

LRG HANDBOOK

ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES
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elsa

The European Law Students' Association

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

We invite you to read the newly drafted LRG Handbook, conceptualised as the complete organisers guide to conducting a Legal Research Group. In writing this Handbook, we have been inspired by the LRG Handbook drafted in 2016 by Antonia Markoviti Vice President in charge of Academic Activities, ELSA International 2015/2016, and Jakub Čája, Vice President in charge of Academic Activities, ELSA International 2016/2017. We wish to thank them for their important work. However, considering the development in LRGs since then, we found it necessary to draft a new and updated Handbook.

A Legal Research Group is a rewarding and exciting project which offers numerous opportunities, our aim with this Handbook is, apart from supporting the Network with a tool to organise the project, to inspire and incentivise National and Local Groups of ELSA to organise unilateral, bilateral and multilateral LRGs. Given the unique characteristics of an LRG, we have given specific weight to the human resources aspects of LRGs by explaining each person needed to coordinate an LRG.

It is our goal with this Handbook to provide you with a step by step guide, through detailed descriptions of the tasks and challenges which the organisers will face while conducting a Legal Research Group. In addition to this Handbook, the LRG Package has been updated and entails a draft Style Guide, draft Language Manual and an outline for prospective participants setting out how and why they should participate in an LRG.

Best wishes,

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Table of Contents

FOREWORD	- 1 -
I. Introduction	- 4 -
1.1 What is a Legal Research Group?	- 4 -
1.2 History of Legal Research Groups in ELSA.....	- 4 -
II. Why organise an LRG?	- 5 -
2.1 For the participants	- 5 -
2.2 For the ELSA group	- 5 -
III. How to conduct an LRG – step by step	- 6 -
3.1 Decide on your goals.....	- 6 -
3.2 Choose the topic.....	- 6 -
3.3 Structure of the organisation	- 6 -
3.4 Set up the coordination team	- 7 -
3.5 Set the timeline	- 7 -
3.6 Set the Academic Board.....	- 7 -
3.7 Prepare the Academic Framework and Guidelines	- 7 -
3.8 Create other research documents.....	- 8 -
3.9 Additional preparatory and simultaneous events.....	- 8 -
3.10 Launch the LRG.....	- 8 -
3.11 Research and review.....	- 8 -
3.12 Publication	- 8 -
3.13 Concluding Report.....	- 8 -
3.14 Follow-up.....	- 9 -
IV. Research documents	- 9 -
4.1 Academic Framework	- 9 -
4.2 Academic Guidelines.....	- 9 -
4.3 Timeline.....	- 10 -
4.4 Style Guide.....	- 10 -
4.5 Language Manual.....	- 11 -
4.6 Template.....	- 11 -

V. Human resources	- 11 -
5.1 The structure explained.....	- 11 -
5.1.1 General Coordinator.....	- 11 -
5.1.2 Academic Board	- 11 -
5.1.4 Linguistic Editor.....	- 12 -
5.1.5 Technical Editor.....	- 12 -
5.1.6 Researchers	- 12 -
5.1.7 Other contributors	- 12 -
5.2 Duties and Responsibilities of the National/Local Research Teams.....	- 12 -
5.2.1. Duties and Responsibilities of the General Coordinator.....	- 12 -
5.2.2 Duties and Responsibilities of the Academic Board	- 13 -
5.2.4 Duties and Responsibilities of the Linguistic Editor.....	- 13 -
5.2.5 Duties and Responsibilities of the Technical Editor:.....	- 14 -
5.2.6 Duties and Responsibilities of the Researchers:	- 14 -
V. Publication.....	- 15 -
5.1 On your website	- 15 -
5.2 Through ELSA International.....	- 15 -
5.3 External law reviews and magazines.....	- 15 -
5.4 Physical publication.....	- 15 -
VI. Partnerships.....	- 16 -
6.2 Universities.....	- 16 -
6.2 Law firms	- 16 -
6.3 NGOs and institutions.....	- 16 -
VII. Fundraising	- 16 -
VIII. Contact	- 17 -

I. Introduction

1.1 What is a Legal Research Group?

A Legal Research Group consists of groups of students and/or young lawyers who conduct research on a certain legal topic. Hence, the project can be conducted at local, national or international level. The research can be conducted remotely by the participants and coordinated online, hence; the project is often very cost friendly. The results of the research shall be compiled in a report that is made publicly accessible.

