generated or managed by RIs by promoting and implementing best practices in data management (e.g. adoption of the FAIR principles) while ensuring robust data security and privacy measures to safeguard sensitive information. • Establish protocols to maintain high standards of data quality and integrity. • Promote collaboration among RIs to develop and maintain shared data infrastructure and services.	• Monitoring and managing user data effectively, including Implementing systems to track the use of RI resources and the outputs or outcomes generated by users. • Achieving consensus on data policies across different RIs and national boundaries, addressing diverse legal and regulatory standards. • Ensuring that data access policies support open access while also meeting stringent security and privacy requirements.

• Enhance the data literacy and skills of researchers and staff to improve data management and utilization.	• Obtaining continuous and adequate funding to develop, maintain, and upgrade high-quality data management and storage infrastructure.
Clear access mechanisms and optimise user base • Streamline access procedures to make it easier for researchers and other users to utilize RIs. • Develop strategies to optimize and manage the user base of RIs, including monitoring user activities and extending access to new user communities. • Ensure long-term, stable access, invest in capacity-building and training, enhance virtual access capabilities, improve visibility and user engagement.	• Enhancing outreach and dissemination strategies to raise awareness of RI services among a broad and diverse user base. • Preparing to accommodate increased demand resulting from expanded access and a larger, more diverse user base. • Securing sustainable funding and integrating flexible, streamlined funding across all EU Framework Programme Pillars.
Human Resources Development: to develop and maintain a skilled and diverse workforce for ERICs	
Improve training opportunities • Collect and assemble data on training aspects within the RI/ERIC system. • Develop communication strategies to evaluate the impact of RI/ERICs training activities in the ERA. • Create and offer integrated training services.	• Establishing a unified system for collecting and analysing data on training needs and outcomes across RIs/ERICs. • Developing and delivering coordinated training programs that address varying needs and capacities across different ERICs. • Implementing a "training of trainers" program to enhance the quality and relevance of training provided, ensuring it complements existing academic and executive education. • Design communication strategies for training initiatives that are accepted and effectively implemented across all RIs/ERICs.
Increase attractiveness/competitiveness for talented staff • Improve employment contracts, potentially standardizing EU contracts. • Establish agreements between ERIC members that go beyond current regulations.	• Harmonising/aligning employment conditions across countries with diverse labour laws, living costs, and labour expenses. • Ensuring that better employment conditions do not create unsustainable financial burdens for ERICs. • Navigating and modifying existing ERIC regulations to allow for more comprehensive agreements.
Enhance mobility and diversity of staff • Address mobility issues arising from the lack of EU-level contracts. • Promote diversity through national representatives in the RI/ERICs General Assemblies.	• Creating a standardized EU-level contractual framework that accommodates the mobility needs of RI/ERIC staff across countries.

	• Balancing the diverse national policies with the need for a cohesive EU-level approach with the goal of fostering staff diversity and mobility across the EU. • Address cultural and organizational differences between ERICs in various countries to support staff diversity, mobility, and cohesive collaboration.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach, leveraging the expertise and resources of various entities across the ERA and beyond. The SEP outlines specific strategies for each group of stakeholders, tailored to the particular challenges they can help address.

Stakeholder identification and analysis

The primary stakeholders of the ERIC Forum include individuals, networks, and organisations that are either affected by or have an influence on the activities and governance of ERICs and other RIs. This SEP aims to translate expert recommendations into concrete actions by bringing together and coordinating key parties to implement strategic improvements, thereby strengthening the role of ERICs within the European research landscape through strategic and collaborative efforts.

Given the broad scope of stakeholders—ranging from funding bodies, policymakers, RIs and their umbrella organisations, universities and higher education institutions, research and technology organisations, R&I-intensive businesses (including SMEs), innovation ecosystem actors, individual researchers, to national and regional authorities, and RI staff—it was necessary to cluster them into six primary stakeholder communities (Figure 2). This approach facilitates the development of tailored engagement strategies for specific topics and recommendations.

The stakeholder grouping broadly aligns with D14.1 while allowing for some flexibility. For each group, a brief description is provided below, outlining its relevance to the ERIC Forum, the purpose of its engagement, and its level of interest and influence in implementing the recommendations. Additionally, general engagement actions have been outlined to support these efforts.

Policy and Funding Authorities	Research communities	Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	International organisations	Industry	Individuals
• European Commission • Research councils • National ministries • National research organisations • Intergovernmental organisations • Funding agencies	• Research/User communities • Academic research institutions • Data management entities • (national/local) Training providers	• ESFRI • ERICs • EIRO Forum • ERIC/RI Governance bodies • ERICs to be	• OECD • Group of Senior Officials (GSO) on global RIs • International Conference on RIs (ICRI)	• Industrial partners • Investors • Technology transfer offices	• RI managers • RI staff • General public

Figure 2. ERIC Forum Primary Stakeholders

Policy and Funding Authorities

ERIC FORUM will ensure active engagement with the relevant policy-making bodies and representatives on a European, national and regional level. Engagement shall focus on securing support and alignment with policy frameworks, gaining insights into potential regulatory changes that may affect the ERIC FORUM collective interests and building alliances for future policy and funding initiatives.

