



Name: Nicolas Van Oostende, PhD

Position: Project Adviser - Scientific Officer

Affiliation: European Research Council (ERC)
Executive Agency

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Pronouns: He/Him

Please briefly describe your current role in your position

Support the execution of calls for proposals, evaluation and selection of proposals, monitor and follow-up funded projects.

What is your terminal and/or current position in academia?

co-PI

How did you hear about your current position? Was it a career option that you were aware about during your educational process?

When in Brussels ... I was browsing the EU job market after my return to Belgium from the US. I always wanted to gain experience at an institutional job. I only became curious about this career option once I started applying for funding my research and noticed many of these organisations employed scientists.

How did you end up working at your current affiliation?

The ERC had advertised a Scientific Officer position on the EPSO website, and after passing several tests and interviews I was awarded the job owing to my particular expertise and profile.

How long have you been working at your current affiliation?

1+ years

What type of position is your current job?

Hybrid (Remote & In-Person)

Is your role more a managerial or individual contributor role?

Individual Contributor

What are the defined roles of your position?

To contribute to the definition, co-ordination and execution of calls for proposals, evaluation and selection of proposals, by the European Research Council, in line with the unit's mission and objectives. To monitor and follow-up funded projects and to analyse the research covered by the current portfolio of funded projects.

What are your day to day tasks that you perform in your position?

The tasks vary from answering questions from grantees, monitoring the scientific progress of projects from the Environmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution panel, contacting external reviewers, supporting the panel chair in the proposal evaluation process and panel meeting logistics, to leading the occasional ERC workshop at international scientific conferences.



What do you like best about your job?

Organising the panel meetings is when I get to meet world class scientists and hear about the exciting research applicants are proposing. I feel privileged to learn about how excellent scientists are pushing the boundaries of science before it even happened.

What do you dislike about your job?

Chasing external reviewers. Their expertise is essential to evaluating specific aspects of the diverse proposals the agency receives, but these experts are hard to get. I assume journal editors might relate to this issue.

If your job is outside of academia, what is similar and what is different about your current job and your terminal position in academia?

I am still immersed into science on a daily basis, but I have not touched a Niskin bottle in a while!

How did your microbial ecology education prepare you for your current position?

The broad expertise in environmental life sciences and biogeochemistry I gained along the way greatly facilitates project monitoring and communication with the panel members and the grantees.

What skills do you wish you learned during your educational process that would better prepare you for your current role (e.g. machine learning, management skills, etc.)?

Project management and writing skills are not typically offered in scientific curricula, but I picked up these skills along my career path.

Do you have any recommendation and/or tips for early career microbial ecologists looking for jobs similar to yours?

Yes. Come and talk to funding agency Scientific Officers next time you see one at a conference. And, more generally, move out of your comfort zone, apply and give it a try!

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