



D8.9 Focal Point Network Report



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D8.9

FOCAL POINT NETWORK Report

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



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Europa Media Non-profit Ltd.



Royal Veterinary College



Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement.



National Veterinary Institute



Shanghai Veterinary Research Institute

Harbin Veterinary Research Institute



China Animal Health and Epidemiology Center



China Animal Disease Control Center



Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação



Huazhong Agricultural University

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Executive Summary

As part of Task 8.4, the LinkTADs Focal Point Network (FPN) has been established in February 2015. It consists of international researchers and experts from the EU and China with experience in animal health related research and relevant expertise in EU-China cooperation, e.g. funding, logistics, networking opportunities, etc.

The main objectives of the LinkTADs FPN were to:

- Collect contact information for experienced European and Chinese scientists highly committed to supporting research cooperation between EU and China on major infectious diseases of animals and zoonoses within an informal framework;
- Serve as a support network for all interested European and Chinese scientists, as well as policy-makers and industrial actors interested in specific aspects of the ongoing or future animal health research in the EU and China, clustered within “User Groups”;
- Regularly and publicly share information and raise awareness on EU-China cooperation and funding opportunities in the field of animal health.

To this aim, a dedicated page was added to the LinkTADs platform, which explains the objectives and scope of the FPN to the wider public, and facilitates the initiation of communications between third parties, potential User Group members and FPN members.

This Focal Point Network report (D8.9) describes the main conclusions from the FPN experience and provides a proposal for a sustainable continuation of the Network after the end of the project.

More specifically, this report discusses:

- Lessons learned from the experiences of the FPN during the duration of LinkTADs;
- Feedback received from engaged parties;
- New concept for a sustainable FPN after the end of the project, including detailed information on the selected platform and on the actual functioning of the Network;
- Roles and responsibilities of LinkTADs partners in maintaining the FPN after the end of LinkTADs;
- A Monitoring and Evaluation strategy;
- The integrated LinkTADs support system for FPN members, including the full set of tools created by the project, which will continue to exist after the end of the EU funding.



01.

Focal Point Network Activities

Focal Point Network Activities and lessons learned

The Focal Point Network (FPN) consists of 20 members, including policy actors, researchers and managers supporting EU-China scientific collaboration (see Annex 1 for the full list of members). Two representatives of the European Commission agreed to be appointed as members of the FPN and contribute to the dissemination of information circulated within the network.

These members have identified a group of users to whom they would like to directly spread information on the project activities, EU-China collaboration news, and other information on animal health research. The total number of users within the User Groups has reached 124 people.

The FPN has put together the so called Monthly Alerts to disseminate relevant information. The first was issued in February 2016, and since that time, each month, a Monthly Alert was generated until the end of the project. The feedback was positive, but the activity rate of the FPN members to contribute to the monthly content has been quite low. The Monthly Alerts contain news on ongoing initiatives, events, news in the research on transboundary animal diseases (TADs) and zoonoses in the EU and China, as well as relevant international cooperation and funding opportunities in the field of animal health and food safety.

The User Group includes members from all over the world, not only the EU and China. Just like LinkTADs news in general, the User Group is well spread geographically over the scientific community in all major regions in the world.

The launch and services of the FPN has been disseminated widely, but generated less interest than expected. The users appreciated the information, but the FPN members have not been contacted through the [online form](#) or indirectly through their membership in the FPN, but have been approached individually as representatives of their organisation, mostly at face-to-face events. The FPN members have attended several research conferences, LinkTADs workshops, and dissemination events, however, their role as FPN members has not been highlighted at any of these occasions.

The use of the LinkTADs online platform services would be a main supporting tool for the FPN members, but too many Chinese stakeholders have had problems accessing the web-platform services. The Chinese Internet policy did not allow Chinese visitors to register and access the internal

platform areas containing additional services and useful information. This is why the consortium has decided to revise the platform and make it openly accessible for any visitor without registration. The changes have been concluded in September 2016, thus there has been too little time to assess the positive consequences in the use of the web-platform services. On the other hand, this experience shows that another online platform is needed where FPN members may get in more direct contact with the User Group members, share knowledge and generate new ideas.

