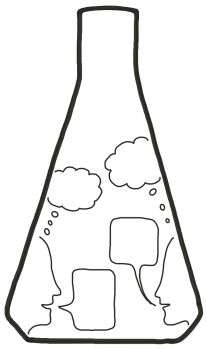
TRAINING AND REFLECTION MODULE

Lab Design



In a nutshell

This document provides a guideline for setting up a 'lab' that acts as facilitator for food system transformation in a specific local context.

What for?

The guideline helps you to work with communities

How long?

Applying the guideline can take several hours to months or years

For whom?

Intermediaries of change / food system transformation

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Something to share?

Log in to the *platform* and leave a comment about this tool.

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What will you gain from this?

This document supports you in setting up a (sustainable) lab that mobilizes people and thereby takes a role in food system transformation in a specific local context.

Participants of a well-designed lab will participate in food system transformation and expand their network by doing so.

Target audience

This document is designed for a variety of stakeholders with certain interest to be a driver or intermediary in food system transformation. Users of this document can be employees of municipalities, universities, science centres, or NGOs.

We recommend assigning one person as a main intermediary or coordinator of a lab. Future lab multi-stakeholder interactions and events, however, may require additional facilitators (e.g. 1 per 6 event-participants).

The eventual lab network exists of 'citizens' and 'stakeholders' (in the widest sense of the word) with certain link to the food system in the (specific local) context of the lab. These actors are also the targeted participants of lab events.

Prior knowledge required

Coordinators of labs preferably have an interest and certain background or experience in working with a wide variety of actors (related to the food system or in general).

Actors that are to be connected in a lab, preferable feel that they are a stakeholder; in other words, they must feel linked to the food system somehow and/or have willpower to transform it.

LAB DESIGN

What is a (food) lab?

Worldwide, there is an increasing interest to create coherence and alignment in the organization of food systems, including the research and innovation that are part of them, in order to facilitator food system transformation. A reason behind this interest lies in the fact that we need to transform our food systems to cope with the worldwide challenges that lie in front of us, such as an increase in urbanization and inequalities, a growing world population and an endangered environment. Therefore, food systems need to be transformed so that they provide enough nutritious food for everyone, while protecting 'mother earth'. Only by such a transformation, food systems can become 'future proof'.

In line with the worldwide interest in food system transformation, the idea of 'labs' as hubs or intermediaries of such transformation has become a phenomenon. The EU project FIT4FOOD2030 is one of the many initiatives that experimented with such labs[1]. Although the word 'lab' may suggest a mere focus on research-like experimentation, the actual aim of (food) labs is to create connections between experimentation ('research' in the widest sense of the word, across disciplines) and practice ('food systems in reality').

Food labs, therefore, connect stakeholders in the widest sense of the word, including citizens, who somehow 1) feel or are explicitly related to a food system in a specifically chosen region, 2) have a willingness to contribute to food system transformation so to make the food system more sustainable or future proof. The aims of multi-stakeholder interactions and events in labs, therefore, mainly are *'to brainstorm about'* and *'to realize food system transformation'*.

With these aims in mind, this document guides coordinators of (food) labs to create and/or run a lab. In the lab design process, we recommend to already include a wide variety of actors that you see as potential network members of the lab. By such inclusion of diverse actors, you are actually already creating the lab network, but you also ensure to actually initiate a lab that is needed and desired in the local context. The lab design steps described below, therefore, can be seen as multi-stakeholder lab design guidelines.

[1] Kok, K. P. W., den Boer, A. C. L., Cesuroglu, T., van der Meij, M. G., de Wildt-Liesveld, R., Regeer, B. J., & Broerse, J. E. W. (2019). Transforming Research and Innovation for Sustainable Food Systems—A Coupled-Systems Perspective. Sustainability, 11(24), 7176. doi:10.3390/su11247176

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STEP 1: NETWORK(S) & LAB SUSTAINABILITY

Objective: Basic brainstorming about (and taking basic decisions on) the various ways that a lab can be run.

A Lab is a platform and/or a network that contributes to food system transformation. Be(com)ing a lab with a transformative function in the food system, therefore, means becoming a platform or network that sustainably mobilizes people to engage in such a transformation.

To explore what you consider as 'sustainable mobilization' or a 'sustainable network', we recommend you to engage in a basic brainstorm with people from your organization and/or potential lab stakeholders about the following:

- Imagine we set up a lab for food system transformation and we have set-up and run various initiatives;
    - In what way does the network created by the lab continue to exist?
    - What will the network be achieving?
- In how far should we set-up a (physical) platform ourselves?
    - Which food-related networks exist in our local context?
    - In how far do they suffice to realize food system transformation?
    - What (additional) role is needed in the local context to realize food system transformation?

