RM ROADMAP

Research Management in Europe: a strategic opportunity for strengthening R&I systems

Overarching Roadmap

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Overarching Roadmap

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Contents

List of abbreviations

EC	European Commission
ERA	European Research Area
HEI	Higher Education Institution
REA	Research Executive Agency
RFO	Research Funding Organisation
R&I	Research and Innovation
RM	Research Management
RMs	Research Managers
RPO	Research Performing Organisation
RSO	Research Support Office
RTD	Research and Technological Development
RTO	Research and Technology Organisations

1. Executive Summary

The RM Roadmap project, funded under Horizon Europe, presents a strategic framework to strengthen the European Research Area (ERA) by professionalising and aligning Research Management (RM) across Europe. Amid the growing complexity of research and innovation (R&I) ecosystems, the project addresses the urgent need for coordinated, well-resourced support structures that help institutions and researchers stay competitive, compliant, and impactful.

Research Managers (RMs) play a pivotal role in translating policy into practice, securing resources, driving innovation and ensuring institutional competitiveness. Despite their growing importance, RM remains a fragmented and under-recognised profession across Europe, without clear career pathways and streamlined professional development opportunities.

Developed through a robust co-creation process involving over 140 RM Ambassadors and 40 national and thematic communities, and informed by the largest pan-European survey of RM professionals to date (2,212 validated responses)[1] and the mapping of 335 professional development opportunities[2] across 35 countries, the Roadmap addresses this gap by offering a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy to elevate RM as a strategic function within European, national and institutional R&I systems.

The Roadmap identifies three foundational requirements for RM system development:

- Define and segment RM roles, acknowledging its diversity,
- Articulate the value proposition of RM for institution leaders, policymakers,
- Establish enabling framework conditions for recognition and professional development.

These are operationalised through four strategic pillars:

- Upskilling – expanding training and professional development opportunities,
- Capacity building – strengthening institutional and national RM systems,
- Networking – fostering communities of practice and cross-border collaboration,
- Awareness creation – promoting recognition and visibility of RM.

Research management contributes essential value to R&I systems across several dimensions, such as by enhancing efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring policy alignment, valorisation of research results, resource acquisition and allocation, governance and institutional development, accountability and compliance, interoperability and flexibility, talent development, researcher training and research infrastructure management.

In addition to identifying the main challenges and strategic opportunities for advancing the professionalisation of Research Management, the Roadmap calls for a coordinated European response across seven action areas and provides practical instruments to support both national adaptation and institutional uptake. It emphasises the need for system-wide dialogue, national assessments of RM systems, strengthened national connections, the use of EU-level guidance and tools, stakeholder engagement and awareness, as well as the planning of national interventions and the integration of key actors and frameworks.

Furthermore, the Roadmap underlines the importance of recognising Research Management within national R&I strategies, embedding RM COMP – the European competency framework designed to support career development, HR planning, and national standardisation – into HR policies, and investing in RM networks and mobility schemes that promote inclusive and flexible career pathways.

To prepare the European R&I system for future challenges and opportunities, it is imperative to:

- Recognise research management as a strategic function, and acknowledge its diversity,
- Professionalise the field through structured, inclusive and flexible career frameworks, such as RM COMP, and enhance training opportunities,

[1] More information on the RM Roadmap survey is available here: https://www.rmroadmap.eu/rm-roadmap-survey
[2] Oliveira, C., Dias, F., Trindade, M., Carrapato, A., Varela, C., Hourmat, B., & Delgado, D. (2024). D2.2 Catalogue of existing professional development opportunities. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13829260

- Enable systemic coordination, collaboration and recognition across relevant actors,

RM Roadmap positions research management as a strategic enabler of research excellence, policy alignment, and institutional resilience. Coordinated professionalisation across the ERA is essential to strengthen national R&I systems and ensure Europe's competitiveness. Member States and institutions are invited to build upon the Roadmap to realise the full potential of RM in enhancing Europe's R&I system.

2. Introduction

1.1.RM Roadmap

The RM Roadmap project set out to chart a course for the future of Research Management (RM) in Europe and a community to support its delivery. Conducted over 36 months and funded by €1.5m under the European Commission's Horizon Europe programme, the overarching objective of RM Roadmap was to identify and adapt the Research Management capital base of the EU, including the widening countries, and the emerging needs of its current and future Research Management workforce in order to improve the EU's competitiveness and sustain its economic performance.

RM Roadmap brought together existing European networks on a smart community platform, enabling an unprecedented co-creation process in RM. This process gathered existing communities and expanded them to reach two main objectives: to create and inform a bottom-up consensus on the future of RM through a strategic roadmap, and to inform the community about existing training, networking, funding, and career mobility opportunities.

Eight partners collaborated to achieve these goals, including European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (Belgium); HETFA Research Institute (Hungary); Nova University Lisbon (Portugal); Association of European Science & Technology Transfer Professionals (Netherlands); Crowdhelix Limited (Ireland), The Cyprus Institute (Cyprus) and associated partners Janssen Pharmaceuticals (J&J) and Una Europa (Belgium).

1.2.The Overarching Roadmap

The Overarching Roadmap (hereinafter, Roadmap) is a central output of the RM Roadmap project. The project itself is connected to Action 17 of the European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda and aims to strengthen the ERA by improving the quality of Research Management profession in Europe. The Roadmap informs policymakers and related stakeholders and outlines the necessary steps to be taken by (national) R&I systems, within their respective contexts and legal frameworks, to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of research management.

While aligned with EU policy and national best practices, the Roadmap recognises the importance of tailoring RM development to national realities and specific context. It is relevant to all organisations, regions and countries, regardless of their current level of RM maturity, and provides a structured path towards greater alignment, consistency, and, where appropriate, standardisation across the ERA.

To achieve these goals, the Roadmap identifies three basic requirements:

- Defining and understanding the scope of research management including identifying the different roles involved (segmentation/classification).
- Raising awareness about the value proposition and evidence base of research management.
- Creating the necessary framework conditions to foster a strong and sustainable research management community.

Building on these foundations, the Roadmap, in line with the objectives of Action 17 of the ERA Policy Agenda proposes four strategic pillars to guide national and institutional action: A) Upskilling, B) Capacity Building, C) Networking, D) Awareness Creation. The Roadmap outlines the steps various actors within the national R&I system can take to enhance their research management practices. It is based on the following key methods:

- A co-creation exercise, involving research management stakeholders across Europe,
- Desk research, surveys[3], focus groups, interviews carried out in various work packages, as well as during open workshops, and various meetings.

[3] The RM Roadmap Survey, completed in early 2024, was aimed at obtaining a comprehensive picture of contemporary RMs across Europe. The survey was completed by a broad range of experts at varying professional levels and has enabled the RM Roadmap project to provide a deeper understanding of who RMs are, where they work, and their education and experience. The survey also looked at the different areas of research management RMs are active in, as well as RMs preferences related to a common terminology of the profession. More information is available here: https://www.rmroadmap.eu/rm-roadmap-survey

By gathering existing findings, best practices, and success stories, and incorporating the input of the research management community from across Europe, this synthesis of information provides a community-based plan to unlock the potential of research management in contributing to more efficient and impactful R&I.

2. The evolving landscape of European R&I

The European and global research and innovation (R&I) landscape is undergoing profound transformation. Confronted with a complex set of global challenges, such as geopolitical instability, the green and digital transition, and increasing societal expectations, Europe has defined a set of strategic priorities for the period of 2025-2029, placing economic competitiveness, strategic resilience, security, democracy and social fairness at its core. To achieve long-term competitiveness, the ambition of "putting research and innovation, science and technology, at the centre of our economy" became an imperative of a strategically autonomous Europe.

There is increasing recognition that Europe's ability to lead in science and innovation depends on a robust, agile, and well-supported research ecosystem. To reduce fragmentation across the R&I landscape and better anchor R&I within the EU single market, the European Commission's forthcoming European Research Area Act is planned to establish the 'fifth freedom', the free movement of research, innovation and knowledge by strengthening R&I investment, aligning national and EU funding priorities, and fostering the circulation of talent across borders. These developments are transforming the conditions under which R&I is conducted in Europe and have direct implications on the R&I ecosystem, including the professionals who enable and sustain it.

However, no single actor can succeed alone. Creating the framework conditions for research excellence requires coordinated support: through teams, leadership, governance, career development, financial sustainability, and institutional reforms. Critically, the most urgent needs arise not only in conducting research itself, but in managing the increasingly complex tasks surrounding it: compliance, funding, reproducibility, research assessment, research infrastructure management, research security and more. Addressing these challenges systematically involves three strategic pillars:

- **Individuals**
- **Systems**
- **Individuals working with systems.**

Although emerging innovations across R&I ecosystems (e.g., through AI) create new opportunities, the focus of the Roadmap's proposition is on a specific group of professionals, Research Managers (RMs). These professionals support R&I systems by connecting policy, practice, and governance through specialist expertise, and their role is vital in enabling organisations and researchers to remain efficient, compliant, competitive, and impactful in the changing global landscape.

The importance of skilled research managers is underlined in the Council Conclusions of November 2024[4], which calls for a reinforced ERA through improved governance, and stronger synergies between R&I and education, industrial and sectoral policies. It also highlights the need to reinforce Europe-wide networks of researchers, entrepreneurs, innovators and RM professionals to enable the better circulation of knowledge, ideas and people and empower them to improve their skills, competences and attitudes towards excellence and impact.

The political agreement reached on 23 May 2025 on the Council Recommendation establishing the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 further recognises the special support research managers provide. With its proposed action on research management, the Council highlights the need for coordinated EU and national policy support to create skilled professionals and strengthen the profession through increased training capabilities and funding opportunities, career development, working conditions, and enhanced mobility, which are core pillars of the RM Roadmap.

In this context, the professionalisation of research management is a strategic investment that enhances Europe's

[4] Council of the European Union. (2024), Council Conclusions on Strengthening the Competitiveness of the EU, Reinforcing the European Research Area and Overcoming Its Fragmentation. November 29, 2024. Available at https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16179-2024-INIT/en/pdf

research excellence and reinforces its strategic autonomy. By strengthening the foundations of research governance, coordination, and support, RM contributes directly to the EU's competitiveness, resilience, and global leadership.

3. The emergence of Research Management as a profession

The demand for specialist support roles in research has grown organically in response to expanding R&I systems. As a result, there is a significant variation in official job titles, hierarchical positions, and responsibilities of Research Managers across organisations and countries. The RM Roadmap project outcomes[5] reveal that RMs are increasingly involved in specific areas such as research strategy and policy development, researcher training, knowledge valorisation, and data management, going beyond the more traditional pre-award and post-award tasks. This reflects a broad and evolving range of responsibilities and knowledge and skills needed to perform this job.

The decentralised and organic growth of research management across Europe presents both a challenge and an opportunity. While it has led to fragmented practices and disparities in capacity, it also offers significant potential for system-wide professionalisation, alignment, and increased interoperability.

To support the strategic recognition and professionalisation of this diverse group of experts, RM Roadmap identified "Research Manager" as the most widely preferred umbrella term. Other terms such as "Research Manager and Administrator" as well as "Research Support Professional" are almost as widely accepted. The choice of terminology was informed by survey data and co-creation feedback. However, national translation and adaptation of terminology must respect and acknowledge Europe's linguistics diversity and national specificities, avoiding terms that could carry negative connotations or diminish professional standing.[6]

In January 2025, the European Commission adopted RM COMP, the skills and competency framework for research managers[7] that was co-created by RM Roadmap and its sister-project CARDEA[8]. RM COMP will support career development and institutional HR planning as well as national standardisation, supporting the recognition of RMs. By co-creating the RM COMP, the following working definition of RM was developed, using an inclusive and flexible approach that recognises the diversity and strategic importance of RM across Europe and enables reflection on the constantly emerging fields and job profiles.

> *Research Managers enable, facilitate, and support the performance of research in all its applications. They hold generalist or specialised roles within the research and innovation ecosystem. Research Managers are based in all types of research performing organizations, including public and private universities, research institutes, research funding organizations, medical institutions, NGOs, companies, public authorities, and so on.*
>
> *Thus, Research Managers can work as research policy advisers, pre-award and post-award officers, project managers, impact managers, science communicators, financial managers and advisors, legal advisors, contract and compliance managers, data stewards, open science officers, research infrastructure managers and operators, equality, diversity and inclusion advisors, research ethics advisors, knowledge and technology transfer officers, innovation managers and business developers, knowledge brokers, human resource managers in research, AI experts, and leaders of research facilitation offices, etc.*[9]

Agreement on the terminology and definition Research Management and defining RM roles contributes to making the profession more visible and valued in the R&I ecosystem. However, these necessities continued efforts, including the articulation of their added value in the R&I systems.

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[5] The outcomes are based on over 2,200 valid survey responses from RMs across 65 countries, 18 interviews, and 3 co-creation sessions, engaging more than 2,200 RMs via 140 Ambassadors and 10 thematic communities across 40 countries in Europe.
[6] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape. Zenodo. Available at https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16570546
[7] Available at: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/jobs-research/rm-comp-european-competence-framework-research-managers_en.
[8] More information about CARDEA is available here: https://www.ucc.ie/en/cardea/.
[9] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape. Zenodo. Available at https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16570546

4. The Value Proposition of Research Management

Research management contributes essential value to R&I systems across several dimensions: it enhances operational efficiency, ensures alignment with policy priorities, drives societal impact through knowledge valorisation, helps secure resources, strengthens institutional governance, competitiveness and sustainability. As the R&I landscape becomes increasingly complex and competitive, the role of research managers has also evolved from administrative support to strategic partnership, as described in the relevant literature, in alignment with the findings of the preliminary report of RM Roadmap[10].

Professionals in research management bring a unique blend of expertise in funding, compliance, policy, innovation, and organisational development. They are integral part of an institution's ecosystem, their work not only supports researchers but also shapes the conditions for research excellence, sustainability, and impact, ensuring that institutions remain future-proof, efficient, and aligned with evolving scientific and technological landscapes. Research Managers are bridge-builders between research, administration, and funding opportunities.

The following core dimensions describe research management's added value across various context, which is supported by evidence from the RM Roadmap project, value proposition workshop outcomes and a catalogue of success stories from across Europe published by the European Commission.

4.1.Efficiency and effectiveness

Research Managers enhance the efficiency of R&I systems by taking on specialised tasks, allowing researchers to focus on their core mission. Examples include project managers ensuring timely delivery and budget control, and financial officers preventing costly compliance errors. This functional specialisation leads to cost savings, increased research output, and improved quality assurance.

Interviews conducted for the final report on the ERA-wide landscape revealed that proactive research management leaders often initiate institutional or national-level reforms, including structured coordination, standardised service catalogues and proactive engagement with researchers to improve the quality and efficiency of research support services. Establishing structured and streamlined coordination and governance processes reduces administrative burden and enhances the overall effectiveness of research activities.[11]

The European Commission collected relevant success stories, best practices and achievements from the research management[12] highlighting the following examples of how RMs managed to improve institutional performance:

- At Tampere University (Finland), dedicated grant writing team was established, to support researchers in applying and managing grants. Their support enabled junior researchers to succeed as project coordinators, freeing up time for scientific work and improved institutional competitiveness.[13]
- The University of Trento (Italy) revamped its pre-award services and introduced tiered support model to address fragmentation issues. By digitalising the service's access and key resources, they have improved internal collaboration and onboarding for new staff. They have succeeded in making research support more efficient and seamless by adapting stronger internal collaboration.[14]
- AO Research Institute Davos (Switzerland) has created the scientific project manager role to support researchers in applying for national and international project applications. A grant newsletter was launched for researchers, and electronic laboratory notebooks were introduced for better data management, which

[10] Csite, B. & Zsár, V. (2023), Preliminary report on ERA-wide landscape. Deliverable 1.1. of the RM Roadmap project funded by the EU (GA no. 101058475). Available at https://www.rmroadmap.eu/s/RM-Roadmap_D1_1_preliminary-report_final-frtf.pdf DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.19039.02723.
[11] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape. Zenodo. Available at https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16570546
[12] European Commission. (2025) Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Success stories from the research management community – A catalog of best practices and achievements, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/7482920.
[13] Ibid. p.21.
[14] Ibid. p.9.

has resulted in record-high grant applications and success rates and improved compliance.[15]

4.2.Policy alignment

Research managers play a critical role in translating policy into practice. They serve as interfaces between institutions and policy frameworks, ensuring that R&I activities are aligned with local, national, and European priorities, including research assessment reforms. Their proximity to policymakers and research leaders allows for agile and informed decision-making, particularly in response to emerging policy developments.

46% of RM Roadmap survey respondents indicated that they participate in strategic advisory activities to institutional leadership, contributing to the development of roadmaps, research assessment frameworks, and foresight exercises. Their ability to interpret and implement policy at the operational level makes them indispensable in aligning institutional goals with broader R&I agendas.

The research management success stories catalogue also includes such examples, such as:

- At IDIBAPS (Spain), a dedicated strategy was established to oversee research coordination, communication, technology transfer and institutional development, enhancing collaboration, innovation and guaranteeing long-term research excellence.[16]
- In Norway, research administrators initiated a national conversation on research culture by organising a dedicated session at the NARMA conference. Their efforts led to the Research Council of Norway integrating research culture into its strategic documents and influencing the upcoming national White Paper on the research system.[17]

4.3.Impact and knowledge transfer / Valorisation of research results

Research managers play a strategic role in driving societal impact by coordinating knowledge valorisation processes, including commercialisation of research results and spin-off creation. Research Managers working as Innovation officers, IP Advisors and Technology Transfer Officers' expertise ensures that scientific breakthroughs translate into societal and economic value and provide structured support for licensing, spin-offs, stakeholder engagement, and innovation procurement. They help institutions navigate complex ecosystems of public and private stakeholders, align research outputs with societal needs.

