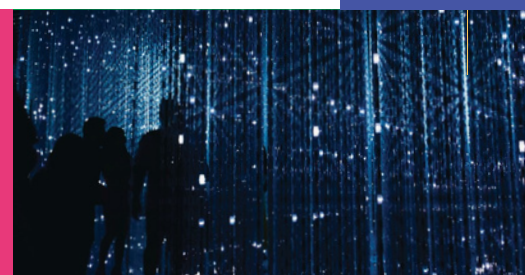


ERA Success Stories

No. 3



Project portraits of Horizon Europe's
Reforming and enhancing the European
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COALESCE

Advancing Leadership and Engagement in Science Communication in Europe

Interview with Jason Pridmore (Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands) and Joana Magalhães (Science for Change, Spain) co-coordinators of the COALESCE project, conducted on July 15, 2026.

Project description: The main goal of the COALESCE project is to build the [European Competence Centre for Science Communication](#), as the main reference platform for science communication daily practice. The Competence Centre will fulfill the COALESCE mission to consolidate knowledge, build capacity and encourage science communication recognition, connect communities to cultivate trust, support evidence-informed decision-making and foster social justice. Via its virtual platform and the network of COALESCE Hubs, the Competence Centre supports daily practices of science communication, bringing together quality-curated resources, training, and networking to support both people and organisations to better reach a diversity of audiences. COALESCE actively promote policies and foster science communication developments, recognition, and professionalisation across Europe and beyond.

PRE-AWARD PHASE

What motivated you to select this particular topic? Are there any links to previous projects?

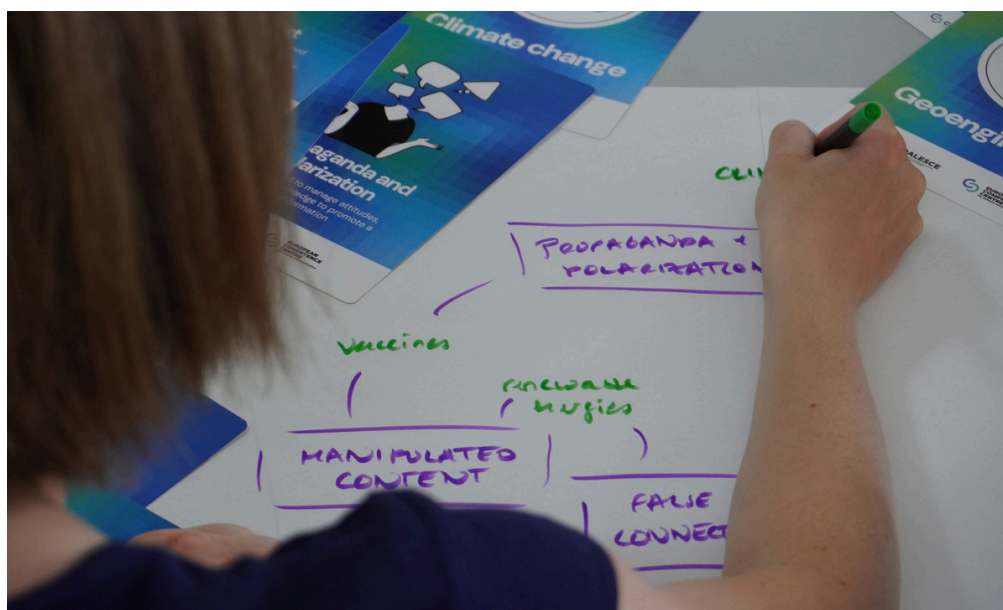
Jason Pridmore, Co-coordinator of COALESCE

The project is called COALESCE, and the name is purposeful. In English, it is quite a common word for bringing people together. The point here is that the call required, as is often the case with EU calls, that we had to collaborate with sister projects (in this case eight ongoing projects from the Horizon 2020 SwafS-19-2018-2019-2020 “Taking stock and re-examining the role of science communication” call). The sister projects’ coordinators and extended team members had been having periodic synergy meetings that included looking for funding opportunities. At a certain point, when the call came out we realised that we could either compete to develop the European Competence Centre for Science Communication or collaborate and work together. That is where COALESCE came from. The project brings together the knowledge, expertise, and leadership developed across the eight SwafS-19 projects. The fact that we were already working together gave us an advantage in learning a lot from each other to reach a deeper and richer understanding of science communication from different perspectives.

