FOOD
LAB
NETWORK

Admission process to join the Food Lab Network

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curated by

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About the Food Lab Network

The Food Lab Network (FLN) is the first international network of academic and institutional laboratories, makerspaces, and living labs engaged in research, innovation, and experimentation for the circular transition of Food Systems.
The Network was established to facilitate collaboration and foster the development of these laboratories' potential, initially with a focus on the European context. It promotes the sharing of practices, tools, and expertise, and encourages international project development with an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to circular innovation.

The Food Lab Network is conceived as a living and evolving ecosystem, open to new partners who share its vision and values. However, the admission of new laboratories follows a structured process of application and approval, designed to ensure coherence, transparency, and mutual responsibility.
This process safeguards the quality and cohesion of the Network, guaranteeing that each new member contributes meaningfully to its scientific, cultural, and operational development. Growth is therefore understood not as expansion in numbers, but as the careful integration of new expertise, perspectives, and capacities that reinforce the collective mission of the Network.

Methods and Criteria to Join the Network

Admission to the Food Lab Network is open to laboratories, research centers, and experimental hubs that:

- operate in the field of food system innovation, design, or transition;
- share the Network's values of openness, inclusivity, and collaboration;
- demonstrate the capacity to contribute to activities through in-kind participation.

New partners are selected based on their relevance, complementarity, and potential for active engagement. Particular attention is given to ensuring balanced representation across disciplines, geographical regions, and institutional profiles, fostering a network that mirrors the diversity of food systems themselves.

Admission Window and Application Process

The admission process is based on two yearly calls, held in January and June, ensuring predictability and transparency. The onboarding of the new members is expected to happen in september/october and April/May respectively.
Applications can be submitted in two ways:

1. By sponsorship: an existing partner laboratory may act as a promoter, presenting and supporting the candidacy of a new laboratory whose profile is consistent with

the Network's mission. This sponsorship implies an initial introduction and short presentation during one of the Network Assemblies, as well as support during the onboarding phase if admission is approved by the current members..

2. By direct application: laboratories may also apply independently, without sponsorship, by filling the form available on the FLN website. In this case, the Coordinators will receive and evaluate the application and activate preliminary exchanges.

Each applicant submits a standardized application form, outlining their activities, facilities, and expected contributions. After submission, proposals enter a flexible waiting window that allows for informal exchanges, preliminary meetings, or participation in open activities, helping both sides assess mutual interest and fit before formal deliberation. This is due because the regular process for entering the Network is subject to a specific moment, namely the Network Assembly, happening twice per year in January and around June/July.

Approval Mechanism

Applications are first reviewed by the Coordinators' Team, which verifies eligibility, completeness, and coherence with the Network's objectives. Each proposal (whether sponsored or independent) is summarized in a short assessment note and presented to the Assembly for deliberation. The Assembly votes on new admissions by simple majority, approving a maximum of six new members per year (three per round). This two-step process, consisting of preparatory screening by the Coordinators followed by final approval by the Assembly, strikes a balance between agility and inclusiveness. It reinforces the principle that joining the Network is both a collective decision and a shared commitment, grounded in transparency and mutual trust.

Onboarding and Orientation

Once accepted, each new laboratory is paired with a "buddy" partner, usually the promoting lab or, in the case of direct applications, a member appointed by the Coordinators. The buddy provides guidance on tools, communication practices, and initial participation. An onboarding meeting with the Coordinators introduces the Network's structure, governance, and expectations regarding in-kind contribution and engagement. New members become part of the Network's annual participation review starting from their first year, ensuring that they are progressively integrated into the collective rhythm of reflection and feedback that sustains the Network's collaborative model.

Evaluation and Confirmation of Current Members

Given the collaborative and experimental nature of the Food Lab Network, participation is rooted in active engagement, shared responsibility, and alignment with the Network's principles, rather than in formal contractual obligations.

To sustain this balance, the Coordinators' Team conducts an annual evaluation and confirmation process for all partner laboratories. This review examines contributions across the year, presence in activities, and the sharing of expertise in relation to specific minimum duties.
The evaluation is conceived as a constructive and dialogic moment. Each partner is invited to provide a short self-assessment or reflection, which the Coordinators synthesize into a summary of participation and engagement across the Network. This summary is then presented to the Assembly for acknowledgement and shared discussion. To ensure transparency and fairness, the Assembly is responsible for the final decision regarding the confirmation of partners.
Based on the annual summary, the Assembly assesses:

- the degree of active participation in Network activities,
- the fulfilment of minimum duties
- the alignment with the Network's values and principles,
- and any critical issues that may have emerged during the year.

At present, the Network does not set a maximum number of partners. The question of size and scalability may be revisited during the first mandate of the Coordinators, if needed, as part of the broader process of refinement of this document.
Through this annual cycle, the Food Lab Network maintains its cohesion and vitality, reaffirming that membership is grounded in mutual trust, reciprocity, and continuous contribution to the shared mission.