Legal Research Groups can be:

- Unilateral: Conducted in one ELSA group;
- Bilateral: Conducted as a cooperation between two ELSA groups;
- Multilateral: Conducted as cooperation between three or more ELSA groups; or
- International: Conducted by ELSA International in cooperation with an academic partner.

1.2 History of Legal Research Groups in ELSA

- At the International Council Meeting in Malta in October 1994 the idea was born to form International Working Groups on different fields of law to contribute to legal research.
- The first working LRG was formed in October 1996 to work on aspects of “International Criminal Law”. After the researchers started their work, they were invited to sessions of the United Nations Preparatory Committee on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court in 1996. The work of the first International LRG led to the Handbook published in 1997. This handbook (updated in 1998) is still one of the few publications on this field of law.
- From 2011- 2013, the ELSA for Children International LRG involved 23 National Research Groups. The project received support from the Council of Europe, especially the Children Rights’ Division and the Directorate of Communications and contributed to the Council of Europe’s 1 in 5 campaign.
- In 2013, ELSA International launched a new International LRG on Online Hate Speech as part of the campaign of Council of Europe “European Youth Against Online Hate Speech” and the “No Hate Speech Movement”, which resulted in concluding conference in Oslo and the report was also translated into Japanese.
- In 2014/15 ELSA followed the success from previous years by launching one of the biggest International LRGs with 28 countries drafting a report on Social Rights and Austerity Measures. This report was presented in a conference in Strasbourg and a concluding report with the main findings were published.
- The fame of the project increased during 2015/16 with an LRG on Freedom of Expression & Protection of Journalistic Sources to have reached 33 countries.

- In the same year, ELSA International initiated a cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and a new ILRG on Occupational Safety and Health was added to the list of legal research achievements. The importance of this project is visible in the fact that the goal was the update of the LEGOSH Database of ILO.
- In 2018, ELSA published an ILRG on Migration Law in collaboration with the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) which involved more than 300 law students across Europe.
- ELSA's ILRG on Renewable Energy was the first to be professionally published with an ISBN in 2020.

II. Why organise an LRG?

An LRG highly contributes to the development of various legal skills of its participants and, for this reason, it is a valuable project which is highly appreciated by academics and employers. Furthermore, LRGs can be organised very simply, in terms of human resources and financial matters, due to the fact that the LRG is very flexible, adaptable and open to additional enhancing features.

The advantages of an LRG have below been developed from the point of view of the participants and the organising ELSA Group respectively. These advantages are only a few examples of the numerous benefits existing.

2.1 For the participants

Below you will find points listed which may be used in attracting students' interest in an LRG. It is of high importance to underline the role of ELSA in contributing to the complementary legal education and the benefits which students will have from taking part in an LRG. The benefits include:

- Active acquirement of legal knowledge and application of (English) legal terminology;
- Contribution to the future careers of law students;
- Cooperation with experts from certain fields of law;
- Development of research skills, legal writing skills and teamwork skills;
- Valid publication, recognition in professional environment and official certification.

2.2 For the ELSA group

The main reasons for National officers to motivate Local Groups to run their own LRGs are the following:

- The possibility of establishing internationality in your group;
- Increased chances of promotion of ELSA in academic and student network;
- Limited financial requirements;
- Ideal tool for institutional cooperation;
- Link for a variety of follow-up events;

- A source with concrete outcome which can be used anytime by the ELSA Group.

