# BE>FUTURE

shaping the future of business events
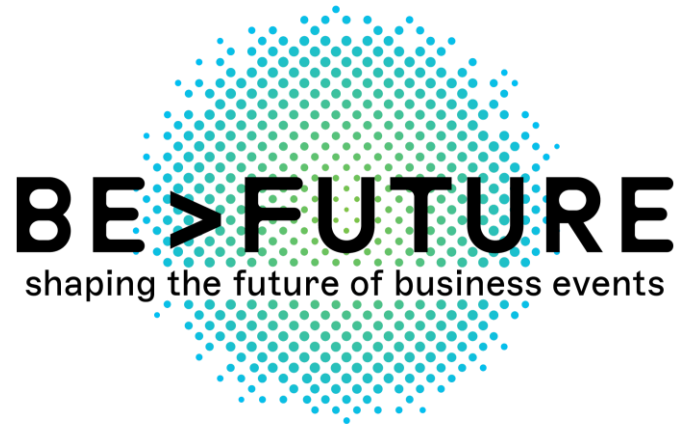
# Hackathon Summary Report

Deliverable 2.3

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Government of Catalonia
**Catalan Tourist Board**

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**Partners:**

- Agència Catalana de Turisme (ACT) - (Spain)
- B. Link Barcelona Strategic Projects SI (B. Link) - (Spain)
- Tipik Communication Agency Sa (TIPIK) - (Belgium)
- Toerisme Vlaanderen (TVL) - (Belgium)
- Linkeus (Linkeus) - France
- Verband Der Veranstaltungsorganisatoren E.V. (VDVO) - (Germany)
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## List of acronyms

4T model – technology, talent, transformation, and transparency
AI – Artificial Intelligence
BE – Business Events
CEO – Chief Executive Officer
D – Deliverable
DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
ICTs – Information and Communication Technologies
MICE – Meetings, Incentives, Congresses, and Events
TRL – Technological Readiness Level

# Table of contents

# About BEFuture

BEFuture "Shaping the Future of Europe's Business Events Sector" is a three-year project co-funded by the European Commission. The project lasts 30 months, starting on 16th September 2023 and finishing on 16th March 2026. The BEFuture project aims to transform the European Business Events (BE) sector by driving it towards sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience. It will facilitate innovation and collaboration within the industry, support SMEs through an acceleration program, and secure Europe's future as a frontrunner in hosting environmentally and socially responsible corporate events. BEFuture envisions an industry that not only thrives on innovation and technology but also prioritises regenerative practices, ensuring a positive and lasting impact.

BEFuture is set to address the pressing need for a sustainable transformation in the European business events sector, aiming to significantly reduce the industry's carbon footprint and waste production while ensuring inclusivity and positive social impacts. During the project and its deliverables, the terms MICE (referring to Meetings, Incentives, Congresses, and Events) and BE (Business Events) are used interchangeably.

# About the Current Deliverable

The current deliverable, the Hackaton Summary Report, provides a summary of the discussion, ideas and actions resulting from the hackathon that took place during the Innovation Forum in Barcelona on November 18th 2024.

# 1. The Hackathon

## 1.1 About the Innovation Forum

The event aims to provide a network platform with learning opportunity for a diverse range of industry and innovation experts, as well as potential applicants for the Acceleration Program. The word Hackaton refers to an event focused on engineering solutions, which did not do justice to the scope and aims of the event. Therefore, the choice was made to name the event 'Innovation Forum'. The BEFuture Global Innovation Forum, held on November 18, 2024, in Barcelona, brought together cross-sector experts to address key challenges in the business events sector. The forum focused on four critical areas: climate change and circularity, talent and inclusion, governance and impact, and event experiences. Participants engaged in dynamic sessions, including the presentation of the BEFuture Acceleration Programme, the launch of a White Paper on the industry's future, and thematic "Challenge Talks" led by top professionals. Collaborative workshops facilitated knowledge exchange and the development of innovative solutions, fostering a forward-thinking approach to the evolving needs of the business events industry.

The event commenced with a networking lunch at 12:00, followed by opening remarks from the BEFuture project team at 13:00. At 13:10, the **White Paper titled "New Scenarios and Business Models for the Future of Business Events"** was presented, offering insights into future industry scenarios and outlining essential workstreams for building resilient business models. This was followed at 13:45 by an introduction to the BEFuture **Acceleration Programme**, which aims to support at least 80 innovative projects with up to €30,000 in funding. At 14:00, the "Preaching for Innovation" session provided practical guidance on fostering innovation within organizations. The agenda also included "Challenge Talks" and knowledge exchange workshops, culminating in a closing session that summarized key takeaways and outlined next steps for participants.

An introduction was given by the project coordinator Blanca Cros and the director of the Catalan Tourist Board, Sònia Serracarbassa to the more than 120 participants.

