

## Regional project development assistance for the uptake of an Aragonese circular economy

# D3.2 - Criteria required by CE projects to bring private investors into their projects

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Abstract	The present document “D3.2 - Report criteria required by CE projects to bring private investors into their projects” describes the organisation and analyses the outcomes of the Final Beneficiaries Expert Committee meetings held within the RESOURCE project aiming at defining RESOURCE support to Circular Economy pilot projects. This deliverable intends to describe what those pilots are expecting in terms of support for accelerating their investment readiness.
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### Disclaimer

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESOURCE is a 36-months project funded by the European Union Horizon Europe programme aiming at developing a **methodology with personalised services to accelerate private financing of circular economy (CE) projects in raising 20 million euros**. This methodology will be tested in the Aragon region, as a pilot case, and will be replicated in European countries.

Co-creation workshops (CCW) have been organised by the RESOURCE team in order to design RESOURCE methodology for supporting CE pilot project's investment readiness and actually accelerate their fundraising.

This deliverable describes the three CCW organised and analyses their outcomes.

The RESOURCE Accelerator Programme focuses on providing comprehensive support for CE projects through environmental assessments, technical assessments, business, legal and regulatory support. The environmental assessments help companies with improving their environmental performance and align with sustainability standards, while the technical assessments ensure the projects are market-ready by evaluating their feasibility and innovation potential. Legal support aids projects in navigating complex regulations, enhancing compliance and reducing risks. This combination of services enhances the attractiveness of CE projects to investors and supports their successful implementation.

Strategic recommendations highlight the importance of a strong team, including sales and HR dimensions, and the establishment of advisory and scientific boards for added credibility. Customized frameworks addressing Circular Readiness Level (CRL), and sector-specific aspects are crucial for tailored project support. Emphasis is placed on thorough technical and business assessments, investor readiness, and business mentorship to avoid common pitfalls. Establishing partnerships with financial institutions and providing clear policy briefs on tax exemptions and legal recommendations further enhance project feasibility and investor confidence. This holistic approach aims to prepare CE projects comprehensively for investment and scaling, ensuring their long-term success and sustainability.

## Table of content

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
LIST OF FIGURES.....	4
ABBREVIATIONS .....	4
1 Introduction.....	5
1.1 Context and background .....	5
1.2 Purpose of this report .....	6
2 The Final Beneficiaries meetings.....	6
2.1 First FBCEM, Zaragoza, November 2022.....	6
2.2 Second FBCEM, Zaragoza April 2024 .....	7
2.3 Third FBCEM, Zaragoza June 2024.....	9
2.4 Individual meetings’ insights .....	11
3 Conclusion and final recommendations .....	11
4 Annexes .....	14
4.1 First FBCEM, Zaragoza, November 2022.....	14
4.2 Second FBCEM, Zaragoza April 2024 .....	16
4.3 Third FBCEM, Zaragoza June 2024.....	16

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - The RESOURCE methodology in 7 steps .....	5
Figure 2 - RESOURCE presented at the Circular Economy Day in Aragon, April 26 2024.....	7
Figure 3 - Workshop Café’s brainstorming session, at the Circular Economy Day.....	8

## ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	Meaning
<b>CCW</b>	Co-Creation Workshops
<b>CE</b>	Circular economy
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>FBCEM</b>	Final Beneficiaries Expert Committee meetings
<b>PDA</b>	Project Development Assistance
<b>PP</b>	Pilot Projects
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and medium enterprises
<b>WP</b>	Work Package

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context and background

Circularity is an essential aspect of the industry transformation towards resource-efficiency, climate neutrality and long-term competitiveness.

The RESOURCE project is studying private funding opportunities needed for supporting circular projects and facilitating their development. RESOURCE's overarching objective is to develop new Project Development Assistance (PDA) services to fund regional circular economy (CE) investment projects. More precisely RESOURCE objectives consist of:

- building an integrated expertise pool to support technically, economically, and legally the regional CE pilots small and medium enterprises (SMEs),
- developing innovative financing schemes and business models,
- launching concrete investments

The methodology developed for the RESOURCE project ensures the sustainability of those CE projects by potentially completing their private funding with other sources of financing (European, national, and regional public funds)

The RESOURCE methodology consists of seven steps:

