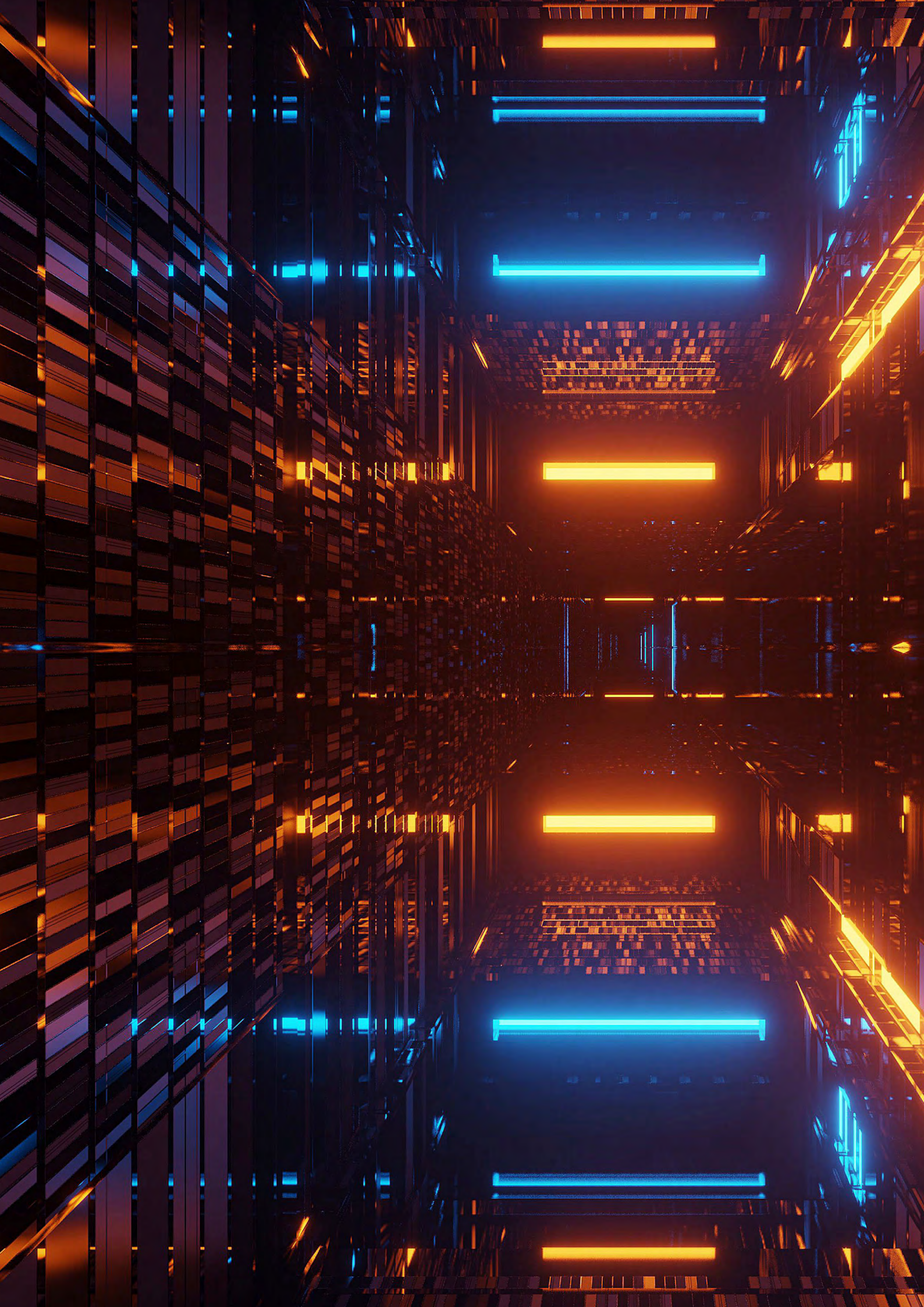


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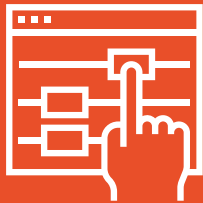
MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION TO IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST IN RISK GOVERNANCE

Gaps and recommendations on effective public and stakeholder communication on risks and safety





INTRODUCTION



This brief report provides a synthesis of current challenges as well as recommendations on the ways forward in addressing risk awareness, perception and inclusiveness in research and policy setting on (safety aspects of) advanced (nano-)materials and related products.

