

RM ROADMAP

Consensus Document for Country Community Belgium

Co-Creation Session 1: Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations

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RM ROADMAP

“Creating Framework Conditions for Research Management to Strengthen the European Research Area”

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Country Community Belgium**

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landscape: National Networks and
Associations**

Co-Creation Session 1

Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations

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1. Introduction

This is an important moment for the research management (RM) community in Europe. The European Commission (EC) and countries across Europe want to better understand the current research management landscape to further strengthen the European Research Area (ERA).

Research management includes a broad range of professionals supporting researchers to achieve excellence in research. For the purpose of this co-creation exercise, Research Managers (RMs) are to be considered as broad as possible including: research policy advisers, research managers, financial support staff, data stewards, research infrastructure operators, knowledge transfer officers, business developers, knowledge brokers, innovation managers, etc. For simplicity, we use the term research management but this exercise covers also other terms such as research support, research management and administration, professionals at the interface of science and other terms which are used as the norm in the national landscapes across Europe.

The RM Roadmap Knowledge and Community Platform (KCP) brings research managers together to shape the future of the profession and support the strengthening of an inclusive research management community in Europe. The KCP is a place where research managers share their views and introduce issues for discussion in a solution-focused endeavour. RM Roadmap Ambassadors lead the discussions for each country on the Knowledge and Community Platform, supported by national and regional RM networks.

This co-creation exercise is the biggest collaboration between RM networks ever to take place in Europe. With a focus on learning insights from RMs, the co-creation exercise seeks to establish a robust framework that can support professional growth and collaboration across the EU and associated countries.

By 2023, 40 country communities have been established within the RM Roadmap Ambassador Network. The RM Roadmap project will use the outcomes from this co-creation exercise to make a roadmap for the future of research management in Europe and to build and exchange solid knowledge on career framework opportunities, upskilling and networking for research managers. RM Roadmap will ultimately build a value proposition for policy makers and institutional leaders who want to strengthen and modernise their research support departments.

This **consensus document for Country Community Belgium** contains the outcomes of the **First Co-Creation Session - Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations**.

A short summary of the main outcomes from the co-creation exercise is included in section 2. More information about the topic of RM National Networks and Associations is detailed in section 3. Recommendations about best practices, challenges and lessons learnt about (formal or informal) national networks, associations, communities are provided in section 4.

For more information about the RM Roadmap initiative, the reader can consult the following website: www.rmroadmap.eu



2. Summary of Co-Creation Session 1

There are several formal and informal networks and associations of research managers in Belgium. The Belgian research landscape is a rather complex one since both education and research are regional jurisdictions. University-linked associations have therefore been erected regionally in a mirroring manner. Exception to the rule, is the RMA organisation which seeks to group national experience. Hence, this document makes a difference between national and regional initiatives / associations.

3. Discussion Outcomes of Co-Creation Session 1

This consensus document for Belgium contains the outcomes of the First Co-Creation Session - Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations.

1. Please list all the formal and informal networks and associations of research managers in your country and link to their websites or online groups.

A. National Initiatives

BE-ARMA

BE-ARMA is a Belgian initiative to support professionals active in European funded research and innovation projects. The focus lies on the Horizon Europe funding programme and possible subsequent Framework programmes.

Professional support is a prerequisite for the successful preparation and execution of complex funding programs and projects. Although many research organisations and knowledge institutions have internal European / Tech-Transfer offices that provide the necessary expertise, BE-ARMA aims at stimulating peer-to-peer learning, sharing best practices, and wants to inspire the target group to create a pool of expertise around EU project management. The goal is to help each other quickly based on experience, and thus to deliver a complementary service to the existing one. Although the focus is on project managers of EU projects, BE-ARMA is also open for project administrators, EU-offices, and National Contact Points. All the following Belgian organisations (and their personnel) can participate in BE-ARMA: universities, universities of applied science, research institutes, large and small companies.

BE-ARMA supports the targeted professionals by creating a “meeting place” and a knowledge and expertise network. In this respect BE-ARMA pursues the following goals:

1. To offer a professional network
2. To secure and share knowledge

Goal 1: Provide a professional network

BE-ARMA offers its members the opportunity to join a strong collegial network which can be an essential help in the practice of the profession. BE-ARMA intends to organize conferences and networking events. In addition, it offers an accessible and intuitive digital platform for online interaction between its members. Interaction with and between members online – or personally – is a core value of the network. Future activities of the association will be managed jointly.

Goal 2: Secure and share knowledge.

By safeguarding the knowledge and skills of its members, but also by actively gathering knowledge amongst its members, the BE-ARMA initiative grows into a learning network and a centre of expertise. The development of this centre of expertise can eventually lead to requests for advice from external parties and requests for the development of new knowledge and skills.

BE-ARMA uses MS TEAMS as IT-platform to share information. There is a general channel for Q&A, exchange of information and knowledge, and a dedicated channel to publish job opportunities.

BE-ARMA meetings take place each year on a regular basis. In principle, the location changes and part of the local organization (room arrangements, catering etc.) is taken care of by a (rotating member) host. The meetings support the creation of the network, stimulate peer-to-peer learning and the exchange of best practices. When applicable, external experts are invited for specific topics.