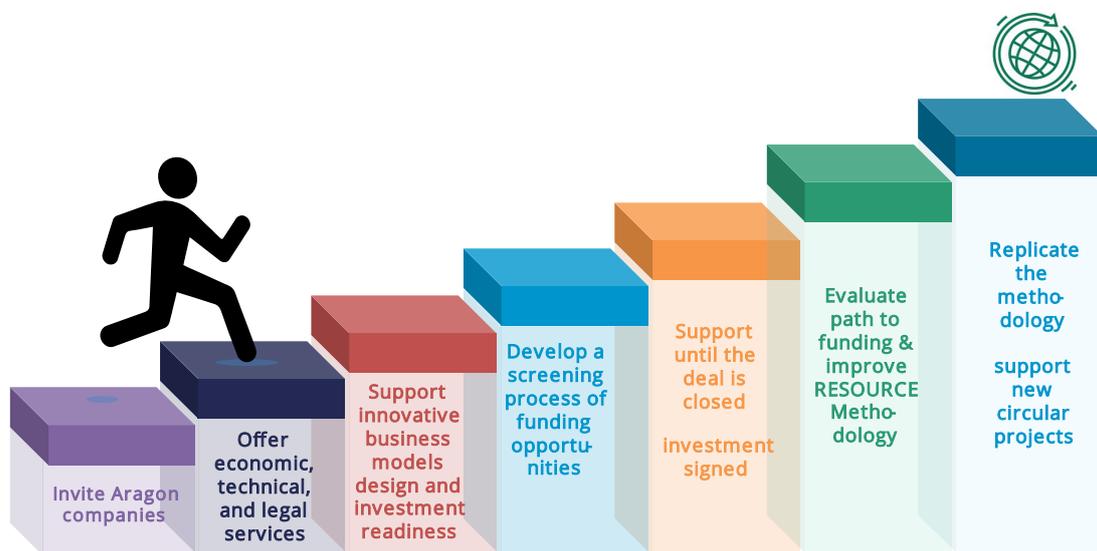


Figure 1 - The RESOURCE methodology in 7 steps

CE is a priority for the Region of Aragon. The Region has launched a manifestation of interest and identified a portfolio of circular projects in need of funding. Nine of these projects will serve as pilots in the RESOURCE project.

The strong interest coming from Aragonese companies to shift towards circular practices will guarantee a sustainable pipeline of projects to test the RESOURCE methodology. The overall objective of the RESOURCE project is to accelerate the development of the CE in Aragon and to reach €20M direct private investment in circular projects through the creation of a portfolio of PDA services, over a period of 36 months, until end of June 2025.

## 1.2 Purpose of this report

This document is developed as part of the RESOURCE project funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement N° 101060142. It represents Deliverable D3.2 - Report criteria required by CE projects to bring private investors into their projects of Work Package 3 (WP) – Pathways to investments.

This report highlights key lessons learned regarding the support expectations from CE projects for accelerating their investment readiness. The conclusions are based on close consultation with the main founders of CE projects supported by the Resource Accelerator. The insights were gathered from individual discussions with the circular pilot projects (PP) and collective meetings with the final beneficiaries' (section 2).

Recommendations derived from this feedback are presented in the conclusion (section 3, to refine of the RESOURCE methodology).

## 2 The Final Beneficiaries meetings

This section describes the organisation and analyses the outcomes of the Final Beneficiaries Expert Committee meetings (FBCEM) held within the RESOURCE project aiming at defining RESOURCE support to CE PP. It also exposes key insights gathered after individual meetings with the PP supported by RESOURCE team.

### 2.1 First FBCEM, Zaragoza, November 2022

At a first event organised in November 2022 in Zaragoza by the GoA with RESOURCE partners and a first set of selected pilots, several conclusions were drawn about pilots' expectations (see Annex 5.1 - First FBCEM, Zaragoza, November 2022).

The companies expressed a range of support needs and funding expectations. They highlighted **the importance of securing investment to advance their projects, particularly in moving from pre-industrial to industrial stages**. For instance, a startup focusing on sustainable agro-industry solutions mentioned a need for a short term first round of 500k€ to prepare for pre-industrialisation, followed by a second phase raising 1.5 million euros to transition to industrial-scale operations by 2025. The company emphasised the need for innovation in the reproduction and industrial automation of their processes to make their products more competitive against traditional soy-based feeds. After discussion, the founder understood the interest in a strategy shift: targeting 1.5 million (or 2 million) euros, to be

refined, from the beginning with milestones for a wider strategy planning, accelerating its development from the beginning.

