

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: Group STSM to Flanders STSM start and end date: 12/06/2017 to 15/06/2017

Grantee name: Sandrine Schwartz

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The BESTPRAC Group short-term mission (STSM) to 3 universities in Flanders aimed at exchanging practices and experiences related to EU research support and project management by supporting individual mobility. The visit took place between 12 and 15 of June 2017.

The 3 host institutions:

- The University of Leuven (KU Leuven)
- The Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)
- The Ghent University

The group STSM went after sharing best practices and experiences for research administration between the institutions involved and to receive an insight into the internal procedures and services offered by the 3 host institutions to their researchers, namely on EU projects.

The main objectives of STSMs were to contribute to the policy and objectives of BESTPRAC, specifically:

- to allow networking and exchanging financial, legal, and administrative experience;
- knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, and increased efficiency in project management;
- to establish a network for the administrative, finance and legal services in universities, research organizations and related entities.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

The opportunity to meet and network with the other STSM participants was very valuable. STSM offered us the occasion to compare our way of management but above all to share many ideas and exchanges best practices used at our entities. We found out that our duties are quite similar but also we could find many differences too (size, organization, internal structure

Participant's presentation (structure, main activities...)

- Cyprus Institution Neurology and Genetics': (fellow: Charalambous Andri) 1 office and 2 people
- Hospital clinic IDIBAPS: (fellow: Juan Abolafia) Pre-award office only focus on EU projects and they develop normal tasks (in pre-award).
- University of Limerick (Ireland) (fellow: Oral Power-Grant): Pre-award office with 4 people, each one them is dealing with a specific program/area.
- Hétfa Research institute (fellow: Dorttya Orbán) The international office established last year.

- Team: 4 people / divided by Programs.
- CEU: Central European University Fellow: Omar Sharifullah).
International and grant office: Team: 14 people.
 - Academy of fine arts and design (Univ of Ljubljana: fellow: Vidraj, Mateja).
Project office: 1 Person. Office created in 2013
 - University of Bucharest. Team: 14 people. Project Office: from the application until reporting. She is (BESTPRACT fellow) in charge of EU funds.

My expectations

Taking part in this action was an opportunity to my institution and me to create an occasion to exchange best practices and experiences in pre-award and post award phase of Eu funded projects management. My main motivations were to improve our process sharing best practices and exchanging with high-level institutions in order to gain knowledge and expertise.

I focused my participation on 4 main expectations:

- Gain clear valuable insight into financial, legal and administrative experiences;
- Build long-term and fruitful relationships between the CRG and the host institutions and also, with the fellows 's institutions;
- Exchanges experiences in light of the functioning of our Grants Offices and our reality;
- The CRG was a newcomer to BESTPRAC activities this training opportunity lays the ground for grong a more solid networking at the international level.

It was very interesting to understand how the 3 host universities are organized and deal with the different topics in research administration. We have also learned what kind of tools Flanders' partners use to support their researchers, how they foster and motivate the participation, how the different administrative ant management services are integrated and collaborate among each other. It was also very interesting to see the research landscape in Flanders and know what are the existing funds to promote the R+D+i.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

My first reflection concerns the profile of each university. Indeed, the 3 universities are all different in term of size, structure and organization, but also regarding the amount of their research income. However, they do have similarities concerning the dedicated, effective and efficiency support that research support staff provide to researchers. Because of this very effective support, their university's EU income has increased over the last few years.

They all of them developed a strategy to improve the research benefits in their own institution encouraging the participation of the researchers through a reinvestment process of their income, giving them tools and resources to be able to apply to EU programs and being competitive. Consequently, they reached successful results and well-done management of the research project.

Moreover, my participation in the STSM, let me know about pre-award and post-award phase activities conducted by EU project offices at both host institutions and other participants 'home institutions:

- Ways to promote funds opportunities (newsletters, workshops, info sessions ...)
- Ways to encourage researchers to apply (incentive plan: financial and professional bonus). Indeed, all 3 host universities develop different kind of stimulation policies and incentives to motivate the researchers to apply for prestigious and competitive funds (ej. ERC) and to be coordinators of collaborative H2020 projects.
- Competitive environment: I would like to underline 1 point. I was very impressive to know all the Professors of the KU Leuven must compete for getting internal funds. This rule can set up situation quite stressful but can also be a source of innovation and stimulation.
- Management of the Overheads: a percentage of the overheads of all the awarded projects is often cede to the researchers (usually 8% out of 25%). But KU LEVEU goes further: "*much you gain much support you have*". 3% of the overheads are also dedicated to some internal purposes of the "grant office":
 - To paid preparatory funding (cover travels, to get consortium together etc..)

- To pay consultancy.
- To pay the afterlife project during 1 or 2 years to allow the research to apply again in the future.
 - PI has to re-apply (it is a compulsory condition)
- Procedures concerning project proposal (TTO is involved in the preparation phase). The support given in the proposal phase seems to be quite similar in the 3 host universities. Models texts for the non-scientific parts of the proposal, such as exploitation and management, are available for the researchers. Some universities use external consultants for the proposal preparation.
- Effective communication and good interaction between the different departments involved in the management of the grants (preparation of the proposal, implementation of the project, justification procedure...).
- Management of the innovation and the role of TTO (patents, clusters to improve the collaboration between academic and private sector, foster entrepreneurship). TTO in the 3 host institutions is involved in the grant offices activities: proposal, implementation of the project, afterlife project ...).
Since 2005, KU Leuven has created a new figure: the knowledge brokers have to manage research and outputs. Their Role: being a bridge between academic sector and non-academic sector.
- Financial issues: internal rules and organization, involvement of researchers in the timesheet process and management of their budget (budgeting projects, processing incoming payment, approval expenses, invoices, personal assignment, reporting & project closure)
The researchers of KU Leuven and Gent are able to access to a dashboard in order to follow their projects, the Timesheet registration and their funds. They received a financial support to check the eligibility of their expenses. Both universities said it is an extra work but at the end, it is a benefit when it is time to justify.
- IT tools used for budget implementation and timesheets registration. The timesheet management practices and IT-systems used in financial management of projects vary between different universities. Strong mutual understanding was that proper IT systems are essential for efficient management. 2 host universities use an IT system for the timesheets registration. In this case researchers are involved in the registration timesheets process (every 6 months there is a control).

I brought back home all the knowledge and know-how. I would like to forward to the CRG all those best practices and lessons in order to learn from their experience and evaluate the feasibility in the CRG.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

The CRG would like to encourage collaboration with all the host institutions and the participant institutions. The objective is to strengthen collaboration and promote exchange of best practices amongst the administrative and management services but also with TTO.

In the future, we would like to maintain contact with the participants of my STSM group and the team of the host institutions in order to set up strong network.

The Grant Office is also very interesting in developing joint action. We are aware about the benefits of working together and strengthen networks. That is why we are interested in taking part to the next EARMA meeting which will take place in Brussels next spring.

Finally, I would like to thank all the parties involved in the EU COST BESTPRACT for providing us the funding and the occasion to be a part of this COST Action. I am also very grateful to the 3 host universities for organizing a 4 days training in Flanders. I thank all the speakers, my head of unit and the CRG to offer this opportunity.