

## Seven Steps to Establishing a Sustainable Scientific Diaspora Network

Mobile researchers are afforded unique opportunities in the experience of not only engaging international scientific landscapes, but essentially becoming a bridge connecting both host and home countries. They endure an equally unique set of challenges, best tackled in alliance with those who have or continue to experience the same. While there is not one single way to establishing a diaspora network, whether you are looking to connect with fellow researchers from your country or discipline (or both), there are 7 starting steps to building a sustainable scientific diaspora network.

*\*\*EURAXESS worldwide hubs, their representatives and their vast network of scientific excellence can help connect you to experienced facilitators as well as other diaspora networks to exchange best practices, tips and tricks \*\**



### **Why establish a scientific diaspora network?**

- Influence policymaking affecting you as a mobile researcher as well as your scientific discipline.
- Consult on research collaboration initiatives between your host and home countries.
- Access resources and extended networks of members and allies.
- Promote your work on multiple national and international platforms.
- Extend your expertise to help newly arriving researchers navigate the new geographic and research landscapes.
- Sense of community.

In the face of global and societal challenges from climate change to extremism in all its faces, there is a demand for building bridges, collaborating and finding solutions. There is a demand, more than ever before, to activating the collective mindset. This piece is the outcome of our combined experience of over 25 years of building networks to, for and by mobile researchers and professionals. It is in response to the evidently growing interest by governments, institutions and researchers alike to leverage the profound potential of scientific diasporas. While these steps are applicable to national, regional or thematic scientific diaspora this article focuses primarily on establishing a national or regional scientific diaspora.

In 2013, the year of the official launch of EURAXESS Worldwide (then EURAXESS Links), William J. Burns, US Deputy Secretary of State at the time, wrote a perspective article on “The Potential of Science Diasporas”. He asserted that at time of writing, though some would certainly argue that this remains a valid assertion, that “the two most powerful currents in today’s international landscape present important opportunities for American Diplomacy: the unrelenting advancement of scientific knowledge and innovation, and the ever-thickening web of connections that brings diaspora communities and their homelands closer together.”

Indeed, the European Commission continues to heavily invest in the advancement and promotion of mobile researchers and their development. Similarly, China and India devise specific policies to both engage and empower their diasporas to establish a constant exchange of knowledge and experience between host and home countries. In short, as a mobile researcher you are an asset and there is no need for you to face challenges alone. Build and they will come. But where do you start?

### **DO YOUR RESEARCH**

Building a network from scratch is not an easy task. As a researcher, you have the tools you need to adequately prepare yourself to the task and magnitude of work it takes to bringing people together. Here are a few questions to ask:

- *How many researchers from your country are in your institute, your city, your host country? Are there any pre-established networks?*
- *Is there a platform where someone raised similar concerns to you as a mobile researcher or expressed interest in a network?*
- *What are the trends of scientific collaboration between your host and home country?*
- *What is the rate of academic/scientific exchange? Are there any policies aimed at increasing this?*

These questions will help lay the ground work for identifying the potential venues your network can leverage to fill the gaps in the support system you need as a mobile researcher. Seek other diaspora network members and leaders in your area, compare and contrast best practices and challenges faced by them to better prepare you in your trajectory. Go to their events, follow them on social media, sign up to their newsletters (yes even if your mailbox does not need another -unsubscribing is but a click away).

### **REACH OUT TO YOUR EMBASSY**

Most embassies do not have a designated science, technology and innovation counsellor, let alone office. This does not necessarily reflect a government's interest, eagerness and various attempts of mapping its researchers abroad. To the contrary, it is our experience that embassies without a designated liaison to their researchers eagerly welcome researchers wanting to champion the effort of building such a network. The support from the embassy does not need to be (and indeed most times is not) financial, it can take many forms including but not limited to:

- *Connecting you to other researchers who may have expressed similar interests;*
- *Facilitating introductions to leading experts in your field in both host and home countries;*
- *Promote your work and research achievements not only in your host country but also at home or simply providing a meeting space.*

There is of course the chance that there is absolutely no capacity for any form of support, your embassy can liaise with embassies of neighbouring countries to explore the possibility of establishing a regional diaspora network until you've rallied more allies for a national one. If nothing else, meet to state your intent and extend an open invitation to explore building a mutually beneficial rapport.

### **IDENTIFY THE CO-CREATORS**

Rewarding as it may be, building and maintaining a sustainable network while working a full-time job, trying to publish, staying healthy and perhaps squeezing some form of social life if you date, can be a daunting business.

