

How to manage international research

- examples from NIVA -



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Note:

This presentation is part of a course that has been given in October 2023 in Belgrade. To avoid any potential issues with respect to copyright, however, the version which is publicly available has been modified. Specifically, some illustrations were removed.

For this reason, layout and design may appear somewhat “empty”.
The course content has not been changed, however.

An aerial photograph of a rocky coastline. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, contrasting with the dark blue of the open sea. Large, layered rock formations are visible, some covered in brownish seaweed. A thin line with a red buoy extends from the left side of the frame towards the rocks.

NIVA

Norwegian Institute for Water Research

Who are we?

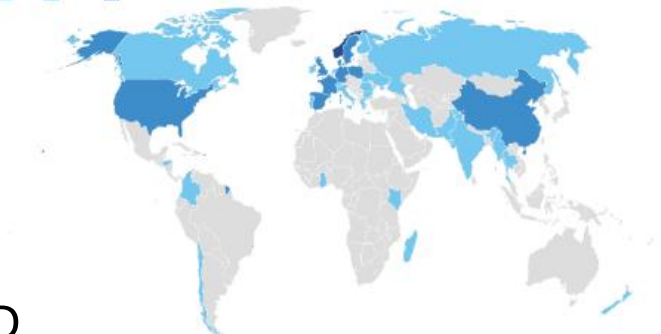
We do research with water in Norway and abroad



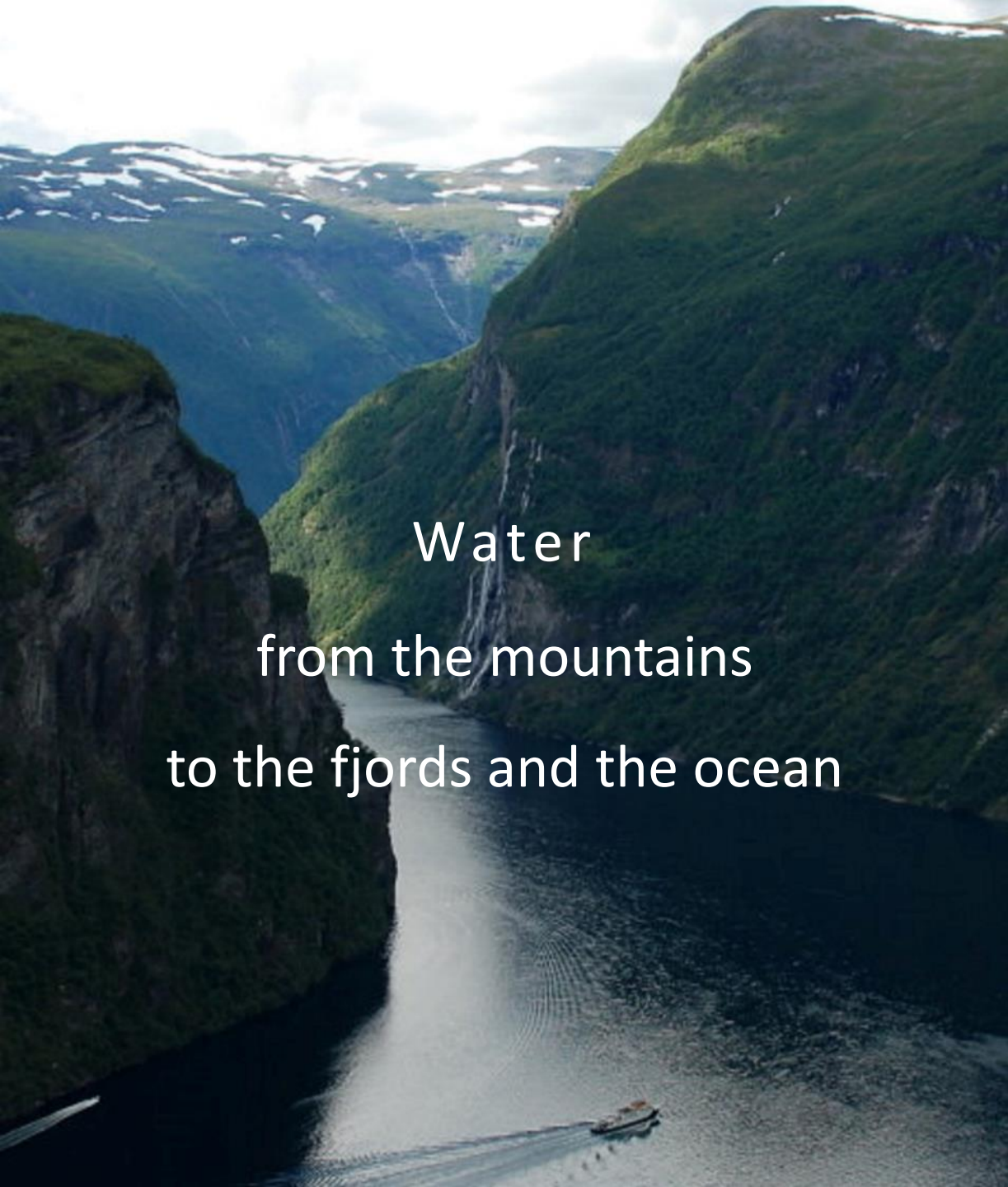
Who are we?

