



The HEInnovate Transformation Journey

A practical guide for European Universities alliances



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
What is HEInnovate?	4
Why HEInnovate for European Universities alliances?	5
The HEInnovate journey in an alliance context	7
Step 0. Orientation: Setting the stage	8
Step 1. Reflect: Assess your own institution.....	9
Step 2. Engage: Discuss with your community	12
Step 3. Plan: Design actions and set goals	13
Step 4. Act: Implement, monitor and learn.....	15
Conclusion	17

Acknowledgements

This guide was prepared by the HEInnovate team with the invaluable support of the HEInnovate Expert Group. The Expert Group provided thoughtful input, practical insights, and constructive feedback throughout the development process, helping to ensure that the guide reflects the needs and realities of higher education institutions across diverse contexts.

The HEInnovate team would like to express its sincere appreciation to the members of the Expert Group for their substantial contributions to this work. Their time, expertise, and commitment were essential in shaping and strengthening the guide.

The HEInnovate team would like to acknowledge, in particular, Marina Ranga, Mona Roman, Charlotte Norrman, Peter Joore, Hannes Raffaseder, Ana Cristina Nicolescu, Bernhard Weber, László Horváth, and Tânia Carraquico.

The HEInnovate Transformation Journey:

A practical guide for European Universities alliances

What is HEInnovate?

HEInnovate is an initiative of the European Commission and the OECD that helps higher education institutions become more entrepreneurial, innovative and future-ready. It offers a **complete framework for change**, guiding you from reflection to action. With HEInnovate, your university can assess its current position, design action plans and access practical resources to turn ideas into impact.

The HEInnovate journey unfolds through **five interconnected stages**, forming a cycle of continuous improvement (**Figure 1**¹). Each stage has distinct objectives, activities and outcomes, **all of which build upon one another to catalyse transformation** across institutions and alliances:

Step 0: Orientation – Familiarise yourself with HEInnovate's framework, resources, and methodology before beginning the formal assessment process.

Step 1: Reflect – Conduct a collaborative self-assessment in which diverse stakeholders complete the HEInnovate survey. This will generate a rich evidence base that captures multiple perspectives on your institution's innovation and entrepreneurship capacity.

Step 2: Engage – Convene stakeholders to discuss assessment results through structured dialogue. This stage prioritises conversation over scores—comparing perceptions, exploring differences, identifying patterns, and building shared understanding through facilitated workshops.

Step 3: Plan – Translate insights into action by designing concrete initiatives, setting measurable goals, and establishing strategic priorities based on identified strengths and improvement areas.

Step 4: Act – Implement planned actions, monitor progress against objectives, measure outcomes, and use learnings to inform the next reflection cycle.

¹ This Guide supports alliances of higher education institutions engaging with HEInnovate. It is primarily addressed to European Universities Alliance coordinators, institutional leaders, HEInnovate coordinators, and Alliance working groups involved in innovation,



FIGURE 1. THE HEINNOVATE JOURNEY

entrepreneurship, and strategic development. If you are using HEInnovate as a single higher education institution, please refer to [The HEInnovate Foundation Guide](#).

Why HEInnovate for European Universities alliances?

European University alliances (EUAs) are reshaping the higher education landscape by integrating education, research and innovation across borders. These ambitious multi-institutional networks bring together diverse universities with different organisational cultures, governance systems, innovation ecosystems and levels of entrepreneurial maturity. While this diversity is a strength, it also presents significant challenges: *How do partners develop a shared strategic vision? How can alliances identify synergies while maintaining institutional identity? How do they demonstrate coherent impact to funders while respecting institutional autonomy?*

HEInnovate provides a structured, evidence-based framework for reflection and transformation. It supports both individual institutions and alliances in assessing and strengthening their innovation and entrepreneurship capacity. Importantly, it provides a **common language** and **comparable metrics** that facilitate productive dialogue across institutional and national boundaries, both of which are essential for building the mutual understanding and trust that underpin successful alliance collaboration.

