

**Parallel Session 19: Scientists and science institutions as PCST agents:  
experiences**

**BEST PRACTICE IN COMMUNICATING THE RESULTS OF  
EUROPEAN RESEARCH TO THE PUBLIC**

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**Abstract**

The presentation will outline the initiatives taken by the European Commission to improve communication, outreach and dissemination of results from EU-funded research projects, and to facilitate the work of project contractors in this respect. Guidelines and best practices to help project participants in communicating and disseminating their research results will be presented and discussed. The European Commission draws in particular the attention of participants in FP6-funded projects on the fact that they can no longer ignore the 'public communication' dimension of their activity and that they are also in an excellent position to improve the image of science and technology among a broad public.

**Key words:** information and communication, media, research projects, best practices, scientific awareness

**Text**

The European Commission is launching some 2,000 new research projects every year. An annual budget of more than EUR 4 billion is being allocated by the European Union for funding research projects.

In the Sixth Framework Programme 2002-2006 (FP6), the European Commission supports very large projects (50-100 partners). Against this background, dissemination of results is a contractual obligation of participation in research initiatives supported under the European Union's FP6. The specific aims of this provision are to promote knowledge sharing, greater public awareness, transparency and education. Consortia are required to provide tangible proof that collaborative research not only exists, but also pays dividends in terms of academic excellence, industrial competitiveness, employment opportunities, environmental improvements and enhanced quality of life for all.

At the same time, the communication of successes and the announcement of exploitable developments are of direct value to the participants themselves. Suitably framed messages can help by:

- Drawing the attention of national governments, regional authorities and other public and private funding sources to the needs and eventual benefits of the research;
- Attracting the interest of potential partners and/or correspondents;
- Encouraging talented students and scientists to join the partner institutes and enterprises;
- Enhancing the reputation of participants, at local, national and international level;
- Where appropriate, aiding the search for financial backers, licensees or industrial implementers to exploit the results; and
- Generating market demand for the developed products or services.

However there are some specific difficulties to communicate in the European dimension (Fig. 1). As the European Research Area becomes a reality, Europe is sorely lacking a mechanism enabling it to draw full benefit from its 'home grown' research activities. At present, there is no structured mechanism for informing the media in one Member States of scientific activities going on in another and giving the highest possible profile to European research. A survey made by ESO (European Southern Observatory) showed that 67% of the articles published in Germany on space and astronomy concerned US research. US research still dominates the European media.

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Research is heavily involved in communicating the results of EU-funded research to the media and the general public. Support and help are provided to assist project coordinators and team leaders to generate an effective flow of information and publicity about the objectives and results of their work, the contributions made to European knowledge and scientific excellence, the value of collaboration on a Europe-wide scale, and the benefits to EU citizens in general.

The European Commission's communication strategy particularly addresses communications via the 'mass media' (TV, radio and the written press), the workings of which may be less familiar to scientific/academic partners. It also covers websites<sup>1</sup> and other internally generated support such as print publications, CDs and video.

The European Commission draws in particular the attention of participants in FP6-funded projects on the fact that they can no longer ignore the 'public communication' dimension of their activity and that they are also in an excellent position to improve the image of science and technology among a broad public.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/index\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/index_en.cfm)

Exposing non-specialists to the results of research work helps to improve their understanding of scientific and technological developments and stimulate public debate on important issues, which not only meets a very real social need but also contributes to the success of RTD policy. The 2001 and 2003 Eurobarometer Surveys (two opinion polls "Europeans, science and technology" that were conducted at the Commission's request in the fifteen Member States between 10 May and 15 June 2001, and in the ten new Member States plus Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey in November 2002) of European attitudes to science showed that Europe's citizens have a very positive perception of science and technology.

However, research has shown that our acceptance or rejection of technological and scientific innovation is determined largely by our preconceived ideas. This means that we must therefore dispense with the widely held belief that high-quality scientific information can influence people's judgement. Many researchers continue to claim, for example, that opposition to genetically modified organisms is due to the fact that most of the population fail to understand the underlying scientific notions.

The presentation will outline the initiatives taken by the European Commission to improve communication, outreach and dissemination of results from EU-funded research projects, and to facilitate the work of project contractors in this respect. Guidelines and best practices to help project participants in communicating and disseminating their research results will be presented and discussed. The presentation will also include examples of successful approaches that have been used to date.

### **Figure 1**

## Communicating European research: A European challenge