**DISCLAIMER: DO NOT DO THIS ALONE. THERE IS POWER IN NUMBERS.**

Reach out to your personal networks and institutions from your home country and ask to be connected to researchers in your host country. For ever-changing privacy reasons, this may not be feasible but it may be

*"The US has the largest number of European researchers outside of Europe. The most active and dynamic European Scientific Diaspora networks in North America are those supported and working directly with their embassy. In some cases, there is even a noticeable shift in the activity level of the diaspora around the time of transition of Science Counselors."*

– Viktoria Bodnarova

#### **This is HOW we did it!**

Link to all the Reports of the European Scientific Diasporas in North America Annual Meetings:

[1<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting \(2015\)](#)

[2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting \(2016\)](#)

[3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting \(2017\)](#)

[4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting \(2018\)](#)

possible to circulate information you provide so be prepared with an email calling on researchers interested in establishing this network to connect with you.

Find platforms that work with and focus on research career developments and ask for your call on researchers to be circulated. For European researchers abroad, for example, EURAXESS Worldwide is an excellent asset in facilitating these introductions and connections to build a stronger community of mobile researchers. On the EURAXESS North America portal, there is a tab dedicated to European scientific diaspora networks including their news, upcoming events and opportunities and the reports of the annual meetings of European Scientific Diasporas in North America with ample insights on this topic.

### **STRATEGIZE. STRATEGIZE. STRATEGIZE.**

This cannot be emphasized enough. How one lays the foundation influences not only the trajectory but ultimately their capacity to see it through to completion. It is imperative for your newly identified working group to be on the same page:

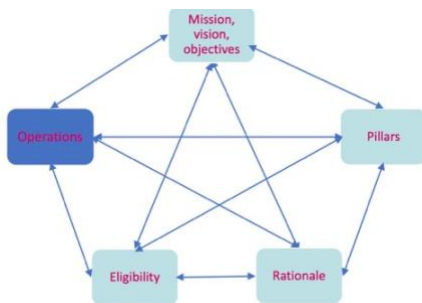


Illustration by FUTOUR

- *Why do you want to establish this network?*
- *Who are you benefiting by this network? How are you benefiting?*
- *What challenges will you address as a network? What or who might stop/constrain you from establishing a sustainable network?*
- *Why is it have a structure? Wat will this structure look like?*
- *How would the network operate? What kind of programs would it offer? How will you finance them?*

Create a one pager with your mission, vision, objectives, pillars, rationale for your network, eligibility. This will be used to announce, recruit and build alliances.

### **FIND YOUR ALLIES**

After much deliberation on the order of this particular step, it is very strategically placed here. It is later in the steps because what we call the “establishrush<sup>1</sup>” will keep one going to a certain point, until the line between passion project and job gets blurred. This effort, or at least starting it, is almost always entirely volunteer work, which is taxing, trying and tiring. The moment the core group of visionaries behind the network, lose their rush: *Things. Will. Falter.*

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<sup>1</sup> The excitement fuelled momentum of establishing something new.

Finding allies helps you maintain momentum and sustain the inevitable challenges and nuances of bringing different personalities and varying need and expertise together. Science-based NGOs, research institutions in host and home countries, funding agencies, programs and experts in Science Diplomacy are all potential allies. Another very important ally is a bracket of the research diaspora communities that often falls through the cracks: the undergraduates. Often looking to build their profile and gain experience, if engaged early they can contribute to administrative, logistic, creative and research tasks.

### **GO LIVE**

In the digital age of insta-tools and social media, there is no need for an official “launch” ceremony. Release your one pager tagging personal and professional networks, research institutions with higher numbers of your target audience and allies announcing that your network is ready to welcome new members.

### **GROW**

There is little to no argument on how scientific diasporas directly contribute to the advancement of both home and host countries: the larger the collective, the more prominent the impact. How does a new, young and probably un/ill-funded grow? By animating synergies through partnerships with alumni networks from home countries and diasporas in neighbouring countries. Here too the forgotten undergraduates can play a vital role. More established researchers have a responsibility to engage, encourage and empower younger and early career researchers. This can be as simple as starting chapters in their respective universities and arranging a series of talks by the more advanced researchers in the network allowing for personal growth through intergenerational collaboration, professional growth whether through the experiences of organizing these events as undergraduates or speaking at them as more established research, as well as the growth of the network and its reach.

*“There is no single formula to establishing and operating a scientific diaspora. There may be some guidelines but ultimately it is a bottom up effort that is custom made to fit mission, vision, objectives, culture, trends, politics and many other things including - of course - the price tag. Don’t let it be your sanity”*

– Dimah Mahmoud, Ph.D.