For European University alliances, HEInnovate offers multiple **strategic benefits**:

Building a shared understanding and vision:

- Develop a common understanding of what innovation and entrepreneurship mean across partner universities, bridging different national and institutional cultures.
- Align priorities and values while respecting institutional diversity.
- Establish a shared baseline that recognises where partners are starting from, reducing assumptions and misunderstandings.

Mapping complementarities and designing collaboration:

- Systematically map institutional strengths and gaps across the alliance.
- Identify complementarities between partners to form the basis for joint initiatives.
- Discover synergies across disciplines, functions or institutional approaches.
- Design collaboration strategies that leverage strengths rather than duplicate efforts.

Strategic alignment across levels

- Align institutional strategies with alliance-level objectives around shared innovation and entrepreneurship goals.
- Bridge the gap between the alliance's ambitions and its operational realities.
- Ensure consistency between alliance governance decisions and institutional implementation.

Supporting the implementation and coordination of entrepreneurship and innovation activities in alliances

- Provide a ready-made diagnostic and monitoring framework for the alliance's entrepreneurship and innovation activities

- Enable evidence-based planning and resource allocation within entrepreneurship and innovation activities.
- Generate data and insights that support reporting and demonstrate impact.
- Facilitate coordination among entrepreneurship and innovation actors through shared assessment criteria and common goals..

Evidence-based reporting and accountability

- Generate robust, comparable evidence to support reporting to the European Commission and national authorities.
- Demonstrate alliance impact through measurable progress over time.
- Provide transparency to stakeholders (including staff, students, and external partners) about alliance development.

Fostering continuous improvement and learning

- Build a culture of systematic reflection, peer learning and mutual support.
- Create opportunities for partners to learn from each other's innovations and challenges.
- Establish feedback loops that enable adaptive strategy development.

Engaging and mobilising the alliance community

- Involve diverse stakeholders in shaping alliance direction.
- Build ownership and commitment across partners through participatory processes.
- Create visibility and understanding of alliance goals among staff and students who implement them.
-

Box 1. LEARNING FROM ALLIANCE EXPERIENCES

These benefits are reflected in the experience of alliances that have already applied HEInnovate in practice. The examples from [Arqus](#), [EUt+](#) and [UIREKA](#) illustrate several transferable lessons for other alliances.

- **Broad participation strengthens insights and buy-in.** Alliances that expanded the self-assessment beyond a core coordination team, engaging academic and administrative staff, leadership, and students, gained richer, more actionable results. The Arqus Alliance collected 210 individual assessments across its partner universities, while EUt+ progressively widened participation with each iteration, finding that familiarity with the tool improved over time.
- **HEInnovate reveals complementarities, not just gaps.** Rather than highlighting deficits, the process helped alliances identify where each partner had relative strengths that could benefit others. UIREKA used this insight to assign leadership of specific development tasks to partners with demonstrated expertise in those areas, turning assessment results directly into project design.
- **Translating results into action requires structured follow-up.** Successful alliances moved from assessment to concrete planning through facilitated workshops, prioritisation exercises, and the development of shared roadmaps or action plans. Arqus used a prioritisation exercise to focus on four key areas and

formed working groups to draft roadmaps; EUt+ embedded findings into its Innovation Vision Action Plan (IVAP), used to apply for EIT HEI funding.

- **The tool supports iterative development over time.** Alliances found value in repeating the self-assessment to track progress, onboard new partners, and support future funding applications. U!REKA plans to repeat the assessment in 2027 to measure alliance-wide development, while EUt+ has used HEInnovate across multiple project proposals to ensure continuity and integration.

The HEInnovate journey in an alliance context

HEInnovate's value and relevance to European University alliances lie not only in identifying current strengths and weaknesses but in building a **shared culture of reflection, collaboration and innovation capacity** across diverse institutions. For this reason, the process is most effective when approached as a **structured, inclusive and iterative process** rather than a one-off diagnostic.