The Draghi report[18] highlights persistent challenges limiting the effectiveness of Knowledge Transfer/Technology Transfer Offices (KTO/TTOs) as intermediaries between academia and industry. The European Patent Office report showed that only a few high-performing TTOs lead most spin-off creation and IP commercialisation[19], while many, especially in Southern and Eastern Europe, lack the necessary expertise and financial resources and remain disconnected from innovation ecosystems.[20] To address these issues, the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy proposes a blueprint for licensing to support IP commercialisation and spin-off creation and foresees the capacity-building of TTOs and the introduction of venture builder roles in universities, RTOs, and research infrastructures by 2026.

RM Roadmap results have shown that approximately 22% of survey respondents collaborate with industry, and 12% takes part in the uptake and utilisation of research results. RM Roadmap interviews highlighted the importance

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[15] Ibid. p.8.
[16] Ibid. p.26.
[17] Ibid. p.27.
[18] European Commission. (2024). *The Draghi report: In-depth analysis and recommendations (Part B*). Available at: ec1409c1-d4b4-4882-8bdd-3519f86bbb92_en
[19] European Patent Office. (2022). *Valorisation of scientific results – Patent commercialisation scoreboard: European universities and public research organisations*. Available at: https://www.epo.org/en/publication-content/valorisation-scientific-results-patent-commercialisation-scoreboard-european
[20] European Commission. (2025). *Commission staff working document: Accompanying the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy – Choose Europe to start and scale* (SWD/2025/138 final). Available at: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8f899486-6e4e-48df-8633-9582375f41eb_en?filename=ec_rtd_eu-startup-scaleup-strategy-swd.pdf

of collaboration between project support and technology transfer offices to maximise the societal value of research.

RM professionals are catalysts for innovation, bridging the gap between research and real-world application through structured valorisation efforts. The research management success stories catalogue highlights the following examples:

- The EU-LIFE, an alliance of 17 European life sciences institutes has established a Technology Transfer Working Group, which is organising a pitch event connecting researchers with investors. Since 2021, this initiative led to the creation of new companies and helped bridge the gap between research and market.[21]
- At the University of Fribourg (CH), the bench2biz workshop, a 10-day pre-seed entrepreneurship programme tailored for deep-tech researchers and students help them understand the nature of bringing their idea to market, and support technology transfer and development. Participants form multidisciplinary teams, working alongside coaches, IP experts and business mentors to refine their ideas, assess commercial potential and design business models. The workshop has created over 25 start-ups, with 25% of participants establishing successful companies within five years.[22]

4.4.Resource acquisition and allocation

Research Managers play a critical role in securing and strategically deploying resources that reinforce institutional sustainability and growth. Through expertise in funding mechanisms, grant writing, budgeting, and programme evaluation, research managers support the acquisition and strategic use of resources. They ensure that institutions are not only competitive in securing external funding but also capable of managing it effectively and in alignment with strategic priorities.

The RM Roadmap results have also revealed that a majority of research managers are involved in pre-award (70%) and post-award activities (64%), including budgeting and proposal development and project management. Their involvement ensures that institutions are competitive and financially resilient by introducing financial diversification and optimization of resources. RMs contribute to building resilient funding strategies that align with both institutional missions and broader European R&I priorities.

- The University of Coimbra (Portugal) increased its ERC-funded projects from 2 to 10 and secured 100 Horizon Europe grants by establishing a Strategic Areas Unit (NAE) to support interdisciplinary collaboration and funding diversification. NAE efforts led to a significant increase in submissions. NAE also supported collaborative proposals and partnerships addressing societal challenges and cross-cutting issues.[23]
- The Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute (Cyprus) developed funding tools and templates, structured procedures, and a monitoring system, while organising training and joining key EU networks to boost collaboration. It secured €10 million in competitive funding through its Research Innovation and Support Unit, which streamlined grant processes and expanded networks and achieved an overall 29% success rate for 188 proposals.[24]

4.5.Governance and organisational development

RMs are strategic actors in shaping the governance and long-term development of their organisations. Governance experts, strategy advisors, and legal officers ensure that their institutions are well-structured, strategically aligned, and compliant with relevant regulatory and policy frameworks. Their work underpins long-term institutional resilience and adaptability.

The RM Roadmap report's results shown that research managers are increasingly recognised as strategic actors in

[21] European Commission. (2025) Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Success stories from the research management community – A catalog of best practices and achievements, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/7482920. p.16.
[22] Ibid. p.45.
[23] Ibid. p.6.
[24] Ibid. p.8.

institutional development.[25] Interviews revealed that institutions with established research support structures often involve RMs in leading or advising on structural reforms. They usually work closely with institutional leadership to improve internal coordination, define service standards, and implement evaluation frameworks. Their ability to bridge operational and strategic levels makes them indispensable in building robust, future-proof organisations.

- At CEITEC Masaryk University (Czechia), a former scientist turned administrator led a decade-long reform to align administrative processes with research priorities. This included streamlining funding mechanisms, introducing family-friendly policies, and fostering collaboration between researchers and support staff, demonstrating how RM leadership can drive cultural and structural transformation.[26]
- Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Italy) established a cross-functional Research Management Community (RMC) to reduce fragmentation and improve coordination between central and departmental units. This peer-driven network enhanced institutional coherence and responsiveness and the overall quality of research support services.[27]

4.6.Accountability and compliance

Research managers are essential in ensuring institutional resilience, particularly in navigating changes in funding landscapes and compliance requirements. They ensure adherence to financial, ethical, and legal requirements, and that research is conducted responsibly and in full compliance with regulatory frameworks. Their expertise in audit processes, data stewardship, and reporting not only reduces institutional risk, but ensures transparency and trust on the long term with funders, partners and citizens. In doing so, RMs reinforce institutional credibility and integrity.

The RM Roadmap final report on ERA-wide landscape also found that Research Managers play a vital role in enhancing the quality, efficiency, and compliance of research, while also amplifying its social and economic impact.[28]

Success stories highlighted in the success stories collection:

- At University Medical Centre Utrecht (Netherlands), research managers successfully navigated a funding crisis during the Grant Agreement Preparation phase of a European Commission project. When a partner failed to meet financial and legal requirements, the team renegotiated consortium terms and ensured compliance, saving the project from termination.[29]
- FI Group, a consultancy supporting with experience in managing EU-funded projects, streamlined amendment requests, improved cost claiming, and enhanced audit preparation of beneficiaries. Their work enabled their clients to focus on technical tasks while ensuring financial and legal compliance across consortia.[30]

4.7.Interoperability and flexibility

Perhaps most crucially, research managers contribute to the coherence and adaptability of R&I systems. They enable collaboration across borders and institutions, reduce duplication, and help integrate education, innovation, and research policies – particularly within university alliances and cross-national initiatives.

The RM Roadmap survey confirms the versatility of the profession, as many RMs operate across six or more areas of responsibility, adapting to institutional needs and supporting diverse research agendas. This flexibility is a defining strength of the profession, allowing RMs to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities with agility.[31]

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[25] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16570546
[26] European Commission. (2025). Success stories from the research management community. p.30.
[27] Ibid. p.36.
[28] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape. p.82.
[29] European Commission. (2025). Success stories from the research management community. p.23.
[30] Ibid. p.25.
[31] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape.pp.28-33.

The success stories catalogue highlights how this adaptability translates into institutional impact:

- The ADAPT Centre of Dublin City University (Ireland) implemented a cross-institutional research support model across eight universities. By expanding their research support teams., they have improved coordination, increased funding by 25%, and enhanced project execution via seamless pre-to post-award knowledge transfer.[32]
- At Copenhagen Business School (Denmark), challenges arose in optimising research support and needed to improve resource allocation and streamline its processes. They have created a collaborative model across departments on research strategies and funding opportunities that has have improved alignment between research strategies and funding opportunities, boosting success rates.[33]
- NOVA University Lisbon (Portugal) established RUMO (Research Units Management Optimisation) to improve collaboration and efficiency, standardise processes, and align with national and international standards. They fostered collaboration through meetings, training, and networking, and optimised processes and data management across research units.[34]

4.8.Talent development, researcher training

Beyond technical expertise, Research Managers play a vital role in research career development, international mobility, and institutional capacity building through training, mentoring, and strategic recruitment. RMs often provide tailored career guidance to researchers, particularly early-career researchers as they navigate complex funding landscapes, manage projects, and build research careers.

This dimension is essential in fostering inclusive, resilient, and high-performing research culture. RMs are also in charge of implementing the action of the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2022-2024 and 2025-2027, focusing on promoting attractive and sustainable research careers across the ERA. Related to this action, RMs are key enablers of the Charter for Researchers, which outlines the rights and responsibilities of actors across the ERA, including research careers and talent development.

In RM Roadmap, 38% of survey respondents reported involvement in researcher training and development, highlighting RM's role in nurturing talent and fostering excellence. RMs are talent enablers, equipping researchers with the skills, confidence, and support needed to thrive in competitive and evolving research environments.[35]

The following success stories from the European Commission's best practice catalogue provide good examples:

- Sorbonne University (France) Research Support Office launched a Seal of Excellence programme to fund top-ranked MSCA applicants, attracting international talent and enhancing postdoctoral career development. This has resulted in increased number of high-potential postdocs joining Sorbonne University.[36]
- Antwerp University (Belgium) faced challenges in managing its growing and diverse research staff, which required a more specific career structure to address expectations, responsibilities, and career sustainability. The reform aimed to enhance transparency, ensure better employability, and balance flexibility and institutional needs. This has resulted in defined structured career pathways and more transparent job roles.[37]
- At the University of Gdańsk (UG), research managers led national and international efforts to advance the Human Resources Strategy for Researcher, in alignment with the European Charter for Researchers. They directly supported Polish universities by offering consultancy, training and peer learning sessions and advised partner institutions on improving research conditions and internationalisation strategies.[38]

[32] European Commission. (2025). Success stories from the research management community. p.33.
[33] Ibid. p.12.
[34] Ibid p.49.
[35] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16570546 p.29.
[36] European Commission. (2025). Success stories from the research management community. p.26.
[37] Ibid. p.28.
[38] Ibid. p.54.

4.9.Research infrastructure management

Research managers also play key role in ensuring the strategic development, coordination, and sustainability of research infrastructures. These infrastructures are essential for enabling access to cutting-edge facilities, fostering collaboration and supporting open and excellent science. As research infrastructures increasingly serve as hubs for international cooperation, RMs support institutions ensuring research security, crisis resilience and long-term viability. They support institutions in navigating access models, compliance requirements, and collaborative governance structures, ensuring that infrastructures remain responsive to both scientific and societal needs.

According to the RM Roadmap results, infrastructure management is an emerging but increasingly important area of research management, with 17% of survey respondents being engaged in this area. The inclusion of Research Infrastructure Management as a distinct competence area in the RM COMP framework reflects the growing recognition of this function.[39]

The success stories collection of the European Commission highlights the following best practices:

- The ESTEEM3 project, coordinated by Euronovia, harmonised access to electron microscopy infrastructure across Europe. It supported over 500 projects and delivered 6,000+ access points, demonstrating the power of coordinated infrastructure management.[40]
- At the Centre for Marine Sciences (Portugal), a strategic infrastructure manager transformed the microscopy facility by coordinating with suppliers and researchers, leading to the acquisition of advanced equipment and fostering a culture of collaboration.[41]

5. Main challenges Research Managers face

While RMs play a vital role in enhancing the quality, efficiency, and compliance of research, and amplifying its social and economic impact, they remain undervalued in the ERA. The RM Roadmap has identified several systemic barriers and challenges they face in terms of professional recognition, unclear career structures, and limited professional development opportunities, implying that profession has not yet reached its optimal stage. Despite the growing recognition of research manager's added value, significant systemic barriers persist. These include:

1. **Organic and incidental development**: RM roles have evolved without coordination, leading to duplication, inefficiencies, and gaps across institutions. The RM Roadmap results have revealed that RM professionals enter the field indirectly, with no formal training in RM. This led to in inconsistent job titles, overlapping responsibilities, and lack of standardised professional identity. The RM Roadmap survey identified over 1,000 different job titles, reflecting the absence of shared frameworks and unclear career paths.
2. **Siloed structures**: Limited collaboration across ministries, funders, and research organisations hinders systemic improvements. Fragmentation across institutional and national levels limits the development of shared standards and interoperable systems. Research management is not strategically integrated into national R&I agendas, and coordination between actors remains ad hoc or absent. This lack of structured dialogue and shared frameworks reduces the efficiency of research support services and slows professionalisation.
3. **Inequality and variability**: Capacity and awareness vary widely across Europe, particularly between widening and non-widening countries. The RM Roadmap mapping exercise[42] has shown that structured professional development opportunities in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans remain limited. The

[39] Zsár, V., Balázs, Z., & Koltai, L. (2025). D1.2 Final report on ERA-wide landscape. p.29.
[40] European Commission. (2025). Success stories from the research management community. p.19.
[41] Ibid. p.50.
[42] Oliveira, C., Dias, F., Trindade, M., Carrapato, A., Varela, C., Hourmat, B., & Delgado, D. (2024). D2.2 Catalogue of existing professional development opportunities. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13829260

V4WB RMA Network Plus[43] project revealed that beyond common challenges, many institutions in this region rely on a single individual to manage all aspects of research support. These professionals usually work without formal recognition, adequate training, or institutional support. Specialised expertise in legal, financial, and data management is scarce, while high staff turnover, project-based contracts, and low wages contribute to instability and hinder talent retention.

4. **Hidden roles**: Many research professionals and researchers perform research management functions without recognition, training, or career progression. RM Roadmap survey data indicate that only 25–30 % of professionals receive institutional support for training, mobility or networking, and certification is rarely required by employers (8.5 %) and viewed as useful by just 13.9 % of respondents. Such limited recognition and support underline how often research management functions are performed informally and without clear career pathways.

These challenges result in substantial inefficiencies and missed opportunities at all levels: from project audits and policy implementation to infrastructure use and talent development. Addressing them is essential to unlock the full potential of research management as a strategic enabler of the ERA.

6. Strategic opportunities and interventions

To unlock the full potential of research management and address these systemic barriers, coordinated action is needed at institutional, national, and European levels. The Roadmap identifies six key areas for strategic intervention:

- **Strengthening the identity and recognition of the RM profession:** Reinforcing the umbrella term of Research Manager as an inclusive concept, covering the diversity of RM roles, ensuring equity, and promoting formal recognition of RM as a profession across ERA countries is a key step. Promoting greater harmonisation of terminology across Europe should be considered a strategic objective and recognition must be supported by institutional and policy-level actions to elevate RM as a strategic profession.
- **Creating career paths and training opportunities**: Although training dominates the opportunity landscape (51 %), only two offers target mid-career RMs and one targets senior staff, while 81.9 % of professionals devote less than one month per year to development. Career-stage-sensitive pathways aligned with RM COMP are therefore essential for retention and progression. Establishing structured, clear and multidimensional career pathways, aligning training to RM1-4 levels, as described in RM COMP, investing in high-quality training and improved employment conditions will enhance talent retention and capacity building.
- **Establishing standards and anchor points**: RM Roadmap survey and mapping data reveal that Europe currently offers only four accredited RM programmes and fifteen ECTS-bearing courses, yet 76.7 % of respondents favour micro-credentials and 59.6 % call for expanded university provision. This gap demonstrates the need for adopting and implementing shared competency frameworks, certification systems, and national strategies to guide professionalisation. RM COMP identifies 50 competencies across 7 competence areas with 800 learning outcomes, and its implementation will support standardisation.
- **Connecting across silos**: Facilitating cross-actor networks involving ministries, RFOs, RPOs, and other actors will promote alignment and efficiency. Enhanced inter-institutional collaboration and structured exchanges will support overcoming fragmentation. Formal recognition of RM as a distinct occupation in international classification systems (e.g. ISCO, ESCO) would support interoperability, benchmarking, and policy alignment across Member States.
- **Recognising and investing in networks**: Supporting national and thematic research management communities and ensuring stable and long-term funding for professional networks and associations is vital. RM Roadmap mapping exercise[44] identified networks as around 30 % of all 335 professional-development initiatives, and stakeholders ranked funding RM associations as the top policy priority. Therefore, investing

[43] V4+WB RMA Network Plus project. More information is available at: https://hetfa.eu/v4wbrmanetworkplus/
[44] Oliveira, C., Dias, F., Trindade, M., Carrapato, A., Varela, C., Hourmat, B., & Delgado, D. (2024). D2.2 Catalogue of existing professional development opportunities. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13829260

and integrating these communities into policy dialogues leverages an existing, high-value infrastructure for networking, peer learning and advocacy.

- **Creating a more strategic approach to build, solidify and promote Research Support ecosystem:** Effective research management also depends on well-structured and strategically positioned Research Support Offices (RSOs) and Technology Transfer Offices. Investing in team development, leadership training, and operational models that align RM functions with institutional goals is vital. It is also essential to improve commercialisation outcomes and support academic entrepreneurship. Enhancing partnerships between researchers and RMs and develop micro (institutional) and macro (national & European) level methodologies to measure and assess the impact of RMs in the R&I ecosystem is also supported.

7. The way forward: a coordinated European response

The professionalisation of research management is accelerated by initiatives such as the ERA Policy Agenda, RM Roadmap, RM Framework, RM COMP, CARDEA, but also V4WB RMA Network and FoRMAtion, setting the stage for a truly coordinated European strategy for research management. These initiatives collectively represent a new layer of policy coordination at the European level, building a momentum for systemic change in collaboration with Member States. Implementation is guided by three principles: A) flexibility, ensuring adaptation to national and institutional contexts, B) inclusivity, recognising the diversity of roles, skills and career pathways, and C) proportionality, guaranteeing that standards and frameworks remain fit for purpose and scalable. These principles ensure that the Roadmap remains adaptable, equitable, and practical across diverse European contexts.

In the past five years, significant groundwork has been laid through both bottom-up community mobilisation and top-down policy actions. Member States now have a unique opportunity to build upon this dual momentum to strengthen national R&I systems while contributing to a more interoperable and cohesive European Research Area (ERA). This effort requires not only harmonised frameworks but also active engagement of the professionals who manage the complexity of research collaboration.

