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[STAR]



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Executive Summary

STAR (Strategy for Allied Radioecology) is a Network of Excellence (NoE) in Radioecology funded under the EC's 7th framework. STAR is a consortium of nine partners from eight countries dedicated to strengthening the science of radioecology in Europe.

This document is a report of STAR's expenditure of its Flex Fund account of 159.5 k€. The primary purpose of the account is to bring new partners into the STAR consortium and 100 k€ was earmarked for an open competitive call for new partners to the NoE. The remaining amount (59.5 k€) was set aside for emergency allocations. The report covers the period from 1 February 2011 (when funding began) to 31 January 2014.

No flex funds have been used to date, but are anticipated to be allocated in April 2014 to a new STAR member that has been selected.

This document details the historical and convoluted process in which STAR has sought new partners. The process was convoluted because of the 2011 Great East-Japan Earth Quake and Tsunami that occurred on 11 March 2011 (just 39 days after STAR's official start), causing extensive damage and radioactive releases from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear complex. The radioactive releases changed STAR's strategy of acquiring a new member. STAR's funding agency, the EC, suggested that it would be appropriate for STAR to obtain a Japanese partner. Several attempts to bring a Japanese partner into the consortium are detailed in the historical perspective section of this report. The changing patterns of radioactive releases from the Fukushima Daiichi Complex resulted in prolonged contamination of the marine environment. The EC responded by stating that they wanted STAR to find a new partner to specifically conduct marine research related to the accident. The EC stated that the partner could be from any organization in the world. Thus, STAR initiated a call for proposals specific to marine research.

The call was open between 30 October and 18 December 2013. In total six proposals were received. According to STAR's Description of Work and Grant Agreement, STAR's External Advisory Board (EAB) provided an independent evaluation of the proposals based on EC criteria.

A consensus-decision-making meeting on the proposals was held by the EAB in Rovaniemi Finland, 15-16 January 2014, in parallel to STAR's 36-month progress meeting. The EAB ranked the proposals and made their recommendation.

The EAB presented their recommendation to STAR's Steering Committee (SC) on 16 January, 2014. The Steering Committee reviewed the proposals and concurred with the selection of the EAB.

A Call Summary Report was prepared and sent to the EC for approval. The report detailed the process of seeking a new member and presented the EAB and SC recommendations. The EC approved the Summary Report on 29 January 2014, and stated that STAR could proceed with the process of bringing the selected candidate into the STAR consortium.

Because this report is public, and the notification and approval process is still on-going, the candidate member is not identified herein.

STAR's coordinator will contact the successful proposers and a contract amendment procedure will be started with the new beneficiaries in accordance with the Grant Agreement. The Coordinator will also communicate to the other proposers whose proposals were not successful.

The intention is for the new partners to begin during May 2014 and for their research to be completed by the time that STAR's funding ends (July 2015).

Once the actual amount allocated to the new member is finalized, then STAR's Steering Committee will decide how best to spend the remaining flex funds. That meeting is anticipated in the summer of 2014.

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1. Introduction

STAR (Strategy for Allied Radioecology) is a Network of Excellence (NoE) in Radioecology funded under the EC's 7th framework. STAR is a consortium of nine partners from eight countries (IRSN-France; STUK-Finland; SCK•CEN -Belgium; NERC-UK; CIEMAT-Spain; Stockholm University-Sweden; BfS-Germany; NRPA-Norway; and University of Life Sciences-Norway) dedicated to strengthening the science of radioecology in Europe. The primary objective of STAR is to develop a sustainable, efficient, long-term integration of radioecology in Europe by (1) integrating a substantial part of STAR members' activities in radioecology, while pursuing research that was prioritized in our draft Strategic Research Agenda; and (2) by establishing a framework for transitioning STAR to a more sustainable, long-term integrated structure represented by the ALLIANCE platform. More details about the NoE can be found on the STAR website (www.star-radioecology.org).

This is a report of STAR's expenditure of its Flex Fund account of 159.5 k€. The primary purpose of the account is to bring new partners into the STAR consortium and 100 k€ was earmarked for an open competitive call for new partners to the NoE, or for subcontracts to third countries. The remaining amount (59.5 k€) was set aside for emergency allocations. **No flex funds have been used to date, but are anticipated to be allocated to a new STAR member in April 2014.**

2. Status of new partners

2.1 Historical perspective

In STAR's grant agreement with the EC, 100 k€ was allocated within a flexible fund account to bring a new partner into the STAR consortium. STAR intended to use a competitive call as a mechanism to enlarge the expertise of the consortium, and to enhance collaboration with the wider, international scientific communities. Proposals from the competitive call were to be evaluated by STAR's External Advisory Board, and the successful candidate was to have full rights within STAR, similar to the original nine members.

The 2011 Great East-Japan Earth Quake and Tsunami occurred on 11 March 2011 (just 39 days after STAR's official start), causing extensive damage and radioactive releases from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear complex. The radioactive releases changed STAR's strategy of

acquiring a new member. STAR's funding agency, the EC, suggested that it would be appropriate for STAR to obtain a Japanese partner.

