

Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) Report:

“Sharing of administrative knowledge, tools, best practices and work flows”

Grantee: Ms Katharina Buesel

Home Institution: Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI)

Host Institution: Project Management Agency c/o German Aerospace Center

Unit: International Bureau (DLR), Bonn, Germany

Date of STSM: 27 to 31 October 2014

Action number: TN1302-The voice of research administrators - building a network of administrative excellence (BESTPRAC)

Summary

The main aims of this STSM “Sharing of administrative knowledge, tools, best practices and work flows” were to exchange financial, legal and administrative experience, to share best practices and knowledge on project administration and project planning as well as to strengthen the already existing cooperation between DLR and ZSI. The envisaged results of this STSM were and are, besides knowledge gain on project management and administration for especially EU funded projects on both sides (ZSI and DLR), an updated budgeting tool, a list of best practices and weaknesses in project management (especially financial administration) and project planning.

Purpose of the STSM

Besides the strengthening of the existing cooperation between ZSI and DLR and the exchange of general experiences especially in financial administration and sharing of best practices, this STSM had the following specific aims:

- Exchange and joint (further) development of budgeting and financial monitoring tools (for pre- and post-award phase);
- Identification of recurring obstacles and barriers in the (financial) project reporting for project partners;
- Exchange of experiences with the final (financial) reporting of FP7 projects and of possible lessons learnt, sharing of best practices and experiences with audits;
- Exchange of internal processes of project monitoring, e.g. communication between financial management and project management, as well as of internal processes of coordination and communication in DLR and ZSI.

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

Monday, 27.10.2014

- **Introduction to PT-DLR and Unit “Europäische und international Zusammenarbeit”** by **Mr Pohl**: Organisational structure of PT-DLR, internal administrative processes and communication and coordination between Units (e.g. unit meetings, (internal) process descriptions), synergies, coordination and distribution of responsibilities and tasks between national and EU funded projects, project managers (EU and national projects) and researchers. Presentation of organisational structure of ZSI, internal administrative processes and communications.
- **Meetings with Head of Units “Zentrale Aufgaben, Verfahren, Controlling, Rechtsfragen”** **Mr Aretz**, Unit “Amerika, Asien, Ozeanien” **Mr Heinrichs** and Unit “GUS, Afrika, Nahost” (and „Europäische und Internationale Zusammenarbeit”) **Mr Sonnenburg**: Introduction to their Unit: main activities, tasks, structure and internal processes.
- **Meeting at BMBF (German Federal Ministry of Education and Research)** with **Ms Santa-Kahle** of “Referat 223: Forschungspolitik der EU” and Telephone Conference with **Ms Miener**: Introduction to communication processes within BMBF, structure of BMBF, EC-information processing, activities regarding SFIC (input preparation, commenting and statement preparation e.g. regarding ERA progress report), development of ERA Roadmap, defining of focus activities for ERA priorities, H2020 programme committee for Societal Challenge 6, EUREKA (industrial research, new EUREKA strategy) and JRC.
- Meeting with **Ms Bangert**, project administrator: discussion of amendment procedure and difficulties, Consortium Agreement in H2020 (e.g. what should be included beyond the DESCA model content?), H2020 reporting periods, H2020 prefinancing, H2020 internal reporting and payments to partners.

Tuesday, 28.10.2014

- **Staff meeting with EU project and financial administrators (Mr Pohl, Mr Bossenz, Ms Gruner, Ms Bangert)**
 - **Internal Administration**: Introduction to the electronic time recording system and receipts and documents collection and archiving.
 - **EDV tools**: presentation of different excel tools currently used by DLR and ZSI for budget planning and budget monitoring, discussing advantages and disadvantages of the different tools. DLR is working on a webbased tool for the reporting, as the Excel based tools are prone to errors and complications.
 - **Administrative Questions**: Difficulties regarding internal reportings, H2020 Grant Preparation Phase and SyGMA, Adjustments in H2020, productive hours calculation, FP7 differences between other costs and subcontracting, advantages and disadvantages of FSign and LSign and problems in connection with the electronic system.
 - Discussion about the use of a revival of a small admin-e-mail group (DLR, ZSI, maybe other research administrators from other organisations?).

