

Water Research Management: Good practices in programming, project implementation and evaluation

Introduction

Good research management is key to increasing the success rate of any research programme and project, especially when several stakeholders and nationalities in the South and North are involved. Research management principles are already used in many of the EU Member States. However, a SPLASH review of research management shows that there are considerable differences in country practices and that specific research management guidelines are rarely used. A challenge for development research today relates to this lack of common practices and guidance for research management.



The purpose

SPLASH carried out an investigation into good research management and the optimal use of resources for development related water research. This study contributes to the overarching SPLASH objectives of better coordination of research initiatives and of ensuring that good research management practice is known and used. It is hoped that this will also aid other research projects in terms of improving management procedures and methods. The main results of this work and the evaluations of Member State research programmes and projects are summarised in this fact sheet.

Headline facts

- A review of existing research management practices within EU Member States revealed that most countries conduct their respective research programming, implementation and evaluation without using specific written management guidelines or instructions.
- A need has been identified for a structured approach in managing research programmes and projects, thereby increasing the opportunities for feedback and uptake of lessons learnt from past evaluation of programmes.
- A guidance note or check-list of issues and questions to be addressed in the different stages of the management process of new research initiatives has been developed as an “aide memoire”.



Recommendations

The main steps in the research management process are research programming, research project implementation, and research project evaluation. Accordingly, it is recommended that a systematic approach to research management is taken which addresses the following main elements as appropriate:

Programming:

- Develop a research strategy through a proper scoping exercise
- Set research priorities
- Develop “SMART” objectives for the research programme
- Develop call text and agree criteria for project selection
- Screen expression of interests and evaluate full proposals
- Facilitate programme steering and uptake of lessons from project evaluations

Project implementation

- Ensure stakeholder engagement and develop capacity according to needs
- Implement day-to-day research and management activities
- Ensure efficient procurement and financial management
- Conduct rigorous quality control and monitoring

Evaluation

- Conduct a thorough project evaluation exercise
- Ensure evaluation feedback to the research programming level

The full report provides a checklist of issues and questions to be considered for each of the steps above.



Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH fact sheets available on the SPLASH website www.splash-era.net

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