

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

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

Action number: TN1302

STSM title: BestPrac: The voice of research administrators - building a network of administrative excellence

STSM start and end date: 11. - 15.2.2019.

Grantee name: Olja Ulični Nikšić

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

School of Engineering and Natural Sciences, University of Iceland (host organization) and School of Medicine University of Zagreb (UZSM) (sending organization) take part in Horizon2020. Both institutions have close collaboration and participate in projects with their local biomedical researchers.

Hosts and visiting project manager met during COST Bestprac Belgrade Workshop, during which they identified similar management interests and project cases. For closer relations, learning opportunities and possible joint project collaboration, the newly introduced team applied for COST BestPrac STSM.

Also recently UZSM has started to organize it's own project management office and to see know-how of successful project management grant office was an excellent learning opportunity.

It was great benefit for Croatian project manager to visit University of Iceland as they had experience of EC project audit and have applied their project management with audit recommendations, thus they can serve as example of good practice.

The following aims were included in this STSM:

- Sharing project management skills
- Get information on strategies and success variables on participation in international research projects,
- Sharing best practices and internal grant processes,
- Specifics on internal grant IT tools.
- Explore possibilities of collaboration at different levels and identify common interests.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

Monday 11th February 2019:

- Participation in the general startup meeting for the admin staff of School of Engineering and Natural Sciences (SENS).
- Introduction to University of Iceland campus with Brynja Dís Guðmundsdóttir, project manager at the Project Management Office.
- Brief talk on Croatian home Institute. Meeting open to interested SENS and Central administration staff.
- Meeting with Gréta Björk Kristjánsdóttir, SENS Research Director. Supporting the grant process at SENS: support services to researchers, interaction, providing information on funding opportunities, dissemination, pre-award European Proposal Management service, proposal writing, relationships with European platforms or other lobbying bodies, providing costing and liaising with Research

Services. Research strategy, working with researchers, detection of opportunities, tools, support provided etc.

- Meeting with Sigrún Reynisdóttir, technician-biomedical scientist at the Life and Environmental Sciences. Discussion about research projects of the Life and Environmental Sciences.

Tuesday 12th February 2019:

- Meeting with the Grants Office, central administration on Audits at the University of Iceland. Meeting with Gyða Einarsdóttir, project manager, and Svandís Helga Svavarsdóttir, project manager.
- Visit to School of Education and The Educational Research Institute. Research strategy, working with researchers, detection of opportunities, tools, support provided etc. Meeting with Katrín Johnson.
- Visit to Division of finance. Meeting with Jóhanna Linda Hauksdóttir, project manager in charge of international research grants. Discussion about management tools for finance and travel

Wednesday 13th February 2019:

- Participation in weekly Project Management Office (PMO) meeting.
- Meeting with heads of PMO, Gréta Björk Kristjánsdóttir and Hulda Proppé. Discussing set-up, history and strategy of the PMO.
- Meeting with PMO staff discussing the IT tools used by the PMO staff. Meeting with Brynja Dís Guðmundsdóttir, Una Björg Einarsdóttir and Kristmundur Þór Ólafsson.
- Science Institute University of Iceland. Meeting with operation managers Anna Jóna Baldursdóttir and Íris Davíðsdóttir.

Thursday 14th February 2019:

- Visit to the School of Health Sciences. Research strategy, working with researchers, detection of opportunities, tools, support provided etc.
- Meeting with Ása Vala Þórisdóttir, Research Director of the School of Health Sciences (SHS) and Auður Bergþórsdóttir, project manager.
- Meeting with project managers of the larger ERC grants of the SHS Ásdís Rósa Þórðardóttir and Dóra Ragnheiður Ólafsdóttir.
- Meeting Halla Arnarradóttir, head of the Clinical Research Center of Landspítali and University of Iceland.

