BESTPRAC WG1/WG2/WG3 Meeting

Report

February 8-9, 2018
University Politehnica of Bucharest, Romania

The ninth meeting of the three working groups of COST Targeted Network TN 1302 (BESTPRAC) was held on February 8-9, 2018 in Bucharest, Romania.

The main objective of BESTPRAC is to establish a network for the administrative, finance and legal services in universities, research organizations and related entities supporting researchers involved in the lifecycle of European funded projects in order to exchange experiences and share and develop best practices, encourage knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer and increased efficiency.

The BESTPRAC target group is the staff in universities and research institutions carrying out administrative tasks in support of European projects during the post-award phase, often with low salaries, without any possibility to travel and to network and share experiences about carrying out administrative tasks in European research projects. The target group does not include researchers, European project officers focussed on the pre-award phase of the project lifecycle, managers/directors, and people with PhDs.

There was a great interest in participating in the joint meeting. In total, 130 applications were received. In total, 134 applications were received. Finally, 108 research administrators from 35 countries attended the meeting. Among the participants 48 % came from so-called inclusiveness countries, 35 % were MC members, 61 % Working Group members, and 44 % so-called Early Stage Administrators. It shall also be mentioned that 79 % of the participants were female and 56 % already participated in previous BESTPRAC activities.

Two joint sessions of all three working groups as well as the meetings of the three individual working groups were scheduled. Theme of the joint session 1 was “Impact in RIA and CSA proposals - how to address the impact in proposals” presented by Klaus Schuch, COST Scientific Committee Member and a director of the Centre for Social Innovation, Vienna.

During the joint interactive session 2 for all WG1/WG2/WG3 participants, WG2 members, Vanessa Ravagni (University of Trento) and Staska Mrak Jamnik (University of Ljubljana) presented “Recommendations for financial rules in FP9” in order to contribute to the “Public consultation on next EU Research & Innovation programme” as BESTPRAC community. This document is one of the WG2 deliverables. During this plenary session was concluded that BESTPRAC should contribute to the public consultation launched by the EC with deadline at 8 March 2018 and further activities should be following: BESTPRAC participants will receive a draft filled in questionnaire in 1 week with 2 days for answering. Draft of the questionnaire will be updated with received comments and submitted by WG2 before deadline.

The respective documents can be downloaded at http://www.bestprac.eu/events/workshop-bucharest-february-2018/

Summary of WG1-meeting

The first meeting was used to shape the future direction together with the group. There were two organised discussions, 1 on the direction of Bestprac2 and 1 on the future of the Research Support Staff Framework (RSSF). Summary of the discussions is presented in chapter 1 and 2 respectively. Next to the discussions a session on Ethics, Data management and GDPR was organised the presentations and presenters can be found in chapter 3. The presentations will be available on the website and short guidebook will be made from the content.

1. Future directions of WG1 in BestPrac2

Introduction

To ask the group regarding their wishes for future topics on research administration and understand the challenges that lie ahead regarding research administration we consulted the group on topics that arose from the group. The topics were divided into 5 large themes. These themes will be used for future guidance when preparing the meetings writing guidebooks and empowering the WG1 group but also help research administration which is not part of Bestprac2. The themes were: FP9 pre and post award (Caroline Strickson); Collaborating with the EC (Grujica Vico); EU funding opportunities (funding sources and financial instruments other than H2020) (Virag Zsar); Impact (Borbala Schenk); The difference between information sharing and learning (Javier Gonzalo).

FP9 Pre and post award

At this stage there are a lot of question marks with regard to the new FP, e.g. whether the widening budget will increase, how Brexit will affect success rates, whether it would be possible to offer the same daily rates for researchers. There are ongoing consultations between the EC & NCPs which, however, does not reach research administrators in all cases **– more information would be needed.**

The rules are quite simple already so there is not so much space for further simplification; nevertheless, it seems that the raise of overheads results in problems for certain administrations. R&I landscape needs simplification, thus synergies should be further sought with other EU funds, more importantly, and different funding rules should be harmonized.

According to the participants, the elaboration of data management plan & impact strategy is essential for current calls and its importance will raise in future calls. This necessitates **specific training for research administrators**, especially in case of MSC fellowships. The so-called ‘mission oriented approach’ and conflict of interest should be also further explained to researchers.