III. How to conduct an LRG – step by step

Below you can find a detailed manual explaining how to establish and run an LRG in practical steps. We are aware that there are more options on how to run an LRG and many different versions thanks to its flexibility, however, this is suggested as a “standard” procedure.

3.1 Decide on your goals

Before commencing any project, you need to set the goals for the project; what do you wish to achieve with the LRG and by which time? Set overall goals with several sub-goals. We encourage that you set goals that are realistic and easily measurable so you can follow up on your progress with certainty.

3.2 Choose the topic

When organising an LRG, the organiser first needs to choose the topic of research. While deciding upon the topic, there are a few crucial aspects you should have in mind:

- Consider focusing on currently topical issues of law in order to attract participants and partners.
- Have in mind the possibility of choosing a topic related to the current topic of the ELSA International Focus Programme, which all ILRGs are connected to.
- Consider a topic which has actual practical challenges instead of only being academically interesting. In this way, you increase the chances of having the outcome of your work recognised (citations, legislation development etc.).

Before settling on the topic, it is important that you actually conduct some research of your own to examine whether it is possible to conduct comparative research on the topic.

3.3 Structure of the organisation

You need to decide whether you wish to collaborate with other ELSA Groups by conducting a bilateral or multilateral LRG. When choosing partnering groups for your LRG, you should take into consideration several aspects depending on what you want to use the LRG for:

- If you wish to analyse legislation in similar legal systems, choose jurisdictions that are similar to yours.
- If you, on the other hand, wish to analyse different legal systems, you should look for groups with different customs.

Furthermore, you may choose to partner with countries with whom you have been closely working with on other projects and thus strengthen your relations with them.

If you decide to organise a unilateral LRG you do not have to involve foreign groups and this step may be skipped.

3.4 Set up the coordination team

Once the topic has been chosen, and the ELSA Groups have decided to cooperate on the LRG, you need to set up a central coordination team. This team will be in charge of the overall coordination of the LRG, including communication with National Coordinators, partners and reviewers. This team is also responsible for compiling the report and conducting technical and linguistic review of the final report. The coordination team should consist of at least an international coordinator with the overall responsibility for the LRG, a linguistic editor and a technical editor (see more below under “Human resources”). In addition to the central coordination team, each participating group should have a national coordination team consisting of at least a national coordinator, a linguistic editor and a technical editor.

3.5 Set the timeline

It is very to have the entire process planned in advance. Therefore, you should set a timeline for your LRG with the key deadlines and performance indicators (see more below under “Research documents”). The timeline must be flexible and should be agreed upon with the Central Coordination Team, the National Coordination Teams and the Academic Board.

3.6 Set the Academic Board

In order for your LRG to be of high academic quality and receive proper recognition, it needs to be academically reviewed. Therefore, we recommend setting an Academic Board comprised of academics and practitioners who are experts in the field. We recommend approaching experts you have already worked with on other projects (e.g. moot courts, conferences etc.) as well as offering this opportunity to your general partners (see more below under “Partnerships”). In addition to having a central Academic Board, we recommend having a national Academic Board in each participating group or at least one Academic Supervisor.

3.7 Prepare the Academic Framework and Guidelines

In order to conduct comparative research, the researchers must have a common ground on which the research. This is called the Academic Framework and should consist of one main thesis which is sought answered through several sub-questions. The Academic Framework could be structured as: Introduction, Analysis, Assessment and Conclusion. The Academic Framework should be drafted by the Central Academic Board. We recommend developing Academic Guidelines in addition to the Academic Framework. The guidelines serve to further develop on how the Academic Framework should be answered. We also recommend including a list of core readings and sources which can be used by the researchers. See more below under “Research documents”.

3.8 Create other research documents

Other than the Academic Framework and Guidelines, we recommend creating a style guide setting out how the report should be technically edited as well as a language manual for linguistic purposes. See more below under “Research documents”.

