

Widening Country Inspiration Story

“Don’t be discouraged by failed applications; learn from them.”

Organisation name: Masaryk University

Organisation type: Higher education organisation

Country: Czech Republic

Project Acronym: FANTOM

Project start and end date: 1.01.2023-31.12.2026

Type of MSC action, Horizon Europe: Doctoral Networks

Is your organisation a coordinator? Yes



What is your project about and why is the topic important for science advancement?

The FANTOM Doctoral Network seeks to train a cohort of 10 PhD students through a research programme focussing on cancer of the immune system called Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (ALCL). This cancer largely affects children and young adults, particularly when associated with aberrant expression of a protein called anaplastic lymphoma kinase (ALK). Whilst survival is relatively high for childhood ALCL, 30% of children relapse and suffer the long-term side effects of therapy. This situation can only be improved if fundamental and clinical science is performed to identify less-toxic therapies.

What communication and public engagement measures have you foreseen?

The FANTOM Doctoral Network brings together a multi-disciplinary network that will collectively conduct research into childhood cancer while training and educating 10 talented researchers. Together, they will communicate their research to both the general public and fellow professionals through social

media and a devoted website which will act as the major public-facing communication channel for the network. We are also working with key associated partners, including Biolution, Open Science and the Naked Scientists, who collectively have significant experience in public engagement and will assist with communication activities, including the production of videos, hosting events and radio/ TV programmes.

What kind of support did you get?

While preparing our application, we used our experience of a prior successful application from our network, the ALKATRAS Innovative Training Network, which was funded in 2015. This prior application provided the framework for the current programme. At the same time, we very carefully read through the application materials to ensure that all required aspects were covered in our proposal. The guidelines can vary with each call and Work Programme, so it is important to read the instructions carefully. We also had support from Biolution, a company based in Vienna that has significant successful experience in

preparing applications for Horizon funding.

Do you have other successful projects under Horizon 2020/ Horizon Europe?

Yes, the ALKATRAS Innovative Training Network (ITN).

What in your experience helped you to succeed?

Our successful application resulted from two failed attempts – all scoring high but just below the funding cut-off. This was followed by two further failed attempts before a final sixth successful application. Perseverance pays off! Don't be discouraged by failed applications; learn from them, carefully read and address the feedback in subsequent attempts, and keep trying.

How did you find the partners in your consortium?

Our Doctoral Network arose from an existing research network, the European Research Initiative for ALK-related malignancies (ERIA), an independent group of researchers that came together in 2011 (www.erialcl.net). Associated partners were invited based on existing collaborations within the network and personal connections.



What tips can you give other organisations that would like to apply for MSCA?

Read the guidelines! These give you many details of what the European Commission looks for in successful proposals. You must address key aspects in your application that are important for a high score. In the life sciences, there is a significant competition where the difference in one or two seemingly minor aspects can make all the difference between a successful and a failed application. Also, seek advice from prior successful applicants but bear in mind that guidelines change slightly over the years, so a previous successful proposal may not address all of the required aspects of the current funding call.

More information on the project:



The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) support researchers at all stage of their career across all disciplines. The MSCA also support cooperation between industry and academia and provide innovative trainings and career developments.

The MSCA Doctoral Networks (DN) offer doctoral programmes implemented by partnerships of organisations from different sectors across Europe and beyond to train highly skilled doctoral candidates, stimulate their creativity, enhance their innovation capacities and boost their employability in the long-term.

The MSCA-NET project is the MSCA NCP project to facilitate the transnational cooperation to achieve a consistent and harmonised level of NCP support. The scientific community can also profit from our project to support their MSCA application.