Collaboration with European Commission

BestPrac2 should contribute to the **recognition of the research administrators as stakeholders by the European Commission**.

Existing contacts with EC should be strengthened and the communication with them should be deepened.

The following suggestions were collected during the discussion:

- Invite relevant EC representatives to BestPrac2 meeting.
- BestPrac2 should start **direct networking with EC and gain better visibility**.
- **Creating relevant statements** from BestPrac2 meetings and sending to EC.
- Supporting EC openness for research administrators in form of STSM or trainings focusing EU orientation towards inclusion countries.

EU funding opportunities

Many people confirmed that they deal with different funding programmes on a daily basis apart from H2020, such as INTERREG, DG Justice, EEA, Eurostars, COSME, EIT, EIC, Creative Europe, Europe4Citizens, Erasmus +. Experiences with these programmes are diverse, in some cases universities are banned from taking part due to high risk of costs becoming ineligible by programmes (mainly in case of INTERREG), or the necessity of co-financing, or the difficulty in understanding state-aid rules. We agreed that being involved in different programmes, one has to be familiar not only with financial, administrative and reporting rules, but also the mindset of both the administrator and the researcher has to change since each programme requires different approaches and focuses. Nevertheless, it is always good to be familiar with different funding opportunities thus the groups agreed that it would be useful to

- get more information on different funding programmes, especially EIT, EIC projects, Erasmus +,
- share good practices in developing and implementing these projects (reporting, intervention logic, etc.).

Impact

With regard to the understanding of impact there are differences between research cultures, SSH research. Impact is also hard to formulated, especially in Humanities Researchers think that the research speaks for itself, researchers don't understand the concept and importance of impact, they feel it is something obligatory only because of the requirements of the EC. Researchers can't write impact, because it needs special expertise, as project writing in general does

How to overcome these challenges? The involvement of research administrators is essential: bridging the gap - knows what questions to ask, impact clinic, helps if the national grants start asking for impact as well. There are different options:, a) researcher writes it b) research administrators writes it c) consortium partner writes it with this dedicated task d) engaging stakeholders in already the preparation phase of the proposal - involve them in writing the impact section.

Research administrators need the expertise in seeing possible **policy impact and commercial exploitation, sharing impact case studies**.

The groups agreed that **sharing success stories** would motivate other researchers as well

The difference between information sharing and learning

We defined the difference between sharing information and learning as the use that the receiver does with the information. If the receiver does not use the information, learning does not take place.

We started the discussion how we empower (or try to empower) our researchers with the information we send, in other words how we can be sure that the researchers use this information and learn.

Most of the institutions use mailing list to share the information, but this is not enough to guaranty the learning, it is just sharing information. So, we shared some interesting options to improve the learning. Some of them are useful for big institutions or some of them for small ones. The strategies were the following:

- Identify specific calls and match with the specific researchers, this needs follow up
- Sessions where beside the information about new calls on rules in H2020, a successful project is presented, in order to encourage other researcher sharing their experience. During these sessions the invited researcher can encourage the rest to contact our project office.
- Live streaming sessions

- Face to Face meetings
- Use mailing list by topics
- Specific actions for young researchers

Following some interesting ideas shown up during the discussion:

- Learning is not in our site, teaching is. we can push for learning but researcher have to want it
- Try to make the researcher to see us as a key player of the project at all of the stages, from proposal preparation to closing
- Do not invest time in people not interested
- Important to work together with communication office

Conclusions

Discussions in the various groups along the various topics underlined the importance of the raised topics and specific suggestions of members were formulated which should be taken into account for the organization of upcoming activities – not only meetings, but STSMs and training schools.

FP9 pre and post award:

- there is a need for continuous spread and **exchange of information**
- there is a need for **specific trainings** focusing on different parts & scope of the proposals, e.g. data management plan, impact strategy, mission oriented approach, etc.

Collaboration with the European Commission:

- BestPrac should start **direct networking with EC, invite the EC** to BestPrac meetings, **organize STSM or training school** for ITC research administrators
- there is a need **make accepted researcher administrators as stakeholders**
- BestPrac should further formulate **statements** and channelling them to EC.