3.9 Additional preparatory and simultaneous events

When preparing the LRG, it is necessary to think about its purpose and therefore the further use of the report. We suggest the organisers to consider from the beginning the opportunities for creating follow-up and side events, which may be workshops, panel discussions or conferences, where the process of drafting or the final report from your LRG will be presented. It is recommended to brainstorm these opportunities and organise one of them even before the actual launch of your LRG, since it may serve as one good incentive for participation. Moreover, we suggest organising a webinar in which the Academic Board may introduce the topic and Academic Framework to the participants.

3.10 Launch the LRG

Communicate with your marketer and prepare the promotion materials. Legal research can be a demanding project; for this reason, focus a lot on the power of the materials and what incentives you project with them. Publish all research documents on your website and open the call for researchers. Once the call has been closed, the researchers need to be appointed and we suggest that this is done on National/Local level.

3.11 Research and review

Once appointed, the researchers begin their research. We recommend setting several deadlines for the research to ensure timely execution. When the research is finished, it shall be compiled by the Central Coordination Team and for the sake of academic coherence, corrected by Linguistic Editors and finally checked by the Academic Board. Thus, there should be at least one deadline for submitting the reports for academic, linguistic and technical review by the Central Coordination Team and the Academic Board. Furthermore, there should be a deadline for implementing their feedback. National Coordinators should set up communication channels for conducting communication between the researchers and the National Coordination Team in order to exchange information, get the feedback, discuss questions ask any clarifications, if necessary.

3.12 Publication

Once the report is finalised, it should be published. Publication can take many forms, varying from a pdf on the website of your National Group to a physical publication with an ISBN, see more below under “Publication”.

3.13 Concluding Report

Previous experience has showed that many external entities are not interested in reading a long report. Therefore, it is recommendable to create a separate Concluding Report with the main findings and conclusion. This Concluding Report can be distributed during the follow-up event(s).

We suggest establishing a central research team with the purpose of drafting the Concluding Report.

3.14 Follow-up

Once your Final Report has been published, it is time to utilise it. You should present the findings and conclusions, send it to decision makers and you may even consider organising your own conference or lecture to present the research.

IV. Research documents

As mentioned above, you will need several research documents in conducting the LRG. The purpose of the main documents is outlined below, however, depending on the structure of your LRG you may need more or less of these.

4.1 Academic Framework

The Academic Framework sets out the scope of the research. It consists of an overall thesis as well as several questions. Each participating group answers the same questions so the results can be compared. We suggest the following structure for your LRG:

- **Introduction:** One or more questions introducing the topic of the LRG. For an LRG on Sports Law this could be “Is sport specifically regulated in your country and how is sport defined?”. The introductory questions(s) should be rather broad.
- **Analysis:** The questions setting out the main analysis which go deeper than the question(s) in the introduction.
- **Assessment:** Through one or more questions, ask the researchers to assess the quality of the legislation and case law on this area and suggest whether and how the legislation could be improved.
- **Evaluation/conclusion:** Summarise the main findings in the report. A tip is that a reader should be able to read the introduction and conclusions and have a broad overview of the area.

As an example, you may find the Academic Framework for the International Legal Research Group on Internet Censorship [here](#).

4.2 Academic Guidelines

The Academic Guidelines provide further guidance on how the questions in the Academic Framework should be answered. The Academic Guidelines are very important as they ensure that the Groups answer the Academic Framework correctly and that there are fewer discrepancies between the different reports. For the LRG on Sports Law, guiding questions for the analysis could be:

- Has your country been party to cases related to sports? Please include reference to and a thorough analysis of relevant case law. Please structure your case law analysis as follows: short outline of the facts, the decision and an evaluation of how the decision affected state of the law.
- Please list the legislation and explain how this legislation regulates the issue.
- Please include reference to any policy papers and/or proposals.

As an example, you may find the Academic Guidelines for the International Legal Research Group on Internet Censorship [here](#).

