

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: ECOST-STSM-TN1302

STSM title: Best Practices for Post-Award Challenges to make EU funded multidisciplinary research projects successful 'BESTPAC'

STSM start and end date: 25/08/2019 to 30/08/2019

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PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The Institute for Research in Biomedicine (IRB), a world class institute located in the Barcelona Science Park, was identified as a host in my STSM application for exchanging ideas and sharing best practices with the particular focus on pre and post award project management challenges, fostering collaborations and mutual networking. The purpose of the STSM was to discuss and compare institutional practices, challenges and successes in order to enhance efficiency and performance in project management. I was hoping to exchange ideas, receive in-depth knowledge about Best Practices for Pre and Post Award Challenges to make EU funded multidisciplinary research projects successful. The STSM was designed to learn examples of BESTPAC, many of which can be implemented in my institutional context. Moreover, the opportunity for international networking could also pave the way for my home institution to become a host institute for STSM exchange programs in future along collaborative research between IRB Barcelona and University College Dublin.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

IRB Barcelona is conducting world class multidisciplinary research (> €40 million core and external annual funding), training and inspiring scientists at all stages of their careers. The research support office at IRB consist of Competitive Funding and International Promotion Department, Human Resources, Finance, Innovation, Communications and General services sections. The staff at these sections was visited for exchange of ideas and knowledge sharing for;

1. Competitive Funding and International Promotion
2. Human Resources Excellence in European projects
3. PRE and POST AWARD Management Support for large multidisciplinary EU projects
4. POST-AWARD Finance support at IRB for EU funded projects
5. Impact, Outreach and Technology transfer
6. Strategy and General Support Services

There are about 50 staff members working in Research Support at IRB Barcelona and my principal contact at IRB Barcelona research support was Dr. Clara Caminal who is Incharge of International Strategic Support section within the Competitive Funding and International Promotion Department. At the start of my STSM Clara gave a detailed presentation on IRB Barcelona and it's research support that was followed by a number of meetings to share knowledge and exchange ideas along visit to various research facilities at IRB Barcelona.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The following project management and institutional good practices were identified:

- 1.** To identify various funding opportunities and develop coordinated projects, it is important to organize and attend meetings, conferences/seminars and invite scientists you want to be part of big projects. Informal meetings are the best to get to know people and make acquaintances among specialists whom you want to see in your consortium. Create your own network and stay in touch. They could be your potential project partners. Personal contacts with them help avoid communication failures during the upcoming project. Online tools similar to Research Professional are best to identify funding opportunities especially for early career researchers.
- 2.** Recruiters/PIs should be clear about what they are looking to hire for Post doc and RA roles. It should be well described in the job description without any ambiguity. In order to select best candidate, it is important to advertise the role at all possible forums to get maximum no. of applications that could make it easier for a PI to recruit the most suitable candidate. IRB Barcelona was awarded with HR excellence logo on the basis of strong recruitment, conflict of interest, code of conduct and research ethics policies. More details on these policies can be found at IRB Barcelona website link; <https://www.irbbarcelona.org/en/about-us/policies>
- 3.** For internal communication, virtual project meeting/skype call discussing the progress per each work package every few months for couple of hour duration is a good practice. This is to keep all partners updated on project progress (and upcoming issues). Additionally, stick to the planned topics, take minutes from every meeting and distribute in the consortium. It is also good to discuss the tasks regularly with the partners involved in the task to see if there are any problems and their possible solutions. Also, it is important to find solutions for different communication cultures as some one prefer to be contacted by phone and some other partner may find other electronic channels more suitable.
- 4.** IRB Barcelona is still in its evolutionary stages so a permanent position dedicated for research data management is yet to be created.
- 5.** For research ethics, all research projects must meet EU regulations highlighted in the call program and on top of that it is compulsory to get research authorization approval from Catalan government especially for research that has human or animal aspect as an experimental unit. Catalan government critically review the applications and grant licences that are valid for the duration of research and each PI and concerned researcher has to make sure that authorisation is in place before starting an experiment. This not only allows fair use of any human and animal tissues for research purpose but also give good reputation to a research organisation.
- 6.** IRB Research Finance Unit is dedicated to provide support to the financial administration of research projects during the post-award stage of the Research Project Lifecycle. Finance officers are specialized in the field of accounting, finance and purchase and are responsible for scholarship and fee payments, requisitioning, overall financial control of the research accounts, addressing financial enquiries from researchers, preparation of cost statements/statements of expenditure, financial reporting to the funders, financial record keeping and auditing. Periodic audits may be required by a funding agency. If a PI receives notice of an audit s/he should contact the IRB Research Finance Unit for assistance. Similarly, they provide support for review of all the budgets and accompanying justification, prior to submission of the research proposal.
- 7.** IRB Barcelona has devised a proactive strategy to ensure that the discoveries made in its labs are developed into products and technologies that serve the community. The Innovation Department at IRB is awarded with TECNIO seal by Catalanian government. This seal signifies key technology providers and facilitators in Catalonia. Advised by an international Business Advisory Board, specialists from the Innovation Department work shoulder to shoulder with IRB researchers to identify results with commercial potential and to protect, develop and commercialize them with the aim to establish strategic public-private