STAR invited Japan's National Institute of Radiological Sciences (NIRS) to join the consortium on 9 May 2011. NIRS responded with positive enthusiasm to STAR's offer; however, they requested additional time to evaluate the proposition. Understandably, NIRS was extremely busy responding to the demands of the nuclear accident. In February 2012, NIRS notified STAR that they would not be able to fully respond to STAR's offer in a timely manner and that they would prefer to work with STAR via their representative (Dr. Satoshi Yoshida) on STAR's External Advisory Board.

In May, 2012, STAR invited Japan's Institute for Environmental Sciences (IES) to join the consortium. IES has a long history in radioecology and had recently joined the radiation biology consortium DoReMi, within the European MELODI low dose radiation platform. Thus, IES was a good candidate for promoting cross disciplinary collaboration. IES was also enthusiastic about STAR's offer. They, however, declined the proposition in October 2012, due to limitations of human resources within IES and the additional demands put on them from the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Then on 3 December 2012, STAR invited Fukushima University to join the consortium. Fukushima University expressed their interest on 5 December to join the STAR consortium. Their rapid and positive response was, in part, due to Fukushima University having already learned about the ALLIANCE and the European initiative in radioecology. Fukushima University was already a full collaborative partner within another radioecology proposal that had been submitted to the EC, called COMET¹. The **C**oordination and **i**mplementation of a pan-**E**uropean instrumen**T** for radioecology (COMET) was proposed to the EC as an additional transition consortium to further strengthen radioecology as STAR's funding period comes to an end in July 2015

The COMET proposal to the EC was accepted and COMET official started in June 2013. COMET is coordinated by SCK-CEN in Belgium, via Hildegard Vandenhove. The COMET

¹ COMET will strengthen the pan-European research initiative on the impact of radiation on man and the environment by facilitating the integration of radioecological research. COMET will build upon the foundations laid by the European Radioecology Alliance (ALLIANCE) and the STAR Network of Excellence in radioecology. By collaborating with the European platforms on nuclear and radiological emergency response (NERIS) and low dose risk research (MELODI), COMET will significantly aid preparation for the implementation of the Horizon 2020 umbrella structure for Radiation Protection.

consortium expands the organisations of STAR and the ALLIANCE by linking with countries that have experienced major nuclear accidents (i.e. former Soviet Union states and Japan), and by forming links with European platforms concerned with radiation biology and radiological emergency response.

Like the other two Japanese laboratories that STAR approached, Fukushima University is extremely busy dealing with various aspects of the accident, and has only a limited amount of time that it can devote to a European consortium. Fukushima University was not in a position to contribute to the research of STAR. An international conference hosted by Fukushima University was proposed as a way of using the EC funding efficiently to the benefit of the European community as well as Japan. The plans also called for Fukushima University to add their perspective to the Strategic Research Agenda that STAR is preparing. STAR was working with Fukushima University in developing budgets and milestones for their transition into the STAR consortium when the EC notified STAR that workshops were not their preferred mechanism for using EC funds and that a new member to STAR would be required to conduct research.

By this time, COMET was fully operational, with Fukushima University as a full member. STAR's management team decided that bringing Fukushima University into STAR was now redundant with COMET, and would be a waste of time and a duplication of effort. Fukushima University's role in COMET fulfils the EC's request to have a Japanese partner within a European Radioecology Network.

The EC agreed, and suggested that STAR bring a European partner into the Consortium. The EC suggested that the partner should come from a "new member state" and even suggested a specific laboratory. STAR's management team discussed this and decided that they preferred an open-call for proposals, rather than inviting a specific, single laboratory. Discussions were held with the STAR Management team in Tromsø, Norway as to the feasibility, logistics, and tasks that a new member might work on. A path forward was agreed upon, with the intention that the Coordinator calls the EC to confirm that an open call, as stated in our original grant agreement, was ok.

The EC responded again by stating that they wanted STAR to find a new partner to specifically conduct marine research related to the accident. The EC stated that the partner could be from any organization in the world.

Thus, STAR initiated a call for proposals specific to marine research.

2.2 Call announcement

STAR's call for a new partner was initiated on 30 October 2013. Briefly the call was for:

“MARINE RADIOECOLOGY RESEARCH

Request:

This call for research proposals is aimed at addressing current issues on any human or environmental aspect of marine radioecology following the 2011 Great Earth Quake and Tsunami.

The proposal must:

- *show the importance and relevance of the proposed research to human or environmental aspects of marine radioecology following the 2011 Great East-Japan Earth Quake and Tsunami.*
- *demonstrate your accessibility to any needed data held by other parties (e.g., a modeling proposal might need access to data collected by a Japanese governmental agency), or access to appropriate field sites pertinent to the proposal.*
- *demonstrate a work-plan compatible with a funding period of approximately 15 months.”*

The call for proposals was placed on STAR's website (www.star-radioecology.org) and, per EC rules, advertised in several newspapers (the *Guardian* in the UK; *Die Zeit* in Germany; and a Finnish national newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*), as well as in the scientific journal *Nature*. Additionally, the call was emailed to many laboratories the world-over that specialize in oceanography and marine radioactivity.

