

Blog



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So you have won an EU
funded project, now what do
you do?

HIRE A PROJECT MANAGER!

Gemma Watts

www.misfires.ucd.ie



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 771217)



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

You receive notification that your proposal has won funding and after the ecstatic feeling has eventually worn off, reality hits...what do you do next? The first 3 months to mobilise your project are some of the toughest. It is like a start-up when everybody and everything has to be put in place. And this is where a good Project Manager is needed. A Project Manager will oversee the management of and be responsible for key activities and requirements of the project, which in the first 3 months can look something like this.

Starting Point – Understanding the Project, Relationship Building and Planning

Professor Susi Geiger won her ERC Consolidator Award in late 2017, and both the project and I started on the 1st August 2018. The starting point for me was to understand what the project was about, the aim, budget, timeframe, and to build a relationship with the lead researcher.

So read, read and read some more – read the proposal, the funder's guidelines, the grant agreement, any EU or organisational relevant material. Talk to the lead researcher to start a dialogue, to feel their passion and excitement, and to completely immerse yourself in understanding the project as much as you can. Remember you are talking to an expert in their field, your knowledge therefore will never be as in-depth, but you must have some basic understanding to move forward. Then plan the project out, more detail for the immediate weeks and months, with more of a general outline for the middle to long term phase of the project.

Financial

What does this mean? It means understanding the budget, what costs are eligible and what are ineligible, and knowing the financial requirements of the EU and host organisation. It means recording, monitoring and approving all expenses, whilst running monthly financial reports. It means starting off on the right foot and maintaining this throughout the lifetime of the project.

Brand Identity

So the project is known to the researcher and you... but now you need to build a brand with a logo, theme, colour scheme for the project. You need to develop a concept for the logo, so for MISFIRES it needed to look professional (industry stakeholders will be targeted), easy to read (as the project looks at healthcare markets and therefore could potentially involve people with visual disabilities), and similar to the organisational branding (as the project is based at UCD). We also played around with keywords about the project until we finally agreed upon a strapline of "Innovating together for better markets".

Website

I have worked with website designers to build project websites in the past, supplying the content and design brief. But this time I decided to tackle this challenge head on, by being the one to design and build the MISFIRES' project website. I am now a self-taught web designer thanks to YouTube, who would believe it. The website will evolve over time, as it is very much driven by content, so the initial website is just a simple overview, but will expand.



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Social Media

So now you have a brand and a website, you need to communicate this to the EU and beyond. So even before building the website, you need to have an idea of who your audience are, what messages you want to get out, and how. What social media accounts you want to use that suit the project best? We chose our starting point to be twitter. The first tweet can be a big step. Then it can be challenging to keep a dialogue going with your followers in the initial phase, until you really have something to tweet about, such as research findings, papers, conferences and workshops.

Recruitment and Office Manager

Whilst you are working on an online and social media presence, you are knee deep in the recruitment phase with the lead researcher. This means job descriptions, advertising roles, adding jobs to the project website, tweeting about the roles, piles of documentation and liaising with HR on contracts. Once those huddles have been jumped successfully, you move onto the next stage, to the arrival of the team who breathe life into the project. There follows individual inductions, office requirements (such as desk space, lockers, keys), promoting the team (through the website and tweets), purchasing (computers, monitors stationary, even down to the paperclips).

Those first months fly by and it is an uphill challenge, but now the real fun of the project begins, and you are only 3 months in... What comes next? Well, this will be for another blog!

Notes on Author:

Gemma Watts has worked in UCD for over 10 years. Firstly in the many divisions within the central research support office, UCD Research. And since 2015 working directly for leading researchers to assist in running their EU projects, from H2020 Marie Curie Actions – ITNs, to European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Award. She has also been involved in the proposal writing for large EU grants.

She holds the project management qualification – PRINCE II practitioner, a Chartered Institute of Marketing Diploma and a Business Administration Degree.