

SEREN5 TRAININGS FOR STAKEHOLDERS WITH ZALE JOHNSON, UK NATIONAL CONTACT POINT CIVIL SECURITY FOR SOCIETY



SEREN5 is the Horizon Europe support initiative for Cluster 3 — Civil Security for Society. It helps organisations and National Contact Points (NCPs) participate more effectively in EU security research by offering practical training, guidance on proposal preparation and consortium building, and clarity on the security appraisal process. With targeted online and in-person activities, SEREN5 focuses on improving proposal quality, strengthening collaboration, and sharing up-to-date know-how across Europe — including the cybersecurity community.

01

WHY IS TRAINING SO IMPORTANT FOR STAKEHOLDERS WHO WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN HORIZON EUROPE?

Where do I begin there are so many reasons why educating our stakeholders is important. Training is an essential element of the whole Horizon Europe participation process, and that's why the SEREN5 project dedicated a Work Package to education, training and information sharing. Not only for those entities who want to participate in Horizon Europe, but also for the National Contact Points, who on a daily basis provide guidance and support to their stakeholders.

The driving force for this, was of course, the European Commission who believed that the quality of submitted proposals was good but they believed that the quality could be boosted and enhanced through relevant training. Therefore, my responsibility within SEREN5 was to educate stakeholders so they were better equipped and better prepared for the Horizon Europe experience.

02

HOW DID YOU DECIDE WHAT AREAS OF TRAINING FOR YOUR STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

The decision to the subject areas of the training, was based upon information coming from 4 main sources. The first was communicating with the Commission and understanding what their 'asks' were. The second was my experience as an NCP and working closely with stakeholders, who let me know their needs, the third was speaking with other NCP colleagues nationally and internationally. The final source came from my own personal experience as a partner within several EU funded projects.

All of these, really did provide me with a true understanding of some of the hurdles and challenges faced by stakeholders when embarking on these types of projects. So, all in all, the decision for the subject areas for the training was well founded in fact which gave me confidence in knowing that the training I put together was going to be of real practical use to our stakeholders.

03

CAN YOU PROVIDE DETAILS OF THE SUBJECT AREAS OF TRAINING THAT HAS BEEN PUT TOGETHER AND THE CHALLENGES THAT HAD TO BE OVERCOME?

Via the SEREN5 project there have been several training events over the past 3 years and some of the subject areas covered have been: Proposal writing, considerations for building a consortium, maximising impact in Horizon Europe projects, and the security appraisal process.

When I put the training together, I had to be mindful of a number of things such as, what training had gone before, what prior knowledge the audience may already have, making sure the content was correct, relevant and up to date, and most of all, making sure what I was presenting was interesting and engaging for the audience. So these were my challenges! In the first instance, I did lots of research and looked at the training that was already out there on-line. There were a few videos, but mainly the training was in the form of PowerPoint Presentations with no supporting dialogue or narrative. The subject areas mainly tackled proposal writing; however, I felt that they didn't really offer stakeholders practical and real-world advice. So, from looking at prior training I now had a benchmark to set the new SEREN5 training against.

With regards the security appraisal process training, that was a direct request from the Commission. It had been highlighted by them, that there was a lack of understanding of the process, which was leading to errors being made by stakeholders. Consequently, these errors were having a negative impact on their proposal submissions. For this training, I worked closely with the Commission, and after many months we produced a final product which was endorsed by the Commission. This subject area had never really been tackled before from the perspective of the stakeholder, so this training was not only novel, but it also offered clear step by step guidance on how to avoid making mistakes.

04

COULD YOU GIVE SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON STAKEHOLDER TRAINING AND ANY ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO STAKEHOLDERS?

For me stakeholder training is a critical part of Horizon Europe, as it offers the relevant knowledge and skill to effectively participate in the Programme, and I would encourage anyone who wants to embark upon these types of projects to seek out the training that is available on the SEREN5 website. I remember a gentleman that came up to me at one of our training events. He said he that he was quite sceptical about what he would get out of the training. He told me that he had been participating in EU funded projects for almost two decades and thought that he knew everything there was to know. He admitted to me that not only had the training provided him with new information, but he also thought that the practical methodologies put forward were really helpful and he would be using these in the future. This goes to show that even the seasoned stakeholder can learn something new from the training.

From a personal point of view, the work that I have carried out over the past 3 years within the SEREN5 project, that being planning and putting together and delivery of stakeholder training has been an absolutely enjoyable experience, and as such I have learned a great deal myself!



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WATCH THE TRAININGS (SCAN THE QR)



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