The ambition of this document is twofold: (i) to inform about how to effectively communicate potential risks and benefits of nanotechnologies to the general public; and (ii) to provide guidance and suggestions for including different stakeholders' needs in risk governance on innovative (nano)materials applications.

The brief is an outcome of the research activity on the topic by three European projects, including specific engagement activities and interviews with experts and dialogue initiatives with stakeholders from research, industry and civil society and citizens. Details on the methodology are reported in Gov4Nano deliverable 5.6: Report on case studies for Risk Governance available on www.gov4nano.eu.

These activities are part of a series of initiatives organised by the **Gov4Nano project**, in cooperation with the **RiskGONE** and **NANORIGO** projects, to discuss governance issues in the development of nanomaterials and nano-enabled products, with the goal to promote the safety and sustainability of innovation in nanomaterials in Europe.

BACKGROUND



Risk governance applies the principles of good governance (such as, amongst others, trustworthiness, inclusiveness, openness and transparency) to the identification, assessment, management, and communication of risks. Multistakeholder engagement helps governing bodies to be informed and better understand needs and views within different stakeholder groups, supporting risk governance of advanced (nano)materials.

Based on gained practical experience of multistakeholder engagement, **this brief provides recommendations for public communication and a best-practice example on how to engage with different stakeholder groups, supporting better decision-making that includes and addresses multi-stakeholders' positions, views and perceptions.** It summarises general recommendations on how to implement multistakeholder engagement into initiatives that are actively dealing with risk governance and describes what needs to be considered to optimise the communication process.

THE PROBLEM AT STAKE



Keeping pace with technological innovation while addressing the needs of all stakeholder groups including society, and the changes in information and communication practices in our daily life, is a challenge of any new and innovative technology.

Despite more than a decade of intensive research there is yet a limited availability of data (and related methods, techniques, and tools to gather and collect data) to make a scientifically-sound, evidence-based decision on risk analysis of nanomaterials and nano-related products.

Thus, at least for some advanced (nano)materials and applications, there is the need to use the precautionary principle and apply a case-by-case approach for risk analysis.

Depending on the envisaged target application, the risk-benefit analysis of an advanced (nano)material may differ as this strongly depends on the use context (e.g., a hazardous advanced (nano)material can still be used in nanomedical applications if its medical treatment is unique to a serious disease, while it may be banned from a non-necessary use in other sectors). How to communicate risks of nanomaterials, inform risk-benefit analysis and take decisions in a trustworthy, inclusive, open and transparent way is a significant governance problem for at least some of the existing and future nanomaterials and nano-related products.

GAPS AND ROADBLOCKS



Although several communication and engagement activities on nanomaterials have been and are being performed by national and EU governance bodies, we identified some limits in the current practices:

- Multi-stakeholder engagement initiatives are often performed on an occasional basis, they are not embedded (structurally) into policy and strategy setting for research and innovation of nanomaterials (and advanced materials) by policy makers, researchers and innovators
- The level of transparency and follow-up of initiatives is sometime limited: several elements often are not addressed, including who or which organization was involved in what way, how was the feedback/concern/input processed, what is the impact of the involvement.

Improving communication during the whole risk governance process could help to increase transparency and build trust among all types of stakeholders.



WAY FORWARD

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Drawing on studies on public perceptions of nanotechnologies and based on expert interviews, we developed the following recommendations for both stakeholder and laypeople-oriented public communication of risk and safety issues around new technology developments.

