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D1.2 NGI STRATEGIC GUIDANCE REPORT

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<p>Abstract</p>	<p>This deliverable provides an update of the NGI Communication and Marketing strategic approach and guidance within the NGI ecosystem, reporting on WP1 main activities during the first 18 months of NGI4ALL.E.</p> <p>By taking into account the NGI Communication Audit outcomes, which are provided as an Annex to this deliverable, and the lessons learned in the first half of the NGI4ALL.E project, critical considerations on how to possibly improve communication and marketing of the NGI along several directions in the second reporting period are provided. This should be considered as input for discussion with the EC and other stakeholders in the NGI ecosystem.</p>
<p>Keywords</p>	<p>Communication, Marketing, Strategy, Impact, Sustainability, NGI</p>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document builds upon the foundation laid in deliverable *D1.1 NGI Communication and Marketing Strategy and Plan*, and provides updates on several strategic and operational aspects to effectively guide efforts in the next reporting period.

These updates are based on what we have learned from guiding the NGI communication and media efforts in the last 18 months and by also taking into account the main outcomes of the NGI Communication audit that was run between Q4 2022 and Q1 2023.

This deliverable serves as an important milestone by incorporating relevant developments, refining strategies, and reporting on the progress of Work Package 1 led activities. Its main findings are planned to be discussed with the NGI Unit representatives, as well as other stakeholders in the NGI ecosystem, to make sure there is a good alignment on how to improve communication and marketing of the NGI in a broad and impactful way.

The strategic approach outlined in Deliverable 1.1 aimed at maximising the growth, awareness, and impact of the NGI initiative and all its players remains central to the NOO strategy and planned work.

However, since the NGI is entering into a new phase of its history after five years of its activity, it is necessary to adjust and follow the needs of a community in continuous growth and evolution. This also in consideration of the changing boundary conditions and relevant initiatives in Europe and beyond that are going to influence the future steps of the NGI projects.

This deliverable reiterates the NGI4ALLE consortium's commitment to adaptability and continuous improvement. It serves as a valuable resource for shaping future activities, fostering collaboration, and maintaining the NGI community's position at the forefront of research, innovation, and societal transformation.



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1 INTRODUCTION

The Next Generation Internet Outreach Office is in charge of guiding communication and marketing efforts across the whole NGI ecosystem. Given the growth and transformation of the whole initiative, it is of utmost importance to stay relevant and be able to follow the community in its evolution and needs in a smooth and agile way.

In this respect, under the lead of WP1, the NGI4ALL.E consortium provided guidance to all NGI stakeholders in their outreach activities, by closely and regularly coordinating with them and with the EC via several channels and initiatives.

When the NGI4ALL.E started, we were able to build upon what was done by the predecessor CSA (namely NGI4ALL) and work on what were identified as the major critical aspects - as discussed extensively in deliverable D1.1. However, since in the meantime the NGI ecosystem itself had gone under some major transformations, it was important to adapt along the course of action, but also take a critical perspective on what had been done in the past by the NGI Outreach Office (NOO).

Therefore, to better understand what had been more or less effective at communication and marketing level, an NGI Communication Audit was run - its outcomes are provided in a separate document. This exercise has provided some important indications to the NOO - some of which were followed and implemented, while some others were not considered as relevant or feasible (see section 2).

By reflecting on the main learnings during its first 18 months of work, in this deliverable, the NGI4ALL.E consortium aims to help understand how and why some strategic and operational decisions have been made, but also critically indicate in which way some activities should be conducted in the future.

As this report comes to the end of the first reporting period of NGI4ALL.E when some other deliverables are produced by other work packages, namely *D2.2 NGI Stakeholders Engagement Report*, *D3.2 NGI Outreach Activities Report* and *D4.2 NGI Diversity and Inclusion Report*, we try to minimise repetitions and focus in this document on the main learnings and consequent strategic and operational decisions that are key to continue lead communications and marketing for the NGI is a relevant and impactful way.

1.1 THE NGI ECOSYSTEM MAIN TRANSFORMATION FACTORS

The NGI is in continuous evolution and the NOO must consequently adapt its strategy and plans when it comes to communication and marketing. Important factors of transformation that have been (and will have to be) taken into account can be summarised as follows:

- **Growth of the community** as the number of third party projects has increased, as well as the number of ongoing NGI projects (starting beginning of 2024), which include four Innovation Actions (also called NGI Pilots) at work for wider adoption of NGI solutions; 2 Coordination and Support Actions, one focusing on policy related aspects, namely NGI Commons, and one focusing on international collaboration with US and Canada (NGI Transoceanic); and one “big” new Research and Innovation Action, the



NGI Zero Commons Fund, that will be distributed more than 21 million Euro on technology commons to third party projects.

- **Increased diversity of the NGI population and of the NGI technologies and solutions** as the span towards new communities at work on different research and innovation topics has significantly expanded the NGI boundaries. As of today, more than 1'000 NGI Solutions are promoted via the online catalogue hosted by the NGI.EU portal and many more are being developed and expected to be made available soon. As recently confirmed at the latest edition of the NGI Forum, this diversity is destined to increase reconfirming the NGI is a community of communities spanning across several R&I domains.
- **Limited understanding of the NGI of third party funded innovators.** It has been observed by the NOO that there is sometimes a certain lack of awareness and thereby recognition, from several innovators funded by the NGI, of the fact that funding comes indeed from the NGI and not from organisations that run the NGI RIAs. This, especially when considering the need to act as one to amplify the strength and impact of the NGI, needs to be addressed. As a matter of fact, with all third party innovators echoing and participating in the promotion of the NGI, the multiplying effect could become much more significant.
- **Policy priorities/initiatives of relevance** - with digital independence and technological sovereignty of Europe becoming increasingly central to the European Commission agenda, as well as to many Member States, initiatives like the NGI are becoming increasingly relevant. As recently reiterated by Director General Roberto Viola at the NGI Forum 2023, the NGI mission is to re-imagine and re-engineer the internet, which is central to creating an open, federated and democratic future empowering all citizens. In this regard, the alignment of the NGI mission and values with several EC driven policy initiatives can be leveraged to increase its visibility.
- **Centrality of NGI R&I topics, technologies and solutions** - across open source, open hardware, open web search, large language models, as well as decentralised social media and much more - is growing in relevance across a variety of sectors, from public to private ones. As a matter of fact, availability of open source, trustworthy, secure and inclusive digital conditions is essential for the sustainable development of our economy and society. In particular, there is an increasing push for further development and adoption of digital commons as a foundational element for Europe's digital future, which the NGI is a champion of. This can help increase the relevance of NGI-driven efforts across several other sectors.

1.2 IMPACT ON THE NOO STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS

These transformational factors have (had) a direct influence on the way the NOO has been and is steering efforts across the NGI ecosystem and more broadly within the European research and innovation landscape. This can be summarised as follows:

- The growth in size and diversity has implications at strategic and organisational level as the NOO has to deal with an increasing variety of stakeholders and communities



to which the NGI can meaningfully contribute and from which the NGI can benefit. This requires dynamically following up on more and more diverse communication channels - not always mainstream and not always easily accessible for the “non developers / technical” experts. Also, messages need to be “mapped” into what resonates the best into different groups, which sometimes can be or should be very technical. *Therefore, more than ever it is crucial for the NOO to engage the NGI intermediaries (and in the future also the NGI Pilots) as they are essential to reach out and involve more effectively their communities of interest into the NGI dialogues and initiatives.*

- Creating awareness about the role of the NGI and the value that the community provides even beyond funding is essential and the NOO must work on this front with all NGI stakeholders, possibly increasing chances of direct encounters with NGI innovators. While the NGI Communication Task Force monthly calls are the main appointments with the NGI intermediaries that the NOO organises and leads, it is of utmost importance to ensure an active engagement of all the NGI Project Officers to encourage more continuous collaboration also beyond those calls. *More regular NGI community meetings, involving all NGI Projects’ Coordinators, would also be, in our view, very important in this respect.*
- The growing relevance of values and principles that the NGI has been pushing forward since its inception at a pan-European scale at political, economic and technological levels is on the one hand providing hooks for the NGI into larger debates, on the other hand it dilutes the effectiveness and impact of the NGI voice and contribution. In a way, in an ocean of communication and information that is all about digital openness, trustworthiness and inclusivity, there is a risk of not emerging as a distinctive initiative. In this respect, we believe it is becoming increasingly important *to have high level representatives of the EC speaking about the NGI more explicitly, but also let the NGI Solutions speak on behalf of the NGI, meaning that by providing tangible solutions and technologies of relevance to many public and private organisations, the overall initiative will gain credibility/relevance.*
- With respect to the reach out to the media and the general public, communication must adapt the tones and the messages in different ways by combining top-down and bottom-up kinds of measures. On the one hand by addressing both the technical and general press and following up on online and offline communications across social media, via the web site and at events (in presence or remote), by producing and curating original content, while, on the other hand, by echoing and amplifying the messages and communications that are generated by the NGI researchers and innovators across their communities - i.e., passing on their content possibly helping them curate it and elaborate it further when needed. *This is why the NOO communication training should be considered as an important asset to build upon, together with planned interactions with NGI innovators via dedicated events and initiatives, like the sustainability and impact creation Working Group.*



2 THE NGI COMMUNICATION FOUNDATION AND APPROACH

The NOO is acting as a communication agency at the service of the whole NGI initiative interacting with several stakeholders within the ecosystem and beyond its borders. The core foundation of its approach to NGI promotion is **to be an active communication hub for both the NGI insiders and outsiders**, facilitating encounters and promoting know-how and technology transfer across several channels.

