

Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) Report:

“Sharing best practices on pre award activities and activities useful to develop and support the scientific career of researchers”

Grantee: Ms Marija Šola Spasić

Home Institution: University of Belgrade, School of electrical engineering

Host Institution: Politecnico di Milano, Research support office

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Summary

The main aims of this STSM “Sharing best practices on pre award activities and activities useful to develop and support the scientific career of researchers” were to exchange best practices on pre award activities on EU projects, to share best practices and knowledge on Research Offices optimal organization, sharing best practices related to scouting activities useful to develop and support the scientific career of researchers as well as to strengthen the cooperation between UB and Polimi. The envisaged results of this STSM were and are, besides knowledge gain on how to strength pre award activities aimed to obtained new research projects especially EU funded, how to use supporting tools for scouting activities to develop scientific career of researchers and how to increase number of ERC projects.

Purpose of the STSM

The exchange of general experiences especially in pre aware phase and sharing of best practices, this STSM had the following specific aims:

- mutual understanding of a project support offered in pre award phase by all institution involved in this STSM (Politecnico di Milano, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), HÉTFA Research Institute , Budapest (HU), University of Belgrade, School of electrical engineering),
- getting insights into internal procedures of the Politecnico di Milano especial in Researcher Office ,
- comparison of practices used,
- improving quality existing and add new services provided to researchers by identifying success factors ,
- promoting future collaboration between institutions involved in this STSM.

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

Monday, April 10th

The morning meeting took place at the Sala riunioni 1 - Fondazione Politecnico. All participants introduced themselves and the programme for next three days was presented by Stefania E. Grotti (Head of Office). The presentation about the Fondazione Politecnico di Milano was delivered by his director. Other STSM participants also briefly introduced their organizations. Then Stefania E. Grotti introduces of Politecnico di Milano and its research related services included detailed analyses of

composition, branches and competencies in Research Office (RO). After lunch, we visited the premises of RO and met all 13th employed, discussed division between centered and distributed system of research project management (pre award and post award phase). It was very interesting for me to learn about new (third one) phase in project management the so-called Pre-Pre award. After that, presentation of Departments, Labs and Areas and Top scientists selection was delivered by Stefania Suevo.

Tuesday, April 11th

The morning meeting took place at the main building Politecnico di Milano and following issues were discussed:

- How to organize the support for collaborative projects
- How to organize the support for individual grants
- How to select researchers for individual grants
- How to advice researches to build their CV
- How to combine pre- and post-award

Sharing best practices on pre award activities and Research Offices optimal organization with insights into internal procedures of the Politecnico di Milano was delivered by Silvana Carminati, Lisa Santarnecchi and Gianluca Pappalardo.

The afternoon meeting took place at DEIB – Department of Electronics, Information and Bioengineering. Researchers from my institution are involved in H2020 project “Elderly-friendly City services for active and healthy ageing” City4age coordinating by Politecnico di Milano and I take the opportunity to met coordination team and there administrative staff.

Wednesday, April 12th

We took participation in internal workshop for researchers and administrative staff for funding search provided by Research Professional (<http://info.researchprofessional.com/>). The funding opportunities database in *Research Professional is available to all researchers from Politecnico di Milano and this workshop was organized with aim to demonstrate all possibility and explain advance tools for search this database. After this workshop, we visited one of the ERC PI’s Laboratories on Politecnico di Milano and met PhD Corinna Rossi (Dipartimento di Architettura, Ingegneria delle Costruzioni e Ambiente Costruito). One of the major aim Polimi RO is to increase the number of ERC projects. In this moment, Polimi is host institution for 18 ERC grant. PhD Corinna Rossi is Principal Investigator on ERC project named LIFE - Living In a Fringe Environment which started with implementation in 2015. During the meeting, we discussed about practical help which we can provide to PI during the preparation of project proposal.

At the end, we had meeting with all colleagues from RO which are involved in Pre-Pre award and Pre award activities and check of possible joint projects and methodology for optimizing the support in a grant office.

Contribution to the goals of the COST Targeted Network

The STSM “Sharing best practices on pre award activities and activities useful to develop and support the scientific career of researchers” allowed me to build a network of personal contacts with several project administrators and other supporting staff at Polimi Research Office, to exchange financial, legal and administrative experience and to share knowledge about internal processes on pre award activities and Research Offices optimal organization, best practices and difficulties in encouraging researchers to apply for EU funded projects. Thus it fully contributed to the goals of the COST Targeted Network “BESTPRAC”.

Description of the main results obtained

Due to the STSM I have a bigger picture of how other university deals with a project administration and project management. The visit at the Polimi revealed some similarities and differences between functioning of both universities. Main the differences are:

- University of Belgrade is not integrated and each of our Faculty is independent legal entities. But, in structural sense our Faculties works as Departments on Polimi. The essential difference between our Faculties and Departments on Polimi is financial independence of our Faculties.
- International relation on Polimi is dividing in two offices. One of them works with students and projects related to high education financed by EU such as Erasmus+ and similar. Second one is Research office which supporting and monitoring national research projects, international research projects and corporate projects. On the other side, University of Belgrade International relation office support all international activates in the field of high education and research.
- Our Faculty has own PIC number and apply for finance directly as Faculty not as University.

