

Internationally Active – Professionally Valuable

International projects – how to get involved

WSPA, Poland



InterAct

Credits

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1. Introduction

Participation in the implementation of international projects, regardless of the source of their financing and the degree of complexity, is an excellent opportunity to gain valuable, helpful experience in everyday academic work.

Many programs offer opportunities to finance various activities that can be carried out in cooperation with foreign partners. These are activities based on cooperation between universities and academic centres, in which staff may be involved in the implementation of individual activities and projects carried out by individual academic staff with the support of the university.

Regardless of the nature of the project, each participation in international activities contributes to the increase of experience, improving language skills, acquiring new competencies, and establishing contacts that may contribute to further professional development in the future, which is extremely important from the point of view of scientific work.

Getting involved in the implementation of international activities is not easy. It often requires - apart from the substantive knowledge in a given area - to devote a significant amount of time - for example, to understand the rules and principles of applying for funds or the rules of participation in a given activity, overcoming barriers (mainly linguistic), the ability to communicate and work in a culturally diverse environment and organizationally, often also negotiating skills and considerable assertiveness, as well as independent organisation of one's work and acting under time pressure.

Nevertheless, it is worth devoting time and energy to finding opportunities to implement international projects and consistently participate in such activities.

2. Benefits of involvement in international projects

Teaching work, especially at the university, requires constant development, raising competencies, improving skills, and responding to new developments and challenges - both in terms of content and organisation. The latter was evident during the period of restrictions related to the covid-19 pandemic. Suddenly, the lecturers faced utterly new challenges of an organisational nature. And many academic lecturers, despite their enormous knowledge, did not immediately cope with the emerging challenges. Because in today's dynamic world, even very extensive knowledge is not enough to work effectively in an academic environment.

Currently, additional elements play an increasingly important role, often determining the professional position of university teaching staff. Such elements include, among others, activity in the international arena, including participation in international projects. So why is it worth getting involved in the implementation of international projects? Below are some of the most important reasons.

1. Participation in the implementation of projects creates opportunities to acquire new skills. Most projects are based on substantive cooperation between employees of different universities. Such cooperation often aims to develop a common result: publications, courses, methodologies, cooperation models, etc. In most cases, it is strictly scientific work, and the people involved have

a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience in the fields covered by the project. Therefore, it is an excellent opportunity to broaden your knowledge, acquire new skills, and observe other educators' working methods and solutions. All this can then be applied in your daily work to benefit your future career.

2. Participation in the implementation of projects provides an opportunity to improve professional skills. There are a large number of international grants that can be used strictly for research projects. On the one hand, it is a unique opportunity to conduct research, which is especially important for researchers. On the other hand, the international component and the presence of international staff give meaning and prestige to the research activities. It may also increase the recognition of research and the scope of conducted works. And also contribute later to the broader dissemination of the results of the research work carried out and, thus, to the research's continuation. It is a crucial factor for the academic staff.
3. Projects provide opportunities for professional development. Gaining new skills and experiences and implementing new solutions is certainly noticed by the institution where a given person works. Many universities grant additional gratuities for participation in international projects, which are then taken into account when offering promotions, awards or financial gratuities
4. Participation in international projects makes it possible to implement professional plans. Not always and not all projects are initiated by universities. Many projects can be implemented by academic staff. Thanks to this, individual research and teaching staff have space to carry out activities consistent with their professional plans. The international component of these activities always increases their quality and scientific value. Many universities also offer the possibility of co-authoring a project in which the university is the subject. Still, the employee co-creates the project from the moment of developing the application and then participates in its implementation. It is also an opportunity to implement professional plans for individual research and teaching staff.
5. The implementation of international projects helps to improve language skills. Functioning in an international team that carries out joint activities requires communication. This is an excellent way to enhance the language, especially when it is the working language of the team and not the mother tongue of its members. Then it is usually easier to break the language barrier, especially in spoken language. The practical application of language is the best way to consolidate it.
6. Implementing international projects creates opportunities to work in a culturally diverse environment. Working in an international team, you can observe the influence of culture on how you work, and you can learn about different approaches to the tasks performed and different ways of communication - thanks to this, you can learn to function in a highly diversified environment. It is a beneficial skill for working in an increasingly diverse academic environment.
7. Participation in the implementation of international projects helps to establish contacts in a specific scientific environment. Typically, project activities are focused on a particular scientific issue. There is an excellent opportunity to develop connections that may be helpful in the further development of your professional career in the future.

3. Types of international projects

From the point of view of the research and teaching staff, international projects can be divided into 2 main groups: projects carried out individually by employees and projects implemented by universities in which the employees are engaged.

3.1 Individual projects

These are usually grants for research activities by individual research and teaching staff. Funding applications are generally submitted by the employees or through the university.

