



**European Cooperation
in the field of Scientific
and Technical Research
- COST -**

Brussels, 16 July 2013

COST 045/13

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Subject : Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of a European Targeted Network designated as COST Action TN1302: The voice of research administrators – building a network of administrative excellence (BESTPRAC)

Delegations will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for COST Targeted Network TN1302 as approved by the CSO by written procedure on 9 July 2013.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
For the implementation of a European Concerted Research Action designated as
COST Targeted Network TN1302
The voice of research administrators – building a network of administrative excellence
(BESTPRAC)

The Parties to this Memorandum of Understanding, declaring their common intention to participate in the concerted Action referred to above and described in the technical Annex to the Memorandum, have reached the following understanding:

1. The Targeted Network will be carried out in accordance with the provisions of document COST 4114/13 “COST Action Management”, or in any new document amending or replacing it, the contents of which the Parties are fully aware of.
2. The main objective of the Targeted Network is to network the administrative, finance and legal services in universities, research organisations and related entities supporting researchers involved in the lifecycle of European funded projects in order to exchange experiences and share and develop best practices, encourage knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer and increased efficiency.
3. The geographic dimension of the activities carried out under the Action has been estimated, on the basis of information available during the planning of the Action, to include 24 COST countries.
4. The Memorandum of Understanding will take effect on being accepted by at least five Parties.
5. The Memorandum of Understanding will remain in force for a period of 2 years, calculated from the date of the first meeting of the Management Committee, renewable once for a further two years, unless the duration of the Action is modified according to the provisions of Chapter V of the document referred to in Point 1 above.

A. ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

The aim of the Targeted Network is to allow networking and exchanging financial, legal and administrative experiences and to share and develop best practices encouraging knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer and increased efficiency in research project administration within research-performing institutions throughout Europe.

Keywords: Research, Management, Administration, Finance, Legal

B. BACKGROUND

B.1 General background

The administration of research projects plays an important role for the success of the project. Over the years a lot of effort has been put into improving the information and know-how around the research project, but only a small effort into improving the necessary skills and competences of the group of staff members actually dealing with the daily management and administration of the projects thus leading to unproductive reinvention of administrative procedures, time-consuming management practices, and in worst cases mismanagement. This has led to failed and penalized projects and to time- and cost-intensive rescue procedures.

B.2 Current state of knowledge

Research administrators are not a well-defined group in research institutions. Their jobs vary in many ways, the positions are fluctuant and development opportunities often vague. Several European networks and Associations are dealing with research management and administration, hereunder EARMA, and the annual EARMA conference include a range of training sessions and workshops targeting key challenges in project and research management.

In recent years, professional associations of research managers and administrators in Europe have drawn attention to the need for developing training programmes to support professional development in this area, to improve the quality of the services they provide, to address the growing need for improved and standardized research management practices, and to support the researchers across all disciplines and fields. Such a wide interest has given rise to the need to examine the influences shaping the development of the profession of research management and administration. So far however, there is not a well-established or formulated body of knowledge in the field, but

findings from previous projects, e.g. Keylink (LLP) will be integrated.

B.3 Reasons for the Targeted Network

The Targeted Network “The voice of research administrators – building a network of administrative excellence (BESTPRAC)” addresses the problem that lack of knowledge, skills and competences in the management of research projects threatens the quality and outcome of research projects, and creates barriers for involvement, in particular for less experience institutions and countries.

A number of EU projects have dealt with capacity building, but only relating to the capacity building in research fields rather than the ability to actually manage projects in an adequate way.

This had led to disappointing relationships with the EU system and failed projects. There is an urgent need for establishing and harmonising skills, for simplification of procedures, and for lowering the administrative burdens of participating in EU projects. Building on existing knowhow and sharing of knowledge can make a significant contribution in this regard.

Research is an international even global process and with H2020 on the doorstep and the intention of widening the participation, it becomes urgent to include all groups of research support in this process, so the project is needed and timely.

B.4 Complementarity with other research programmes

As this project is not a research project, there is no direct complementarity to other ongoing research projects, but by building up capacity and enhance the capability of running and managing successful cross-European projects, it will inter-alia strengthen the quality and outcome of ongoing and future research projects. In this sense, the project is complementing ongoing FP7 and coming Horizon 2020 and other EU-funded research projects.

