

**REPORT**  
**Short Term Scientific Mission**

**BEST PRACTICE TRANSFER IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION**

**TN1302: BESTPRAC**

**The voice of research administrators: Building a network of administrative excellence**

**LOCATION OF STSM:**

1. ECOHOST – The Centre for Health and Social Change, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, University of London, UK (ECOHOST), Ms. Despoina Xenikaki
2. Institute for Global Health, University College London, UK (UCL IGH), Ms. Mary Caspillo-Brewer

**TIME and DURATION OF STSM:**

August 28<sup>th</sup> – Friday 4<sup>th</sup> 2015

**PRE-APPROVED BUDGET:**

750,00 EUR

**SUMMARY:**

As an early stage research administrator (Associate for International Projects) working in a research institute in Croatia, Institute for Anthropological Research (IAR), it is of great importance for my professional progress and for the IAR itself for me to gain more knowledge and practice in the domain of project management. It is important for persons working in project management of EU funded projects to exchange experiences, especially between low performing and internationally leading organizations. I visited two different organizations based in London, UK, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and Institute for Global Health, to learn in practice the best practices of research administration. STSM was implemented with great success. There were 5 large topics that our workplan was organized around: coordinating a team and communication (pre-award phase); budget forecast; budget management; coordinating a team and communication (post-award phase); timesheets and personnel costs.

**PURPOSE OF THE STSM:**

Croatia, like many European countries, is going throughout serious economic crisis. The fact is that a generous amount of funding or grants is now available. It is important to have prepared projects and competent people for their application and implementation. Considering the size, complexity and importance of these projects, it is necessary to educate and apply the methodology of project management in their preparation and implementation. Complexity manifests in skills and competences of project manager that has to have in pre- and post-award phase, and along with it, it is essential to know very well all the financial and legal regulations of European Commission and adjust them to national laws. Besides this, a research administrator has to possess different kinds of skills and competences, like communication skills, coordinating a team, budget forecasting, expenditure management etc. Working in a “low performing” Member State, it is important for me to learn in practice from experienced administrators working in the internationally leading universities.

**WORK CARRIED OUT:**

*Work was carried out according to proposed work plan.*

<b>1<sup>st</sup> day</b>	<b>Pre-award phase, coordinating a team &amp; communication (ECOHOST)</b>
<p>On the first day of STSM, Ms. Despoina Xenikaki and I were discussed different types of communication strategies and how to deal with communication obstacles and conflicts. It was very useful to hear how somebody else who faces similar issues, and how to deal with them. We went through materials from communication courses Despoina had been on which included topics such as: the DESK technique, influencing skills, assertiveness, active listening, conflict analysis, positive communication etc. We also did a role-playing conversation to see how we will resolve the issue that we were facing. As stated in the proposed work plan, we discussed what difficulties we experience when communicating with principal investigators, researchers, HR, finance and how to overcome them. I also learned strategies that I will use when coordinating a team in pre-award phase (for example when planning a budget).</p>	
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> day</b>	<b>Pre-award phase, budget forecast (UCL-IGH)</b>
<p>At the Institute of Global Health (IGH) Ms. Mary Caspillo-Brewer put together a research administration guide and introduced me to pFACT (project financial appraisal and costing tool) software. In addition, Mary stressed the importance of a network of research administrators in your own university (or country). She established the Research Support Network at University College London (UCL) and the network has over 200 members. She is also a member of the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA). One of the things that I have learned is that at the preliminary stage of proposal application, a detailed budget is not necessary, as this will be modified in the later stage depending on the funder and scheme. As the UK currency is not in Euros similar to Croatia, we discussed how we should “play it safe” if the rate changes drastically. Generally, she gave me an insight to the UK high education funding system and funding schemes that IGH usually uses. Mary put together a manual that she made which is very useful, very practical and to the point and which I will definitely use to change some of the practices in my organization.</p>	
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> day</b>	<b>Post-award phase, budget management (ECOHOST)</b>
<p>Despoina showed me how she keeps track of expenditure in a project. As a research administrator she has access to finance reports but she also keeps her own records of what is spent. As an assignment, I had to enter in a separate Excel sheet the ECOHOST monthly expenditure and then compare it with the finance report. As a result, we are able to see what hasn't reached finance yet and carry forward any unreconciled expenditure until it's paid. Despoina also showed me a program called pFACT that is used in most of the UK's universities to plan a project budget.</p>	
<b>4<sup>th</sup> day</b>	<b>Post-award phase, coordinating a team &amp; communication (UCL-IGH)</b>
<p>Similar to the pre-award phase topic on day 1, Mary and I discussed various cases in coordinating a project team. As a part of the manual she made, she established various policies and procedures for pre and post-award phases that I will most definitely use in my organization. As I was very interested in budget management in IGH, Mary showed me how they are managing their expenditure. So I took the test used for recruitment of a research administrator at IGH which contained various tasks. I gained new skills through these practical tasks.</p>	
<b>5<sup>th</sup> day</b>	<b>Post-award phase, timesheets and personnel costs – best practice for time effectiveness (ECOHOST)</b>
<p>On the last day at ECOHOST, Despoina showed me various templates for timesheets and what techniques she uses to calculate hours and staff costs. As an exercise to complete the training, Despoina asked me to do a budget using the pFACT costings' tool for a project to be funded by the European Research Council.</p>	

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE GOALS OF THE COST TN:**

Through this STSM all the goals of the BESTPRAC are fulfilled:

- networking;
- exchange of experience;
- knowledge, know-how and best practice transfer in preparation and execution of EU projects;
- increased efficiency.

**MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED:**

Main result of this STSM is to experience practices that are used in one of the best British universities. Consequently, what it is in my power, I will implement them in my Institute so that I can be more efficient and more helpful to others.

**CONFIRMATION BY THE HOST INSTITUTION OF THE SUCCESSFUL EXECUTION OF THE STSM:**

*Two letters confirming the success of STSM are attached.*