Examples of grants that can be used as an individual university employee:

1. **Exchange program to the United States** - Research grants for Polish and cooperating universities and research unit employees.
2. **NAWA Intervention Grants.** Participation in the Program enables scientists to undertake interventional research in international cooperation and develop solutions for responding to groundbreaking events. The program aims to support international cooperation of research teams or international mobility of scientists, undertaken in response to sudden, influential, unforeseen social, civilisation and natural phenomena with global or regionally significant consequences.
3. **National Geographic grant program.** Adult grants for innovative projects on various topics related to nature conservation, education, research, storytelling or technology. Activities that strictly support laboratory work or collect the effects of other people's work are usually excluded from funding. The program consists of 3 categories of grants:
 - Grants for career starters;
 - Exploration grants;
 - Grants for the implementation of specific offers.
4. **Internships at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).** It is an offer addressed to younger research and teaching staff, but it is still worth considering. EIGE conducts research, collects statistical data, documents cases of gender-related violence, conducts information activities - publishes publications, and organises events. <https://eige.europa.eu/recruitment>
5. **Internships at the European Joint Undertaking for the Implementation of the ITER Program and the Development of Fusion Energy.** The internship program aims to raise awareness of the role of F4E in ITER and the European context and to promote and bring these issues together in general. Internships in the fields of nuclear engineering, physics, administration and communication are aimed at university graduates. People who:
 - are nationals of the EU Member States or Switzerland;
 - have a diploma of at least three years of higher education (at least a bachelor's degree);
 - they know English very well (minimum B2 level).

Information on the recruitment of trainees is published on the Agency's website.
<https://fusionforenergy.europa.eu/traineeships/>

6. **European Research Council (ERC) Advanced Grants.** The ERC Advanced Grants are aimed at recognised research leaders of any nationality (regardless of age) to support groundbreaking research projects that set new directions in their fields. The European Research Council (ERC) is a European initiative to set up a fund to support the best European scientists, engineers and scientists. Its task is to support the research of the highest quality and pioneering research in all fields of science by awarding grants (by competition). Advanced ERC grants are for researchers who have become independent research leaders. More information <https://erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/advanced-grant>
7. **DAAD scholarships for research stays for PhD students.** The scholarships enable PhD students and young scientists who want to complete their PhD in Poland (or have already completed it) to conduct research at one of the German universities or one of the non-university research institutes in Germany. The scholarship stay may be combined with a doctoral dissertation in Poland or a research project unrelated to obtaining a diploma. More information <https://www.daad.pl/pl/>
8. **WTO Prize for Young Economists.** Award for the author of the best work on trade policy and international trade cooperation. The award aims to promote high-quality research in policy and trade cooperation and strengthen the relationship between the WTO and the academic community. PhD students or graduates of doctoral studies may apply up to two years after the defence (up to the age of 30). A complex work may be a joint work (application criteria apply to both authors). More information https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news22_e/essay_16feb22_e.htm
9. **The European Research Council (ERC)** supports creative and innovative research ideas in all areas of knowledge. Interdisciplinary projects with high scientific risk, leading to important discoveries and breakthrough results, are highly valued. The classic division into basic and applied research does not matter: research must be cognitive, pioneering, and go beyond the current limits of knowledge. <https://www.kpk.gov.pl/horyzont-europa/excelence-science/erc-frontier-research>
10. **The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** program supports researchers at different stages of their careers by funding research and training activities in Europe and beyond. At the same time, the program enables institutions to develop their staff by employing researchers and participating in international research and training projects. Programs falling under the scope of the MSCA can be implemented in any scientific discipline and may relate to basic and applied research. The basic requirement is the international mobility of researchers. MSCA is part of the European Union's Horizon Europe program. Individual researchers may participate in MSCA programs. However, researchers (of any nationality and from any country) must be eligible to start doctoral studies / open a doctoral program. They may not be employed by any institution when applying for a grant. The academic degree determines the possibility of applying for one of this program's 4 types of projects. <https://nawa.gov.pl/dzialania-marii-skłodowskiej-curie>

1.2 Projects implemented by universities

These are generally projects in which the applicant is a university. Nevertheless, individual university employees are usually employed as members of project teams implementing activities planned for individual projects. It is also often the case that respective universities allow employees to take the initiative and submit application forms prepared by employees, who then deal with implementing individual projects.