In principle, policy making stakeholders should be considered as of high interest and influence, considering their significant impact in future policy direction and funding mechanisms. The engagement strategy shall focus on regular consultation, high-level meetings, and policy briefs while maintaining the information workflow on key milestones and outcomes.

Purpose of Engagement:

- Secure regulatory support and alignment with policy frameworks.
- Gain insights into potential regulatory changes that may affect the RI landscape
- Build alliances for potential future policy or funding initiatives.

Stakeholder Analysis:

Influence: High — Policy makers can significantly impact future policy direction and funding.

Interest: High — They are responsible for providing the necessary cohesive strategic direction for the ERICs, ensuring effective governance frameworks. This responsibility aligns with their vested interest, as ERICs are strategic assets within the ERA landscape and among Europe's most effective instruments for achieving scientific, technological, and societal impact.

Engagement Strategy: Regular consultation, high-level meetings, and policy briefs.

Research Communities

Special attention shall be dedicated to the Research Community. Gathering insights and feedback to align ERICs efforts with scientific trends and emerging research needs while building a steady collaborative approach will guarantee a bottom-up approach to aligning efforts.

Purpose of Engagement:

- Gather insights and feedback to align ERICs efforts with scientific trends and emerging research needs, thus ensuring that ERICs and their services remain at the cutting edge of their field.
- Build collaborations that contribute to the success of the ERICs and to streamline their recognition for the benefit of ERA.
- Raise awareness of the existence and function of RIs and why they are essential. Given the research community's limited knowledge of RIs, which restricts their number of users, increasing awareness is crucial to ensuring broader and more effective utilization of these infrastructures.

Stakeholder Analysis:

Influence: Medium — While they do not directly control funding or regulation, their support can drive innovation and provide critical research input.

Interest: High — Research communities will directly benefit from the outcomes and have a vested interest in ERICs success.

Engagement Strategy: Host workshops, collaborative forums, and provide regular research updates. Foster two-way communication and collaboration.

Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations

Purpose of Engagement:

- Ensure the alignment of the EF2 with existing European RI initiatives.
- Facilitate integration with ongoing research programs and shared resources.
- Enhance the visibility, influence, and credibility of the EF2 and the ERICs within the European research landscape.

Stakeholder Analysis:

Influence: High — As key facilitators of research collaboration, they can help in mobilising resources and ensuring interoperability with other research initiatives.

Interest: Medium to High — They are interested in expanding their research capacities and ensuring successful cross-border collaborations.

Engagement Strategy: Build strategic alliances through high-level discussions, regular updates, and project showcases.

International Organisations

Purpose of Engagement:

- Align ERIC FORUM's outputs with global standards and international frameworks.
- Gain support and recognition from influential international bodies.
- Facilitate collaboration across borders and access to international resources or funding.

Stakeholder Analysis:

Influence: Medium to High — International organisations can drive global policy alignment, provide funding and enhance the credibility of the ERIC FORUM 2 and ERICs at an international level.

Interest: Medium — While they may not have a direct stake in national or EC projects, international organisations are interested in projects that contribute to global goals (e.g., sustainability, innovation).

Engagement Strategy: Participate in global forums, seek partnerships on aligned initiatives and ensure regular reporting on progress and alignment with international goals.

Industry

Purpose of Engagement:

- Foster public-private partnerships to support innovation and commercialization.
- Encourage investment and resource contribution from the industry.
- Ensure that the ERICs outputs are aligned with market needs and trends.

Stakeholder Analysis:

Influence: Medium — Industry stakeholders may control critical resources, technologies and investments that could enhance ERICs success.

Interest: Medium-Low — Industry partners are typically interested in how they can benefit commercially or strategically from the project's outcomes and resources/expertise provided to advance their innovation pipeline.

Engagement Strategy: Regular industry briefings, joint ventures, innovation workshops, and partnership opportunities. Engage through trade shows, collaborative R&D projects, and industry networking events.

Individuals

Purpose of Engagement:

- Address concerns or challenges posed
- Enhance mobility and employment conditions for skilled staff within ERICs
- Build trust and ensure involvement in decision-making processes where appropriate to mitigate potential negative impacts.

Stakeholder Analysis:

Influence: Medium to High

Interest: High — These stakeholders are directly impacted and have a vested interest in the ERICs success and position in the R&I landscape

Engagement Strategy: Organise public consultations, community meetings, and provide clear, accessible information on how the project will impact them

Stakeholder engagement plan

The SEP has been developed as a strategic roadmap to guide engagement throughout and beyond the project lifecycle. To address the challenges associated with implementing the recommendations outlined above and recognising that each stakeholder group has a distinct purpose and varying levels of influence and interest, the plan presents tailored strategies for engaging the relevant stakeholders for each recommendation category. Importantly, many of the proposed activities are already part of the day-to-day operations of both the ExBo and the project, ensuring continuous and proactive engagement. Some of these activities are highlighted in the blue boxes under 'State of Action'.

