



Science Europe Policy Brief

On Public-to-Public Partnerships and
the Next Framework Programme for
Research and Innovation

NOVEMBER 2017



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November 2017

'Science Europe Policy Brief On Public-to-Public Partnerships and the Next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation':
D/2017/13.324/9

Available at <http://scieur.org/p2ps-brief>

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See also:

Position Statement on The Framework Programme that Europe Needs

<http://scieur.org/h2020-position>

Policy Brief on FET Flagships

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Policy Brief on Research Infrastructures in EU Framework Programming

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Executive Summary

Public-to-Public Partnerships (P2Ps) aim to foster co-ordination and collaboration between national and regional research and innovation activities. They play a key role in improving the efficiency of public research funding in Europe. However, over the years the types of P2Ps, the number of initiatives covering similar areas, and the various rules of funding and participation, have proliferated: this results in a complex European research-funding landscape.

The ongoing preparation of the 9th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP9) offers a timely opportunity to address this complexity and reflect on a better articulation of European, national, and regional research efforts.

Science Europe proposes a two-fold strategic approach to the design and evaluation of future P2Ps. FP9 should facilitate:

- ▶ a top-down process that earmarks multiannual co-investment for large-scale P2Ps in few prioritised areas and supports them with an overarching strategic agenda. The underlying principles are: European added value, long-term political and financial commitment, and leverage effect; and
- ▶ a genuine competition amongst bottom-up initiatives, of smaller scale and driven by EU Member States. The underlying principles are: variable geometry, flexibility, and competition.

A thorough effort of rationalisation per area will be required for existing P2Ps, leading to the continuation, merging, or termination of initiatives. Both new and existing P2Ps should be evaluated along quantitative (such as funding of research activities) and qualitative indicators (such as openness of the initiative to newcomers).

In order to realise the potential of P2Ps, Science Europe calls on all parties (the European Commission, EU Member States and Associated Countries, national funding bodies, and research organisations) to live up to their shared responsibilities and discuss their commitment in depth. Science Europe and its Member Organisations are willing to contribute their extensive expertise and know-how to the design of P2Ps, their governance, and management.

Introduction

When the notion of a European Research Area (ERA) was first introduced in 2000,¹ the principle of reciprocal opening of national research programmes and the establishment of information mechanisms on the objectives and content of these programmes were presented as pivotal in realising it. As a result, Public-to-Public Partnerships (P2Ps) were developed to foster co-ordination and collaboration between national and regional research and innovation (R&I) activities.

Since 2000, various types of partnerships have been created and numerous initiatives were launched.² According to a recent study by the Technopolis Group, “instead of replacing existing [initiatives], the approach has been to launch new partnership instruments alongside with the existing ones. This has resulted in a rather complex landscape of partnership instruments, many with the same fundamental rationale, and several focusing on the same thematic areas.”³ Today, P2Ps range from EU Member State-led activities to instruments strongly supported by the European Commission Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation, and to partnerships among public agencies. They include initiatives launched under Article 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), European Innovation Partnerships (EIP), Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs), ERA-NETs and European Joint Programme (EJP) Cofund Actions.

Science Europe acknowledges the role P2Ps can have in improving the efficiency of public research funding in Europe. However, the complexity of the current landscape has to be addressed. The ongoing debate on the 9th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP9) offers a timely opportunity to reflect on a better articulation of regional, national, and European research effort and the role of Research Funding and Performing Organisations (RFOs and RPOs) in this process. This paper presents Science Europe’s views and flags possible ways forwards to adopt a more strategic approach to the design and evaluation of P2Ps. It complements the Science Europe Position Statement on ‘The Framework Programme that Europe Needs’.⁴

Public-to-Public Partnerships in a Complex European Research-funding Landscape

P2Ps have become an important part of the European R&I landscape. Over the period 2004–2016, more than 500 joint calls have been launched by P2P networks, representing a combined investment of over €5 billion in more than 5,500 transnational projects.⁵ Although increasing, this is still a very small share of the total public funding for research and innovation in Europe.⁶ The allocation of such funding should be more strategically oriented, and the division of labour and responsibilities between national, regional, P2P, and Framework Programme should be clarified.

Additionally, many different instruments are being used, and resources are spread across a multitude of initiatives and calls in various areas. There are currently 93 active P2Ps: 30 (out of 43) Science Europe Member Organisations are involved in 55 of them.⁷ Over FP6, FP7 and Horizon 2020, Science

Europe Member Organisations have been involved in launching 363 calls for research proposals in the context of P2Ps.⁷ This provides Science Europe with invaluable first-hand experience of the reality of P2Ps, where initiatives are below critical mass and resource intensive for partners, especially in terms of overhead.

Horizon 2020 provides top-up funding to P2P research, for instance via Article 185 of TFEU and the ERA-NET Cofund scheme. This is welcome as part of joint efforts between the European Commission and EU Member States to support research. However, the added value of resorting to co-funding should be carefully assessed.

The High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU Research and Innovation Programmes recently pointed out that “the Public-to-Public Partnerships supported by Horizon 2020 co-funding [...] appear not to have been influential on Member States’ policies and strategies.”⁸ The key driver for EU Member States when entering P2P-type collaboration should remain the ambition to jointly tackle challenges that they cannot address by themselves.