There are multiple ways to implement HEInnovate within an alliance. Alliances may engage with HEInnovate at different stages of maturity, ranging from exploratory use to fully embedded, cyclical self-assessment processes. This guide presents a range of possible approaches, allowing users to select those that best suit their needs. The following section provides guidance for each stage of the HEInnovate journey, with specific considerations tailored to the multi-institutional and cross-border nature of alliances.

Two coloured boxes will appear within each step:

Starting small

Blue boxes present a simplified pathway for using HEInnovate within an alliance context. They outline a minimal viable approach that allows users to quickly experience the tool's benefits. Below the blue boxes, additional guidance will be provided on how to further expand and deepen the use of HEInnovate.

Choose an approach that fits your context and the level of formality appropriate to your situation. Remember: the most important step is to get started! Your approach and scope can evolve as you move forward.

Considerations

The collaborative and multi-actor nature of alliances often entails additional layers of coordination and adaptation compared to single-institution settings. Green boxes highlight specific considerations that alliances may encounter when applying the HEInnovate framework within their partnerships.

Step 0. Orientation: Setting the stage

As a first step, **take some time to explore HEInnovate** and prepare for the process ahead. The key is understanding what the tool offers and clarifying how you want to use it in your context. The activities below represent common approaches to Step 0. Remember that you can **adapt them to fit your circumstances**, whether you are leading an institution-wide initiative, coordinating across an alliance, or starting with a small pilot group.

Starting small

1. Explore the HEInnovate platform

To get comfortable with how HEInnovate works and what questions it explores, you can visit heinnovate.eu and familiarise yourself with:

- **The eight dimensions** that structure the self-assessment.
- **User stories** from institutions that have used HEInnovate. Particularly relevant are the cases of [U!REKA](#) and [EUT+ Alliance](#), as they showcase great examples of how alliances have benefited from the tool.
- **Other resources**, such as [guidance notes](#) and [training materials](#), will later support your HEInnovate journey.

2. Clarify your purpose

Being clear about why you're using HEInnovate helps shape all subsequent decisions. Your purpose might be, among others:

- Developing or refreshing an innovation strategy.
- Supporting a specific project, Work Package or initiative.
- Understanding current strengths and identifying improvement areas.
- Establishing a baseline for monitoring progress.
- Generating evidence for stakeholders or funders.
- Building capacity and shared language around innovation.

Your goals will influence decisions about scope (in which HEInnovate dimensions you want to focus), participation (which stakeholders you want to engage in your journey), and how you use the results. Take some time to articulate this clearly, but recognise that your purpose may evolve as you learn more through the process.

3. Consider leadership engagement

Leadership support can significantly amplify your impact, but the timing and approach vary:

- **If you have existing leadership buy-in:** Engage senior leaders early to explain HEInnovate and request visible support.
- **If you're building toward leadership buy-in:** Start with activities you can control, gather evidence of value, and use that to make the case to leadership later.

4. Introduce HEInnovate to potential participants

Think about how to build awareness and interest among those who might participate:

- **Informal conversations:** One-on-one or small group discussions to gauge interest and explain what's involved. This may be more appropriate for pilots or grassroots efforts.
- **Formal kick-off event:** A structured session introducing the framework, explaining your purpose and outlining the process. This works well for institution-wide or formal initiatives.

Considerations

Implementing HEInnovate across an alliance requires additional coordination while respecting each partner's autonomy and context.

Governance and endorsement: Alliance-level political support is particularly important in multi-institutional contexts. Consider presenting the HEInnovate process to your Steering Committee, Rectors' Council or equivalent body. High-level endorsement helps ensure commitment across partners and provides legitimacy.

