



CROSS-BORDER BUSINESS COLLABORATION

A guide to successful corporate collaborations

TIPS FOR

small and medium-sized enterprises
and business associations

FCS

FUTURE CLEANTECH SOLUTIONS

This is a guide to how small and medium-sized enterprises can make the most of the opportunities resulting from major local investments.

The guide is for anyone working at a small or medium-sized enterprise. It is also for anyone working within a business association who wants to promote and support local entrepreneurship and sustainable development.

The guide is a result of an Interreg Botnia-Atlantica project, Future Cleantech Solutions – a project to connect local small and medium-sized cleantech companies with investments and establishments in the Kvarken region. It is filled with tips and useful advice that we hope may be beneficial.

Enjoy!

November 2021

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Photo: Jonas Westling



This guide is about creating a basis for successful collaboration between small and medium-sized enterprises and major stakeholders such as big companies, municipalities, cities and authorities. In the guide we refer to these throughout as SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and major stakeholders.




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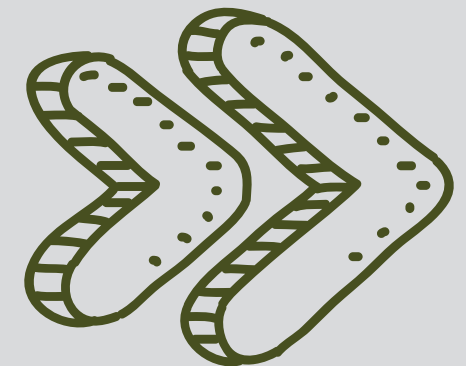
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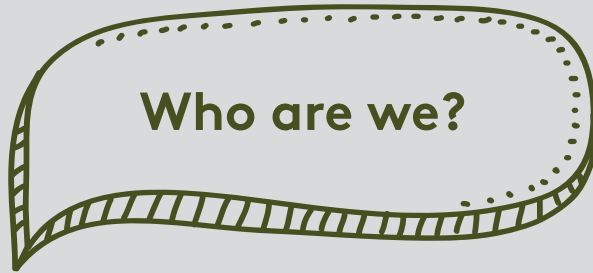
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1. Who are we? About Future Cleantech Solutions



Who are we?

About Future Cleantech Solutions

Future Cleantech Solutions is a three-year project running from 2019 to 2021. The aim has been to strengthen sustainable development in the Kvarken region by establishing conditions for cleantech companies to take advantage of new business and collaboration opportunities. The project has been run as a collaboration between regional organisations and companies with support from the EU Interreg Botnia-Atlantica programme.

THE FOCUS OF THE PROJECT has been making the most of new opportunities arising through establishments and investments in the region, primarily within the development fields of energy, smart sustainable cities, bioeconomy and chemistry. Consequently, the project team has been working to strengthen the value chain between major stakeholders and small and medium-sized enterprises. The project activities have included development of methods for disseminating practical business information, support for tangible cross-border business collaboration and initiatives to promote development of new and existing cluster collaborations. Promoting equality and inclusion has also been a high priority in all project activities.

The project owner was Kompetensspridning i Umeå AB, working in partnership with Kokkolanseudun Kehitys Oy, Skellefteå Science City, Technology Centre Merinova Oy, Vaasa Region Development Company and Örnsköldsvik Municipality.



EUROPEISKA UNIONEN

Interreg
Botnia-Atlantica

Europeiska regionala utvecklingsfonden



OUR PROJECT TEAM.

Back row from left: Jon Moraeus, Ylva Billing, Peter Hedman, Lasse Pohjala, Nora Birkman Neunstedt, Sanna Näsström, Maria Lidberg, Triinu Varblane, Nina Rismalm, Mauritz Knuts, Reija Harlamow, Jeanette Holmlund de Miranda.

Not present in picture: Jenny Åkermark, Peter Sundberg, Sanna Orellano, Johannes Lövdahl, Peter Hellström and Kjell-Owe Ahlskog.

FUTURE CLEANTECH SOLUTIONS has been funded by Interreg Botnia-Atlantica, the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, Region Västerbotten, Region Västernorrland, Umeå Municipality, Skellefteå Municipality, Örnsköldsvik Municipality, City of Vaasa, City of Kokkola, Technology Centre Merinova, Vaasa Region Development Company (VASEK), Kokkolanseudun Kehitys Oy (KOSEK), Umeå Energi and Skellefteå Kraft.



Regional Council
of Ostrobothnia



region
västerbotten



Region
Västernorrland





2. Success through sustainability and inclusion

Success through sustainability and inclusion

We are in the midst of a green transition – a transition that is presenting both new opportunities and new challenges for companies. Demand for clean energy is increasing and demands to reduce emissions are stepping up. At the same time, when competing for skilled labour, it is becoming increasingly important to ensure an inclusive approach to creating sustainable workplaces for the future.

In short – sustainability and inclusion are vital success factors for a company's development. The increasing significance of sustainability is also clearly evident in that many large-scale companies are setting more demanding requirements for their subcontractors and partners, and the UN's global sustainable development goals are gradually having a greater impact in regulations and funding.



FUTURE CLEANTECH SOLUTIONS is not an equality project – but in order to promote development within the cleantech sector, increased focus on equality is needed, as well as more women serving on boards and in management teams. Equal workplaces show a higher level of job satisfaction, greater capacity for innovation and, not least, improved profitability. One ambition in Future Cleantech Solutions has therefore been to take lead in achieving a more equal Kvarken region.

