

Connecting ELIXIR Communities and Platforms

Date: Mon 02 June 2025 16:00-17:30 EEST

Timber Hall II

Chairs: Katharina Heil, Chris Evelo, Tony Burdett

Abstract:

ELIXIR is large and complex. Many activities take place and are developed in one or several places by one or the same person. In other words, many of the people working for and contributing to ELIXIR are involved across different activities and areas. Connecting the dots and ongoing initiatives taking place e.g. in ELIXIR Communities and Platforms to leverage synergies and collaborate is key for success and consequently a larger impact. This mini symposium will showcase a number of examples where Platforms and Communities are working in a collaborative way and present the achieved impact. The examples shall also serve as an inspiration for other Platform-Community pairings and highlight challenges and fallbacks that should be addressed in the future. The session includes presentations and a panel discussion, which includes the (end) user perspective, that should be considered by both Platform and Community activities and can inform the way these interact.

[Joint Slide deck](#)

Slido - <https://app.sli.do/event/ne91Da56ogotpa5tQaBKCy> - # 8339415 ([slido.com](https://www.slido.com))

Time (EEST)	Subject
16:00-16:10	Welcome and introduction Speaker: <i>Chris Evelo</i>
16:10-16:18	Interoperability Platform (pairing 1) Speaker: <i>Danielle Welter</i>
16:18-16:26	Metabolomics Community (pairing 1) Speaker: <i>Nils Hoffmann</i>
16:26-16:34	Training Platform (pairing 2) Speaker: <i>Jessica Lindvall</i>
16:34-16:42	Single Cell Omics Community (pairing 2) Speaker: <i>Eija Korpelainen</i>
16:42-16:50	Microbiome Community Speaker: <i>Rob Finn</i>
16:50-16:58	Compute Platform Speaker: <i>Michael Crusoe</i>
16:58-17:25	Panel/open discussion Chair: <i>Tony Burdett</i> Panelists: our session speakers This section is an open discussion for all symposium participants. The discussion will be chaired with opportunities to put questions to the panel of speakers. Themes for discussion: • Empowering People • Creating New Connections • Removing Barriers and Obstacles
17:25-17:30	Wrap up and possibly next steps

Notes (collectively taken)

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- Communities might have/have the same challenges than the overall ELIXIR community
- Communication as a challenge
 - How to improve
- Compute Platform - "credit"

Slido questions/comments:

- Would an ELIXIR certification of training programs (e.g. meeting specific standards) be of any use or interest in the future?
- Are the applied and the technical communities and the platforms forming a tripartite graph/network? If yes, should that be reflected in the next version of that circle of logos?

Panel

- What accelerated the collaboration
 - common/shared motivation
 - Speaking and spending time together!
 - Once progression can be seen - activity takes off/accelerates
- Challenge - knowing who can help with what
- Common goal that already exists based on a common/joined/shared need - not an engineered scenario
- "Control - competence - or - clarity"
 - Hub to orchestrate connections?!
- How to tackle the hard challenges
 - get/have funding available
 - Use Communities as a space to discuss about funding - generate funding opportunities?
- Funding - European funding - often/at times ELIXIR opportunities/questions/potential projects are not aligned with EC funding
- Are we lacking the skills - e.g. community management, to achieve/address challenges?
 - How does a Platform ensure that Communities know about Platform activities
 - Ensure what one/a Community can do with what a Platform offers
- Things - collaborations take time
- Community champions - "real people" to directly talk to Communities → better, direct communication
 - Training liaisons
- Use cases are helpful to showcase - especially new Communities - e.g. Food & Nutrition

- Challenge - knowing what is going on
- Is it time to standardise spatial omics training (material/...)
 - Documentation comes before standardisation
- If we want to serve researchers - more need to be included/involved in the conversation
 - Include researchers in the conversation - e.g. AHM - ask questions and get to know people
 - AHM “too small” - only the usual suspects are attending - but not the ones that would possibly benefit even more
 - People interaction - meet, discuss, understand better
 - Translate “their problem” to “our problem”
- Nodes/HoN - should do work to make Communities known on a national level
 - National meetings - can help - but the European level is also needed - use resources in domains across Europe
- Need to go out/wider than the common/known/current ELIXIR community/landscape
- Outreach
- “These examples were great” - think of a different/other way to share
 - Better sales pitches - e.g. web-pages, success stories, ...
- Very many layers of interaction
 - Platform-Community
 - Community-Community
 - RI to RI
 - ...
 - All examples were heard
 - There is a lot of complexity in messaging
 - We need to possibly think about “re-thinking”
- Some suggestions were made during the course of the discussion to make connections between and with communities easier:
 - **Language.** People really have problems understanding both general technical talk about work relevant but they were not yet involved in (e.g. “what is CWL?”), or the other way around (“why is a X-over study hard to capture in standard metadata templates?”). Being aware of that problem, reducing the use of abbreviations, acronyms and meaningless references (e.g. what is task 2.3?) already helps. An LLM based procedure to improve the cross domain readability of all internal ELIXIR documents and notes, with specific and targeted instructions, might help a bit.
 - **Documentation.** While we do a lot of work on writing manuals and training material there still are problems with that. The main things mentioned were:
 - Documentation on the code level. (Here again a standard approach to involve AI, for instance with “can you describe in a comment what I just did?” (or more specific, e.g. “what this loop does?”), or a mechanism to improve code itself (like: “please apply this consistent naming scheme for variables, parameters and functions” might help).
 - User documentation and interfaces are still often written from a developers perspective rather than from a users perspective. A classic sample are buttons that say “submit” instead of something about what the system will

do like “search” or “calculate”. The same thing happens in ELIXIR’s internal communication (like I want you to apply for what the system does (commission a service) instead of what you will do in the application (implement an approach in a study)).

- **Not going the last mile.** Typically users/communities ask for something that does a task completely. We (correctly) subdivide that in tasks, but then the task becomes a goal in itself and we do not reflect whether we solved the original problem and whether that might still need additional steps. The language problem makes this worse because the problem owner typically finds it hard to understand the ongoing subdivided work and loses track.
- **Closed source elements.** (not really mentioned in the workshop), Often in European research infrastructure companies are involved that build a key element of a data workflow as closed source. While maintenance and further development are already hard, missing a key element makes it even harder.
- **Forking.** An example that was mentioned came from the metabolomics communities was “we use an ISA based dialect). We see a lot of these dialects as derived standards. We lack modular approaches to make sure that extensions can be added (like we need a better metadata description for the material used (from ISAtab-nano) and for the assay performed (from Toxtemp) *in combination*.
- **Community champions or liaisons to the external life science world.** (not the champions you know, and more described as a communication problem rather than as the possible solution).
 - Technical people could connect/work with people active in doing the actual development in more domain specific projects (e.g. RI, flagships, partnerships). (we do that for data and data projects, not so much for life science itself).
 - We could try to involve PI level people more, the people that know about the needs in their domain in general and that often write the proposals for developments in their own field. We see some developments in that direction in communities like toxicology, food & nutrition and rare disease. But this could be, and should be, improved if we want that half million of life science researchers to know what ELIXIR is doing and to get ELIXIR involved in the domain specific data and data analysis problems they have.

Note that on both levels this is likely more about involving new people, those that already work in the application domain, rather than appointing people from current communities.

If we do this well it might lead to ELIXIR communities, and through them people working in platforms, involved in external research and research infrastructure projects. These projects typically already have a data work package or bioinformatics work package which could benefit from ELIXIR participation and even provide some (external) funding for people doing the work in ELIXIR itself.

ELIXIR ALL HANDS
2-5 JUNE 2025

