



EU Blue Book Traineeship Report

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Abstract

The Blue Book traineeship program at the European Union Institutions offers valuable insight into the inner workings and decision-making processes of the European institutions. During my tenure at the Communication Unit of the Public Health and Food Safety Department (DG SANTE), I contributed to impactful communication strategies on public health issues, including mental health and cancer. Leveraging my medical background, I crafted scientifically backed messages for high-level events, such as the World Mental Health Day conference and Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. My experience at DG SANTE reinforced the importance of inclusive communication strategies in effecting positive change.



Introduction

The European Union Institution's Bluebook traineeship program stands as a sought-after position of international opportunity, attracting over 12,000 applicants biannually. Rooted in inclusivity, the program embraces diverse candidates. The vacancies span a wide range of professions—from graphic designers to lawyers, engineers, scientists, and journalists—the program fosters a richly diverse professional environment. As expected, most applicants are European citizens, however, a small percentage of non-Europeans are accepted.

The successful candidates are exposed to the inner workings' dynamics, decision-making processes, and operational pipelines of the European institutions.

I was accepted in the Communication Unit of the Public Health and Food Safety Department (DG SANTE). The communication officers of this unit are mainly involved in outreach activities. They manage the communication strategies related to public health and safety through different channels (social media, official statements, citizen inquiries and conferences) while they keep close contact with specialized policy units and the spoken person service.

Contributions to Communication Strategies

The mission of DG SANTE is to “Protect and promote human, animal, and plant health and food safety in Europe”. To accomplish this aim they count on communication professionals with extensive experience who orchestrate high-budget communication strategies. My responsibilities encompassed crafting narratives on public health and safety. Notably, I contributed to initiatives targeting noncommunicable diseases, mental health, and cancer, aligning with the priorities of the current mandate.

The efforts of the institutions were reflected in high-level events held by the commission. The aim was to raise awareness, promote a comprehensive approach, and catalyze policy improvements across all fronts. I contributed to logistics organization and technical input for the content and promotion activities of 2 events: the **World Mental Health Day conference** and **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**.



World Mental Health Day Conference, October 10, 2023



Europe Beating Cancer Plan: Joining Forces, January 31, 2024

Health Research and Message Crafting

My approach to health research and technical input entailed leveraging my medical background and fundamental biological understanding, complemented by insights from PhD-level scientists. At the communication unit, we received technical documents and policy packages from specialized units and agencies. I contrasted the source material with recent findings from multiple sources. This process informed the crafting of scientifically backed messages, ensuring accuracy and conciseness within limited word constraints. The support from my supervisor and colleagues with vast experience in health-related files was fundamental for this endeavor. For instance, in the Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) campaign, I collaborated with a dedicated group to distill complex information into accessible and impactful messaging. We circulated the content and plan among the members of the group to polish the outcome. Journalists, visual artists, writers, and policy analysts were part of the process.

Personal Reflections

My tenure at DG SANTE was marked by a fast-paced yet nurturing environment, characterized by multiculturalism and mutual respect. The leadership exemplified a harmonious blend of competence and humility, fostering a dynamic yet empathetic atmosphere. The whole team is a living example that talented professionals can have a human touch leaving egos aside. This context taught me to embrace change and maintain adaptability to respond effectively to evolving circumstances with a kind approach.



In addition, from a networking perspective is a good opportunity to gain insight into how large international organizations function. Trainees have the chance to work with officials from the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and other international institutions. Gaining visibility for an international profile.

On the other hand, while the program provides an enriching experience, there is certainly room for improvement.

It underscores the need for longer-term engagement. It lasts 5 months, which limits the follow-up of projects the trainee was involved in. Perhaps in the future, they may consider making the traineeship last longer. In addition, the program attempts to be inclusive in terms of professional and cultural background and provides a monthly allowance. However, less privileged individuals struggle with the living expenses of a city like Brussels.

Purpose and Wider Impact

Regarding my motivations for this program. I consider that the ultimate goal of public health is the protection of the well-being of the population. The execution of health policies is an important tool to reach a wide range of persons. A position that provides the opportunity to spread scientific-based information regarding the implementation of policies on public health-focused aspects was particularly attractive to me. I was driven by a desire to spread scientific-based information and foster inclusive policies.

This experience has not only deepened my understanding of political institutions but has also fortified my resolve to effect positive change through effective communication strategies. In the future, I am eager to be involved in health-related affairs and communications. I think it is important to ensure that policies and messages across the population respond to the needs of all different social groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my traineeship experience at the European Commission has been profoundly enriching, offering insights into the machinery of influential institutions while nurturing invaluable soft skills. As I embark on future endeavors, I carry with me a heightened awareness of the complexities inherent in policy-making processes and a steadfast commitment to effecting meaningful change through inclusive communication strategies.



About the Author

Iván Acevedo Monterrosa holds an International Master of Science in Biomedical Sciences from the University of Freiburg, Germany and the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina. He has extensive experience as Blue Book Trainee-Communication Officer at the European Commission/Public Health & Food Safety, where Iván contributed significantly to major communication strategies. Throughout his career he has also demonstrated skills in project management, research and clinical trial coordination.