

EAIC SURVEY ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT

RESULTS

APRIL 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



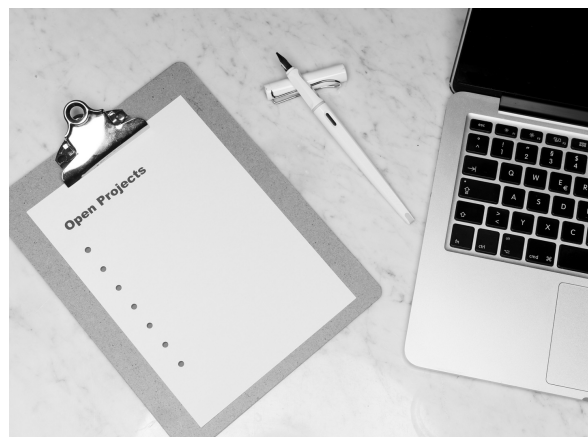
In October 2022, the European Association of Innovation Consultants (EAIC) launched a survey on project management-related aspects of EU-funded projects. The survey was open until December 2022 and received 64 responses, 12 of which were from coordinators. The results indicate that coordinators who have used a professional project management service are generally very satisfied with such a solution. Furthermore, it seems that by using professional project management, coordinator organisations could save 3–5 days a month. These companies need and use professional project management support more than RTOs and other public organisations that are likely to have dedicated project management teams with expertise and capacities in house. Organisations who have their own project management resources or capabilities were understandably most critical towards the added value of professional help. The survey respondents suggest further simplifying the financial and contractual rules and applying a standard reimbursement rate of 100% for management activities. In addition, they provide numerous insightful recommendations for successful project implementation and suggestions for the European Commission.

INTRODUCTION

In October 2022, the European Association of Innovation Consultants (EAIC) launched a survey on project management-related aspects of EU-funded projects. The present report introduces the survey, its objectives, targets, and results.

OBJECTIVES

The survey aim was to collect experience and insights from coordinators and consortia of ongoing or recently ended Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe projects, to assess the benefits of collaboration with professional project management organisations and identify potential areas of improvement with respect to project implementation processes.



The collected feedback, summarised in this report, provides insights into why a coordinator or consortium should consider help from professional project management organisations. It also helps European innovation professionals to be better prepared to support future EU project consortia. The results of the statistical and qualitative analysis of the data will also be used as part of the EAIC's broader goal of informing decision-makers on the role of innovation consultants and how current rules impede the full potential of their contribution.

METHODOLOGY

To ensure broad representation and homogeneity of potential responses, the coordinators of 300 EU projects invited to participate in this survey were first selected according to the following criteria:

- H2020 projects that started after 1 January 2019
- Total project budgets divided into three groups: <€5M (small), €5-12M (medium) and >€12M (large)

A list of 100 projects per budget category was then prepared with a balanced representation of the following secondary criteria:

- Coordinator EU zone (south, central, eastern, or north)
- Type of coordinator (Large Enterprise, Research Organisation, SME, Other)
- Consortium size (small <10 partners, medium 10-20 partners, large >20 partners)
- Topic
- Status: Closed/Ongoing
- Funding scheme (Research and Innovation Action/RIA, Innovation Action/IA, Coordination and Support Action/CSA)

The survey remained online for three months, and a total of 64 responses were received by the end of December 2022. While 33% of respondents indicated that they had received support from a professional project management organisation (for 70% of them, the professional project management organisation was involved either as a project partner or beneficiary), 67% indicated that they had not received such professional support.

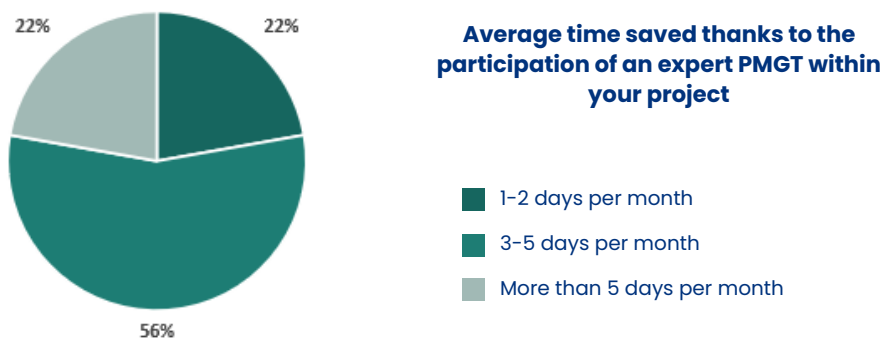
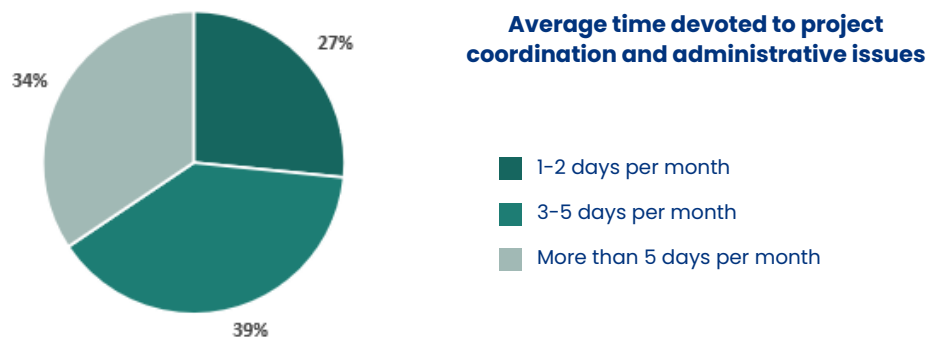
The analysis was carried out using the five key questions below as a common thread:

- **Key question 1:** How much time on average do researchers allocate to project coordination and administrative issues? How much time on average did they save due to the participation of a project management expert within their project?
- **Key question 2:** Do you think that a professional organisation specialised in the management of European R&D collaborations would have added value for the planning and execution of your project? And if yes, how exactly?
- **Key question 3:** Does the size of the consortium and/or the profile of the coordinator influence the decision to be accompanied by a professional project management organisation?
- **Key question 4:** What are the lessons learned from coordinators and beneficiaries to ensure the successful implementation of a collaborative project?
- **Key question 5:** What improvements would the coordinators and beneficiaries recommend that the EC bring to the project implementation process?

THE COORDINATOR'S WORKLOAD IS REDUCED REMARKABLY THANKS TO SUPPORT FROM A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION.

Key question 1 considered the work effort dedicated to coordination tasks. Survey respondents acknowledge that they devote a significant amount of time to project coordination and administrative issues, with responses divided into 1 to 2 days per month, 3 to 5 days per month or more than 5 days per month. The result reflects the average of projects of all sizes. Respondents that have received support from a professional project management organisation further estimated the average time saved thanks to the involvement of such organisations; for most (56%), the average time saved was between 3 to 5 days per month.

Saving coordinator time on management tasks offers several benefits: Firstly, the coordinator has more time to focus on leadership and technical issues. Secondly, some potential coordinator candidates may hesitate to take on the role due to the heavy workload expected. Hence, using professional project management services may allow new types of organisations to assume a coordinator role, which brings new skill sets and capabilities into the European RDI ecosystem.



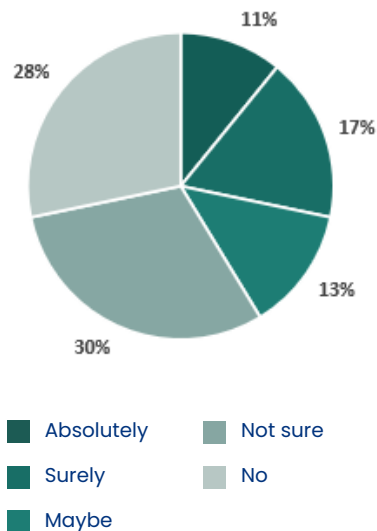
COORDINATORS WHO HAVE UTILISED PROFESSIONAL PROJECT MANAGER SUPPORT ARE CONVINCED OF ITS ADDED VALUE

Key question 2 considered the added value of professional project management services. Analysing the results, it is important to note that only some of the respondents were coordinators with real first-hand, practical experience on the role and contributions of professional support. The others were project partners, who naturally observe some of the PPM's work, but do not necessarily see all the work done in the background. This difference is also reflected in impressions of added value.

Coordinators who have used a professional project management service are generally very satisfied with such a solution: The average score is 4.5/5 (4 = very good and 5= excellent), and out of 12 respondents in this group, 11 selected a score of either 4 or 5. Even though the number of respondents is not very high, this provides a clear signal.

Looking at all the respondents collectively, 41% estimated that involving a professional project management organisation brought added value to the project (absolutely, surely, and maybe), while for 59% of the respondents, involving such organisations was not necessary or beneficial (not sure and no). However, 44% of the respondents that were not convinced about the added value indicated that they already have their own management capacities. Hence, a significant portion of the critical voices believe that they can (or want) to handle management tasks themselves, which is not exactly the same as criticism of the actual value of the professional's work.