The RM Roadmap project has played a particularly catalytic role in this process, involving over 140 Ambassadors and engaging thousands of research managers across 40 country and 10 thematic communities. The initiative connected fragmented efforts, mapped capacities, and co-created tools and recommendations with national and European stakeholders. Crucially, the project also generated the largest pan-European survey of research managers to date - 2,212 validated responses spanning the entire ERA – and by systematically mapping 335 structured professional-development initiatives[45] in 35 countries. Drawing from this collective input, a coordinated way forward is emerging across seven key action areas:

7.1.System-wide dialogue

The first imperative is to establish structured, system-wide dialogues among all relevant national actors. These typically include ministries, research funding organisations (RFOs), research performing organisations (RPOs), research infrastructures, research councils, academic networks, rectors' conferences and professional associations. Research Managers are embedded across all these institutions, yet they often remain invisible due to fragmented titles, inconsistent organisational positioning, or a lack of formal recognition.

This fragmented reality stems from organic, siloed growth, with research managers seldom involved in national policy discussions. Addressing it requires forging stronger cross-institutional links such as structured dialogue platform between RFOs, RPOs and RM communities to align national strategies with ERA goals. The RM Roadmap project promoted such dialogue through co-creation sessions and stakeholder engagement formats that help identify national priorities, training, funding and mobility gaps, and existing capacities. These sessions have also demonstrated that Research Managers often serve as the operational bridge between policy design and institutional implementation and therefore must be involved from the outset in any reform process.

Research Managers are essential to the success of the ERA. The implementation of ERA Policy Agenda actions,

[45] The mapping exercise is available on the CARDEA Dashboard. Available at: https://www.ucc.ie/en/cardea/dashboard/

particularly those focused on capacity building, openness, excellence, and other values and principles of the ERA require the active participation and coordination capacity of research managers. Their inclusion in system-level planning is therefore essential to achieve ERA goals.

7.2.National assessment of research management

A comprehensive assessment of research management systems and capacities, and growing investment in R&I is critical for evidence-based reform. National needs vary significantly depending on the maturity of the research system, the structure of national funding, and the level of institutional autonomy. Therefore, national strategies must reflect local funding structures and R&I priorities. The RM Roadmap provides flexible tools that can be adapted to diverse national contexts, including survey results, co-created landscape reports, skills and competence frameworks, training offers, and catalogues of national RM-related policies, and the agreed definition.

Key areas for assessment include:

- **Existing roles, titles, and functions:** The RM Roadmap has identified that the terms "Research Manager," "Research Manager and Administrator," and "Research Management and Support Professional" are most preferred by the community. "Research Manager" is increasingly accepted as an umbrella term in policy discussions, but its translation into national languages must be sensitive to local contexts and linguistic diversity. Research Managers are involved in all stages of research, typically covering 2-4 areas of Research Management and there is a significant variation in official job titles and responsibilities. The second co-creation session has confirmed the community's support for a broad definition of Research Management covering the diversity of RM fields.
- **Legal and policy frameworks:** There is a need for robust legal and policy frameworks related to research management. The first co-creation exercise focused on collecting existing national RM-related legal regulations and policies in Europe. A total of 91 different legal documents/ policies have been collected in this report, and 23 countries indicate the existence or relevance of national laws and policies. Thirteen countries indicated a lack of national legislation or policies.
- **Career structures and professional development opportunities:** The RM Roadmap report on professional development opportunities highlighted that while these are growing, they remain unevenly distributed. Mobility and funding for training is still limited. The lack of time, and funding is the main barrier to access training, networking and mobility opportunities. The majority of RMs favour short courses, interactive training, online and hybrid formats, and modular, accredited credentials, while certification was not considered as essential.[46]
- **Capacity gaps and regional disparities:** Structural challenges faced by RMs were identified during the 3rd co-creation session, including the lack of formal recognition, the absence of clear career pathways, inconsistent HR policies, and insufficient access to professional development and training, especially in areas such as open science, research security, dual use, and the measurement of societal impact. The report notes that RMs often face limited resources at both institutional and project levels. These issues are further complicated by national differences in research funding systems, policy frameworks, and institutional cultures.
- **Measuring the impact of research support services:** To move from a support role to a strategic partnership, Research Managers' expertise must be made more visible to researchers and leadership by collecting user feedback, performance indicators and developing more robust methodologies to demonstrate the added value and measure the impact of Research Support Services (RSS).

These national snapshots provide a baseline for planning and foster mutual learning by enabling comparisons across contexts. They build on the project's inventory of 335 structured professional development initiatives and the pan-European survey of 2,212 responses, the largest dataset of its kind, thus avoiding costly duplication of evidence gathering.

[46] Oliveira, C., Trindade, M., Carrapato, A., Campelo, D., Hourmat, B., & Varela, C. (2025). D2.3 Report on the professional development opportunities. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16570777

7.3.Strengthening national connections

Institutional silos and the absence of formal networks have long hindered the development of research management as a recognised profession. Many countries lack national RM initiatives, and where networks do exist, they often suffer from limited visibility and insufficient funding. This fragmentation restricts opportunities for peer learning, upskilling, and professional recognition.

Informal communities of practice and formal associations are key to overcoming fragmentation. They foster trust, enable knowledge sharing, and support strategic alignment between research funding (RFO) and research performing (RPO) organisations. The first RM Roadmap co-creation session revealed that only 29 countries reported having national RM networks or associations, while 7 were unaware of any such initiatives. Even where networks are present, they often lack formal recognition and resources and rely on volunteers. By creating spaces for collaboration and peer learning and joint problem-solving, networks accelerate the spread of best practices and raise the profile of RM as a strategic function. The professional development mapping showed that RM networks facilitate over 30% of all catalogued professional opportunities, and 74.5% of professionals consider national associations 'vital', highlighting their central role in the ecosystem.[47] Cross-organisational collaboration also reduces duplication, improves consistency, and strengthens responses to national and EU-level initiatives.

To support setting up these networks, RM Roadmap developed a Guide for building and sustaining national and regional RM networks (Annex 4). Based on insights from established national networks, the guide outlines practical steps, common challenges, and the benefits of structured RM communities. It positions network-building as a strategic priority for countries aiming to professionalise RM, enhance visibility, and influence research policy.

The RM Roadmap results shown that ensuring stable, long-term funding for RM networks and associations is essential. Such investment supports knowledge exchange, professional development, and capacity building, and ultimately strengthens the R&I ecosystem.

7.4.Leveraging EU-level guidance

Member States are encouraged to fully utilise the EU-level tools and frameworks that have emerged from ERA Action 17 and related initiatives. These include:

- **The RM COMP Framework (skills and competences):** The RM COMP laid the foundation for adopting structured progression model for career planning, training design and institutional HR alignment. The 3rd co-creation session confirmed strong community support for integrating RM COMP into national and international policies.[48] While some countries have initiated informal discussions within RPOs, no systematic national-level adoption has yet occurred, highlighting potential legal and political barriers.
- **The RM Roadmap (implementation and coordination guidance):** The RM Roadmap project provides a comprehensive blueprint for strengthening RM across the ERA, including a 2,212-response pan-European survey, a bottom-up co-creation process involving national and thematic communities, strategic recommendations for RPOs, RFOs, and RM associations and a smart community platform to support knowledge exchange and policy dialogue.
- **Good practice case studies and pilot programmes:** The RM Roadmap and related initiatives have collected and piloted training models and trainer collaboration formats, which offer replicable formats for national adaptation and institutional uptake. The RM Roadmap project also prepared a catalogue of existing professional development opportunities, identifying 335 opportunities across 35 countries.[49]

[47] Oliveira, C., Trindade, M., Carrapato, A., Campelo, D., Hourmat, B., & Varela, C. (2025). D2.3 Report on the professional development opportunities.
[48] The RM community has also shared insights into existing initiatives or practices that could leverage the adaptation or adoption of the RM Comp framework. For example, some countries reported informal discussions taking place within RPOs regarding professionalisation of RMs. However, no systematic efforts have yet been initiated at the national level.
[49] Oliveira, C., Dias, F., Trindade, M., Carrapato, A., Varela, C., Hourmat, B., & Delgado, D. (2024). D2.2 Catalogue of existing professional development opportunities. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13829260

- **Policy briefs tailored to specific stakeholder groups:** RM Roadmap project has produced a policy brief, which includes specific recommendations for interventions for various stakeholder groups. It was also suggested that research managers engage better in national policy discussions, supporting national R&I strategies and policies.
- **EU-level institutional mobility and capacity-building scheme for research management professionals:** During the 3rd co-creation process with 34 national and thematic RM communities, two different formats of a potential EU-wide training and mobility programme for RMs were analysed in terms of feasibility, relevance and impact: Scheme A envisaged individual grants for upskilling and mobility (following the model of MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships and ERA fellowships); and Scheme B aimed at institutional collaboration and capacity building (following the model of MSCA Staff Exchanges and ERA Talents). Stakeholders prioritised the Scheme B, supporting institutional-level interventions to enhance the exchange of best practices, capacity building, and long-term collaboration[50].

By aligning national actions with these European instruments, and raising awareness of policymakers, university leaders and university networks, and countries can ensure coherence, leverage synergies, and avoid duplicating efforts.

7.5.Stakeholder buy-in and awareness

Successful implementation requires active engagement and buy-in across all stakeholder groups within the ERA, from researchers, industry representatives to funders and policymakers. While the RM Roadmap has laid the groundwork for a coordinated European response, national and institutional implementation requires targeted outreach, tailored messaging, and inclusive dialogue (Annex 3).

The RM Roadmap recognises that stakeholder engagement must be both broad and adaptable. In some countries, policymakers must be engaged first to create enabling frameworks, in others, institutional leadership or national networks may be the primary drivers of change. Stakeholder needs also vary across institutional types. For example, universities of applied sciences can have different RM requirements, particularly in areas such as compliance, co-design with industry, and agile project management. Similarly, RM roles embedded in large-scale infrastructures require distinct competencies and long-term coordination skills. These differences should be reflected in national strategies and capacity-building efforts

The materials developed through the RM Roadmap are designed to foster mutual understanding, clarify roles, and build a shared commitment to reform. Importantly, they help position research management not as a bureaucratic layer but as a strategic enabler of research excellence, impact, and compliance.

7.6.Planning national interventions

Building on assessments and stakeholder engagement, countries can begin formulating targeted interventions. This could be supported by the creation of a national research management coordination body or task force, ensuring continuous dialogue among key actors to help translate European-level strategies into operational national policies. It would be instrumental in consolidating existing efforts and supporting a more unified and strategic development of the profession. The RM Roadmap provides reflection tools to support this process, posing key questions such as:

- *Is there a national definition of research management?*
- *Is a shared evidence base available to demonstrate its value?*
- *Are career structures and training ecosystems adequate?*

Priority areas for intervention often include:

- *Upskilling and continuous professional development*
- *Structured career pathways and recognition mechanisms*

[50] Its relevance is highlighted by evidence showing that mobility accounts for only 2.69 % of the 335 mapped professional development opportunities, while 32.1 % of research managers have never participated in any mobility activity.

- *Network building and support for RM communities both at national and international levels*
- *Targeted awareness and advocacy campaigns*

Regarding professional development, evidence pinpoints two urgent actions: expand accredited, modular training and design career-stage-sensitive pathways aligned with RM COMP. Many of these interventions have already been piloted in specific countries and can serve as transferable models across Europe. For more information, please refer to the relevant co-creation session of RM Roadmap (links?).

7.7.Integrating key actors and frameworks

To build a more structured, visible, and impactful research management framework across the ERA, coordinated action is needed from Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), Research Funding Organisations (RFOs), and national RM associations.

Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) should serve as early adopters of frameworks like RM Comp by embedding them into institutional HR policies, offering pilot programmes, and building internal recognition structures. Embedding professional development within institutional strategies is critical: only 25–30 % of respondents currently receive organisational support for training, mobility or networking, and protected time plus dedicated budgets are cited as prerequisites for real impact. RPOs are encouraged to expand short-term accredited training opportunities and modular, flexible formats that can accommodate different time availabilities and career stages. Integrating professional development into institutional strategies, ensuring protected time, structural support, and incentives for RM engagement will support the professionalisation of research management.

Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) at national and European levels can act as standard-setters by incorporating RM contributions into funding criteria, enabling dedicated RM budgets, and driving systemic reform through programme design. RFOs are encouraged to establish an EU-level institutional mobility and capacity-building schemes and support cross-border exchanges and long-term capability building. RFOs should develop and maintain a centralised information hub to consolidate training, mobility, and funding opportunities to reduce fragmentation and improve access. They are invited to promote voluntary, competence-based models that reflect institutional diversity and community preferences, if possible, avoiding the introduction of mandatory certification frameworks.

National RM Associations are key advocates for policy integration, training design, and community-building. Therefore, associations are encouraged to advocate for long-term funding and recognition as central actors in professional development, and peer-led training. By empowering RM associations, policymakers can foster inclusive, bottom-up engagement and ensure that RM professionals are equipped to contribute fully to the ERA.

Together, these actors contribute to a more structured and visible profession, enhance interoperability across systems, and support the broader aims of the ERA.

8. Conclusion

Research managers are key in realising the ambitions of the European research and innovation system. Their expertise spans the full research lifecycle, from funding acquisition and compliance to talent development, infrastructure coordination, and societal impact. As the European R&I landscape becomes more complex, interconnected, and mission-driven, the role of Research Managers is not only relevant, but also indispensable.

RM Roadmap demonstrated that although the profession is growing in scope and recognition, their potential remains underutilised due to fragmentation, invisibility, and a lack of systemic support. Addressing this requires intentional, coordinated investment and the structural integration of research management into national and European R&I systems.

To prepare the European R&I system for future challenges and opportunities, it is imperative to:

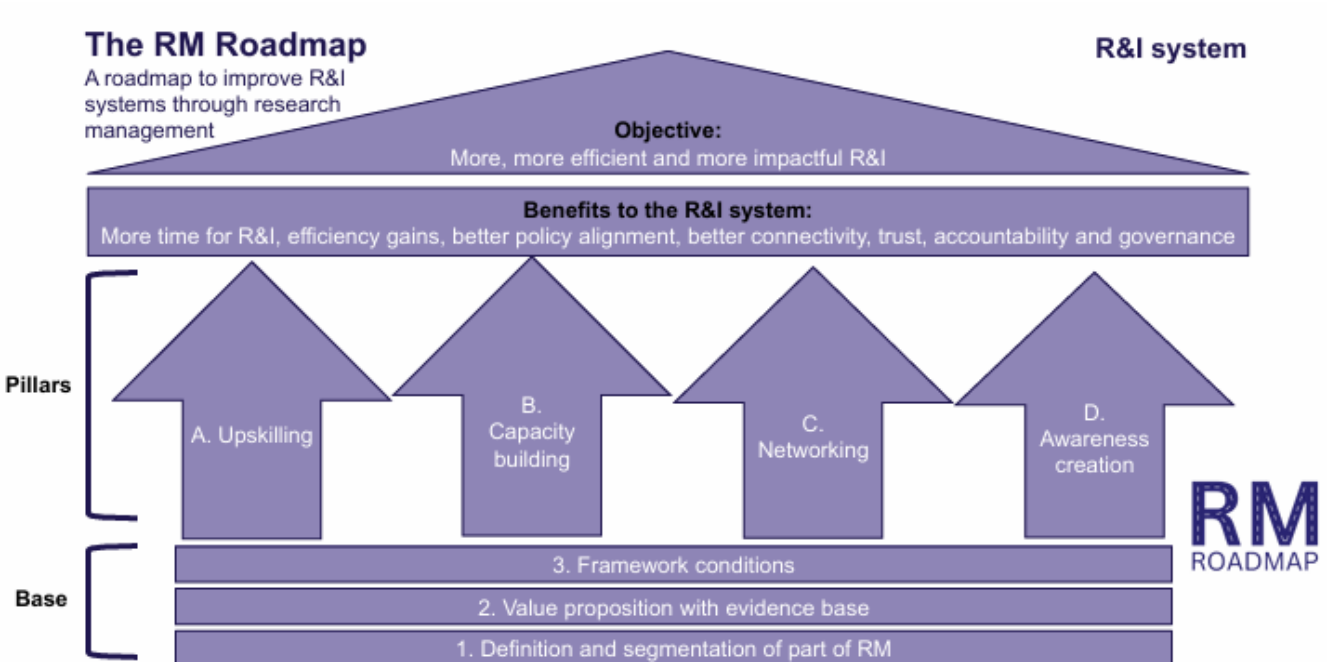
- Recognise research management as a strategic function and acknowledge its diversity,
- Professionalise the field through structured, inclusive, and flexible career frameworks such as RM COMP,

- Enable systemic coordination, collaboration and recognition across relevant actors.

A flexible, Europe-wide framework for research management – adaptable to national contexts and institutional realities – will be essential to achieving this goal. Such a framework must support career development, enable mobility, and foster a shared professional identity. By aligning efforts across borders, Europe can remove long-standing barriers to recognition and unlock the full potential of its R&I systems.

This coordinated approach would help overcome institutional and systemic obstacles, enabling smoother mobility and collaboration across countries and build a cohesive and inclusive R&I ecosystem that elevates the visibility and value of research management. Ultimately, only through such a framework can Europe establish a high-performing, inclusive research management ecosystem, one that strengthens the ERA and secures Europe's leadership in science, innovation, and societal progress.

Annex 1. Graphic representation of the Overarching Roadmap



Annex 2. Value proposition

Author: Olaf Svenningsen

Value proposition of the research management profession

Why would anyone invest resources in a service or product? The value proposition provides the answer, outlining how the service or product benefits the customer or user.

The concept of a value proposition defines how a service or product benefits its users and is essential for research management (RM), given its interconnectedness with the broader research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem.

This document outlines a structured approach for defining RM value propositions through three core components: relevance, quantifiability, and unique selling point (USP). It aims to contribute to the development of adaptable and compelling RM value propositions for institutional leaders, policymakers, and funders.