Lessons learned in summary:

- The benefits of being an FPN member and using the network contacts has not been highlighted enough for the members of the Users Group or the FPN members themselves
- Distributing Monthly Alerts on relevant news and events is useful for the Users, however not a sustainable activity in this format after the end of LinkTADs
- The Internet policy of China has generated problems for the Chinese stakeholders to access and use successfully and efficiently the web-platform services, which would be a main support tool for FPN members to generate future interest and collaboration. The platform has been modified to ease the access to these services.
- An online collaboration platform should be selected to ease the cooperation between the FPN members and the User group members. The logical solution would be LinkedIn because it is a work-related social networking tool and because it is widely used both in the EU and China.

Interest in the Focal Point Network

In the second half of 2015, feedback has been collected from users of the LinkTADs platform, including from the FPN members through a form created by Europa Media and distributed via social media, the website, emails, newsletter and other channels.

The Feedback Form was a Google spreadsheet with a limited number of questions. [See the Feedback report](#).



The first few questions asked the name, organisation and location of the respondent. The next question was “How do you know about the website?” to see how the respondents got access to the LinkTADs portal.

Are you an EU or Chinese researcher on animal health? Check our platform and give us your thoughts! #LinkTADs

Published on April 4, 2016



LinkTADs brings together world-class research institutes and experts in cross-border cooperation with the aim to coordinate research between the EU and China, thus improving scientific excellence in animal health (epidemiology and laboratory).

The LinkTADs platform <http://www.linktads.com/> provides interested parties with all relevant information about EU-China cooperation. With the help of the platform international researchers are able to generate new cooperation ideas and contribute to discussions in the field of animal health research, agriculture and food safety. This Feedback Form asks the opinion of the users of the platform on the content and functionalities.

Thank you for your interest and your support! Your feedback will be analysed and an updated website will be developed.

LinkTADs Feedback Form: <http://linktads.com/news/73#sthash.1jc0sDRv.amHdMKYe.dpbs>



We also asked if they are registered as a member on the website to see if they were motivated enough to go through the registration process and access the additional functions and information available.

The two questions requiring longer answers were:

- What were your expectations in terms of: Access to information and data and Collaboration functions with Chinese or European colleagues?
- How do you think the web platform can be improved?

As a final question we asked if they would recommend the website to their colleagues.

The main comments received by FPN members were the following:

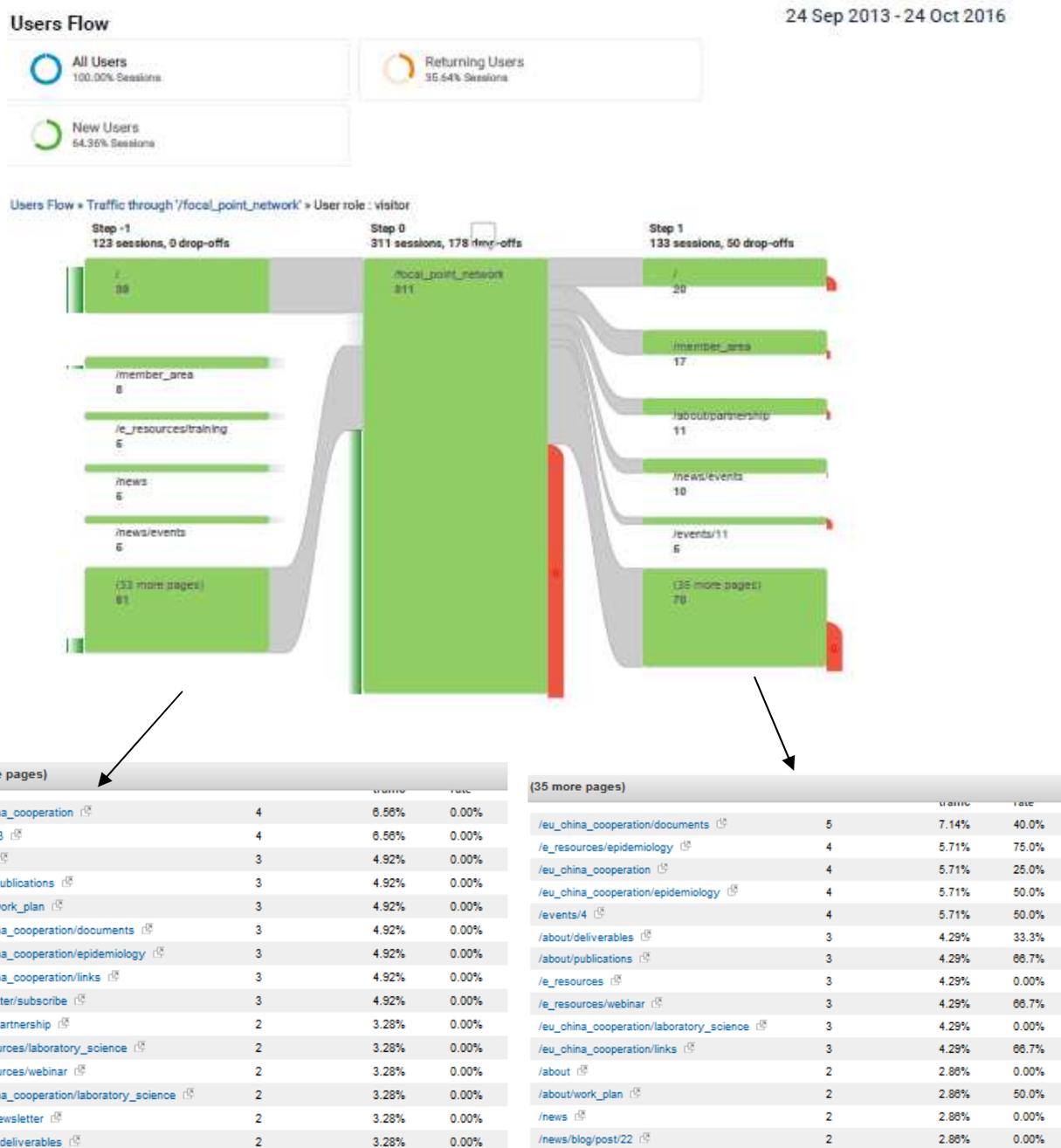
1. More news and events could be shared and their documents, news should become more visible;
2. Enable easy communication between researchers in animal health worldwide;
3. A lot of information is available, it should be more structured;
4. There is not enough time to read all documents on the website;
5. Not everyone registers from those who could benefit from the documents available for the registered users only – As a result, less documents get used as they should;
6. There are new registrations coming, but they do not use the functionalities supporting collaboration (online discussions);

7. Extend the funding opportunities section; and
8. Partners recommended rephrasing some sections.

As a general conclusion, the Newsletter and the Monthly Alerts from the FPN members were very useful and generated new registrations to the LinkTADs newsletter.

Google Analytics was also continuously used to monitor online trends in the LinkTADs platform. It should be noted that the FPN page has been the third most visited page during the project duration.

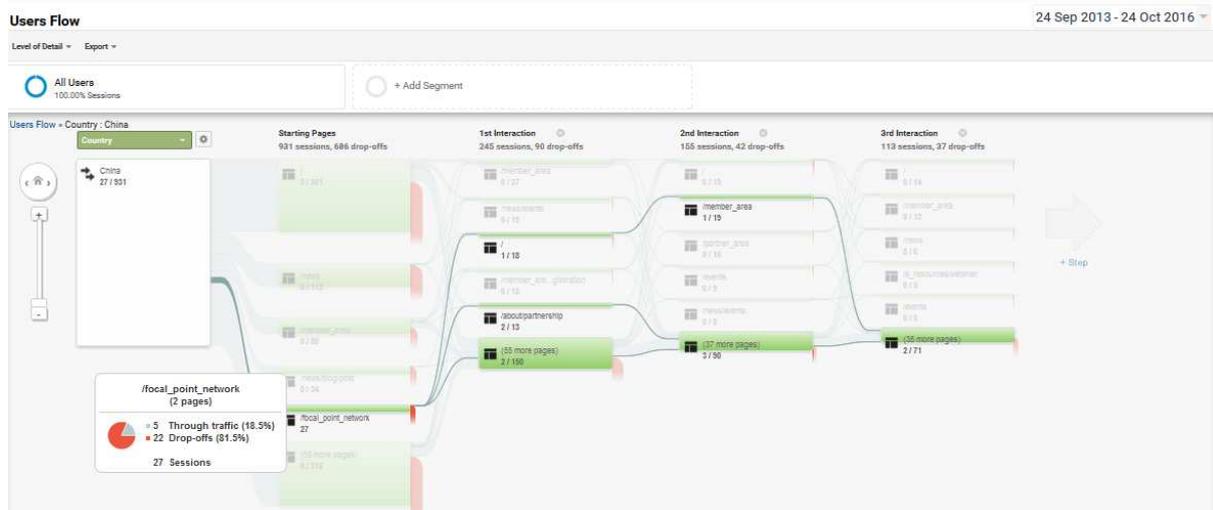
According to Google Analytics, for the whole duration of LinkTADs, this was the typical Users Flow through the website page of the FPN:



The majority of sessions (39) included the visit to the homepage before the visit to the Focal Point Network page, followed by the page on EU-China cooperation (4). On the other hand, after visiting the Focal Point Network page, most users visited again the homepage (20) or the documents page under the EU-China cooperation page (5).

More specifically, according to Google Analytics, during the duration of LinkTADs Chinese users ran 27 sessions out of 931 on page of the Focal Point Network; the pages visited in the first interaction afterwards were mostly the Homepage and the Partnership page.

As a second interaction, 6 sessions completed registration to the member area.





02.

Proposal for a sustainable Focal Point Network

Proposal for a sustainable Focal Point Network

In order to ensure sustainability of the Focal Point Network after the end of EU funding, the LinkTADs consortium proposes to transform the Network by following guidelines explained below.

The Focal Point Network members agreed on providing more detailed information on their background and interest in terms of policy-research-general collaboration between the EU and China. When all collected, the **shared profiles** will be uploaded to the website and will be available also through the online collaboration platform selected by the members. This information would enable a better search and fit for interested stakeholder to connect with the relevant members who could support their initiatives regarding EU-China collaboration in the field of animal health.

The new Focal Point Network will act as an **Alumni Network**: it will bring together scientists and researchers working in the field of animal health who have had a collaboration experience with Chinese colleagues and would like to share their know-how with like-minded individuals who are looking to engage in similar activities.

The Network will thus continue to serve as an informal support network in the specific field of EU-China collaboration in animal health; but will be extended with new members as well. Besides the Members already appointed to the FPN within the lifetime of LinkTADs, the FPN will invite the following groups to join:

- Researchers trained within the exchanges, workshops, webinars and other activities within the duration of LinkTADs;
- Members of the LinkTADs group on LinkedIn.

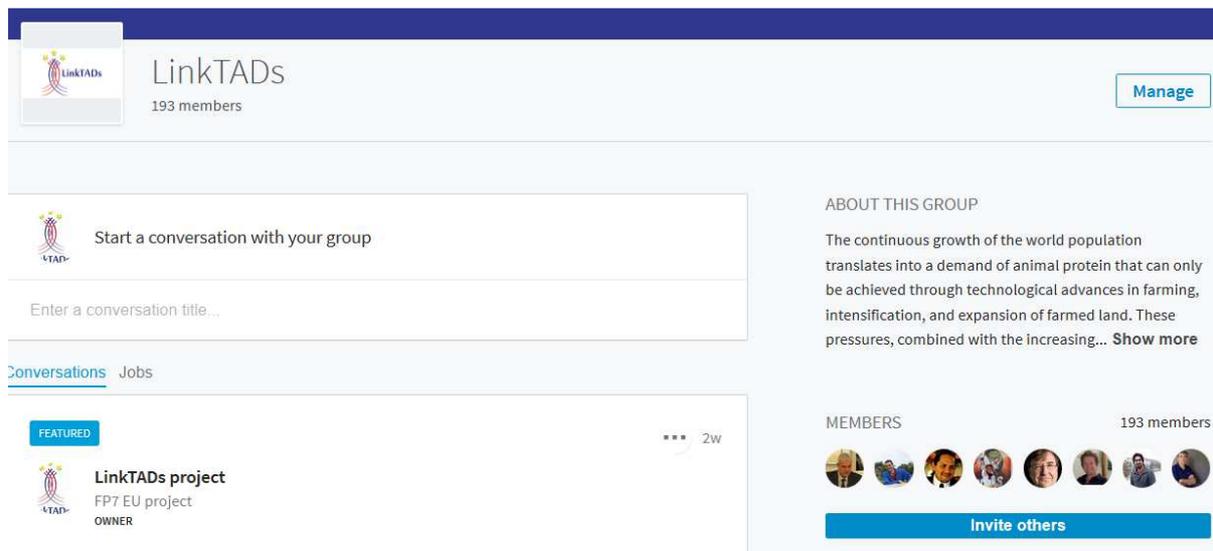
A call for expression of interest will then be launched to achieve a higher number of members.