Within the NGI ecosystem, the NOO primarily interacts with the Project Officers of the NGI Unit, as well as the Coordinators and Communication leaders of the ongoing NGI projects (within the context of the NGO Communication Task Force). Less frequently and more indirectly, the NOO directly interacts with the NGI innovators, which is perceived as one of the main current weaknesses and therefore one of the fronts where more attention has been and will be devoted to. In particular, as already mentioned, it is essential that the NGI intermediaries help minimise the distance between their communities and the NOO. What was done in this reporting period on our side, was to follow up on more frequent interactions in relation to the Who's NGI Blogs, the preparation and promotion of NGI Solutions catalogue, the promotion of Open Calls, the NGI communication training sessions, the promotion of and participation at events organised by the NGI projects, the organisation of the NGI Forum 2023, etc. In this respect the activation of the NGI Exploitation, Impact and Sustainability Working group (under the lead of Task 1.4) has been of central relevance as it has created a collaboration framework aimed at directly supporting and promoting the work and the achievements of the innovators. This will be further elaborated and the NOO is already preparing a series of NGI Impact Stories blog posts, a dedicated section in the NGI portal for showcasing NGI impact/best practice /success stories and NGI Innovator Meetups, which are going to cover different elements such as for example ePitching session and NGI Enabler matchmaking (see WP3), etc.

Beyond the NGI ecosystem boundaries the NOO is interacting with a plurality of actors in a pan-European and international perspective, with focus on collaborations with the US and Canada that ongoing NGI projects are directly in charge of. Across Europe, the NOO has activated and keeps triggering interactions with the press, but also pulls into the NGI events and discussions prominent experts and influencers that help reinforcing the key messages pushed by the NGI - see for instance events like the NGI Info Session on Pilots and Internet Commons Policy, the High-Level expert webinar on Digital Commons and Digital Sovereignty, and the upcoming NGI Panel on Communities, Digital Rights and the Future of the Internet. Moreover, constant echoing of NGI communication and messages is ensured in other related European R&I communities the NOO has established well-oiled liaisons to. This includes the Next generation Internet of Things initiative (ngiot.eu), the EUCloudEdgeIoT.eu initiative, the 6G Smart Networks and Services Joint Undertaking (<https://smart-networks.europa.eu/>), but also research and innovation associations and initiatives very closely related to the NGI such as the AI, Data and Robotics Association (adr-association.eu), the Big Data Value Association (bdva.eu), the FIWARE Foundation (www.fiware.org), the Digital SME Alliance, the Internet of Us/WeNet community ([internetofus](https://internetofus.com)), and several others. Moreover, under the lead of WP4, more direct connections have been established with external experts and policy making focused organisations and initiatives such as the Linux Foundation, OpenForum Europe,



Open Future, Sovereign Tech Fund, WikiRate, Commons Networks, EDRI, Access Now, Missions Publiques, Algorithm Watch, The Wikimedia Foundation, etc.

2.1 THE NOO OBJECTIVES AND AMBITION

All NGI4ALL.E objectives, as discussed in detail in D1.1, remain actual and central to the NOO mission and activities. The work and learnings in the first 18 months of the project's activity have been crucial to refine the way in which the consortium aims to obtain such objectives and even improve on the initially planned ambitions.

Objective 1 - Reinforce the core - *to bolster the NOO leading and coordinating its efforts as a 360-degree communication and marketing agency at the service of the whole NGI initiative and community.*

The NOO continues at full steam towards this goal that represents an ongoing work stream at the service of all NGI stakeholders, supporting the NGI community insiders and reaching out to the outsiders as relevant. A refreshed and enlarged palette of services to effectively serve a decentralised and growing community, while increasing the NGI initiatives, solutions and technologies impact, has been delivered across all active tasks and work packages that have closely collaborated all along the first reporting period, as reported in deliverables D2.2, 3.2, 4.2.

Learnings and improvements:

- Closer interaction with NGI intermediaries, including both RIAs and IAs, as well as with other NGI CSAs will be sought, by possibly pulling in the various EC Project Officers in the discussions. This is aimed at also increasing the proximity and number of interactions that the NOO has with third party funded NGI innovators.
- Some social media channels will be dismissed as non-relevant - namely FB and Instagram, while others will definitely become more prominent, such as Mastodon, PeerTube and maybe new ones coming.
- Some online tools like the NGI Map might be dismissed as not very instrumental to the mission and objectives of the NOO, while the online NGI innovations catalogue will be further expanded and promoted.

Objective 2 - Empower and value - *to strengthen the NGI ecosystem by engaging its constituency in an even more meaningful, valuable and sustainable way, helping NGI innovators and stakeholders to grow and succeed.*

The NOO is fully committed to helping bring the NGI beneficiaries together and closer to the NGI initiative, by helping provide incentives for all participants in the ecosystem to be more active. Increased opportunities of promotion of the NGI solutions (via the online dedicated catalogue), the NGI innovators (Who's NGI Blog), their success stories and their impact (Impact Stories Blog Series), the offered NGI communication trainings, are some of the more tangible benefits that the NOO provides to third funded parties in the ecosystem. Often the NGI researchers and innovators have only very limited experience with communication, marketing as well as business development. Therefore, the support the NOO offers, especially under the lead of Tasks 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, are main assets we will continue building upon.



Learnings and improvements:

- In the previous edition of the NOO, when running the NGI4ALL CSA, close collaborations with a CSA fully dedicated to NGI acceleration and business development services like TETRA was very valuable. This is something that could be considered by the EC when calling for next NGI projects.
- To empower NGI innovators means to understand their needs and follow them in their innovation journey which is per se a huge and challenging task the NOO has only limited resources for. However, the start of the NGI Pilots in January 2024 might help in doing more and more efficiently empower the NGI innovators.
- To engage all NGI innovators - as repeated by now several times in this document, the role of the NGI intermediaries is essential and more can and should be done. The NOO is committed to foster increased and closer engagement.

Objective 3 - Scale up and reach out - *To grow the NGI ecosystem engaging new Internet researchers, innovators, Start-ups/SMEs, by leveraging well-oiled processes and tools, on top of target measures to involve newcomers.*

The engagement of new players into the ecosystem has been pursued by widely promoting all NGI initiatives via online and offline communication channels, including the NGI community platform, but also by leveraging on the outreach and liaisons established with other relevant initiatives (such as NGIOT, EUCloudEdgeIoT, 6G SNS, the Digital SME Alliance, etc.). The support for advertising NGI Open Calls and the specific promotional activities for such calls that have been organised by the NGI intermediaries (typically online Info Sessions) has been closely coordinated on a regular basis and this will continue also for the future calls of new and ongoing NGI projects. Clearly here the outreach to R&I communities that the more technical/technological partners involved in the NGI have is of high relevance for this engagement to be more effective. However, the NOO has cross-promoted communications in close collaboration also with open source initiatives and organisations such as the organisers of FOSDEM, FOSS Backstage, 4YFN, Digital SME Summit, etc.

Learnings and improvements:

- The visibility and presence of several NGI intermediaries, such as for instance NLNet, in R&I communities and initiatives that are not necessarily traditionally linked to EC funding circuits has definitely helped to engage many newcomers to the NGI. This has created a sort of snow-ball effect gathering many new players.
- The involvement of new organisations in the various NGI projects, including Ideas for Change as new partner in the NOO, is important to diversity and increase the outreach and should be well leveraged - the NGI communication can and should be amplified via the channels of all organisations involved in the NGI.
- The NGI Online Community has intensified its efforts to diversify and enhance connections with open source initiatives by sharing contents, participating at events, amplifying communications across different channels, etc. see deliverable D2.2 for more details).
- The engagement of influencers as prominent representatives in various external communities to the NGI to help rely and amplify the NGI communication is an important way to scale up and reach out beyond the current ecosystem borders.

Objective 4 - Diversify and evangelise - *To ensure better access to the NGI ecosystem fostering diverse and inclusive participation, while broadly promoting the NGI vision and values to policy makers and end users.*



NGI addresses the need for a more fair, safe, resilient, sustainable, human-centred and decentralised internet. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are therefore the backbone of this envisioned digital future all citizens and organisations should be able to benefit from. In the first 18 months of the NGI4ALL.E project, under the direct lead of WP4, several activities have aimed at first of all assessing how the NGI performs in terms of equity, diversity and inclusion, but also in creating better awareness all across the ecosystem on how to foster large and inclusive participation in the NGI, by making its resources better accessible and understandable to diverse target audiences (grass root initiatives, local communities, citizens, policy makers) and engaging so far under represented groups.