sector collaborations, licencing agreements and spin-off companies. By now four spin off companies have been registered by IRB. Business angels interested investing in the field of science and innovation, support start ups of these companies. Agreements for sponsored research, patenting, licensing, technical and scientific consultancy, and other commercialisation opportunities provide support to IRB researchers as well. By favouring public-private collaborative research projects, IRB Barcelona aims to create and maintain long-term relations between researchers and industry partners.

- 8.** Dissemination and outreach at IRB Barcelona is well thought out depending on the different stakeholders and target groups. IRB organizes Escape Room and Open Days as part of outreach activities and to enhance the impact of their research for wider benefit of the society. During the weekends of June and July 2019, IRB Barcelona organised an escape room in one of its laboratories where 127 participants in 13 teams visited the Escape Room. For Primary School Students, a three-year collaboration between IRB Barcelona and a local primary school finalized last year, with excellent results that aimed to boost academic results and social cohesion by bringing biomedicine into the school curriculum. For secondary school students, a flagship year-long mentoring programme is in place that brings 24 secondary school students in their first year of baccalaureate into IRB labs for hands-on learning.
- 9.** IRB Barcelona also organises regular science training workshops for secondary school teachers, bringing them into the lab to investigate some of the current questions researchers are tackling in molecular medicine and to get a hands-on look at the methodologies they use. Scientists and teachers work together to develop and refine materials and resources to take back to the classroom.
- 10.** External advisory board and Board of Trustees devise strategies for overseeing research activities, approving the operating funds and ensuring that the annual goals at IRB Barcelona are met. These boards are completely independent. The scientific work of IRB Barcelona is regularly assessed by an External Advisory Board which comprises of 15 leading international researchers in the field of biomedicine. Their main task is to provide guidance in shaping IRB research and related activities.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

This STSM has certainly strengthened the relationship between IRB Barcelona and UCD, which materialized into future collaboration on a H2020 project. UCD is now collaborating on a proposal for funding within the H2020 MSCA-COFUND-2019 call to foster IRB's current International PhD fellowship programme which will attract young researchers to carry out their PhD in the unique international and multidisciplinary setting offered by IRB. This proposal will be submitted at the end of September, 2019. Various researchers from UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science, UCD Conway Institute has shown interest in this proposal and this all happened through my STSM supported by eCOST. The Director of UCD Conway Institute has shown great interest in this proposal and provided letter of support for IRB Barcelona. This means UCD is now included in a pool of partner organisations where fellows/early career researchers would undertake their secondments or training. For the proposal to be competitive, the COFUND project should have a strong international dimension and with collaborations and agreements with several research institutions worldwide. Fellows joining IRB Barcelona will have the possibility to undertake secondments or training courses in these institutions. Hopefully, close collaboration between research support staff at both institutes will contribute to establish further scientific collaboration in joint research areas and possible future project partnerships. It was agreed that there will be further contact in the future and continued sharing of knowledge between the two institutions that will lay down foundation for productive long-term cooperation.