

Lessons learned from experimental laboratory cross-border pharma project - irene-reporters.org

1. Choose carefully your research partners

In cross border research projects journalist teams are very closely working together during a very long time. The chain is as strong as the weakest link. It is not sufficient that team members do have enough research experience. Team members must also 'like' the collaboration. Mutual trust is a very important key message. Support by the team members in difficult times and being a 'soundboard' for each other is a big advantage of investigative teamwork.

2. Communication

Skype is an interesting tool to organise 'meetings'. It is important to discuss very regularly and profoundly working methods, timings, tools, interviews... in order to avoid misunderstandings.

3. Deadline problems

Even if you are collaborating in different countries it still remains important to simultaneously in the different countries get the 'news' out. Make clear arrangements about publication dates between team members. In this context monthly magazines are not so easy to include in a cross-border project.

4. Focus problems

Working in several countries at the same time can make research more complex. There is a risk to lose general helicopter overview. Now and then it is important to try and get overview as not to lose important aspects out of sight.

5. Personal agenda

It is important to discuss in detail when the team will plan time to research. Planning of individual holidays should be discussed. Try to reserve a lot of time in the months preceding the publication period.

6. Some tasks take more time in a cross-border project

To be able to divide interviews is time saving. However, some tasks are more time consuming. Writing clear reports in the working language of the team, for instance, if this is not your mother tongue. It is important to write clear reports consequently, so that team members know what has been discussed during the interviews.

7. Need for a detailed planning of tasks

It is important to schedule common interviews, so that they fit in the general timeframe. Also deadlines for exchange of semi-finished material that has been translated into English should be planned.

8. Working methods should be discussed beforehand

It is possible team members use different methods. Some prefer to use raw material and to write proper stories, others prefer to write stories together. However which methods to use should be discussed before starting with the project, as methods might have implications for the planning. Is everybody using line by line? Double checking data? What about mailing quotes before publication? Team work enables crosscheck!

9. Need for a central digital file that is easy to work with

Try to implement a central digital file in which all information – documents, mail addresses, telephone numbers, interviews – are being posted. There is need for a waterproof system using encryption – so that the information cannot be consulted by third parties. Such a central file can contain information about dates, which team member adds a point, what kind of document it is, what the source is (wobbed, open document etc), what the main content is, which language it is in, an interview or not, planned or already done, by whom, whether it's on or off the record, what are the main points, which language is it in and which format (my note pad, mp3, transcription), have the quotes been cross-checked with the source before publication etc.

10. Translations

Cross-border research never seems to be completely over. Translations of the finished articles are very crucial if you want to put your project online in an international context.

11. When collaborating cross-border in Europe, individual journalists are a lot stronger. Especially when research can appear in several European countries at the same time.

Multinationals for instance often use similar strategies in the countries they operate. Cross-border research makes uniform communication lines very clear.

12. It is interesting to use the FOI in different European countries at the same time. By doing this there is a bigger chance to get documents out. Especially when including Scandinavian countries such as Sweden or Denmark that have a long tradition of FOI.

13. By working cross-border the outcome of the research is much more solid. In the team journalists bring together a lot of experience. The stories can be based on interviews with top experts in different countries. Working together gives the possibility to divide the workload.

14. Funding and payments

Cross-border projects seem difficult without the financing of funds for investigative journalism, covering freelance costs and wobbing costs.