Collective launch and alignment: Bringing representatives from all partners together early helps build shared understanding. Use this opportunity to:

- Introduce the HEInnovate framework
- Discuss how it connects to alliance strategic priorities
- Agree on broad timelines while allowing flexibility
- Clarify how results will be synthesised and used

Coordination structures: Multi-institutional coordination benefits from clear roles, though you have flexibility in how you structure this:

- Someone to coordinate at the alliance level (managing overall process and synthesis across partners)
- Champions or contacts at each partner institution (coordinating local activities and serving as liaison points)

Recognising diversity: Partners will likely have different starting points, priorities and levels of familiarity with HEInnovate. Design your approach to accommodate this diversity.

Linking to alliance priorities: Connect the HEInnovate process explicitly to relevant alliance objectives, Work Packages (particularly those on entrepreneurship, innovation or ecosystems) and reporting requirements. This helps partners see how participation supports shared goals they are already committed to.

Step 1. Reflect: Assess your own institution

The Reflect stage involves collecting perspectives on the alliance's innovation and entrepreneurship capacity through the HEInnovate self-assessment. HEInnovate uses an online survey where participants rate statements across the eight dimensions. Each person completes the assessment individually based on their knowledge and experience. The

platform then aggregates responses, showing patterns across your group while maintaining individual anonymity. This generates an evidence base that captures how different stakeholders perceive strengths, challenges and opportunities across the eight dimensions.

To get started with this step, you can follow the suggestions below:

Starting small

1. Decide who to involve

Define the scope of the self-assessment you plan to carry out. If this is your first time using HEInnovate and the goal is to become familiar with the tool, the self-assessment can be completed by a small group of selected representatives from the partner institutions, creating a focused space for reflection within the alliance.

If there is interest in expanding the HEInnovate journey, the exercise can be scaled up to include a wider range of internal and external stakeholders. This broader approach is described in more detail below this “Starting small” box.

2. Set up your assessment group

The HEInnovate platform allows you to create groups and invite participants:

Create your group on the platform:

- Log in to HEInnovate and create a new assessment group
- Give it a clear name (e.g., "University X Innovation Assessment 2025")
- The platform generates a unique invitation link

Invite participants:

You have two options for inviting participants:

- Use the platform's email invitation feature to send a link directly to participants.
- Copy and paste the link into your own email, newsletter or communication channels with a personalised message.

 It is important that invited participants also register and create an account on the website, and not complete the assessment as guests.

3. Review results

Once you have sufficient responses, explore what the data shows. Use the platform's dashboard to:

- View aggregated scores across the eight dimensions.
- Identify dimensions with the highest and lowest scores.
- Notice where there's consensus vs. divergence in ratings.
- Examine patterns by stakeholder group.

See [A Quick Start Guide: Self-Assessment for the Individual & Group Participants, and Organisers](#) for a detailed step by step description of completing self-assessment.

HEInnovate's value increases as a wider range of perspectives is brought into the process. Where capacity and interest allow, the self-assessment can be scaled up to include a broader set of internal and external stakeholders. If this is the case:

Define the scope of the larger self-assessment you will implement. You can have a:

- **Focused participation** (a smaller, strategically selected group) is easier to manage and can still generate meaningful insights when participants are carefully chosen.
- **Broader participation** (a larger group representing diverse roles) offers more comprehensive coverage and fosters wider engagement, but requires greater coordination.

To define this decision, you can refer to the matrix in the [Stakeholders Engagement Toolkit](#), which outlines the motivations, contributions and benefits for different stakeholder groups. Use the matrix as a starting point for identifying participants most relevant to your context. In both cases, it is recommended to consider gender equality and diversity measures, ensuring that the self-assessment process is equitable and representative across different groups.

After gathering the responses, you may analyse your results by using the website's dashboard. You may also export the data to Excel for more in-depth analysis, if desired.

Considerations

Defining the focus of the self-assessment: At the outset, the alliance should decide whether participants will complete the self-assessment based on (a) their own higher education institution, or (b) the alliance's joint activities and structures. In most cases, alliances are not yet ready to evaluate joint activities in detail. The common and recommended approach is for respondents to reflect on their home institution, with the results later synthesised to create a collective picture of the alliance, highlighting common strengths, weaknesses and areas of complementarity.