Governance and Strategic Development

Strategic Planning and Road-mapping

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Annual	- Workshops - Bilateral meetings - Policy briefs	Align long-term strategies
Research Communities	Medium	High	Bi-annual	- Forums - Consultation workshops or webinars	Collect and incorporate emerging research needs and trends
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	High	Medium	Bi-annual	- Focus groups - Collaborative planning sessions	Discuss resource alignment and interoperability

Resource allocation and flexibility

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities (EU)	High	High	Quarterly	- Roundtable discussions - Strategic reviews	Coordinate discussions on transparent budgetary mechanisms and funding priorities
Policy and Funding Authorities (National)	High	Medium	Bi-annual	- Bilateral discussions	Collaborate on developing flexible funding models to address changing priorities
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	Medium	Medium	Bi-annual	- Joint workshop - Collaborative projects	Promote shared resources and flexibility in funding allocation

Performance monitoring and evaluation

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Quarterly	- Policy briefs - Evaluation meetings	Develop and review performance monitoring frameworks
Research Communities	Medium	High	Bi-annual	- Focus groups - Surveys	Engage in discussions to define and refine performance metrics
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	High	Medium	Annual	- Annual reports, - Webinars	Share best practices and performance data to enhance evaluation systems

Support full implementation of RI/ERIC potential

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Quarterly	- Position papers - Formal consultations - Roundtable or bilateral discussions	Advocate for sustained funding and policy support for RI/ERIC operations.
Research Communities	Medium	High	Bi-annual	- Promotional campaigns - Open days - User surveys	Facilitate access to RIs and gather feedback on service utilization
Industry	Medium	Medium	Annual	- Innovation workshops - Public-private partnerships	Foster partnerships to maximize research output and commercialization potential

State of Action: Most recommendations are being addressed or are in the initial stages of planning. Of key importance are the regular consultations with the EC, which take place through bilateral meetings between the EC and ERICs, and high-level meetings including the ERIC Forum Annual Meeting and ERIC Committee workshop. Additionally, several policy briefs and position papers have been prepared, including the recent position paper on *The Role of ERICs in the 10th Framework Programme* (FP10)[12]. This paper highlights the critical role of ERICs in advancing Europe's scientific and technological landscape, addressing key aspects such as funding, consolidation, structural support, governance, innovation, and access. These considerations aim to position ERICs as essential instruments for achieving scientific excellence and societal impact under FP10.

Added Value: Enhances alignment with research priorities, ensures sustainable funding, and integrates stakeholder insights into RI/ERIC operations.

Key considerations:

- Strengthen collaboration with policymakers (and industry, if possible) through structured liaison initiatives to enhance financial sustainability and policy alignment.
- Further focus can be given to supporting the full implementation of RI/ERIC potential.

Stakeholder Engagement and Impact

Enhancing socioeconomic impact

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Quarterly	- Policy briefs - High-level meetings	Develop policies supporting technology transfer and commercialization
Research Communities	Medium	High	Annual	- Training sessions - Collaborative research	Develop training programs and upskilling initiatives to enhance economic contributions
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	High	High	Ongoing	- Public outreach campaigns	Increase awareness of ERICs' contributions to economic growth and innovation
Industry	High	High	Bi-annual	- Joint R&D projects - Innovation workshops	Strengthen industry partnerships to translate research into commercial applications

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[12]ERIC Forum Position Paper (2024): The Role of ERICs in the 10th Framework Programme (FP10). https://www.eric-forum.eu/2024/04/25/the-role-of-erics-in-the-10th-framework-programme-fp10/

Strategic Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	**Comm. Type**	**Objectives**
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Quarterly	- Policy papers - High-level meetings	Develop clear messaging to communicate ERICs' role in national and European research strategies
Research Communities	High	High	Annual	- Training sessions - Collaborative research - Attendance to R&I Open Days	Establish structured engagement mechanisms for researchers to contribute to policy and operational discussions
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	High	Medium	Bi-annual	- Innovation workshops - Public-private partnerships	Foster partnerships to maximize research output and commercialization potential

State of Action: Two significant actions are currently underway in this regard. Firstly, the development of a future reporting platform is ongoing, which will serve as a centralised virtual repository for documents and data, that will provide stakeholders with a more comprehensive overview of the ERIC community (Deliverable 1.2[13]). Secondly, stakeholder mapping conducted by Work Package 14 and the current deliverable, which also presents a roadmap with concrete actions to engage stakeholders. Moreover, Cluster activities and individual efforts by each ERIC are currently ongoing.

Added Value: Enhances transparency, fosters collaboration, and strengthens the socioeconomic impact of ERICs.

Key considerations:

- Expand engagement efforts with industry by identifying key sectors for collaboration, establishing innovation hubs and fostering commercialization opportunities, if possible, through dedicated partnership programs.
- Further refine messaging with focus on socioeconomic impact and implement targeted actions to strengthen these efforts.

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[13] ERIC Forum 2, Deliverable 1.2 "Strategy for collection, curation and stewardship of data, information and knowledge relevant for the reporting platform". [unpublished].

International Collaboration

Attractiveness to third countries and international organisations. International networking

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Bi-Annual	- Bi-lateral meetings	Discussions on policy, funding, regulatory frameworks across countries and alignment of international collaborations with national research priorities
Research Communities	Medium	Medium	Ongoing	- Information campaigns - Participative workshops	Promote international collaboration opportunities and collect research needs
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	High	High	Annual	- Working groups - Workshops	Address differences in standards, practices and operational procedures. Develop effective communications strategies to convey the value and impact of ERICs to global stakeholders
International Organisations	High	High	Annual	- Conferences - Working groups	Coordinate and jointly plan access to research facilities at an international level
Individuals	High	High	Bi-annual	- Outreach events - conferences	Identify cross border initiatives and opportunities.