While the call was open, STUK provided an administrative Help Desk for proposers.

2.3 Call closure and receipt of the proposals

The call was closed on 18 December 2013 at 17:00 Brussels time. In total, six proposals were received (**TABLE 1**).

TABLE 1: Proposals to the STAR Consortium listed by numbers, acronyms, titles, participants and residence

Proposal No	Proposal acronym	Proposal title	Lead organisation and participants	Countries
1	RERAN	Remobilisation of radionuclides from marine sediments contaminated by Fukushima releases	1. Universidad de Sevilla (USEV) 2. Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI)	1. Spain 2. Republic of Korea
2	FORWARD	Dynamics of radiocesium from contaminated sediments to biota; laboratory, field and model analyses	1. Research Foundation for SUNY 2. <i>(Tokyo University, UT)*</i>	1. USA 2. Japan
3	TLDA	Testing the lognormal distribution assumption	Oregon State University (OSU)	1. USA
4	FATE	Unraveling the sources and fate of radionuclides from the Fukushima Dai-ichi NPP into the ocean	1. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) 2. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) 3. <i>(University of Tokyo; UT)*</i>	1. Spain 2. USA 3. Japan
5	LORAFU	Long-term radiological assessment on the release of radioactivity in the ocean due to the Fukushima Dai-ichi accident	1. Ukrainian Center of Environmental and Water Projects (UCEWP) 2. Institute of Environmental Radioactivity of Fukushima University (IER)	1. Ukraine 2. Japan
6	BACKUPS	Bioaccumulation of cesium: Kinetic study to understand transfer processes in seafood	UMR 7266 LIENSs, Université La Rochelle - CNRS	1. France
			<i>*(presented as an unfunded partner)</i>	

The call administrators confirmed the receipt of all proposals. The confirmation emphasized that the receipt did not indicate that the proposal was eligible, it simply confirmed that the printable proposal was received. After the proposals had been organised and provided to the EAB, all proposers were informed that their proposal was now under evaluation.

1.1 Evaluation process

According to STAR's Description of Work and Grant Agreement, STAR's External Advisory Board (EAB: Dick Roelofs; Mikhail Balonov; Satoshi Yoshida; Valery Forbes; Rick Jones, and Nina Cedergreen) provided an independent evaluation of the proposals, based on the EC criterion in **TABLE 2**.

TABLE 2. Criteria used for evaluating the proposals.

1. Scientific and/or technological excellence (relevant to the topics addressed by the call)	2. Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management	3. The potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results
<i>Sub-criteria</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Soundness of concept, and quality of objectives - Progress beyond the state-of-the-art - Quality and effectiveness of the S/T methodology and associated work plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures - Quality and relevant experience of the individual participants - Quality of the consortium as a whole; including complementarity, balance(if appropriate) - Appropriateness of the allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (budget, staff, equipment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribution, at the European [and/or international level], to the expected impacts listed in the work programme under relevant topic/activity - Appropriateness of measures for the dissemination and/or exploitation of project results, and management of intellectual property.

Each criterion was given up to a maximum of 5 points. Half marks could be given. The points were determined based on the following scoring system:

- 0 - The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information

- 1 - Poor. The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- 2 - Fair. While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
- 3 - Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.
- 4 - Very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
- 5 - Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

1.2 Candidate member selected

A consensus-decision-making meeting on the proposals was held by the EAB in Rovaniemi Finland, 15-16 January 2014, in parallel to STAR's 36-month progress meeting. The EAB ranked the proposals and made their recommendation.

The EAB presented their recommendation to STAR's Steering Committee on 16 January, 2014. The Steering Committee reviewed the proposals and concurred with the selection of the EAB.

A Call Summary Report was prepared and sent to the EC for approval. The report detailed the process of seeking a new member and presented the EAB and SC recommendations. The EC approved the Summary Report on 29 January 2014, and stated that STAR could proceed with the process of bringing the selected candidate into the STAR consortium.

Because this report is public, and the notification and approval process is still on-going, the candidate member is not identified herein.

2. Next steps

STAR's coordinator will contact the successful proposers and a contract amendment procedure will be started with the new beneficiaries in accordance with the Grant Agreement. The Coordinator will also communicate to the other proposers whose proposals were not successful, and will enclose an unsigned version of the EAB's summary evaluation report of their proposal. **The intention is for the new partners to begin during May 2014 and for their research to be completed by the time that STAR's funding ends (July 2015).**

Once the actual amount allocated to the new member is finalized, then STAR's Steering Committee will decide how best to spend the remaining flex funds. That meeting is anticipated in the summer of 2014.