Key challenges in defining RM value propositions include the perception of RM as administrative overhead, diverse organizational structures, and varying stakeholder expectations. Co-designing services with researchers, institutional leaders, and external stakeholders ensures alignment with strategic goals and external expectations.

Quantifying RM's impact is difficult due to the complexity of its contributions. Metrics such as efficiency gains, cost savings, and increased research outputs can help demonstrate RM's value but must be used alongside qualitative insights to avoid oversimplification. The VESPERS tool is one example of a method for iteratively defining and testing RM value propositions.

The document also presents a cost model comparing scenarios where researchers handle all, some, or none of the administrative work. Findings indicate that delegating administrative tasks to professional staff reduces costs and increases research output, demonstrating that administrative support enhances rather than detracts from research.

Institutions are encouraged to optimize the balance between academic and administrative work, emphasising RM as a strategic partner rather than merely a support function.

1. Introduction and purpose

For research management (RM), understanding and articulating its own value is crucial, as RM services are deeply interconnected with other actors in the research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem. The purpose of this document is to outline what a value proposition is and outline how it could be implemented for the RM profession.

RM offers a broad range of services that depend on and influence many stakeholders within the Research and Innovation (R&I) system. Due to this interconnectedness, defining the value proposition of RM is more challenging compared to other professions. While it is not possible to define a single value proposition that fits all RM services, a structured approach can help describe and analyze the value propositions of individual RM services, ideally in a tool that supports RMs in describing value propositions in a systematic and consistent way. Such a tool can support RM units, institutional decision makers, and other stakeholders in designing RM services that are well suited to the needs of the R&I system.

One key requirement for value propositions is that they need to be short and efficient enough to be attractive and compelling for decision makers, for example, university management (rectors, deans, department heads), politicians, and funders.

Purpose: This document aims to suggest a definition of a value proposition for RM (section 2), and its three main components; relevance (section 3), quantifiability (section 4), and USP (unique selling point, section 5).

These three components are suggested to form the core of a flexible tool to define compelling and structured value propositions that can be adapted to any type of RM.

The concepts in this document are intended as a foundation for discussions within groups of stakeholders in the RM Roadmap project, including partners, the RM Roadmap Ambassadors, and other relevant parties.

1. What is a Value Proposition in research management?

The concept of a *value proposition* emerged in the 1980s in the context of business

plans/models and strategies. Although there is no single generally accepted universal description, a general definition that is used in this document is as follows.

Definition of Value Proposition:

A clear and concise statement that explains the unique benefits of a product or service, how it addresses the customer's or stakeholder's needs, and why it's better than the alternatives.

This definition can be applied in various fields, including administrative and service activities, focusing on specific advantages and outcomes for stakeholders, such as improved efficiency, personalized service, or cost savings.

A value proposition must be easily understood and effectively communicated to resonate with the target audience. A value proposition is not just about the features of the product or service; it must illustrate how these features translate into tangible benefits for the customer.

The literature on value propositions is voluminous, mostly relating to business models. One model that is very widely used and recognized by many, and that has inspired this text, is the Business Canvas Model by Alex Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur. The Business Canvas Model includes a Value Proposition Canvas, which is a tool for understanding and describing the value model of any product or service.

1. **Relevance**: It must address the target audience's specific needs.
2. **Quantifiable value**: It should deliver measurable benefits (see below for a discussion on metrics and value propositions in RM).
3. **Unique Selling Point (USP):** It should highlight what makes the service unique or superior to alternatives.

To be compelling, a value proposition must meet three fundamental criteria:

Value propositions need to be straightforward yet specific and must avoid excessive detail that can and will obscure the core message.

2. Relevance of Research Management

The design of an effective value proposition requires a deep understanding of the needs of the stakeholders, the features and benefits of the service, the environment where value is created, and the competitive landscape.

To be efficient with the target audience, it is also crucial to understand the possible arguments against the presented value proposition; Are there any alternative ways to perform the service or acquire the desired results? For research management, this is the "competitive landscape".

The relevance of RM includes a number of well-known parameters, for example, increasing competition for funding, rising expectations from funders, decision makers, and other stakeholders for transparency, efficiency, and measurable results. The growing complexity of the research ecosystem also necessitates a professionalization of research support and research management.

RM also contributes to the policy area, for example, by helping to align institutional goals with national and EU-level research strategies and policies. Well-functioning RM contributes to building institutional resilience in navigating EU framework programme transitions, widening participation challenges, and political upheavals like Brexit or politically motivated changes in the US research landscape. Finally, RM allows institutions to achieve greater competitiveness and sustainability, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

2.1. Challenges in applying value propositions in RM

The profession of research management faces unique challenges in defining its value proposition:

1. **Perception as administrative overhead:** RM is often viewed as an administrative cost, equated with

bureaucracy rather than contributing to research progress. This perception can create significant resistance to the development and resourcing of RM services.

2. **Diverse organizational structures:** RM services are tailored to local conditions and vary widely in organization. A universal model for RM services is unlikely to be effective or desirable, so value propositions must be adaptable.
3. **Lack of a unified and simple definition: The concept of RM is not uniformly understood throughout Europe or even within individual countries.** Even a standardized definition by the European Commission or professional bodies like EARMA may not significantly impact local practices.
4. **Lack of shared language:** There is often no clear framework for discussing RM from an organizational perspective. Research offices may be established without a clear understanding of needs and possibilities, resulting in poorly defined value propositions.
5. **Divergent stakeholder interests:** Key stakeholders, such as researchers and institutional leaders, may have conflicting views on what constitutes value in RM services. A value proposition that resonates with one group may be resisted by another.

To counteract the challenges, it is important to co-design value propositions with stakeholders:

- Incorporating the input of researchers in the definition of RM services will ensure alignment with their needs. There is a clear tendency for RM services to drift from researcher-focus to leadership focus, and whereas this is natural and beneficial, the balance can shift too far, providing service almost exclusively to the institution leadership, rendering RM irrelevent to researchers.
- Demonstrating how RM adds strategic value to institutional leadership beyond operational efficiency (e.g., aligning grant portfolios with institutional priorities or risk mitigation in compliance). RM is in a position to have direct and often unique contact with key stakeholders.
- Finally, it is important to involve external stakeholders (for example, funders, collaborators or policymakers) to align RM services with external expectations.

Current professional trends also favor developing compelling value propositions for RM. It should be explored how defining value propositions contributes to the **evolving identity of RM as a profession**:

- RM transitions from being seen as a support service to being recognized as a strategic partner in research success.
- The development of structured value propositions aligns with global trends in professionalization, such as certifications, competency frameworks, or benchmarking initiatives.

Finally, RM is a global profession, and developing a European RM value proposition tool may have positive consequences across the world, highlighting, a.o., how value propositions may differ between regions. Cultural norms, institutional structures, and funding practices may also influence how RM services are valued and structured, but best practices will always be universally useful.

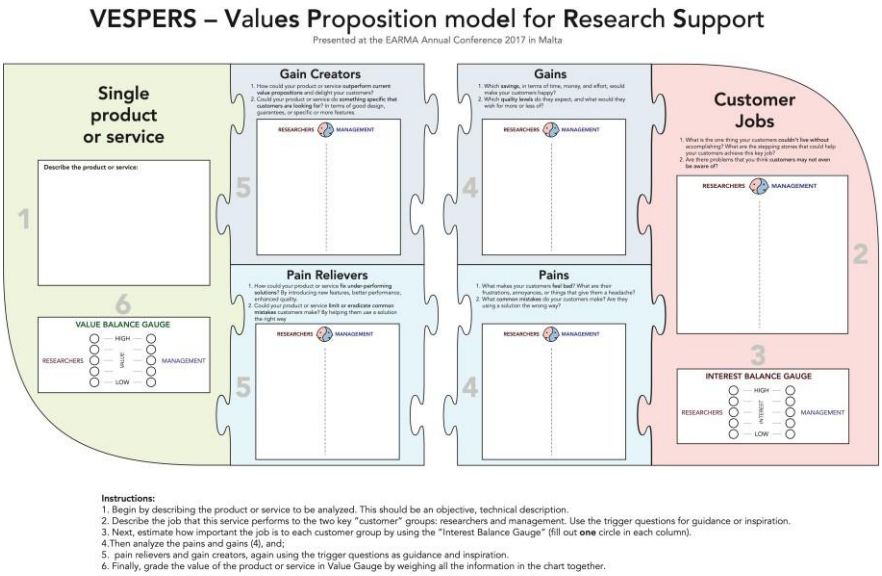
2.2. An example of a structured approach to describe relevance in value propositions for RM: VESPERS

An example of an attempt to design a method for describing, defining, and testing value propositions in research management and administration is VESPERS, presented at the 2017 EARMA Annual Conference in Malta. VESPERS is briefly outlined in the text box below:

The VESPERS Tool for Research Management

The VESPERS (Values Proposition Model for Research Support) tool was introduced at the EARMA Annual Conference in 2017. It is a specialized adaptation of the Value Proposition Canvas for research services, developed

to help analyse and define the value propositions of RM services. The tool was tested at the University of Southern Denmark and proved effective in clarifying why certain services were underused or rejected and why others gained unexpected popularity.



Key insights from using VESPERS include:

- *Value propositions can only be meaningfully defined for individual services or products*. A general value proposition for an entire research office or the RM profession must be based on the value propositions of its component services.
- RM "customers" consist of multiple stakeholder groups, often with conflicting interests; RPO leadership and researchers. A value proposition that appeals to one group may not resonate with another, highlighting the need for nuanced communication.

The lesson of VESPERS can enrich the discussion of value propositions for RM by exploring its potential for broader application:

- Could VESPERS or similar tools be adapted to different institutional contexts (e.g., large research-intensive universities vs. smaller teaching-focused institutions)?
- Could iterative testing of value propositions through tools like VESPERS help refine RM services over time, ensuring continuous improvement?
- Could VESPERS be used not only to craft value propositions but also to build consensus among stakeholders by clarifying shared goals and addressing points of contention?

The adaptability and practical utility of such a tool needs to be explored and carefully considered

3. Quantifiable value of research management

Measuring RM has consistently been one of the biggest and most recurring challenges facing the profession. The two biggest overarching challenges are:

1. The connection between RM services and the results it produces may be very complex and is separated over time by months and years, making the effect difficult to quantify.
2. RM is by its nature a support activity, and its contribution is sometimes/often obscured by the sheer compexity of research.

These and other challenges are detailed below.

At the core of this component of a value proposition, numbers and indicators are very important to key stakeholders and decision makers who influence RM.

3.1. Research management and metrics

The requirement that a value proposition describes a 'quantifiable value' requires a discussion of metrics in RM. Metrics provide a quantitative way to demonstrate the tangible benefits of a product, service, or process and help translate the value proposition into measurable results.

Here are a few examples of how metrics can be used to capture different aspects of a value proposition:

1. **Relevance**
    - **Customer satisfaction scores**: Metrics like Net Promoter Score (NPS) or

Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) indicate how well the service or product meets the needs of the target audience.

- **Adoption and use rates:** The number of users or departments that use a service can demonstrate its relevance to the organization.

2. Quantifiable value

- **Efficiency metrics**: Time saved, reduced administrative burden, or faster turnaround times can be tracked to show how a service increases efficiency.
- **Cost savings: Metrics such as cost reduction, cost avoidance, or return on investment (ROI) can quantify financial benefits (see separate section on cost of administration in research).**
- **Performance improvements:** Metrics such as increased research output, higher grant success rates, or improved collaboration can demonstrate the impact on performance.

3. **Unique Selling Point (USP)**

- **Benchmarking data**: Comparisons with alternative solutions or industry standards can highlight what makes the service or product superior.
- **Innovation metrics**: The number of unique features implemented or new solutions developed can illustrate the distinctiveness of the offering.

4. **Impact and outcomes**

- **Outcome metrics:** For research management, metrics such as the number of successful project completions, publications, or patents can demonstrate impact.
- **Stakeholder engagement: Measures such as the number of partnerships, collaborations, or stakeholder satisfaction scores can show how the service fosters engagement.**

5. **Competitive landscape**

- **Market share or position**: Metrics that show the service's position relative to alternatives can help highlight its unique strengths.

Using metrics to capture value propositions allows organizations to articulate and also validate the benefits they claim to provide. It helps align expectations, communicate effectively with stakeholders, and make data-driven decisions to improve or re-orient the offering.

However, there are several **potential drawbacks and limitations** to consider when considering using metrics to capture value propositions:

1. Oversimplification

- **Loss of context**: Metrics can reduce complex value propositions to simple numbers, missing nuanced aspects such as customer satisfaction, long-term strategic benefits, or qualitative improvements.
- **Ignoring non-quantifiable value**: Some benefits, like enhanced reputation, improved stakeholder relationships, or organizational culture, are difficult to quantify and may be overlooked if metrics are the sole focus.

2. **Misalignment with strategic goals**

- **Focus on short-term gains**: Metrics often emphasize short-term, easily measurable outcomes, potentially neglecting long-term goals or strategic objectives that are harder to quantify.
- **Gaming the system**: There is a risk that efforts may be directed towards improving metrics rather than achieving real value. This can lead to manipulative practices where the focus shifts to meeting the numbers, rather than the actual quality or impact of the service.

3. **Complexity and overreliance**

- **Data collection challenges**: Gathering accurate, reliable data can be resource intensive and may not be feasible for all aspects of a value proposition, especially in complex systems like research management.
- **Overreliance on metrics:** Organizations may place too much trust in metrics, overlooking other valuable qualitative insights and feedback that provide a fuller picture of the value delivered.

4. **Misinterpretation and miscommunication**

- **Misleading metrics**: Poorly chosen or contextually inappropriate metrics can misrepresent the actual value, leading to incorrect conclusions or misguided decisions.
- **Lack of stakeholder understanding**: Not all stakeholders may understand or value the same metrics, leading to miscommunication of what the metrics actually represent in terms of value.

5. **Focus on what is measurable, not what is important**

- **Metrics dictate priorities:** There is a risk of prioritising activities that are easy to measure over those that are strategically important, but harder to quantify.
- **Neglecting soft outcomes**: Metrics can overshadow "soft" outcomes such as employee morale, innovation potential, or customer loyalty, which are crucial but difficult to capture quantitatively.

6. **Dynamic and evolving nature of value propositions**

- **Inflexibility**: Metrics may not keep pace with the evolving nature of value propositions as customer needs, market conditions, and organizational strategies change.
- **Reflection gap:** Some metrics only reveal their true impact after a significant time gap, making them less useful for real-time decision making or strategic adjustments.

In general, while metrics are valuable tools to capture and communicate value propositions, they should be used as part of a broader evaluation strategy that includes qualitative insights, stakeholder feedback, and contextual understanding. This approach ensures a more balanced and comprehensive view of value.

Future directions for RM value propositions

Data from the RM Roadmap project can help develop a framework for defining value propositions in RM. *Rather than seeking a single overarching value proposition for the profession, the goal should be to create a method or tool to systematically define and describe the value propositions of individual RM services.* This approach can provide a practical tool for RM professionals while also aligning with broader policy objectives.

By focusing on the unique needs of different stakeholders and the specific contexts of RM services, we can create value propositions that not only support the effective

development of RM services, but also enhance the overall R&I system.

4. Unique Selling Point

While there are many potential USPs for RM, one central question will always be the cost and efficiency of the service. For this reason, a newly developed model that demonstrates why investing in RM services is beneficial is presented in detail below.

4.1. Cost of administration in research

"Administration takes money from research; we must reduce administrative staff."

Is this statement familiar? It is a guiding principle at many universities and research institutions. But is it true? Do universities save money and become more effective by reducing their administrative staff?

The short answer is no.

In fact, evidence suggests that when administrative tasks are managed by professional administrators, overall costs decrease, efficiency improves, and research productivity grows (Appendix 5.1).

4.1.1. *Introduction*

Administration is:

1. All production, collecting, processing, compilation, putting together, and reporting of information
2. To interested parties of different kinds (principals, owners, executive groups and officers, managers, staff and personnel, interest groups, authorities, customers, suppliers, media, etc.).
3. In order to maintain, coordinate, manage, and control an organized system of any sort (an operation, an organization, a project, a network, etc.).
4. Over time and space

What is administration? There are many different attempts to define the concept, and in their 2014 book, The Administration Society (*Administrationssamhället*, only available in Swedish), the Swedish organization researchers Anders Forssell and Anders Ivarsson Westergren provide this well-researched, systematic, and useful definition:

The key is that administration is necessary to maintain, coordinate, and control any organized system. This definition makes it obvious that administration is essential to maintain the structure and function of research projects and institutions.

But who does this essential work?

In universities and other research-performing organizations (RPOs), a large portion of administrative tasks are undertaken by researchers rather than by dedicated administrative professionals. In Europe and the United States, studies have shown that researchers can spend between 25% and 50% of their time on administrative tasks

(Appendix 5.2). This often leads to frustration among researchers and concerns about the efficient use of resources.

In response, university leaders often attempt to reduce administrative costs by minimising administrative staff. In many institutions, it is even a formal policy to keep administrative staff low to reduce the so-called 'administrative burden.' However, this approach is based on several faulty premises:

1. ***"The more administrative staff, the more administrative workload".*** Administrative demands and needs usually originate from organizational (leadership) or external requirements (e.g., funders, policymakers) rather than from the presence of administrative staff. Reducing these administrative tasks

requires changes at the leadership level, not simply a reduction in administrative positions.

2. ***"Administrative tasks disappear by reducing administrative staff "***.

This is obviously not true: When administrative staff are cut, the tasks they

perform still exist and must be performed by someone else, usually researchers or teachers. This is a common issue not only in universities but also in other sectors, such as healthcare and public safety.

3. ***"Money can be saved if researchers do administration themselves".***

Due to their specialized training and qualifications, researchers generally have higher salaries than administrative staff. Consequently, having researchers handle administrative work costs more than having dedicated administrative professionals do the same tasks. Studies indicate substantial efficiency gains when experts do the

work for which they are trained (Appendix 5.3).