In the Nordic region we have come a long way in regards to equality, comparatively speaking. A great deal of work has been done – and is being done – to ensure equality is seen as a self-evident and fundamental right. However, in order to strengthen regional competitiveness, with attractive, modern and sustainable companies and workplaces, more needs to be done. We need to be proactive in taking equality work within the business sector to the next level.

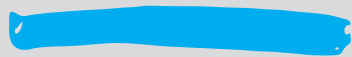
An environment where exchanges of opinions and experiences can flow freely generates more creative and innovative solutions that contribute to business success. We have therefore employed a variety of measures within the framework of the project to help increase equality and diversity in the region. This has included spreading good examples from companies' equality work, ensuring visibility for both men and women in communication activities and highlighting women in the sector, e.g. at different types of events.





We have collaborated with and supported companies of the future through the project Future Cleantech Solutions. Our focus has been companies we deemed to be sustainable from a climate and environmental perspective. During the course of the project we have also increasingly focused on equality and inclusion – in order to strengthen sustainable leadership among companies and contribute to sustainable workplaces for the future.

“An environment where exchanges of opinions and experiences can flow freely generates more creative and innovative solutions that contribute to business success.”



3. Collaboration with major stakeholders

For associations: Establishing a basis for collaboration

PAGE 10-11

For SMEs: Making contact with major stakeholders

PAGE 12-13

Establishing a basis for collaboration

Investments and new establishments in the region create new business opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises. In order to take advantage of such opportunities, it is crucial to build relationships and facilitate collaboration with the major stakeholders. Business associations can play a key role in this.

Business associations that work with SMEs fulfil an essential and valuable function when it comes to initiating contact and facilitating relationships with major stakeholders such as big companies, municipalities and public bodies. Such relationships can in turn open up means for new collaborations for SMEs that can and want to offer their smart solutions. Below we outline the process which have been used during the project to create these possibilities.

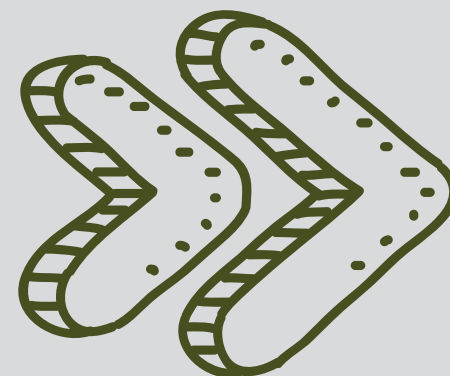


Bear in mind that peripheral effects can offer just as significant opportunities for SMEs as the actual establishment/investment. Peripheral effects refers to indirect business opportunities that arise as a result of a large-scale initiative undertaken by an organisation. So listen to the needs of subcontractors too!

1. **Gather information** on relevant major stakeholders by following information channels such as social media and newsletters.
2. **Identify the right contacts** at the major stakeholders. Think inclusively even at this stage – and ensure that all relevant persons get access to the information.
3. **Book a meeting** with the major stakeholders, in which you present how you are working with and supporting SMEs. Ask them to talk about their activities and any new investments. Investigate any potential interest in collaboration.
4. **Arrange an internal workshop** within your organisation to formulate a proposal for collaboration.
5. **Meet with the major stakeholders again** get a more detailed understanding of their challenges and needs. Explain that you can help them with relevant SME contacts. Come up with a format that suits each stakeholder.
6. **Specify** and create a mandate for your organisation based on how SMEs can best meet the needs of the major stakeholders.
7. **Implement the mandate.** This step is described in chapters 5–7 of this guide (pages 17–31).
8. **Follow up** on the outcome of the mandate.

It is essential to establish a long-term partnership with major stakeholders and check in regularly rather than simply passing contact details to individual SMEs. Some tips for successful implementation:

- Create opportunities
- Do not over-promise
- Adjust the offering to suit major stakeholders
- Set objectives together with major stakeholders.



Information sharing

Once the business association has completed steps 1-6 of 'Establishing a basis for collaboration' – the process on page 10, it is time to share information with SMEs. Disseminating information about investments by major stakeholders and their needs can be done in face-to-face meetings with SMEs or via social media, news posts, webinars or physical events to reach a wider audience. We explain more about sharing information via events in chapter 5: Spreading information – creating successful events.



It is essential to be clear in your communication, so that both major stakeholders and SMEs understand what is needed and what is offered.



SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS are built on developing long-term relationships based on trust, mutual benefit, responsiveness, commitment, open dialogue and all parties being well prepared.

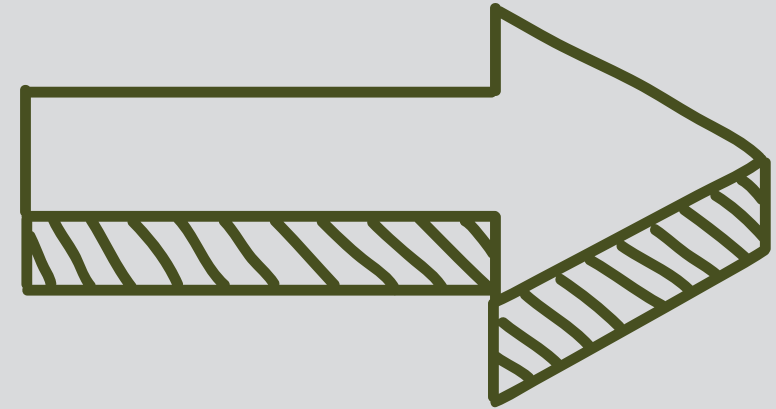
Making contact with major stakeholders

This section presents tips and advice for small and medium-sized enterprises interested in beginning working together with major stakeholders.