EU funding opportunities:

- participants are eager to get **more information on different funding programmes**, especially EIT, EIC projects, Erasmus +, in the frame of **meetings or training school**
- **share good practices** in developing and implementing these projects (reporting, intervention logic, etc.).

Impact:

- seeing possible policy impact and commercial exploitation, **sharing impact case studies** would be important
- **sharing success stories** would provide motivation not only to research administrators but to researchers too

The difference between information sharing and learning

- strategies differ in case of smaller and larger institutions, however, the clue in reaching out and engaging researchers are the delivery of tailor-made messages, whereas the channels can differ

2. RSSF roadmap and notes from the Bucharest meeting

Introduction

This document provides and overview of the working group discussions for the Research Support Staff Framework (RSSF) held in Bucharest 9-2-2018. This framework has been developed by BestPrac1 and seen by the European Commission as an important deliverable that should be further developed. The framework has been described and placed on a WiKi page (www.bestprac-wiki.eu/Main_Page) and other documents are available at this moment, however the content is not ready (marketable) for further dissemination. The Framework should be further developed so it can be used by various stakeholders for instance as blueprint for research support to make a lasting and positive impact in the research support landscape.

To develop the roadmap for this research support framework for the coming two years four working group discussions were held during the Bucharest meeting. The topics in the working groups were: dissemination; WiKi; impact; and development these groups were led by Wannes Ribbens (KUL), Nik Cleasen (EARMA), Veronika Csapo (CEU) and Delphine Nicolas (Université Nice) respectively. Their notes have been used to write the summary underneath describing the findings and a concept working plan for the coming 2 years including a list of deliverables and actions. The deliverables have been subdivided into small tasks by collaborative effort from the whole group many hands will make light work. The appendix shows the original notes from the groups.

Summary of the different topics

Dissemination:

Three different potential stakeholders have been identified they all require different dissemination strategies and approaches. Unique selling points need to be identified to create specific and tailor-made dissemination strategies for the different stakeholders. One essential aspect will be to further develop and simplify the framework. The **three stakeholders are;**

1) Research administrators;
2) Decision makers and
3) Researchers.

The RSS framework can be disseminated via national and international networks stimulating the view of research support as a true profession, in need of recognition, and in need of a clear career development path. The framework should identify and focus on added value of the research support staff for the stakeholders.

To simplify the message the framework can be dissected into the following elements;

- Who am I (title, educational background)?
- What do I do (tasks and activities)?
- What are my main skills and competencies?
- Why am I important (added value)?
- Where do I belong in the research support landscape?

Research administrators selling points for this group is that they are able to assess their profile, examine their strengths and training needs. The framework can be viewed as a career development tool helping early stage career researchers and national research administrator networks to formulate tasks and responsibilities. The Selling point of the RSS framework for **decision makers** is the ability for *university leadership* to assess strengths, weaknesses and gaps in their research support. The *European Commission* should be involved with the future development of the framework as they have regarded it as being an important deliverable of BestPrac1 which needs to be further developed. *National governments* can be shown how to organize effective support staff within universities. The RSS framework can help to identify gaps in research administration and as such act as a leverage to ask for effective and efficient research support at the universities. *Professional, international networks* Professional, international networks may act as an important broker between BestPrac and decision makers. **Researchers** can use the RSS framework and make the diverse tasks and responsibilities clear between researchers and supporting staff knowing when they can expect help.

Impact:

To make sure that the Research Support Staff Framework has an effect on the research support the framework needs to be used. We need to identify who benefits from the use of the framework (see dissemination), how can the framework be used, job descriptions, ease discussion with your superior, identify gaps in the grant office, define the boundaries of the grant offices (pro award only or more) to induce use of the framework and thus increase the likelihood of impact we need a marketable product. This means that the framework needs to be usable, easy and comprehensible.