Additionally, companies stressed the need for **strategic support in forming financing networks with a European reach, identifying suitable investors, and justifying private investments to leverage public funding**. Founders also highlighted the necessity of anticipating actions for partners requiring rapid investment and the importance of helping projects with existing investors secure public funding as a means of enhancing private fund leverage. Moreover, there was a call for workshops focused on investor expectations and effective communication strategies to better position their projects for funding opportunities.

Half of the initially selected companies finally decided to focus on public and non-dilutive funding, which led the RESOURCE partners to deploy a second stage of projects selection.

## 2.2 Second FBCEM, Zaragoza April 2024

On Friday, April 26, 2024, the Government of Aragon and CEEI co-organised the Circular Economy Day in Aragon (see Annex 5.2- Second FBCEM, Zaragoza April 2024), held in Zaragoza, under the motto “Towards a common strategy” in the frame of the RESOURCE project. It was held in collaboration with the ENERGAIA Foundation, the Zaragoza City Council and the Club of Rome, as members of the REDOL EU project, all demonstrating their support for a green and sustainable transition at the regional level.

### Methodology and event frame

This event aimed to explore innovative solutions for the CE in Aragon by bringing together institutions, experts, and over 80 companies. Here are the main strategic points: it highlighted real business cases and the RESOURCE project, focusing on CE-based production processes.



Figure 2 - RESOURCE presented at the Circular Economy Day in Aragon, April 26 2024

It was organised in collaborative mode with breakout workshops and workshop cafés that conducted brainstorming sessions to enhance financing for innovative CE projects and develop a common territorial strategy.



Figure 3 - Workshop Café's brainstorming session, at the Circular Economy Day

Discussions tackled 4 axes that are strategic for CE projects:

- Axis 1: Project identification and selection criteria:
  - Environmental and socioeconomic impact (e.g., energy viability, job creation).
  - Business model and economic viability (e.g., investment, cost savings).
  - Technological development and innovation level.
- Axis 2: Company needs and market transition:
  - Barriers and opportunities in legislation and regulations.
  - Proposals to facilitate market transfer.
  - Market trends in environmental and socioeconomic impact.
- Axis 3: Financing sources:
  - Common forms of investment for CE (e.g., self-financing, private financing).
  - Differences between financing CE projects and other projects.
  - Motivations for investing in CE based on participants' experiences.
- Axis 4: Sector opportunities in Aragon:
  - Ideas for creating subsectors based on CE principles (e.g., redesign, reduce, reuse, recycle).

### **Key outcomes to restrain**

Analysing the outcomes of this event both fundraising criteria and support expectations to accelerate this fundraising can be highlighted:

## 1. Fundraising Expectations

1. **Public subsidies need to be more flexible**, covering machinery costs and simplifying application processes. There should also be specific funding lines tailored to the needs of CE projects.
2. **Private Financing** should be more accessible, with investors considering the long-term sustainability and scalability of CE projects. There is a need for platforms and forums that connect investors with project owners.
3. Entrepreneurs require **better financial education** to understand and navigate funding opportunities effectively. This includes understanding the risks and benefits associated with different types of funding.
4. Financial institutions should incorporate **sustainability criteria** when evaluating projects. This can help ensure that only projects with genuine sustainable impact receive funding.
5. There should be **specific laws and tax incentives**, such as the Startup Law, which provides fiscal benefits to new and innovative companies.

## 2. Support Expectations

1. Companies need **access to training, advisory services, and mentoring** to facilitate market transfer and adoption of CE practices.
2. There should be **financial incentives** to encourage non-polluting practices or penalise contaminating ones. This includes subsidies and tax incentives for sustainable practices.
3. Access to **technological centres and support for the adoption of new technologies** are crucial. This includes the creation of internal procedures to foster a culture of CE.
4. There should be **communication and awareness efforts** to promote the benefits of the CE to the public and within the industry. This includes showcasing successful initiatives to inspire others.
5. **Improved coordination at European, national, and regional levels** is needed, along with the development of necessary regulations to support CE initiatives.

These expectations eventually highlight the need for comprehensive support systems and flexible, accessible funding mechanisms to foster the growth of CE initiatives.

## 2.3 Third FBCEM, Zaragoza June 2024

Along the RESOURCE Consortium Meeting held in Zaragoza in June 2024, a special session was organised for partners to meet with PP and to provide them with a training session on a specific type of funding: the cascade funding (see Annex 5.3 - Third FBCEM, Zaragoza June 2024).