In this section we present different approaches for making contact and establishing communication with major stakeholders, which hopefully will lead to actual business. Major stakeholders refers in this context to big companies within the private sector, municipalities, cities, authorities and other organisations that invest in a certain region.

The **first step** involves actively seeking out information about what is going on in area you have chosen. You can do this through:

- **Trendspotting.** Looking for signals and signs that may be significant in the future.
 - This could be unformulated ideas, articles in trade publications, university research, new start-ups – in fact, almost anything. Early trends can manifest in many ways – the common factor is that they are the first indications of a forthcoming change.
- **Keep an eye on relevant media.** Study regional news media, industry media and social media related to the area you have chosen.
 - Local media often covers investments and establishments in its local region. Any individuals featured in articles may be important contact persons.
- **Monitor interesting companies.** Once you have identified a major stakeholder of interest – follow the company on social media, keep an eye on their websites, subscribe to newsletters, and so on.
 - If this particular stakeholder has a purchasing portal, you can register there.
- **Visit the region.** The best way of all to gain information and relevant contacts is to visit the area where the investment is being made. Visiting the region also gives an insight into how the area functions overall, and it is easier to identify potential peripheral effects and to detect ‘silent’ signals that are important to follow.
 - Keep an eye out for relevant events in the region that



can be incorporated into your visit. Attending on-site events often offers the best opportunities for networking, making contacts and gathering information.

- **Take part in digital information sessions and events.**
 - Many events are conducted digitally, which means that you can take part even if you do not have the time and resources to make a visit in person. Finding all the digital events being held can take time, but it is essential not to miss them!

Create a presence and network

It is important for the major stakeholders to be aware of you and know what you have to offer. In order to get on the investors’ radar – find your place in their network and try to become a part of it. Make your presence known as early as possible by being visible and available at both open events for information sharing and smaller unofficial meet-ups. Securing a local office naturally increases scope for building a network. A less costly alternative may be to open a pop-up office on specific occasions, such as relevant events.

Business opportunities in the public sector

When a large-scale private investment is made, for example, a large factory, infrastructure generally also needs to be developed. In many instances the state or municipality is responsible for developing infrastructure in connection with large-scale private investments. This could be preparation of properties, the power grid or logistics solutions to be implemented. Development of infrastructure usually gives rise to procurement processes, which yield business opportunities for stakeholders, both large and small.

In addition, municipalities and other public organisations undertake regular purchasing and procurement for day-to-day operations, which also generates good business opportunities.

Large-scale public contracts are conducted by means of procurement via a variety of procurement systems. You can obtain useful information about public procurements from relevant authorities:


- Sweden: upphandlingsmyndigheten.se/en
- Finland: publicprocurement.fi

You can also find public procurements online, e.g.:

- Finland: hankintailmoitukset.fi/en/
- Sweden: offentligaupphandlingar.se or opic.com/upphandlingar
- EU: All public announcements for the European Union can be found in the European system: ted.europa.eu



Tip! Set up monitoring of procurements to keep an eye out for business opportunities in the public sector.

A group of people are gathered around a table in a meeting room, working on laptops. The room has large windows and a whiteboard. The lighting is warm and orange. The text is overlaid on the image.

4. Collaboration with small and medium-sized enterprises

For associations: Providing valuable support
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For SMEs: Asking for advice and support
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Providing valuable support

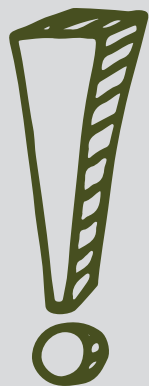
Most small and medium-sized enterprises need support and advice to prepare for meeting up with a major stakeholder, to move forward with discussions and to do cross-border business. Business associations can provide valuable support in preparing pitches and acting as a sounding board.

Business associations: Offering advice to SMEs

Business associations have a responsibility and a huge opportunity to support SMEs in their preparations when it comes to creating presentation material and reviewing websites, as well as support with preparing a company pitch or matchmaking.

In order to ensure such support actually yields result, it is important, in our experience, to keep communication open and support SMEs in moving forward with the process step by step. Remember that every dialogue is unique, and multiple discussions and continuous development will most probably be needed. It is also essential to identify the obstacles faced by the company and guide it towards expert assistance within that specific area. Those working in the region should have a good overall picture, enabling them to provide support and contribute a broader perspective and different angles of approach.

Below is a list of important points to review with SMEs when providing support. More detailed information for SMEs can be found in the following chapter.



- Learn more about major stakeholders and gather information
- Begin networking
- Ask for advice and support from organisations that can help
- Create material for your business offering
- Prepare ahead of any meeting with major stakeholders
- Follow up on results and develop the business sector



