



Adding and sustaining the value of research: Recommendations for research funding institutions

The Brief in brief

For research to support more effectively policy processes, research funders can play an important role. This brief outlines some challenges that research funding institutions currently face, and some recommendations to address these challenges.

Challenges faced by research funding institutions

Research funders face a series of challenges, including:

- Designing funding strategies that incorporate policy-relevant topics in a timely manner, anticipate policy needs and help to raise awareness of the need for policy activities;
- Encouraging and supporting projects in their efforts to interface with policy;
- Ensuring that the knowledge gained in past projects is maintained and openly available for on-going and future projects, but also for policy processes, end-users and the wider society;
- Taking stock of lessons learnt on science-policy interactions and fostering improved practises in new projects.

Recommendations for research funding institutions

The following recommendations¹ may contribute to address these challenges:

- **Support the early and continuing policy connection of projects.** Projects may need explicit help to make early policy connections and identify relevant beneficiaries of their work. This may also help avoid policy makers being bombarded by untimely and/or untargeted information. Possible measures include improving the:
 - Memory of science-policy interactions. The EC Directorate-General for Research and Innovation and other funding agencies could implement a process to develop a “memory of science-policy interactions”, where new projects can gather knowledge on how to plan and conduct such interactions and avoid repeating mistakes from other projects.
 - Memory of policy landscape mapping. A dynamic “map of the policy landscape” could be established to facilitate access to relevant policy information, building on policy landscape analyses made in previous projects, to serve as a resource for, and be dynamically updated by, new projects.
 - Partnering of parallel projects. Bringing together thematically-related research projects in regular meetings and other forms of interaction to exchange information and best practice about communication needs, formats, options, and to support the implementation of joint SPI activities.
- **Fund specific brokerage and dissemination projects.** For some policy areas, one can establish support projects that promote wide dissemination of research results and science-policy interactions by pro-actively acting as knowledge brokers for other projects. Existing examples include RESPONDER and other knowledge brokerage projects², the KNEU support action³ and the MarineTT support action⁴. This may be particularly useful when policy processes require the collection and synthesis of information from different projects.
- **Ensure availability of ad hoc flexible funding for SPIs.** Flexible and rapid funding mechanisms should be available in Horizon 2020 to allow for rapid response to specific science-policy interface activities as policy priorities evolve. This could include funding for science-policy workshops and synthesis processes.

¹ The following recommendations were developed at a workshop on “Better interfacing EU research projects and EU policy-making”, organised by SPIRAL jointly with the European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), with the participation of the European Environment Agency (EEA).

² RESPONDER aims to promote sustainable consumption by exploring novel ways of knowledge brokerage: www.scp-responder.eu; WATERDISS 2.0: www.waterdiss.eu; PSI-CONNECT: www.psiconnect.eu
³ www.biodiversityknowledge.eu
⁴ www.marinett.eu

- **Combine research and implementation.** In some cases, combining research and implementation projects can significantly improve science-policy interactions. The project formats of COST actions⁵ could be a starting point. LIFE⁶ or INTERREG⁷ projects could also be potential partners for research projects.
- **Ensure long-term availability of information and data.** Maintaining long-term information and data should be considered a project goal in its own right, alongside specific “new questions” in each funding period. This could be strengthened through contractual obligations, greater awareness of policies on access to environmental data (particularly INSPIRE⁸) and in-project evaluations and reviews.
- **Develop and use existing information systems** such as the Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE) as knowledge hubs. The role of BISE as a major hub and entry point to biodiversity and ecosystems research results should be strengthened (see companion SPIRAL brief for recommendations on BISE). Projects could consider making data and research results available in BISE, or similar relevant systems in other areas.
- **Require minimum mandatory policy-relevant information from projects.** In order to support the information hub function of platforms such as BISE, all research projects in Horizon2020 should provide basic information on their science-policy related work, including (a) a policy-focused project description including yearly updates on relevant activities, and the right key words, and (b) specific reporting products for policy-relevant results. Such elements could become part of the evaluation processes of on-going projects.
- **Develop a SPI ‘survival kit’ for projects.** The EC Directorate-General for Research and Innovation could develop and make a series of tools and resources available to projects to help them develop and implement their SPIs. This could include guidelines on how to prepare a policy brief, the forthcoming SPIRAL handbook on SPIs, a list of potential policy contacts and relevant EU institutions.
- **Systematically inform projects about key science-policy events.** Projects should be made better aware of key event such as Green Week, Bridging the Gap, side events at UN Conferences of the Parties of Environmental Treaties, and how they can get engaged. This could be done via a regular information mailing to

coordinators, and through direct contact on a case by case basis.

- **Strengthen use of EU research information media.** The European Commission should promote its own popular science journals and policy services (RTD Info, Research EU, Science for Environment Policy) and websites, and strongly encourage all projects to publish policy-relevant activities and results there. These media could include articles on successful interfacing from both a science and a policy perspective. This would also address the problem of the plethora of unconvincing business-driven research dissemination magazines approaching projects, sometimes claiming that they are mandated by the European Commission.
- **Brief evaluators and reviewers.** Evaluators of proposals and project reviewers, as well as EC Directorate-General Research and Innovation scientific officers moderating evaluation panels, should receive more guidance on how to assess the science-policy interface and dissemination activities in projects.

Looking for more information on science-policy interfaces?

For more SPIRAL results, including separate briefs focussing on recommendations to policy-makers and research projects, see companion SPIRAL briefs at <http://www.spiral-project.eu/content/documents>

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⁵ COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is one of the longest-running European frameworks supporting cooperation among scientists and researchers across Europe <http://www.cost.eu/>

⁶ LIFE is the EU's financial instrument supporting environmental and nature conservation projects throughout the EU, as well as in some candidate, acceding and neighbouring countries: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/index.htm>

⁷ INTERREG provides funding for interregional cooperation across Europe: <http://www.interreg4c.net/>

⁸ The INSPIRE Directive establishes an infrastructure for spatial information in Europe to support Community environmental policies, and policies or activities which may have an impact on the environment: <http://inspire.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>