News from Editing Societies

NECOBELAC, a European project to promote the diffusion of scientific information in public health

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NECOBELAC – Network of Collaboration Between Europe, Latin American and Caribbean Countries, www.necobelac.eu – is a three-year project started on 1 February 2009 and funded by the European Commission within the 7th Framework Program. It aims at enhancing the production and dissemination of quality scientific information in the field of public health and focuses on two main objectives: the promotion of training initiatives intended to improve the scientific writing skills of all professionals working in the health-related areas, and the implementation of scholarly communication systems based on the concept of immediate, open, and permanent access to research results. The six partners are represented by academic and scientific institutions from Italy (project coordinator), UK, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and Colombia; they have gained sound experience in providing information services and outputs through networked initiatives. The project intends to raise awareness on shared principles of good practice among all stakeholders (authors, editors, publishers, information professionals, funding agencies, institutions, learning societies) of the scientific information chain and to promote a cultural change in the information production and dissemination process.

Project motivations and ideas

Since 2006, the descriptions of all scientific works published by ISS (about 1600 publications including contributions on ISS serials) have been accessible online through DSpace ISS (http://dspace.iss.it/dspace), the institutional repository, which complies with open access (OA) principles. It holds more than 25,000 items and is a focal point for the scientific papers produced by Italian research institutions in the biomedical area.

All NECOBELAC partners play a significant role within the OA community at both national and international level. Their shared opinions on OA strategies strongly enhanced the NECOBELAC partnership. Several project partners and supporters are members of EASE (European Association of Science Editors) and guarantee full and professional awareness of editorial issues from both technical and ethical points of view; other partners are actively involved in the main networks created for scientific information dissemination both in Europe and Latin America (SHERPA, www.sherpa.ac.uk; DRIVER, www.driver-repository.eu; SciELO, www.scielo.br/; Virtual Health Library, www.virtualhealthlibrary.org). They have common expectations towards the idea of integrating the existing initiatives in health information services, such as those provided by the National Library of Medicine in the framework of the Medline system. Their collaboration is also oriented towards a democratization of knowledge, particularly in the field of public health.

The project's design envisages an evaluation of the single phases of the project by a subcontractor party involved as consultant within similar international initiatives.

Project characteristics

One of the key elements of the NECOBELAC project is facilitating cultural change in the production and dissemination of scientific information, not merely changing infrastructures. The project's main aim is to promote a bidirectional exchange between Europe and Latin America/Caribbean countries, to overcome the Eurocentric perspective of a unidirectional transfer of information and training activities towards Latin America.

The wealth and variety of the informative resources available in the two continents will be of benefit to all the countries that are involved and promote new collaborative research activities.

European partners, particularly the University of Nottingham (United Kingdom) and the Universidade do Minho (Portugal), have been leaders in the Open Access community in Europe. The Centro Latino Americano e do

NECOBELAC partners

Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS), Italy; Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), Spain; University of Nottingham (UNOTT), United Kingdom; BIREME, PAHO, Brazil; Instituto de Salud Pública (ISP), Colombia; Universidade do Minho (UMINHO), Portugal.

Key Perspectives Ltd, United Kingdom, and Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain, are respectively subcontractors and third party within WP2 and WP4.

Caribe de Informaçao em Ciencias da Saude, BIREME, PAHO, the Brazilian partner (a PAHO specialized centre), has expertise in the management of online scientific information services.

NECOBELAC is unique among OA initiatives in focusing on public health. This will provide a well-focused operative strategy able to meet the specific information and training needs in this domain.

Project activities

The NECOBELAC project foresees the creation of a network of institutions collaborating to implement a training plan on scientific writing and on the spread of the Open Access movement to research outputs.

The first phase of the project is to implement a prototype flexible training course for teaching staff in European, Latin American, and Caribbean countries. It will be adapted to train authors of scientific publications at a local level, according to the specific needs of the different institutions participating in the network. The project's website (www.necobelac.eu) will facilitate the communication and availability of the training initiatives.