Asking for advice and support

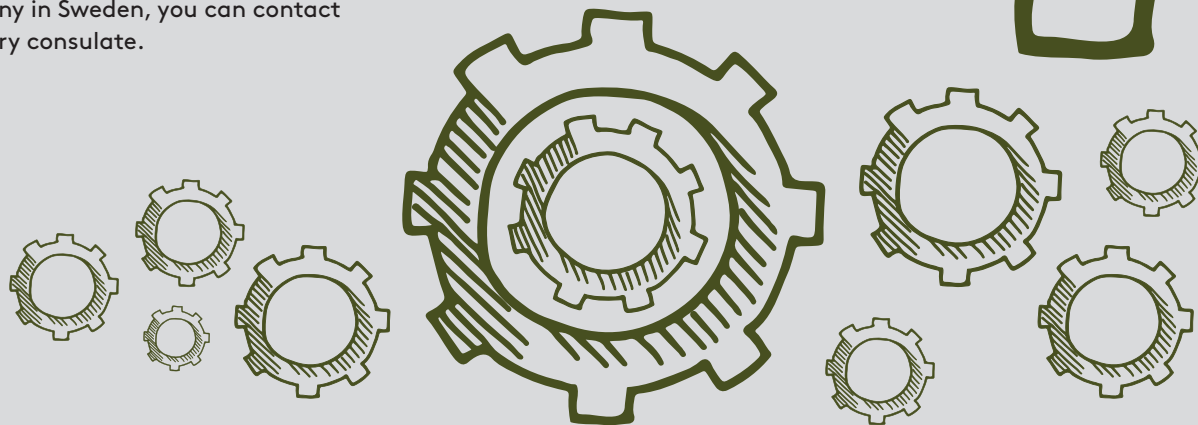
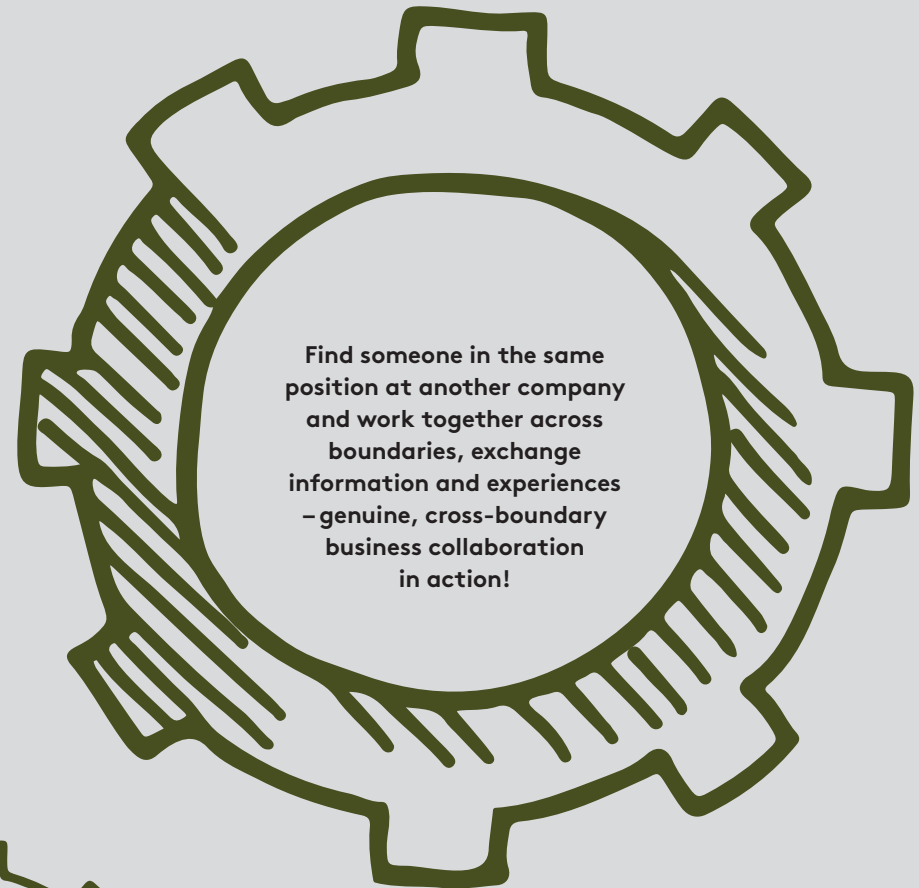
As a small or medium-sized enterprise it can be difficult to know how to go about finding the right contacts and business partnerships in a new region. It is essential to have the courage to reach out and ask for help – there are numerous public and private organisations commissioned to create opportunities for companies.

Contact organisations within your field of interest and request a meeting. The structure of support organisations differs in the Nordic countries, but it does not take long to become part of the network after initial contact. Here are some examples of organisations that can help SMEs:

- Business Sweden and Business Finland
- Municipal business offices or development companies
- Local chambers of commerce and the Finnish-Swedish Chamber of Commerce
- Local entrepreneurship associations
- Private consultancy firms that work in market development
- Cluster organisations, incubators and science parks.



Tip! Honorary consulates in the Nordic region are extremely helpful. Why not try contacting them? As a Swedish company, for example, you can contact Business Sweden in Finland, and as a Finnish company in Sweden, you can contact Finland's honorary consulate.



5. Spreading information

For associations and SMEs: Creating successful events

PAGE 18-19

For SMEs: Creating marketing material

PAGE 20-21

Spreading information: creating successful events

Planning and implementing an event or a series of events takes a great deal of work before, during and after the event and it is therefore essential to begin planning well in advance.

In order to ensure a successful event, it is crucial that everyone involved knows what the goal of the event is. Consequently, it is important to communicate clearly and continuously and to allocate tasks in a sustainable manner. The shared journey from planning to implementation is also a rewarding and educational venture, contributing to a stronger sense of community across national borders, between both event organisers and representatives of companies, large and small.

The Future Cleantech Solutions project team has tested Lean Tool for planning, setting objectives and improving the event process. This is described in further detail in chapter 7: Keep moving forward – continuous development. Here and now we want to share our tips and advice concerning sustainable planning and organisation of events.

Important to keep in mind for sustainable planning and organisation of an event:

- **Begin your planning** well in advance, ideally six to twelve months before the event.
- **Establish the event theme and date** based on the discussions with major stakeholders:
 - Is the event intended as an information session, match-making or both?
- **Establish** objectives, target group, budget and staff resources including division of responsibilities.
- **Decide on the format** for the event (physical/virtual/hybrid):
 - What works best for both major stakeholders and local SMEs?
 - Check the list of pros and cons for physical and digital events (page 25).
 - Book venues for physical events and/or technical support for digital events well in advance.