Such challenges are grand societal, scientific, and technological challenges. They can be related – but are not limited – to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the European Union is committed to tackling. The anticipated contribution of R&I in addressing these goals should be realistically defined. As a consequence, the SDGs’ weight in FP9 design should be carefully considered.

P2Ps in the Next Framework Programme

Earmarked FP9 co-investment for large-scale P2Ps in few prioritised areas

The next Framework Programme should aim to co-invest in a small number of P2Ps in areas of high European added value that benefit from long-term (political and financial) commitment from EU Member States and Associated Countries. This co-investment approach should focus on areas that call for both a substantial contribution from R&I and sustained co-operation amongst countries. Past or current successful collaborations among Member States and Associated Countries could inform the necessary selection process.

The alignment of European, national, and regional investments in this small number of initiatives would ensure substantial funding, as well as critical mass and high-leverage effect. Any prioritised area should benefit from stable (multi-annual) and structural co-funding. FP funding should cover co-ordination and roadmapping, as well as co-fund research projects. It could foster participation in the research activities from beyond partner countries. EU Member States and Associated Countries could allocate research funding to multiply the amount provided by the FP.

For all prioritised areas, decision-making on P2Ps will be part of a strategic process. The articulation between FP, national, and regional programmes, and a limited number of carefully designed partnerships (including P2Ps) could be agreed via a shared overarching strategic agenda. For

areas already covered by more than one existing P2P, the suggested process should start with a thorough effort of rationalisation per area, leading to the informed continuation, merging, or termination of initiatives.

Whilst promoting some alignment of EU and national investments, the suggested overarching agendas should complement national strategies in a flexible way. They should also acknowledge the added value of some degree of duplication in preserving the competition and reproducibility vital to scientific endeavours.⁹

RFOs should be first involved at their highest level, alongside ministries, in decisions leading to the setting up of P2Ps that would require securing funds ahead of calls for proposals. They should subsequently be the major actors in the P2Ps' governance. They have the necessary expertise in tailoring funding envelopes and instruments to meet the challenge in question. They also are in a unique position to contribute to the articulation between regional, national, and P2P activities. In addition, the active participation of RPOs is essential to realise the potential of P2Ps and to reach their expected outcomes.

Flexible FP9 support to smaller-scale Member State-driven P2Ps

EU Member States and Associated Countries may choose to continue co-operating in smaller-scale initiatives on a variable-geometry basis. FP9 could stimulate a genuine competition amongst bottom-up P2P proposals.

FP9 funds would primarily cover administrative/operational costs of the initiatives. They could also be allocated to research activities; as part of a truly bottom-up process, such support would not be limited to priorities earmarked in FP9 work programmes.

After a few years of demonstrated fruitful collaboration amongst EU Member States and Associated Countries, these initiatives could be candidates to larger-scale co-investments (see above).

Monitoring and evaluation of P2Ps

All P2P initiatives should be established for a given duration. Their monitoring should focus not only on quantitative indicators (such research activity funding) but also on qualitative indicators related to: additional activities (networking, training, and so on); the openness of the initiative to newcomers; the ratio of research funds allocated vs administration costs; a well-functioning national inter-ministerial structure; the relevance of the established international collaborations; and, the effectiveness of the articulation of their activities with the FP, national, and regional levels. Relevant evidence (quantitative and qualitative) should be collected when P2Ps are being evaluated: they would inform the continuation or termination of a given P2P.

Conclusions

In order to make the most out of P2Ps, all parties (the European Commission, EU Member States and Associated Countries, national funding bodies, and research organisations) should live up to their shared responsibilities and discuss their commitment more thoroughly. Science Europe and its Member Organisations are committed to taking up this challenge, together with their partners.

As an immediate consequence, the design of the next FP should not be made in isolation. It should rely on a common understanding and optimisation of the overall European research landscape – including instruments, funding, and activities at the European, P2P (and other partnerships), national, and regional levels. There again, Science Europe and its Member Organisations are committed to sharing their know-how and expertise with regards to funding and performing research.

Notes and References

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2. 273 P2Ps in total over FP6, FP7, and H2020, based on ERA-LEARN 2020 database (extracted on 17 October 2017)
3. Increased coherence and openness of European Union research and innovation partnerships Final report, Technopolis Group, June 2017: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/eu_ri_partnerships_final_report.pdf
4. Science Europe Position Statement ‘On the Framework Programme That Europe Needs’ (October 2016): <http://scieur.org/h2020-position>
5. ERA-LEARN 2020 – Second Annual Report on Public-to-Public Partnerships, November 2016: <https://www.era-learn.eu/news/2ndannual-report-on-p2p-partnerships-2016>
6. Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) stood at €299 billion in the EU-28 in 2015; 32.3% was funded by governments, and 0.8% by higher education. Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/R_%26_D_expenditure#R_.26_D_expenditure_by_sector_of_performance
7. ERA-LEARN 2020 database of P2P networks, organisations, and calls – Status 12 October 2017: <https://www.era-learn.eu/network-information>
8. LAB-FAB-APP – Investing in the European future we want (July 2017): https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other_reports_studies_and_documents/hlg_2017_report.pdf
9. Science Europe Position Statement On the Role and Future of Joint Programming (August 2015): <http://scieur.org/jpi-statement>

Science Europe is a non-profit organisation based in Brussels representing major Research Funding and Research Performing Organisations across Europe.

More information on its mission and activities is provided at www.scienceeurope.org.

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