4. ***"Researchers can easily do administration".***

Researchers are typically not trained in administration and may find these tasks frustrating and time-consuming. In contrast, administrative professionals are more efficient in handling such tasks, allowing researchers to focus on their primary work.

5. ***"Administration does not contribute to research".***

Contrary to the view that administration is merely a burden, it is actually a necessary part of the research process, enabling smooth operations and meaningful outcomes. Efficient administration is fundamental to effective research.

6. ***"Only academics can be credited in research projects".***

Traditionally, only academic staff receive formal acknowledgment in research output, yet research success is a team effort. Many other categories of employees make substantial and very important contributions that go uncredited. In other fields, such as film production, broader recognition practices offer a more accurate representation of contributions.

7. **Mislabelling of administrative tasks as academic.**

In many institutions, all activities performed by academic staff are reported as academic, even when administrative tasks constitute a substantial portion. This misrepresentation can lead to costly mismanagement, such as unnecessary reductions in administrative staff.

4.1.2. *A model for the real costs of administration*

Purpose: This model demonstrates the effects of researchers performing

administrative tasks versus hiring professional administrators. It aims to challenge the claim that 'administration takes away resources from research'.

The model applies universally to organizations with core (research) and support (administrative) staff, illustrating how hiring administrators impacts costs and research output.

How the model works: The model explores three hypothetical scenarios in a research unit:

1. **Scenario 1:** The researchers do all the administrative work (no administrative staff).
2. **Scenario 2:** Researchers and administrators split administrative tasks equally.
3. **Scenario 3:** Professional administrators handle all administrative tasks.

While scenarios 1 and 3 are pure end-points and as such does not exist in reality, they provide the framework to understand how varying staff allocation affects costs and output.

Key assumptions:

- **Administrative work** is fixed as a percentage of total work. In the example used to illustrate the model, this proportion is assumed to be equal to the proportion of indirect costs to total costs in research, typically around 1/3.
- **Efficiency gains** occur when experts handle tasks that they are trained for, ranging from 5% to 70%. Efficiency gains also occur when researchers can invest more time into their research.

Definitions: The model uses two categories of staff, core (researchers) and support (administrative) staff:

- **AC** – academic staff whose primary responsibilities are the core functions of research and teaching, also referred to as "researchers".
- **TA** – technical and administrative staff focused on supporting research and organizational functions, also referred to as "administrative staff".

The amount of work performed is measured in the following way:

- **AWU – annual work unit,** representing the amount of work that one person completes in a year.

Five variables affect the results, and may be changed in the accompanying Excel sheet to reflect other research units (university, faculty, department, or any other unit):

1. **Number of AC**
2. **Average salary cost of AC**
3. **Average salary cost of TA**
4. **Proportion of administrative work** in percent
5. **Efficiency gain** when experts do the work for which they are trained, percent

Example for demonstration of the model: A faculty at a Danish university is used to provide realistic numbers for the example to demonstrate the model. The number of

researchers is rounded to 600 for simplicity, but the example uses real average salary costs to provide realistic, not arbitrary, numbers. In the example, average annual salary costs in Danish Kroner (DKK) in 2024 for AC are 607,000, and for TA it is 535,000.

In the example, the rate of indirect cost is used as a proxy to estimate the proportion of administrative costs. The average proportion of indirect costs to total costs in research

is typically c. 1/3, which is the same as an overhead rate of c. 50%. This proportion varies significantly at the department or faculty level, but the overwhelming majority of

research-performing organizations (RPOs) report indirect costs that constitute c. 1/3 of total research costs. At the Danish faculty, this rate has been calculated to be c. 40% of total costs, which is equal to an overhead of c. 67%, but because this is higher, a more typical is used.

When researchers self-report their administrative workload, it is often estimated between 25 and 40% (Appendix 5.2).

The five input variables can be changed to examine the effects at any other university or RPO, or just to study the effects of varying the parameters.

Scenario 1: Researchers do all administration

In **Scenario 1**, the research unit has no administrative staff at all. For some, this might seem like the ideal situation, but it also means that all the administrative work has to be performed by researchers because they are the only staff category available.

Because 1/3 of the total workload is administrative, researchers spend 200 AWUs on administrative tasks:

- Researchers spend 200 annual work units (AWUs) on administration, costing DKK 134 million.
- The remaining 400 AWUs are for research, costing DKK 268 million.
- **Total cost:** DKK 402 million.
- **Research output:** 400 AWUs.

Scenario 2: Researchers do half of the administration.

In Scenario 2, the faculty has *hired administrative staff to do half of the administrative work*, or 100 AWUs, and the number of researchers is therefore reduced to 500. The 500 researchers do 100 AWUs of administration, so the research output is the same as in Scenario 1, or 400 AWUs.

Due to the 15% efficiency gain, only 85 TAs are needed to perform administrative work, and the total administrative cost decreases from 134 million to 110.45 million DKK. The total salary cost is reduced from 402 to 378.5 million

DKK.

If the budget frame is the same as in Scenario 1 (DKK 402,000,000), an additional DKK 23,550,000 has thus become available for other purposes. If reinvested into research, an additional 35 researchers can be hired, increasing the research output to 435 AWUs.[1]

- Administrative staff handle 100 AWUs; researchers handle 100 AWUs.
- Researchers are reduced to 500, maintaining a research output of 400 AWUs.
- 15% efficiency gain means that 85 TAs is enough.
- **Cost of administration (AC + TA):** DKK 110.45 million.
- **Total cost:** DKK 378.45 million.
- **Savings compared to Scenario 1:** DKK 23.55 million.
- **Potential research output:** 435 AWU (with reinvested savings).

Scenario 3: Researchers do no administration

In **Scenario 3**, *administrative staff is hired to perform all of the administrative work*, or 200 AWUs, and the research staff is consequently reduced to 400. The total cost of administration is 43.05 million DKK lower than for Scenario 1, which is enough to hire 64 researchers within the same budget.

- Administrative staff handle all the 200 AWUs; from Scenario 1 researchers do not do any administrative work.
- Researchers reduced to 400, maintaining the same number of researchers doing research as in Scenario 1.
- 15% efficiency gain means that 170 TAs is enough to handle all the administrative work.
- **Cost of administration (TA only):** DKK 9.95 million.
- **Total cost:** DKK 358.95 million.
- **Savings compared to Scenario 1:** DKK 43.05 million.
- **Potential research output:** 464 AWU (with reinvested savings).

Hiring administrative staff to perform administrative work thus does not take resources away from research, but does the exact opposite. In Scenario 3, costs of administration are 47% lower, and research output 16% higher than in Scenario 1.

[1] If 20 additional researchers are hired, the administrative workload would increase proportionally, but to keep the model simple, it is assumed that the increased efficiency of having professional administrative staff would compensate for this.

Conclusions: The key take-aways and implications of the model are as follows.

A. Hiring administrative staff to perform administrative work does not take resources away from research; it **enhances research and reduces costs**.

B. When professional administrative staff performs administrative work, **costs will decrease** both because of lower average salary costs and efficiency gains, **liberating resources to be reinvested** into e.g. research.

C. Hiring administrative staff to perform administrative work, even if the number of researchers decreases, will **increase the research output** of an institution.

D. Optimizing the balance between academic and administrative work requires **leadership commitment, not indiscriminate staff cuts**.

E. **Efficient administration supports institutional goals, making it integral to research success**.

Administration will only take resources from research if administrative staff on average have higher salaries than academic staff or if more administrative staff than required is hired.

By allowing researchers to devote their efforts to core research activities, professional administrators can reduce costs, improve efficiency, and support institutional goals. Rather than striving to reduce administrative staff as an end goal, universities and RPOs should focus on optimizing the balance between administrative and academic work, fostering an environment where all staff contribute to research success.

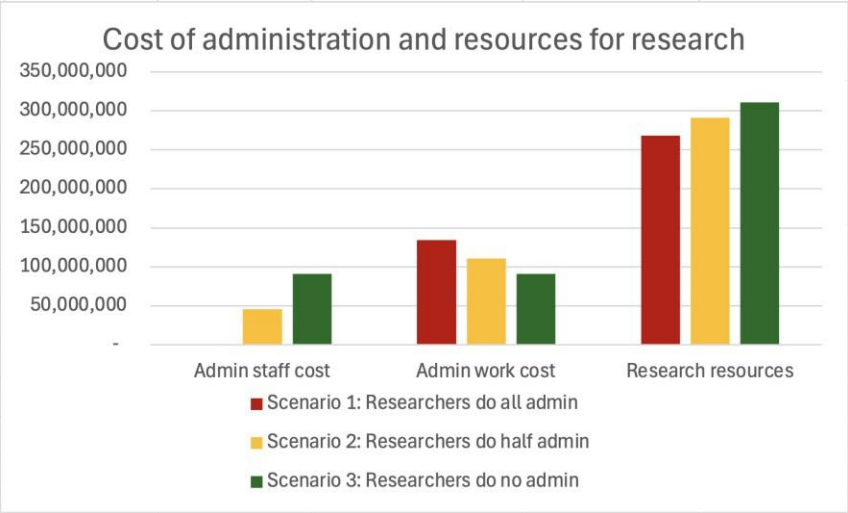


Figure 1. Diagram that illustrates the effects of hiring professional administrative staff in universities. The cost of TA staff increases sharply from Scenario 1 to Scenario 3, but the total cost of administration

decreases by c. 47% and the research resources increase with c. 16%. The total cost remains the same in all three scenarios.

Appendix 5.1: Similar studies

There are several analyses and models that examine the relationship between administrative costs and productivity in research or related fields. Here are a few key examples:

1. **Health Care Research on Administrative Costs**: A study from Stanford Medicine focused on reducing administrative complexity in the US healthcare system provides an interesting parallel. The researchers developed a framework to reduce administrative costs without disrupting the system. They found that administrative complexity drove costs through separate contracts, compliance, and service terms, and suggested that simplifying these processes could reduce administrative costs by up to 63%. Although focused on healthcare, this

approach emphasizes the idea that simplifying administrative tasks can free resources, similar to the model discussed in your text (ACRP)(Stanford Medicine).

2. **Productivity Models in Clinical Research**: Another study applied a productivity model called OPAL to clinical research, focusing on redistributing workloads to improve efficiency. The researchers found that by optimizing the roles of staff and incorporating additional administrative factors, they increased job satisfaction and research productivity. This analysis aligns with the idea that specialized administrative roles can enhance overall efficiency by allowing researchers to focus on research rather than administrative work (ACRP).

3. **Economic Models in General Productivity**: Broader economic models like those discussed in the Journal of Productivity Analysis, examine how output per unit of input can be measured and improved by balancing labor and administrative resources. These models are more abstract but share the principle of redistributing

administrative burdens for better productivity. They help solidify the idea that optimizing administrative tasks is crucial for improving overall organizational efficiency(SpringerLink).

Although none of these studies are direct analogs of our model for costs in administration, they all highlight similar themes: improving efficiency by reducing administrative complexity or redistributing workloads can lead to significant cost savings and enhanced productivity.

These models reinforce the argument that strategic investments in administration can benefit research output and efficiency across different sectors.

Appendix 5.2: Selected references for how much time researchers spend on administration

Researchers spend a significant portion of their work time on administrative tasks, which impacts their ability to focus on research. Here is a summary of the findings of various studies:

1. **Time allocation trends:** A study on US agricultural and life science faculty found that time spent on research decreased by about 20% from 1975 to 2005, primarily due to increased administrative burdens, especially related to pre- and post-grant activities (Barham et al., 2014).
2. **Administrative burden for faculty:** A survey by the Federal Demonstration Partnership revealed that principal investigators spend 42% of their project-related time on administrative tasks rather than research (Rockwell, 2009).
3. **Role of Research Administrators**: Although some administrative tasks are integral to research, they can impede academics from fully engaging in research and teaching. These tasks include grant management, compliance monitoring, and personnel administration (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009).
4. **Career impacts**: Administrative duties are found to disproportionately affect senior researchers and those in leadership roles, leading to a decrease in research output over time (Kawaguchi et al., 2016).
5. **Inefficient use of faculty time**: A study highlighted that faculty in leadership roles spent more than 70% of their workweek on managerial and administrative tasks, which could be delegated to free up time for research and teaching (Hancock, 2007).
6. **Effect on satisfaction and burnout**: Increased administrative workloads are correlated with lower career satisfaction and higher burnout among researchers and physicians in academic settings (Rao et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Administrative tasks consume a significant share of researchers' time, reducing their ability to conduct research and impacting career satisfaction. Addressing this challenge through better administrative support and task delegation could improve research productivity and job satisfaction.

Appendix 5.3: Indirect cost rates in research – a possible proxy for 'administrative burden'

Indirect costs in research, often called overhead costs, cover administrative expenses, facility maintenance, and other non-direct expenses associated with research projects. Several studies have analyzed the average rates and variations of these costs. Key findings include:

1. **General Averages and Variations**:
    - Average indirect cost rates at US institutions ranged from 36.3% to 78%, with a mean of 54.5% for on-campus research grants. These rates vary by institutional factors such as public vs. private status, with private institutions generally having higher rates (Johnston et al., 2015).
2. **Factors Influencing Rates**:
    - Rates are influenced by geographic region, cost of living, and the institution's NIH funding level. For example, institutions in the Northeast of the US have higher rates compared to other regions (Johnston et al.,2015).
3. **Standardization Challenges**:

- Efforts to standardize costs across institutions often reveal even greater rate variation, suggesting systemic differences in how costs are calculated or justified (Massy & Olson, 1994).

4. **Institutional Practices**:
    - Indirect costs are not consistently applied and perceived across institutions. Some institutions use these funds transparently, while others do not, causing concerns among faculty about their equitable allocation (Fitch, 1994).

Conclusion

Indirect costs in research typically average around 54.5%, with significant variation due to institutional and regional factors. These rates are vital for maintaining research infrastructure, but face criticism regarding their calculation and transparency. Efforts to standardize indirect costs have often highlighted complexities rather than resolving disparities…

Specific for Europe

In Europe, indirect costs of research and related activities also show variability based on institutional, regional, and sectoral factors. Key findings of the studies are as follows:

1. **General overview**:
    - Indirect costs often form a significant portion of total research expenses, though direct comparisons to US institutions are complicated by methodological differences and varying accounting standards (Sobocki et al., 2007).
2. **Sectoral and disease-specific studies**:
    - Studies on the economic burden of diseases such as multiple sclerosis and schizophrenia show indirect costs representing significant proportions of total costs, up to 44% for schizophrenia and more for diseases with higher productivity losses (Fasseeh et al., 2018), (Stawowczyk et al., 2015).
3. **Variability across countries**:
    - There is notable variability between countries in indirect costs for conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease. For example, costs related to work impairment and informal caregiving vary significantly between regions, influenced by economic and healthcare system differences (Holko et al., 2022).
4. **Higher Education and Research Institutions**:
    - European universities also face challenges with indirect costs due to varying policies and reimbursement mechanisms. Standardization efforts remain inconsistent across the region (Massy & Olson, 1994).

Conclusion

The European situation reflects a similar dependence on indirect costs as in the United States, but with greater variability influenced by national economic conditions, institutional practices, and sector-specific factors.

Annex 3. Targeted stakeholder outreach documents

Research Management for Researchers: The role of Research Management in advancing excellence and research careers

Introduction

As a result of growing geopolitical tensions, global challenges and high societal expectations, Europe's research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem is becoming increasingly complex. In this changing landscape, upholding scientific excellence, requires researchers to navigate a growing array of legal, financial, ethical, and policy-related requirements. Researchers meeting these multifaceted demands necessities the strong and coordinated support of Research Managers (RMs), who enable, facilitate, and support the performance of research in all its applications. They hold generalist or specialised roles within the R&I ecosystem.[51]

This document outlines how professional Research Management contributes to research excellence, the benefits of collaboration, and invites researchers to advocate for the development of robust support systems within their institutions and across the European Research Area (ERA) to achieve long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

This document was developed as part of the RM Roadmap Horizon Europe project, which aims to strengthen the ERA by professionalising and aligning research management across Europe. It provides strategic guidance, tools, and evidence to support institutional reform, capacity building, and recognition of research management as a vital component of research excellence.

1. Research in a changing context

Researchers and innovators are central to Europe's knowledge-based societies. Investment in R&I reflects a shared commitment to competitiveness, resilience and democratic values. However, this investment also raises expectations for accountability, efficiency, and impact.

As research becomes increasingly competitive, collaborative and international, researchers face mounting requirements: ethical compliance, open science, financial reporting, gender equality, sustainability and security, all requiring specialised expertise. While each of these are justified, the necessity to meet all these requirements can result in administrative overload, while institutional support often remains fragmented or insufficient.

Policy initiatives such as the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 and 2025-2027 and CoARA focus on strengthening research careers and research assessment with the aim to create more equitable, inclusive, and supportive research cultures across Europe. While these initiatives are forward looking, a structured, professional support system is required to enable researchers and institutions alike.

2. Managing complexity: systems, specialists, and synergy

Navigating this evolving R&I landscape requires three strategic enablers:

1. **Robust systems** – including digital tools, such as AI-based platforms to streamline workflows,
2. **Skilled professionals** – including but not limited to experts in policy, compliance, finance, and project delivery,
3. **Integration of people and systems** – ensuring that technology complements, rather than replaces, human expertise.

The latter two are embodied by Research Managers, who work in close collaboration with researchers, and enable

[51] *Research Managers are based in all types of research performing organisations, including public and private universities, research institutes, research funding organisations, medical institutions, NGOs, companies, public authorities, and so on. They can work as research policy advisers, pre-award and post-award officers, project managers, impact managers, science communicators, financial managers and advisors, legal advisors, contract and compliance managers, data stewards, open science officers, research infrastructure managers and operators, equality, diversity and inclusion advisors, research ethics advisors, knowledge and technology transfer officers, innovation managers and business developers, knowledge brokers, human resource managers in research, AI experts, and leaders of research facilitation offices, etc.*

scientific excellence, societal impact, and institutional resilience. They provide strategic, operational, and compliance-related expertise, while supporting researchers in safeguarding academic freedom and reinforcing the conditions for independent, curiosity-driven research.