Wiki:
Improving the WiKi or find another means of presentation of the framework on the World Wide Web is an essential part of the dissemination and communication strategy. At this moment the content is present on the BestPrac wiki but the quality must be improved we therefore need Quality assurance, logic and rationalisation and improve from the current content. Low threshold ways to interact with the framework: Job descriptions, internal awareness creation. A practical solution might be to make a **website** and keep the wiki for the experts and to act as the data. **Website will be the front end, wiki the back end**. The website would have **different parts** or **different entry points** for different target groups.
Development:
Job development description; The website/WiKi can be developed to serve as an official job description used by stakeholders to form the research support at their institutions. **Training opportunities coupled to RSSF; The framework provides a clear indication of the tasks, responsibilities and competences of the different support staff.** This can provide an opportunity to develop a clear apprenticeship programme with the goal of not just learning, but getting certified it can even be further developed into a MA in Research Administration. These frameworks can also be used by organisations such as EARMA that already have a certification system (much like ARMA). These certificates are based on the level of experience. Both soft skills and hard skills are needed. The funding for the training could come from the European Commission to train research support staff of inclusiveness counties at a uniform manner which best suits the support to European projects. A local association of research administrators or NCP can serve as a basis of the training at national level. The training, if implemented could be based on tasks, skill, competences and knowledge.
Stimulating Use of RSSF. RSS needs to be communicated with the national research funding agencies. Concrete action points need to be adopted to each country's funding agency. A system could be introduced where if an application involves certified research administrators, the proposal receives extra points during evaluation. Similarly to the HR logo of excellence there could be a similar seal of excellence. This looks simple on the surface, but the content behind it is a lot more substantial, there need to be several formal requirements. A session with the Legal working group on how to go about it would be helpful. When giving recommendations to the national funding agencies, universities should include the RSS. To make RSS more visible each university's research support office should evaluate the impact their office has on a researcher's career.
Fit of the RSSF to all universities Different institutions have very different structures. In Estonia, for example the RSS does not fit the university's Research Administration Office. There are small universities in this country, with 1-3 people doing everything from financial to legal tasks.

Deliverables/actions
Issues to be resolved

- Where will the BestPrac website and the wiki be hosted. Buy a domain name and then hand it over or sustain it after BestPrac in line with the sustainability group we need to test/experience it and then modify/adapt it by the end of BESTPRAC. (name)
- To define/clarify our roles in the organisation (name)
- The focus should be on the added value of the Research support staff. Such a message is likely to resonate better with stakeholders (e.g. What will be the gain for governments if they invest more in research support staff?) (name)

Development of the framework

- Identifying the unique selling points and specific, tailor-made dissemination strategies for the different stakeholders (name)
- Actively involved in the continuation of the RSSF (advisory board) (Nik Claesen)

- Draft annotations and definitions document will be provided by Nik (Nik Claesen).
- Making job descriptions based on the RSSF (name)
- Marketing plan for the RSSF (name)
- condense » the RSS framework to a comprehensive level (name)

Communication

- infographic The package should be attractive and preferably visual (name)
- nice presentation (prezi) (name)
- self-explanatory avatars for the three types (name)
- creating message (name)
- describing added value of framework (name)
- promoting linked-in page (name)

Networking

- engaging stakeholders (name)
- Involve WG2 and WG3 in the developments. (name)
- BestPrac and EARMA. For university leadership there is however a need for a clear and simple presentation (name)

Website and WiKi

- A demo of the wiki. (Nik Claesen)
- technical responsible website (Anna Kiviletho)
- training or instructions on using Squarespace (Anna Kiviletho to take the lead)
- Material for website (names)
- Website design (names)

WG1.2. Current Status and Next Steps Requested by RSS Development

The following are the ideas that came up during this session – much like brainstorming style.

1. Develop and official job description
2. Apprenticeship programme with the goal of not just learning, but getting certified at the end
3. MA in Research Administration
4. RSS needs to be communicated with the national research funding agencies. Concrete action points need to be adopted to each country's funding agency.
5. A system could be introduced where if an application involves certified research administrators, the proposal receives extra points during evaluation.
6. EARMA has a certification system (much like ARMA). These certificates are based on the level of experience. Both soft skills and hard skills are needed.
7. The funding for the training (whatever form it takes) should come from a general, EU level. (Otherwise less advanced countries would lag behind even more.) A local association of research administrators can ban serve as a basis of the training at national level. (If and where these associations exists, e.g. in Switzerland. In Portugal „only" an informal network exists, but that could also serve as a basis.)
8. Similarly to the HR logo of excellence there could be a similar seal of excellence. This looks simple on the surface, but the content behind it is a lot more substantial, there need to be several formal requirements. A session with the Legal working group on how to go about it would be helpful.
9. Different institutions have very different structures. In Estonia, for example the RSS does not fit the university's Research Administration Office. There are small universities in this country, with 1-3 people doing everything from financial to legal tasks.

