

A Short Guide to EU Grants for Science Communication

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Key Words

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Introduction

We can definitely describe science communication as one of the most innovation-needy fields. Why is that? The new tools of general communication catch the attention of people — especially youngsters — easily, not leaving too much space for traditional communication tools, which can seem to be boring compared to the new innovative and interactive eye- and ear-catching tools. Another important factor is the demand for quick and up-to-date information, which sets the requirement of easy access to information from everywhere, at any time. Science communication has to live up to this challenge dictated by the needs of the target group. Like all fields with these characteristics, science communication is often in critical need of funding for its innovative projects.

The traditional way to get funding for a project is to approach the national research-funding agency. However, in the case of international and intercontinental projects, the national funding option is not applicable in most cases. This is the point where the



Figure 1. Is FP7 a new type of organic smoothie drink?
Credit: ESA/Hubble (Martin Kommesser)

words of Janez Potocnik come into context. The European Union (EU) also provides support for projects communicating science to the general public!

In order to provide a fair picture, it is necessary to emphasise that the EU should not just be considered a money distributor. There are other important actions where the EU influences the general appreciation of science communicators and science communica-

Summary

“The importance of communicating science to the general public cannot be overestimated. Science cannot live isolated from society.” As the words of Janez Potocnik, EU Science and Research Commissioner, clearly demonstrate, there is a political call to the European Union (EU) for supporting science communication. But as we all know, the reality lies in the implementation and not in the mission statements. So let’s see what the EU can offer to science communicators.

tion itself. The EU sets policy principles that aim to impact national legislation and the national budgets to improve the situation for science and science communication. It organises Europe-wide science communication conferences and public debates, and harmonises national projects and actions in order to build space for Europe-wide joint projects. And indeed the EU provides grants for international projects, which serve the interest of European research, and which are not eligible for funding at national level.

But what are these grants?

1. 7th Research and Development Framework Programme

The 7th Research and Development Framework Programme¹ (FP7) is the EU’s main instrument to provide funding for European research and technological development projects. FP7 will run for seven years (until 2013), with an overall budget of 50,521 MEUR. FP7 provides grants through open competitive Calls for tenders (Call).



Figure 2. European Commission Seventh Framework Programme logo.

FP7 is divided into four basic blocks, the so-called Specific Programmes (SP):

1. Cooperation (32.413 MEUR)
2. Ideas (7510 MEUR)
3. People (4750 MEUR)
4. Capacities (4097 MEUR)

Each Specific Programme is further divided into parts or themes. What is relevant to science communicators is the Capacities Specific Programme, and inside that Programme the Science in Society (SiS) theme and the International Cooperation (INCO) theme.

1.1. Science in Society

The aim of the Science in Society theme is to stimulate the harmonious integration of scientific and technological endeavour and associated research policies into European society².

The SiS has an overall budget of 330 MEUR for the seven years, and support for one project varies from between ten and a hundred thousand EUR to one or two million EUR. Of course not all the Calls submitted under the SiS programme can be used for science communication, especially for astronomy science communication. There are some Calls to be published in 2008 that can be of use to *CAPJournal* readers:

- 5.1.1.4³ The role and image of scientists.
- 5.2.1 Gender and research.
- 5.2.2 Young people and science.
- 5.3.0.1 The provision of reliable and timely scientific information for the press and media.
- 5.3.0.2 Training actions to bridge the gap between the media and the scientific community.
- 5.3.0.3 Encouraging a European dimension at science events targeting the public.
- 5.3.0.4 Promoting science by audiovisual means in European co-production and the circulation of science programmes.

- 5.3.0.5 Promotion of excellent transnational research and science communication by means of popular prizes.

It is worthwhile to devote some time to the details of the last Call. The European Science Awards, in particular the Science Communication Prize (former Descartes Prize), which is unique.