The main types of international projects in which the applicants are universities are:

1. **International Projects co-financed by the Ministry of Science Education in Poland.** Applicants are generally Polish universities, but partner universities from abroad are also welcomed as partners (any foreign university can initiate such a project by asking a Polish university to apply for funding). The program may finance project costs up to 90% of eligible costs incurred by the applicant for project implementation from national funds. The aim is to support the participation of entities of the higher education and science system in international projects, including scientific research or development works, co-financed from non-returnable foreign sources, implemented in cooperation with foreign partners, including projects involving research carried out on large research devices located outside country borders, as part of:
 - European Union research programs;
 - other international research programs, initiatives or ventures.
2. **The Excellent Science program.** The subject of the program is to support entities of the higher education and science system and other organisational units acting for the dissemination of science in the implementation of projects aimed at presenting scientific achievements, including the latest results of scientific research or development works, by organising scientific conferences and publishing scientific monographs. Here, the applicants are also Polish universities. Still, the program assumes the implementation of activities with universities from different countries. Therefore it is possible to find a partner university in Poland and jointly apply for funds for international activities. More information - <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/dwiedzala-nauka>
3. **The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** program supports researchers at different stages of their careers by funding research and training activities in Europe and beyond. At the same time, the program enables institutions to develop their staff by employing researchers and participating in international research and training projects. Programs falling under the scope of the MSCA can be implemented in any scientific discipline and may relate to basic and applied research. The basic requirement is the international mobility of researchers. The MSCA is part of the Horizon Europe program belonging to the European Union. Therefore, institutions from the European Union or outside the EU can participate in the MSCA programs:
 - scientific institutions (universities, research institutes)
 - enterprises (including SMEs)
 - non-governmental organisations, hospitals, museums, associations, banks, etc.

- international organisations.
4. An institution may have the status of a beneficiary, which involves signing a grant agreement with the European Commission, employing scientists and receiving funds directly from the European Commission, or a partner organisation that trains and accepts scientists for internships/internships, and the costs of its participation are covered by the beneficiary.
<https://nawa.gov.pl/dzialania-marii-sklodowskiej-curie>
 5. **ERASMUS + Higher Education.** Universities, their students and employees, and in some activities - also other organisations cooperating with universities, may participate in the Higher education sector. Universities can exchange students and staff and coordinate international projects or participate in them as partners. The condition for the participation of universities in the program is to have an Erasmus Charter for higher education. The program allows students to travel abroad for part of their studies and internships. Academic teachers may conduct classes for students at foreign universities. Employees from various university units can take advantage of training trips. Moreover, students and university staff can participate in international projects in which their unit is involved. In most cases, these are projects under Action 2 - Cooperation of higher education institutions for innovation and exchange of good practices. "Cooperation partnerships" in the higher education sector are international projects aimed at developing, transferring and implementing innovative practices and joint initiatives promoting cooperation, partnership learning and exchange of experiences at the European level. The effect of this type of project should be primarily the modernisation of the university's educational offer, its better adaptation to the needs of society and the economy, and the improvement of the quality of education. Results should be reusable, transferable, scalable, and, if possible, have a strong interdisciplinary dimension
 6. **The EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism** (i.e., the so-called EEA and Norway Grants). Programs under the 3rd edition of the EEA and Norway Grants will be implemented until 2024. The exception is the Bilateral Cooperation Fund, which will be implemented until April 30, 2025. Norwegian funds may finance, among others, research carried out by employees of Polish universities <https://www.eog.gov.pl/pages/learn-with-the-funds/goal-and-principles-of-action/>
 7. **The Interreg Europe 2021-2027** program continues the Interreg Europe 2014-2020 program. In addition, Interreg Europa 2021-2027 supports the exchange of experiences, innovative solutions and capacity building of institutions participating in preparing and implementing regional development policies, including programs under the Investments for employment and growth objective. <https://www.ewt.gov.pl/stroiny/o-programach/programy-interreg-2021-2027/program-interreg-europa-2021-2027/>

4. How to get involved in the implementation of international Projects?

There are, as a rule, two main methods here.

On the one hand, you can look for grants for activities that can be carried out independently by the university's research and teaching staff. These are most often research grants under which you can plan and implement specific scientific research or organise international events.

The second way involves close cooperation with the university. When preparing projects, universities often cooperate with specific employees - authors of the concept of a given project. These people have an idea for the project implementation, prepare a substantive contribution to the application, and then deal with the substantive implementation of a given project - in the event of receiving a grant. Here, too, there are two ways of doing things. Some universities already have a ready list of programs in which they would like to apply or apply for funds periodically and are looking for research and teaching staff with project ideas. Employees receive support in completing the application and managing the project - implementing only its substantive part. There are also universities where the bottom-up initiative of employees is preferred, who can search for programs themselves and get help from the universities in preparing the application and managing the project.

It is best to find an office for international affairs or a unit of this type within the structures of a given university and ask about the possibilities of applying for funds from projects in which the university may be the applicant.

5. References and further readings

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