> **State of Action:** WP7 has already carried out excellent work, fully reported in D7.1[14], which summarises the ERIC Forum's shared understanding of methodologies, challenges and opportunities for global collaboration. The deliverable analyses the current status of ERIC's partnerships with third countries, identifies potential barriers and opportunities to enhance cooperation, and offers recommendations to various stakeholders on best practices.
>
> **Added Value:** Opening services to countries outside Europe is a challenging but highly needed activity, which fosters improvement to the infrastructure and allows the opportunity to tackle global challenges.
>
> **Key considerations:**
>
> WP7 has identified a significant amount of experience and expertise within the ERIC community. This will be explored and exploited for their next deliverable on "Cooperation activities implemented with the international organisations selected". This will greatly advance the above engagement plans.

User Access and Data Management:

Data access and standardisation

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	**Comm. Type**	**Objectives**
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Ongoing	- Working groups	Achieve consensus on data access and standardization policies across countries, ensuring alignment with diverse regulations and the evolving landscape.
Research Communities	High	High	Annual	- Workshops - Working groups	Promote dialogue on advancements, challenges, and needs for improving data access, an also provide clear guidelines and best practices.
Individuals	High	High	Ongoing	- Working groups	Establish protocols for managing data in accordance with open science and FAIR principles, while ensuring data security, quality, and integrity.

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[14] ERIC Forum 2, Deliverable D7.1 "Best Practices and Recommendations for Procedures of Engagement with Third Countries" [unpublished].

Clear access mechanisms and optimise user base

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities	a. Low b. High	Medium	Annual	a. Reports b. Bi-lateral meetings	a. Promote RIs services portfolio and access mechanisms b. Advocate for sustained funding
Research Communities	Medium	High	Annual	- Information campaigns - Participative workshops - Surveys	Promote RIs services portfolio, access mechanisms and success stories. Identify gaps and needs of the communities.
Individuals	High	High	Ongoing	- SOPs - Reports	Focus on optimising access procedures and developing strategies to effectively manage the user base.

State of Action: In the context of data access and standardisation, there are several ongoing initiatives and projects that are developing guidelines, tools and blueprints to facilitate data management and sharing. Examples include the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) and the European Health Data Space (EHDS). Many ERICs are involved in these initiatives and projects, and are therefore already participating in consultations, discussions and the development of protocols and tools to facilitate data access/sharing.

In relation to access mechanisms, **WP5** has reviewed the schemes for the deployment of transnational and virtual access in order to identify ERIC needs, and access barriers and limitations, as well as potential improvements, where relevant. The outcome of this comprehensive work is reported in the upcoming deliverable D5.2[15].

Added Value: Improving user access to ERICs and the data they produce will significantly enhance their value and impact for research, solidifying their role as key actors in the European research landscape.

Key considerations:

- Expertise in data and skills in data management are essential assets for ERICs to navigate the current data-rich research landscape.

It is also necessary to consider advocating for funding to develop, maintain and upgrade high-quality data management.

Human Resources Development:

Improve training offer

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	**Comm. Type**	**Objectives**
Research Communities (trainers)	High	High	Annual/Bi-annual	- Ad-hoc meetings - Consultative workshops	Find relevant training programs that address varying needs and capacities across ERICs.
Individuals	High	High	Ongoing	- Participative workshops - Surveys	Collect training needs and outcomes and collectively agree on training programs that address the needs and capacities across RIs/ERICs.

Increase attractiveness/competitiveness for talented staff

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	**Comm. Type**	**Objectives**
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Annual	- Bi-lateral meetings - Policy briefs - Position papers	Advocate for policy adjustments that facilitate standardized employment contracts across ERICs and countries, secure funding mechanisms that enable competitive employment conditions without financial strain.
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	High	Medium	Quarterly	- Collaborative Forums - Working groups - Joint reports	Foster alignment and collaboration between RIs to share best practices for employment conditions, explore collective bargaining solutions, and coordinate strategies to enhance the attractiveness of ERICs as career destinations.
Individuals	High	Medium	Ongoing	- Surveys - Focus groups - Internal newsletters - Career development workshops	Gather insights on employment challenges, inform staff about efforts to improve conditions, and promote available opportunities for career growth within ERICs.

Enhance mobility and diversity of staff

Primary Stakeholders	Influence level	Interest level	Engagement Actions		
			Frequency	Comm. Type	Objectives
Policy and Funding Authorities	High	High	Annual	- Bi-lateral meetings - Policy briefs - Position papers	Advocate for an EU-level contractual framework to improve staff mobility and diversity across ERICs. Seek policy and funding support for cross-border employment solutions.
Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	High	Medium	Quarterly	- Collaborative reports - Working groups - Dedicated task forces	Align efforts to support mobility and diversity, share best practices, and propose flexible employment solutions within existing regulations.
Individuals	Medium	High	Ongoing	- Surveys - Focus groups - Internal newsletters	Gather feedback on mobility challenges, raise awareness of opportunities, and promote inclusivity through cross-border collaboration.