# White Paper

At the Innovation Forum the BEFuture White Paper was launched. The paper, titled **"New Scenarios and Business Models for the Future of Business Events"**, explored transformative strategies and trends for the future of the Business Events (BE) industry. The presentation by Jochem Jansen (from the European Tourism Futures Institute), Evelyne Bardyn (from Visit Flanders) and Sònia Serracarbassa (from the Catalonia Convention Bureau) discussed a forward-looking vision for the BE sector, focusing on its evolution in response to pressing global trends such as digitization, sustainability, climate change, and socio-economic challenges. It emphasized the need for fostering innovation, resilience, and inclusivity to meet future demands and expectations.

The findings indicated that the Business Events industry is experiencing significant transformation, driven by generational value shifts, rapid technological innovation, and sustainability imperatives. Challenges like over-tourism, climate regulations, and changing consumer preferences demand innovative, adaptable business models. Emerging technologies such as XR, AI, blockchain, and immersive tools are pivotal in enhancing engagement, operational efficiency, and sustainability. The industry is urged to adopt regenerative practices, engage communities, and prioritize inclusivity, safety, and accessibility. The White Paper highlights the "4T's Model"—technology, talent, transformation, and transparency—as a framework for achieving profitability and sustainability, emphasizing smart destinations, hyper-personalized experiences, and collaborative innovation to future-proof the sector.



# Acceleration Programme

During the Innovation Forum, BEFuture took the chance to explain the key facts of the Acceleration Programme, designed to **foster innovation and development within the Business Events ecosystem**. The presentation emphasized the willingness of the EU to support SMEs in the creation, scaling, and commercialization of innovative solutions in the tourism sector, with a strong focus on sustainability and technology.

Research from the Think Tanks, the Future Scenarios, the Call for Best Practices the Talent Development Program and the White paper led to four main areas the Acceleration Programme wants to tackle: (a) climate change and circularity; (b) talent and inclusion; (c) governance and impact; (d) event experience. Work package leader Marta Rojas from BLink, elaborated on the funding aims; to finance radical, disruptive, substantial and incremental innovative projects.

## Preaching for Innovation

The "Preaching for Innovation" session, presented by Montserrat Guàrdia (Chief at People and Culture IDEADED), explored the transformative potential of innovation within the Business Events sector. It emphasized the importance of integrating creativity, technology, and sustainability to reshape the future of business events and align them with evolving market needs and societal goals. The session highlighted innovation as vital for transforming the Business Events sector toward sustainability and resilience, enabling it to address global challenges and benefit stakeholders and the environment. Creativity was framed as key to this process, inspired by nature, art, culture, and meaningful conversations that spark fresh ideas for solving complex problems.

An interactive approach to innovation was advocated, emphasizing alignment between technological advancements and market needs. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) were identified as essential for creating efficient, customer-focused solutions, despite challenges like managing risk and evolving demands. Collaboration across disciplines was underscored as crucial for generating knowledge to drive impactful solutions. Finally, the session stressed the importance of empathy and systematic problem-solving to match innovative solutions to challenges. By reframing problems and leveraging collaboration, the BE sector can ensure its growth is both sustainable and adaptable to future needs.

## Challenge Talks



## Event Experience

Felix Rundel (co-founder of FuturHein) urged the industry to become trendsetters for positive change by adopting transformative practices that resonate with contemporary cultural paradigms. Central to his message was the idea that business events must balance the physical and digital worlds, integrating personalized and memorable experiences to leave lasting impressions on attendees. Rundel emphasized the need for strategic planning and data-driven systems to measure engagement, enabling the industry to innovate while prioritizing knowledge exchange, networking, safety, and wellness.

To achieve these goals, Rundel proposed actionable solutions such as identifying attendee friction points, enhancing retention and loyalty, and delivering transformative experiences. He advocated for leveraging advanced tools to gather insights into participant needs and expectations, ensuring the development of scalable yet personalized event strategies. By combining sophisticated systems for engagement and sustainability, business events can achieve a dual impact on individuals and the planet.

## Talent and Inclusion

Iolanda Triviño (founder and CEO of Institute for Futures) highlighted the importance of adopting Talent 5.0 principles and embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) into the business events industry. She identified challenges such as budget constraints, skills gaps, and cultural barriers, which hinder the industry's ability to balance DEI goals with business priorities. Triviño stressed the urgency of addressing these gaps to create a talent pipeline aligned with the industry's future needs. She also called for leadership programs that incorporate DEI and for leveraging AI and technology to support these initiatives.

Action steps included integrating DEI into talent development strategies, tracking progress, and measuring impact. Triviño advocated for balancing high-tech solutions with human-centric approaches to bridge gaps in hybrid and in-person models. By embracing diverse talent and prioritizing inclusivity, the business events sector can inspire change, drive lasting impacts, and leave a meaningful legacy for future generations.