- **Choose speakers and moderator:**
 - Contact desired speakers in good time to ensure they're available.
 - Invite speakers with consideration for both gender and diversity to encourage more in-depth discussion.
 - Think about choosing a suitable moderator. They will play an essential role in creating a positive atmosphere.
- **Specify equipment and technology**, e.g. what studio and technology supplier will be used.
- **Notify** representatives from the major stakeholders of the selected format.
- **Market** the event in an appealing way:
 - Involve the marketing team from the beginning. Create a marketing plan by identifying the target group and adapting the marketing accordingly.
 - Send out Save the Date messages as soon as time, location and theme have been set. Invite participants once again once the event programme is finalised.
 - Consider what channel best suits the selected target group. Social media is often effective.
- Good distribution often requires graphic material, enticing headlines and in some cases also advertising/marketing as a part of the marketing budget. Consider how to ensure posts are shared by as many people as possible for organic distribution.
- Ensure your event has inclusive appeal with your choice of pictures; avoid stereotypes or excluding anyone. For inspiration and guidance, see this report on images depicting equality: northswedencleantech.se/en/about-us/equality/
- If photo and video material is produced, ensure that the material is GDPR compliant and fulfils accessibility requirements.
- **Consider your own resources** and efforts – remember that you do not need to take care of everything yourself. When it comes to graphic material and technology, for instance, the best solution may be to hire professional expertise.





One person in the team can be responsible for ensuring that equality is taken into account at every planning meeting. Why not rotate the role, so that multiple points of view emerge?

Think about sustainability for events too. This could include using local and organic products and services, sorting waste and minimising transport linked to the event.

Inclusion is central, ensuring everyone feels welcome, seen and heard. Allow time and space for dialogue, discussion and questions, as this creates a sense of community and facilitates the flow of information.

Consider how you can engage and involve the audience using technical tools. Visualising the event using tools such as live scribing can also increase the level of engagement.



Time for you and your company to be more visible

By increasing your visibility, you increase your chance of appearing on the radar of the major stakeholders – and ultimately landing a deal. To be successful in this, you need different types of marketing material that can be used for different contexts and channels. This could, for example, be printed or digital material, a sales presentation, your company's website, search engine optimisation, social media, newsletters, etc.

Marketing material

When producing your marketing material, it is essential to be specific about your offering. Identify your unique advantages (USPs, i.e. Unique Selling Points) and formulate a clear message. Ideally include references from earlier satisfied customers to reinforce your message.

You should also consider making your material available in the language of the target group. Consider also whether other languages may be relevant to your target group. For instance, it is always beneficial to provide a summary of the key information in English. Adapt the material to the customer you will be meeting with and – if possible – get assistance in understanding any potential cultural differences you should take into account.

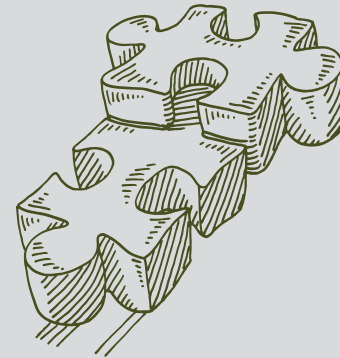
If you can, it may also be useful to get help from a professional communications agency or other expert to fine-tune your sales material.

Elevator pitch and sales presentation

Ensure you always have a verbal presentation prepared and ready to go, a so-called elevator pitch. It should be brief, no more than three minutes. (Hence the name – three minutes is a long elevator ride).

Also prepare a so-called one-pager – a written presentation on one page that you can e-mail or hand over at a meeting. A one-pager must generate interest and cover the most important points about your company.

Once you have booked a meeting to present your company – consider who you are pitching to. What is the essential information for that specific target group? How long will you have? Is it a face-to-face or digital meeting? Always adapt your material to the customer.



A video can also work well for presenting your company and your offer, in which case 1–2 minutes is the perfect length. Ideally use a professional film producer to ensure you get your message across.

Remember to 'close the deal' by booking a new meeting with the customer.



Tip! The best pitch is a story or narrative. Dare to be different. Being prepared means that you can deliver your pitch at any time and anywhere, even without any supporting material.

A possible pitch template

- 1. Cover page**
 - Basic information about the company + the event in question with a good graphic format
- 2. Hook/Interest generator**
 - Create focus, interest
- 3. Need/Problem**
 - Describe the need/problem/requirement
- 4. Solution**
 - Describe the solution offered by your company
- 5. Advantages**
 - Describe the advantages of your solution
- 6. Competition**
 - Describe the competition, direct and indirect
- 7. Team/Expertise**
 - Describe why you specifically will succeed
- 8. Call-to-action**
 - What do you want the listener to do after having listened to you? Give out your contact details.

Digital presence

Put some thought into your company's digital presence! What comes up when someone searches for your company name in a search engine like Google? Is the information correct, relevant and up to date?

How does your website look: Is it easy to navigate and is your offer clear? Is it obvious what benefits you can provide? What references do you have from previous customers? What do your images communicate? Are they relevant, inclusive and equal? Make sure that your website is kept up to date with relevant information and contact details clearly visible.

Also review the information visitors are greeted by on your social media

channels – these should serve as a digital business card for your target groups.

Once you have dealt with the hygiene factors – that the information is clear, correct, relevant and up to date – formulate a marketing strategy in which you can specify what you want to get out of your digital communication. Each channel aimed at customers/subcontractors/future employees should have a distinct and well thought-out purpose and provide a uniform image of the company. Update your social media as often as possible with relevant information, ideally at least once a week.