State of Action: Some work is ongoing. **WP11** for example, has done a tremendous work in D11.1[16]. The deliverable provides a comprehensive analysis of employment practices across international organizations and ERICs. The work carried out serves as the basis for establishing common employment conditions guidelines, that could evolve into a European employment framework for ERICs, reflecting best practices within the European research landscape.

Added Value: Access to top talent. Moreover, diverse and mobile workforce fosters knowledge exchange, creativity, and high-impact research. Standardized and improved employment conditions make ERICs more sustainable and resilient in the long run and can facilitate cross-border research collaboration and resource-sharing.

Key considerations:

- Consultations and discussions on employment conditions and mobility should involve not only directors and administrators but also representatives from RI employees to ensure diverse perspectives and address the needs of the entire workforce.

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[16] ERIC Forum 2, Deliverable 11.1 "Employment regulations applied to researchers and support staff in different Countries" [unpublished].

Resources and responsibilities for implementing the SEP

In order to engage ERIC Forum stakeholders in an effective manner, it is essential to implement a well-structured approach that is supported by adequate resources. The allocation of resources is crucial in ensuring that engagement activities are strategic, efficient, and sustainable. Without proper resource allocation, engagement efforts may become fragmented, leading to miscommunication, stakeholder disengagement, or delays in achieving ERIC Forum's objectives. The key resources required for implementing a SEP can be broadly categorised into human, financial, technological, and material resources.

Human resources

Engaging stakeholders effectively requires a team with specific roles and responsibilities. These include:

- **ERIC Forum ExBo/ERIC directors:** responsible for leading the stakeholder engagement strategy and ensuring alignment with the ERIC Forum goals.
- **Coordinator of the Project:** responsible for ensuring compliance of the stakeholder engagement via the ERIC Forum project with the overall strategy agreed by the ExBo of the ERIC Forum and in alignment with the Chair of the ERIC Forum ExBo. In collaboration with relevant WPs of the project, the coordinator is involved in identifying key stakeholders.
- **Communications and Public Relations Team/WP on communications:** responsible for developing messaging and communication material, and for managing media and digital engagement platforms.
- **ERICs (staff):** Including project managers, operations leads and directors, they are responsible for implementing engagement activities, providing technical support and resources, addressing stakeholders concerns and incorporating stakeholder input into planning and strategy development of their individual ERIC.

To ensure a cohesive and strategic approach to stakeholder engagement, it is recommended that the Coordinator and the Communications and Public Relations Team/Communications WP provide guidance on engagement to the individual ERICs, whenever stakeholder management concerns topics of interest to the overall ERIC Forum community. Current processes and regular activities for stakeholder engagement are being coordinated between the ERIC Forum ExBo and the ERIC Forum 2 project through the ExBo Secretariat, recurring participation of the ExBo in Project Meetings and ExBo reviews of the project strategic outcomes. Together they are assuring a regular interaction with key stakeholders. Multiple examples of ongoing activities have been included in the 'state of action' inserts above and in the Success Stories section below. Expanding on these efforts will further enable a consistent engagement strategy, streamline communications, and ensure that stakeholder interactions are aligned with the broader objectives of the ERIC Forum. By coordinating efforts across all ERICs, this approach can effectively manage outreach, maintain unified messaging, and facilitate cross-ERIC collaboration, ultimately enhancing the impact and visibility of the RIs.

For the SEP to be effective, active stakeholder participation in engagement activities is essential. By providing insights, feedback, and suggestions, stakeholders play a crucial role in fostering dialogue, strengthening the RIs/ERICs' value chain, and ensuring that RIs effectively fulfil their mission while addressing the needs of their respective communities.

Financial resources

Adequate funding is essential to support stakeholder engagement activities. Key financial considerations include:

- **Budget allocation**, ensuring sufficient funds are available for stakeholder meetings, workshops, outreach programs and travelling for engagement activities.
- **Event and communication costs**, covering expenses for venues, catering, printed material and digital communications.
- **Contingency funds** for unforeseen or additional engagement needs

These resources are currently secured under the ERIC Forum 2 project. Additionally, the Forum will advocate for future funding from relevant stakeholders as part of its activities.

Technological resources

Technology enhances efficiency and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement efforts. Critical resources are:

- Stakeholder Management System that can help track engagement activities, interactions, feedback, engagement history, etc. As a first step, we have developed a custom-made Stakeholder Engagement Matrix (Annex I) with the following characteristics and/or functions:
  - It is a living document that can be updated in real time as stakeholder interactions evolve, making it a dynamic tool for tracking engagement.
  - It provides a clear, structured way to categorise stakeholders based on interest, influence, and engagement level, allowing teams to visualise relationships at a glance and facilitating stakeholder prioritization.
  - Facilitate monitoring by helping in tracking engagement efforts, identify gaps, and ensure that all key stakeholders are appropriately managed.
  - Can be easily translated into graphics, as data from the matrix can be transformed into charts, graphs, or stakeholder maps to enhance communication and decision-making.
  - Facilitate strategic development by supporting the tailoring of communication and engagement strategies for different stakeholder groups, as well as the allocation of appropriate resources and efforts to high-priority stakeholders.
  - Optimise performance evaluation by enabling the tracking of engagement effectiveness through KPIs such as participation rates, feedback quality, and stakeholder satisfaction.
- Communication and collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, that enable real-time interaction and remote stakeholder participation.
- Survey and feedback collection tools (e.g., Google Forms, SurveyMonkey) that streamline data collection and stakeholder opinion analysis.

