

The Challenge

Many SMEs participate in networking events and matchmaking activities, yet only a small proportion develop lasting collaborations. Initial meetings often remain isolated interactions because organisations lack preparation, structured follow-up and support to explore concrete opportunities.

EDIHs and EEN nodes play a key role in bridging this gap by helping SMEs move from first contact to long-term cooperation.



SustainX Best Practice One-Pager | July 2026

From Matchmaking to Meaningful Collaboration

The Best Practice

Within the SustainX project, matchmaking was designed as part of a broader collaboration process rather than a standalone event. SMEs were supported before, during and after networking activities through a combination of ecosystem mapping, capacity building, Learning Journeys and targeted follow-up.

This approach helped create stronger connections between SMEs, research organisations and innovation support actors, increasing the potential for future joint initiatives.

How can EDIHs & EENs replicate this approach?

Prepare SMEs before matchmaking

Help companies clearly define:

- their innovation challenge;
- the expertise they are looking for;
- their collaboration objectives.

Prepared SMEs are more likely to establish meaningful partnerships.

Focus on complementary strengths

Match organisations based on complementary capabilities rather than simply operating in the same sector.

Cross-sector collaborations often generate higher innovation potential.

Involve the wider innovation ecosystem

Bring together:

- SMEs;
- research organisations;
- clusters;
- universities;
- investors;
- business support organisations.

Diverse ecosystems create more opportunities for collaboration.

Create opportunities for trust-building

Combine matchmaking with activities such as:

- Learning Journeys;
- study visits;
- thematic workshops;
- bilateral meetings.

Successful partnerships are built through interaction and shared experiences—not just introductions.

Ensure continuous follow-up

Support does not end when the event finishes.

Schedule follow-up meetings, share relevant funding opportunities and facilitate further introductions where needed to help partnerships mature.

Successful matchmaking is not measured by the number of meetings organised, but by the collaborations that emerge afterwards.

Benefits for EDIHs & EEN Networks

- ✓ Higher quality SME partnerships.
- ✓ Better use of matchmaking activities.
- ✓ Stronger engagement of regional innovation actors.
- ✓ Increased opportunities for interregional cooperation.
- ✓ Greater potential for European collaborative projects.



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