Learnings and improvements:

- Internet end users/citizens/individuals and many organisations, whether public or private, are not always capable of understanding how the NGI solutions are relevant to them. In this respect it is important that the NGI projects and the NOO-guided communications “translate and speak to them” by using the right messages and means, like for instance participatory workshops, infographics, concrete use cases/examples of usage of NGI solutions, etc. (see WP4 activities).
- To diversify and become even more inclusive the NGI initiatives have to reach out to top-down initiatives, e.g., policy makers, policy-driven efforts, industry associations, and grass-root movements and organisations.
 - Top-down perspective. Even though only limited resources were available to this dedicated effort (task 4.1), several major contacts have been established especially to experts and prominent representatives in the digital commons scene. This will be further strengthened in the second reporting period, by ensuring close collaboration with the policy- focused CSA NGI Commons, which starts in January 2024.
 - Bottom-up perspective. A comprehensive mapping of grassroots communities and initiatives of direct relevance to the NGI has been put together as well as an extensive list of women in tech initiatives (see deliverable D4.2) with the aim of better liaising with relevant organisations and identify synergies that can help diversify and render the NGI even more diverse and inclusive.

2.2 ALIGNING WITH THE NGI COMMUNICATION AUDIT INPUT

Between the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, building upon the successes of the past years, the NOO conducted a comprehensive communication audit, assessing its performance across various areas with the goal of expanding the reach and influence of the NGI's communication efforts.

The results of this audit, delivered in Spring 2023 have been very useful to further guide and refine the NGI communication strategy and tactics. Additionally, the collected data can serve as valuable benchmarks for future initiatives.

The primary objectives of the NGI communication audit were threefold:

- Identify strengths and weaknesses concerning the NGI communication objectives.
- Recognize potential threats and opportunities that could impact the NOO ability to achieve new communication goals.



- Collect anonymous feedback from the NGI community to assess the effectiveness of current practices and pinpoint areas for improvement.

Based on the audit findings, strategic and tactical recommendations have been produced and categorised into initiatives that the NOO can more swiftly implement with minimal resource impact and those that might require more substantial effort and thereby budget reallocation/allocation in the future.

As part of its commitment to advancing the NGI communication impact and outreach, the NOO has already successfully followed several recommendations outlined in the audit, while some would require additional resources or changes in the plan of action. As a matter of fact, it is important to note that NGI4ALL.E has been flexibly adapting to several emerging requests from the EC or other NGI stakeholders as they came along, which clearly has had an impact also on the priorities and overall capability of implementing all communication audit recommendations.

- **Involving more directly the NGI community stakeholders** in the organisation/building of events, and more specifically of the NGI Forum 2023 as flagship event of the whole community. From the very beginning, the NOO has closely collaborated with the NGI Unit Project Officers and the various NGI intermediaries, but also with NGI innovators (engaged via the intermediaries).
- **Planning a full social media and press activation** around the NGI Forum to ensure attendance. This has been done extensively and despite November being a month full of events and Brussels being a rather expensive location, very good participation was ensured, also considering remote attendance was possible.
- **Creating dynamic content** (especially interviews and videos) to disseminate on the NGI channels. Several videos and interviews with innovators, NGI experts and policy makers have been pushed out and widely promoted. Besides the NGI YouTube channel, the NOO supported promotion of videos via the PeerTube NGI channel managed by the EC.
- **Securing media partnerships** to ensure major visibility for the NGI Forum. This, as detailed in deliverable D3.2, has been very successful and prospects for further activities look very promising.
- **Online communication and engagement:** social media animation as well as creation and promotion of news, blogs and events has been done by trying to diversify the messages, using captivating graphics, curating content, calling to action and tracking the performance on a regular basis. Some of the limitations the NOO has encountered relate very much to the irregular input (in some periods rather scarce) from the NGI intermediaries. The web site has been regularly updated with new content and adapted in its layout to the changing needs of the initiative and its performance regularly monitored. Notice that requirements for accessibility to the NGI portal have been gathered, structured and addressed for visually impaired people, including the community of blind individuals.
- **Communication training programme:** substantial improvement in the promotion of the initiative through closer collaboration with the RIAs who are in direct contact with the innovators; creation of a new opt-in mailing list for innovators wishing to be informed about the training programme; creation of much more engaging and viral promotional content (videos); improvement and adaptation of the training courses according to the feedback gathered through the ongoing satisfaction survey.



- **NGI Online Community:** several updates to the NGI Online Community platform have significantly enhanced the NGI's visibility within the open source Community. Moreover, building on top of the influencers' programme but also on the Impact Stories series, the NOO expects to grow the community. Additionally, the NOO plans to introduce "NGI Innovator Meetups" as an online appointment to foster direct engagement and interaction within the Open Source Community.
- **Review and update NGI's high-level (positioning) narrative:** the continuous conversations and interactions with stakeholders beyond open source developers, and specifically with end-users communities and those networks and initiatives involved in preserving human rights in the digital world, allow to give insights on how to align the central narratives and key principles of the NGI, with the societal demand for a future internet that is fair, safe, sustainable and human centric. An emerging taxonomy of principles and topics as a key contribution to the NGI's future positioning narratives is presented in Deliverable 4.2
- **More regular, proactive communication about NGI's core values, mission and purpose:** as part of the EDI effort, the core messages of NGI as well as its core principles are being communicated and disseminated to different audiences currently underrepresented in the NGI ecosystem (see details in Deliverable 4.2).
- **Creation, dissemination and promotion of thought-leadership materials:** new content from representatives of communities and networks in the context of the future internet is planned to be produced and published from the interviews and interactions undertaken as part of the work around Equity Diversity and Inclusion (see Deliverable 4.2), but also by interacting with policy makers, newcomers to the NGI pulled in via the new NGI projects, but also NGI RIAs leaders.
- **Organisation of regular, smaller-scale events on critical topics for NGI:** several presentations of the NGI and its principles have been carried out (see Deliverables 2.2 and 4.2), including four Women in Tech Mentoring sessions, and more are planned to happen, e.g., NGI Innovator Meetups, NGI Panel, etc.



3 NGI COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING UPDATES

3.1 NGI BRANDING

The NGI brand continues to confirm its success in terms of impact and recognition across the whole community and beyond, as also confirmed by the NGI communication audit.

The strategy that was adopted - a modular system, with clearly defined minimum bases and sufficient creative freedom for projects - is proving to be effective, flexible, and easy to implement for the new NGI projects joining the initiative.

Looking ahead:

Strategically, in a forward-looking perspective, what is very important is to make sure that all NGI innovators recognise the NGI as the unifying brand under which their funded efforts can be promoted so as to maximise the outreach and impact. In this respect all NGI projects should consistently align to the NGI communication branding guidelines that are shared by the NOO as needed. At the beginning of each new NGI project the NOO is running communication onboarding procedures that, among others, provide direct support for branding their work and project.

3.2 NGI COMM TASK FORCE

The NGI community meets on a monthly basis during the NGI Communication Task Force Calls organised by the NOO. These meetings are held via Big Blue Button and rely on collaborative editing of agendas and minutes taken and shared via Cryptpad.

During the first period of the NGI4ALL, an extensive overhaul of the NGI Communication Task Force mailing lists was executed to ensure all members of the community were included, while former ones were dismissed. To enhance monitoring and organisation, a dedicated spreadsheet for the NGI stakeholders' contacts was developed. This comprehensive spreadsheet includes project-specific details for each contact, encompassing their name, project affiliation, role within the project, and email address. Additionally, it tracks their inclusion in various mailing lists:

- NGI Communication Mailing List: Encompasses contacts from the ongoing projects participating in the communication task force call.
- NGI Coordinators Mailing List: Enlists all contacts serving as coordinators for the current projects.
- NGI Projects Mailing List: Incorporates contacts from current and past projects.

Simultaneously, the spreadsheet monitors participation in key activities, such as the NGI Communication Call Task Force meetings, the NGI Exploitation and Sustainability Task Force meetings, and access to the NGI drive. As NGI projects conclude, their associated contacts are transferred to the spreadsheet dedicated to concluded RIAs. The spreadsheet is also regularly updated to include European Commission contacts, ensuring a comprehensive and current database for effective communication and collaboration.



Regular monthly NGI Comms TF meetings were convened, with exceptions in August (because of summer holidays) and November (coinciding with the NGI Forum 2023). In 2023, a strategic shift was implemented in meeting invitations, wherein each contact was individually included rather than relying on the mailing lists. This change extended to reminders as well. Notably, the consistent participation of the NGI4ALL.E Project Officer in these meetings has proven instrumental in fostering increased engagement of NGI RIAs.

Looking ahead:

Even though in 2022 some NGI projects were not very reactive, participating in the NGI Comms TF Calls only occasionally, in 2023 the situation has improved. The NOO has been pinging one-to-one the various NGI RIAs also in between the NGI Comms TF Calls and the participation and engagement of the NGI4ALL.E Project Officer has helped stimulate more active participation on several occasions.

With the start of the new NGI projects (seven in the beginning of 2024) new organisations will join the NGI Comms TF and we expect this will revive the participation and inject new ideas and energy into the community in relation to new topics, new calls, new communities and new channels of communication that will be activated.