- NIVA is Norway's leading environmental research institute for the aquatic environment (freshwater and marine).
- Research Institute, established in 1958, **private foundation => we must raise our own salary!**
- “Headquarters” in Oslo
- NIVA Group has ~ **450 employees**, ~ 40 nationalities, > 40 % international
 - > 300 at NIVA
 - About 150 in Akvaplan-NIVA, Denmark, Chile, China
- > 40% of employees with a PhD

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NIVA



Water
from the mountains
to the fjords and the ocean

What do we do?

Research for a sustainable future

- High quality and relevant research
- Solving societal challenges related to the aquatic environment
- Sustainable development with a holistic perspective on climate and environment
- Expertise in aquatic ecosystems - freshwater and marine
- Interdisciplinary focus on the interaction between water, environment and society



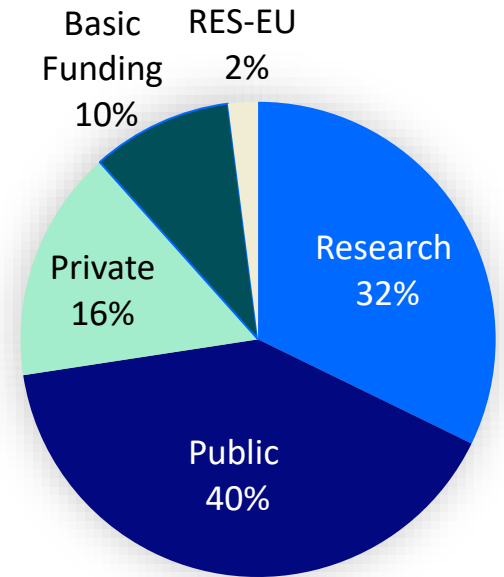
How do we fund ourselves?

Private sector 16 %

Industry	7 %
Aquaculture	3 %
Other	6 %

Public sector 40 %

Environment Agency/Ministry	27 %
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	4 %
Other	9 %



Research 32 %

RCN	21 %
EU	5 %
Other	6 %

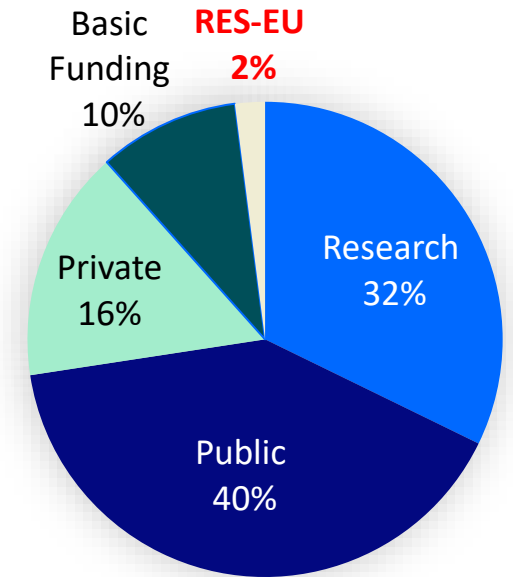
For NIVA it is important to have a **good balance between private, public and research funding.**