The main results obtained from the STSM include learning from Polimi colleagues and other STSM colleagues how they implemented university policy, organisational culture and procedures with regard to enhancing participation of researchers in H2020 projects, publishing in top-ranking journals, cooperating with good external partners, etc. I learned from their experience and know-how on how to form strategic goals and measures to achieve them, find finance opportunity and empower researchers to take an active part in international projects. In addition, I learned about possible phases in research support. On the very beginning, we have Pre-Pre award phase which include following activates:

- Cross disciplinary opportunities (Strategies)
- Talent development
- Research Communication
- Networking
- Scouting
- Brokerage events

In strategic process, Pre-Pre award is development phase and requires investments in: policy and strategy, carrier development and cooperation.

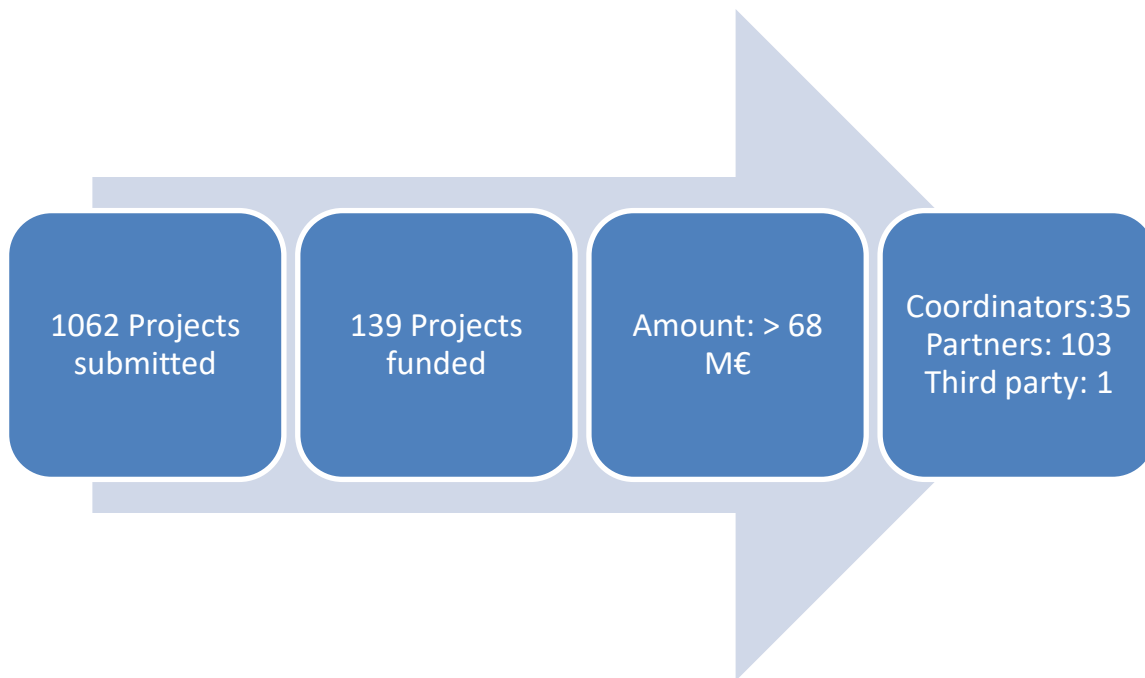
After this, Pre award phase started when new idea is generated. In strategic process, this phase include specific support such as participation in brokerage events, information about funding opportunity, pre-proposal support etc. At the end, when project is approved for finance, post award phase will be launched. In this phase, research support activities include: training, negotiation, project management, reporting and audit.

What I found surprising was that Polimi Research Office team does not help with writing proposals (they consult just budget issues). If researchers need help to write proposal or to find consortium partners they can use services provided by Fondazione Politecnico. ERC projects are exemption because in RO is set up Erc helpdesk which is the part of Pre award phase. Also, implementations of success projects are managed by Departments not by Research Office directly. Post award phase is transferred from central administration to level of department. Except in case of ERC projects which are managed by RO directly. In Post award phase RO organized, time to time, internal audit of projects implemented on departments. This audit has aim to help project administrator to work properly and in line with rules set up by EU or other donors.

I found it very interesting that at the each Department has own administrative staff dealing with timesheets and project reporting. For example, on DEIB – Department of Electronics, Information and Bioengineering they have IT system for filing timesheets. Each researcher involved in EU projects has to fill his own timesheets directly in the system and maximum number of productive hours allowed is 1720 per year.

On the end of each reporting period, research administrator can generate report with information how many person months project team spent in each work package.

Research Office in Polimi has pro-active approach in research support which is result in great figures in H2020. Statistics about participation Polimi from beginning H2020 till third quarter 2016 (Source: ParticipantPortal - December2016) is following:



Even though there are some differences at organizational level, work of research support of both Institution is similar (with similar rules/solutions implemented) and we seem to struggle with the same problems, e.g. researchers coming for an advice the day before the deadline or difficulties in initiating cooperation between academia and business sector.

Future collaboration with host institution

Such an experienced and offering fantastic administrative and financial support Polim Research office would be a desired project coordinator or partner for the our Faculty. We have already identified brokerage event, which will held in Belgrade this automat, where colleagues from Polimi will come to present new project idea of his researchers. On the other side, I will give my best to provide participation of researchers from my University which are involved in the same research field. I will seek for the opportunities our researchers, PhD students and other research administrators to engage in joint projects, joint events for networking, joint publications, joint study programmes, mobility events,etc. We will be open and seek proactively any forms of further cooperation on the institutional and personal level.

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

Please find attached

Other comments

I would like to thank staff from Research support office Politecnico di Milano, for their hospitality and openness.

And a big thank you to the EU COST-BESTPRAC Network for providing the funding for this STSM

I thank all the speakers for their very experience and useful presentations and for openly sharing their best practices in different phase of EU grants.