In particular on nanomaterials and nano-related products:

- **Provide scientifically sound foundations for informed choices.** Interested persons should be able to receive sound information and not have to resort to questionable sources on development, use and disposal of (products containing) nanomaterials in Europe, and their safe and sustainable development.
- **Monitor public discussion on nanomaterials and nanotechnologies and provide foresight.** Although, currently, public discussion about nanotechnology is almost absent, new nano-enabled products that enter the market may lead to new concerns that are then publicly discussed suddenly. The work of stakeholders could be supported by means of “horizon scanning” and identifying possible emerging topics in the public discussion. The monitoring should include different types of media on regional, national and international level (e.g., newspapers, magazines, social media and other online sources).
- **Based on this monitoring and foresight function, react to emerging topics and communicate what is known about the risks and safety of different nanomaterials in the context of their benefits.** It should be compiled and communicated what is known about the safety of different nanomaterials in a nuanced way, putting emphasis on scientifically-sound information on both risks and benefits – especially in situations when specific nanomaterials and/or nanoproducts attract more public attention.
- **Develop and use easy-to-share information formats.** Existing information platforms such as websites, could be complemented with a diversity of communication channels and formats (e.g., smartphone-compatible infographics, factsheets or explanatory videos) to help reaching wider audiences
- **Use social media.** Social media platforms could be used for laypeople-oriented topical communication and for complementing the existing information sources (e.g., websites, traditional media).
- **Pay attention to influencers.** On social media, established institutions enjoy less attention than heavily followed social media channels, especially in younger age groups. If (individual) nanomaterials or -products would gain strong public attention, influencers taking part in the discussion could be provided with specific scientifically substantiated information.
- **Make laypeople-oriented communication available in different**

European languages. Whereas the expert community can be informed in English, the information directed at the general public – especially less-educated groups – should be made available in as many languages as possible.

- **Allocate resources for communication activities.** All the possible aforementioned activities require personnel resources, from scientific expertise to journalistic and graphic design competences.
- **Evaluate your communication activities regularly.** If an active role in the public discussion is taken up, a qualitative evaluation of the activities – also compared to other institutions active in public communication – is called for.
- **Be transparent.** Easy-to-understand information on “Who we are” and “What we do” is required for strengthening the trustworthiness in public communication.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS
TO FACILITATE
MULTISTAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT**

There are several different ways to facilitate discussion between stakeholders (experts) and lay-people on risks and benefits of a (new) technology. In our experience, we identified the so-called **User Committee** as a best practice example to discuss on actual and perceived risks and benefits of advanced (nano)materials and facilitate the integration of needs and views from various stakeholder groups early in the product development and risk governance process.

We developed the User Committee as an interdisciplinary group of individuals from different spheres of society with a particular link to nanotechnologies and (exposure to) nanoparticles. It consists of members that are evenly spread over (i) science/research, (ii) industry/enterprises, (iii) regulation/governmental organizations, and (iv) civil society/non-governmental organizations. The composition of the members and its format should be adapted based on the topic at stake and its social and political environment. Regular dialogues (e.g., on (bi)annual basis) with the User Committee help to improve awareness about potential risks and to understand how risk perception is formed in different stakeholder groups. It is also a strong tool to identify trends and facilitate risk communication on new (nano)materials at early stage.

Based on our four years’ experience with this methodology, we identified the following key recommendations:

1. Develop a common understanding

When working in a multistakeholder setting, make sure that enough time and space is given to develop a common understanding of specific terms related to the technologies developed and related to the risk governance process. This is facilitated by not only confronting the different stakeholder group representatives with content, but also allowing them to present their views and perceptions separately.

2. Process the stakeholders’ input transparently

Feedback, concerns and input from the stakeholders should be collected and further considered and addressed transparently within the risk governance process. It should be publicly accessible (while following the GDPR rules, e.g., anonymising the feedback) and shared with the relevant institutions. Any follow-up activities such as responses, reactions to it, evolving processes etc., should be monitored and presented to the User Committee members in a timely and transparent manner.

3. Provide feedback on the stakeholders’ impact

The stakeholders’ input should be taken into account in further research and policy setting activities related to the discussed concerns by initiatives that are actively dealing with risk governance, and its impact should be demonstrated transparently to the User Committee members.

