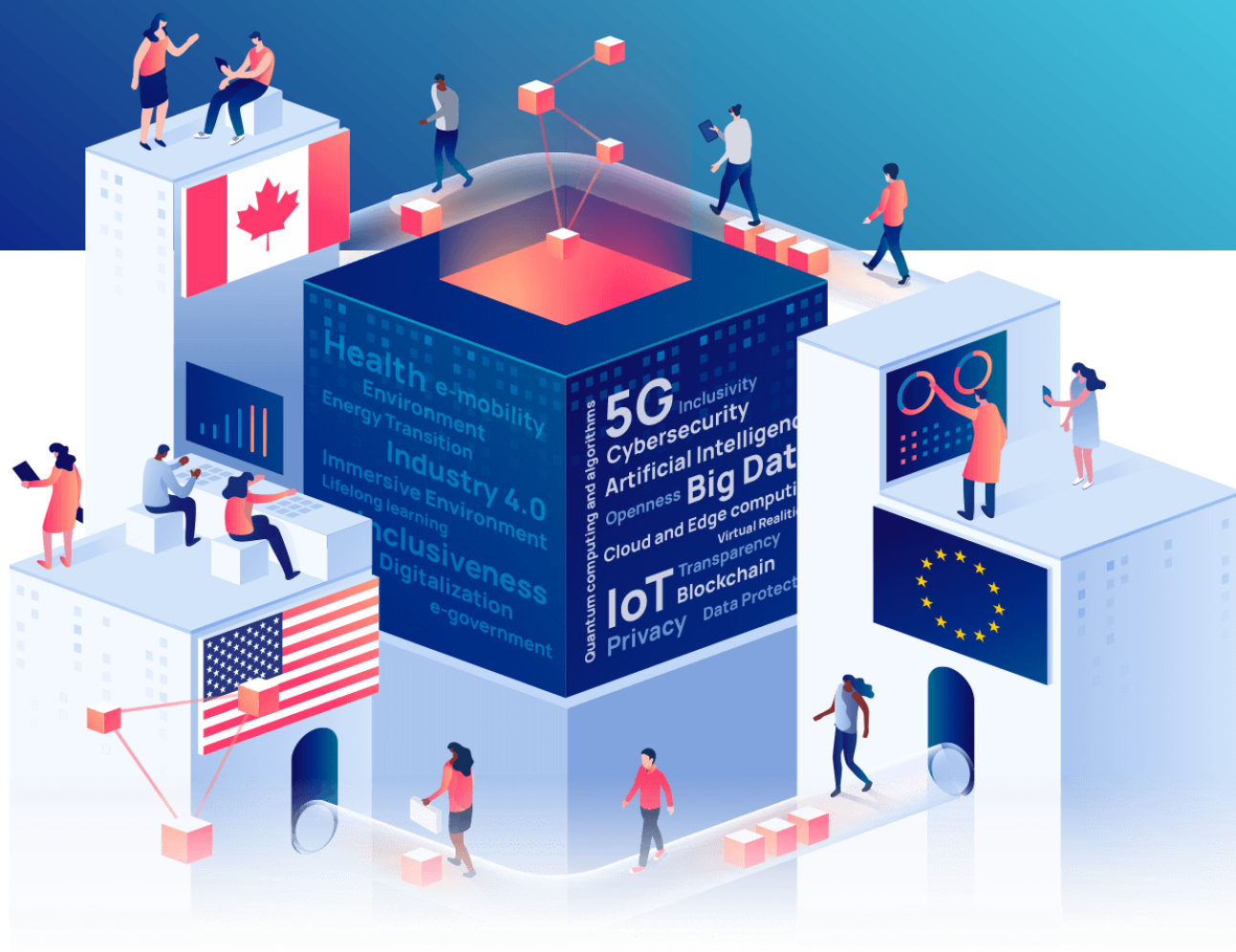# NEXT GENERATION INTERNET

ENRICHERS TRANSATLANTIC

Prepared with the inputs from the NGI ENRICHERS Consortium: GAC Group; STI Management; University of Minnesota, Technological Leadership Institute,; SPI; APRE; ENRICH GLOBAL; Temple University; AEI; EAEC; NCURA; led by GAC Group

Lessons learnt from the Next Generation Internet Transatlantic Fellowship Program NGI Enrichers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NGI Enrichers is a European project which supported European NGI researchers and innovators to spend 3-6 months in the US or Canada to work and collaborate with US and Canadian hosts, to promote knowledge-sharing and establishing long-term collaborations on NGI technologies, services, and standards.