3.3 PRESS OFFICE

As extensively reported in deliverable 3.2, the NGI Press activities have been intense and successful, although they highlighted the importance of continuous media relations and tailored approaches to each EU Member State's media landscape. The overall impact was extremely positive, aligning with or surpassing the set objectives and establishing a foundation for future enhancements in NGI's communication strategy.

Looking ahead:

Recent efforts by the NGI Outreach team have highlighted the importance of a proactive, ongoing approach in communications with the NGI community and the media. Tailoring content to suit local contexts and aligning outreach with significant local events enhances media coverage significantly. A key learning is the value of continuous engagement with journalists, which extends beyond the typical cycle of issuing periodic press releases.

Looking ahead, the strategy for the next 18 months will prioritise strategic timing and sustained media engagement. The team plans to deepen the relationship with the European Commission (EC) to bolster the credibility of NGI narratives. Promoting stories of impact from NGI Innovators and engaging local NGI actors in press relations are also central to this strategy, ensuring more localised and relevant communication. This localised approach is expected to significantly enhance the effectiveness and reach of NGI outreach efforts.

These main learnings and looking ahead factors can be summarised as follows:

Tailor content to journalist preferences

- Create unique, exclusive content.
- Provide summarised post-event materials for time-constrained journalists.
- Develop long-term journalist relationships for consistent engagement.

Adapt to media and translation needs

- Regularly update and translate press materials for diverse audiences.



- Focus on local and regional news for partner media outlets.
- Simplify technical language for generalist and mainstream media.

Localise outreach efforts

- Enhance NGI visibility in focus countries with localised strategies.
- Adapt to changing media landscapes, including new outlets and personnel shifts.

Assert NGI's relevance

- Continuously highlight the NGI's role in EU topics to stakeholders.
- Use the European Commission association to enhance credibility.

Expand media outreach

- Diversify media lists to include varied publications and influencers.
- Utilise innovative content formats like multimedia storytelling.

Increase engagement in complex markets

- Tailor strategies for complex markets like Germany and France.
- Build relationships with key media outlets in these regions.

Develop FAQ resources for journalists

- Create and update FAQs on NGI policy topics for media use.

3.4 ONLINE PRESENCE AND COMMUNICATION

As discussed in deliverable 3.2, the NOO has actively executed its content dissemination strategy, utilising both owned and earned channels, with the NGI.eu portal serving as the primary gateway to the NGI online communication ecosystem. The NGI4ALL.E consortium has helped promote communication efforts of other NGI projects, but also consistently crafted and published original content to highlight various NGI activities. Notably, a series of several blog posts, featured under the 'Who's NGI' section, were successfully published during this reporting period, besides several news items, newsletters and many social media posts across primarily the NGI Online community, X (former Twitter), LinkedIn, YouTube, Mastodon and more recently PeerTube.

Looking ahead:

For online communication and outreach, the NOO team has learned the critical importance of an adaptable strategy that responds to the audience behaviour, platform dynamics, and emerging trends. Utilising diverse and targeted content has proven effective in extending reach, while the regular monitoring of website and social media metrics was essential for informed decision-making.

While the Facebook and Instagram NGI channels have been basically dismissed, new ones have gained importance, in particular Mastodon and PeerTube. The move towards open source decentralised social media will be further explored and other platforms / channels might be established and exploited - e.g., Diaspora, Lemmit.

Moving forward, the team aims to enrich the content spectrum, focusing particularly on impact and success stories, working closely with NGI intermediaries and beneficiaries. Plans include integrating interactive elements into both the website and social media platforms to foster greater user engagement. Expansion of the social media strategy to include decentralised



channels is also a priority, although traditional and mainstream channels will continue to be used. The NOO team will constantly monitor the metrics, ensuring that communication efforts are both effective and resonant with the target audience, aligning also with mainstream policy-driven efforts, but also with grass-root initiatives as highlighted in deliverable D4.2.

For what concerns the NGI website, it is clear that the portal should focus on compelling content that resonates with the audience, while also employing analytics to study visitor behaviour and preferences. To do this, we will continue and increase the use of techniques such as call-to-actions, surveys and internal links to increase the time spent on the website. Improving the newsletter subscription process and including event-specific web pages is also crucial for maintaining a consistent online presence, but we believe that the greatest potential will come from featuring and promoting new NGI Impact Stories and solutions. As a matter of fact, availability of open source NGI technologies and innovations has the potential to attract many individuals and organisations that can adopt and further develop what NGI innovators are delivering.

In this respect, target promo campaigns will run to increase visibility of the online NGI innovations catalogue, but also to promote the NGI Impact Stories and the online NGI Innovator Meetups as opportunities to learn further about the benefits of concrete solutions and technologies the NGI is releasing.

Editorial activities - news / newsletters / blogs

The NOO has been following up on the curation and promotion of several news, newsletters and blogs all along the project's duration either by elaborating on new content or by amplifying the communication of other NGI projects.

Specific attention has been devoted to promoting NGI achievements, NGI innovators, NGI events, but also other relevant news in the policy, research and innovation scene.

As already mentioned, the Who's NGI Blog has been an intense activity, consuming more resources than expected to sort out less blog posts than planned. This however, has been an important learning factor. Engaging innovators and chasing after them to interview them has not always been very efficient and the fact approval of the posts had to go through several iterations slowed down the process quite significantly. More recently, in coordination with the EC, it was decided to focus more on Impact Stories (see below) that is one of the reasons why on the Who's NGI Blog front less frequent posts are planned, even though we hope that with the start of the NGI Pilots and their planned open calls new impetus might come also for the Who's NGI Blog series.

Looking ahead.

The previously planned "NGI Awards Programme" concept has been replaced, in agreement with the EC and other NGI projects, by a more inclusive initiative called "NGI Impact Stories". The main goal is to recognise exceptional NGI innovators' contributions. RIAs, past and present, can share their perspectives on NGI's impact by participating in NGI Forum Editions or contributing to the NGI Website and NOC platform. The NOO will help put together and promote these stories (a dedicated section is being added to the NGI Portal), inspiring newcomers and promoting NGI solutions.

The shift from the "NGI Awards Programme" to "NGI Impact Stories" underscored the importance of flexibility and adapting strategies, showcasing the need for continual strategy evolution.



Central to the initiative was inclusivity and collaboration, fostering a strong community spirit and ensuring ongoing participation. The multifaceted promotion strategy effectively reached a broad audience by utilising channels like the NOC, LinkedIn, and Twitter and employing diverse content types like banners, images, and videos.

The NGI Forum 2023 played a crucial role in this initiative, serving as a platform for storytelling and audience engagement. Planning for the event's content extended its impact beyond its duration. Detailed content planning and management highlighted the importance of organisation in effectively engaging the target audience.

There is more potential to explore the NGI Impact Stories to unite the community and show the human side of NGI's technology and innovation. These Impact Stories will likely become even more important for guiding and encouraging the community by sharing NGI's values, activities, and goals through real use cases. Their good response at the NGI Forum suggests they have much more to offer in the future.

NGI Influencer Programme

As a result of discussions with the EC, aiming for a stronger alignment with the current NGI outlook and strategy towards Digital Commons, the previous “*NGI Ambassadors Programme*” concept was replaced by a more streamlined and horizontal “*NGI Influencer Programme*” setup in accordance with the Work Package 3 objectives.

The main goal of this activity is to grow the general interest in the NGI by engaging different audiences and significantly increase the legitimacy of NGI within the developer and innovator open source communities, as well as to address and engage more systematically policymakers, Internet end users and the media in the NGI conversations.

In order to do so, the NGI Influencer Programme is recruiting practitioners and thought leaders with online presence and proven expertise and experience within the realm of NGI that allow for the NGI vision, objectives, results and activities to be disseminated within an heterogenous ecosystem and beyond by also tapping into adjacent communities.

Within their 4-month lasting programme activities, NGI Influencers are asked to disseminate any specific NGI activities such as open calls or events as well as via specific posts, driving conversations in topics of relevance aligned with their expertise. Also, NGI Influencers may organise NGI Talk webinars about specific topics of their choice, usually based on their expertise or hold an interview with another NGI stakeholder of their choice in order to animate conversations that address relevant topics for their audience.

Ongoing recruitment of potential influencers allows NGI4ALL.E to keep a live candidate pool list, gathering suggestions from the EC, the NGI RIAs and other NGI community members, including NGI beneficiaries. Every 4 months the Selection Committee consisting of the NGI4ALL.E consortium partners selects 3 influencers by consensus or 2/3 majority out of this list until a total of 10-12 influencers is reached by the end of the CSA's activities.

Looking ahead:

The NGI Influencers Programme has revealed that attracting and engaging Influencer candidates presents a significant challenge. Individuals who are either current or former NGI beneficiaries, particularly those active in the Digital Commons and open-source domains, demonstrate a greater inclination to participate. A critical aspect of future success lies in ensuring that all NGI beneficiaries are thoroughly informed about NGI's mission and activities. The strategic plan going forward involves persistent recruitment and integration of new



influencers every four months. The programme aims to encourage these influencers to commit long-term, contributing to broader discussions through NGI Talks and interviews, thereby expanding the scope and impact of their involvement.