Platform

The consortium has agreed that LinkedIn should be the preferred online platform for the FPN to extend and enhance collaboration between the members, for the following reasons:

1. A LinkedIn group already exists

The LinkTADs project owns a LinkedIn group with 193 members and a very good engagement rate. We can therefore build on a successful initiative, rather than creating something completely new and diluting efforts into promoting it from zero. The group has now more than 500 relevant connections.



Before the end of the project, members of the LinkedIn group will receive the communication, both as a public post in the conversation feed and as a private message, that the group will be changed from “LinkTADs” into “LinkTADs Focal Point Network”. They will receive all necessary information concerning the new objectives, scope and expected outcomes of FPN, so that they are aware of the changes and have an opportunity to decide whether to continue being part of the group.

2. LinkedIn has proved to technically work very well both in Europe and in China

Unlike other online platforms, such as Facebook or any Google-based platform, LinkedIn has been easily accessible by Chinese partners and third parties throughout the duration of the project. This is therefore, according to our experience, the most efficient technical solution for EU-China collaboration. A second potential option could be WeChat, which is very strong in China and utilised by a very diverse audience; however, it is not so well-spread and known in Europe, which could undermine its reach-out potential. Several people of the 124 User Groups members have joined already the LinkTADs LinkedIn group, but many others can be invited again to join as they have a LinkedIn profile and reaching them thus is easy.

3. Existing profiles

LinkedIn group members have their profile uploaded already, it just needs to be extended with their specific interest information regarding EU-China collaboration, which could be the first discussion topic launched by the new FPN. In terms of making FPN visible on LinkedIn, there are three main options:

- Showing the FPN group on a person's profile --> this is already automatic, but unfortunately most people are part of several groups, so FPN would not become that visible.
- Adding FPN as Volunteer experience --> users would need to add "Organisation" (FPN), then "Role" (member), select a Cause, dates and a short description.
- Adding FPN as an Organisation --> users would add "Organisation" (FPN), position held, they could choose the professional position to link this activity to, time period and a short description (this seems to be the most flexible solution).

Functioning

Members of the Network will be encouraged to proactively contribute to discussions, introducing themselves with a short post, inviting other members to connect on LinkedIn and sharing their participation in selected conferences/events, where they could meet face-to-face.

Members will be sharing relevant calls for proposals and abstracts, funding opportunities, relevant news from the animal health field, details about ongoing initiatives and projects, and related information that can be useful for European and Chinese researchers in the field looking to expand their network and learn more about EU-China research and teaching cooperation opportunities.

Most importantly, a clear focus should be given to personal contacts: younger researchers with no experience in EU-China collaboration should feel encouraged to directly contact the group as a whole, as well as specific individual researchers with larger experience to ask specific questions.

Europa Media will be generating several discussions after the end of the project duration to boost the activity of the group members.

Responsibilities of Focal Point Network Members

Role of FPN members in the LinkedIn group

Europa Media will be the overall supervisor and moderator of the LinkedIn group. It will contribute to discussions and moderate them in the specific field of EU funding available for EU-China research and teaching collaboration.

It will be helped by FAO, both its European and Chinese chapters in moderation tasks, when technical issues are concerned. To this aim, selected staff members of FAO will be given login details to the LinkTADs LinkedIn account, so that the moderator appears externally as one single voice. SPI will support the group by sharing relevant news on EU-China bilateral cooperation.

All LinkTADs partners will contribute to a mass online promotional campaign to invite new members to the group.

Furthermore, partners will look for opportunities to link the LinkTADs FPN group with other ongoing initiatives and projects, for example by adding the logo and link to their websites and by agreeing on a regular sharing of news.

Other general roles of the FPN members

The following roles are recommendations, out of which FPN members will follow those that will provide them with the highest benefits in their every-day policy-research-collaboration activities. These activities/roles have been selected as the most efficient tools/ways to build up and maintain a network of contacts successfully.