The demand for specialist support roles in research has grown organically in response to expanding R&I systems and specific institutional needs. As a result, there is a significant variation in official job titles, hierarchical positions, and responsibilities of Research Managers across organisations and countries. While some research performing organisations benefit from well-established research support units, others rely on minimal resources, or individual researchers to manage complex projects. This particularly applies to Widening countries with limited research support capacity[52].

To unlock the full potential of research management, it must be professionally recognised, adequately resourced, and structurally embedded within institutions in the ERA.

3. European coordination and support for Research Management

Research Managers are strategic enablers, enhancing policy implementation, and fostering environments where researchers can thrive. Advancing research management requires coordinated actions across institutional, national, and European levels.

To address systemic disparities, the **European Commission**, in collaboration with member states, associated countries to Horizon Europe and stakeholders, has launched a coordinated response through the **ERA Action on Research Management**, a key priority of the **ERA Policy Agenda for 2022–2024** and **2025–2027**.

One of the landmark outputs of this action is **RM COMP,** a European-wide framework that defines the skills and competencies of Research Managers across functions and career stages. This is complemented by **RM Roadmap**, that has mobilised over 140 national ambassadors across 40 countries to co-create evidence, tools, and recommendations for improving research management frameworks.

Collectively, these initiatives lay the groundwork for structural reform through targeted investment in the specialist personnel who enable and support the research process across institutions.

4. The role of Researchers in advancing Research Management

Though less visible in day-to-day research outputs, the contributions of Research Managers are critical to enabling research success. Among others, their contributions include:

- Ensuring effective project delivery, budget oversight, and risk mitigation, while maintaining compliance with regulatory and funding requirements.
- Supporting researchers, particularly early-career researchers, through tailored training, career guidance, and capacity-building initiatives.
- Operationalising evolving policy frameworks, such as ethics and integrity, research assessment and research security and within institutional practices.
- Facilitating knowledge valorisation and the translation of research outcomes into societal and economic impact, including through spin-offs and industry engagement.
- Identifying funding opportunities, support competitive proposal development, and strengthen institutional funding strategies.

In many institutions, these responsibilities are unevenly distributed, with some falling entirely on researchers, particularly those who are most successful in securing external funding. This model risks reducing research time, creating inequalities across disciplines, and reinforcing institutional inefficiencies. When empowered and embedded into institutional strategies, research managers become key enablers of excellence, translating institutional and policy requirements into actionable support, thereby enabling researchers to focus on inquiry,

[52] *The V4WB RMA Network Plus project revealed that beyond common challenges, many institutions in this region rely on a single individual to manage all aspects of research support. These professionals usually work without formal recognition, adequate training, or institutional support. Specialised expertise in legal, financial, and data management is scarce, while high staff turnover, project-based contracts, and low wages contribute to instability and hinder talent retention.*

innovation, and impact.

Therefore, researchers are invited to:

- Engage in institutional dialogue to advocate for the structural integration of professional research support across the research lifecycle.
- Recognise Research Managers as strategic partners, whose expertise in compliance, funding, project delivery, and policy implementation and beyond directly contributes to research success.
- Support the implementation of frameworks such as RM COMP and promote their integration into institutional HR and research strategies.
- Promote inclusive and collaborative research cultures, where the contributions of research managers are formally acknowledged and valued.
- Consider Research Management as a viable career pathway and advocate for its recognition within research assessment and career development frameworks.

The strategic integration of Research Managers offers a pathway for researchers to reclaim time, reduce administrative burden, and strengthen the conditions for scientific autonomy. By actively participating in shaping research support structures, researchers reinforce the conditions necessary for sustained excellence, contributing to the resilience and competitiveness of the broader research ecosystem.

6. Conclusion

Research excellence is underpinned by an ecosystem of interdependent components, including governance structures, administrative systems, funding mechanisms, and human expertise. Among these, Research Managers play a pivotal role in ensuring that research processes remain efficient, compliant, and strategically aligned. Their contributions warrant formal recognition and systematic integration across all levels of the R&I system.

To support this transformation, researchers are invited to explore and engage with the following resources:

- **Overarching Roadmap**
- **RM COMP Framework**
- **ERA Policy Agenda (2025–2027)**

By engaging with this agenda, researchers help ensure that excellence remains not only aspirational, but achievable, supported by the structures, partnerships, and professional expertise necessary for long-term impact.

Research Management for Research Funding Organisations: The role of Research Management in advancing excellence in the R&I ecosystem

Introduction:

As a result of growing geopolitical tensions, global challenges and high societal expectations, Europe's research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem is becoming increasingly complex. In this changing landscape, Research Managers[53] constitute a foundational pillar within the functioning of Research Funding Organisations (RFOs). Their specialist expertise is essential to the effective design, implementation, and evaluation of funding programmes, as well as to ensuring institutional compliance, transparency, and strategic alignment with national and European R&I priorities.

By outlining the added value of Research Management, the document invites RFOs to support and implement the Research Management Roadmap (RM Roadmap), RM COMP, the European Competence Framework for Research Managers, to contribute to the advancement of the European Research Area (ERA) Action on Research Management, and play a leadership role in fostering national dialogues aimed at strengthening research management capacity across the R&I system.

This document was developed as part of the RM Roadmap Horizon Europe project, which aims to strengthen the European Research Area by professionalising and aligning research management across Europe. It provides strategic guidance, tools, and evidence to support national and institutional reforms, capacity building, and recognition of research management as a vital component of research excellence.

1. Research in a changing context

RFOs occupy a central position in the research and innovation system. They are accountable for the effective stewardship of public funds and must balance policy priorities with the needs of research-performing organisations (RPOs), industry, and society. To meet these demands, RFOs rely not only on excellent researchers and sound policy but also on professional support systems, including a growing number of Research Managers.

To drive forward the European Research Area (ERA), the **European Commission**, in collaboration with member states, associated countries to Horizon Europe and stakeholders, has launched a coordinated response through the **ERA Action on Research Management**, a key priority of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 and 2025-2027.

2. Managing complexity: systems, specialists, and synergy

Navigating this evolving R&I landscape requires three strategic enablers:

1. **Robust systems** – including digital tools, such as AI-based platforms to streamline workflows,
2. **Skilled professionals** – including but not limited to experts in policy, compliance, finance, and project delivery,
3. **Integration of people and systems** – ensuring that technology complements, rather than replaces, human expertise.

The latter two are embodied by Research Managers, who provide strategic, operational, and compliance-related expertise, while supporting researchers in safeguarding academic freedom and reinforcing the conditions for independent, curiosity-driven research.

The demand for specialist support roles in research has grown organically in response to expanding R&I systems

[53] *Research Managers enable, facilitate, and support the performance of research in all its applications. They hold generalist or specialised roles within the research and innovation ecosystem. Research Managers are based in all types of research performing organisations, including public and private universities, research institutes, research funding organisations, medical institutions, NGOs, companies, public authorities, and so on. Research Managers can work as research policy advisers, pre-award and post-award officers, project managers, impact managers, science communicators, financial managers and advisors, legal advisors, contract and compliance managers, data stewards, open science officers, research infrastructure managers and operators, equality, diversity and inclusion advisors, research ethics advisors, knowledge and technology transfer officers, innovation managers and business developers, knowledge brokers, human resource managers in research, AI experts, and leaders of research facilitation offices, etc.*

and specific institutional needs. As a result, there is a significant variation in official job titles, hierarchical positions, and responsibilities of Research Managers across organisations and countries. While some research performing organisations (RPOs) benefit from well-established research support units, others rely on minimal resources, or individual researchers to manage complex projects. This particularly applies to Widening countries with limited research support capacity[54].

To unlock the full potential of research management, it must be professionally recognised, adequately resourced, and structurally embedded within institutions in the ERA.

3. European coordination and support for Research Management

To drive forward the European Research Area (ERA), the European Commission, in collaboration with member states, associated countries to Horizon Europe and stakeholders, has launched a coordinated response through the ERA Action on Research Management, a key priority of the ERA Policy Agenda for 2022–2024 and 2025–2027.

A landmark outputs of this action is **RM COMP,** a European-wide framework that defines the skills and competencies of Research Managers across functions and career stages. This is complemented by the **RM Roadmap**, that has mobilised over 140 national ambassadors across 40 countries to co-create tools, guidance, and recommendations for improving research management systems.

Collectively, these initiatives lay the groundwork for structural reform and provide tools, knowledge, and a shared language for professionalisation. RFOs now have an opportunity to lead and benefit from this systemic evolution.

4. The role of RFOs in advancing Research Management

Research Managers are essential for the success of RFOs, not only in delivering funding programmes, but in shaping their strategic direction, policy alignment and long-term impact. Among others, their contribution include:

- **Delivering impactful funding programmes** by coordinating strategic portfolios, calls, evaluations, and compliance processes, ensuring that funding operations are efficient, transparent and of high quality.
- **Strengthening research excellence** by designing robust peer review procedures and selecting high-quality proposals that align with scientific priorities and societal missions.
- **Embedding policy frameworks** into practice by translating open science, ethics, gender equality, and research assessment principles into actionable strategies that reflect European and national policy goals.
- **Building institutional capacity and inclusive research cultures** by supporting infrastructures, organising training and outreach activities, and fostering research environment that promote collaboration and diversity.
- **Supporting talent and strategic alignment** by advancing professional development opportunities, acting as National Contact Points (NCPs), and securing alignment with EU priorities.

Together, these functions reinforce the credibility, efficiency, and strategic focus of RFOs. To sustain this capacity, especially in a competitive labour market, RFOs must invest in attracting and retaining skilled RMs by offering clearly defined roles, structured career paths, and strong integration with national and European Research Management networks.

RFOs are uniquely positioned to lead the next phase of research management development. This is not about launching a new initiative – it is about recognising and building on what already exists. Their close engagement with Research Managers across programmes and institutions gives them the insight and leverage to drive systemic

[54] *The V4WB RMA Network Plus project revealed that beyond common challenges, many institutions in this region rely on a single individual to manage all aspects of research support. These professionals usually work without formal recognition, adequate training, or institutional support. Specialised expertise in legal, financial, and data management is scarce, while high staff turnover, project-based contracts, and low wages contribute to instability and hinder talent retention.*

change.

To realise this potential, RFOs should take concrete steps to embed, resource, and elevate research management as a strategic function – within their organisations and across the broader R&I system.

Therefore, RFOs are invited to:

- Support ERA Action on Research Management by ensuring national representation in the ERA Forum and contributing to capacity building at national level.
- Engage with national research management communities, including networks, associations, and ambassadors, to remain informed about evolving practices, identify capacity gaps, and co-develop solutions.
- Leverage EU-level resources, such as RM COMP and the RM Roadmap outputs, to assess and strengthen organisational research management capacity and to inform strategic planning.
- Initiate structured national dialogues involving ministries, RPOs, and research professionals to develop national strategies and ensure alignment of funding instruments with institutional needs.
- Advance recognition and professional development by embedding research management roles in funding programmes, establishing dedicated budget lines, and creating clear and sustainable career pathways.

5. Conclusion

Research Managers are already integral to the functioning of RFOs, contributing to scientific programming, evaluation procedures, and ensuring financial governance and policy alignment. They operate across internal departments and external interfaces, ensuring that RFOs can deliver on their mandates efficiently, transparently, and in alignment with national and European research priorities.

At the European level, substantial groundwork has already been laid through coordinated initiatives, most notably under the ERA Research Management Action, including the development of RM COMP and RM Roadmap, providing a coherent set of instruments and evidence for advancing professionalisation and capacity building of RMs. Leadership within RFOs now has a timely opportunity to translate this European direction into national and institutional action.

To support this transformation, RFOs are invited to explore and engage with the following resources:

- **RM Roadmap Main Document**
- **RM COMP Framework**
- **ERA Policy Agenda (2025–2027)**

By initiating or supporting structured national dialogues on research management – and by engaging actively with available tools, networks, and stakeholder communities – RFOs can position themselves as central actors in the modernisation and strengthening of R&I systems.

Research Management for Research Performing Organisation: Research Management to advance excellence and institutional reform

Introduction

As a result of growing geopolitical tensions, global challenges and high societal expectations, Europe's research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem is becoming increasingly complex. In this changing landscape, Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) need to navigate a growing array of legal, financial, ethical, and policy-related requirements and must demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and operational effectiveness. To meet these multifaceted demands, the strong and coordinated support of Research Managers (RMs) is required, who enable, facilitate, and support the performance of research across the full spectrum of activities and impacts. They hold generalist or specialised roles within the R&I ecosystem.[55]

This document outlines how professional Research Management contributes to research excellence and invites RPOs to advocate for the development of robust support systems within their institutions and across the European Research Area (ERA) to achieve long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

This document was developed as part of the RM Roadmap Horizon Europe project, which aims to strengthen the ERA by professionalising and aligning research management across Europe. It provides strategic guidance, tools, and evidence to support institutional reform, capacity building, and recognition of research management as a vital component of research excellence.

1. Research in a changing context

Research Performing Organisations, including universities and public and private research institutes, are central to the European R&I system. They serve as hubs for knowledge generation, talent development, and innovation. However, the context in which they operate is becoming increasingly complex due to geopolitical shifts, technological disruption (e.g., Artificial Intelligence), and growing societal expectations related to impact, compliance, inclusiveness, and accountability.

Policy initiatives such as the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 and 2025-2027 and CoARA focus on strengthening research careers and research assessment with the aim to create more equitable, inclusive, and supportive research cultures across Europe. While these initiatives are forward looking, a structured, professional support system is required to enable researchers and institutions alike.

2. Managing complexity: systems, specialists, and synergy

Navigating this evolving R&I landscape requires three strategic enablers:

1. **Robust systems** – including digital tools, such as AI-based platforms to streamline workflows,
2. **Skilled professionals** – including but not limited to experts in policy, compliance, finance, and project delivery,
3. **Integration of people and systems** – ensuring that technology complements, rather than replaces, human expertise.

The latter two are embodied by Research Managers, who work in close collaboration with researchers, and enable scientific excellence, societal impact, and institutional resilience. They provide strategic, operational, and compliance-related expertise, while supporting researchers in safeguarding academic freedom and reinforcing the conditions for independent, curiosity-driven research.

The demand for specialist support roles in research has grown organically in response to expanding R&I systems

[55] *Research Managers are based in all types of research performing organisations, including public and private universities, research institutes, research funding organisations, medical institutions, NGOs, companies, public authorities, and so on. They can work as research policy advisers, pre-award and post-award officers, project managers, impact managers, science communicators, financial managers and advisors, legal advisors, contract and compliance managers, data stewards, open science officers, research infrastructure managers and operators, equality, diversity and inclusion advisors, research ethics advisors, knowledge and technology transfer officers, innovation managers and business developers, knowledge brokers, human resource managers in research, AI experts, and leaders of research facilitation offices, etc.*

and specific institutional needs. As a result, there is a significant variation in official job titles, hierarchical positions, and responsibilities of Research Managers across organisations and countries. While some research performing organisations (RPOs) benefit from well-established research support units, others rely on minimal resources, or individual researchers to manage complex projects. This particularly applies to Widening countries with limited research support capacity[56].

To unlock the full potential of research management, it must be professionally recognised, adequately resourced, and structurally embedded within institutions in the ERA.

4. European coordination and support for Research Management

Research Managers are strategic enablers, enhancing policy implementation, and fostering environments where researchers can thrive. Advancing research management requires coordinated actions across institutional, national, and European levels.

To address systemic disparities, the **European Commission**, in collaboration with member states, associated countries to Horizon Europe and stakeholders, has launched a coordinated response through the **ERA Action on Research Management**, a key priority of the **ERA Policy Agenda for 2022–2024** and **2025–2027**.

One of the landmark outputs of this action is **RM COMP,** a European-wide framework that defines the skills and competencies of Research Managers across functions and career stages. This is complemented by **RM Roadmap**, that has mobilised over 140 national ambassadors across 40 countries to co-create evidence, tools, and recommendations for improving research management frameworks.

Collectively, these initiatives lay the groundwork for structural reform through targeted investment in the specialist personnel who enable and support the research process across institutions.

5. The role of RPOs in advancing Research Management

Research Managers' contributions are critical to enabling research success. Their contributions include:

- Enhancing competitiveness by providing structured support that allows researchers to focus on core research activities while increasing proposal success rates and research impact.
- Reducing inefficiencies through the development of shared standards, aligned procedures, and recognised roles which help minimise the burden of audits, duplicative processes, and inconsistent quality requirements across funders and institutions.
- Fostering greater interoperability by facilitating cross-organisational and cross-border collaboration, which becomes more feasible when roles, systems, and expectations are aligned.
- Improving researcher experience by building mature support ecosystem that improves job satisfaction, institutional loyalty, and the ability to attract and retain top talent.

The next phase of institutional advancement in RPOs will depend on the recognition and strategic development of research management as a core organisational capability. Reinforcing this capability is critical to enhancing capacity, ensuring efficient use of resources, and supporting research excellence.

RPO leaders are now in a position to harness this European momentum and align their institutional practices with broader ERA objectives. Therefore, RPOs are invited to:

1. Assess internal Research Management capacity using the RM COMP and RM Roadmap tools to evaluate roles, support structures, career pathways, and training opportunities within your organisation.
2. Contribute to a national dialogue with ministries, RFOs, and other RPOs to foster a shared vision on Research Management and a mutually supportive R&I ecosystem.
3. Strengthen collaboration across the R&I system by involving Research Managers in institutional efforts to improve interoperability and efficiency.

[56] *The V4WB RMA Network Plus project revealed that beyond common challenges, many institutions in this region rely on a single individual to manage all aspects of research support. These professionals usually work without formal recognition, adequate training, or institutional support. Specialised expertise in legal, financial, and data management is scarce, while high staff turnover, project-based contracts, and low wages contribute to instability and hinder talent retention.*

4. Support and recognise Research Managers by establishing structured roles, investing in professional development, and increasing institutional visibility.