The following action points have been carried out so far:

- Programme setup
- First influencer recruitment
- Selection of first batch of influencers
- Onboarding and briefing of first batch of influencers
- First posts by influencers and NGI Talks are being organised - Q1 2024.
- Ongoing influencer recruitment for next rounds.

For more detailed information see deliverable D3.2, section 4: NGI Influencer Programme.

3.5 EVENTS ORGANISATION AND PARTICIPATION

NGI4ALL.E ambition for the start of the project was to grow the NGI Forum in size and diversity, with higher participation of NGI innovators and under-represented groups, ensuring gender balance, while opening up to end users and policy makers. The objective was also to ensure inclusivity and gender balance at all our events.

The NGI Outreach office has organised or co-organised numerous events (explained and detailed in D3.2.) and has provided support to several events organised by third parties. The primary goal during these initial 18 months of the project was to ensure the **visibility and dynamism** of NGI. Additionally, there was an emphasis on re-establishing connections within the NGI community through in-person events.

Despite the multitude of events (hybrid, on-site, or online) available on various NGI-related topics, we can observe a genuine attraction and enthusiasm for in-person or hybrid events, particularly within the community we aim to engage. These events provide participants with opportunities to exchange ideas, network, share experiences, and, of course, foster collaborations.

The NGI Forum 2023 proved to be a major success, as on-site participants, including high-level representatives, remained engaged throughout the entire event, actively interacting with their peers.

The NGI Forum agenda was meticulously designed **by and for** the NGI community, transforming it into a dynamic, compelling, and participatory experience.

This personalised approach not only contributed to the success of the event but also emphasised the importance of **community involvement** in shaping the direction and atmosphere of NGI-related events. Overall, the strong turnout and positive engagement at the NGI Forum 2023 underscored the value and impact of fostering in-person connections within the NGI community.

NGI's principles, opportunities, solutions, and actions were also presented in several venues. Two events were organised directly by the NOO (two editions of the Beers4Change event taking part on 2nd March and Nov 22nd where the project was presented and the funding opportunities were shared with a mixed audience of innovators); four additional events have



been third parties' ones (Presentation introducing Women in NGI at STEM Women Congress in December 2022, Presentation at 3rd Data Feminism Conference at la CIBA on April 14 2023, a Webinar Fostering Women in NGI with women entrepreneurs community from 22@ - April 27th and the Workshop with CodeWomen on June 19th)

Looking ahead:

Learnings from past NGI events highlight that while in-person engagement proves more interactivity and networking, it incurs higher costs, particularly in locations like Brussels. **Collaborative involvement** across various NGI projects is essential for effective event participation and the focus will be given to collaboration for the next events.

Addressing the diverse needs of the ecosystem requires a strategic approach in organizing a spectrum of events that vary in terms of size, type, and location.

Recognizing and accommodating the different interests, and requirements of a diverse community is crucial for creating an effective and inclusive engagement strategy.

Large-scale events offer the opportunity for extensive networking, knowledge exchange, and collaboration while smaller events provide more focused thematic where participants can delve into specific topics, engage in deeper discussions, and establish meaningful connections within niche areas of interest.

The future strategy emphasises the incorporation of interactive sessions, including round-table discussions and workshops, into event formats. The NOO will continue to focus on showcasing innovators and their success stories more prominently. The strategy also includes enhancing networking opportunities and conducting workshops led by accomplished innovators.

A priority will be placed on representing NGI effectively at various events through engaging presentations, informational stands, and tailored materials.



4 NGI COMMUNITY BUILDING UPDATES

4.1 NGI ONLINE COMMUNITY PLATFORM

The NGI Online Community (NOC) includes a 'New Highlights' section and an updated Landing Page, which improve user navigation. By the end of 2023, the NOC's membership had increased from 3188 (July 2022) to 3395 (December 2023). Initiatives like the 'NGI Impact Stories' and the 'NGI Innovator Meetups' are anticipated to extend the community's reach further. An overview of the progress is provided hereby and a more detailed report can be found in deliverable D2.2 Stakeholders Engagement Report.

Highlights and Community Engagement: The Highlights Section, prominently featured on the NOC home screen, receives daily updates highlighting the most pertinent and engaging content. This section enhances user interaction by displaying new posts since a user's last visit. It ensures that the most timely and captivating material is given prominence. To aid recognition and non-intrusive visibility, each new content update is accompanied by a thumbnail of the poster's profile picture, enriching the user experience with familiarity and convenience.

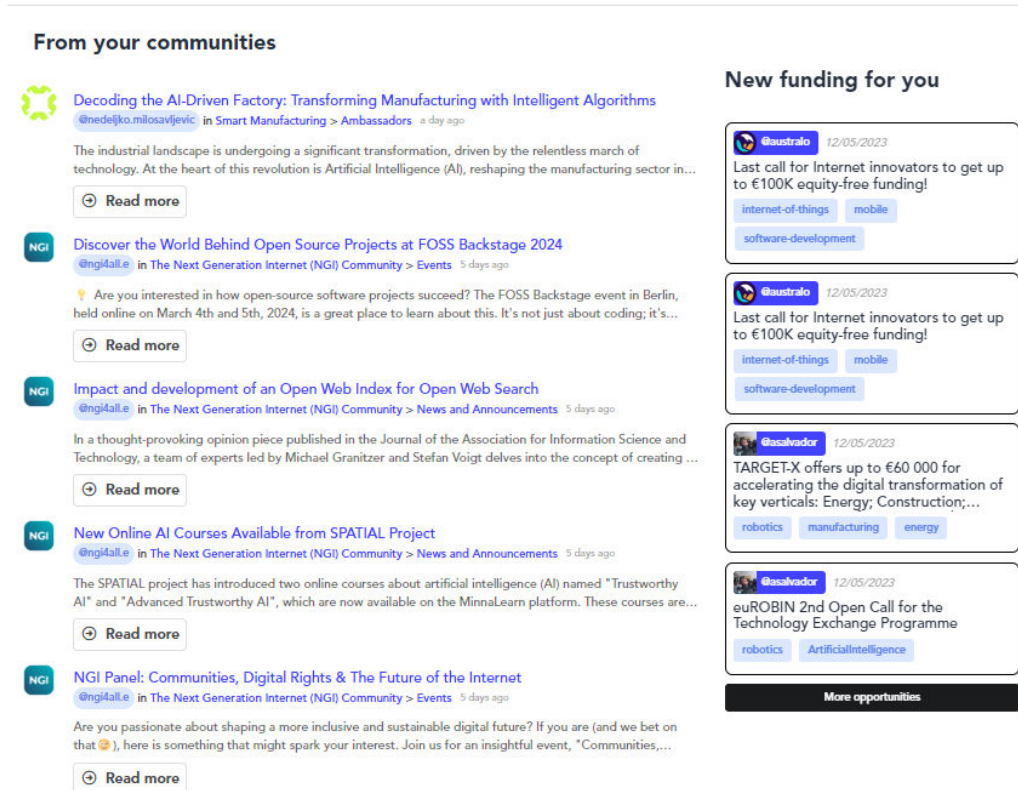


FIGURE 1: SNAPSHOT OF THE HIGHLIGHTS SECTION OF THE NGI ONLINE COMMUNITY (NOC)

Monthly Community Digest: Subscribers increased from 922 to 1,111 (in between September 2022 and December 2023), maintaining an open rate above 40%. The digest features the best community content and exclusive material, fostering continuous learning and engagement.