The purpose of these basic brainstorms is not necessarily to get the answers, but rather to explore the different options and various considerations together.

"There are already many food-related and inter-linked initiatives in the city of Amsterdam (though of course everyone is signed up to MUFPP), including a (new) Food Council which in itself is trying to build a network of practitioners to change the food system here. As a result, we have seen that the food-related 'networked-ness' of the local lab context brings advantages and disadvantages for designing and setting up a food lab, see Table 1."

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages that come along with the (food-related) networked-ness in the local context of a food lab

	Advantages	**Disadvantages/challenges**
(Operate in a) local context with well-established food-related networks	• Lots of momentum to build on • Potentially a bigger impact within a few years	• More time needed to get to know the network • Finding how you 'fit in': who are the right people and how do you get in? • Potential perceived notion of competitiveness
(Operate in a) local context with less-established food-related networks	• Easier to get to know what exists • Chance to play a greater role in shaping the network • Potentially there is a greater need	• More time on initial identification of actors, creating connections • Less chance of building momentum

A suitable task after exploring the network desires of your brainstorm participants is to perform a stakeholder analysis to see which degree of food-related networked-ness applies to the local context of your lab.

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STEP 2: LAB CONFIGURATION

Objective: Exploring and deciding on which lab configuration should be chosen (to start).

After the basic lab brainstorms suggested above, your lab configuration can be explored by means of the following:

- Take time to discuss the various lab configurations explained below, considering the networked-ness of the local context, and where possible, take a decision on which lab configuration your desire to take (first).

The networked-ness of the local context will have an impact on the 'freedom of choice' for your lab configuration. In case of a local context with (a) poor or little-established food-related network(s), a first (simplified) possible lab configuration is a network in which your lab connects to a variety of new stakeholders. This configuration results in a centralized network with your lab as core, see Figure 1.

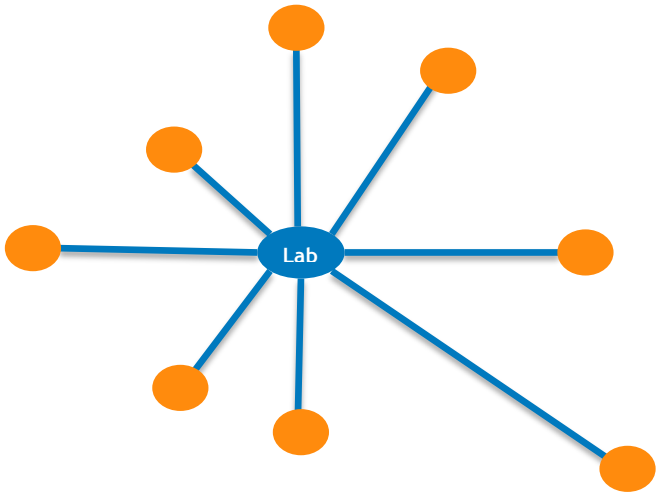

Figure 1: Visualization of a centralized lab configuration

In case of a local context with (quite) well-established food-related networks, a second (simplified) possible lab configuration is to act as connector of certain stakeholders who already have their established networks, see Figure 2. In this configuration, it might be possible to form a core group with some of the contact persons of specific networks, here showed in green. However, as can be seen in Figure 2, there are stakeholders in this network that are not directly connected to your lab.

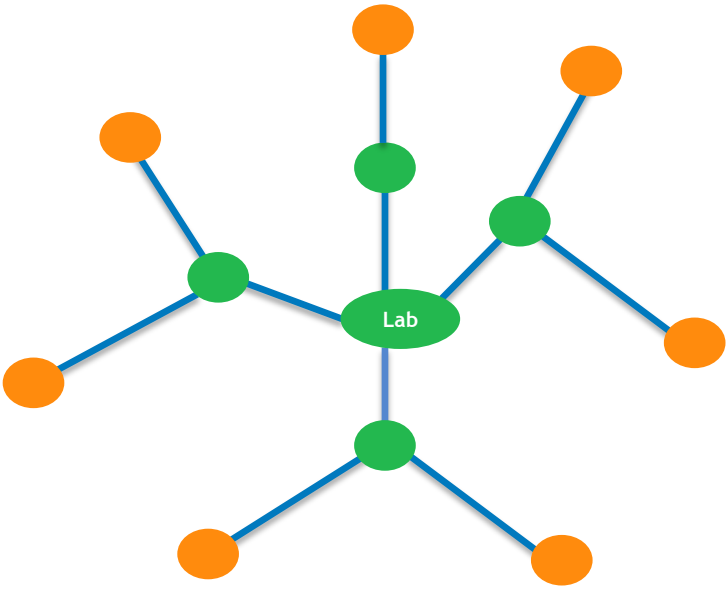

Figure 2: Visualization of a lab configuration in which the lab acts as a connector of established networks

A third simplified possible lab configuration, most suitable for a local context with a high degree of food-related networks, is a network in which all stakeholders are interconnected, meaning different networks are brought together and merged into a (new) informal, 'overarching' network. See Figure 3. This is a more scattered and distributed network than the first two networks, where the Lab is not necessarily 'the core' of the network.