10. There were opposing opinions on whether new researchers should get to know the basics or not. Those who were for yes suggested that PhD training include research management basics. On the other hand, those who think there is no need for researchers to know about research management (Finland, for example) say the their researcher do not want to do anything with it – this what research support offices are for. Even so, some of them like to do their own management.
    The training, if implemented would be based on tasks, skill, competences and knowledge.
11. When giving recommendations to the national funding agencies, universities should include the RSS.
12. To make RSS more visible each university's research support office should evaluate the impact their office has on a researcher's career.
13. Suggestion for a linked-In group – it already exists, but only few know about it.

3. Presentations on Ethics, Data management, GDPR.

The following has been presented at the meeting. Presentations and a guidebook on the topics will be available on the website.
14:30-14:55 Ethics in research (Anna Kivilehto)
14:55-15:20 Open data GDPR and data management (Geraldine Canny)
15:45-16:10 open data GDPR (Oonagh Kinsman)
16:10-16:30 ERC ethics issues (Edwin Kanters)

Summary of WG2-Finance Meeting

During the second day of the BESTPRAC Meeting in Bucharest, WG2 members (48 attendants from 26 COST Countries) analysed and discussed following topics:

- Financial Management of EU Projects
- Managing H2020 Projects: Guide to Best Practice - Financial Issues,
- Implementation of synergies between H2020 and ESIF

Financial Management of EU Projects
During the WG session, WG2 participants analysed the financial management of EU projects under exchange different practices in following: financial management methods and tools; responsibilities and risks of a project coordinator; Currency fluctuation.

1. **Needs of those who practice financial management of cross-border, European research projects:** Per Inge Andresen (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) presented financial management methods and tools which can be useful in both project phases pre-award and post-award.
2. **What does it mean to be a H2020 coordinator?**: Wolfram Rieneck (Medical University Innsbruck) discussed the responsibilities and risks of a project coordinator and possible solutions for better deal with these challenges.
3. **How to deal with euro-fluctuations in European projects when a country you work in doesn't use euro:** Zhanna Saidenova (University of Oslo) presented several situations in which currency fluctuation can result in financial losses and example how University of Oslo deal with this risk.

4. **Future Development: FP9:** Meike Dlaboha (Weihenstephan-Triesdorf) discussed the FP9 challenges and what lies ahead as well as German position.

Managing H2020 Projects: Guide to Best Practice - Financial Issues

One of the key objectives of WG2 for the period 2018-2020 is to provide New Guide to Best Practice - Financial Issues drawing lessons from the beginning of the H2020. This document should take in to account all changes in Model of Grant Agreement from the beginning of the H2020. During this meeting WG2 member, divided in six subgroups, analyzed different chapters of previous documents and discussed the content of the new one. Each subgroup was led by volunteers who presented after the discussion suggestions of his/her team and plan what they will prepare for the next meeting in the Belgrade.

1. **Subgroup 1: Legal Framework and Financial Audit - Vanessa Ravagni, Vera Shiko**
2. **Subgroup 2: Eligible and ineligible costs - Géraldine Léonard**
3. **Subgroup 3: Other Direct Costs - Wolfram Rieneck**
4. **Subgroup 4: Budgeting - Per Inge Andresen**
5. **Subgroup 5: Financial management and reporting Maria Saalpo**
6. **Subgroup 6: Synergies between H2020 and ESIF and other sources of funding (national), Dace Karkle**

Implementation of synergies between H2020 and ESIF

During the session Dace Kārkle (Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis) presented example of same project (action) financed by H2020 and ESIF or national funds and challenges in implementation. The Seal of Excellence was presented as a prime example of the synergies established between Horizon 2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds. WG2 members discussed about lack of harmonization of cost models and reporting requirements of H2020 and ESIF.

Summary of WG3-Legal meeting

In the beginning of the second day WG3 leaders Sarah Dello (Ghent University, Belgium) and Niina Mikkonen (Aalto University, Finland) presented the agenda for the day including WG3 objectives and approach for the current and upcoming meetings.