Recognition is a strong driver for research and innovation. The EU, in parallel with its political decision to strengthen European scientific research, established a prestigious international prize to give emphasis to this important decision. The Descartes Prize supported international research themes with 1,150,000 EUR annually since 2000, and science communicators with 275,000 EUR annually, since 2004. The history of the communication prize is clearly not a long one, but the initiative certainly demonstrates dedication. On a national level almost every EU member state grants science communication prizes, but on a Europe-wide level this is the only one.

During the last three years five winners and five finalists were awarded the recognition and reward of the Descartes science communication prize for their high quality work of communicating to the general public each year. In 2007 some changes were made to the Descartes Prize structure. In parallel with the launch of FP7 the two main parts of the Descartes prize were separated. The prize for excellence in transnational and collaborative research kept the Descartes label, but the prize for excellence in science communication was simply renamed as the "Prize for Science Communication". One could argue that for a science communication prize a more appealing name might have been chosen, but the prestige of the prize remains.

In parallel with the name change the budget and conditions have been changed as well. In 2007 a maximum of three Laureates receive an award of 60,000 EUR each and up to three Finalists receive 5,000 EUR each. "The Prize targets individuals and organisations having achieved outstanding results in science communication and having been selected as winners by European and/or national organisations which carry out existing science communication prizes of any kind. This implies that prize organisers can send their winners as candidates to the EU prize..."⁴ Who knows, maybe one day the *CAPJournal*, or one of its readers, will be among the Laureates? More information for all candidates can be found on the new website of the European Science Awards⁵.

1.2. International Cooperation

Although not obviously targeting science communication projects, the International

Cooperation⁶ (INCO) theme of the Capacities programme also contains some possibilities to exploit with a bit of imagination and flexibility while defining a new science communication project. Astronomy science communicators often work in international teams connecting people from different countries and continents. The INCO can be a solution for these cross-continental projects, with its overall budget of 108 MEUR for the seven years. Next round of INCO calls is expected in the first half of 2008. More information can be gathered from the FP7 website.

1.3. HELP!

It is not easy to find your way in the jungle of FP7 rules. Brussels knows this as well, so they have tried to make all the information easily accessible. The main website of the FP7 programme is the door to the different parts of the programme: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html. The updated information about open Calls can be found on the "Find a Call" page of the website: (<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm>).

However, it would be understandable if you were to shut down the computer after an hour of desperate attempts to understand the structure, the procedures and the meanings of FP7 Calls. It would then perhaps the right time to approach a National Contact Point or the organisational equivalent. The EU Commission, in collaboration with its Member States and Associated States, has established the system of National Contact Points (NCP); a network of professional EU FP7 officers whose main task is to help people to understand FP7, find Calls and write applications. A list of the NCPs can be found on the "Get support" page: (http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/get-support_en.html) of the FP7 website.

2. The eContentPlus Programme

Nowadays science communication, in particular in the field of astronomy, relies on and contributes to the evolution of new technological developments such as Internet-based innovative applications managing digital contents. For these projects the eContentPlus programme offers lots of possibilities in a framework that is less complicated than FP7.

The aim of this multi-annual programme is to make the digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable using the available 149 MEUR overall budget of the programme. The programme addresses areas of public interest, and that would not develop (or would develop at a slower pace) if left to market forces⁷.

The projects financed under this scheme have to be based on a proven state-of-the-art technical solution, so this grant cannot be used for technological innovation, but for innovation in organisation and in deployment.

The programme supports educational digital content and digital libraries among other target areas. For the purpose of the programme educational content means digital content that can be used for learning in different contexts, both in formal and informal education. Digital libraries have a very broad definition in the eContentPlus framework: organised collections of digital content made available for the public by cultural and scientific institutions and private content holders in the EU Member States and the other participating countries of the programme⁹.

