



Detect-it2 Success Story

“ DECanBio ” a novel way to identify biomarkers in the cancer area

This small scale focused research project addressed the call: HEALTH-2007-2.4.1-2 : *“Translating clinical “omics”-technology (genomics, proteomics, metabolomics) into innovative cancer biomarkers aiding in early diagnosis, prognosis and treatment selection of cancer patients”.*

With the “omics” related technologies or the emerging new parallel sequencing technology, the health sector is entering today a new era. Humanity yesterday’s dream to develop targeted drugs for each individual is on the way to turn into reality, at least on a technological point of view. Nevertheless, there are still big challenges on the road to success and biomarkers identification is one of the major bottlenecks that have to be overcome in this field. DECanBio is a project proposal that fits perfectly well in this evolving environment as it addresses translational research on this specific topic. It targets novel MS-based strategies to discover and evaluate cancer biomarkers in urine with application to diagnosis of bladder cancer. The generic strategy defined should enable to target other cancer types in the future. The “DECanBio” proposal was submitted for the 1st Health call within FP7 and has already received very positive feedback from the European Commission for the first evaluation round. Let’s “hold the inches” for the next round ...

Before coming back to the support brought by a tool like Detect-it 2 to similar project proposals, it is important to highlight rapidly the research context for DECanBio. Today’s technology allow to characterized thousands of genes or proteins in one single experiment, providing new insights into biological processes. High throughput transcriptomics and proteomics enable comparisons of bio-specimens from large populations of patients and controls. These large scale studies were not possible some years ago. Nevertheless, a main challenge remains anyway in this fast evolving environment regarding the integration of these technologies (and their large amount of data generation) in a clear clinical set up. Key issues in the discovery phase are to identify novel biomarkers on one hand, and to translate the findings into new clinical assays on the other.

Despite the fact that translating recent discoveries into daily clinical practice is a long, tedious and costly process, addressing this problematic necessitate additionally a very large spectrum of skills and competences that are unlikely to be provided within a single institute or company. This was the starting point to set-up a research consortium. In fact a key point that is addressed by the Detect-it 2 database and the partners search options.

The discussion turned very quickly on the identification of the right partners in terms of skills and complementary technologies. Former experiences from SMEs showed that mastering the whole value chain from research to market (clinical phases) increases dramatically the overall project chances to be first granted and then successful on a commercial point of view. This matter of fact was very nicely summarized by consortium partners saying that *"beyond good sciences, writing good research proposals is above all a business of people"*. In fact scientists and entrepreneurs have to be part of networks. They have to meet, exchange, share ideas and point of views to generate new projects and build contact for future potential consortium. Key issue is the type of network considered. Usually scientists have contact all over the world in their field but very often do not have access to industrial or industry oriented networks.

The Detect-it tool responded perfectly well with these two expressed needs. On the one hand it offered the possibility to ask for partners with specific skills or technologies, and on the other hand it gave the possibility to meet, i.e. at brokerage events organized within the project or in collaboration with partners. This support was very useful to complete specific consortiums and to generate new research ideas.

As illustrated above, the detect-it 2 tool appeared to be very supportive for SMEs targeting FP7 calls. Nevertheless, as animator for the biotech cluster, we were also interested to know in which extend SMEs' needs, were fully addressed by the detect-it 2 support action, and if not, what could be the area of improvement. We would like to conclude on this point with the feedback given by Mr. de Chastonay, executive director business development at DiagnoSwiss SA, a company based at BioArk in Monthey (Switzerland) : *"... building R&D consortium needs full confidence in the partners and thus takes time ... why not organize virtual brokerage events based on "second life" or other similar tools ?"*

This proposition looks very valuable as it will not only allow exchanging ideas or performing partner searches as with the current Detect-it tool, but also gives the possibility to discuss directly with potential partners on a "virtual" one to one basis. This approach might lead in dramatic savings in terms of resources for SMEs. Actually the time needed to meet physically will only be invested after first contacts and discussions will have been performed on the virtual platform. As a consequence, the numbers of contacts will increase and the partner qualification's phase (screening and identifying the "right" partner) will be much cheaper before organizing the first "physical" meeting. This approach represents a huge potential regarding networking development and efficiency related aspects.

A very interesting idea that will for sure be discussed for future FP7 calls ...

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For more information:
Eric Plan
Biotech cluster animator for Detect-it2
www.detect-it2.org