

Digitalization challenge for the BioNanoTech Project Support Centre

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1. BioNanoTech Project - objectives and activities

The BioNanoTech project was submitted several years ago to a competition within the Structural Funds Program, competition dedicated to offer financial support in synergy with the Horizon 2020 program. One of the tasks of this call was to support the establishment of Support Centers able to provide information and consultancy for European and international projects. In this framework the BioNanoTech Project was submitted, accepted and started in April 2020. Within this competition a total of eleven projects were selected¹.

The aim of the BioNanoTech-Support Center is to improve Romania's participation in the Horizon 2020 and other European and international projects (ie. Horizon Europe program) in the fields: advanced ecomaterials, nanomaterials and biotechnologies - beneficiary focus in the NE region of Romania (research institutes, universities, innovative enterprises etc.).



To address its ambitious goal, the BioNanoTech Support project contains several specific objectives:

- O1. The administrative organization of a BioNanoTech-Support Centre for European projects.
- O2. To set up a national and international cooperation network that will improve the participation of institutions from the NE region of Romania in the European Union Research Framework Program (Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe);
- O3. To develop a web platform and a dedicated database to provide on-line support for beneficiaries from the NE region to design and implementation of research projects within the European Framework Program
- O4. Consultancy and support in making proposals and managing projects within the European Framework Program

These objectives are to be archived through a specific set of activities:

- Documentary and informational activities
- Support for proposals for RDI projects submitted to EU programs: (a) appropriated calls for specific ideas, (b) search for partners in the country and abroad, (c) eligibility verification, (d) proposal verification; (e) proposal submission in ECAS
- Dissemination of information for EU projects proposals *including the development of a dedicated web portal² able to become a long-lasting working tool for the Center*
- Administrative support for the management of financed projects

¹ <https://www.research.gov.ro/uploads/comunicare/comunicate/analiza-centre-suport2.pdf>

² www.bionanotech.ro



2. Digitalization challenge in Horizon Europe

As shown in the *2030 Digital Compass*³ Strategy, “one of the key lessons of the pandemic is that digitalisation can bring people together independently of where they are physically located. Digital infrastructure and rapid fast connectivity bring people new opportunities. Digitalisation can become a decisive enabler of rights and freedoms, allowing people to reach out beyond specific territories, social positions or community groups, and opening new possibilities to learn, have fun, work, explore and fulfil one’s ambitions. This will enable a society where geographical distance matters less, because people can work, learn, interact with public administrations, manage their finance and payments, make use of health care systems, automated transport systems, participate to democratic life, be entertained or meet and discuss with people anywhere in the EU, including in rural and remote areas.”

The Commission proposes setting up a Digital Compass to translate the EU’s digital ambitions for 2030 into concrete targets and to ensure that these objectives will be met. The first two cardinal points are focused on digital capacities in infrastructures and education & skills, and the other two are focused on digital transformation of business and public services.

The BioNanoTech portal addresses these goals directly and its Center is moving as much as possible to the online structure. Even if initially the development of the portal wasn’t the core of the project, pandemic experience has changed our perspective.

The transformation of BioNanoTech activities will depend on the ability to adopt new digital technologies rapidly and across the board. However, even if the team members have understood the need of digitalization of part of the Center activities, the end users are still distrustful of this change. Thus, the BioNanoTech has to face a new and unexpected challenge: to train the NE Romanian region end users (and not only) to face the digital challenges in Horizon Europe program

3. BioNanoTech digitalization challenge

One of the main tasks included in the workplan of the BioNanoTech project was the development of a web portal that can offer all services provided by the Centre in an on-line environment. The initial idea for this portal was that sometimes end users would prefer on-line contact to face to face contact. As such, the BioNanoTech team came up with this tool as a modality to attract more end users. The unexpected Coronavirus crisis has change the importance of this tool in the BioNanoTech project implementation and we are currently working to develop it as a central element of the project.

Aware of the role and importance of digitalization, the BioNanoTech team, in collaboration with the company S.C. Click Net Solutions S.R.L designed and created the project website and portal.

The specialized company’s contribution was of a great importance in:

- setting and configuring the database;
- the graphic development of the web interface (html, css, php, javascript)
- menu implementation.
- adding and formatting content to the section “General information,“ Expertise offer ”,“ Information about competitions ”,“ News and events ”,“ Procurement ”+ administration panel available to the procurement department,“ Contact ”;
- creating a customized interface.
- the technical maintenance of the website.

Among the services offered through the portal we list:

- Consulting services in identification of funding sources,
- Consulting services in drafting project proposals,
- Consulting services in project management,
- Partner search services.

³ 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade; COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS; COM(2021) 118; Brussels, 9.3.2021



With a single click, online, beneficiaries can access updated information about open competitions, as well as useful documents in drafting a project proposal: (a) O2020 COMPENDIUM – that contains a summary of main technical questions (financial, legal and HR related) received from our users and the reply offered by our team, (b) Horizon-europe-strategic-plan-2021-2024, (c) Horizon Europe Work Programs with short resume and open calls; (d) Romanian National Contact Points for Horizon Europe Program; (e) links to several partner search facilities; (f) links to several tools useful for project management etc.



The portal interface has also a private section where:

- The BioNanoTech team can access their mail and also modify/update content of several sections of the portal (ie Open Calls, New, Events etc)
- end users can register and directly contact our team in private chat room where they can directly discuss their project ideas – section under development

Finally, throughout development, the design of our portal should build on and seek collaboration with existing project related webpages and develop synergies with other relevant European, national or regional initiatives and platforms. All participants in European projects will need to adapt to the new trends in project management and will need to rely on digitalized solutions so it is vital to develop such tools that can provide working interfaces for collaboration. For instance: an important part of Horizon Europe is channelled through collaborative projects; it's very important to provide a guidance around the current ways available for participants to look for partners for their proposals. Although in the current social media & digital era, there are many channels available where suitable partners can be found to start research collaborations, the official support structures of Horizon Europe do also continue to provide this type of support to the special needs of Horizon Europe consortia. The members of the BioNanotech team are available to offer help in finding partners on official platforms (such as ECAS Funding and Tenders Portal⁴ or Enterprise Europe Network partner search tool⁵) and from other sources (brokerage events, training sessions, workshops, and periodic newsletters) and to support applicants in the preparation of their partner

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/partner-search>

⁵ <https://een.ec.europa.eu/partners>



profiles. The BioNanoTech portal offer links to several partner search facilities and also a section (section under development) were user can register and post their partners search profiles.

4. Conclusions

It has been widely recognized that the availability and fast upgrade of digital skills in Europe is vital for the future of the European economy. The EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) aims to finance projects that directly tackle the economic and social impact of the Coronavirus crisis and support the green and digital transition. Thus the development of IT solutions is vital for companies/projects and other initiatives that need to update their digital skills in order to be able to fully take stock of future opportunities arising from advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence, future networks and mixed reality nor will they resist on a market.

For us, the BioNanoTech portal now represents the first step to the future shape of the Center that needs to become more and more digitalized to coop with the European development trends.

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We look forward to having your questions and to guide you with proposal writing.

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