Pressed by the increasing role of competition-based research funding, today’s academics require the separation of such functions as research management, international relations and guidance counseling from their profession into specialised independent pursuits. Once part of academia’s usual responsibilities, these activities are now in the process of migrating into the purview of professional administration services.

Many studies (Whitchurch, 2009; Shelley, 2008; Allen-Collinson, 2007) show that there has been a shift in the manner how research is managed in universities. The need for strategic and professional research management has been demonstrated in studies of universities management (Green & Langley, 2009) and the most reasonable starting point for the discussion of research management

profession would be an attempt to understand the history including best practices of the profession. Research support has changed as a consequence of the research sector responding to recent science and higher education policy. These changes have impacted on research managers' role, changed the occupational group and moved research managers' field boundaries (Shelley, 2008). The studies conducted in British universities demonstrate that RMA field boundaries have moved and this has resulted in a space of tension, where research managers and academics compete for research cultural capital (Shelley, 2010). In that perspective the meaning of the profession of research managers has developed and gained importance in all research-intensive higher education institutions (Green & Langley, 2009).

C. OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS

C.1 Aim

The aim of the project is to allow networking and exchanging financial, legal and administrative experiences and to share and develop best practices encouraging knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer and increased efficiency in project management European wide. .

C.2 Objectives

The main objective of this initiative is to establish a network for the administrative, finance and legal services in universities, research organizations and related entities supporting researchers involved in the lifecycle of transnational external competition based (in particular European funded) projects in order to exchange experiences and share and develop best practices, encourage knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer and increased efficiency. The specific focus on administration, financial and legal staff associated with the implementation of research projects (rather than the management level or with the pre-award proposal submission phase) reflects both the:

- importance of excellence in research project administration in supporting excellence in research, and
- the current lack of opportunities for these people with such important responsibilities to meet, develop networks, share problems and solutions and develop best practices.

Indeed this is why it is foreseen that the MC Members and the majority of the Steering Group will be administrators rather than project managers.

Important secondary objectives include: to establish networks between project administrators in order to overcome isolation, stimulate mobility and hereby also encourage professional development and progression, strengthen retention and recruitment of project administrators and hereby emphasise the need and importance of the profession.

C.3 How networking within the Targeted Network will yield the objectives?

Networking is the only way to establish the necessary platform for sharing best practice in the field of research management and administration. Know-how and competences are spread across Europe and are often very difficult to identify even within the research institution itself. Many Research Administrators are working very close with the Project Manager (the researcher or the research team), and are employed directly on the project, and not in the administrative bodies of the institution (like the research support office, financial office, HR etc). Some institutions though have centralized or concentrated the project management of projects.

The networking activities will contribute to the establishment and sharing of best practices, and by bringing research administrators and legal and financial officers together establishes a mutual understanding of key obstacles that need to be addressed and develop consensus about the best ways to address these issues.

In this Targeted Network the above listed objectives will be achieved by joining forces of administrators and legal and financial officers working as administrators in support of transnational research projects (1) Regular Working Group (WG) meetings, (2) Workshops and Training Schools to disseminate experiences and knowledge to research administrators and legal and financial officers throughout the COST countries, (3) Short Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) to enable mobility of research administrators and legal and financial officers and to promote collaborations and progress in the pursuit of excellence in research administration, (4) Large international conferences to facilitate dissemination of outcomes and best working practices, (5) Establishing a transnational network of excellent research administrators, including legal and financial officers, (6) an open access web-based platform for the exchange and discussion of practices.

C.4 Potential impact of the Targeted Network

The Targeted Network will contribute significantly to the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of running research projects. With annual funding volumes in the billions of Euro and research projects counting in the hundreds, it can be estimated that improving research management and

administration can bring a certain percentage of projects from the pool of failure to the ocean of success. Even if this percentage is very small, the saved financial contributions can be estimated to be in the (tens or even hundreds of) million Euro, making this project and its costs worthwhile. The Targeted Network will not only give a voice to research administrators, enabling them to discuss and resolve the issues they are facing but will also enable them to (im)prove their role as a useful partner in producing excellent research.

