

## Mixing Business and Research: A Recipe for a More Competitive Proposal?

By Bruno Woeran

What's wrong with spicing up that basic research menu? Add a pinch of business ingredients, sprinkle some knowledge exchange and a dash of IP rights. Spin, incubate, and voila: A deliciously rounded proposal is served which improves chances for success. Implementing processes and structures to make this happen has to be put early on the shopping list for that funding menu. Eventually, those basic research ideas turn into proposals, which then can turn into successful bids and eventually funded sponsored research will make an impact on your institution's intellectual property list, knowledge transfer office, patent income sheet statement or licensing and royalties fees' A-List – one hopes! And that dies last.

In recent years, continuous changes can be seen in the layout and conception of new and innovative funding programmes, aiming towards creating an impact with the outcomes and results of those research efforts. This of course has to do with the fact of decreasing funding sources, the high-level of research proposals, increasing demand for sponsored programmes and lack of sufficient resources thereof. In order to create that critical mass menu of highly successful research bids, other factors have come into play.

### From Uncertainty towards Innovative and Collaborative Efforts

Those were the days of sponsored research proposals simply stating, 'possibly there might be a result at the end' or better even, 'this research has a high probability of failure due to unforeseen experiment results', '... not be successful in the results expected', etc. Long gone are the times when conclusions ended with 'further research will be needed in order to explore...' Having been in the proposal kitchen long enough to know what's cooking by scanning Programme Calls from the past two decades, there is a clear trajectory to be seen that by only explaining the basic research idea is simply not cutting it any more; moreover, it hasn't tasted right for quite some time. Palates

change; hence, impact, implementation, exploitation and commercialization ideas have to be added to the menu. They need to be described in detail in order to showcase the possibility of a successful spin-off/out/commercialization path.

Nowadays, professional support structures in research administration offices, in an effort to involve other parties across the technology transfer/knowledge exchange field very early in the game of ideation and proposal development, are very often the success factors to secure that very competitive bid to be funded.

### Creating that Tasting Menu for Sumptuous Proposal Dishes

In order to make that paradigm shift possible, research administrators' tasks have evolved dramatically in parallel with changes in sponsored funding programmes foci. We research administration officers are playing a huge role that starts way before there is anything tangible with which to make that commercialization buck. Processes and structures in place to give advice, innovative approaches to connect with technology transfer/knowledge exchange offices, IP Councils, Incubator & Science Parks, and decisions on how to pursue those plans with the PI's intentions in mind are the modern success factors for our tasks at hand.

Once, it was enough to simply state: 'IP rights will be protected,' 'good licensing terms will be offered,' and 'exploitation results pursued.' Now, a full-fledged, detailed impact plan must be presented at the proposal stage. So, getting an early head start during the mentoring and counselling of PIs to ensure their attention to detail and the importance of these new game-changing factors will give us the competitive advantage in providing professional advice and support.

### Conclusions

As is with the ever-evolving sponsored funding programmes, research officers have to undergo constant changes and adaptations in order to stay

ahead of the game, to match the demands of funding authorities, to secure the best value out of each research dollar, to make sure those innovative commercialization sparks are put early onto the shopping list of the PI's IP menu. Hence, to make that proposal menu an alluring one, a good collaboration base with all the other actors on the

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funding table has to be maintained. Decisions we make, plans we develop, advise we give, and the collaborations we form with the likes of technology transfer offices, etc. very early in the life of a project proposal can have profound impacts on the success and efforts years later. May the proposal dishes be perfect.

Bon Appetit! ■



**Bruno Woeran** is EU-Affairs Manager Research Funding and Innovation Networks for Merinova Technology Center, Energy-Cluster Vaasa, Finland. He is current President of [www.TII.org](http://www.TII.org) and Board Member for [www.ispim.org](http://www.ispim.org). Bruno is active in NCURA's international region and is involved in Knowledge Transfer and Education with several networks [www.eaie.org](http://www.eaie.org), supports European Qualification Framework (EQF) qualification efforts [www.ecqa.org](http://www.ecqa.org) and is a ferocious cook. He can be reached at [bruno.woeran@merinova.fi](mailto:bruno.woeran@merinova.fi)