Also look at whether you have a consistent and appropriate

graphic profile or whether it needs to be reviewed.

Potential customers use search engines to find products and services, and so search terms should also be a priority. Major stakeholders are active in their supplier networks, and that is somewhere you want to be first in line. It may be relevant therefore to look more closely at search engine optimization (SEO), which is a set of methods and techniques that you can use to improve the searchability of a website and achieve better results in search engines.



6. Time to meet up

For associations: Arranging matchmaking
PAGE 23-25

For SMEs: Taking part in matchmaking
PAGE 26

Time to meet up: arranging matchmaking

Once the needs of a particular major stakeholder have been identified, events for information sharing have been held and SMEs have received advice – it is time to meet up.

By arranging matchmaking activities a business association can give SMEs the opportunity to meet up with a major stakeholder at a business meeting. A matchmaking event can be combined with information sharing. However, in our experience it can be advantageous to circulate information about a current major investment first and subsequently arrange matchmaking.

Just as for information-sharing events, successful matchmaking requires a great deal of work in the form of preparations and communication with both major stakeholders and SMEs. Some of these steps are the same whatever the type of event, but matchmaking also requires certain specific preparations.

CHECKLIST for the organiser with regard to matchmaking

- **Identify and clarify the needs and interests of the major stakeholder:**
 - Is a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) needed?
 - Identify possible times and create a timeline.
 - Agree how many SMEs the major stakeholder can meet with during one session.

- **Decide on time and location:**
 - The location should be suitable for numerous short meetings, with the possibility of private discussions.
 - It could also be digital. If so, choose an easy-to-use platform and make sure in advance that it meets the organiser's requirements.

- **Decide on the format for the SMEs' expressions of interest and presentation of what the SMEs are offering to the major stakeholder:**
 - For instance, a brief presentation text, graphic one-pager or short video.
- **Create the event:**
 - Information about the event and an option for registration should be available on a website or other digital platform.
 - Why not create event pages on a variety of social media such as LinkedIn?
- **If necessary – instruct and coach SMEs prior to the event:**
 - If you opt for a digital alternative – test the technology (camera, microphone, lighting and internet connection) well in advance.
- **Compile a presentation of the SMEs and their offers:**
 - Based on this the major stakeholder will decide which SMEs they want to meet with.
- **Assist the major stakeholder with additional information if needed:**
 - It can be tricky to evaluate an SME. As organiser, you

may have knowledge to facilitate matters.

- **Set up a meeting schedule for the SMEs that the big company has chosen to meet with:**
 - Include short breaks and allow time between meetings to ensure a smooth transition.
- **Take into account possible waiting periods for participating SMEs:**
 - Make sure that all the time spent at the event is of value to the companies.
- **Round off with a short evaluation meeting with the major stakeholder:**
 - Listen and document to ensure continuous mutual development.
- **Contact the SMEs who attended to check on the outcome afterwards:**
 - Also gather written feedback immediately after the event.
- **Contact the participating parties once again around six months after the event to keep the relationship going.**



The importance of a positive atmosphere

How do you package and deliver a business-oriented event to ensure as many people as possible get as much as possible out of it? The project team of Future Cleantech Solutions spent a lot of time trying to figure that out. We have tried out several different methods – traditional and innovative, face-to-face and digital. An important lesson: do not underestimate the importance of creating a good atmosphere during an event.

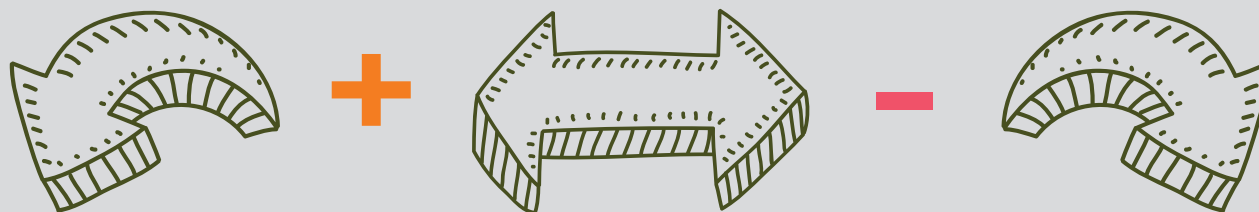
As an example of the importance of a good venue atmosphere, we would like to mention one of the matchmaking events organised in Future Cleantech Solutions. The actual matchmaking session was preceded by an hour of corporate presentations, and those of us working on the event were worried that the energy in the room would drop and have a negative effect on the matchmaking process.

Therefore, we decided to bring in a moderator with the task of injecting some fresh energy – to get participants to feel engaged and to share, build relationships and do business. In order to boost the energy level further, we also hired a singer who took requests from the audience. These elements combined helped to generate a creative and energetic atmosphere, which was instrumental in bridging cultural differences in a simple and inclusive way. Feedback from participants after the event highlighted these factors as positive eye-openers and reminders that the energy in the room can change the mood and the results.

Physical or digital?

Arranging a digital event presents great opportunities – but also a number of challenges. This is something that many people have experienced as a result of the global coronavirus pandemic, if not before.

For Future Cleantech Solutions, the pandemic struck in the middle of the project period. Suddenly as a project team – like people worldwide – we were forced to rethink things and familiarise ourselves with a variety of digital tools in order to continue organising events and matchmaking activities. The benefit of the pandemic hitting in the middle of our project was that we have experience of both face-to-face and digital events plus a combination of the two, so-called hybrid events. Below is a list of the pros and cons of the various options.