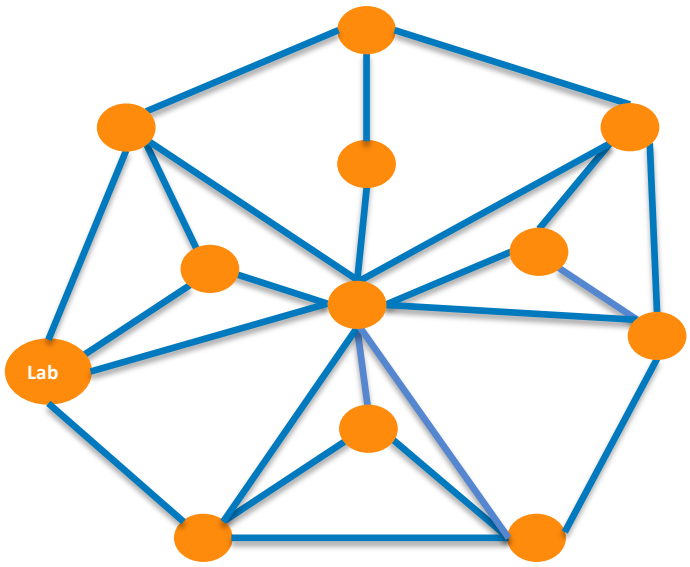

Figure 3: Visualization of an interconnected lab configuration

Whichever lab configuration is chosen while designing a lab, it will (expand and) emerge while running the lab. We therefore recommend seeing your lab configuration as an emerging process, upon which reflection once in a while is useful, in order to see whether the configuration (still) suits the local context and (contemporary) aims of the lab.

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STEP 3: 'MIX-AND-MATCH' YOUR LAB DESIGN

Objective: 'Mix and match' your Lab design (suitable at any stage of setting-up or running a food lab)

The following (reflection) exercise can be done after or independent from the steps described above:

- Explore Table 2 about the various lab design parameters to make choices about (left column), and possible options that can be chosen regarding each parameter (second column onwards). Note that this parameter-list and these provided options are not exhaustive. Also, some options will already be 'a given' regarding the local context; so explore for which parameters there is freedom and for which there is no freedom in choice.
- To challenge yourself in lab design decision-making, choose (only!) one box (option) from each row (parameter). Bringing all these options together, what lab design will you get? With these options in mind, formulate a (draft) lab name, mission, vision, events or activities timeline, and assign roles and responsibilities to people.

Table 2: Lab parameter and options to choose between

Parameters	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option X
Lab governance model	Small core team, changing actors involved in activities	Broader core team, with ambassadors that stay involved throughout process	Lab connects to existing established or emerging networks	…….
Networked-ness of the local lab context	Established network(s) or initiatives	Mix of established and emerging networks or initiatives	Only emerging networks or initiatives	No networks or initiatives yet, only unconnected actors
Role of lab in local context (= related to lab configuration)	Taking a leading and transformative role in established network(s) or initiative(s)	Intermediary between (emerging and) established networks or initiative(s)	Connecting relevant (unconnected) actors & creating a new community from scratch	…….
Scale of the lab	City centre	A (wider) region	National	International
Level of focus in the lab	(Start with) The food system in general	(Already) Focus on a specific priority area	…….	……
Focus of local actors	Food & nutrition	Research & innovation	Education or (professional) competency development	……
Aim of the lab (and interactions or events that the lab will organize)	(Direct) Food system transformation in a specific local context, all events and outputs are means to realize this transformation	Food related (R&I) policy coherence and alignment (to realize food system transformation after all)	Transformation in the food research and innovation system (to realize food system transformation after all)	Educational materials to develop competences among actors in the food system (to realize food system transformation after all)
Desired lab sustainability	A sustaining lab, run and funded by a sustainable source	A sustaining lab, run and funded by variable sources (rotating coordinator-ship, funding sought in different directions, every year)	A lab that dissolves when set-up activities are sustainably continued by actors among whom connections were created	….
Parameter Y	……..	……..	……..	…….

"In the Amsterdam Lab we had to deal with the highly networked city. As a result we chose to take an intermediary role in North Holland region, with a small core team and changing actors involved in activities. We decided to aim for a lab that sustains - though funded by various EU projects after one another – merely focusing on the creation and applying of educational modules for food-(system) related professionals of the future."

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Coordinated by:

VU VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

Partners

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