

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: Exchange of practice: EU research support and project management

STSM start and end date: 12/06/2017 to 12/06/2017

Grantee name: Mateja Vidrajz

1. PURPOSE OF THE STSM

I took part in a group STSM in June of 2017 in Flanders, Belgium where I visited three Universities taking part in the short term scientific mission: Free University Brussels, KU Leuven and the University of Ghent. My aim was to learn as much as possible about good practices on project management issues at the three universities.

As the goal of the STSM is to exchange best practices and experiences from pre-award phase to post-award finances and technology transfer, to develop concrete tools for increased efficiency in proposal writing and project management; it is raising the understanding of the importance of excellence administration of research projects. It is promoting better and more consistent administration of domestic and transnational research projects, thereby supporting excellence in research.

We were introduced to various subjects related to all phases of research administration work. Subjects that were presented and discussed were: the role of the research office, its support structure and services, incentives and motivation of researchers, reporting issues and track systems, ethical, legal and financial management, and technology transfer to end markets.

Another goal of the STSM is to help create networks and connections between research projects administrators to overcome isolation, stimulate mobility and encourage professional development. This goal helped us realize the need and importance of the project administrators who guarantee support to researchers at our domestic institutions. This was a great opportunity to network with like-minded individuals and exchange financial, legal and other administrative experiences we came across while working on project management.

My main motivation for taking part in this STSM was to gain new expertise and try to implement it at the academy. I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to learn from highly esteemed experts of the host universities and to gain a unique insight into their research support services.

The STSM was helpful in many aspects. It has given me not one but different best practice guides on all the introduced topics, as different environments demand different approaches. I was also happy to learn that we are going in the right direction with the implementation of the project office and has therefore given me much needed motivation to keep implementing desired changes.

2. DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

The first day of the STSM started with a meeting at the UK Research Office (UKRO) in Brussels. We were introduced to the research landscape and funding system in Flanders followed by our presentations of home institutions. Jon Brookes (UKRO Advisor) presented the UKRO, H2020 background, work programs, and further plans for FP9 calls, his presentation was followed by a presentation of EARMA networks for research managers by Nik Claesen, EARMA's Managing Director. The following discussion focused on how overheads are distributed at different Universities and financial hot topic within H2020 as new regulations are being presented. The evening finished with a visit to the Parliamentarium (European Parliament's Visitors' Centre).

Next day started off with an introduction to KU Leuven with Stijn Delauré. We were familiarized with the role of the research office, its support structure and workflow from an idea to the post-project support. We were closely introduced to the KU Leuven central financial monitoring system, by Patricia Pardon. During lunch we had a chance to talk with EU support team colleagues Wannes Ribbens and Tom Vercruyse. Myriam Witvrouw familiarized us with the TTO, EU support unit and its services. The discussion continued with Hannelore Vanhaverbeke on the issue of Open Access in Horizon 2020. Open access was introduced in details from the point of mandatory aspect and practical implementation.

The third day the STSM continued with a visit to the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Brussels. Here we had an overview of VUB and research support services at VUB, explicitly on how EU projects are supported in each phase of the project lifecycle. In the succeeding representations we debated matters on how to support Erasmus+ project proposals, best practices on financial management of EU-projects, ERC support track at VUB, outline and basics of consortium agreements and intellectual property rights for non-legals, discussion on incentives related to EU projects. We talked about our experiences at home institutions and made comparisons between them. During our visit we also took a short tour in the campus.

On the last day the group met at the University of Ghent where we heard about the organization of the European Research Office and support services, their European strategy and incentives plus trainings offered to researchers. We learned how dissemination of information works via their newsletter and platform. Later we had a discussion about trainings, introductions for newcomers and various workshops realized at the Ghent University, H2020 financial administration and reporting issues, including time-sheet management and reliable programs for it. Our visit continued at the Tech Transfer Office in the Technologiepark, where the project becomes real and are transferred to the market with support by the Flemish government and EU. Jobs are created, spin offs are helping the economical development of the local communities. At the end we met with dr. Elke Gruyaert who shared her practical experiences with FP7 and H2020 projects, project coordination and cooperation with the European Research Office.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

Working as a Project Manager at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana I am in charge of full support to researchers and professors working on European and national projects. With every call I am working in all phases from motivation of researchers to apply for external founding, proposal writing, to project implementation and exploitation of project results. Since I also help with time sheet management and financial planning it was very beneficial for me to get familiar with the strategies of the three Universities. I believe the enrolment in the program enables me to share my new knowledge with my superiors to further develop the project management office. The main issue we face is strenghtenitng our team and bring new forces to the office. There are no separate people who work only as administrative support or project managers, which makes it difficult to distinguish between general advice and project-specific management. Right know we do not have any division of labour in our research support staff between EU-funding and other funding sources as we do not have enough people working on these issues. We don't have a basic time sheet management electronic system, we moslty work on paper based systems. Implementation of fully electronic system is not possible at the moment, but progress can be made on the current model. In the future proper IT systems should be implemented in our investment plans as they are indispensable for efficient management.

It was useful to hear about the legal aspects of EU projects such as intellectual property rights and conflict resolution. We were shown examples of consortium agreements where these issues were resolved in different ways. Similar practices can be applied to other agreements that have similar consequences.

An interesting part was the strategic use of overheads to found administrative staff and to help generate new projects by giving incentives to successful researchers. Similar distribution of overheads might contribute to increase motivation to apply for external founding at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana.

With all the experience acquired within the time of the STSM I now have the opportunity to transfer these experiences to my home working environment. I hope my institution will make an effort to implement some of the incentives that I learned about during this STSM.

We are currently developing a new web site wich will also have a designated window for publishing news regarding forthcoming calls, ongoing projects and colaborations with business. Currently we are disseminating news throu direct e-mails to all employees.

4. FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (IF APPLICABLE)

I hope we will all benefit from the newly formed connections to establish and grow a strong network of support among administrative stuff from different institutions and countries to further share and develop best practices enguraging knowledge transfer and increase in efficiency due to newly obtained expertise.