FINAL REMARKS



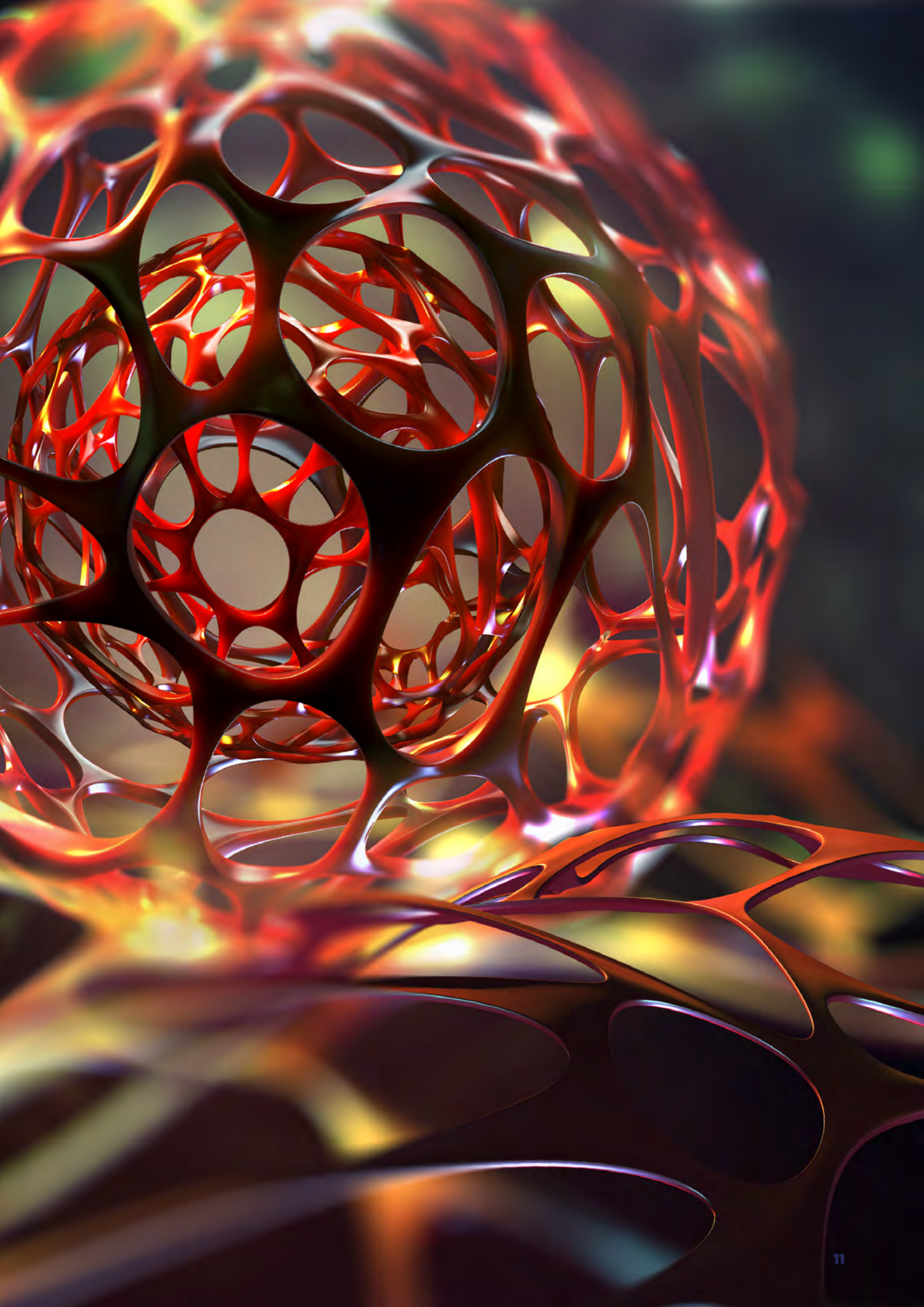
Early dialogue between different stakeholder groups is key to ensure effective risk governance practices that serve society and support innovative materials and technologies development.

Multi-stakeholder engagement in the governance process leads to more effective solutions and helps in setting priorities. The “User Committee” as structured approach to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement is one best practice example for future stakeholder involvement in technology development.

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- **D3.2 “Best-practice guidelines for communication, information provision and engagement”**
- **D3.7 “Concept paper on how to address civil society’s and insurances’ needs within the organisational form for Nano Risk Governance”.** both reports are publicly available www.gov4nano.eu



Brief: Multistakeholder engagement and public communication to improve transparency and trust in risk governance

Main authors: Susanne Resch, BioNanoNet Forschungsgesellschaft mbH (BNN), Austria
Mikko Rissanen, DIALOG BASIS, Germany

Other briefs of the series available on: www.gov4nano.eu



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