Material resources

Physical and informational materials play a crucial role in supporting engagement activities. These include:

- **Informational and promotional materials** like reports, brochures, newsletters, and presentations that provide stakeholders with key information. As part of the project, the **WP14 Communications team** has already produced many of these materials and is always ready to assist when new materials are needed.
- **Meeting and event venues** for stakeholder consultations, including conference rooms or virtual meeting spaces. Logistics support for the organisation of these events is a must.

The appropriate allocation of human, financial, technological, and material resources is crucial to ensuring that engagement activities are well-organized, effective, and adaptable to evolving stakeholder needs. While some resources are currently available through individual ERICs, the coordinator, or the project's budget, long-term sustainability requires dedicated support. Without sufficient resources, stakeholder engagement as a community, risks becoming fragmented, inefficient, and ultimately less impactful.

Monitoring

Monitoring stakeholder engagement is a critical process for ensuring meaningful involvement and feedback. This includes providing regular updates, documenting key interactions, and periodically evaluating and adapting engagement strategies based on feedback and emerging needs.

Key Monitoring Activities:

- Regular updates on stakeholder engagement in the ExBo and General Assembly.
- Documentation of engagement activities in ExBo minutes.
- Periodic evaluation and adjustment of engagement strategies.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs help measure the success of stakeholder engagement efforts. The main indicators include:

Stakeholder participation and engagement

- Number of meetings/events held.
- Percentage of stakeholders that participated.
- Number of responses to surveys, meetings and emails.

Impact on Decision-Making

These metrics ensure that stakeholder engagement is not only tracked but also leads to meaningful, actionable outcomes.

- Percentage of stakeholder feedback incorporated into key decisions.
- Number of policy changes influenced by stakeholder input.

Adherence to Engagement Plan Milestones:

Regular assessments of progress against the milestones help identify potential delays or areas for improvement, allowing for timely adjustments to keep the process moving forward efficiently.

- Percentage of planned activities completed on schedule.

Additional (Optional) KPIs:

For a more in-depth assessment, the following KPIs can also be considered:

- Percentage of stakeholders who express satisfaction with the engagement process.
- Representation of diverse stakeholder groups in engagement activities.
- Percentage of stakeholders attending multiple meetings or engaging in several activities.
- Depth and quality of stakeholder feedback (e.g., detailed, constructive responses rather than simple acknowledgments)
- Number of new programs, policies, or initiatives influenced by engagement.
- Frequency of follow-up engagement after decisions are made.

Regular tracking of these indicators ensures engagement remains effective, transparent, and impactful. Adjustments can be made as needed to enhance participation and outcomes.

Success stories

Prior to the drafting of this document, several key actions have already been carried out over the past year as part of the ERIC Forum's efforts to engage with policymakers and research communities. These initiatives, predominantly led or attended by the ExBo and/or ERIC representatives, have been highly successful and have laid the groundwork for further engagement. Some exemplary actions include:

January 2024

First meeting of the expert group set with representatives from the EC and the ERIC Forum to discuss the upcoming revision of the Guidelines Implementing the ERIC Regulation. A second meeting took place in April to revise the implementation guidelines.

Recommendation category: Governance and Strategic Development

Stakeholder group: Policy and Funding Authorities

February 2024

Inaugural meeting EC expert group on Technology Infrastructures. This expert group will assist the Commission in strengthening technology infrastructures for European industry, including SMEs and start-ups, by helping in identifying strategic pilot investment areas and developing EU-level coordination mechanisms. ERIC Forum's invitation to participate in this expert group marks a strategic milestone, positioning ERIC Forum to influence European policy priorities in industrial ecosystems.

Recommendation category: Impact and Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder group: Policy and Funding Authorities, Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations, Industry

April 2024:

The ERIC Forum publishes position paper where it presents its considerations for the FP10 programme, focusing on funding, consolidation, structural support, governance, innovation, and access.

Recommendation category: Governance and Strategic Development

Stakeholder group: Policy and Funding Authorities

May 2024:

ERIC Forum 2 participated in the EC working group revising the European Charter for Access to RIs, contributing valuable insights during review consultations. They emphasized the importance of open science and data, as well as the growing demand for industry access to RIs. The updated Charter now reflects a modern vision of RI access, open, resilient, and effective, providing a framework to enhance access to and collaboration with RIs, strengthening the ERA.

Recommendation category: User Access and Data Management

Stakeholder group: Policy and Funding Authorities, Research Communities

June 2024:

ERICs and the ERIC Forum were prominently represented at the "Research Infrastructures in a Changing Global, Environmental and Socio-economic Context" Conference, where they were showcased as strategic assets of the ERA. Contributions from ERIC representatives and the ERIC Forum Chair highlighted shared challenges and strengths, underscoring the pivotal role that ERICs play in strengthening Europe's RI landscape.