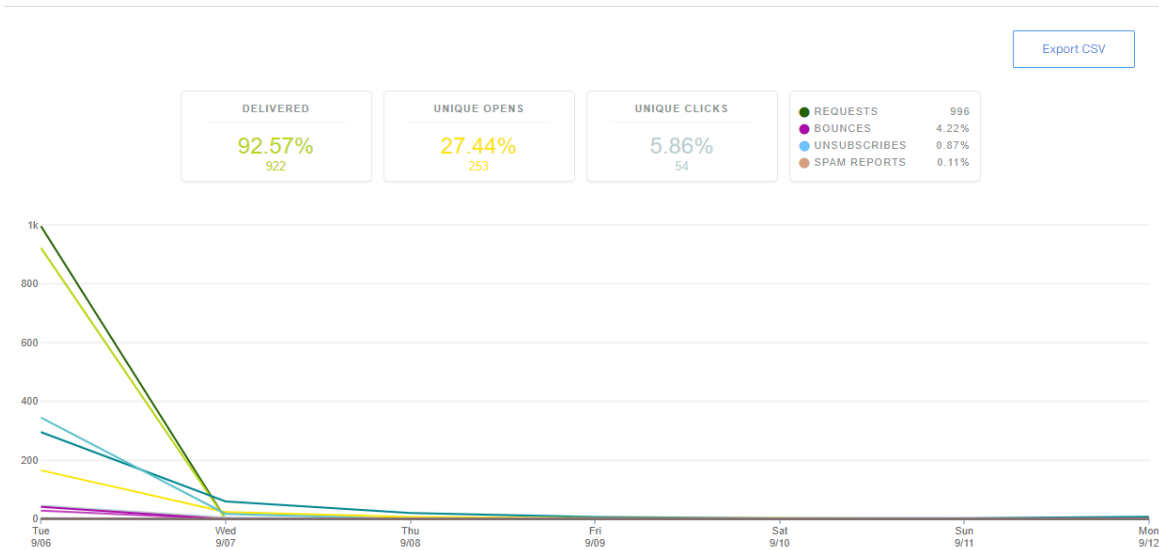
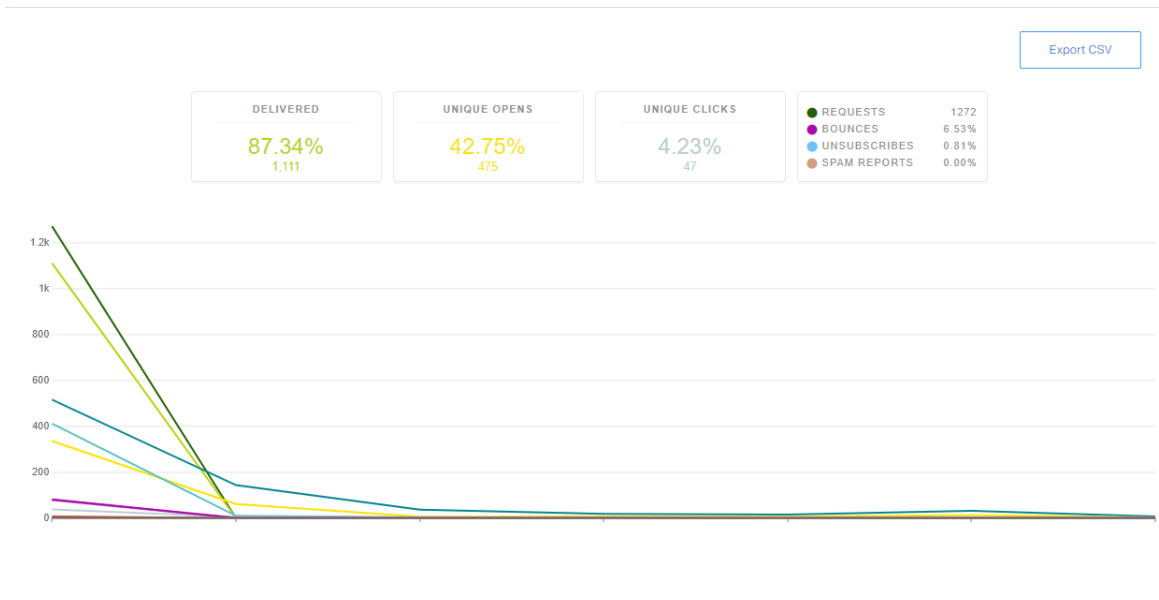


FIGURE 2: STATISTICS FOR THE MONTHLY COMMUNITY DIGEST

Surveys and User Feedback: In our ongoing efforts to improve the NGI Community, we conducted pivotal surveys on October 24, 2022, and February 14, 2023. These surveys, integral to our strategy, focused on evaluating the relevance and utility of the community’s content, the simplicity of user interactions, and overall member satisfaction with the community’s structure and offerings. They also included specialised questions to conduct statistical analyses, an essential step towards cultivating an inclusive and diverse community. This targeted approach allows us to gather comprehensive data on our members’ diverse preferences, backgrounds, and experiences, enabling us to customise the community to effectively cater to a wide array of user needs.

Additionally, each month, in the Community Digest, **we encourage members to contact us with any suggestions for improvements to the Community**. This ongoing dialogue ensures that our efforts align with our members' evolving needs and aspirations, fostering a continually adaptive and responsive community environment. Our commitment through these surveys reiterates our goal of fostering an inviting and comprehensive environment for every member of the NGI Community.

Our activities have been well-received, as indicated by our surveys' over 40% open rate. This suggests that the NGI Community actively engages with and appreciates our content, showing that our efforts to create a diverse and user-friendly community are effective.

In addition to our successful outreach to open-source communities, which has made the NOC more diverse, profiles from various groups were included and the influencer selection (see D3.2) adapted accordingly in order to incorporate a wider range of voices. This approach is increasing the appeal of our platform, as evidenced by the growing number of subscribers to our Monthly Community Digest and their keen interest in our NGI Impact Stories. These stories, showcasing among other elements, the impact created by innovators from within the open source community, are helping to carry on transforming the NOC into an even more vibrant and inclusive space for sharing and learning.

One of the main lessons learned is the importance of staying attuned to our community's dynamics. As a result, we are planning to send out surveys more frequently in order to even better adapt to the community's changing needs and interests.

Looking ahead to the next year, the focus is going to be on further promoting open-source events, expanding the NGI Impact Stories initiative and incorporating the upcoming NGI Innovator Meetups activities (see deliverable D2.2).

Community Growth and Innovator Support

- By December 2023, monthly growth had been consistently experienced, with community users reaching 3,395 and Community Digest subscribers totalling 1,111. This steady progress brings the platform closer to the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of 4,000.
- Each Digest includes a Call-to-Action linking to a repository of articles on maximising community benefits (meta content to educate the members), **ensuring continuous learning and engagement** (NOC wiki, tutorials, etc).
- Regarding the "Enable dedicated matchmaking activities for NGI funded solutions (NGI Accelerator tasks)" section, we are soon starting the **NGI Innovator Meetups**. These meetups will provide a platform for innovators to discuss their specific needs related to matchmaking and additional support within the NGI ecosystem beyond what they already receive in their respective RIAs (Research and Innovation Actions). The aim is to foster connections and collaborations, enhancing the overall impact and effectiveness of NGI-funded solutions by creating a more cohesive and supportive environment for innovators within the NGI network.
- The community regularly **announces and disseminates the achievements of innovators**, creating specific campaigns for this purpose through social media and the Community Digest. An [instant-access tag](#) has been implemented for these achievements, streamlining the search process.
- We have established specific areas within the community platform for promoting [funding opportunities](#) and [services](#) for the NGI Community. These spaces are updated



weekly with regular contributions of new content, ranging from three to five pieces each week. This ensures innovators are continually informed of **the latest opportunities, news and resources**, fostering growth and development. By providing these dedicated spaces, we can more effectively support our innovators in their endeavours, helping them access vital resources and expand their impact in the NGI ecosystem.

- Community members receive regular benefits through specific publications, reinforcing member loyalty and participation ([example 1](#) & [example 2](#)).

Focus on Open Source and Media Engagement

The community's strong orientation towards Open Source is evident, with [over 100 publications in the last six months](#) focusing on updates and events in this domain (and closely related ones).

The NOC has created [a space](#) for individuals with a strong media presence, offering them an opportunity to join the ecosystem through a benefits program. This initiative diversifies the community's expertise and expands its reach and influence.

The NGI Community has demonstrated a dynamic and user-centric approach in its latest initiatives. The focus on enhancing user engagement, promoting innovators, and fostering a diverse and inclusive environment has been evident. With the community boasting nearly 3,400 members, the results show a thriving ecosystem conducive to collaboration and innovation.

Given this current membership, the target to reach 4,000 interacting users, representing a 35% increase from the project's start, appears well within reach. This progression reflects the success of these strategies, indicating that the key performance indicator (KPI) for community growth is on track to be achieved.

4.2 ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN COMMUNICATION

As described in Deliverables 1.1, 4.1, and 4.2, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are the backbone of the NGI. Dedicated activities have become an explicit and integral part of the work and approach followed and promoted by the NGI Outreach Office. As a recap, the work on EDI is driven by three main objectives:

1. Making the **NGI better accessible and more inclusive**, targeting under-represented groups and aiming at diverse participation in terms of profiles, gender, abilities, and nationality.
2. Ensure **increased participation of women researchers and innovators into the NGI**, while promoting the NGI funded women and their work, in close collaboration with NGI intermediaries (i.e., the NGI RIAs).
3. **Fostering increased end users' engagement** with the twofold objective of better assessing their needs in terms of a trustworthy, secure and sustainable internet, and broadly promoting the NGI solutions.

To address these objectives, the EDI strategy is drawn upon five pillars of action (see Deliverable 4.1): 1) NGI Resources and Tools; 2) NGI Innovators; 3) NGI Online Community; 4) Women in NGI; and 5) Communities and End-users involvement. In summary, the next



subsections provide, for each of the five pillars listed above, a recap of the plan, the actions undertaken so far, as well as an overview of the preliminary findings achieved at the time of writing this deliverable. It is noted that a detailed work plan including time-based breakdown of specific tasks to address each pillar is provided in Deliverable 4.1, while the progress to date and the preliminary findings are presented in Deliverable 4.2 (December 2023).

NGI Resources and Tools include all online artefacts that allow individuals or organisations to engage with NGI and its RIAs. These include applicants to the RIAs, actual innovators and people interested in joining the Community or learning about NGI outputs and outcomes. The following resources and tools have been defined and validated within the scope of this pillar: (1) the NGI website; (2) “Join NGI” (i.e. the digital assets and the resulting process for individuals to join the NGI Online Community and to subscribe to the NGI Newsletter); and (3) the Brand Guidelines available in the NGI Drive for innovators including the Innovators Toolkit, the NGI Templates and Graphics.

To-date, the accessibility tests conducted revealed no significant issues, and alignment with the W3C Web Content Accessibility guidelines¹. Similarly, as extensively described in Deliverable 4.2, no accessibility problems have been encountered with respect to the Innovators’ Database, the NOC, and in relation to access and content consumption across other channels.