### Methodology and event frame

Sploro, an innovation consulting firm, delivered a presentation on the concept of cascade funding, a European Commission (EC) mechanism that distributes public funds to SMEs and

startups for technological development and adoption. The presentation covered the fundamentals of cascade funding, tips for writing excellent proposals, notable funding opportunities, and the benefits and evaluation process of such funding. Specific examples like GreenSME and WomenTECHEU were highlighted as open calls for June 2024, emphasising sustainability and gender balance in tech entrepreneurship.

Other organisations also disseminate Cascade Funding in the European Union, such as, the EC through the participant portal, which is responsible for distributing public funds to SMEs, startups, and mid-caps for the adoption or development of digital technologies. External platforms such as FUNDINGBOX and F6S also play a crucial role in the process of submitting proposals for Cascade Funding, but (unlike Sploro) they only promote the calls that they themselves evaluate. These platforms help externalise the submission process and provide channels such as emails, Google Forms, and other communication channels for applicants to apply for funding opportunities.

### **Key outcomes to restrain**

Key recommendations for making a good presentation included understanding and aligning with the objectives and evaluation criteria of the funding call, staying updated with the latest information and guidelines, considering specific and formal aspects of the proposal, and being well-prepared for the evaluation process, including interviews.

Cascade funding provides an additional resource of funding for the PP, besides direct grants, loans, equity, etc. that is not subject to the minimis constraints. Since it is not a direct grant, different calls can be applied and run, as long as they are not for the same project and no more than 100% of the project costs are funded.

Evaluating the investment readiness of a project from an entrepreneur's perspective involves considering several key criteria essential for securing cascade funding. First, the financial viability of the project is crucial, requiring entrepreneurs to present a clear and compelling business model with detailed projections of cash flows and profitability. This includes demonstrating sustainable revenue streams, cost structures, and a solid plan for scaling the business. Entrepreneurs must also highlight the market potential by showcasing a deep understanding of the target market, identifying demand for the product or service, and differentiating their offering from competitors.

Second, addressing the project's risk profile is vital for attracting cascade funding. Entrepreneurs need to show strong internal capabilities, such as a skilled management team, operational efficiency, and technological readiness. They must also be prepared to navigate external risks, including regulatory challenges, economic fluctuations, and geopolitical factors. Articulating a comprehensive risk management strategy and aligning the project with current investor priorities, such as environmental sustainability and social impact, can significantly enhance its attractiveness. Ultimately, entrepreneurs must adopt a holistic approach, blending financial acumen, market insight, and risk mitigation to make their projects compelling for cascade funding.

## 2.4 Individual meetings' insights

In addition to the FBCEMs, individual meetings through working sessions provided some interesting highlights as regards to their preparation and funding criteria.

- **Business Model Clarification:** All technologies require a proof of concept (use case) to demonstrate their efficiency. Funding the proof of concept is key in the process. The founder needs help to target technology applicable in concrete production, with larger market potential.
- **Focus and Challenges:** while aligning objectives and technics or processes with future European regulations and sustainability goals (SDGs) is commendable, the market size should also be considered to attract substantial investor interest. Founders often address too many targets and should prioritise their efforts.
- Founders need support to identify bankable customers, to distinguish between user and payer, and to set short-term and later stage targets and future potential. Also, lobbying (legal and policy recommendations) can support positive potential market evolution.
- **Strategic Goals and Investment Needs:** The company might need to transition its model, for example, from a service offer to a certification key player. They need strategy support and investment process recommendations. For instance, a sandbox initiative by the Spanish Ministry of Energy Transition could provide a supportive framework for the ambitions of some of the PP.

New business models need to be designed, tested and implemented. In those innovative and political led environments, founders need a conducive environment for attracting investments and achieving long-term sustainability goals.

## 3 Conclusion and final recommendations

Based on the insights from various meetings and discussions, global and final recommendations for circular project founders regarding fundraising criteria can be summarised as follows:

### Entrepreneurs' 5 main fundraising expectations

1. **Flexible Public Subsidies:**
  - Public subsidies should be more adaptable, covering essential costs like machinery and simplifying application processes.
  - Develop specific funding lines tailored to the unique needs of CE projects, ensuring accessibility and relevance.
2. **Accessible Private Financing:**
  - Encourage investors to consider the long-term sustainability and scalability of CE projects.