Group structure options:

You can organise participation in different ways:

- **Single alliance-wide group:** All participants from all partners together, creating one unified dataset.
- **Separate institutional groups:** Each partner conducts independently, results are compiled for comparison later.

Each has trade-offs around coordination complexity and institutional autonomy. The Excel export allows filtering by institution regardless of structure.

Setting up and managing the assessment group:

For either model, **one person must create the assessment group** on the HEInnovate platform. Afterwards, they can distribute the group invitation link. It is essential that:

- Participants **register on the platform** when using the link (and **do not complete the assessment as guests**).
- Participants select **their own higher education institution** when creating their user profile.

This ensures that the group administrator can later conduct both alliance-wide analysis and institution-specific analysis, and that results remain comparable across partners.

Key coordination considerations:

- **Institutional Champions:** Identify a contact point in each partner institution to tailor communication, encourage participation, respond to questions, and maintain momentum.
- **Timeline flexibility:** Partners may need different lengths of time to complete the assessment. Allow variation while keeping a clear deadline for alliance synthesis.
- **Language and accessibility:** The HEInnovate self-assessment is available in all EU languages, allowing participants to complete it in the language they feel most comfortable with.

Step 2. Engage: Discuss with your community

This step transforms data into dialogue by bringing stakeholders together to reflect on the self-assessment results. The aim is to build a shared understanding of the findings across stakeholder groups, explore differences in perceptions and unpack the underlying reasons behind observed patterns.

Through this collective discussion, participants identify key strengths to build on, gaps that need to be addressed and priority areas for change. The ultimate goal is to build consensus around the main themes that will inform the next stage of action planning.

Starting small

1. Organise a discussion meeting

Bring together assessment participants for a structured discussion around your HEInnovate results. The event can be online or onsite, depending on what works best.

Present results: Use the graphs and radar charts from HEInnovate's dashboard to show key patterns of your self-assessment results.

Facilitate discussion: Guide a structured conversation addressing key questions:

- What explains these results?
- What evidence or experiences support these perceptions?
- Why might different stakeholder groups perceive this differently?
- What is working well that should be built upon?
- What barriers or gaps exist?

Identify priorities: Through dialogue, surface the most important themes, strengths to maintain and gaps requiring attention.

2. Write down your findings

Create a short summary capturing the ideas discussed by participants, including:

- Key strengths of the alliance
- Priority development areas

- Notable insights
- Initial priorities for action

This document will inform Step 3: Plan.

If you decide to implement a broader self-assessment, you can organise a workshop that brings together internal participants and other relevant stakeholders for a structured discussion. To support this process, HEInnovate provides [workshop guides](#) and [training materials](#) on its website, which you can use as a reference.

Remember that the aim is to build a shared understanding of the findings across stakeholder groups, explore differences in perceptions and unpack the underlying reasons behind observed patterns. Through this collective discussion, participants will be able to identify key strengths to build on, gaps that need to be addressed and priority areas for change, ultimately building a consensus that will inform the next stage of action planning.

Considerations

Step 2 in alliances combines institutional self-reflection with collective dialogue among partners. We propose two alternative approaches for alliances to choose from:

a) Three-step process:

- **Institutional workshops:** Each partner conducts its own internal workshop and documents findings in a summary report.
- **Collective synthesis:** A designated responsible person compiles institutional reports into a synthesis, then shares it with all partners.
- **Alliance workshop:** All partners gather to have a collective dialogue:
 - Where do partners' strengths complement each other?
 - How can one partner's strength address another's development area?
 - What clusters of excellence exist across the alliance?

b) Streamlined approach: If partners lack time or resources for institutional workshops, you can conduct a more focused process:

- **Alliance analysis:** A designated responsible person conducts an analysis on the alliance using the self-assessment results of each partner, finding key patterns without conducting a full workshop.
- **Alliance workshop:** Convene partners for deeper discussion at the alliance level, using the previous analysis as the foundation for collective dialogue.