BE-ARMA website: <https://bearma.be/>

B. Regional initiatives and associations

1. National Contact Points

National Contact Points (NCPs) are support structures that are an essential component in the implementation of the European Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation. These support structures are funded by the 27 EU member states and the countries associated to the framework programme.

They provide information and on the ground advice to potential applicants and beneficiaries, throughout the project life cycle, in a manner that would be impossible to do so for the European Commission and the Agencies when acting alone.

The NCP for Horizon informs stakeholders about the Horizon Europe EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, running from 2021-2027, and offers support for Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) projects which are still underway.

The Commission considers NCPs to be important partners in the implementation of the programme and the main structure for providing practical information and assistance to potential participants.

For RMAs, the NCPs are crucial and are widely used. RMA valorise the swift relaying of information on EU R&I funding topics and policy through newsletters and informal information initiatives, the ad hoc support in case of questions, information relaying to the EC, the sharing of best practices as well as the joint positioning.

1.1 NCP Flanders

NCP Flanders is a cooperation between FWO, the Research Foundation Flanders, and VLAIO, Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship. It offers several services aimed to:

1. Inform and raise awareness

NCP Flanders offers advice to all stakeholders located in Flanders (enterprises, institutes, non-profit-organisations, universities, university colleges,...). The NCP advisors are located at the offices of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) or Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO).

2. Train, assist and advise

NCP Flanders offers, in collaboration with other partners, different types of trainings throughout the year, for example training workshops for applicants, training seminars for multipliers, training seminars involving the participation of foreign experts with significant experience in the Framework Programme.... Information and training courses: training on topics such as successful proposal writing, European funding for SMEs, intellectual property rights, etc.

NCP Flanders will assist in finding partners for international cooperation and offers advice to potential applicants and beneficiaries.

Support is also provided related to project and financial reporting, contract amendments, and other legal and financial issues of on-going projects

3. Inspire

In the end, funding goes to research and innovation projects which create new knowledge, services, products etc. for the benefit of science, citizens, and society. Inspiration for research and innovation ideas, project planning and writing process, can be taken from many available resources.

Website: <https://ncpflanders.be/>

1.2 NCP Wallonie

NCP Wallonie offers guidance & assistance for stakeholders, news and event updates, covering all domains and topics of Horizon Europe, Horizon 2020 and Digital Europe.

1. Inform and raise awareness

NCP Wallonie informs all stakeholders located in Wallonie (enterprises, institutes, non-profit-organisations, universities, university colleges,...).

2. Support

NCP experts give support towards European financing, from the idea to the submission of the application. Personalized support is offered free of charge by the Region to enable all R&I players eligible for European funding to participate in the development of Wallonia and Europe.

3. Connect

NCP Wallonia connects with European partners. The NCP Wallonia opens its network and contacts to develop synergies in Europe.

Website: <https://www.ncpwallonie.be/>

2. Tech Transfer Offices

2.1 Tech Transfer Offices -Flanders

TTO Flanders is a joint initiative of the five Flemish universities: Ghent University, Hasselt University KU Leuven, University of Antwerp, and Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The technology transfer offices (TTOs) of these universities are responsible for the transfer of knowledge and technology from universities (and their associated university colleges) to private and public partners.

TTO Flanders hence offers a unique portal to the knowledge and technology of the Flemish universities and university colleges, and specifically aims at:

- being a unique point of contact for industry looking for research expertise and licensing opportunities;
- maximising the valorisation of the available university knowledge and technology for the benefit of the economy and society;
- further improving the collaboration between the TTOs of the Flemish universities;
- strengthening the performance of the TTOs by developing common means and sharing best practices;
- becoming a player on the European and international innovation scene.

The TTO Flanders website offers an overview of the technologies all Flemish universities have in store for companies. An overview of the universities' business developers (and a list of specific references) is provided since they can provide more detailed information of the available expertise within their research domain, and can efficiently redirect the website visitor to exact needed contact person / research entity within the universities.

This [brochure](#) introduces you in the world of research valorisation by means of 25 striking examples.

Website: <https://ttoflanders.be/en/>

2.2 Réseau Lieu – Connecting Business to Research

The LiEU Network brings together the Knowledge Transfer Offices (KTOs) of six universities of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles: Liège Université, UCLouvain, Université de Mons, Université de Namur Université Libre de Bruxelles, and Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles. LiEU is a unique gateway to all the universities' competences: it brings together researchers with private or public partners to stimulate collaborations.

LiEU is an operational network of the CReF (Conference of Rectors for the University of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles). It has been established in 2003 with the support of the Walloon Government.

The LiEU Network has four objectives:

- to promote the scientific resources of universities and facilitate their access to companies;
- to develop research collaborations between companies and research units.

- to operate the tech transfer, from scouting inventions to licensing and spin-off creation;
- to support the KTO's teams in a continuous process of learning.

For the period 2023-2027, LiEU's actions will be supported by the ERDF fund according to measure 3c of the Walloon programme dedicated to the valorisation of the research results.