- 1. Speaking at major events dealing with animal health research worldwide collaboration or EU-China collaboration in R&I**

When attending events as part of their work, the members could also mention being part of the FPN and encourage people to initiate discussion, collaboration with any of the people being part of the FPN. Entering China with a collaboration proposal is hard, and personal connections is a must to succeed. Using FPN is a good gate/channel to start. That would generate benefit for the FPN member in question or the other members. On the other hand,

presenting ideas and experiences attracts input and collaboration from people with similar problems and interests, which is a major benefit for the members.

2. Publishing

Young researchers should be encouraged to initiate common work, publishing with their more experienced colleagues from the other region. Young researchers could contact FPN colleagues in China and Europe and these specific topics related to their field might generate new, EU-China joint publications. As a final benefit, these actions can generate global interaction, brainstorming, and debate around shared interests and challenges.

3. Serving the profession

As FPN members are also members of professional organisations and other groups, maybe even members of organizing committees for conferences, etc. they can share interest in developing deeper connections and broader the FPN with new members. Thus also more experienced experts could find benefits in joining the network.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The consortium has agreed to set a target in terms of number of group members and engagement rate, as well as a clear deadline, by which to evaluate whether the FPN is really sustainable.

The targeted number of group members on LinkedIn is 250 members, 1000 connections and more than 200 followers, as well as being part of more than 40 relevant other LinkedIn groups.

The targeted engagement rate is

- 5 new monthly discussions
- 100 monthly average of likes
- 50 monthly average of comments
- 20 monthly average of shares

The deadline is 30th April 2017.

In order to monitor these rates, Europa Media will be responsible for maintaining an up-to-date analytics document.

03.

LinkTADs Support System for Focal Point Network Members

LinkTADs Support System for Focal Point Network Members

In order to provide adequate support to FPN members for initiating discussions, start collaboration, launch new exchange of ideas, etc. - beyond the end of LinkTADs – the following tools and services will be available:

1. LinkTADs platform services
 - a. e-Resources
 - b. Find funding
 - c. Partners search
2. Identified interests and willingness to support joint publishing and joint collaboration in certain topics
3. Major final deliverables of LinkTADs:
 - a. Roadmap for strengthening EU-China animal health research cooperation
 - b. Joint Innovation Report
 - c. Best Practices Report
4. Continuous support in LinkedIn activities
5. FAO ECTAD China support in China and continuous links to FEPTV programme,
6. Access to CAAS institutes and other major organisations in China through LinkTADs connections.