6. Conclusion

The professionalisation of research management constitutes a strategic opportunity for RPOs to reinforce their organisational resilience, enhance their competitiveness, and strengthen their contribution to national and European research and innovation priorities. Achieving this potential requires the active engagement of institutional leadership in recognising research management as a core function of the research ecosystem.

To support this transformation, RPOs are invited to explore and engage with the following resources:

- **Overarching Roadmap**
- **RM COMP Framework**
- **ERA Policy Agenda (2025–2027)**

By aligning with the objectives of the European Research Area, drawing on the RM Roadmap as a guiding framework, and participating in cross-actor dialogue, RPOs can position themselves as key drivers of a more effective and interoperable European research system. Timely action is essential - not only to optimise internal processes and capacities, but also to help shape a more coordinated, efficient, and impactful research and innovation landscape in Europe.

Annex 4. A Practical Guide to Building and Sustaining Research Management Networks

RM ROADMAP

A Practical Guide to Building and Sustaining Research Management Networks

Best Practices from European Research Management Communities, collected through the RM ROADMAP project

A Practical Guide to Building and Sustaining Research Management Networks

Best Practices from European Research Management Communities, collected through the RM ROADMAP project

The RM-ROADMAP project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe programme under grant agreement number 101058475

Key Take-aways at a Glance

The RM ROADMAP Best Practices Guide offers a comprehensive and practical resource for those seeking to establish, strengthen, or sustain Research Managers (RM) networks. Drawing on the collective experience of established European RM communities, the guide addresses the growing demand for professional recognition, community building, peer support, and structured development within the research management profession.

Launching a new research management network begins with understanding the professional landscape. Early growth often depends on leveraging existing relationships, fostering a shared sense of purpose, and cultivating a community culture that reflects and supports its members' needs.

As the idea develops, transitioning from an informal collaboration to a more structured and sustainable initiative involves defining clear goals, target audience, and scope. While most networks begin informally to retain flexibility, legal formalisation may become necessary to manage finances, apply for funding, and gain policy influence down the line.

Over time, networks start expanding their membership, securing financial sustainability, offering targeted activities, and refining governance. A strategic and inclusive approach to these four pillars enables networks to establish a solid foundation and support long-term growth.

The Guide also acknowledges periods of stagnation as a natural part of a network's lifecycle. Addressing these challenges involves identifying root causes and taking proactive steps to renew energy and direction. Peer support from more established networks can offer valuable insights and reassurance. Rather than signalling failure, such phases present opportunities for reflection and reinvention.

Building and sustaining a research management network demands time, commitment, and resilience, but the long-term benefits are substantial for individuals, institutions, and the research system as a whole. RM networks empower professionals, strengthen institutional capacity, influence policy, and contribute to the professionalisation of research management. The RM ROADMAP project offers this guide as a living tool to support both emerging and established communities in creating lasting impact.

The RM ROADMAP Project

RM Roadmap is an EU-funded project, running between 1st September 2022 and 31st August 2025, aiming to enhance the professional development and recognition of Research Managers across Europe. It is a pan-European community of research management excellence, coming together to define a roadmap for the research management profession.

The project seeks to create a roadmap for the future of research management in Europe and a community to support its delivery. The aim is to identify and adapt the research management capital base of the EU, including the widening countries, of its current and future research management workforce to emerging needs to improve the EU's competitiveness and sustain its economic performance. A state-of-the-art pan-European network of research managers can support the establishment of strategic, cross-border partnerships between research managers in industry, research funding organisations, higher education and research institutions.

RM Roadmap unites European networks in a ground-breaking global co-creation process for research management. This co-creation process aims to bring together the existing communities and expand upon them to reach two main objectives: create and inform a bottom-up consensus on the future of RM in a "roadmap" and inform the community about existing training, networking, funding and mobility opportunities.

About This Guide

This guide was built upon a series of in-depth interviews conducted with leaders and key members of nineteen research management networks and thematic associations across Europe, between December 2024 and April 2025. The contributors listed in the acknowledgments reflect a wide spectrum of experiences and represent a diverse range of networks and associations: from newly formed, informal groups to established, legally registered associations in various national contexts. Their diversity provides a rich and nuanced perspective on what it takes to initiate, grow, and sustain a professional network in varied institutional and cultural environments.

The primary aim of these interviews was to capture real-world experiences, best practices, and common pitfalls encountered in the lifecycle of a professional network. The insights gathered were then analysed, clustered, and structured into thematic chapters to create the practical, step-by-step guide. The 'Tips from the Field' sections at the end of chapters represent direct and recurring advice from these experienced contributors. This advice proved essential in their own journeys and may now serve as inspiration and guidance for others setting out on a similar path.

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Table of Contents

01. Why Form a Network

In research institutions across Europe and beyond, professionals working in research management and administration have long played a vital yet under-recognised role. Among a variety of tasks and responsibilities, research managers support the design, coordination, administration, and strategic planning of research activities across institutions. Nevertheless, disparities persist in their professional status, career progression, and systemic recognition.

Forming a national, or regional, network of research managers is a strategic response to the multitude of shared challenges that addresses a common need for professional development, community-building, knowledge exchange and peer learning across roles, institutions, and regions. Networks provide access to opportunities, collaborators, and mentorship, all key drivers for career growth. At the same time, they can alleviate professional isolation, a common issue in a field with diverse, and sometimes niche roles. Perhaps more crucially, networks can afford a collective voice that pushes forward policy improvements towards the recognition and legitimisation of the role of research managers, and can help create a much-needed professional identity.

As the global research environment becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, structured networks can help enhance institutional research performance by creating channels for sharing best practices in grant writing, financial management, governance, and stakeholder engagement, to name but a few examples. As such, they can contribute towards more agile, resilient, and innovative research ecosystems, better equipped to respond to international funding frameworks, evolving compliance standards, and interdisciplinary demands. Ultimately, RM networks have the potential to reshape the research landscape from within.

Despite the numerous benefits of forming a research management network, many remain reluctant in taking the first step. The process can appear daunting, leading to uncertainty or inaction. In response to these concerns, the RM ROADMAP project has developed the present guide, aiming to facilitate the first steps by addressing common challenges, and offering practical insights to encourage the development of new networks.

02. Planting the Seed

Mapping the Area

Before setting out to launch a new network, it is important to understand the landscape in which it will take root. Having a clear overview of the size of the community, the diversity of roles within it, and the types of institutions in which research managers work helps ensure that the network is built upon realistic foundations. One of the most critical early questions to answer is whether people in the field identify themselves professionally as research managers. Across many of the interviews conducted for the purposes of this guide, participants described how this lack of self-identification posed a fundamental challenge. In several contexts, the very idea of "research management" as a distinct profession had to be introduced and defined from scratch. Even people with years of experience in the field, managing complex research projects or institutional portfolios, were often oblivious to the fact that their occupation fell under a recognised professional category. As a result, early efforts to build a network might need to start from the very basics: giving a name to the profession, affirming its value, and helping individuals see themselves as part of a broader community. A sense of identity and alignment with a shared mission is what ultimately enables a network to grow from an idea into a tangible, legitimate entity.

Laying the Foundations

Most already established research management associations evolved organically out of more informal setups, rather than as the outcome of deliberate efforts to establish a professional structure. Interview participants described early meetings as oftentimes nothing more than a few colleagues getting together over lunch or at a conference fringe session. These informal beginnings are a common and effective way to build trust and reciprocity, which are critical for future collaboration. At the same time, informal exchanges, though unstructured, provided a rare space to discuss shared challenges and common experiences, compare institutional practices, and exchange thoughts with peers who understood the context. These interactions revealed that the challenges faced were not individual, but rather systemic, and in the absence of an organised community that could address them, the idea that a more structured, collective effort was needed began to take hold.

In other instances, participation in EU-funded projects and national consortia gave rise to post-project communities. Some groups began as spin-offs of consortia that sought to resume their collaboration on national level, recognising the value of continued exchange. At the same time, participation in European RM communities, such as the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA), also served as a catalyst in some cases, providing opportunities for further networking and examples of best practices to replicate at home.

While the majority of associations originated independently, a few benefited from early support by public agencies, national bodies or research funders, seeking to promote the development of research management capacity, as a means of fostering collaborations. Whether bottom-up or top-down, the driving force was consistent across all contexts: recognising the value of strengthening research management, by forming an organised, structured community to provide the opportunities for professional development, knowledge transfer and collective representation.

Branching out

It is natural for a new initiative to feel inward-looking at first: defining a clear purpose is vital for communicating a coherent message externally. Growth in these early stages is rarely fast and it will require a lot of patience and perseverance. One of the most effective ways to begin building momentum is by leveraging existing professional relationships and capitalising on personal contacts. Reaching out to colleagues who share the same views, reconnecting with peers from past collaborations, and inviting others into the dialogue creates the foundation for a powerful early network of support. These interactions are not only about expanding reach but, more importantly, about setting the tone and shaping the culture of the emerging community. When people see their own challenges reflected in the mission of a new network, they are far more likely to engage. A shared sense of purpose gives direction and can slowly but steadily lay down the roots that can support future growth.

Tips from the field...

- Understand the landscape: Start by exploring the context in which you will operate. Understand how research management is perceived locally to inform your approach.

- Identify the needs: Pin-point the gap you are setting out to fill. Are colleagues seeking professional development, better policy representation, stronger peer exchange, or simply a sense of belonging? Be clear in your scope, while remaining open to evolution.

- Build on professional contacts: Networks are built on relationships. Begin by finding like-minded individuals, whether within your institution or through broader collaborations.

03. Setting the Wheels in Motion

Getting Started

Once the idea of forming a network begins to take shape, the next challenge is to move from informal collaboration into a more structured, sustainable initiative. This phase requires deliberate planning, inclusive engagement, and a flexible approach to governance and activity. It is important to recognise that, as with any new endeavour, visible progress may be slow, and patience, resilience and determination will be essential. Perseverance will be key in what could be a long and, at times, frustrating process, with few immediate rewards and many behind-the-scenes efforts going unnoticed. Still, this is the point at which momentum is either built or lost; and while not one shoe fits all, there are some general guiding principles that have proven helpful across a wide range of settings.

Defining Purpose and Audience

The first foundational step is articulating a clear purpose. What problem is the network trying to solve? What value will it bring to its members? This might involve facilitating professional development, sharing best practices, providing a peer support network, or advocating for recognition and resources. It is important to define the scope early on to ensure activities are tailored to the members' needs.

Setting simple, achievable and quantifiable KPIs can help keep the work focused and provides a straightforward measurement of progress. As an example, setting a target to host one national event, publish one newsletter, and recruit 20 members within the first six months offers a practical benchmark, and helps test what is actually realistic, feasible, and achievable.

The audience should also be identified. Will the network serve individuals, institutions, or both? Should it include only universities, or also research-performing organisations, private sector entities, and funders? Will it be national or regional? These decisions are important, as they can have significant financial implications, and will shape everything: from the governance model to the membership structure and the style of communication.

Early Governance

Networks often emerge from a small group of highly motivated individuals who initiate the first steps. At this early stage, governance tends to be informal and rooted in volunteerism, typically operating without formal elections, term limits, or rigid procedures. This founding group becomes the backbone of the network, coordinating early activities, nurturing relationships, and engaging potential members. While it may be premature to establish formal rules, identifying a committed core team or steering committee is vital for ensuring continuity, consistency, and a shared sense of direction.

A coordination group, or steering committee, may form naturally. The general advice has been to keep the number of core people small; this affords a more agile set-up and keeps the decision-making process simpler and faster. Distributing roles and responsibilities among people (e.g., coordination, communications, event organisation, etc.) helps share the workload, with coordination responsibilities rotating as needed. Assigning two individuals to each task provides more flexibility and allows continuity of action in case one person is unavailable.

Ideally, this group should represent a diversity of perspectives, skills, and institutional types. Involving professionals from both research-intensive universities and smaller or regional institutions, as well as from non-academic sectors, enriches the network and fosters inclusivity from the outset. It is also beneficial to include individuals with complementary expertise in areas such as administration, finance, and communications, skills that can support the development of the network beyond core research management functions.

It might be helpful to elect interim boards, or form working groups to explore areas, such as membership structure, event planning, and funding options. It is important to strike the right balance between flexibility with accountability: enough structure to ensure decisions are made and actions followed through, without burdening volunteers with bureaucracy.

Legal Status

Most networks begin as informal communities without legal status or formal governance (see Annex for Existing Models of RM Networks and Associations). This offers the flexibility needed to test ideas, generate interest, and assess interest before committing to a formal structure. Not all networks need to become legal entities immediately, or even at all. In fact, many operate effectively as informal groups for years. In some regions, networks consciously choose to remain informal, particularly when supported by a host institution or embedded in a larger organisation. This model works well when administrative support is available and legal autonomy is not required, and is especially common where research management recognition is already built into the research policy landscape.

However, there are practical reasons to consider formalisation, such as opening a bank account, managing finances, applying for grants and funding, and entering contracts. Legal registration typically involves drafting statutes or bylaws, electing a board, registering with the relevant national authority, and implementing proper bookkeeping procedures. Although the process may seem intimidating and will realistically require considerable time and effort, it is reassuring to remember that it is a one-time undertaking. According to interviewees, formalisation demonstrates commitment and professionalism to external stakeholders while also allowing for clearer engagement with government bodies, funders, and international partners, opening the door to new funding opportunities and collaborative partnerships. At the same time, a network with a formal status is more likely to be able to influence research policy at national level while representing the interests of research management professionals.

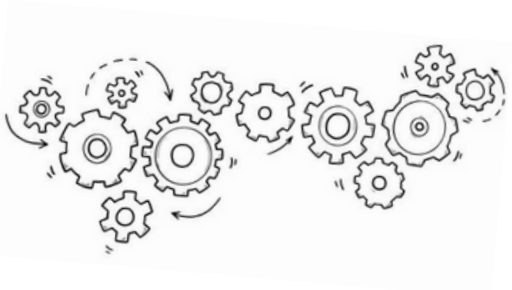
Communication and Visibility

As resources and funding are likely to be limited in the early stages, taking advantage of free tools and platforms is as sensible as it is effective: creating a LinkedIn page to enhance visibility; putting together a mailing list to share news and updates; setting up a collaborative platform to enable communication; and sending out a regular newsletter to help maintain engagement. These channels allow members to share information, coordinate events, and maintain regular contact, while giving the network visibility, and creating entry points for new members. Regardless of the method of communication, what matters most is consistency: regular updates, invitations to participate or contribute, and responsiveness to questions.

A pilot event is an excellent opportunity to launch the new network, introduce it to a wider audience, and generate some initial interest. Hosting this first event online is not only cost-effective, but also allows for higher participation by removing geographical barriers. An event can serve multiple purposes: it can help identify active members, validate the network's relevance, and begin to establish its reputation. It also delivers immediate value through knowledge-sharing networking, creates an opportunity for member engagement and feedback, and showcases the network's potential to funders and institutional stakeholders. Following the event, it is advisable to use feedback forms to identify points of interest to better inform future activities, while sharing key takeaways, presentations, and photos through the network's communication channels extends both impact and visibility.

Tips from the field...

- Don't wait for the perfect timing: It is not about getting everything right at once, it is about creating the space and a community where one did not exist before. You will figure it out as you go along.
- Be prepared for adversities: Expect that it will not be easy, but be reassured that it is well worth the effort.
- Know your context: Each setting is unique; make sure to understand yours well, as it will inform your future strategy and actions.
- Keep it simple: Do not invite too many people into your decision-making; a smaller core group is more efficient, and saves both time and energy.
- Limit your horizons (at first!): Set tangible, realistic goals over shorter periods, and revisit often; adjust where necessary.
- Be extroverted: Define a communications strategy that will make you as visible as possible, as early as possible. Make sure to follow up with consistency.



04. Cultivating Growth

While every network will inevitably need to follow its own path within its specific context, its growth and evolution will need to go through common developmental milestones. This phase is a pivotal point, where the network can transition from a more informal initiative, into a structured, established organisation. In this process, there are four main points to address: growth of its membership basis, financial sustainability, development of activities, and governance structure.

Expanding Membership

One of the first signs of growth is a steady increase in membership. Word of mouth, and an active presence on social media are two very efficient and cost-effective tools for expanding the membership basis. Each network must decide how to manage this growth: some may wish to continue with an open-door model, where anyone can join a mailing list or attend events, while others may wish to establish formal membership criteria, including registration, payment of a fee, or institutional affiliation. The choice depends on the network's goals, legal status, and capacity to manage engagement.

Individual membership allows for broader participation and can foster a personal sense of investment, which, in turn, can translate into more active participation. This model can also provide more autonomy and stability, preventing mass withdrawal in case an institute revokes its member status. Alternatively, institutional membership models can offer financial stability and direct engagement with leadership at universities and research organisations. Some networks adopt a hybrid approach, offering both individual and institutional memberships, with tailored benefits for each. Institutional packages may include discounted fees, guaranteed seats at events, or the right to nominate board members.

However, it is important to emphasise that choosing between individual, institutional, or hybrid membership is one of the most consequential decisions a network will make. Once implemented, the membership structure can be difficult to alter and may have lasting implications for governance, finances, and inclusivity. For this reason, the decision warrants careful thought and strategic consideration.

Building Financial Sustainability

As a network expands and its activities become more ambitious, financial sustainability becomes an increasingly important concern. To ensure long-term viability, most networks rely on a blend of income sources, to fund their operations in a sustainable manner. Some common sources of funding include:

- Membership fees: A reliable source of income, usually collected annually. While membership fees are typically small amounts, they provide a dependable and predictable income and can be scaled as the network grows.
- Event registration fee: Another significant revenue stream comes from events, such as workshops, training sessions, or conferences, where participants may pay registration fees. This could include discounted fees for members as a membership benefit, while charging full prices to non-members.
- Grants: In addition to self-generated income, many associations apply for grants, often through national bodies or European funding schemes. These can help support specific activities, such as capacity building or policy engagement.
- Institutional support: A common way of indirect financing is through institutional in-kind contributions. Member institutions may allow staff to carry out network-related tasks during work hours, but can also facilitate events to take place on their premises, by providing the meeting venues and borrowing of equipment.
- Volunteering: In addition to the board members, who contribute their time and services on a voluntary basis, a number of activities are made possible thanks to the support of other professionals within the community. For example, senior research managers and other experienced individuals might volunteer to lead training sessions, deliver workshops, or act as mentors to less experienced colleagues, helping to strengthen capacity building, and adding value to the services the network provides to its members.
- Sponsorships: While less common, some networks may also receive sponsorship from external stakeholders, such as governmental bodies, service providers, and funders, who see value in supporting a well-connected and professionally active community.