=> this is to spread the risk: if something goes wrong with one sector, we still have “other legs to stand on”

=> in total, **7%** of our funding currently is directly or indirectly related to the EU

=> however, this was less before

=> in 2015, NIVA developed a strategy to increase the number of EU projects



Research	32 %
RCN	21 %
EU	5 %
Other	6 %

So how did we do this?

NIVAs recipe:

1) Make sure you have at least one **really competent person in «finance»**
(= an economist who knows/learns how to deal with EU rules for funding)

2) Establish a **section for project support** (similar to your ICPO); role of project support: administrative

- Keep a list of and prioritize project calls that are relevant for your organization, and who wants to lead proposals to which call
- Know and remind scientists about deadlines and timelines
- Keep an overview over «good practice examples» from earlier, successful proposals (especially important for «impact» and «implementation» sections in the proposal)
- ...

So how did we do this?

NIVAs recipe:

3) Make sure you have somebody in your team who **knows EU «bureau-crazy»**
(= everything from how and where to find relevant calls, to how to operate the EC website including how to enter which details for proposals and granted projects)

4) Make sure you have somebody in your team who knows **how to read and write consortium agreements and contracts**

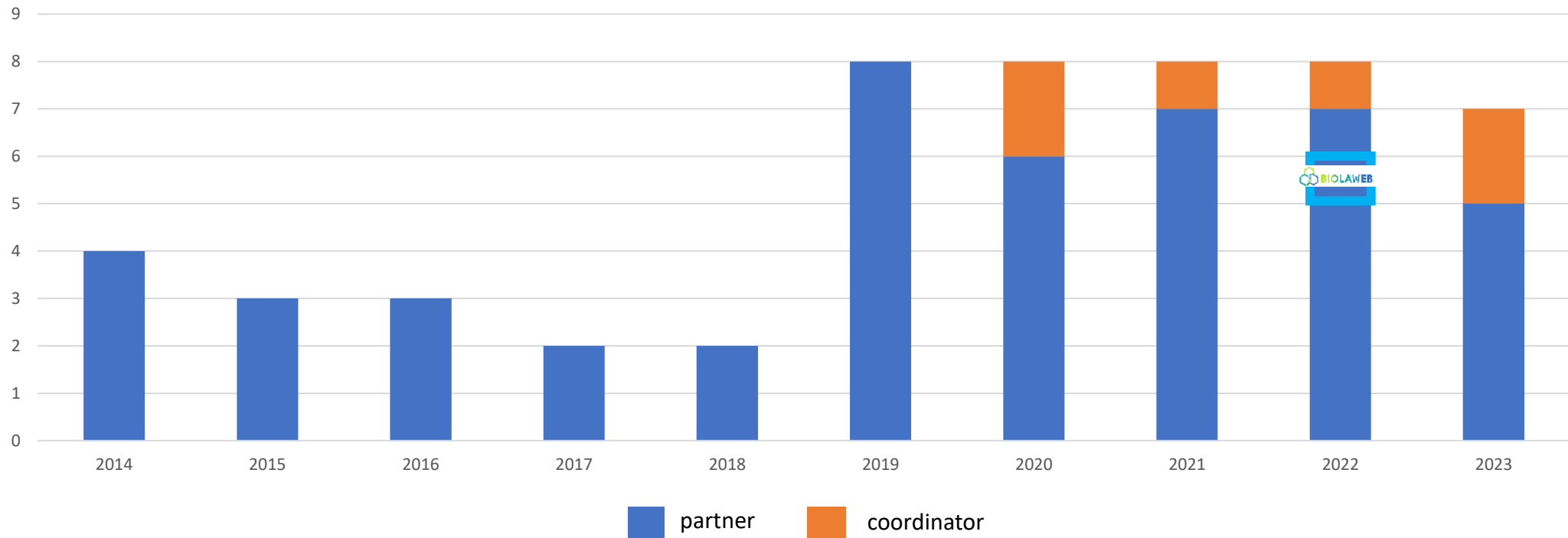
So how did we do this?