C.5 Target groups/end users

Target group

Best practices in the field of research management and administration is targeted towards a group not yet well organised: the financial, legal and administration officers in institutions actually handling the research funding, preparing the financial reporting towards the funding body and also towards the research involved, reading and understanding the different financial rules and regulations of the different (international) funding instruments and act accordingly, communicating and discussing with auditors, running the registration systems for manpower (time-sheets), equipment, purchasing, negotiating the grant agreements with the funding agency, other legal agreements, the working contracts with the employees, organising the overall reporting process and consortium events, and dealing with research strategy, technology transfer, dissemination etc. This role has many names, among them project manager, project officer, financial officer, etc, but in this project we have used the notion Research Administrator (corresponding to the Operational rather than Management or Leadership level of the ARMA RDF):



Education, training and salary can vary dramatically within an institution, a country and between countries and may range from low level helping hands to highly qualified specialists. Language skills can be a barrier and there are often “cultural” and communication clashes between the administrative and the scientific world.

D. SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

D.1 Scientific focus

The focus of the project is the improvement of the administrative, financial and legal procedures of research projects carried out with European funding.

D.2 Scientific work plan methods and means

The aims and objectives of the activity will be met through networking and communication at meetings and events and virtually, bringing together all stakeholders to exchange financial, legal and administrative experiences and to share and develop best practices encouraging knowledge share, knowledge transfer and increased efficiency in project management European wide. Short Term Missions (STSMs) will be another important mechanism through which the BESTPRAC’s objectives will be achieved.

The project will be launched by a workshop comprising plenary sessions and parallel streams for each WG (administration, finance, legal). Subsequent meetings of each WG will be arranged, separately or combined according to the needs of the particular topics to be covered at that meeting. Short Term Missions (visits) from one country to another will be the foundation for spreading and attaining Best Practice. A significant emphasis (and a significant proportion of the BESTPRAC budget) will be invested in this regard. Much effort will be placed on the follow up and analysis of the STSMs. As best practices are identified for various issues dissemination will be undertaken, through the website, through information multipliers and through the organisation of Training Schools.

Evaluation and documentation will be concluded at the final meeting of the project.

Working group 1 Administration (WG1) will cover issues relating to the overall management of externally funded research projects. Through meetings, training schools, and workplace exchange, the following key issues will be addressed: Project establishing (tools, methods and procedures);

cross-cultural barriers; overall reporting, timesheets and closing of projects; audit.

Working group 2 Finance (WG2) will cover issues relating to the financial aspects of preparing and running cross-European projects. Through meetings and summer schools, the following key issues will be addressed: accounting practices, VAT, overhead, exchange rates, audit.

Working group 3 Legal (WG3) will cover issues relating to the legal framework of the projects. Through meetings, training events and workshops, the following issues will be covered: A new framework programme standard contract and consortium agreement, IPR, and IPR in working with third parties, patenting and technology transfer, international legal frameworks.

The project will be managed by the Management Committee, and the MC will appoint a Steering Group to manage the day-to-day running of the Targeted Network. SG is responsible for communication, website, newsletters, reporting etc, and for the general progress of the Targeted Network.

Beside the three WG's , transversal task-forces (TTF) can be established on specific topics: Mapping of national differences, Training, and eventually others. It is foreseen that administrators should comprise at least half of the Management Committee.

Deliverables:

- Transnational meetings of administrators to network, share experiences, identify common problems and national differences and begin identifying solutions
- Short Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) of administrators, finance and legal staff to develop networks and experience administration practices in other countries.
- Development of an EU project administration best practice guide
- Development of a common vocabulary of project administration
- Establishing of “knowledge hubs” – smaller networks in specific areas – legal, financial etc.
- Establishing of “Twinning Offices” where research support offices collaborate on targeted challenges
- Training Schools to disseminate the experiences to larger groups of administrators within the participating countries
- Presentation at European research administrator meetings and conferences
- Evaluation and documentation
- Policy recommendations to transnational competition based research funding agencies (and in particular COST and the European Commission) regarding simplifications and procedural changes.