Added value to involve professional project management organisation

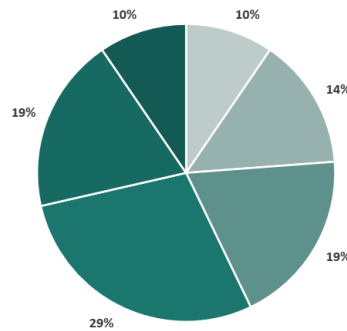


However, some reasons for hesitation relate to topics which professional organisations need to consider in providing their services. These include a potential lack of the necessary technical background, which could prevent understanding the big picture of the project, or the introduction of an extra layer of coordination and/or an overload of management tools, increasing efforts from the partner's point of view.

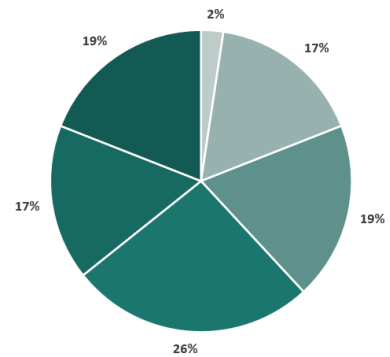
THE PRIVATE SECTOR NEEDS PROFESSIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT MORE THAN RTOS AND OTHER PUBLIC SECTOR PLAYERS

Key question 3 considered the impact of consortium size and type. The results indicate that consortium size did not significantly influence the decision to be accompanied by a professional project management organisation. This picture does not change when we focus only on coordinator responses – project sizes were rather evenly distributed. This might, however, reflect the respondents more than the actual real-life situation.

Size of the consortia accompanied by professional PMGT



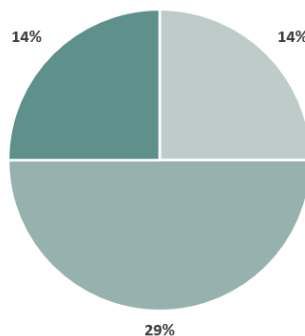
Size of the consortia not accompanied by professional PMGT



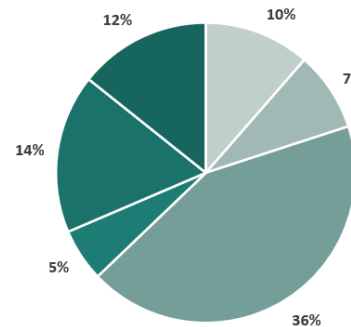
- Between 3-5 entities
- Between 6-10 entities
- Between 11-15 entities
- Between 16-20 entities
- Between 21-30 entities
- More than 31 entities

However, project coordinators from companies (large or SME) seem to favour involving professional project management organisations (29% and 14%) as opposed to RTO, NGO, public organisations, and universities. This result is not surprising, as RTOs are more likely to have relevant EU project-related in-house experience, expertise, and capacities (for instance, through specialised EU grant offices or units providing project management support).

Type of coordinating organisation accompanied by professional PMGT



Type of coordinating organisation not accompanied by professional PMGT



- Company - SME
- Company - Large
- Research Technological Organisation
- Non-governmental Organisation
- Public Organisation
- University

SUCCESSFUL PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRES FREQUENT INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND MONITORING, GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTISES, AND A FOCUS ON EXPLOITABILITY

Key question 4 concerned the lessons learned from coordinators and beneficiaries on ensuring the successful implementation of a collaborative project. The results can be summarised, classified, and ranked within five main categories:

First, **internal communication**: meetings should be frequent and adapted to the situation (bilateral meetings to discuss specific issues versus project meetings to share project results and some working sessions). Whenever possible, favour face-to-face meetings (at least twice a year) and get to know each other through team-building activities to strengthen trust and collaboration within the consortium. Internal communication is optimised when coming from one person/organisation and can be better implemented using specific mailing lists. Communication should take place between the coordinator, the partners, and the funding body. The coordinator should also communicate frequently with partners about the long-term project vision.

Second, **management support** is essential! Whether or not professional EU project management is outsourced, most respondents agreed that such support is necessary (see key question 2 above). Experienced project managers bring a clear management structure to the collaborative project and strongly support the project coordinator with the bureaucracy and administrative burdens that are usually associated with such projects.