ADVANTAGES OF PHYSICAL EVENTS

- + Greater sense of community with face-to-face meetings
- + Possibility to continue discussions later at the same event
- + More flexible communication without digital tools
- + More extensive experience of physical events can make implementation feel easier

ADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL EVENTS

- + Possibility of rapid meetings
- + Easier to invite participants from other parts of the world
- + Equal opportunities and low threshold; everyone can participate from their desk
- + Easy to show digital presentation material and distribute material afterwards
- + Unnecessary travel is eliminated. This saves on resources and is important from a sustainability perspective



Prioritise generating a good atmosphere! In our experience this is an aspect that is often overlooked – but it is crucial for achieving a good result for everyone involved.

DISADVANTAGES OF PHYSICAL EVENTS

- Time-consuming for participants
- High environmental impact from long journeys
- Higher cost for participants
- It can be more difficult to include everyone and offer them the same opportunities

DISADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL EVENTS

- More difficult to read body language and emotions
- More difficult to build lasting relationships
- Risk of technical problems
- Demands more careful planning to keep the audience interested
- Unaccustomed participants, requires different types of preparations and contingency planning to physical events

Taking part in matchmaking

Taking part in a matchmaking event is a good way of making direct contact with interesting customers and presenting what you can offer to meet their specific needs. However, bear in mind that a good salesperson starts by asking questions – allow the customer to tell you about their needs first! That makes it easier to know if and how your offer may be relevant.

Trade fairs are another platform for meeting up

Both physical and digital fairs can be useful for building networks. Choose between attending as a visitor or as an exhibitor with your own stand. A less costly alternative to having your own stand is sharing a stand with others; in many cases you can find companies that organise such arrangements. However you choose to participate, you need to have a plan.

Invite existing and potential customers to your stand well in advance of the event. Make sure everyone is active and welcoming when meeting new contacts, and remember to reconnect with your new contacts once you get back home!



CHECKLIST for SMEs with regard to matchmaking:

- **Take part in different events offering the opportunity to meet with customers.**
 - Do not forget smaller-scale events. The fewer attendees, the easier it is for positive interaction with a potential customer.
- **Make a plan for the event.**
 - Set objectives for what you want to achieve from attending. Time at an event is limited, so use it well!
- **Identify in advance the persons you most need to make contact with and actively seek out opportunities to meet with them during the event.**
 - Some events make use of digital tools, making it possible to book meetings in advance. It pays to familiarise yourself with these before the event.
- **Remember to do your homework! Set aside time in your calendar after the event to follow up on your new contacts.**
 - Follow up on any discussions. If you have promised to send further information or material, it is essential to do this as soon as possible.
- **A good way to plan the things that need to be done after an event is to hold an internal presentation within your company – who you have met, what you have learned, what you have agreed, what potential deals need to be followed up.**
 - Presenting an event internally strengthens internal communication and provides an opportunity to distribute information if needed.
- **Follow up on results from the event.**
 - How did your advance planning work out? Did you stick to it and did you accomplish your set objectives? Measure the results! Why not use the same plan for the next event, but rework and update it based on your experiences and lessons learned?

A group of people are seated around a table in a meeting room, engaged in a discussion. The room features large windows and a wooden wall. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. A white brushstroke is visible across the middle of the image.

7. Keep moving forward: continuous development

Keep moving forward: continuous development

Sales and purchasing processes and business projects are time-limited and transient by nature. What remains is the need for continuous development, for cleantech SMEs and for major stakeholders.

One fundamental prerequisite for learning from the work that has been done and improving the processes is to ensure they are documented and followed up on. It is also essential to ensure that all parties who were involved in the process are included in the follow-up, since it is an important opportunity to obtain valuable information for moving forward with their work.

Unfortunately this is often easier said than done – and in our experience it is easy to give it a low priority. Below we have compiled our best advice to make follow-up as simple and useful as possible.

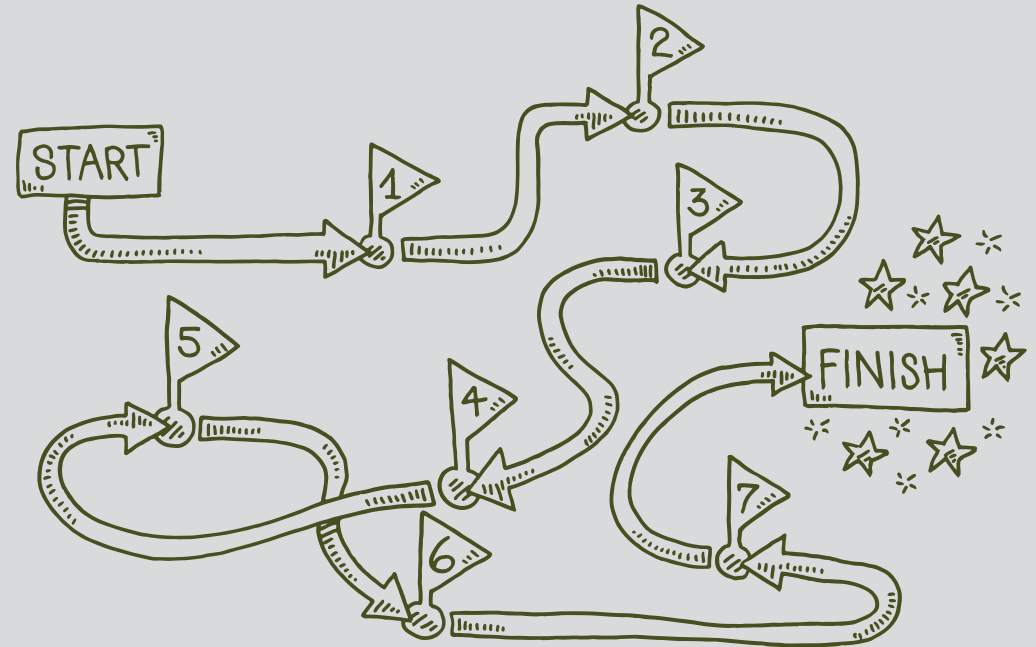
FOLLOW-UP TOGETHER WITH COMPANIES

- **Ask the questions.** Get in touch with SMEs afterwards, ask how their meeting went, what they intend to do next and whether they need help with anything in order to move forward. Contact the major stakeholders too and ask about their experiences and any new needs.