4.3 Timeline

As outlined above, it is important to have a timeline for your LRG to ensure that you progress properly. The timeline should be flexible, and you may have to change the timeline as your work develops. We suggest including at least the following deadlines:

- Deadline for finalising the Academic Framework and Guidelines
- Deadline for appointing National Coordinators
- Launch
- Deadline for applications
- Deadline for appointing researchers
- Deadline for National/Local Reports
- Deadline for review
- Deadline for review implementation
- Publication

4.4 Style Guide

The International Council Meeting Decision Book sets out that, an LRG must have a Style Guide for formatting and referencing in accordance with the Oxford University Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities (OSCOLA). The Style Guide is of imperative importance, as it sets out how the report should be edited and hence ensures the consistency and professional outlook of your LRG.

You may find a draft Style Guide in the LRG Package. We suggest that the Style Guide sets out at least:

- The length that each report should be;
- The language utilised;
- The use of headings;
- The style of referencing.

4.5 Language Manual

For your LRG to have a professional appearance, the language must be coherent and consistent throughout the report. Therefore, we recommend drafting a Language Manual which helps the researchers in drafting the report and the Linguistic Editors in reviewing the report. You may find a draft Language Manual in the LRG Package, however, we suggest adding sections specific to the topic of your LRG.

4.6 Template

As technical editing can be complicated, we suggest developing a word template which complies with your Style Guide and which the researchers can use for compiling their report.

V. Human resources

A Legal Research Group is a project organised and coordinated by different people. Since coordination is required on many different levels (and not only on an academic level), it is extremely important to ensure efficient management of human resources. Below, we provide you with a description of tasks for all the positions, which shall be included in every LRG organised.

5.1 The structure explained

The human resources in the LRG are comprised of:

1. General Coordinator (Local/National level);
2. Academic Board;
3. Linguistic Editor(s);
4. Technical Editor(s);
5. Researchers;
6. Other contributors.

5.1.1 General Coordinator

This will often be the Vice President in charge of Academic Activities, although the Board of a National or a Local Group can, of course, choose anyone else.

5.1.2 Academic Board

The Academic Board ensures the academic development and quality of LRG. The Academic Board is responsible for drafting the Academic Framework and Guidelines of LRG in cooperation with any relevant stakeholders, if needed. Furthermore, the Academic Board serves as a contact point for any academic questions from Research Groups and assists them with research activities in the scope of LRG.

5.1.4 Linguistic Editor

The Linguistic Editor reviews the reports from a linguistic perspective, as well as ensures correct use of (British) legal English. The Editor provides inputs to the researchers' queries on the use of language.

5.1.5 Technical Editor

The Technical Editor assists with implementation of the Style Guide and ensures that all formatting requirements as set out in the Guide are met. In addition, the Editor provides inputs to the researchers' queries on the formatting of the report and the use of the Style Guide.

5.1.6 Researchers

Researchers are the law students and/or young lawyers selected to participate in LRG. Their main task is to conduct research and to answer the questions of the respective Academic Framework.

5.1.7 Other contributors

You might want to involve a few more essential contributors who could provide their assistance to the project. Your President could help with external relations in your search for a partner; your Treasurer could contribute to the fundraising activities and advise on expenses management when it comes to publishing of the Final Report; your colleague for Marketing would be the one to help you to develop promotional materials to raise awareness about the project; your Vice President for Seminars & Conferences could assist you in case you would like to organise a follow-up event, e.g. a conference.

5.2 Duties and Responsibilities of the National/Local Research Teams

Below we have set out the responsibilities of each of the team members.

5.2.1. Duties and Responsibilities of the General Coordinator

- Submitting a final report, which is in compliance with the expected academic quality, guidelines and deadlines;
- Recruiting researchers and coordinating them;
- Representing the researchers to the external parties;
- Implementing a marketing strategy to promote the project, benefits and opportunities of participation and importance of conducting legal research.

As the Coordinator plays a managerial role in the project, they are expected to demonstrate:

- Management, leadership and cooperation skills;
- The ability to work independently as well as work efficiently in a team;
- A strong commitment to the project and results-oriented management;

- Sufficient availability and responsible performance of the required tasks;
- Flexibility, tenacity and proven reliability.