After the introduction, the WG3 participants briefly presented themselves. Some of the WG3 participants participated in previous BESTPRAC meetings but we also welcomed a few participants new to BESTPRAC. WG3 is not only composed by lawyers but also by EU research administrators who have to deal with legal issues in their day-to-day work.

The agenda of WG3 contained the following three topics, co-lead by 6 WG3 volunteers.

- The new GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) coming into force in May 2018: relevance and points of attention for universities
- Misconduct and bankruptcy: how is it dealt with under H2020, practical consequences for the project
- Conducting smooth consortium agreement negotiations as a coordinator of a H2020 proposal

WG3.1: The new GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) coming into force in May 2018, relevance and points of attention for universities:

The new General Data Protection Regulation will become enforceable on May 25, 2018. As the GDPR takes the form of a regulation, it will be directly applicable in all EU member states, without being implemented in national legislation. The new GDPR introduces stricter rules regarding data protection applying to all data controllers and processors across Europe. Critical question is how can universities best prepare for the regulation.

The session started with general introduction on GDPR including its impact on universities and actions that Aalto University is taking because of the regulation. Presentation was given by Niina Mikkonen (Aalto University, Finland). After this general part Sabine Reinalter (Technische Universitaet Wien, Austria) presented the experiences of GDPR at TU Wien.

The session gave practical guidance to the WG participants for ensuring GDPR compliance in their respective institutions. The session also gained interest in other WGs and few participants from WG1 and WG2 attended the GDPR part of WG3 meeting. WG3 also had very lively discussion about the GDPR and actions that universities are taking or planning to have related to GDPR.

Interesting to see was that BESTPRAC members participating in the other groups (WG1 and WG2) also joined this session. They indicated that the topic of GDPR is also very relevant to them. This demonstrates that the topic of GDPR is a topic which should be looked into in further detail during the upcoming BESTPRAC meetings and could be a cross-working group topic for a joint interactive session or workshop.

WG3.2 Misconduct and bankruptcy: how is it dealt with under H2020, practical consequences for the project

Research misconduct, research integrity and bankruptcy are terms addressed in consortium agreements but often the clauses are not negotiated because one assumes that the likelihood of these clauses applying is rather small. Nevertheless, it is important to point researchers on the practical consequences of these concepts to the implementation of the project.

The session started with presentation of Kristín E. Hardardottir (University of Iceland, Iceland). She explained the principles related to misconduct and bankruptcy under H2020 and practical consequences of them. Important part of the session was survey that Nataša Jakominić Marot (University of Rijeka, Croatia) had done amongst the WG3 participants related to issues and difficulties that universities are facing with misconduct. Natasa presented the results.

The session created awareness of misconduct and bankruptcy issues amongst the WG3 participants.

WG3.3: Conducting smooth consortium agreement negotiations as a coordinator of a H2020 proposal

Throughout the BESTPRAC1 WG3 meetings, the DESCA template consortium agreement has been examined in detail. In previous sessions the focus has been on the theoretical concepts behind the legal provisions.

In this session Sarah Dello (Ghent University, Belgium) and Miriam Ryan (Maynooth University, Ireland) presented the critical consortium agreement clauses that coordinator most commonly faces up to. They also provided useful tips and tricks for successful consortium agreement negotiations as a role of coordinator.

The session was practical and focused on the clauses and topics within the consortium agreement that cause negotiations to be impacted and provided fall-back clauses and creative solutions to overcome hurdles during negotiations. After presentation WG3 participants shared their experiences and issues that they had overcome as coordinator.

Looking ahead

A short survey was conducted amongst the WG3 members in order to identify i) which topics would gather interest of the WG3 participants and ii) to identify which specific expertise of the WG3 members is available and can be used for putting together the programme for the upcoming WG3 meetings. For the upcoming meetings, ideas for topics are:

- deeper dive in GDPR => adding content to checklist / survival kit
- FP9: first insight => identifying where potential (legal) issues are
- Technology transfer: licensing, IP transfer, spin-outs etc.
- Joint interactive sessions on GDPR
- Workshops, led by WG mini-team, on cross-WG topics