Creating Value through Targeted Activities

As the membership base begins to grow, so too does the need to retain and actively engage it. The key to sustaining interest lies in the range and quality of the activities offered. At this stage, the network should move beyond basic communication and occasional meetings, developing a consistent programme of engagement. Activities need to be both relevant and targeted, to address the priorities and basic concerns of the people in the field. Most successful networks continuously adapt their offerings based on member feedback and the evolving needs of the profession.

A clear value proposition is essential for attracting and retaining members within a research management network. Members need to be aware of what tangible benefits their participation or membership fee brings and how the network supports their growth. At the same time, having a carefully considered offering to non-members can help maintain visibility across a broader audience. Based on the experiences of other associations, some of the most commonly implemented activities include:

- Annual conferences: to discuss innovation, policy updates, professional development frameworks, and best practices, providing a much-needed opportunity for regular networking.
- Training programmes: offering tailored workshops or courses for early and mid-career professionals, as well as senior managers.
- Mentorship schemes: pairing experienced professionals with newcomers to foster knowledge sharing and career development.
- Thematic working groups: focusing on areas such as pre- and post-award support, research infrastructures, research ethics, open science, financial administration, research impact, etc.
- Career development opportunities: keeping members informed about national and international courses and workshops available, as well as job openings, fellowships and secondment opportunities.
- Resource libraries: sharing templates, guides, and tools, accessible to members via a central platform.
- Frequent online meet-ups: including virtual coffee hours, discussion boards, and occasional webinars and workshops to help sustain engagement between in-person events.

Developing an annual calendar or engaging in longer-term activity planning can greatly improve the organisation and consistency of the network's events and initiatives. Assigning responsibility to an event coordinator or manager can be particularly helpful at this stage, ensuring oversight of timelines, logistics, and communication across the membership base. It is equally important to provide a feedback mechanism. This allows members to share their experiences, suggest improvements, and express concerns, providing valuable insights to inform future activity decisions.

Governance & Structure

As a network matures, its governance structure tends to evolve accordingly. Insights from the interviews conducted reveal that nearly all established associations are managed by elected boards, operating on a voluntary basis. The board usually includes defined roles, such as Chair, and Treasurer, and in some cases, extend to positions like Communications Officer, Events Manager, and so on. Sometimes members of the board head different working groups that focus on specific initiatives or topics. Separating roles and assigning clear responsibilities is important, first and foremost, for sharing the workload, and secondly, for ensuring that all tasks and activities are receiving appropriate attention.

Boards are typically comprised of a maximum of 10 members, though several interviewees emphasised that smaller boards (i.e., of up to 7 people), are preferable, in order to facilitate a more efficient decision-making process. At the same time, some cautioned that very small boards (fewer than six members) can pose challenges of their own; if multiple members are unavailable at once, it may become difficult to reach quorum or take timely decisions. To mitigate this risk, appointing substitute board members can be a valuable strategy, helping ensure continuity in governance and prevent disruptions to decision-making processes. Substitute members are appointed to step in when regular board members are temporarily unavailable or unable to fulfil their duties. While they typically do not hold voting rights unless officially replacing another member, they often attend meetings to remain informed and prepared.

Rotating leadership models are common, with board terms generally limited to two or three years. Some associations adopt a chair-elect and past-chair system, a leadership succession model that aims at continuity and institutional memory within the governance structure (after term end, the Chair transitions into the role of Past-Chair in an advisory capacity and for limited time, to support the Chair-Elect in their new responsibilities). Broad representation on the board is also encouraged, with an emphasis on including members from different regions, institution types, and professional roles, in order to better reflect the diversity of the research management community.

Where resources allow, appointing a paid part-time administrator or coordinator can significantly reduce the burden on the volunteering members by providing support with day-to-day operations and, perhaps more importantly, ensuring continuity between boards. Some associations have reported receiving partial funding from ministries, research councils, or through participation in European projects, while others are able to finance the position on own means, such as membership fees.

Tips from the field...

- Anticipate some politics: Not all institutions may be supportive of their staff joining the network, as knowledge sharing among the community may be perceived as a potential threat to competitive advantage. Frame the network as collaborative, rather than competitive, underlining long-term benefits, such as professional development, access to best practices and more opportunities for collaboration.

- Be transparent in processes and finances: Publish meeting minutes, financial reports, election procedures and key decisions, so as to enhance credibility and professionalism. Openness builds trust and encourages broader engagement.

05. Surviving the Valley of Death

Periods of stagnation are a natural part of a network's lifecycle. Interest wanes, engagement may decline, volunteers can become overloaded, and activities may lose momentum. These phases can be triggered by internal changes, such as leadership transitions or diminishing capacity, or by external factors, like shifting policy agendas or the end of primary funding streams. Sometimes stagnation is subtle, a gradual loss of energy rather than a crisis. In other cases, it may be brought on by more abrupt changes, or follow a significant event, such as the departure of a key member or the conclusion of a major funded project. Recognising and planning for these inevitable cycles is crucial to sustaining long-term resilience and relevance.

Recognising the Signs and Diagnosing the Causes

Before addressing any potential issues, it is essential to identify the warning signs that the network may be entering a period of stagnation. These signs can manifest in a range of ways, sometimes subtle and at other times more overtly. One early indicator is a decline in volunteer participation, particularly when fewer volunteers are stepping forward to take on board or committee roles. This can place additional pressure on existing members and reduce the network's overall capacity. Similarly, declining attendance at events or online meetings may reflect a drop in interest or a sense that these gatherings are no longer offering sufficient value or relevance. Stagnant membership growth or high turnover signal a difficulty in either attracting new members, or challenges in retaining them. Leadership burnout and reduced engagement from volunteers are also common indicators, often accompanied by a decrease in actions, such as fewer newsletters or training sessions, and diminished activity and visibility on the various communication channels.

Once the signs have been identified, understanding what drives these periods of stagnation is equally important. Without a correct 'diagnosis' of the underlying causes, attempts to revive engagement risk being misdirected or short-lived. The contributing factors can be several, and stagnation may often be due to a combination of these factors, rather just only one. A common contributor may be fatigue among the board members. This can be both a sign and a cause, in and of itself. Long-serving

board members may begin to feel overwhelmed or worn out, reducing both their capacity and motivation. Lack of visible results is one major factor that may prompt a lot of people to disengage. If activities fail to yield clear or tangible benefits, members may begin to feel disillusioned and lose interest. Losing sight of the core purpose is another root cause. This may happen when too many agendas are pursued at once, resulting in a loss of both focus and coherence. Finally, a rather obvious reason may be a significant decrease in funds, which will naturally and severely limit the network's ability to maintain operations, regardless of how committed its volunteers remain.

Turning the Tide

Stagnation does not mean failure. It is often a sign that the network has reached a transitional phase and must adapt to new realities. There are several strategies that can help reignite interest, re-engage members, and renew strategic direction. While there is no single formula of recovery, all will require deliberate action, clear priorities, and often a willingness to adapt or rethink existing practices and ways of working.

Inject new energy into leadership

Renewing the leadership team is one of the most effective ways to reinvigorate a network. New board or committee members can bring fresh ideas, energy, and perspective that can help shift the organisation out of stagnation. To support this, it is important to establish clear term limits and actively encourage rotation. Including diverse voices is equally critical: early-career professionals, individuals from underrepresented institutions, or those working in new or adjacent sectors can all contribute valuable insights. At the same time, a well-planned leadership transition planning is vital and overlapping terms can help preserve institutional memory and valuable knowledge.

Refocus the mission

Periods of stagnation often signal a loss of alignment between the network's activities and the members' needs. Re-examining the mission and goals can help clarify priorities, re-engage stakeholders, and spark new initiatives. This process should involve honest reflection and open dialogue. Key questions to consider include: What challenges are our members facing today that were not on the agenda before? What does our community need

at this stage? Is it stronger advocacy, increased training opportunities, greater recognition, or deeper connections? Are our current activities still relevant and impactful? Tools such as short surveys, or community consultations can help realign the network's direction.

Explore new initiatives

Introducing a new initiative or activity can be a driver for renewal within the network. Thinking outside the box and offering something new and different to the usual formats and topics can inspire fresh engagement among members. Try to respond to current concerns and align with needs as they evolve by integrating sessions on 'hot topics' and contemporary themes of interest to ensure the network remains relevant, responsive, and forward-looking. Reach out to stakeholders, with whom there was previously limited engagement and form new collaborations that open up untapped opportunities for learning, innovation and impact.

Work on visibility and communication

When networks begin to stagnate, they often suffer from fragmented messaging, outdated platforms, or isolated flows of information. Clear, consistent, and engaging communication is fundamental to maintaining a strong sense of connection and visibility. Practical steps might include relaunching a regular newsletter with relevant and relatable content, refreshing the website and social media channels, or introducing more dynamic formats, such as short video updates or member spotlights. Informal opportunities, like virtual open office hours, can encourage dialogue and reinforce a sense of accessibility.

Broaden the base

Expanding the network's reach to new sectors, geographies, and professional roles can stimulate renewed engagement. Inviting participation from private research organisations, regional agencies, and new stakeholder groups can bring in new and interesting perspectives. Targeted outreach to underrepresented regions or smaller institutions, particularly when tailored to their specific contexts, ensures a broader and more inclusive membership. Including diverse professional roles can also enrich discussions and expand the network's relevance across the research landscape. Rotating events geographically and offering materials in multiple languages promote inclusion and open up new spaces for participation, collaboration and community-building.

Strengthen strategic relationships

Expanding collaboration with external stakeholders, such as government ministries, funding bodies, or international organisations, can help stimulate activity and reposition the network as a valued and influential partner. Strategic engagement might include co-organising events or training programmes, participating in national policy consultations, applying jointly for European projects or pilot schemes, or providing expert input on key research reforms. These types of collaboration not only raise the network's profile, but also reaffirm its relevance and expertise. In this context, EARMA can serve as a valuable connector, helping to forge national and international relationships while also inspiring training initiatives and career development pathways. Such partnerships can significantly enhance the network's visibility, credibility, and member engagement.

Seek peer support

Sometimes, the fastest way is to look for inspiration in the examples of other organisations, who have faced similar challenges and found effective ways to navigate them. Reaching out to more established associations and asking for practical guidance, or joining regional clusters or European alliances, not only offers valuable insights and tested approaches, but also reinforces the idea that the network is part of a broader, shared effort. The interviews conducted highlighted the strong collegial spirit among the European RM community, where collaboration and the exchange of best practices have been common. Interviewees expressed genuine enthusiasm for supporting emerging RM networks, showing a willingness to share their experiences and even take on mentoring roles to help new initiatives find their footing.

Tips from the field...

- Avoid recurring stagnation by implementing regular strategic reviews and designing structures that anticipate and adapt to change.
- Embrace the pause: temporary slowdowns are natural and even necessary. Take the time to reflect, learn valuable lessons, and regroup.
- Approach it with openness: The most successful networks are not those that grow endlessly, but those that adapt purposefully. See this as an opportunity to reassert relevance.

06. Navigating the Do's and Don'ts

Development is shaped as much by learning from pitfalls as it is by best practices. While mistakes can offer valuable opportunities for growth, avoiding critical missteps in the early stages can mean the difference between a network that flourishes and one that collapses before it has had the chance to take off. Below are a few tips and recommended practices, along with areas of caution.

Don't over-plan without action. Spending too much time drafting rules, structures, and legal frameworks before engaging the community can delay progress, stall momentum and alienate stakeholders.

Do adopt a "learning by doing" approach. Hosting a pilot webinar, setting up a mailing list, or launching a short survey to gather input can build visibility early on and provide tangible results to guide future planning.

Don't rely too heavily on a few individuals. Networks centred entirely on a small number of key people are highly vulnerable and fragile, especially if those individuals become overwhelmed, step back, or relocate.

Do build a broader base. Identify potential successors, document key processes, and implement a rotating leadership model. Distribute responsibilities and mentor new volunteers to prevent burnout and promote cohesion.

Don't narrow your membership base by unintentionally focusing too much on specific roles, types of institution, or geographic regions. This can exclude potential members and can limit the network's reach and legitimacy.

Do prioritise inclusivity by inviting participation from a wide range of institutions, rotate event locations, offer hybrid event formats, and ensure representation from across the research management spectrum.

Don't take on too much administrative burden too soon. Avoid unnecessary and overly complex formalisation early on, or until you have built a solid base. Legal structures bring responsibilities: accounting, reporting, compliance. Not all networks need these in their early stages.

Do start with a light governance model where possible. Leave formal procedures for when it becomes necessary (opening a bank account, applying for funds, signing contracts).

Don't act in isolation and try to reinvent the wheel. Many challenges faced by emerging networks have already been encountered (and often solved) by others.

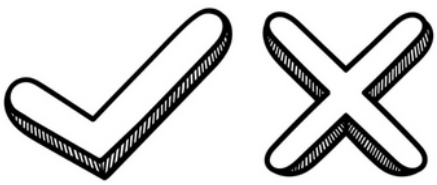
Do reach out to established associations for advice and guidance, participate in European networks and make the most out of their experience and the support they can provide.

Don't neglect your communication channels. A poorly-maintained or outdated website, or too long between updates on social media accounts can give the impression of an inactive network and diminishes its value.

Do maintain a strong presence and visibility by keeping digital platforms up to date and regularly posting on social media.

Don't remain fixed on old practices or rely solely on what has been successful in the past. Practices that worked in the past, will not necessarily continue to meet the needs of your community indefinitely.

Do refresh and expand the network's offerings by developing a diverse professional development portfolio and exploring thematic groups, task forces, or new formats for engagement.



07. Reaping the Harvest

As highlighted throughout this Guide, building and sustaining a research management network requires time, commitment, and resilience. At the same time, the rewards, personal, institutional, and systemic, can be substantial. When networks mature, they realise their full potential by empowering professionals, shaping research ecosystems, and driving meaningful change. Their legacy is reflected in the careers they have supported, the policies they have influenced, and the communities they have helped to foster across the research landscape.

Empowering Professionals

At the heart of every network are its people: a community offering support, collaboration, and collegiality. Networks can provide professional development opportunities through training programmes and mentorship initiatives. These initiatives not only help individuals grow in their roles but also raise the visibility and value of research management as a profession. By connecting people and creating shared experiences, networks play a crucial role in legitimising the profession and fostering a sense of identity among research managers.

Enhancing Institutional Capacity

Networks do not only benefit their individual members, but also help strengthen institutions. A network provides a platform for collaboration, hence, facilitating inter-institutional partnerships and joint funding applications. In addition, networks can ‘translate’ complex policies, funder requirements, and European regulations into practical, accessible guidance, helping institutions stay aligned with evolving requirements. And regardless of membership status, institutions can benefit from the work carried out at network level: by providing access to training opportunities for research management professionals, networks help enhance individual capabilities, enabling institutions to tap into high-quality professional development without the need to develop in-house programmes.

Shaping National Policy

As a network gains legitimacy, it becomes an influential voice in policy discussions. Through collaboration with key stakeholders, networks can advocate for national reforms in research and ensure that the perspectives of research management professionals are represented. Furthermore, they can contribute to the development of national roadmaps, evaluation frameworks, and research infrastructure strategies. Through these contributions, networks help bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that reforms are grounded in operational realities and that decision-making is informed by the experiences of the professionals in the field.

Contributing to Systemic Change

Beyond immediate institutional and policy impacts, a network can ultimately play a crucial role in driving broader systemic change. By advancing the professionalisation of research management, networks help to establish shared standards, ethical frameworks, and training benchmarks that support the field's long-term development. They also promote a cultural shift within institutions, highlighting the importance of support services and fostering more integrated approaches to research delivery. In doing so, networks not only strengthen the profession, but also contribute to building a more resilient and responsive research system.

08. Toolkit for New Associations

Checklist for Starting Out

- Identify motivated individuals
- Map national institutions and existing RM actors
- Choose a name, mission, and basic structure
- Launch initial communication channels (email, LinkedIn)
- Plan a kick-off event or online seminar
- Draft a non-binding vision or roadmap

Early Governance Framework

- Coordination group of 3-7 members
- Rotating tasks (events, comms, admin)
- Simple decision-making processes (consensus or majority vote)

Basic Legal Setup (for formal associations)

- Statutes or constitution
- Defined roles (Chair, Treasurer, Secretary)
- Bank account and fiscal registration
- Hosting institution or legal address

Engagement Tools

- Member surveys
- Thematic interest groups
- Online discussion space
- Newsletter or bulletin

Sustainability Planning

- Budget forecast and membership fee model
- Volunteer management plan
- External funding scan (EU projects, national grants)
- Leadership succession plan

09. Annex: Existing Models of RM Networks & Associations

Model 1: Informal Volunteer Network

- No legal status
- Operates through mailing lists, meetings, and shared events
- Relies entirely on member time and in-kind institutional support

Model 2: Legal Non-Profit Association

- Registered entity with bylaws and a bank account
- Elected board, membership fees, and external partnerships
- Applies for grants, contracts services, advocates nationally and internationally

Model 3: Government-Embedded Network

- Housed within a public body (e.g., regional funder)
- Coordinates working groups and events with public funding
- No legal entity needed, but limited autonomy

Model 4: Rotating Secretariat Network

- Hosted by member institutions on a fixed-term, rotational basis
- Shared costs and staffing responsibilities
- Balances long-term sustainability with institutional flexibility

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