Recommendation category: Impact and Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder group: Policy and Funding Authorities, Research Communities

September 2024:

ERIC Forum 2 was featured at the ERA Stakeholder Conference "European Research Area: Fostering Greater Integration. Advancing Competitiveness", as one of the 18 successful EU-funded projects supporting the implementation of the first ERA Policy Agenda and contributing to improving ERA.

Recommendation category: Governance and Strategic Development

Stakeholder group: Policy and Funding Authorities

Conclusions

The SEP is a vital tool to ensure that ERICs continue to evolve as key enablers of European research and innovation. By fostering collaboration among policymakers, researchers, funders, and industry partners, the SEP creates a structured framework for strengthening governance, improving access, and securing sustainable funding for ERICs. The successful execution of this plan will require consistent stakeholder involvement, regular monitoring, and adaptive strategies to address emerging challenges. The ERIC Forum, as a unifying body, will play a central role in ensuring that engagement activities remain strategic, impactful, and aligned with European research priorities. As the European research landscape evolves, the active participation of all stakeholders will be essential to maximising the value of ERICs, enhancing their role within the ERA, and ensuring their continued contribution to global scientific progress. Implementing this plan will enable ERICs to enhance their impact, foster innovation, and consolidate their position as essential components of Europe's research ecosystem.

Annex I. Stakeholder Assesment Matrix

PROJECT NAME

ERIC Forum 2

WP4 - Task 4.2

PROJECT DELIVERABLE

D4.1 Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) for implementing the recommendations of the EGERIC and OECD reports

TOPIC	SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATION	STAKEHOLDER CATEGORY	STAKEHOLDERS	INFLUENCE	INTEREST	INFORMATION TYPE/OBJECTIVES	DECISION MAKER?	Frequency	Type	Non-engaged	Informed	Engaged	Actively engaged
Governance and Strategic development	Strategic planning and road-mapping	Policy and Funding Authorities	National ministries, research councils, agencies responsible for science and technology	High	High	Align long-term strategies	Yes	Annual	- Workshops - Bilateral meetings - Policy briefs			✓	
		Research Communities	Academic research institutions, user communities	Medium	High	Collect and incorporate emerging research needs and trends	No	Bi-annual	- Forums - Consultation workshops or webinars	✓			
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ERICs Governance Bodies	High	Medium	Discuss resource alignment and interoperability	Yes	Bi-annual	- Focus groups - Collaborative planning sessions				✓
	Resource allocation and flexibility	Policy and Funding Authorities	EU	High	High	Coordinate discussions on transparent budgetary mechanisms and funding priorities	Yes	Quarterly	- Roundtable discussions - Strategic reviews			✓	
		Policy and Funding Authorities	National	High	Medium	Collaborate on developing flexible funding models to address changing priorities	Yes	Bi-annual	- Bilateral discussions	✓			
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ERICs, ERICs to be, EIRO Forum	Medium	Medium	Promote shared resources and flexibility in funding allocation	No	Bi-annual	- Joint workshop - Collaborative projects			✓	
	Performance monitoring and evaluation	Policy and Funding Authorities	EC, National ministries, research councils, agencies responsible for science and technology	High	High	Develop and review performance monitoring frameworks	Yes	Quarterly	- Policy briefs - Evaluation meetings	✓			
		Research Communities	Research/user communities	Medium	High	Engage in discussions to define and refine performance metrics	No	Bi-annual	- Focus groups - Surveys	✓			
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ERICs, ERICs to be, EIRO Forum	High	Medium	Share best practices and performance data to enhance evaluation systems	Yes	Annual	- Annual reports - Webinars			✓	✓
	Support full implementation of RI/ERIC potential	Policy and Funding Authorities	EC, National ministries, research councils,	High	High	Advocate for sustained funding and policy support for RI/ERIC operations.	Yes	Quarterly	- Position papers - Formal consultations - Roundtable or bilateral discussions		✓	✓	
		Research Communities	User communities	Medium	High	Facilitate access to RIs and gather feedback on service utilization	No	Bi-annual	- Promotional campaigns - Open days - User surveys	✓			
		Industry	Investors, technology transfer offices	Medium	Medium	Foster partnerships to maximize research output and commercialization potential	No	Annual	- Innovation workshops - Public-private partnerships	✓			
Impact and stakeholder engagement	Enhancing socio-economic impact	Policy and Funding Authorities	EC	High	High	Develop policies supporting technology transfer and commercialization	Yes	Quarterly	- Policy briefs - High-level meetings			✓	
		Research Communities	Acadmin research Institutions, training providers	Medium	High	Develop training programs and upskilling initiatives to enhance economic contributions	No	Annual	- Training sessions - Collaborative research	✓			
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ERICs, ERICs to be	High	High	Increase awareness of ERICs' contributions to economic growth and innovation	Yes	Ongoing	- Public outreach campaigns		✓		
		Industry	Industrial partners, Investors, technology transfer offices	High	High	Strengthen industry partnerships to translate research into commercial applications	No	Bi-annual	- Joint R&D projects - Innovation workshops	✓			
	Strategic communication and stakeholder engagement	Policy and Funding Authorities	EC, National ministries, research councils,	High	High	Develop clear messaging to communicate ERICs' role in national and European research strategies		Quarterly	- Policy papers - High-level meetings		✓	✓	
		Research Communities	Research/user communities	High	High	Establish structured engagement mechanisms for researchers to contribute to policy and operational discussions		Annual	- Training sessions - Collaborative research - Attendance to R&I Open Days	✓			
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ESFRI, ERICs, ERICs to be, EIRO Forum	High	Medium	Foster partnerships to maximize research output and commercialization potential		Bi-annual	- Innovation workshops - Public-private partnerships	✓			
International collaboration	Attractiveness to third countries and international organisations. International networking	Policy and Funding Authorities	European Commission, DG RTD, National Ministeries	High	High	Discussions on policy, funding, regulatory frameworks across countries and alignment of international collaborations with national research priorities	No	Bi-Annual	- Bi-lateral meetings	✓			
		Research Communities	Researchers	Medium	Medium	Promote international collaboration opportunities and collect research needs	Yes	Ongoing	- Information campaigns - Participative workshops	✓			