The programme aimed to:

- Reinforce EU-US-Canada cooperation in the area of Next Generation Internet, and to establish a continuous dialogue among US, Canada and European innovators.

- Increase inclusiveness, by supporting a human-centered approach to technology development that is aligned with European social and ethical values, as well as sustainability.

- Generate sustainable, high-quality jobs by targeting skills mismatches, the need to empower workers, and ethical considerations relating to technological progress.

During the lifetime of the programme from September 2022 and finishing in August 2025, NGI Enrichers received 192 finalised applications during 3 rounds of calls, selected 67 fellows, 59 out of which successfully completed their fellowships.

Overall, NGI Enrichers was a successful programme with numerous positive feedback from fellows, hosts, and other relevant stakeholders. Lessons learnt from the NGI Enrichers include suggestions on improvement of the selection process, fellowship duration and structure, support resources, knowledge transfer mechanism, long-term impact, and a list of additional recommendations. For more details, please see the chapter "Lessons learnt".

The key recommendations that could be considered by policy stakeholders are listed below:

1. To embed in the programme design a component related to support of an Alumni network, including tracking of fellows' career trajectories.

2. To provide more visibility tools to equip fellows, ensuring visibility of the fellows' success stories.
3. To separate fellowships for researchers and innovators, at least based on the different durations needed to advance in each category.
4. To consider organisation of reverse fellowships, to continue further collaboration.
5. To re-think the existing approach on the Intellectual property rights (IPR) as there could be limitations to share knowledge from the institutions, and the IPR approach could complicate work for both fellows and hosts.
6. To review the visa process for fellows, as it heavily complicates the fellowships organisation process.
7. To invest additional efforts and resources in soft skills development of researchers and innovators.
8. To continue supporting inclusion, which brings more diversity to similar programmes and strengthens the overall ecosystem.

CONTEXT

NGI Enrichers is a European project which supports European NGI researchers and innovators to spend 3-6 months in the US or Canada to work and collaborate with US and Canadian hosts, to promote knowledge-sharing and establishing long-term collaborations on NGI technologies, services, and standards. The programme provided travel funding, living allowance, and visa cost for visiting fellows from Europe, and supported both fellows and their hosts, with bootcamps, mentors, visibility, community building and more.

Overall 192 finalised applications were received during 3 rounds of calls, and 67 fellows were selected and 59 completed. 3 tracks were suggested for fellows:

- **Paired teams track (24 fellows)**: Applicants were required to submit a proposal to advance their ideas, products and/or services along with an already identified US or Canadian partner from an organisation, that already agreed to host the Fellow, if selected.

- **Open ideas track (25 fellows)**: Applicants were required to submit a proposal around their ideas, products or services, selecting three preferred hosts among the list of organisations collaborating with the NGI Enrichers programme. The programme facilitated the best match between the applicant and the host organisations.

- **Challenges track (10 fellows)**: Applicants were required to submit a proposal answering a challenge (research topic) related to the NGI domain and defined by the hosting organisation.

The majority of the Applicants were researchers with a technical profile (44,8%), followed by Innovators – Entrepreneurs/self-employed (43,3%), Researchers with a Multidisciplinary background (7,4%) and Researchers with Social Sciences and Humanities profile (4,5%). The majority of the Applicants came from an EU Member State (85%), while 8 Applicants came from an Horizon Europe Associated Countries (North Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine and United Kingdom), and two Applicants were resident/taxpayer in Switzerland. [1]

For the Policy Briefs goals, the NGI Enrichers consortium organised two polls.

For the first one, the feedback was gathered from 20 fellows in the late 2024. 60% of fellows' replies confirmed that the fellowships results were above expectations, 35% that within expectations, and 5% said that the result was less than expected.