Some were really focused on journalism, others on public engagement or on popular science communication. This diversity facilitated the conversation and building from our common strengths and complementarities.

Joana Magalhaes, Co-coordinator of COALESCE

Within our own projects, we had already connected in many different activities (on scientific papers, conferences). This allowed us to build each other's knowledge and intersect the different ongoing discussions that we were having at the same time. Throughout our projects, we created a relationship based on trust and mutual learning.



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Which were the winning elements of your proposal and which challenges did you face during the proposal phase?

Joana Magalhaes

When we decided to move forward, we adopted a very democratic approach to choosing the coordinator because everyone was a coordinator of former projects - we were bringing eight coordinators together. We shared our ideas, everyone had the opportunity to pitch, and then we made the decision collectively. The final version really wanted to bring the lenses from different types of organisations, like small enterprises, private foundations, research organisations, and at the same time, connect science communication research to practice. We really wanted to have this reflected in both the coordination and the work package leadership, which is representative of the diversity of the field itself.

This worked very well across the different work packages. In the end, it was an enriching experience to see how different perspectives and ways of working can complement each other. Being able to create a very strong narrative in how we were building from existing knowledge, from existing resources, from our communities of practice that, at that time, already had 5,000 people, was one of our success factors. Another element was the use of participatory elements throughout the entire project.

Since the main goal of the project is to create a sustainable European Competence Centre for Science Communication, we involved different types of stakeholders who would ultimately become our end users, seeking to understand their needs and requirements and to build the Centre around the real needs of its future users, so following a human-centric and participatory approach.

Jason Pridmore

In practice, however, this approach also has its challenges in terms of how you actually make it happen, where you share leadership and coordination, and how you include communities of practice that have a lot of overlap. Another challenge was that, although we were focused on science communication, there were other closely related fields, from public engagement to citizen science, that also needed to be considered.

POST-AWARD PHASE

What are the main activities of COALESCE? Could you tell us about some key milestones and highlights so far?

Jason Pridmore

The main activity is building a platform that brings people together around science communication, which is now open and accessible, its different components coming online. The results of our work are most visible in this virtual platform, which is intended to be both a one-stop shop and a space for all activities and resources developed through the previous projects. We were also very open to build relations with the proponents of projects that were not successful in the call during the Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) event in Rotterdam in April 2023, where our new COALESCE project was publicly launched. The first post-award activity was focused on engagement and reaching out to all those, as we had to keep the consortium relatively small.

Joana Magalhaes

In fact, we have collaborations with more than fifty organisations, including policy-oriented organisations. Complementary to this, we also started conversations with high-level stakeholders from the very beginning of the project. At an early stage, we went to Brussels to talk with the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Research Council, Members of the European Parliament, which is not the usual approach in projects. Normally, this is done at the end. But we really wanted to guarantee that we were aligned with the policy agendas and that we would also be able to have our voices heard on behalf of the community in terms of setting the agenda for the coming years.

Another important point, which was a gap in our proposal, is that whilst building the European Competence Centre for Science Communication, there was no competency framework for science communication. With the EU Skills Agenda, and a set of important frameworks being released in the last years, including ResearchComp, RM Comp and Science4Policy, ourselves had to keep up and build it within the project, even if it wasn't foreseen, following learnings and gaps, with regard to scicomm professionals from those being published by the Commission and the JRC. The training that will be available on the platform responds to the competencies identified within this competency framework, which is being co-created with multiple professionals, such as researchers, communication officers and museum staff. In this way, we can support the capacity-building and the professionalisation needed to continue to advance in the field.



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What other challenges have come up during implementation and what are the lessons learnt so far?

Jason Pridmore

Part of COALESCE's goal is to build a competence centre that can be self-sustaining in the longer term. Science communication is often seen as an add-on and funding for training is frequently provided on an ad hoc basis.

While there are EU and national projects that have funding for science communication, there is no centralised European Competence Center. Of course, every project and every research institute has to communicate, whether that is CERN or Max Planck or a university or other research institutes. But most of those have their own in-house processes.

So, the challenge, and the communication that we had to do with the stakeholders, again from a policy level, but also at a local level, was to convince them why it is of benefit for them to fund capacity building activities, training, resources. We are still working out the business model and determining the extent to which the Centre will be publicly funded once the project comes to an end.