- Establish platforms and forums to connect investors with project owners, facilitating better communication and understanding.
- 3. Financial Education for Entrepreneurs:**
    - Provide comprehensive financial education to entrepreneurs, helping them understand and navigate various funding opportunities.
    - Educate on the risks and benefits associated with different types of funding to enable informed decisions.
  - 4. Incorporation of Sustainability Criteria by Financial Institutions:**
    - Financial institutions should include sustainability criteria in their project evaluations, ensuring genuinely sustainable projects receive funding.
    - Implement laws and tax incentives to support new and innovative companies, such as the Startup Law.
  - 5. Strategic Support for Forming Financing Networks:**
    - Assist companies in forming financing networks with a European reach, identifying suitable investors, and justifying private investments to leverage public funding.
    - Provide workshops on investor expectations and effective communication strategies to position projects better for funding opportunities.

### Circular entrepreneurs' 5 main support expectations

- 1. Training, Advisory Services, and Mentoring:**
  - Offer access to training, advisory services, and mentoring to facilitate market transfer and adoption of CE practices.
  - Provide strategic support for companies transitioning their business models, such as moving from service offers to becoming certification key players.
- 2. Financial Incentives for Sustainable Practices:**
  - Implement subsidies and tax incentives to encourage non-polluting practices and penalise contaminating ones.
  - Support the adoption of new technologies by providing access to technological centres and creating internal procedures to foster a culture of CE.
- 3. Communication and Awareness Efforts:**
  - Promote the benefits of the CE through communication and awareness campaigns, showcasing successful initiatives to inspire others.
  - Foster improved coordination at European, national, and regional levels, developing necessary regulations to support CE initiatives.
- 4. Support for non-dilutive sources such as Cascade Funding:**
  - Educate project founders on cascade funding, a mechanism that distributes public funds to SMEs and startups for technological development.

- Provide guidelines on writing excellent proposals, understanding funding opportunities, and navigating the evaluation process.
- Highlight examples of successful funding calls, emphasising sustainability and inclusivity in tech entrepreneurship.

**5. Enhanced Financial Ecosystem:**

- Encourage tighter sources of financing for medium and long-term projects with a degree of industrial scalability.
- Foster a conducive environment for attracting investments and achieving long-term sustainability goals through innovative and policy-led initiatives.

These recommendations aim to create a supportive framework for circular project founders, ensuring they have access to the necessary funding and resources to advance their initiatives and contribute to a sustainable future.

## 4 Annexes

### 4.1 First FBCEM, Zaragoza, November 2022

#### Agenda of the Pilots presentations

Purpose	Pilot Projects presentation to the consortium members and discussion
Date	23.11.2022
Time	11:45 – 13.30
Place	“Hermanos Bayeu” Hall, Pignatelli Building

Time	Agenda items
10:45	Roundtable consortium partners and Advisory Board members presentation
11:00	THERMOWASTE S.L. Presentation
11:10	MONDO TUFTING S.A. Presentation
11:20	CERCO Presentation
11:30	BIOSELVAL (ARCO IRIS GROUP) Presentation
11:40	CONFECCIONES OROEL Presentation
11:50	Break
12:05	FERTINAGRO BIOTECH Presentation
12:15	VALOGREENE MUEL S.L. Presentation
12:25	YUDIGAR S.L. / ARROPADOS Presentation
12:35	FELTWOOD ECOMATERIALES S.L. Presentation
12:45	BUGCLE Presentation

#### Attendees

##### *On site attendees*

RESOURCE Partners	Names	Mode
GAC	Geraldine Quentin	On site
Aragon Government	Miguel Luis Lapeña	On site
Aragon Government	Eloy Fernández	On site
Aragon Government	David Guardiola	On site
Aragon Government	Blanca Pérez	On site
AITIIP	Lara Escudero	On site
AITIIP	Eva Gavín	On site
ULEI	Bernhard	On site
ULEI	Maria Myridias	On site
CEEIARAGON	Celia García	On site
CEEIARAGON	Pilar Izquierdo	On site
CEEIARAGON	Antonio Martínez	On site
CEEIARAGON	Concepción Ramos	On site
CEEIARAGON	Jesús López	On site
CEEIARAGON	Beatriz Lorente	On site
ANCES	Eva María Elena Ramos	On site

GAC	Marc Pattinson	On-line
GAC	Marianne Baumberger	On-line
EBN	Agata Papotto	On-line
EBN	Livia Marcantonio	On-line
ULEI	Hauke Ward	On-line
EU-REA (PO)	Davide Delaiti	On-line

### ***Advisory Board members***

Organisation	Names	Mode
CONEXO	Javier Artiach	Online
ENRICH Global	Svetlana Klessova	Online
Keiretsu Forum	Fernando Moroy	Online