- **Meeting** with **Ms Splett-Rudolph** and project administrator group: discussion about internal budget planning and controlling for financial years 2014 and 2015.
- **Staff meeting:** Presentation of the – still ongoing – progress regarding the development of a description of processes on how to manage calls, which steps have to be taken, what should be considered, definitions of certain terms etc.

Wednesday, 29.10.2014

- Meeting with “GUS” group leader **Ms Kintzler** and “GUS” staff: Introduction to ZSI, to group projects and workflows.
- Meeting with **Mr Kahle**, coordinator of “ERA-NET RUS PLUS”: risk assessment, explanation of modalities of budget and ERA-NET calls.
- Meeting with **Mr Heilmayer**, head of “multilateral cooperation and monitoring” group:
 - Discussion about budget monitoring tool: different excel tools developed by different organisations; general rule: updating the internal tool; DLR is currently working on the development of a web-based monitoring tool where it is possible that each partner can fill in the numbers on a monthly basis – budget monitoring tool should be presented at kick-off meeting but additionally a web-conference is possible shortly at the first internal reporting to go through and explain the tool in more detail;
 - Other monitoring activities: constant updates of country profiles on web-portal www.kooperationen-international.de, News and Newsletter; indicators and their visualisation.

Thursday, 30.10.2014

- Meeting with **Ms Kunze**, discussion about DLR tasks of DANUBE-INCO.NET.
- Meeting with **Ms Kühn**, internal quality management and assurance:
 - Demonstration and explanation of the steps of examination to be taken regarding certain administrative procedures for (national) calls and certain project phases.
 - Demonstration of the file documentation guidelines – for every project the file folders should be structured the same.
- Meeting with **Ms Lewerentz**, legal and financial NCP:
 - Introduction to ZSI and to main activities of legal and financial NCP at EU-Büro (two-day Infodays for FP7, one-day Infodays for H2020 as for H2020 there is still much information missing especially for project implementation phase; maintaining website horizont2020.de; NCP meetings twice a year where previous collected questions are answered by Research Enquiry Service Unit (RES) → FaQ is online available)
 - Discussion about Consortium Agreement (recommendation to use H2020 DESCA: most important points are open data/access, data protection/IPR – articles 6; 7; 11.8 of DESCA), the Open Data pilot and opt out possibility and the Background Agreement.

- Discussion about Horizon 2020 financial rules: Annotated Model Grant Agreement is not legally binding only Grant Agreement is binding; discussion and definition of personnel costs, timesheets, productive hours, adjustments, equipment, subcontracting.
- Discussion about participant portal: System of roles - generally and at DLR and ZSI, steps to be taken for grant preparation phase.

Friday, 31.10.2014

- Meeting with **Mr Rohde**, discussion about dissemination activities of “NoGAP” project.
- Meeting with **Ms Shen** and **Ms Stinner**, Euraxess links:
 - Presentation about ZSI and about Euraxess links.
 - Explanation about administrative and financial procedures: supervision of Euraxess links bureaus, setting up of management system with process descriptions and quality management, organizing of Infosessions in 11 different countries and at least four big events each year with thematic workshops.

Contribution to the goals of the COST Targeted Network

The STSM “Sharing of administrative knowledge, tools, best practices and work flows” allowed me to build a network of personal contacts with several project managers and project administrators at DLR, to exchange financial, legal and administrative experience and to share knowledge about internal processes of coordination and communication, best practices and difficulties in project management, especially for EU funded projects. Thus it fully contributed to the goals of the COST Targeted Network “BESTPRAC”.

Description of the main results obtained

One big issue in the discussions during my STSM was the budget planning and budget monitoring tools: There are not only different tools from different organisations, each using their own in their projects they are coordinating, but there are also different tools developed and used in the own organisation because of the need of different detail level. Several different excel based tools were discussed and their advantages and disadvantages highlighted. Even though it was agreed that it is time-consuming and to some extent redundant that so many people develop their own budget monitoring tool instead of using one single tool, it was considered, at least to some extent, necessary as some project partners might have special needs which can't be covered by one tool (e.g. calculation of personnel costs by year versus by internal reporting periods) and as people do prefer different tools to work with. Some of these tools are going to be shared among ZSI and DLR staff via the – already partly – established folder on the file sharing system “own cloud”. As excel tools are quite prone to errors, which are afterwards mostly hard to detect and to fix, different options were discussed: possibly it would be better to use pdf-forms with macros or web-based tools. As commercial web-based tools are too expensive for budget monitoring of EU projects, DLR is currently developing a web-based budget monitoring tool for EU projects. The best solution would be to develop a web-based tool integrated in the participant portal (ECAS) which every EU project should use to monitor their budget.