Did your NGI Enrichers fellowship satisfy your expectations?

Answered: 20   Skipped: 0
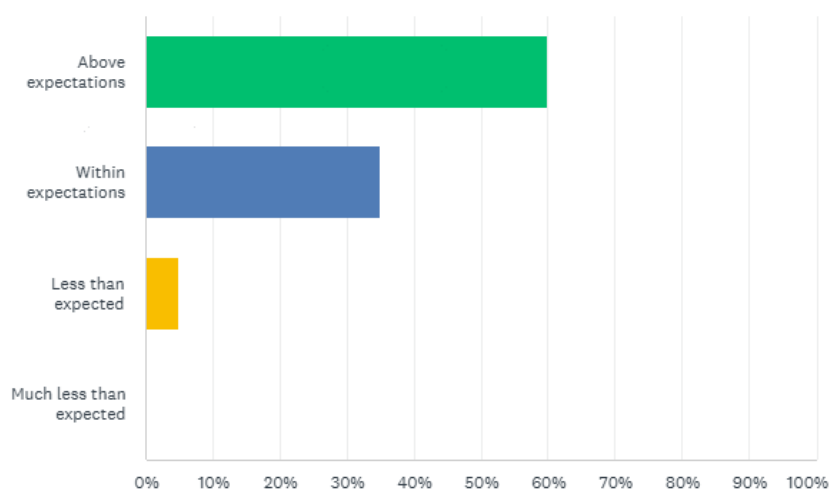
The second poll, conducted separately during 2023-2025, gathered the replies from 31 fellow, who rated the overall experience in the fellowship programme from 1 to 10. The results are presented below, with 65% of fellows satisfied for 10 out of 10 (and all for at least 7 out of 10):

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[1] NGI Enrichers D1.4: Final report of the three rounds of open calls

enrichers.ngi.eu
The NGI Enrichers project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement 101070125.

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1/10 ★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
2/10 ★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
3/10 ★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
4/10 ★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
5/10 ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
6/10 ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆	0	0%
7/10 ★★★★★★★☆☆☆	2	6.45%
8/10 ★★★★★★★★☆☆	6	19.35%
9/10 ★★★★★★★★★☆	3	9.68%
10/10 ★★★★★★★★★★	20	64.52%

In addition, fellows were asked how the mentorship component was beneficial for them. 80% of fellows chose at least 7 out of 10.

1/10 ★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
2/10 ★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
3/10 ★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
4/10 ★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
5/10 ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆	1	3.23%
6/10 ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆	5	16.13%
7/10 ★★★★★★★☆☆☆	3	9.68%
8/10 ★★★★★★★★☆☆	8	25.81%
9/10 ★★★★★★★★★☆	3	9.68%
10/10 ★★★★★★★★★★	11	35.48%

Regarding the networking opportunities and collaboration with other fellows, 80% of fellows assessed it for at least 7 out of 10.

1/10 ★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
2/10 ★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
3/10 ★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
4/10 ★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆	1	3.23%
5/10 ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆	3	9.68%
6/10 ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆	2	6.45%
7/10 ★★★★★★★☆☆☆	2	6.45%
8/10 ★★★★★★★★☆☆	7	22.58%
9/10 ★★★★★★★★★☆	3	9.68%
10/10 ★★★★★★★★★★	13	41.94%

The overall level of support from the coordinator and organisers was assessed high as well, with 94% of fellows who chose minimum 7 out of 10.

1/10 ★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
2/10 ★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
3/10 ★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆	0	0%
4/10 ★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆	1	3.23%
5/10 ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆	1	3.23%
6/10 ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆	0	0%
7/10 ★★★★★★★☆☆☆	1	3.23%
8/10 ★★★★★★★★☆☆	5	16.13%
9/10 ★★★★★★★★★☆	6	19.35%
10/10 ★★★★★★★★★★	17	54.84%

Finally, 97% of fellows chose at least 7 out of 10 confirming that fellowship programme positively impacted their career goals.

LESSONS LEARNT

The Policy Brief provides an overview of main lessons learned by the NGI Enrichers consortium during the lifetime of the NGI Enrichers programme. The programme included all steps required to organise the fellowship: starting from its design, going through the fellows and hosts selections; support of the participants on all stages of the fellowship process, including mentorship; managing cascade funding; communication and impact assessment of the programme results.

