

Widening Country Inspiration Story

“Start preparing the proposal early! It takes time to build a network and to get everyone on board!”

Organisation name: University of Nova Gorica

Organisation type: Higher education organisation

Country: Slovenia

Project Acronym: SMASH

Project start and end date: 1.07.2023 – 30.06.2028

Type of MSCA, Horizon Europe:
COFUND

Is your organisation a coordinator?
Yes

What is your project about?

SMASH is an intersectoral, career-development postdoctoral training programme. It aims to recruit 50 outstanding postdoctoral fellows to work on cutting-edge machine learning (ML) applications and artificial intelligence (AI) techniques applied to five research areas from the fields of science and the humanities. ML/AI tools are increasingly shaping various aspects of everyday life, but are still not fully adopted in scientific research. This is a complex task, but it is clear that successful application of ML/AI to scientific issues will bring about new discoveries. Just this year two Nobel prizes were given to ML/AI and one to its application in scientific research. .

Why is your project important for society?

SMASH fellows will address, with the help of ML/AI methods and the Vega supercomputer, the most challenging research problems which include predictions related to the impacts of climate change, development of next-generation precision medicine tools, answering essential questions about our Universe, and digging deep into the fundamentals of language and how we communicate. While developing their research within SMASH and benefitting



from the universal language of ML/AI, fellows will also strengthen relations between the five Slovenian hosting institutions and at the same time build new ones with our network of 35 associated partners chosen among prominent academic institutions worldwide, as well as Slovenian SMEs that use ML/AI in their projects.

What communication and public engagement measures have you foreseen?

Planned public engagement measures include extensive and global social media presence, scientific workshops, public lectures, and collaboration with media to disseminate research impacts broadly.

What kind of support did you get?

We utilised comprehensive guidance from National Contact Points, insights from successful Horizon Europe

proposals, and detailed EU application guidelines. We also worked closely with an experienced science writer, whose advice helped us shape the proposal.

Do you have other successful projects under Horizon 2020?

Yes.

What in your experience helped you to succeed?

Strategic partnerships, a clear vision aligned with EU goals, and robust project management were all crucial for success. We also designed the project to offer a creative environment, excellent personal mentoring from leading world-wide experts in various SMASH fields, and the opportunity to develop a powerful set of transferable skills tailored to the needs of each individual postdoctoral researcher. All of this will contribute to and expand the Slovenian research environment as well as its recognition abroad.

How did you attract resources for the co-funding of your project?

The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Slovenia made our application possible by committing to co-fund the project if it was accepted by the EC.

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

Emphasise a strategic approach with a strong consortium, be inclusive, go global for attracting talent, have clear impact goals, and robust management plans. Highlight unique elements like excellent science, international outreach and interdisciplinary research opportunities to enhance proposal strength. Also, start preparing the proposal early! It takes time to build a network and to get everyone on board!

More information on the project:



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

The MSCA COFUND aims to stimulate regional, national or international programmes to foster excellence in researchers' training, mobility and career development, spreading the best practices of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions.

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.