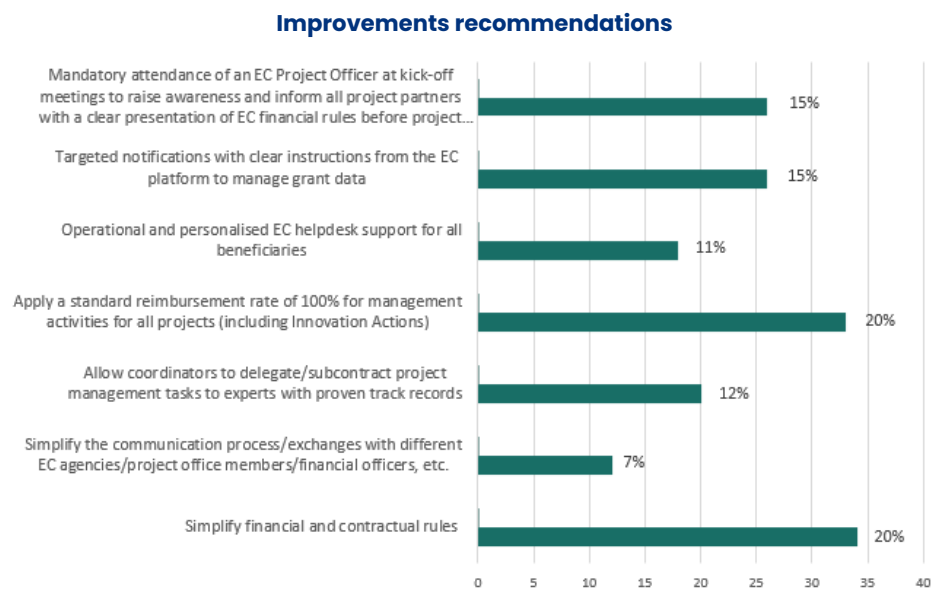
Third, **clear rules and guidelines** provide a strong framework for a consortium. A project handbook containing the rules, procedures, instructions, and main project information gives partners (and especially newcomers to EU grants) greater awareness of their responsibilities. Project coordinators should set good examples in being responsive and available to consortium partners.

Fourth, **monitoring and planning**: it is necessary to continuously monitor project risks, results, and costs to identify potential deviations from the initial project plan as early as possible. Contingency plans and measures to minimise the impact of these delays should be rapidly implemented, in agreement with the funding body. Strong forward planning, including alternative plans, is necessary to avoid project failures.

Fifth, **project success** is often measured according to results and their exploitation potential (i.e. the possibility to publish the results in scientific journals, provide open access to project data, or introduce a new product/technology to the market). This is possible if intellectual property management and exploitation plans are agreed early on in the project and if the partners remain open to introducing changes to the work plan so as to maximise the outcomes and impact of projects funded with public money.

THE RESPONDENTS PROVIDED INSIGHTFUL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Key question 5 explored potential recommendations for the EC. The survey respondents suggest further simplifying the financial and contractual rules, but also applying a standard reimbursement rate of 100% for management activities as was formerly the case in previous FP6 and FP7 Framework Programmes.



The respondents also provided many valuable recommendations such as:

- Avoid frequent and constant changes in Project Officers (POs) during the project lifetime: Changing POs may hinder the formation of a good research work overview.
- Explore the possibility of an EU Project Management Handbook/standard with a certification.
- Improve project monitoring with more frequent reviews and mandatory drafting of contingency plans, including improbable risks.
- Provide coaching opportunities and share best practices through dedicated events/initiatives and use national support desks as true alternative EU representatives.
- Strengthen collaboration with project coordinators who enjoyed successful project management in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe.

CONCLUSION

Even though this survey was available for only three months (October to December 2022), a total of 64 responses were submitted. 12 respondents were actual coordinators, while the others were project partners. Only 20% of the pre-selected EU projects accepted the invitation to complete the survey, which therefore makes it impossible to draw representational conclusions on current project management practices in European collaborative projects.



The coordinators who have used a professional project management service are generally very satisfied with this solution: The average score is 4.5/5 (4 = very good and 5= excellent), and out of 12 respondents in this group, 11 selected a score of either 4 or 5. On the other hand, respondents who indicated they have their own in-house project management resources or skills were understandably more hesitant about the added value of professional support.

Even though the number of respondents was not very high, this does provide a clear signal. Furthermore, by resorting to professional project management, coordinator organisations could save 3-5 days a month, and dedicate that time to planning and leading technical coordination, where their expertise is definitely needed. Thus, a project would be more likely achieve its goals and KPIs on time and with higher quality.

Based on the responses received via the EAIC survey, it seems that companies need and use professional project management support more than RTOs, NGOs and other public organisations that are likely to have dedicated teams with in-house expertise and capacities for this kind of work. This suggests that companies could undertake and volunteer to act as coordinators more often if professional project management organisations were available to reduce their workload. This, in turn, could introduce new views, skills and capabilities into the European RDI ecosystem.

To improve the project implementation process, survey respondents have also highlighted the possibility of further simplifying the financial and contractual rules or applying a standard reimbursement rate of 100% for management activities.

If you are interested in obtaining more information about the survey, please contact the European Association of Innovation Consultants at info@eaic.eu.

ABOUT THE EAIC

The European Association of Innovation Consultants (EAIC) brings together active innovation consultants in the field of European research and innovation projects. The association aims to facilitate the exchange and promotion of best practices, as well as to uphold professional skills and expertise in European RDI funding. To date, the group has assembled more than 50 members who are active throughout Europe.

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