

## **WG1 Dynamic Exchange**

### **D1.4 Report on Identified Opportunities and Proposal Activities**

#### **Funding Exploration for AT Research**

#### **a-STEP COST Action CA19104**

**2020-2024**

### **Executive Summary**

This report documents the funding opportunities explored and proposal activities undertaken by a-STEP members for coordinated and interdisciplinary Assistive Technology research. Through collaborative efforts, members have engaged in multiple funding applications across various European programs, achieving several successes while building valuable proposal development experience.

### **1. Successful Grant Applications**

#### **1.1 ARBIT Project**

**Title:** Augmented Reality for Body Schema, Joint Attention, and Imitation in Autism

**Funding program:** Erasmus+ European Commission

**Number of partners from a-STEP:** Three a-STEP members

**Focus:** The project implements an innovative AR system called *Pictogram Room*, designed to develop body language and imitation skills in students with autism and intellectual disabilities. These fundamental skills are crucial for social competence development.

#### **1.2 Voice Kids Project**

**Title:** Voice Kids

**Funding source:** ERASMUS+ (2024-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000257353)

**Lead Organization:** GLIC Association, Italy

**Number of partners from a-STEP:** Six a-STEP collaborators

**Focus:** Development of a voice-based communication tool to enhance social interaction and communication capabilities for children with communication difficulties.

### **2. Pending Applications**



## 2.1 New COST Action Proposal

**Scope:** Large-scale collaborative initiative

**Number of partners from a-STEP:** 21 members from the a-STEP network

**Status:** Under evaluation

**Objective:** Building upon a-STEP's success to create new collaborative research opportunities.

## 2.2 Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellowship

**Program:** HORIZON-MSCA-2024-PF-01

**Number of partners from a-STEP:** Two a-STEP members

**Status:** Under evaluation

**Focus:** Postdoctoral research advancement in collaboration with a-STEP members

## 3. Learning Opportunities from Unsuccessful Applications

### 3.1 Independent Living Skills Project

**Title:** Supporting the Acquisition of Independent Living and Employment Skills for Empowering Individuals with Intellectual Disability

**Program:** Erasmus+

**Number of partners from a-STEP:** Five a-STEP members

**Focus:** Enhancement of independent living and employment skills for individuals with intellectual disabilities

**Learning outcomes:** Valuable experience gained in proposal development and partnership building

### 3.2 DigiTrale Initiative

**Program:** Erasmus-Edu-2024-CBHE

**Partners:** Two a-STEP collaborators

**Focus:** Digital technology application for language education enhancement in higher education and lifelong learning, particularly targeting disadvantaged groups

**Experience gained:** Insights into proposal strengthening and partnership development

## 4. Impact Analysis

### 4.1 Network Engagement

The proposal activities have successfully engaged 39 a-STEP members across various funding applications, demonstrating strong network collaboration and knowledge sharing. This broad



participation has strengthened internal network connections and enhanced proposal development capabilities.

## **4.2 Funding Success Rate**

Analysis shows a current success rate of 33%, with two successful applications out of six total submissions. Two additional proposals pending evaluation indicate continued momentum in securing research funding. This success rate demonstrates both the network's capability and areas for potential improvement.

## **4.3 Geographic Distribution**

The proposals have effectively spanned multiple European countries, creating robust international collaborations within the network. This geographic diversity has enhanced proposal strength and increased potential for meaningful cross-cultural research impact.

## **5. Strategic Learning Points**

### **5.1 Successful Elements**

The network's most effective proposals demonstrated excellence in interdisciplinary collaboration, combining diverse expertise to address complex challenges. Their clear focus on social impact resonated strongly with evaluators, while innovative technology applications showed promise for practical implementation. The diversity and expertise of partners proved particularly valuable in successful applications.

### **5.2 Areas for Improvement**

Analysis of unsuccessful proposals revealed opportunities to strengthen technical details in future submissions. Impact measurement methodologies require more robust development, while sustainability planning needs greater emphasis. Enhanced stakeholder engagement strategies could improve proposal effectiveness and implementation potential.

## **6. Future Opportunities**

### **6.1 Targeted Programs**

Research has identified several promising funding streams for future applications. The Horizon Europe program offers multiple relevant calls aligned with network objectives. The European Social Fund Plus presents opportunities for social inclusion initiatives. The Digital Europe Programme provides potential funding for technological innovation, while various national funding schemes offer complementary opportunities for member institutions.

### **6.2 Development Areas**

Future success requires concentrated effort on strengthening evaluation methodologies across proposals. User engagement strategies need refinement to ensure practical impact. Sustainability models require more detailed development to ensure long-term project viability. Implementation frameworks need enhancement to demonstrate practical feasibility.

## **7. Recommendations**

### **7.1 Proposal Development**

Future proposals would benefit from increased early stakeholder engagement throughout the development process. Enhanced methodology documentation should emphasize practical implementation approaches. Impact measurement frameworks require more detailed development, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative metrics. Sustainability planning should address long-term project viability from project inception.

### **7.2 Network Collaboration**

The network should implement regular proposal writing workshops to share expertise and build capacity. Development of shared proposal resources would enhance efficiency and proposal quality. A mentoring system for new proposal writers would strengthen the network's proposal development capabilities. Enhanced partner matching systems would facilitate more effective collaboration formation.

## **8. Conclusions**

The funding exploration activities have yielded valuable results and learning experiences. The success rate demonstrates the network's capability to secure competitive funding, while unsuccessful applications have provided important insights for future proposals.