E. ORGANISATION

E.1 Coordination and organization

The management of the Targeted Network will be carried out by a Steering Group, comprised by Chair, Vice Chair, the WG-leaders, STSM Manager and Dissemination (including website) Manager, and where necessary the TTF-leaders.

Participation in BESTPRAC is not open to consultants which are making a business of administering European projects, neither in the MC and Working Groups nor in events and trainings organised. It is not the purpose of BESTPRAC to generate new consultancies or train existing ones.

E.2 Working Groups

The initiative will be implemented by three parallel working groups each concentrating on key topics to contribute towards the objectives:

Working group 1 Administration (WG1)

Working group 2 Finance (WG2)

Working group 3 Legal (WG3)

These three WGs will each identify and focus on the most important issues for them. There will also be a transversal identification and resolution of issues that require the involvement of representatives from more than one of these WGs.

E.3 Liaison and interaction with other research programmes

Ongoing research programmes might be approached in order to harvest hand-on experience or to discuss findings of the project. Furthermore when the Targeted Network is dealing with issues in which the perspectives of transnational external competition based research funding institutions and agencies is relevant representatives of these research funding institutions and agencies will be invited to participate in the relevant meetings. STSMs between Targeted Networks to funding institutions and agencies are also foreseen.

The European Commission will be asked to appoint an observer to BESTPRAC as it has done for the first Targeted Network.

E.4 Gender balance and involvement of early-stage administrators (ESA)

This Targeted Network will respect an appropriate gender balance in all its activities and the Management Committee will place this as a standard item on all its MC agendas. The Targeted Network will also be committed to involve early-stage administrators and legal and finance officers. This item will also be placed as a standard item on all MC agendas.

F. TIMETABLE

	Year 1			Year 2			Year 3			Year 4					
MC meetings		X	x		X	x		X	x		X	X			
WG 1 meetings		X			X			X			X	X			
WG 2 meetings		X			X			X			X	X			
WG 3 meetings		X			X			X			X	X			
Conference												X			
Training School					X			x			X				
Workshop			x					x			x				
STSMs		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

G. GEOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

The following COST countries are involved in this COST Action: AT, BE, BA, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, HU, IS, IE, IT, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, SE, CH. Other COST countries expressed their interest to participate and will be invited.

H. DISSEMINATION PLAN

H.1 Who?

The target group for dissemination is individuals responsible for administration, financial and legal support to transnational (and in particular European-funded) research projects. In order to reach a maximum of these individuals and in the most efficient way dissemination of the Targeted Network's activities and outcomes will seek to make use of relevant existing fora, including:

- EURAXESS

- European and national associations for research administrations,
- National rectors conferences/university associations and LERU and EUA as well as corresponding institutions in the institute sector,
- Science Europe
- Information multipliers such as NCPs , Liaison Offices,

Furthermore Training Schools are foreseen as a dissemination measure. For linguistic reasons these Training Schools might have to be run as a series of national Training Schools. Short Term Missions (STSMs) and follow up activities will also be an important dissemination activity. BESTPRAC will ensure that all STSM recipients are responsible for dissemination to their colleagues upon completion of the STSM.

H.2 What?

Dissemination will vary according to the target group and will include:

- Articles in national and international magazines and newsletters
- Presentation at European and conferences for research administrators and/or stakeholders (funders, European Commission, institutions or their network, LERU, EUA etc)
- Articles in COST newsletter
- Best practice guide for COST Actions
- Training schools and workshops targeting
 - Institutions and research organisations
 - National and cross-European networks
- Best Practice guideline online (body of knowledge) A Targeted Network website will be established as a cornerstone for the Targeted Network. The website will be the Targeted Network's main communication, dissemination and learning tool and will include a dynamic version of the 'best practice guide' that can be constantly updated and supplemented by different users

H.3 How?

BESTPRAC will appoint a MC Member as the Dissemination Manager. This Dissemination Manager will be a member of the Steering Group and will be responsible for ensuring the optimal development and implementation of dissemination activities within the Targeted Network. The

Dissemination Manager will also oversee the implementation of the Targeted Network website. In addition to the Targeted Network's own website the Targeted Network will establish links with other relevant electronic fora eg EURAXESS