NIVAs recipe:

5) Make sure you have **competent researchers with good ideas**

Did we succeed?

Number of projects acquired in H2020 og HEU



Lessons learned – tips for the future

- It takes some years from the start of the efforts to the first visible success
 - => **be persistent but also patient**
 - => **do not give up after the first disappointments**
- Do **regular systematic reviews of the upcoming calls**, and **summarize all calls that are potentially relevant for your institute in a file** (e.g. Excel; this can be done by the ICPO, or by an experienced scientist who knows the entire institute)
- Organize **regular discussions with relevant scientists** at the institute, to find out who would like to participate in/ lead a proposal to a certain call. Do not wait too long with this! Encourage scientists to participate! **Collect ideas**, but also **evaluate** if the topic/idea is **strategically important** for your institute, and if you have the necessary human resources to write a good proposal and execute the project if granted.

Lessons learned – tips for the future

- Build insight into **EU policies**. Learn what the EU really wants. **Make sure that your project idea matches the call text!!** A critical issue is often the «impact» part of proposals: the EU is generally not only interested in good science, but also in **applying this science to boost the economy in Europe**.
- Use your **network** to find out which institutions, national and international, are also planning to submit a proposal to the calls you are interested in. Ask if your experience can be relevant for their idea, and if you can become a partner (but do not get frustrated if they say NO).
- Make sure that the **project support office is ready to help** during proposal writing, especially when the submission deadline is approaching. Give **personalized support**, and do **regular quality assurance** of the proposal BEFORE submission. Ensure tight collaboration between the project support office and the scientists (mutual understanding).

Lessons learned – tips for the future

- Be aware that EU proposals are **a lot of work** => be selective, **prioritize**, and only apply to calls in which you really think you have a chance (this should be discussed in meetings)
- **Evaluate the application process** (both successful and not successful proposals), in your institute. What worked well, what should be improved for the next time? Make sure not to repeat previous mistakes.
- Remember that most proposals do NOT get granted! Do not get too frustrated about this, but instead **gather and compile your experience for the future**. Your «bad luck» might improve the proposal of your colleague. Parts of your proposals might be reusable for another call, either nationally or internationally. Working on proposals drives new ideas and innovation!

How do we use EU money at NIVA?

- NIVA is a **private foundation**, and we need to raise 90% of our funds from projects.
- EU projects are one of several sources of income to NIVA (in fact, not the most economically beneficial)
- Each NIVA scientist must **note the hours he/she worked on each day**, specifically for each project (e.g., today, I worked 3 hours on BIOLAWEB, and 3 hours on project X and 2 hours on project Y; for every hour I write on BIOLAWEB, money is taken from NIVAs BIOLAWEB project budget)
- The vast majority of project budget is used for staff hours. The hourly rates must cover our salary, but also the salary of the project support team, IT, and all other expenses NIVA has (otherwise we go bankrupt).
- This also means that NIVA scientists cannot work on projects any longer after the budget is spent (because our salary comes from projects, and if the project money is spent, the project cannot fund our hours any longer).

Why do we apply for EU money?

- Get access to and be involved in research in Europe
- Our purpose is to contribute to solving societal issues:
we want to be relevant
- NIVA's scientific expertise is part of an international knowledge base
- The Norwegian government specifically wants it
- International success gives us credibility on our home turf



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Thank you for your attention!

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