5.2.2 Duties and Responsibilities of the Academic Board

- Coordinating and monitoring the academic development of the conducted research;
- Answering academic questions from the Researchers and/or communicating inquiries to the Academic Supervisor for additional information;
- Ensuring high quality of the research and writing of the final report and timely intervening to mitigate any issues related to academic content throughout the research and writing process when necessary;
- Ensuring absence of any cases of plagiarism and/or political views/opinions in draft reports;
- Analysing and proactively providing feedback on the submitted drafts of the research;
- Processing and providing feedback on the final report prior to submission of the report for the review or publication;
- Validating and approving the Final Report.

The Academic Board members are selected according to their academic qualities. As such, they are expected to demonstrate:

- Significant academic expertise in the field of the LRG topic;
- Professionalism and willingness to support the Research Group with their experience;
- Responsiveness and willingness to perform the required tasks.
- Strong managerial, leadership and cooperation skills;
- The ability to work independently as well as work efficiently in a team;
- Knowledge of law and willingness to perform extensive research in the field of the LRG topic;
- High level of written (British) legal English;
- A strong feeling of commitment to the project and results-oriented management;
- Sufficient availability and responsible performance of the required tasks.

5.2.4 Duties and Responsibilities of the Linguistic Editor

- Assisting the Researchers on the proper use of citations and plain legal English, following the Language Manual;
- Proofreading the drafts of report (both non-Final and Final) and introducing corrections, if necessary;
- Answering linguistic questions from the Researchers.

The Linguistic Editor is selected on the basis of their academic qualities and linguistic expertise. In case you have LRG in a language other than your native, international exchange students, being perhaps native English speakers, could be involved into the project. Linguistic editors are expected to demonstrate:

- A strong legal English background;
- Proficiency in written legal English;
- The ability to work independently as well as work efficiently in a team;
- A strong feeling of commitment to the project and orientation on results;
- Sufficient availability and willingness to perform the required tasks.

5.2.5 Duties and Responsibilities of the Technical Editor:

- Assisting the Researchers in ensuring compliance with the Style Guide;
- Reviewing the drafts of report (both non-Final and Final) and introducing corrections, if necessary;
- Answering technical (formatting) questions from the Researchers.

The Technical Editor is selected on the basis of their technical expertise. Technical editors are expected to demonstrate:

- Proficiency in the use text editing software;
- Deep understanding of the Style Guide;
- The ability to work independently as well as work efficiently in a team; The ability to work under pressure;
- A strong feeling of commitment to the project and orientation on results;
- Sufficient availability and willingness to perform the required tasks.

5.2.6 Duties and Responsibilities of the Researchers:

- Producing a collective and homogeneous report, which is in compliance with the Academic Framework and that is in accordance with the expected academic quality, guidelines and deadlines;
- Ensuring that the academic content of report is accurate, cited properly and written in the precise legal terminology;
- Maintaining open and constant communication with the Research Group by providing regular updates and responding promptly to requests and inquiries from the members of the Research Group;
- Respecting all deadlines set up by the Coordinators.

The researchers are selected according to their academic qualities and proven motivation. As such, they are expected to demonstrate:

- Knowledge of the relevant field of law and willingness to perform an extensive research in this field;
- A high level of written legal terminology in the language of the report;
- The ability to work independently as well as work efficiently in a team;
- A strong feeling of commitment to the project and orientation on results;
- Sufficient availability and willingness to perform the required tasks.

V. Publication

Publishing your Final Report is an important part of the LRG organising process as the results must be made publicly available. Therefore, we have outlined some of the options for publishing your LRG.

5.1 On your website

The simplest and fastest option is always to publish the report on the websites of the participating ELSA Groups. In this way, you can quickly show the work done to researchers and partners.

5.2 Through ELSA International

ELSA International offers National and Local Groups to have their LRG reports published in the LRG library on the LRG website of ELSA International. The only requirement for such publication is that the report is drafted in English.