## Governance and Impact

Javi Creus (founder of Ideas for Change) emphasized the importance of governance models that maximize positive energy and minimize entropy within the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) ecosystem. He described how events generate external inputs (visitors, materials, knowledge) and local resources (talent, policies) to produce energy in the form of economic opportunities, new projects, and talent development. However, he noted that unmanaged "collisions," such as congestion or waste, can lead to increased entropy and inefficiency.

Creus proposed a four-step governance framework: co-designing events with all stakeholders, managing resources to maximize energy and minimize waste, sharing evaluations across stakeholders, and focusing on long-term impacts. By implementing this framework, the industry can drive innovation and ensure events are more sustainable, inclusive, and impactful.

## Climate Change and Circularity

Guy Bigwood (CEO of the Global Destination Sustainability Movement) opened by gauging the audience's optimism about climate change before offering a stark reality check. During the glacial era, the Earth's average temperature was approximately 4-5°C cooler than pre-industrial levels, and today, it is already about 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. Bigwood highlighted the devastating consequences even small temperature increases have on ecosystems and societies, emphasizing the need for urgent action to mitigate these effects.

Bigwood advocated for systemic changes, including adopting circular economy principles, reducing carbon footprints, and promoting regenerative practices within the industry. He stressed the importance of embedding sustainability into every facet of business events, from planning to execution. His call to action encouraged stakeholders to transition from passive optimism to proactive efforts, effectively leveraging innovation and collaboration to combat climate challenges.

## 1.2 About the Hackathon session: Parallel Matching & Knowledge Exchange

The Hackathon session, called Parallel Matching and Knowledge Exchange, consisted of a co-ideation session where future applicants of the BEFuture Acceleration Program, future mentors and experts in the field of business events, sustainability and technology worked together on accelerating

ideas of innovation. The session was based on pitches from ten innovators who presented their project proposals, followed by discussions to validate and accelerate these innovations. Two innovations were pitched in the category **Event Experience** and two in the category **Talent and Inclusion**. Four applicants pitched in **Governance and Impact** and two in **Climate Change and Circularity.**



## Table Assignments

Participants were asked to choose a table hosted by one of the ten innovators, each representing one of BEFuture's four key categories. Each table consisted of one applicant, 6-8 participants, and one BEFuture consortium member responsible for reporting and time management. Two rounds of table pitching took place, enabling participants to rotate twice, providing both participants and future applicants with the opportunity to give and receive feedback and thereby deepen their understanding of the various topics and profoundly validate the proposals. The below poster was used per table to collect feedback. Photos of the completed posters from all ten Innovation Proposals are available upon demand.

## Table Session and Pitching Process

The table session was structured to maximize interaction and feedback:

1. **Pitch Presentation**: The future applicant had 5 minutes to present their innovation engagingly and convincingly.
2. **Pitch Feedback**: Participants wrote down their initial understanding and their opinion of the pitch to provide feedback to the applicant on how to improve the pitch deck.
3. **Questions**: Participants asked questions to deepen their understanding of the proposal. These questions were written down because they hold valuable feedback on the unclear aspects of the proposal.
4. **Pros and Cons**: Participants wrote down which elements of the proposal they considered strong and which elements needed attention or improvement. They were asked to pick out two pros and two cons of the Post-its, discuss them with their neighbors, and present them to the group.
5. **Applicant's Choice**: The applicant selected which pros and cons they wanted further advice on from the group.
6. **Expert Opinion**: Experts (the speakers at the Innovation Forum) joined the tables to provide their advice and suggest potential experiments or collaborations.

# 2. Analysis: discussion, ideas and actions

## 2.1 Key Findings

The sessions generated an interactive and collaborative environment: The design of the session proved to be successful with highly interactive, encouraging participants that engaged deeply with the innovation proposals. The serendipitous mixture of participants led to diverse perspectives and the inclusion of participants from various backgrounds and countries ensured a wide range of perspectives and insights. The structured feedback mechanism of pitching, discussing, and evaluating proposals helped to systematically identify strengths and areas for improvement for the proposals that were pitched. The presence of experts who provided targeted advice and potential collaboration opportunities added significant value to the process as well.

The session revealed a technological gap indicating the need for future applicants to attract technological experts or establish partnerships to ensure a high TRL (Technological Readiness Level) upon submission. Feedback that was given multiple times by participants during the table pitches e.g. referred to the use of AI technology for prototyping purposes and for refining project ideas, as well as using technology for target group interaction and adding gamification components to the projects. The resulting discussions on these topics, however, also highlighted that it proves difficult to reach those technological innovators who are not (yet) involved in the BE sector.

Data management and data protection and connected privacy concerns were reoccurring topics in the table discussions. These discussions were in line with findings from previous BEFuture workshops, e.g. in the context of the future scenario's development (D1.3) and therefore something that is a point of attention for the Acceleration Program (evaluation).