Friday 15th February 2019:

- Visit to the Grants Office, Division of Science and Innovation. Discussion on the set up of the Grants Office, the SMES group, legal services offered for negotiation and administration, management support, consultancy services, collaboration with industry etc.
- Meeting with Úlfar Kristinn Gíslason, project manager, Gyða Einarsdóttir, project manager, and Svandís Helga Halldórsdóttir, project manager.
- Meeting with Gréta Björk Kristjánsdóttir. Closing session.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

This STSM supported individual mobility and enabled learning opportunity which is quite rare for Croatian administrative project personnel in relation to researcher's mobility. STSM enabled knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, and increased efficiency in project management in H2020 for all involved partners. Experience was gained, both by the home and host institutions, exchanging financial, legal and administrative experience, as well as sharing best practices and processes.

STSM connected administrative, financial and legal services in both institutions. By visiting institutions which deals in similar research area, it was much easier to discuss similar challenges and problems related to biomedical project management.

STSM visit enhanced the knowledge acquired in the COST BestPract Action and Workshops. This visit fitted perfectly with the target groups of the Action allowing the exchange of knowledge among staff of faculty and research institutions carrying out administrative tasks in support of European projects during the pre and post-award phases.

University of Iceland has a centralised system with a monitoring central grants whereas School of Medicine University of Zagreb has a more wider decentralised system. The pros and cons of the two systems were

intensively discussed and each institution can see advantages in the other system. We also talked about general project management offices and how lean management and visual management may be of benefit in small institutions where resources are limited.

Training and career development for administrators were also discussed. This is an issue for smaller institutions where budget for regular trainings can be limited. Webinars and strong personal professional-networks can subsidise this. Both institutions agree that networks like BeastPract are thus invaluable for learning from other institutions, making contacts and benchmarking

Shared best practices and internal processes mainly dealt with how is configured the internal arrangement of the project management offices and how they interact with the research community and the central grants office. We would highlight the following aspects:

- Specific job positions give proper support to the PI and project manager (e.g. open access officer, tech transfer officer, legal support officer, financial advisor etc).
- It is possible to have a central grants office which gives support to the research community as long as there is a sufficient number personnel supporting the office.
- Specialization of project management staff per funding scheme is also important to allow a better understanding and tracking of each funding scheme and, therefore, better support to the PIs.
- Incentives to the researcher community are also very useful tool to promote the participation of the research community in international projects.
- Provide free training to academics / researchers, such as for example on proposal writing, identifying funding opportunities and research project management. This training should be provided in-house or in many cases by internal and external experts.
- Providing PIs with tools and information in order get international funding.
- Specific internal IT tools and binders aid the PIs and project manager to properly track project development.
- Anticipation is key for success, e.g. inform the PIs well in advance on the topics of the future work programmes and next steps in project development.
- The culture of accountability among the project administrators and research community seem to help a lot to get funds and to properly conduct projects.
- Possibility of further empowering project management office was also discussed (e.g. stop an project application not fulfilling the administrative and financial criteria).
- In order to properly track the implementation of the institutional strategy and take decisions, frequent analyses should be performed (e.g. participation, success, types of projects etc.).
- The internal overhead distribution is very useful, both for the research community and support of project management office.
- Surveys should be performed within research community in order to track the quality of project management office support.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

Close collaboration and personal contacts were established by this STSM between School of Engineering and Natural Sciences, University of Iceland and School of Medicine University of Zagreb. Knowledge exchange will continue after STSM as there is still lot to exchange e.g. Croatian practice with H2020 internal invoices and Icelandic templates for H2020 financial statement preparation etc.

If there would be possibility for another COST BestPrac STSM call, there is interest for Icelandic research manager to visit Croatia in order to enable two way educational exchange and learn from wider network of Croatian project management offices and especially University of Zagreb. In this STSM Croatian project manager represented their local experience in biomedical research grants with focus on single home institution as each research institution is represented by their own PIC and approaches EC individually in Croatia, while in Iceland all research institutions approach EC under single university's PIC thus Icelandic project management office has much broader scope on different projects and researchers needs.

Also there were good recommendations to Croatian partner by Icelandic host for applying for Erasmus+ learning exchange or MSCA RISE practice which will aid development of newly founded Croatian Project management office.

Hopefully close collaboration between two project management offices will contribute to establish also scientific collaboration in joint research areas and possible future project partnerships.

There will be further contact in the future and continued sharing of knowledge between the two institutions, particularly at the time when Croatian partner start implementing learned practices and establishes it's own Project management office.