

Community and connection in Madrid

After 6 months of preparation, I'd finally arrived. Six months of learning Spanish on Duolingo, weeks of polishing my PowerPoint skills and creating my poster, hours of pouring over the program. And now here I was, fortunate enough to be at the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS) Congress Madrid 2025.

And so were 2,200 other research management and administration professionals who had converged from 67 countries around the globe, the largest ever such gathering! Simply being together in one place with so many likeminded people filled me with awe.

For me, the Congress began at a pre-conference workshop on research impact in Horizon Europe funding applications, facilitated by ERINN Innovation. The ERINN team made reading a European funding call look simple, showcasing one of the true arts of research management professionals – being a translator. And the location on campus at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid gave us a peak into Spanish university life.

The Congress was formally opened the next day by the inspirational Dipti Pandya, Chair of European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA), which hosted this year's Congress. Setting the tone for the next 2 days, Dipti empowered us by informing us that here “we don't need to explain what we do in our jobs”, and the sessions are “all aimed at us”.

With 16 concurrent sessions, I'll admit I had much session envy. The most popular sessions were those focused on AI in research management, many of which were over capacity. Indeed, AI was omnipresent in all streams: if not in the presentation, then in the questions from the audience such as “Did you use AI for that?” or “Why didn't you use AI for that?”. It fast became clear that AI use is already ubiquitous in research management.

Other major themes were developing research missions, applying for and managing EU funding, and supporting knowledge valorisation (translation) and research impact. Threads running through the conference included responsible metrics and evaluation (e.g. embedding the CoARA Agreement in practices) and working with community (e.g. the idea of the 4th generation university).

Since the first time I attended INORMS, in 2018, siloing between teams was much less evident. Several impressive presentations showcased resources or frameworks that had been developed across entire research organisations, using the kind of stakeholder engagement skills that are mirrored in community-engaged research.

One of the strongest themes of the Congress was professionalising research management. The rooms were packed for sessions launching RMComp (a European competency framework for research managers) and discussing RM Roadmap (a roadmap for the future of research management in Europe, including training, networking, funding and mobility opportunities). These important projects were developed with Horizon Europe funding, are freely accessible and are applicable to other regions. There was genuine feeling about the difference they will make and the importance of the research management workforce to improve the EU's competitiveness and sustain its economic performance.

Amid the dazzling session choices, I also presented my own work: a poster on a 7-year researcher development initiative at the Monash Biomedicine Discovery Institute. I congratulate the Congress organisers and participants for making the poster area one of the liveliest and most engaged areas of the entire Congress. I was truly surprised by the overwhelming and genuine interest I received from research managers based in Spain, France, Germany, UK, India, South Africa and even Australia. The conference app enabled quick connections, and it was delightful to be pinged by people who said, “I'm at your poster and would like to discuss it”. I highly recommend presenting a poster as a way to open up dialogue about your work.

At only 3 days, the Congress was a whirlwind. The locations around and outside Madrid were entrancing, the Spanish food was a taste sensation (crushed tomato on baguette is a surprisingly good brain fuel for breakfast) and, most of all, the community made it special – with pop up events for the over 30 Australians and New Zealanders, National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) region VIII members, and meals with colleagues and friends old and new.

Dadley-Moore 2025

Overall, the Congress brought home to me the true power of community and connection among research management professionals. In sharing knowledge, approaches and stories, we foster each other's learning, build bridges between institutions and nations, develop sustainable ways of working – and make research happen around the globe.

I extend a huge thank you to ARMS, including the ARMS Executive Office and the selection panel for the ARMS-INORMS Travel Award, for making this possible. Without ARMS, I would not have been able to travel for this richly rewarding experience. I also extend my deep thanks to my manager at the Monash Biomedicine Discovery Institute, Professor Dena Lyras – a true champion of research management professionals as partners -- for supporting my application and sharing in my excitement and learnings along the way.

And to finish, I'll share the words of the opening panellists so that you can take them with you too: "Your work matters." "The future depends on you."



When 2,200 research managers go to lunch at the same time...



A jetlagged poster author before poster rush hour. Photo by Lucy Donaldson.



The spectacular welcome event, which featured a high-security, palatial government building, circus performers and flamenco guitar.



The main auditorium: Imperial College's Anna Aston talks AI bots.