Website: <https://reseaulieu.be/>

3. University Networks

3.1. VLIR (Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad)

Within the VLIR, member universities compare their research and innovation policies with each other, formulate common positions and prepare advice on the policy of the Flemish and European governments.

Some of the agenda topics: the financing channels, the coordination of research and innovation parameters in distribution keys, the statutes of researchers, the possibilities to deliver joint doctorates, the social valorisation of research, research communication.

VLIR has different working groups (WG) of interest to RMA's such as e.g. the widely attended WG on 'Research and Innovation'. These WGs intend to exchange experiences and to facilitate common relevant and possible joint positioning. Different WGs have been created around the following subjects:

- Authoritative panel VABB-SHW
- Doctoral Schools (incl. consultation with external labor market)
- EU Research (incl. working group, VLIR & CRef)
- RDM (Research Data Management) and OS (Open Science)
- TTO (Tech Transfer Offices)
- working group Science, Ethics and Integrity (WE & I)
- Academic heritage
- Ad hoc working groups (ex. Animal testing legislation)

Website: <https://vlir.be/>

3.2. CRef (Conseil des rectrices et recteurs)

CRef is made up of a Board of Directors bringing together the rectors of the 5 university institutions of the FWB and a General Assembly bringing together the aforementioned rectors as well as the General Secretary of the F.R.S.-FNRS, and the secretary of the Council of Rectors and rectors.

Essential activities:

- develop exchanges and consultation between universities and university institutions, in particular between rectors;
- collect and process all useful information concerning all university institutions, in particular, by constituting and managing several databases for this purpose according to established rules;



- carry out studies and research of interest to all universities and academic institutions and their cooperation;
- ensure, within the limits set, the communication and publication of the data, information, or results of work available to it.

Other fields of activity of the CRef include e.g. the three Councils dedicated respectively to teaching, research and international relations, and specific working groups.

In addition, concerning research, CRef also manages the Statistics of the “Research” database with:

- annual publication of statistics relating to R&D expenditure, and
- online publication on the website of the database of current research units and projects in universities.

Website: <http://www.cref.be/>

C. Other networks

There are also networks/associations available to our RMA-colleagues specialising in OA/RDM, legal issues, HR-related issues (researcher statutes, visa issues, ...), ethics and integrity, research communication, training of young researchers,....

Within those, often more informal networks, they meet, collaborate, exchange information/experiences.

2. If you have a national network (formal or informal), how did it help you? If you don't, please say how you have built your (internal) network and are using it.

Testimony:

“Of all the organisations listed here, I have had experience with BE-ARMA and NCP Flanders since the 3 years I am now post-award project manager at the EU team at Ghent University.

For me, BE-ARMA is mainly a help to ask low-threshold questions and it is always nice to get together and discuss difficult issues and other matters and get interesting input from people with similar jobs in Belgium. At NCP Flanders, there is the advantage that you can approach people with specific expertise and ask questions.

I personally found the NCP very helpful in my starting years, especially the legal & financial meetings I attended. Since the RM profile is so broad, it's interesting to meet counterparts around very specific topics. Recently this has been taken over partly by BE-ARMA, organising very useful get-togethers/info sessions. The NCP is also an effective intermediate between beneficiaries and the EC, and has advocated our concerns towards the relevant EC bodies in many occasions.”

3. What challenges do RM networks and associations encounter in contributing to national and European R&I systems?

Influencing policy requires people who comprehend the in-policy development process and at the same time understand the (sometimes technical) issues RMs face in their day-to-day work. The challenge RM networks herein face, lays in the a vast variation in job content of their members; research managers have different specialisation such as: pre-award, post-award, financial, data management, legal, focus on national or international financing bodies / programmes & projects,...

On top of this variety, every RM experiences this from the own perspective and from the own constraints and challenges.

The current RM network BE-ARMA faces these and other challenges on several fronts.

Firstly, there is a sense that a true community feeling is lacking, making members hesitant to share their experiences and insights. This lack of connection can hinder the open exchange of knowledge and ideas within the network.

Secondly, there seems to be a lack of confidence in the concept of peer-to-peer learning. Members may not fully trust in the effectiveness of learning from their peers (i.e. colleagues of competing institutes) which can limit the potential for collective growth and development.

Lastly, the network's Steering Group (SG) operates on a voluntary basis. While this commitment is admirable, it also leads to challenges in terms of dedicated time and resources, potentially impacting the network's ability to address the aforementioned issues.

4. Please list and link to any policy documents and funding which mentions research management or the equivalent national name(s) for research management.

Many policy documents on research, innovation and technology emphasize the importance of research management, but 'research managers in the broad sense' are not mentioned as such. These documents rather focus on the researcher, the faculty's research policy, and the function and importance of, for example, the research council and the private and public partners.

4. Recommendations

The existence of national and regional associations and networks is really important for RM's. The associations and networks create environments to learn from each other, to stay updated on the latest opportunities and to chair best practices in our field. It is valuable to connect with other RM's and associations and networks also facilitate professional development in many ways. Research policy should (continue to) acknowledge the valuable role they in fostering a productive and innovative research landscape and (continue to) provide support for these initiatives.



RM ROADMAP

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