Furthermore, specific actions have been implemented to test accessibility features integrated in the digital tools, specifically the website. For instance, a testing session has been organised with a community of blind individuals to test the plug-in integrated for visually impaired people. This evolved into a broader session on navigability and understandability of the web as a whole for screen readers. Findings and changes in the web structure have been promptly implemented as a result of this interaction.

NGI Innovators Pillar The focus within this second pillar consists in understanding if underrepresented groups exist among NGI Innovators, who these are, and fostering their engagement with the NGI Program. From a practical point of view, an integrated living document in the form of a spreadsheet-based database has been built and continuously updated outlining all data available about: 1) profile of applicants (country and organisation type); and 2) profile of innovators (country, gender, and organisation type). Actions are and will be taken throughout the project in an iterative manner, according to the results of this continuous analysis. This includes:

- Explore who is underrepresented and identify examples of potential actors in Europe (see Deliverable 4.2).
- Conduct 20 semi-structured interviews (by now 13 have been run) including both innovators and those actors related to groups that are currently underrepresented. As of today, public sector agencies and representatives, innovators from eastern EU countries, and women innovators are the main target for this effort.
- Provide recommendations to the NGI RIAs for the overall open call process to be more consistent with EDI principles.
- Recommend geographically strategic hubs to be leveraged to amplify communication and dissemination of future open calls in places where so far outreach and success (i.e. number of funded proposals) has fallen short. Partially aligned to this purpose, Deliverable 4.2 presents the ongoing efforts with respect to two relevant mapping exercises being conducted, i.e. concerning: (1) relevant networks, organisations and initiatives acting as representatives of society in developing a safer and human-centric

¹ Full guide available at: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>



digital world; and (2) existing networks, organisations and initiatives devoted to women and all gender participation in technology-related discourses and developments.

- Assist with targeted communication for future open calls addressing diversity challenges identified.
- Contribute towards a wider and more diverse NGI community among which future calls can be promoted and disseminated (from effort in NGI community - see next subsection).
- Propose new topics to extend diversity in participation in NGI RIAs (from the effort planned with end-users, see below).

At the time of writing this document, significant progress with respect to this pillar has been achieved. First, an extensive analysis of the current situation with respect to diversity among innovators based on the data available has been performed (primarily country, type of entity, and type/category of solution implemented) and presented at the NGI Forum 2023. From this analysis (described at a great level of granularity in Deliverable 4.2) the tasks moved on with the identification of underrepresented groups to be subsequently targeted through custom communication and interviews. The latter are being valuable to further understand their interests and needs, and act accordingly. Also, as part of this effort, NGI is being presented at public sessions (in addition to those venues where currently underrepresented groups typically gather), both within and beyond the (open) software development field.

The NGI Online Community Pillar. The effort within the NGI Online Community is similar in nature to the previous pillar. Indeed, as explained in Deliverables 1.1 and 4.1, through systematically exploring currently underrepresented groups in the NGI Online Community, new actions are being designed to identify, engage, and involve new groups, cohorts, and individuals thus enriching diversity of participation in NGI at different levels. The work is therefore divided in two main stages: 1) analysing the database to identify underrepresented groups (based on the data available, i.e. gender, organisation type and general interest); 2) target those groups subsequently. Other actions include:

- Identify actors in Europe related to those groups that result to be underrepresented.
- Targeted communication and promotion to those underrepresented groups' channels.
- Recommendations for improvement in the Online Community design and processes for it to be more valuable for members, easier to access, and to provide a more inclusive experience.

Multiple additional methods are being leveraged for this endeavour. The aforementioned interviews are also being leveraged to gather opinions and experiences on how useful the NOC is and how this can be improved to better serve NGI Innovators and partners.

As of today, a similar effort as compared to the one undertaken for innovators to attract more diverse profiles to the NGI ecosystem has been carried out, complemented by an analysis of accessibility of the channel and its features. Specific reflections are proposed in Deliverable 4.2 with respect to engaging public sector entities as both collaborators and end-users of NGI solutions as well as on the nature of the community given the very peculiar ensemble of stakeholders (i.e. open source developers). The document also includes more specific reflections on the structure and the purpose of the NOC itself.

Women in NGI Pillar. Consistent with this scope, Deliverable 1.1 and 4.1 outlined its relevant building blocks. In addition, specific objectives formulated towards promoting NGI women innovators include undertaking 10 interviews to women entrepreneurs and ensuring significant representation of women in all NGI-related efforts.



To support these actions, and as an additional contribution from this task, a more open mapping exercise is being conducted to identify individuals or groups of women researchers and entrepreneurs involved in aspects concerning the future of the internet. Deliverable 4.2 presents the preliminary results of this mapping exercise conceived as a living document with the details about each women-led communities, associations, and organisations involved in NGI related topics (see Deliverable 4.2). Communication-oriented partnerships are also being established with those entities identified in the mapping exercise that are involved in women entrepreneurial ecosystems, to increase outreach of NGI-related content to those cohorts. For example, the Women Community at the 22@ Network has agreed to include NGI-related news (mainly open calls) in their future newsletters. Furthermore, women have been targeted, engaged, and upon agreement, proposed to be included in the list of influencers' candidates (in alignment with WP3).

In addition, an extensive analysis of the *as-is* situation based on available data has been conducted, showcasing that, in total, 86.2% (i.e. 852 of the 988 innovators analysed) identify themselves as males, while 13.8% as females across all teams. Women are present in 46.7% of the NGI innovators teams, while 53.3% count with the participation of males only, but women only lead 7.8% of the total teams analysed. Corrective measures are being proposed concurrently.

Further actions to date include, four Women in Tech Mentoring sessions delivered to foster women engagement in NGI: Women in NGI @ STEM Women Congress on 15th December 2022; a webinar fostering the presence of Women in NGI with the women entrepreneurs community from 22@ on April 27th 2023, a presentation including NGI opportunities for entrepreneurs at Data Feminism Days in La Ciba (14th April 2023) and a CodeWomen Workshop celebrated in June 19th 2023. The NOO also developed an ongoing living document mapping existing organisations and networks of women entrepreneurs and women in tech kind of initiatives. Some are selected for interviews. Preliminary findings from the latter are presented in Deliverable 4.2 together with insights on how NGI can address existing gaps and barriers thus fostering women participation and engagement in its ecosystem.

End-Users Engagement Pillar. As extensively described in Deliverable 4.1, within the last working pillar, the perspectives, concerns, visions and desires of end-users and grassroots communities are being co-created and structured in an integrated taxonomy. The resulting future EU agenda will be therefore aligned with the societal demand for a more inclusive, trustable, and safe future internet ecosystem. The focus is therefore on extending NGI-related stakeholders to end-users and grassroots communities.

As of December 2023, 13 of the 20 planned semi-structured interviews have been conducted; one participatory workshop has been carried out with a community of blind people, and four additional are to be conducted (two of which with schools) before the end of the project. Preliminary findings include an emerging list of relevant topics for the future of NGI based on the societal demand for a safer, greener, sustainable and more human centric interests. These revolve around specific topics (e.g. AI and ethics, VPNs, Screen Readers, Voice-Based Captcha Codes, DNS among others) or recommended practices (e.g. wider engagement during development process, challenge based open calls, think and act together with policy, fight polarisation and centralization of power mechanisms, etc.).

In summary, the work across the five pillars presented is iterative and contributes towards equity, diversity and inclusion across the NGI Program. Importantly, the results of this effort are dependent on the availability of data and level of responsiveness/collaboration of the various NGI stakeholders, including the NGI RIAs, the NGI innovators, as well as the EC and other organisations that will be consulted/involved - including media players.



Concluding, the effort in EDI is aligned with and being informed by other relevant actions across other elements of the overall work plan presented in this deliverable. Specific attention is being given to the ongoing Communication Audit as well as the overall communication and outreach strategy (WP3). **As a result of this work, we foresee NGI as a more accessible, inclusive, and societally relevant programme and ecosystem.**

4.3 NGI COACHING AND TRAINING

As part of the services the NGI4ALL.E offers to promote the NGI initiative more effectively, the ‘coaching’ and ‘training’ activities focus on providing dedicated guidance specifically geared at creating **more effective dissemination and promotional efforts across the whole programme, but also to ensure alignment in terms of branding and storytelling.**

The overall purpose of the NGI communication training is to share a better aware communication culture leveraging marketing concepts and research for more effective impact creation. Our training aims at supporting each NGI project to better communicate their own activities and contribute to the overall NGI communication impact. It is also about creating a common communication culture, and thus better aligning the various communication initiatives of all stakeholders. The NGI Outreach Office offers thematic training courses open to all the NGI communication and project managers, as well as ad hoc support if necessary or requested.

The pedagogical approach systematically adopted allows the NGI Outreach Office to engage all participants, regardless of their level of expertise. Training courses are usually introduced by a problem to be solved. This is followed by a presentation of the levers that can be used to solve the problem. The presenter then systematically gets down to business, demonstrating - with the help of examples - how to implement the theoretical advice. The training courses always end with a question-and-answer session during which the participants can express their remarks or additional questions. The approach is usually very visual and engaging, even on the most complex topics.