⚠ Different institutional cultures: Partners may approach self-assessment differently due to their institutional traditions and national cultures. Some tend to be more self-critical, while others are more optimistic. For this reason, we recommend interpreting results within each partner institution, rather than used to compare or rank partners.

Step 3. Plan: Design actions and set goals

With shared insights and alignment established, the focus now shifts to designing a strategic roadmap for change. Step 3 invites you to work collaboratively with your

colleagues to identify priority activities and develop concrete action plans that will move your organisation closer to its defined purpose.

Starting small

1. Organise a planning workshop

Bring together relevant stakeholders to translate identified priorities into concrete plans. Where appropriate, this workshop can be combined with the one organised for Step 2 by, for example, dedicating half a day to each step within a single event.

The planning workshop typically follows a progression from generating ideas to structuring them into implementable plans. Our [workshop guide](#) and HEInnovate resources will help you in this effort:

1. Generate ideas with Action Cards: Use HEInnovate's Action Cards as thought starters and discussion prompts. These cards present practical interventions organised by dimension and institutional profile. Review cards relevant to your priority areas and use them to spark discussion about what actions might work in your context.

2. Define specific actions with the Action Planning Board: Once you have potential ideas, use the Action Planning Template to develop them into concrete actions and structure them by timeframe (short-term, medium-term, long-term).

3. Organise actions into Work Packages: Related activities are often easier to implement and monitor when grouped into coherent Work Packages rather than managed as individual disconnected actions. Use the [Work Package template](#) to:

- Group related actions into thematic packages.
- Assign a Work Package leader responsible for coordination.
- Define key performance indicators (KPIs) to show progress.
- Establish tentative timelines for the package.

This Work Package structure creates manageable units of work, clarifies coordination responsibilities, and makes progress monitoring more systematic.

Considerations

Planning in alliances requires coordination across partners while respecting institutional autonomy and different strategic priorities.

As in Step 2, it is possible to implement the planning phase in different modes:

a) Institutional Action Plans: Each partner develops plans addressing their own priorities. These remain under institutional control and align with institutional strategies.

b) Alliance Action Plans: Based on complementarities and shared priorities identified in Step 2, the alliance develops joint initiatives.

Key opportunities

Complementarity-driven initiatives: Design actions that capitalise on where partners complement each other (i.e. partners who are strong in digital innovation leading

alliance-wide digital services; partners who are strong in industry engagement coordinating alliance ecosystem building).

Shared services and infrastructure: Develop what individual institutions cannot easily establish alone: shared incubators or innovation spaces, alliance-wide entrepreneurship programs or micro-credentials, joint digital platforms, common training programs.

Critical considerations

Sustainability beyond project funding: Many alliance initiatives depend on short-term EU funding. Design actions with long-term sustainability in mind: How will this continue after initial funding ends? What institutional commitments can anchor this over time?

Coordination and communication: For each alliance Work Package, clarify who coordinates implementation, how partners will communicate progress, what governance processes oversee the work, and how challenges will be addressed.

Alignment across partners: Ensure clarity about which Work Packages are institutional versus joint, what resources or commitments are required from each partner, and how decisions about modifications will be made.

Step 4. Act: Implement, monitor and learn

Step 4 brings plans to life through implementation, monitoring and continuous learning. At this point, institutions and alliances move from strategy to action by launching the initiatives defined in Step 3, tracking progress through established KPIs and indicators, and learning from implementation experience. Insights gathered along the way are used to adjust and refine the approach as needed, helping to embed learning and create the foundations for continuous cycles of improvement.