There are three eContentPlus project types that are eligible for funding:

1. Targeted projects (TPs): Targeted projects are open in the areas "educational content" and "digital libraries". The projects should aim to solve specific known problems by pooling together the resources of interested and affected participants in a consortium.
2. Thematic Networks (TNs): Thematic Networks are open for the area "reinforcing cooperation between digital content stakeholders". The aim of bringing the stakeholders together is to define best practices, building consensus in order to better coordinate the availability and usability of digital content.
3. Best Practice Networks (BPNs): Lastly, the Best Practice Networks are designed to serve the areas "geographic information", "educational content" and "digital libraries". The expected outcome of these formations is the adoption of standards and specifications that could enable users to access and use the digital content of certain areas. This type of activity would implement the "Thematic Networks" in practice.

A common eligibility criterion of all the three types of activity is the requirement to have a European dimension to the activity. The current eContentPlus programme runs until the end of 2008. The last Calls will be published during the course of 2008. The new eContentPlus multi-annual programme will be published in the second part of 2008.

So, digital content stakeholders: please do not be discouraged by this very dry text. Go to the main website of eContentPlus for more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/econtentplus>.



Figure 3. European Commission MEDIA Programme logo.

3. MEDIA 2007

I believe all movie-lovers (at least the European ones) remember that some years ago a strange text appeared on the cinema screen before the start of certain famous movies, such as *Goodbye Lenin*, *Secrets and Lies* and the *Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*. I myself watched the film *Breaking the Waves* on DVD and skipped the seemingly unimportant parts and text stating that the movie was produced with the help of the MEDIA programme. Little did I know then that one day I would write about this programme to promote it!

The MEDIA programme already has a long history. The series of four MEDIA programme terms has provided support for the European audiovisual industry since 1991. MEDIA 2007 is the successor of the former MEDIA programmes, covering the years 2007-13, providing the European audiovisual industry with an overall budget of 755 MEUR.

The programme supports different activities of the pre- and post-production phases of filmmaking:

- Training (scriptwriting techniques, digital technologies, economic and financial management).
- Development.
- Distribution.
- Promotion and festivals.
- Horizontal actions and pilot projects.

Calls are submitted on a yearly basis. More information about the programme can be found on the webpage of MEDIA 2007: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media/overview/index_en.htm.

Checking the list of the MEDIA programme supported movies I could not find any science-related one, but at least a science movie festival was there. I hope this can change in the future and that the audiovisual industry will be more encouraged to apply to make more science movies.

Conclusions

As one can see after reading this inventory of EU grants, there are some opportunities to obtain funding from EU for science communication projects. It is, undeniably, not a smooth path to get the funding. EU projects require hard work at all levels. Project prepa-

ration, application, management and reporting are demanding, but it pays well in the case of a successful project. But keep in mind that professional help to get the EU information and to prepare an application is available from public bodies and also from the private sector, giving everyone the chance to choose according to the size of his wallet. And don't forget:

"The importance of communicating science to the general public cannot be overestimated. Science cannot live isolated from society."

Notes

1. http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html.
2. Capacities, part 5, Science in Society Work Programme 2007, C(2007)563, page 4.
3. Call identification number.
4. http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-awards/communication_en.htm.
5. http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-awards/index_en.htm.
6. http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/capacities/international-cooperation_en.html.
7. eContentPlus — A multi-annual Community programme to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable (2005 - 08); Work Programme 2007, page 3.
8. For all areas, the following countries are eligible for funding: 27 EU Member States and Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein, Croatia, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Other countries can also participate in consortia, but without financial support from the EU. Up-to-date information about the participating countries can be found on <http://ec.europa.eu/econtentplus>.

References

- Descartes 2007, Descartes communication prize, General information booklet, EUR 22419, p. 5

Bio

Eniko Patkos obtained her Masters Diploma in Jurisprudence in 1999 at ELTE University, Budapest. She spent 2002 at the ESA HQ, Paris as an International Trainee in the Industrial, Budget and Contracts Departments. In 2003 she obtained a postgraduate diploma in European Studies at the Budapest University of Economics. She joined ESO in January 2006 where she is European Affairs Officer.