

## Summary

---

### Administration of FNP grants

---

Marta Łazarowicz-Kowalik i Aleksandra Czerniawska

**Warsaw, grudzień 2017**



### Study

The study involved the administrative support received by FNP laureates (Measure 4.4 of the Smart Growth Operational Programme—SG OP) from the institutions where their grants were implemented. We are interested in how the administration of grants is organized and paid for, and whether laureates can count on real support in non-scientific aspects of carrying out grants. The study covered laureates of the programmes FIRST TEAM 1/2016 and 2/2016, HOMING 1/2016 and 2/2016, POWROTY/REINTEGRATION 1/2016 and 2/2016, TEAM 1/2016 and 2/2016, and TEAM TECH 1/2016 and 2/2016.<sup>1</sup>

A combination of two research methods was used. In the first stage, interviews were conducted with 18 randomly selected laureates of competitions. The information obtained in the interviews was used to construct a questionnaire survey which the other 56 laureates were invited to participate in. Responses were received from 30 of them (53.6%).

### Key conclusions

Practically all the laureates have appropriate working conditions and equipment provided by the institutions necessary to carry out their research project. A clear majority (87.0%) of them also believe that the means provided by FNP for administering the grant are appropriate.

---

<sup>1</sup> The study was conducted before the Foundation changed its status from Beneficiary to Implementing Authority for SG OP Measure 4.4, which resulted in grant recipients assuming the role of Beneficiaries, causing a significant change in the rules for administering projects.

Most of the respondents (56.7%) believe that FNP's requirements linked to grant administration do not constitute an excessive burden for grant recipient and the host institution. The opposite view was taken by 30.0% of the persons completing the questionnaire. Among the greatest difficulties mentioned were procedures connected with conducting tenders, purchasing, procuring services, and payments. Another problem area is recruitment, preparing employment contracts, and amounts of stipends and salaries. The laureates also complain about how time-consuming it is to prepare financial reports and about the difficulties in settling travel expenses.

Difficulties are felt particularly by younger scientists carrying out their first grants and having to deal for the first time with numerous aspects of grant administration. This can be a serious challenge if the institution lacks appropriately trained administrative personnel or if the institution has overly complicated internal rules adding to the amount of bureaucracy. In extreme instances, the problem becomes a conflict.

The most tension between the laureate and the institution (where the grant is implemented) involves the manner of applying indirect costs, i.e. the "lump sum". Under FNP's requirements, disposition of the lump sum is decided jointly by the laureate and the institution, who can finance with it both project tasks (e.g. travels) and costs of realization of the grant (e.g. maintenance of buildings and research infrastructure), as well as administrative and financial servicing of the grant. The Foundation gives free rein on this issue to the beneficiaries and the institutions employing them, which means that the division and manner of use of the lump sum is a matter of internal negotiations. Dissatisfaction with the manner of settlement of the lump sum was expressed by about half of the persons surveyed. The main reasons for dissatisfaction are problems with settlement for travel within the lump sum and situations where the institution claims too great a portion of the lump sum for costs of administering the grant which are not specified in any detail.

The assessment of grant administration by the host institution came out more positive, although 23.3% of the respondents claimed a negative assessment. Most of the institutions employ persons assisting grant recipients. In the case of administrative support, 73.3% of the respondents could count on the help of an employee of the institution, and in the case of financial aspects, 83.8%. To the greatest degree (90.0%) the respondents could count on support on tenders and public procurement. In about half of the cases where persons from the institution were involved in administering the grant, they assumed these tasks entirely.

Often the laureates themselves, or members of their team (e.g. an assistant), take part in administering the grants. Most often this involves administrative support (36.6% of the respondents) and tenders/public procurement (26.6%), and most rarely financial administration (16.6%). It sporadically happens that scientists are left to administer the grant themselves (10.0% for administrative tasks, none for financial administration, and 6.0% for tenders and public procurement).

Most often, staff administering grants are paid by the institution and the grant recipient does not bear any additional costs for this. A fairly common solution is to create a special administrative unit to handle grants (86.7% of respondents). Exactly half of them function at the level of the university or institution, and half at lower administrative levels, e.g. the faculty or institute.

Sometimes the person administering the grant is employed directly within the grant recipient's research team. The administrative services of such a person were used by 23.3% of the laureates, and for handling of finances and tenders/public procurement, 16.6%. Situations where the person handling administration of the grant is financed wholly or partly out of the grant itself are relatively rare. The view was expressed in the comments, however, that administrative services should be covered mandatorily by the indirect funds of the grant. The respondents felt that the quality of grant administration was not tied to the level of the indirect costs (and thus the grant). This means that the work devoted to this service is not appropriately valued.

There are situations where persons employed within the grant provide free of charge assistance to staff employed to administer grants (no more than 13.3% of cases across all categories of support). In the case of administrative tasks, in a small number of projects (13.3%), all of the work is performed free of charge by the director of the grant or other persons employed under the grant for other purposes.

Most of the respondents claim that the administration of the grant proceeded somewhat or very smoothly and efficiently, but this applied the most to finances (77.0%) and the least to tenders and public procurement (60.0%). More complaints were aired in the interviews, but it can be concluded from the quantitative data that serious difficulties are only a marginal occurrence. The main problem is associated with tender procedures.

Although some respondents attribute the effective administration of grants more to their determination than to the effectiveness of administrative staff, the competencies of the persons handling grants are rated quite high. With respect to each aspect of support (administrative, financial, and tenders/public procurement), over half of the respondents found that the employees' skills were "rather high" or "very high." Among the questions studied, the assessment of the competence of the administration fared the worst with respect to handling of foreigners, as 36% of the respondents thought that the university staff had shortcomings in this area.

Many laureates claim improvement in the quality of administration of grants in recent years, although many also do not see clear change. Particularly in the case of administration of tenders and public procurement, a change for the better was observed by only 17.0% of respondents.