The project is split up into seven work packages (see box), to which all partners contribute, to ensure awareness and collaboration during the different phases of the project.

Work packages in the NECOBELAC project

WP1 – Project Management (ISS) – Implementation and administrative aspects of the project management directly associated with WPs development and "rules and procedures" to be followed by project management.

WP2 – Project Strategy and Impact Assessment (ISS) – Definition of appropriate strategies and networking EU-LAC within a shared operational plan, as well as assessing the impact of the project activities as a whole.

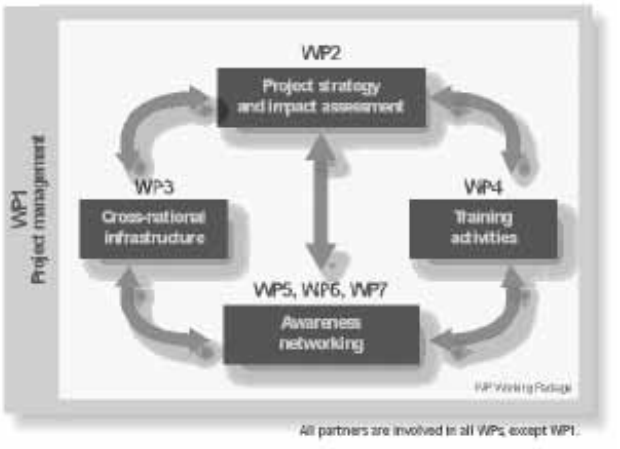
WP3 – Cross-National Advocacy Infrastructure (University of Nottingham) – Development of a cross-national advocacy infrastructure including a website for all stakeholders within the network EU-LAC countries.

WP4 – Training Activities (CSIC) – Organization of training activities for trainers to spread know-how in health information production, dissemination and use in EU-LAC countries.

WP5 – Promoting the Project Infrastructure to Guarantee its Usage in EU-LAC Countries (UMINHO) – Development of the most appropriate actions so that the new infrastructure is fully utilized in EU-LAC countries and training activities fully developed.

WP6 – Networking EU-LAC Countries (BIREME) – Stimulation of the production of information tools and infrastructures on ongoing health activities in LAC and EU countries.

WP7 – Focus on Health-Related structures in LAC Countries (ISP) – Creation of awareness and collaboration among health-related structures in LAC countries to further increase the impact of the project.



A core element of the work packages is networking. The joint efforts of all partners and their background of experiences represent an investment aimed at launching and stimulating new collaborative research activities.

Project activities are closely connected, and will be performed simultaneously (see figure). The shared operative strategy, the constant evaluation of its impact (WP2), together with the web infrastructure (WP3) and the training activities (WP4), are integrated with the tasks of WP5, WP6 and WP7, which are intended to create awareness of the importance of networking institutions to achieve the project goals.

The project benefits from the collaboration of Key Perspectives Ltd (UK) in the evaluation of activities (WP2) and relies on the experience of the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (Spain) for the training initiatives (WP4). It will include an external evaluation panel of experts on scientific writing and OA communication models.

Expected achievements

The duration of the project is three years; its results will include activity reports, training course prototypes, online and residential training courses, production of teaching materials, and pilot programmes for the implementation of digital archives that are OA compliant.

A grid of indicators will facilitate collection of all the information relevant to the capacity of each partner to produce scientific publications in public health and to disseminate them through the internet. This will allow monitoring of progress in terms of training courses performed, number and type of scientific publications issued and posted onto institutional repositories, free access to online journals, and establishments of new collaborations, etc.

The project will promote the launch of new international collaborations through training programs on scientific writing and OA models and through a network of health institutions that will continue to work towards common goals even after the conclusion of the project. The ultimate objective is the long-term use of the materials and services provided by NECOBELAC in the framework of an increasing cooperation between Europe and Latin America for the progress of scientific culture. The project has promoted the collaboration of FAO with regard to applying the training programmes in other geographical areas.