Feedback identified the opportunities and potential for applicants to connect and enhance their ideas together with potential partners, and through these (strategic) partnerships reinforce credibility of the proposed innovations. This, however, could also bring challenges related to cultural differences that might be a disturbing factor in reaching synergy and alignment within the application of the projects.

It was evident that clarity in focus was a point of attention for all applications. Participants had many questions, which illustrated the difficulty of pitching an innovation proposal concisely. Feedback from applicants, as well as participants, indicated the importance of validation and the value of interdisciplinary feedback.

From a business model perspective several potential applicants received feedback towards aspects such as how income would be generated, and how the business model would be financially sustainable long-term. This highlighted a contrast between striving for radical innovations that are less developed in this area and supporting market ready, low-risk economically viable innovations. An important component that is also touched upon in the evaluation of the Acceleration Program. Also, some discussions revolved around striving for uniqueness and authenticity in the proposed innovation, reaching impact on a smaller more localized level versus scaling the projects to an international level and potentially compromising the uniqueness of the project.

Almost all applicants received feedback about how to tell their story. The narrative of an innovation needs to be not only coherent and persuasive, but also engaging and immersive. Providing a strong narrative, incorporating gamification and storytelling elements was suggested to be key in a strong application. To highlight sustainable importance and social impacts, the narrative should also be in line with the organization's strategic values. Suggestions were made to create a value proposition to provide a strong baseline in the proposal.

## 2.2 Actionable Outputs

- **Validated Proposals**: Innovations were validated through comprehensive feedback from participants and experts, helping to refine and improve the proposals.
- **Actionable Insights**: The structured feedback process generated actionable insights that applicants can use to enhance their proposals.
- **Collaboration Opportunities**: The forum facilitated potential collaborations between innovators and experts, fostering further development and implementation of innovative ideas. Specifically, the presence of applicants and mentors enabled the opportunity to mix and match, to ensure mentors and mentees find each other upon the start of the Acceleration Program or maybe even earlier.
- **Future Research and Experimentation**: The advice and suggestions from experts highlighted areas for future research and experimentation, guiding the next steps for the innovators and providing ideas for future applications.

## 2.3 Ideas

- The effective structure of the Parallel Session is replicable for all partners to offer to their applicants during the submission phase. This way, all applicants can be supported to ensure strong, tech-ready and complete submissions.
- Technological gaps or any other gap that will be identified in the applications can be bridged by matching applicants with the right mentor, strengthening the application as well as enabling access to a needed network from other sectors.
- To tackle this gap, matching mentors with applicants should be established well before the application deadline.
- The Call for Mentors Provides the opportunity for mentors to offer their expertise and network, but details on which qualities and knowledge a mentor should have had not been shared. The scope of needed expertise is much broader than indicated, specifically related to expertise in the field of technology.

# 3. Conclusions

The Innovation Forum proved to be a highly valuable event during which experts in the BE industry were able to share and interact with SME's from in and outside of the industry. The mix of knowledge-sharing and interactive workshops made this an engaging opportunity for the various target groups that attended the sessions.

From a BEFuture perspective the Innovation Forum served as a good opportunity to bridge the 'knowledge-gathering' phase that took place in the first approx. year of the project, with the more 'implementation-oriented' phase of the project, which is aimed at building strong connections with SME's in the BE ecosystem and accelerating innovative ideas through the acceleration program.

Especially the whitepaper presentation and 'Challenge talks' served as a good culmination of all the knowledge and insights gathered throughout the BEFuture project, hereby also justifying the key areas in which innovation towards a futureproof BE industry is most needed.

Especially the interactive components of the Innovation Forum highlighted useful points of attention, which the BEFuture consortium can still consider for the launch of the Acceleration Program. From the registrations for the table pitches for example, it became clear that potential applications in the categories Talent & Inclusion and Event Experience were less represented than those in Climate Change and Circularity and Governance & Impact. Something that was also seen in the Call for Best Practices earlier in the project. Considering that also from the applicant pitches it became evident that there potentially is a technology gap, this 'talent and tech' focus is certainly something to pay attention to in the launch of the Acceleration Program. The workshop also showed the benefit of connecting potential applicants with mentors already during the phase and timeframe of preparation for the submission. As this will expectedly make projects that ultimately apply stronger, more focused and clearer. The latter therefore is also something that consortium partners can consider upon the launch of the Acceleration Program.

In summary the Innovation Forum proved to be a highly successful event both from the participant's perspective and the BEFuture consortium perspective. Approximately 140 participants attended the forum, and many positive reactions were received afterwards from the attendees. The forum also led to a lot of engagement online through social media channels. Hereby also spreading news and information about the launch of the Acceleration Program and the key findings of the BEFuture project so far, amongst the vast BE industry ecosystem.