### ***Pilot projects representatives***

Company	Names
CONFECCIONES OROEL	Felipe Blanco Gan
MONDO TUFTING S.A.	María Ángeles Cavero Javier Jiménez
FELTWOOD ECOMATERIALES S.L.	Óscar Longares
BUGCLE	Javier Luis Bail Natalia Vicien Becerra
VALOGREENE MUEL S.L.	José Antonio Villaba José Manuel Martínez Carlos Cataluña
CERCO	Jesús Aljarde
FERTINAGRO BIOTECH	Azucena Mainar
YUDIGAR / ARROPADOS	Carolina Gracia Alicia Julio Nieves
THERMOWASTE	Ana Torrens Oscar Ribas
BIOSELVAL / GRUPO ARCOIRIS	María Lorente

### **Minutes of the discussion about the pilots' presentation**

ULEI held an LCA bootstrapping meeting with the selected pilot projects (10 projects were present) on the 23rd morning to introduce them the LCA method<sup>1</sup> and RESOURCE's expectations from them. The LCA method will be used as a first step to provide a hotspot analysis and initial assessment of improvement potentials of the services/products the pilot projects aim to launch in the future.

<sup>1</sup> LCA (Life Cycle Assessment) is a quantitative method used to measure and analyse the environmental burden of products or services across the projects' life cycle and highlights possible areas of improvement.

An NDA was promised to the projects.

Instead of 9 we decided to select 15 projects. But we only got 10 presented. From these 10 it ends up that only 5 are fitting with RESOURCE objectives. So, we need to find at least 5 more and shall consider the CE definition at larger level, to reach the goal of 20million euros.

We need to re-define our pilot targets, with higher TRL, projects that need private money.

Eva will get in touch with cluster of pork and agroindustry.

Pilar has identified another one in the water and logistics cluster, extracted from the WP1 interview carried out by CEEIARAGON. Pilar is going to follow them, and she will also check internally with CEEI, two possible projects both in CEEIARAGON Teruel.

There are two projects identified by the GoA with TRL higher, we are going to connect with them. Eloy will send us the higher TRL identified projects.

Geraldine and Pilar will also discuss with the PO if it's only private funding or public can be also considered. It is nevertheless agreed that we need to remain flexible about the number of projects vs amount triggered. It is important to demonstrate the added value, to the PO, and to companies.

## 4.2 Second FBCEM, Zaragoza April 2024

(see next page)

## 4.3 Third FBCEM, Zaragoza June 2024

### Pilots' session agenda

13:00	Lunch / assorted tapas
14:00	<p>Welcoming word (Ana Sanz) and RESOURCE team presentation (Geraldine Quetin)</p> <p>Projects' review and mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Explain tech/biz coaching planned– Joanna Abi Abdallah</li> <li>⇒ Cascade funding Opportunities – 1-hour session (Sploro)</li> <li>⇒ General pilots Presentations – 1 hour (4 min each)</li> </ul>
16:30	<p><b>4 groups in 1o1 Sessions</b> to discuss their specific requirements (15min per project)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ ULEI- AITIIP-GoA (specialists for LCA + TRL + Legal supports)</li> <li>⇒ GAC-ANCES (specialists for Communication/overall Strategy + Finance)</li> <li>⇒ CEEI-EBN (specialists for business + Ecosystem relations)</li> <li>⇒ 2 people from Sploro</li> </ul>
18:00	Wrap up and ecosystem event (coffee and Light dinner - tapas)

## Participants

RESOURCE Consortium partners	Pilot projects participating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CEEI Aragon ... Pedro Yus</li> <li>- GAC Group..... Geraldine Quetin / Ana Tasheva</li> <li>- AITIIP ..... David Ponce / Lucas Rivera</li> <li>- EBN ..... Joanna Abi Abdallah</li> <li>- Leiden University    Hauke Ward / Jiunhua Zhang</li> <li>- ANCES..... Eva Maria Elena Ramos</li> <li>- GoA..... Santiago Ruiz / Ana Sanz</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ECOHELP - EWM    Federico Gan    and Ruben Gutierrez</li> <li>- CERFO..... Jesus Aljarde</li> <li>- FELTWOOD.... Carmelo Heras</li> <li>- CADIUCO ..... Fernando Mestre Sanchis</li> <li>- GREEN FOUNDRY    Pedro Sierra</li> <li>- RECICLA Y SUMA    Alicia Orós Francia</li> <li>SMART MOSS... Cristian García Cebollada</li> </ul>