Starting small

1. Launch planned initiatives

Begin implementing the actions and Work Packages defined in your planning stage. This might include:

- New programs or courses (entrepreneurship education, innovation challenges)
- Infrastructure development (incubators, innovation spaces, digital platforms)
- Partnerships and ecosystem initiatives (industry collaborations, community engagement)
- Policy or process changes (new incentive structures, revised procedures)
- Capacity building activities (training programs, professional development)

2. Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Set up systematic ways to track progress and assess impact.

- **Use the KPIs defined in your Work Packages:** Monitor progress against the specific indicators established for each Work Package during planning.
- **Create simple reporting mechanisms:** Establish regular reporting processes that capture progress without becoming burdensome.
- **Review progress regularly:** Schedule periodic reviews (quarterly, semi-annually) to assess what's working, what's challenging, and what needs adjustment.

3. Learn, adapt, and share

Adjust based on learning: Be willing to modify approaches, reallocate resources, or pivot strategies based on what implementation reveals

Document and share lessons: Capture insights from implementation experience – both successes and challenges. Share these within your institution to inform other initiatives and build organisational learning.

Celebrate successes: Recognise and communicate achievements, even small ones. This maintains momentum, builds support and demonstrates the value of your HEInnovate-driven initiatives.

4. Plan for the next cycle

HEInnovate is designed as a continuous improvement process, not a one-time exercise:

Repeat the self-assessment: Consider conducting another HEInnovate assessment after 2-3 years (or aligned with your strategic planning cycles). This allows you to:

- Measure progress against your initial baseline
- Identify new priorities as your capacity evolves
- Engage new stakeholders and refresh perspectives
- Demonstrate impact to leadership and funders

Integrate into ongoing processes: Work to embed HEInnovate insights and approaches into regular institutional or alliance practices: strategic planning, quality assurance, program review and continuous improvement mechanisms.

Consider funding opportunities: Explore how your HEInnovate-informed strategy aligns with funding opportunities. For example, institutions participating in or considering the EIT Higher Education Initiative need to use their HEInnovate action plans as the foundation for developing an Innovation Vision Action Plan (IVAP), which forms the basis of their application. This can unlock funding and collaborative opportunities across education, business, and research sectors.

Considerations

Implementing HEInnovate in an alliance means turning shared insights into coordinated action across diverse institutions. This adds complexity but also creates opportunities for collective learning and long-term collaboration.

- **Coordinate clearly:** Assign defined coordination roles (e.g. alliance facilitator, WP leads) and use shared tools to track progress. Partners may move at different speeds—allow flexibility while maintaining alignment on joint goals.
- **Monitor on two levels:** Track institutional progress locally, while monitoring alliance-wide results through shared indicators. Distinguish between institutional improvements, collaboration processes, and collective achievements. Quantitative KPIs should be complemented with qualitative evidence (e.g. narratives, case examples, stakeholder feedback) to capture cultural and organisational change.

- **Leverage diversity:** Treat partners' different strengths and paces as learning opportunities. Encourage exchange of experience rather than comparison or ranking.
- **Manage joint initiatives transparently:** Designate lead partners, clarify expectations, and communicate openly about resources, timelines, and decisions.
- **Sustain engagement and results:** Celebrate progress visibly, rotate leadership roles, and embed successful joint actions into institutions' regular structures to ensure continuity beyond project funding.

By combining structure with flexibility, alliances can turn implementation into an ongoing learning process, strengthening both institutional capacities and the collective impact of the partnership.

Conclusion

For European Universities Alliances, HEInnovate provides a structured framework to translate diversity into coordinated action. By combining individual institutional reflections with alliance-wide synthesis, it enables partners to identify complementarities, align strategic objectives and monitor collective progress without compromising institutional autonomy. When embedded in governance and strategy, HEInnovate can function not only as a diagnostic tool, but as a strategic governance and learning instrument for European University Alliances.

When implemented systematically, HEInnovate supports both institutional transformation and alliance-level development. Repeating the process periodically strengthens collaboration, facilitates evidence-based governance, and demonstrates progress towards shared European objectives in higher education, research, and innovation.