



ALICE RAP 2nd PLENARY MEETING

-Report on the Policy Science Dialogue Session-



Newcastle, 17th May 2012

MB Mittelmark, WP 21 - Programme evaluation

See [Appendix 1](#) for background on the CMC session that is the focus of this report, and [Appendix 2](#) for a list of the raw data produced by the CMC session.

Fifty ALICE RAP participants contributed to this CMC session on policy-science dialogue, working in eight groups, with each group facilitated by a Table Coordinator and a Table Blogger. The smallest group had four participants and the largest had eight participants. This analysis focusses on the posts that were directly relevant to the question the CMC was intended to address: What level of involvement in ALICE RAP should we aim for, with regard to policy-makers and other key actors and stakeholders?

There was evidence that the groups succeeded in focussing on the relevant question, as in these early posts:

“Once going for a transdisciplinary approach, the role of policymakers changes, from the traditional scientific position to a new one. Where do we place the role of those policymakers?”

“NOT the traditional approach of ‘here are the results’, but working with them from an early stage to develop the process. A real transdisciplinary approach should involve policymakers.”

“Active engagement is positive for policy, good for ALICE RAP to push forward”

The analysis revealed two main themes:

Theme 1: It is a good idea to involve policy makers in ALICE RAP... or is it?

“Be bold!” and “why not partnership at a high level?”

These exemplify a cluster of posts that speaks to the positive aspects of policy maker involvement at more than a token level. Sentiments were expressed that early involvement of policy makers would help build trust, could position ALICE RAP to have more influence on policy processes, would provide a way to get feedback on our work as it progresses, and would provide a way to “ask policy makers what they need and what involvement they need.” There was also some consideration of stakeholders other than policy makers:

“should AR enter into a dialogue with producers, customers apart from policy makers”, and
“We need to build in a mechanism for feeding back to people not just policy makers”



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Nevertheless a certain amount of scepticism was expressed about the dangers of being ‘inside the gates’:

“Can you engage without being influenced or corrupted?”, “Huge risk of abusing the objectivity of science” and “your research integrity is more at risk inside the gates”

These exemplify a cautionary note sounded in some groups, representing the opinion that ALICE RAP should avoid too-direct involvement with stakeholders. Others were not as worried about stakeholder involvement:

“Responding to policymaker’s needs doesn’t mean being subservient to them” and “Idea that policy makers could ‘disrupt’ the science not considered a big risk” express this point of view.

We can only conclude, not unexpectedly, that ALICE RAP participants have a range of views about the wisdom of involving policy makers in the project’s work; there is no clear-cut advice to ALICE RAP management in this regard.

Theme 2: Which policy makers to involve, and at which levels?

Perhaps the richest information to come from the CMC session focussed on the possible need to differentiate our involvement with stakeholders; it may not be wise to have a single stakeholder platform in ALICE RAP, as we have in the Global Science Group and the Media Group. ALICE RAP may be too complex for a single approach, and may also have different needs for stakeholder involvement at different stages of the project. It may also be that involvement should happen at the country, or even community levels, rather than at a European level. Further, the nature of involvement may need to vary depending on what aspect of ALICE RAP’s work is in focus. These posts illustrate some of these issues:

“[In] some areas it’s important to involve policy makers from start – others better to involve at end with results”

“Policy advice should be country/community specific”

“Distinguish engaging with or having impact on politicians or policymakers – could be different audiences”

There was also consideration of diversity in the addictions issues that ALICE RAP deals with, which might call for differentiation in working with stakeholders, as this post illustrates:

“Inside versus outside – where does AR want to be – is it substance specific?”

There was also some consideration of the notion that ALICE RAP is already involved with policy makers via our collaboration with the European Commission, and a reminder that political scientists in ALICE RAP could provide opportunities to build bridge to policy.



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Conclusions

The starting point for the CMC session on policy-science dialogue was the assumption that ALICE RAP has to engage stakeholders, as that is an essential aspect of transdisciplinary research. The issue, then, is how to involve stakeholders. Scenarios were provided to illustrate possible levels of involvement, ranging from simply engaging stakeholders in dialogue, to acting together and taking responsibility together.

The findings suggest that we perhaps need to develop a differentiated strategy for stakeholder involvement, tailored to particular aspects of addiction, to country or community levels of interest, and to the different stages of the project as it progresses. This could be developed as an element in ALICE RAP's Communication Strategy, in collaboration with Areas and Work Packages. The essence of a Stakeholder Communication Strategy would be its emphasis on 'communication with' stakeholders, rather than 'communication to' stakeholders.