Furthermore, ELSA International offers the opportunity of publishing through our Publication Partner, Wolf Publishers. Contact academicactivities@elsa.org for more information.

5.3 External law reviews and magazines

Cooperation with other publications is another professional way of using your publication and a good way of gaining recognition. It is normally not possible to publish the Final Report, or even the Concluding Report, in a law review, and hence, we recommend publishing a summary with a link to the online publication.

5.4 Physical publication

Contact your national and local publishers to enquire whether they would be interested in entering a partnership to publish your Final Report. This adds recognition and gives tangibility to the project. Furthermore, professional publication gives the report its own ISBN which is important in referencing. There are many ways to acquire an ISBN - in case that your faculty has its own publication centre, try approaching them. You may also contact bar associations, libraries and other publishers from your country.

VI. Partnerships

You will need several partners for your LRG to support you academically. Below we have listed a few contacts you may consider. While keeping in mind that conducting an LRG is a great way to achieve new partnerships, we also recommend approaching the experts you have already worked with on other projects as well as offering this opportunity to your general partners. While these partners will provide academic support to your researchers, you will also need the academic partners to help create your Academic Framework and to review the first draft of your research. Remember that having acclaimed experts as your partners will be very important for marketing of the LRG, as law students and young lawyers will be more interested in participating in a project which is supported by well-known experts. Please find assistance on how to approach new external relations in the [BEE section of the Officers Portal](#).

6.2 Universities

In setting an Academic Board, you will be looking at including one or more academics, and therefore, your national and local universities are an obvious place to start. You may also consider having the universities as a general partner on the LRG; you can negotiate to have a possibility for the participants to gain ECTS points for their participation and/or a certificate of participation with the logo of the university.

6.2 Law firms

Having law firms in your Academic Board adds a more practical dimension to the research. You can furthermore organise side and follow-up events with the law firm, and the partnership may include a financial aspect (see more below under “Fundraising”).

6.3 NGOs and institutions

NGOs and local/national/international institutions are often interested in conducting comparative research and are hence an ideal LRG partner. Research institutions, NGOs etc. on the relevant field of law and remember to seek the approval of ELSA International before contacting international institutional relations.

VII. Fundraising

Although an LRG can be conducted without any expenses, there are still great opportunities to utilise the LRG for fundraising. Having a financial partnership can allow you to, for example, print your LRG or to subsidise participation in academic gatherings, where you will be able to promote your work. Keep in mind that having a Concluding Report will be highly useful for this endeavour, as many externals will be more interested in a concise publication which sums up your work.

A well organised LRG will have many benefits to offer to potential partners:

— **Marketing**

Offer your partners a possibility to be featured on your website, to distribute their materials to your mailing lists and during your NCM, to promote them on your social media channels and to mention them during your side and follow-up events.

— **Academic Recognition**

Offer a possibility to influence the drafting process of your Academic Framework, to take part in your side and follow-up events or to host their own side-events, e.g. a workshop on conducting legal research. Offer to have the Final Report and the Concluding Report sent to your partners after the publication.

— **Once the research is done**

Offer your partners a chance to have their logo on the front page of your Final or Concluding Report, to offer a research prize and to host a ceremony after the publication or to be invited to yours.

There are many different external relations who might be interested in supporting you LRG financially:

- **Law firms:** These can be involved in a specific project sponsorship or you can offer the LRG as part of a general sponsorship.
- **Project Grants:** These funds are intended only for one particular project. They vary in demanded conditions and offered options. Many institutions offer them as long as the project has a multiplier effect and engages many people.
- **Universities:** Often universities offer grants for international projects, or one of the research centres may be interested in supporting you LRG.
- **Independent research centres:** These will be interested in further research in their area.

For more detailed information, please utilise the [BEE section of the Officers Portal](#).

VIII. Contact

For more guidance on how to organise your LRG, please do not hesitate to contact ELSA International at academicactivities@elsa.org.