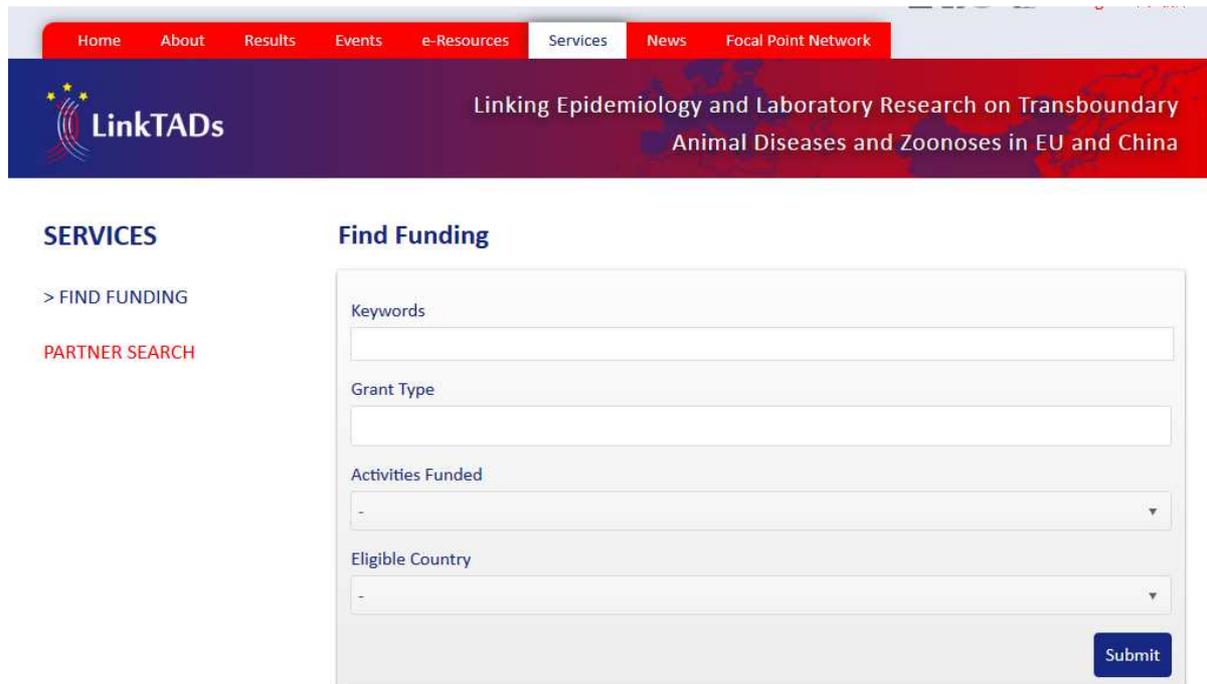
LinkTADs web-platform services

Europa Media has developed the LinkTADs platform which incorporates a set of online tools available for external users as well as Focal Point Network members in order to assist them in information dissemination. These tools are aimed at providing relevant information to facilitate communication between the Focal Points and interested users. The tools include:

a) Find Funding

The Funding Opportunities section includes programmes aimed at increasing the mobility of researchers in the animal health and food safety field, with a particular focus on funding available for research in China.

Users may use filters to easily see the programme they are interested in: by keywords of the programme name, grant type, activities funded and eligible country.



For each programme, grant type, activities funded and a short description are presented. For example, if members search with key word “NSFC”, they will get the following result.

Academy of Finland-NSFC Joint Call on Brain Plasticity and Learning

Grant Type: Cooperation, collaboration, Research Grant (Post-graduate)

Activities Funded: Exchange activities, Promotion and Networking activities, Research activities

Description:

The Academy of Finland and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) have decided to launch a call for joint projects with a view to promoting Finnish-Chinese research collaboration...

International Cooperation with Actors in China for Eco-Innovations

Activities Funded: Exchange activities, Promotion and Networking activities, Research activities

Description:

VINNOVA and the Swedish Energy Agency are now launching a call for cooperation with actors in China under the International Cooperation for Eco-Innovations programme....

National Natural Science Foundation Funding Program

Grant Type: Fellowship

Activities Funded: Exchange activities, Research activities

Description:

Ever since its establishment, the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) has continuously stressed on the importance of international (regional) cooperation and exchange. As an integral part of NSFC's...

NSFC-IUPAC Collaborative Research Projects in Sustainable Chemistry

Grant Type: Cooperation, collaboration, Exchange programme

For further information on the programme, members need just to click on the name of the programme and they will be directed to the official website. Focal Point Network members can make use of this unique funding database specifically targeting LinkTADs' end users and disseminate information on travel grants, PhD or research scholarships available for international researchers via monthly alerts.

b) Partner search

LinkTADs also lists organisations working in the field of animal health. The database is particularly useful for those researchers, who are looking for partners in future projects. Users can search by type of organisation, country and expertise. This function is particularly useful as Focal Point members can direct external users who are interested in finding partners for joint EU-China applications to this database.

Partner Search



The screenshot shows a search form with the following fields:

- Organisation:
- Organisation Type:
- Country:
- Expertise:

A blue "Submit" button is located at the bottom right of the form.

c) LinkTADs e-Resources

LinkTADs consortium collected publications by researchers involved in the LinkTADs project as well as other scientific and research materials produced by international scholars and experts from international research organisations. Materials were collected from open sources within past and ongoing relevant projects and initiatives. Scientific materials are divided thematically under "EU-China cooperation", "Epidemiology", "Laboratory science" and "Training".

d) LinkTADs Focal Point Network Area

A specific section on the LinkTADs platform has been dedicated to the LinkTADs Focal Point Network. This section lists the objectives and services provided by the Focal Point Network members as well as the approved list of members. It is also available in Chinese language.

External users are able to send queries online - Pressing the “contact” button, users are able to direct their questions according to the expertise of Focal Point Members:

- Funding opportunities for EU-China collaboration;
- News on EU-China collaboration in animal health;
- Epidemiology in the EU and China;
- Laboratory issues in the EU and China.

Annex I

Appointed Members of the Focal Point Network:

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