COMMUNICATION

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

Category	Objective	Stakeholder Type	Stakeholder	Priority	Priority	Description	Joint	Frequency	Methods/Tools	C1	C2	C3	C4
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ESFRI, ERIC Forum	High	High	Address differences in standards, practices and operational procedures. Develop effective communications strategies to convey the value and impact of ERICs to global stakeholders	No	Annual	- Working groups - Workshops			✓	
		International Organisations	OECD, ICRI	High	High	Coordinate and jointly plan access to research facilities at an international level	Yes	Annual	- Conferences - Working groups		✓		
		Individuals	RI managers	High	High	Identify cross border initiatives and opportunities.	Yes	Bi-annual	- Outreach events - Conferences			✓	
User Access and data management	Data access and standardisation	Policy and Funding Authorities	European Commission, funding bodies	High	High	Achieve consensus on data access and standardization policies across countries, ensuring alignment with diverse regulations and the evolving landscape.	No	Ongoing	- Working groups				✓
		Research Communities	Data management and users	High	High	Promote dialogue on advancements, challenges, and needs for improving data access, an also provide clear guidelines and best practices.	Yes	Annual	- Workshops - Working groups				✓
		Individuals	RI managers	High	High	Establish protocols for managing data in accordance with open science and FAIR principles, while ensuring data security, quality, and integrity.	No	Ongoing	- Working groups				✓
	Clear acces mechanisms and optimise user base	Policy and Funding Authorities	EC, National ministries, research councils	Low	Medium	Promote RIs services portfolio and access mechanisms	Yes	Annual	Reports	✓			
		Policy and Funding Authorities	EC, National ministries, research councils	High	Medium	Advocate for sustained funding	Yes	Annual	Bi-lateral meetings		✓		
		Research Communities	Users	Medium	High	Promote RIs services portfolio, access mechanisms and success stories. Identify gaps and needs of the communities.	No	Annual	- Information campaigns - Participative workshops - Surveys	✓			
		Individuals	RI managers/RI staff	Low	Medium	Focus on optimising access procedures and developing strategies to effectively manage the user base.	Yes	Ongoing	- SOPs - Reports			✓	
Human resources development	Improve training opportunities	Research Communities	Training providers	High	High	Find relevant training programs that address varying needs and capacities across ERICs.	No	Annual/Bi-annual	- Ad-hoc meetings - Consultative workshops	✓			
		Individuals	RI managers/RI staff	High	High	Collect training needs and outcomes and collectively agree on training programs that address the needs and capacities across RIs/ERICs.	Yes	Ongoing	- Participative workshops - Surveys			✓	
	Increase attractiveness/competitiveness for talented staff	Policy and Funding Authorities	European Commission, National ministries	High	High	Advocate for policy adjustments that facilitate standardized employment contracts across ERICs and countries, secure funding mechanisms that enable competitive employment conditions without financial strain.	Yes	Annual	- Bi-lateral meetings - Policy briefs - Position papers	✓			
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ERICs, ERICs to be	High	Medium	Foster alignment and collaboration between RIs to share best practices for employment conditions, explore collective bargaining solutions, and coordinate strategies to enhance the attractiveness of ERICs as career destinations.	Yes	Quarterly	- Collaborative Forums - Working groups - Joint reports				✓
		Individuals	RI managers/RI staff	High	Medium	Gather insights on employment challenges, inform staff about efforts to improve conditions, and promote available opportunities for career growth within ERICs.	Yes	Ongoing	- Surveys - Focus groups - Internal newsletters - Career development workshops			✓	
	Enhance mobility and diversity of staff	Policy and Funding Authorities	European Commission, National Ministeries	High	High	Advocate for an EU-level contractual framework to improve staff mobility and diversity across ERICs. Seek policy and funding support for cross-border employment solutions.	Yes	Annual	- Bi-lateral meetings - Policy briefs - Position papers	✓			
		Research Infrastructures and Umbrella Organisations	ESFRI, ERICs, ERICs to be	High	Medium	Align efforts to support mobility and diversity, share best practices, and propose flexible employment solutions within existing regulations.	No	Quarterly	- Collaborative reports - Working groups - Dedicated task forces			✓	
		Individuals	RI Managers, RI Staff	Medium	High	Gather feedback on mobility challenges, raise awareness of opportunities, and promote inclusivity through cross-border collaboration.	Yes	Ongoing	- Surveys - Focus groups - Internal newsletters			✓	