Therefore, the main lessons learned could be summarised as follows:

1. Preparation and selection process optimisation. The selection process included the selection of the suitable track, the submission of documents and their evaluation, interviews. Overall, the selection was successful with positive feedback from fellows and hosts. Meantime, the following recommendations could be considered for further improvement of the selection process:

- Modification of the criteria/processes could ensure a better balance across different tracks.
- More involvement of hosts in the selection process could improve the right match.
- More balanced approach in terms of KPIs related to number of hosts engaged could be more efficient as major resources were spent to engage more hosts and many hosts did not receive even one fellow.
- Additional resources were needed to identify the right person in the host organisation that complicated the process of hosts' engagement.

2. Fellowship duration and structure. The programme suggested fellowships from 3 to 6 months for both, researchers and innovators, based on 3 tracks: Paired teams track, Open ideas track, and Challenges track.

- Duration for researchers and innovators could be different, based on the feedback from fellows and hosts (longer for researchers).
- Planning in advance clear expectations and availabilities for hosts and fellows could facilitate the fellowship in more efficient way. In addition, fellowship guidelines with a typical agenda of fellowship could ease the onboarding and planning process. Fellows and hosts were responsible to organise the fellowship based on their joint needs, meantime, the general recommendations could help to structure the fellowship and facilitate the assessment of the fellowships' results. In addition, additional clarifying of

goals and priorities with hosts, including possible access for fellows to premises, software could be helpful.

3. Support resources. The NGI Enrichers programme previewed diverse activities to support fellows and hosts: bootcamps for fellows, mentorship, technical support, peer-to peer sessions. Based on the conducted activities, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Peer support valuable supports knowledge exchange.
- Knowledge on the Intellectual property rights (IPR) is not developed well and additional attention should be put on IPR: no right to exploit intellectual property, could be limitations to share knowledge from the institution.
- Visa issues complicate the organisational process and requires additional efforts to support fellows.
- Additional efforts and resources could be invested in soft skills development of fellows and in providing more visibility tools to equip fellows.
- Some additional guidelines were mentioned by fellows, for example, how to expand the company in the US.

4. Knowledge transfer mechanism. Knowledge transfer from the fellowship programmes is of key importance to maximise the impact of the programme on the fellows' projects and organisations, and overall on European research and entrepreneurial ecosystem. The needed activities were embedded in the design of the programme and NGI Enrichers can confirm the importance of such activities.

- Formal requirements like co-publications, public report support longer impact beyond the project.

5. Long-term impact enhancement. The fellowships affect not only the ongoing projects and research of fellows, but bring much longer impact on their further development, careers. The following tools could intensify positive impact:

- Ensuring visibility of the fellows' success stories, including tools and resources to promote the fellows' successes could be valuable, both during the fellowships and after their ends. Such tools could help to promote success of fellows, to bring new ideas and knowledge to the ecosystem, and to motivate other stakeholders to work on strengthening of the innovation ecosystem.
- Component of tracking of fellows' career trajectories is complicated to realise within the existing structure of Horizon Europe projects. However,

such tracking would be helpful to assess the impact of similar programmes.

6. Additional recommendations

- Reverse fellowships could be previewed for hosts as well, and could bring more value to Europe, and to facilitate continuous collaboration.
- Inclusion (eg Ukraine and gender diversity) is of high importance, it brings diversity and strengthens the ecosystem.
- Creation of Alumni network was suggested several times during the programme by different stakeholders. Taking into account the limited timeline of the NGI Enrichers, the network could be supported only on the volunteer basis by fellows or other interested parties, so could not be planned within the project. Still, such network is considered of high importance for continuous collaboration.
- Development of specific strategies to attract host organisations from the private sector. Most of the hosts represented the universities, research organisations. To attract more private institutions that could be of interest of innovators, requires additional efforts and separate strategies.
- Simplify the provisions included in the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) - without overlooking key issues such as IPR among others this could help to facilitate the participation of a larger number of host organisations.