FOLLOW-UP TOGETHER WITH A BUSINESS DEVELOPER

- **Get in touch** with a business developer after matchmaking with the major stakeholder and report how the meeting went from your perspective. Discuss what you intend to do next and what type of support you may need to move forward with the major stakeholder. Use the business developer as a sounding board. If you have not heard from the major stakeholder, your potential new customer, get in touch and discuss things with them too.





FOLLOW-UP ON YOUR OWN EFFORTS

- **Did you accomplish your objectives?** Evaluate your own activities and the response you received (or ask for a response if you did not get any). What worked well, what worked less well, what needs to be improved? Do not be afraid to fail. Try again and do things better!
- **Are you incorporating equality and diversity into your work?** Equality and diversity aspects need to be followed up continuously. The more differing perspectives you

incorporate, the more innovative ideas you will gain. One basic requirement for new thinking is that the working group includes individuals with different experiences and backgrounds.

- **Ensure the right level of innovation.** In order to complete an activity within a set time, you also need to limit the level of innovation. Make a collective decision as to which areas need development and what is 'good enough'.

- **Employ cross-boundary thinking.** With collaborations involving several organisations or departments we recommend that one participant from each organisation/department takes part in planning. It is also useful to have representatives with differing work roles on board, so that all aspects are considered: communication, technology, marketing, corporate contacts, budget responsibility, etc.



Patience is an important quality. Finding the right contact and building a strong relationship requires multiple meetings and can take time. It is not rocket science – but sales demands hard work and there are no shortcuts.



As mentioned previously, the Future Cleantech Solutions project team has tested a so-called Lean Tool for planning, setting objectives and improving the event process. Since the project involved industrial companies and major industrial investments, it seemed natural to use a tried and tested tool that originated from the automotive industry. The Toyota Production System forms the basis for Lean ideology, with several tools derived from it. A visual Lean Tool (A3) was therefore chosen as the basis for documenting and developing planning of events and matchmaking. The team regularly adjusted the tool in line with the needs that arose during the process. Here we present our interpretation of A3.

Tool for planning and developing activities

POINTS 1-5 TO BE COMPLETED WHEN PLANNING AN ACTIVITY

An activity can be an event, matchmaking, a trip to a fair or B2B sales, etc. The tool is suitable for both SMEs and business associations for solving problems and developing their processes by means of documentation and visualisation.



It is worth regularly reminding the working group of the measures chosen during planning. The A3 method takes its name from the possibility of printing out a reminder list in A3 format – why not try it out?

1. BACKGROUND

Conduct a background analysis by answering the following questions: Why is it important to invest in this particular activity? Why just now?

2. CURRENT SITUATION

Analyse the current situation using the following questions: How are equivalent activities organised at present? How does this work? What results are being achieved today? Why not look through notes from earlier activities in order to benefit from earlier experiences!

3. OVERALL OBJECTIVES

Set clear objectives for the activity. What is the most important thing to accomplish? Set three specific objectives, for example (these could involve number of attendees, number of meetings or satisfaction).

In order to ensure sustainability and equality perspectives are incorporated into all activities, we recommend setting relevant objectives. As a suggestion, set a measurable target for sustainability and one for equality/diversity.

4. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SITUATION

Reflect on factors that may affect achievement of objectives. Draw up a list of challenges, obstacles and strengths based on the available information.

5. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS & MEASURES

Draw up a list of various possible solutions to the challenges identified. Then select a few measures you can try out in connection with the activity. Why not try out some measures you have not previously tried – but remember not to attempt too many new measures at once. Decide who will be responsible for each measure.

Points 6-8 are shown on the next page.

Tool for planning and developing activities

POINTS 6-8 TO BE COMPLETED AFTER THE ACTIVITY HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED



Ideally save your notes in the same place, and regularly reflect on the development process. That way you will have a starting point the next time you commence the process of planning an activity, event or matchmaking.

Points 1-5 are shown on the previous page.



It is also essential to ensure that all parties who were involved in the process are included in the follow-up, since it is an important opportunity to obtain valuable information for moving forward with their work.

6. EVALUATING RESULTS

Evaluating the activity is the key to continuous development. Gather feedback from all parties, both organisers and participants, and then draw up a list of positives and negatives. What worked? What did not work? Focus on the set objectives and the new solutions that were tested.

Try to be constructive. Focus in particular on the sustainability and equality objectives in order to ensure that these aspects are not forgotten.

7. SUMMARY

Write a brief summary based on the results and analysis, explaining the most important lessons learned from the activity, for an outside party.

8. SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Compile a list of suggested improvements. What changes are recommended for the next time a similar activity is planned?



“Equality and diversity aspects need to be followed up continuously. The more differing perspectives you incorporate, the more innovative ideas you will gain.”



Get in touch with us

Contact us if you are interested in continued collaboration

Contact. The following organisations have been involved in the project and their contact details can be found on their websites. Feel free to contact your nearest organisation, or the field of most interest to you.
www.northswedencleantech.se, www.merinova.fi, www.vasek.fi, www.kosek.fi

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