Apart from the discussions about the project monitoring tools and the budget planning tools this STSM resulted in the identification of recurring obstacles and barriers in the (financial) project

reporting as well as in the sharing of best practices. These identified obstacles and best practices were collected and those not yet mentioned were integrated in the already comprehensive manual (see my comments in manual in track change modus).

The exchange of internal processes of project monitoring resulted in the establishment of a working group at ZSI with the task of elaborating clear guidelines and checklists for different phases of project administration (see section below).

Another, quite important result of this STSM was that it has strengthened the existing relationship and collaboration between DLR and ZSI and enabled the, mutually beneficial, exchange of experience.

Additionally, this STSM extended my knowledge in project management and financial management substantially, which I am sharing at my organisation through various measures (see below) and through informal discussions with colleagues.

Description of best practices from the host institution will be implemented by you within your institute

As already mentioned in the STSM proposal, on 4th of November 2014 I held a lunch talk about financial regulations of Horizon 2020 and shared my knowledge gained through this STSM for all interested ZSI project managers and administrators. Besides general information about Horizon 2020 (e.g. simplifications, funding rates, budget shifts, sharing of useful links) and more detailed information about financial regulations (e.g. cost types, cost categories, VAT, exchange rates, auditing, reporting periods, personnel costs) I emphasised on the concept for paperless grant management: describing the identity and access management (IAM), at the participant portal and practical information about the processes for the assignment of LSign and FSign. After my lunch talk presentation there was a Q&A session and we collected open questions besides those I already raised during my presentation and which were already discussed at the STSM.

Despite the obvious institutional differences between DLR and ZSI – e.g. because of the different size and organisational structure – in internal procedures and processes regarding EU project management the process descriptions and quality assurance checklists at DLR are tools which I considered as best practice for internal communication and project management. Therefore a small working group at ZSI was initiated and is currently working on elaborating checklists for the preparation and procedure of audits as well as for the project cycle management for EU framework programme projects. This will result in at least five detailed step-by-step descriptions of: (1) proposal writing and application phase (e.g. budget planning guidelines, ZSI basic data, access to participant portal), (2) grant preparation phase (e.g. description of steps to be taken to sign declaration of honour and grant agreement/accession forms electronically, guidelines for Consortium Agreement, reporting periods, filing of contracts), (3) project implementation phase (e.g. time recording, participant portal guidelines, internal procedures for electronic signing of Form Cs), (4) final reporting (e.g. filling in of dissemination activities in SESAM, financial reporting), and (5) audit preparation and procedure.

Additionally the updated STSM manual on best practices and weaknesses of project planning and implementation, originally started by Andjela Pepic during her STSM at our institution, ZSI, will be shared among ZSI and DLR staff dealing with project management and administration.

Future collaboration with host institution

The strengthened relationship and collaboration between DLR and ZSI will be continued through several means and activities in the future: An online sharing platform will be established (is already partly established) where relevant documents, presentations as well as budget monitoring and planning tools can be shared among interested DLR and ZSI staff. Additionally, it is considered to revive a mailing list involving administrative staff of DLR and ZSI for discussing ad hoc questions regarding administrative and financial management. Future visits from DLR staff to Vienna (and vice versa) in order to exchange knowledge about certain administrative issues are envisaged as well.

Confirmation by the host institution of the successful execution of the STSM



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Confirmation of the host institution Project Management Agency c/o German Aerospace Center, International Bureau (DLR) on the successful completion of the Short-Term Scientific Mission

To the Grant Holder of the COST Targeted Network TN1302 – BESTPRAC

The host institution **Project Management Agency c/o German Aerospace Center, International Bureau (DLR)** hereby confirms the successful completion of the STSM stay of **Ms Katharina Büsel** from **27 October 2014 to 31 October 2014**.

Yours sincerely,

Karlheinz Pohl