During the previous project (NGI4ALL), the training programme was aimed exclusively at CSAs and RIAs. The training sessions, which lasted 60 minutes, were delivered at an average rate of eight sessions per year. They were promoted exclusively through the NGI Comms TF mailing list.

While this approach met and exceeded most of NGI's objectives in terms of the quality of the online communication provided by the beneficiaries, it became apparent that there was considerable room for improvement in several areas:

- **Target audience:** as we participated in various bootcamps organised by other CSAs, it became clear that third-party projects, i.e., innovators who are beneficiaries of NGI support, were very much in demand for this type of communication training to promote their outcomes, solutions and products.
- **Frequency:** given the relatively slow initial frequency of training, it appeared that some essential training (e.g., GDPR compliance) came much too late in the life cycle of the beneficiary projects.
- **Duration:** training participants regretted a certain lack of interaction during the training, mainly due to their brevity (60 minutes).



Based on this experience, the NGI4ALL.E approach has been fundamentally improved. The training programme now consists of **twelve topics** (listed in Table 3), delivered in **ninety minutes** (rather than sixty), on a **weekly basis** (almost every Wednesday, from 11:00 to 12:30). This training programme will therefore be fully delivered in three months, which is much more in line with the needs of the beneficiaries. To accommodate projects that start later in the year, the full programme will be delivered **two to three times a year**.

The duration of ninety minutes allows for more interactivity and a more in-depth exchange between participants and trainers.

Another great novelty is that this programme is now **open to third-party projects**.

Following a recommendation made by the reviewers of the first CSA, we have also integrated a **permanent satisfaction survey** into the training cycle. Participants who wish to obtain a PDF of the presentation must fill in a short form (three minutes maximum) which allows us to improve our approach on a permanent basis and in real time.

Finally, participation in the training requires **prior registration** (Tito platform), which allows us to see who has registered, and from which project the participants are issued. The platform currently used to deliver the courses (BigBlueButton) also provides us with very accurate monitoring of participants, including their login and logout times.

The NGI communication training programme is now promoted via several complementary channels:

- The NGI portal which has a now dedicated section.
- The mailing list "comms@ngi.eu".
- The NGI Newsletter.
- The NGI Online Community Digest.
- The NGI's social channels (Twitter, LinkedIn and Mastodon),
- The social media channels of the RIAs themselves whose mission is to promote the programme to the beneficiaries of NGI funding.



TABLE 1: TRAINING PROGRAMME (2022-2025)

<p>THE NGI ECOSYSTEM MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>11th January 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>COMMUNICATION STRATEGY MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>25th January 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>STORYTELLING MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>1st February 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>CONTENT STRATEGY MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>22nd February 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>
<p>SETTING UP A USER-CENTRED WEBSITE MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>1st March 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>8th March 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY & MARKETING MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>15th March 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>ENGAGEMENT TACTICS MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>22nd March 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>
<p>ANALYTICS MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>29th March 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>ONLINE PITCHING MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>5th April 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>GDPR MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>12th April 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>	<p>DIGITAL TRENDS & WEB 3.0 MADE SIMPLE</p> <p>19th April 2023 11.00h CET</p> <p>REGISTER</p>

4.4 IMPACT, EXPLOITATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Under the lead of Task 1.4, the Impact, Exploitation and Sustainability Working Group (WG) involves the NGI RIAs. The group meets on a monthly basis and is responsible for defining the way the NGI initiative drives impact and sustainability with the intention to enable opportunities for the open-source solutions developed/supported by NGI funding to be taken up by external parties interested in piloting as well as ensuring that open-source policy continues to thrive.

So far, 10 WG meetings have taken place. During the 5 first meetings, the group, together with the project officer, analysed and discussed its initial setup, now aiming for a stronger alignment with the current NGI outlook and strategy towards Digital Commons, including

values and best practices from the wider open source community. As a result, the previous points set out to be addressed within the WG have been updated as follows (see amendment to the Grant Agreement, section 3.1.2, WP1, Task 1.4):

- How to categorise assets resulting out of third party and project results;
- How to best showcase these assets for communication and exploitation purposes;
- How to define impact metrics to understand which NGI beneficiaries are paving the path for the future of the internet and support them via initiatives like the NGI Impact Stories and NGI Innovator Meetups;
- How best to set up a matchmaking process for the NGI beneficiaries with NGI Enablers (public and private Digital Commons stakeholders, citizen grassroots organisations, investors, accelerators, etc).

The WG aims to provide insight as to what the NGI beneficiaries who have applied through their Open Calls require in terms of support in addition to the one received via their RIAs, so that the process of piloting the NGI Innovator Meetups to connect NGI innovators with enablers according to their needs.

Together with the support of NGI4ALL.e, the assets, stories and activities will continue to be communicated via the partners' communication platforms, the NOC and the NGI.eu portal. NGI beneficiaries will be engaged regularly by their RIA coordinators (the WG members) about the different initiatives such as the NGI Impact Stories and the NGI Innovator Meetups as well as interesting events for them to understand what are the existing opportunities to access funding and any other required support and matchmaking. Support services like pitching training will be offered to the beneficiaries on an on-demand basis to help prepare them for matchmaking opportunities with NGI Enablers.

Updates and Status

To date, ten WG meetings have taken place, nine of which were held online and one at the NGI Forum 2023 in Brussels - [meeting minutes](#) are shared in Cryptpad.

RIA assets & services

An initial gathering and analysis of available assets & services produced by the different RIAs took place during the early stages of the WG and the results can be found in the corresponding database on the [NGI Drive Document](#).

The NGI Impact Stories initiative

- Vision, concept and first milestones were discussed within the WG including gathering of NGI Impact Stories candidates from each RIA via their coordinators supported by the NGI Outreach office, firstly for the first public presentation of the initiative in the form of a showcase at the NGI Forum 2023 including 5 pitches and a workshop, and afterward the creation of a specific section on the official NGI website which is going to be populated continuously with the goal of bringing the public closer to NGI innovations and overall goals via impactful storytelling and real-life examples.
- At the time of writing, work on a first draft using one story is about to start and is planned to be discussed during the next NGI Impact, Exploitation and Sustainability Working Group meeting, including the definition of ongoing innovator outreach and



coaching format discussions with the goal of creating a consistent and sustainable series of Impact Stories publications during the coming months.

- For more detailed information please consult NGI4ALL.E_deliverable_2.2 NGI Stakeholders Engagement Report, section 7: NGI Impact Stories.

The NGI Innovator Meetups initiative

Its development is entering its final stages at the time of writing. The themed online meetup sessions are planned to become touchpoints for information exchange and support requests between innovators, developers, WG members/RIAs and the NGI Outreach Office substituting previously envisioned ePitching Sessions and info webinars. An outreach campaign to NGI innovators will be organised around different themes in order to adapt the session calendar as much as possible to the different needs, reinforcing and enhancing the community aspect including support, knowledge exchange and impact identification. The initiative was teased to NGI Innovators during the NGI Forum 2023 on the event's information screen and during the NGI workshop on day 2.



5 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The main lesson learnt in the first 18 months of the NGI4ALL.E project is that despite having grown increasingly acquainted with the NGI mission, values and ambition, we must keep agile in following its evolution, if we want communication and marketing activities to stay relevant and impactful.

The main transformation factors of the NGI initiative are constantly monitored and close collaboration with the EC and NGI projects representatives remain central to the NOO efforts. However, more can and should be done to better engage the NGI innovators in presenting and promoting their work to the outside world. This, we believe, is key to unleashing the potential of NGI solutions across a variety of RIA domains and market sectors.

What represents a key challenge for the NOO to have greater impact is the capability to follow the growth of the NGI community in its size and diversity. In this respect, to work in close collaboration with the ongoing NGI intermediaries and upcoming new projects will be essential. The continuous support of the NGI Unit is also crucial especially when reaching out to relevant stakeholders beyond the NGI ecosystem borders.

In the months to come, the NOO will keep working full steam on several aspects:

- Effectively onboarding the new NGI projects, via ad hoc support sessions, but also via the planned NGI Comms TF mailing list and calls.
- Boosting the NGI Impact Stories initiative - dedicated online section in the NGI portal, a blog series, dedicated online NGI Innovators Meetups, etc.
- Running the new NGI Communication training programme aiming at engaging as many NGI innovators as possible.
- Strengthen collaboration with the NGI Commons CSA so as to better reach out to policy-driven and regulatory efforts/stakeholders/initiatives.
- Continue publishing new NGI solutions via the online catalogue and increase the impact and uptake of the NGI solutions, by:
 - Leading and moderating the NGI Impact, Exploitation and Sustainability Working Group online meetings.
 - Reinforcing the promotion of the NGI innovators through the NOC, the press activities, the NGI influencers, the editorial and social media efforts.
- Organise new events or new sessions at events of relevance, in close collaboration with other NGI players.
- Animate social media channels, as well as running dedicated promotional campaigns to promote the NGI solutions.
- Continue to promote equity, diversity and inclusion, while fostering liaisons with relevant initiatives outside of the NGI in Europe and beyond.