We have some models and issues that we are working on, but the greatest challenge is creating a sustainable entity post-project that will continue to serve scientists across Europe.

Joana Magalhaes

I believe we also have a mindset of transforming challenges into opportunities. We faced challenges regarding the platform development, either in code, how to fulfil users' expectations, priorities, timeline for example, but in this case as well, we tried to apply an agile way of thinking so that we could adapt to the challenges that we were having, and also be able to incorporate novelties in order to deliver timely relevant resources, training or other types of services to our audiences. One example of this was creating a Prize Observatory (available soon). Within our process, we are developing the tools for the platform separately, but in the end it all must work in a holistic manner. So, even in terms of developing the architecture of the platform, you already have to think ahead so that things are prepared when you get to that moment, and make it somehow accessible not only to partners but also to users and keep everyone involved in the conversation.

PROJECT'S IMPACT

How do you ensure sustainability of the project results?

Joana Magalhaes

We still have signatures pending with journalists that we really want to include, particularly the non-science journalists who in times of crisis are at the forefront of the bridge between the general public and researchers. One of the resources we created were guidelines for how to cope with times of crisis for non-science journalists, and another one was a crisis navigator to anticipate how you would use science communication and journalism in times of crisis.

Apart from outreach, we are having the most impact on policy. We conducted a mutual learning exercise in science communication in research and innovation. This is something we hoped that the Policy Support Facility from the Commission would take as an event on their own because they already run other mutual learning exercises, but we understand the queue is long, and decided to do it anyway, and be a connecting element between different PSF official MLEs (such as that in Public Engagement, Citizen Science and future Trust in Science). Nine Member States participated and have already expressed their need to continue to have this high-level working group on science communication policies in Europe. This could also become one of the roles of the future European Science Communication Centre.

Another important collaboration that came out from early and ongoing conversations was that Jason and I have been appointed advisors to the JRC and the EU presence in the G7 Science Forum-Science Communication Working Group, being able to connect advances in the scicomm ecosystem with the global community in topics such as crisis or AI.

On another level, science communication is part of one of the policy pillars for the ERA Forum, together with citizen engagement and trust in science and being strongly recognised by the European Commission as key for building democracy. This is visible for example in the first half of July 2026, where the European Commission launched a campaign on the European Shield for Democracy and the Science for Democracy website or more recently in a campaign ahead of the International Democracy Day (15th September), where the European Competence Centre for Science Communication and training available was mentioned as one of the highlights for tackling misinformation and capacity building.

Jason Pridmore

From a practical perspective, if the desired outcome is a final entity such as a Competence Centre, it is important to think about continuity from the beginning. We built a community of practice around the project and only later realised that transferring those people to the Competence Centre was not an easy thing to do because of data protection and privacy restrictions. So we needed to manually do it, asking for all their permissions. This is something that should be conceptualised as you develop your project. It was a challenge, but it is also a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) that we are trying to reach.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Do you have any tips for other potential applicants?

Jason Pridmore

The co-coordination idea redistributes the workload that often falls on a Work Package leader, for instance, because you have somebody to share a little bit of the burden and have a conversation with about how to strategically engage and bring people in and do the work. If your consortium is built well and can operate this way, this is a great advantage. Some projects do that in relation to having a coordinator and a technical coordinator or some other sort of roles, which is fine, but that is usually for the overall project. In our case, thinking about it per Work Package is something that we found helpful for our consortium partners, but I guess the proposal process, at least in Horizon Europe, is not built for this.

Joana Magalhaes

From the very beginning it is important to build trustworthy relationships, to reach out to people and see who is willing to take the road with you with a long-term vision, because we know that projects have a short duration. We all face this challenge. It is seven years now since the first SwafS projects started and we continue to build our relationships. It is a very shared approach in terms of how we can continue to build on what is already there, and in terms of protecting the people that we are working with, to try to see whether other job opportunities can occur within the network so that we can nurture not only the long-term vision of what we are building but also create career opportunities for people.

FINAL REMARK

Jason Pridmore

We have built a decent relationship with most people in science communication and it is an opportunity that the resources which we are building in the Competence Centre become part of the communication, dissemination, and outreach of every project. Everybody is welcome to join our community. The intention is that we give the trainings, we offer opportunities for people to grow and learn about the most effective way to reach the public to share information on new, innovative projects and the way in which European research is being developed.



Jason Pridmore and Joana Magalhaes, © Coalesce

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