Translation to English by the PRD team of an article on our research that was featured in BGU's Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty's Newsletter. For access to the Hebrew-language article, click here.

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Behind the Research:
The Scholar-Administrator Teams Making ERC-Level Science Possible at BGU

At universities around the world, major research breakthroughs are often associated with a single name: the principal investigator. Yet behind every successful large-scale international project stands a close partnership between scholars and administrators - one that transforms intellectual vision into operational reality.

At Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU), the Participation and Representation in the Digital Age (PRD) project (https://www.prd-erc.eu/), led by political scientist Prof. Jennifer Oser since May 2023, offers a compelling example of this model. Funded by a 1.5 million Euro grant from the European Research Council (ERC), the five-year project investigates how citizens participate in politics in the digital age and whether their voices translate into meaningful political representation.

Winning ERC-level grants requires world-class academic excellence, and this requirement is widely acknowledged in the scholarly community. Less attention is paid to an additional requirement for the successful implementation and management of this type of ambitious project: a network of professionals whose expertise turns research vision into reality, even under challenging conditions.

A Research Partnership Behind the Project

At the core of the PRD project is a tightly coordinated partnership between academic leadership and administrative expertise.



Prof. Jennifer Oser



Lilah Pikus-Horesh



Raya Even David

Jennifer Oser, the project's principal investigator and a professor in the Department of Politics and Government at BGU, leads the research agenda. She recruits and mentors the research team, guiding them in collecting and analyzing data, and producing high-impact academic publications.

The project's financial management is led by Lilah Pikus Horesh, Budget Officer and Assistant to the Head of Research Budget Management in BGU's Research and Development Authority (RDA). In close collaboration with RDA colleagues, Lilah ensures that the project meets the complex financial and regulatory requirements of an ERC grant by overseeing financial reporting and compliance, and international financial coordination.

Raya Even David, the project manager for PRD, completes this partnership by leading its operational and administrative strategy. She oversees budget implementation, HR coordination, procurement and payments, reporting processes, and communication platforms. She also manages public engagement initiatives, including webinars, newsletters, and media outreach, ensuring that the project's academic contributions reach global audiences.

Together, this administrator–scholar partnership forms an integrated leadership structure in which academic and administrative expertise are fully aligned, enabling the project to operate seamlessly across institutions, countries, and systems.

International Excellence in Periods of Uncertainty

The PRD project is inherently international. Its research network includes collaborators across Europe and beyond, including key institutional partnership in Italy and Sweden, as well as research collaborators in the United States, Canada, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Since its inception, the PRD project has operated during a period of remarkable global and regional instability, beginning at the tail-end of the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing to the war that began on October 7, 2023, followed by two rounds of direct conflict with Iran (starting June 2025 and March 2026). Additional challenges, including rising academic boycotts and constraints on international mobility, have further complicated collaboration.

Rather than slowing progress, these conditions have underscored the strength of the administrator–scholar partnership at the heart of the project.

Through coordinated leadership, the team rapidly adapted research plans, implemented flexible remote-work models, and restructured aspects of the ERC implementation framework. The PRD team and their colleagues at the ERC and BGU implemented administrative mechanisms to support researchers working outside Israel, including

bilateral agreements with partner institutions that enabled local employment while maintaining full integration into the ERC project.

At the same time, the project sustained its international research agenda through initiating a webinar series in which BGU students facilitate seminars with world-class international scholars (https://www.prd-erc.eu/events), and through ongoing cross-border workshops. These adaptations strengthened the global intellectual community of the project, while advancing the team's publications and research agenda.

This experience reflects a broader institutional capacity at BGU: the ability to maintain excellence in research even amid prolonged uncertainty. It also highlights that resilient international collaboration is made possible by strong, ongoing partnerships between scholars and administrators who can respond quickly, strategically, and effectively.

The Institutional Ecosystem Supporting BGU's ERC-level Research

The success of ERC-funded projects at BGU is also rooted in a supportive institutional ecosystem. Within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dean Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, Vice Dean Ayelet Harel, and Research Coordinator Noa Cherry have played key roles in strengthening research infrastructure and fostering international engagement. At the university level, Vice President for Research and Development Raz Yelinek provides strategic leadership in advancing large-scale international grants and maintaining global competitiveness. BGU's Research and Development Authority – led by Director Limor Azrai-Horovitz and Head of the International Budget Management Section Jasmin Thalker – have implemented proactive policies to support ERC researchers at BGU that rival the support of leading research institutions in Israel and Europe.

The expansion of support for ERC researchers at BGU in the humanities and social sciences and beyond has taken place in a broader university context that has prioritized international research excellence and global engagement, led by President Daniel Chamovitz, Executive Director Tal Ben-Haim, Rector Chaim Hames, and Vice President of Global Engagement, Michal Bar-Asher Siegal.

Since the PRD project began, these scholar-administrator leaders have supported a broad network of colleagues to create and sustain deep partnerships for BGU humanities and social science researchers who are leading complex research initiatives.

Research and Life in the Negev

For the individuals involved, the story of this project is also deeply personal.

Both Raya Even David and Lilah Pikus Horesh are raising families in Be'er Sheva, where their children attend nursery school in the Eshel Avraham community. Their professional collaboration at BGU intersects with daily community life in the Negev, reflecting the close-knit environment in which many university staff and researchers live and work. During the second Iran war the resilience of that community was tested when a missile

strike damaged parts of the Tet neighborhood in Be'er Sheva, including the Eshel Avraham nursery school, and the synagogue led by Raya Even David's husband, Rabbi Mijael Even David.

Even amid these challenges, the team has continued to maintain the international partnerships and research activities that sustain the PRD project.

A Collective Achievement

While ERC grants are formally awarded to individual researchers, their success depends on collaborative infrastructures that integrate academic leadership with administrative excellence. At BGU, the partnership between Jennifer Oser, Lilah Pikus Horesh, and Raya Even David is the inner circle of a broader scholar-administrator collaboration that illustrates how such alignment enables world-class research to flourish.

This model goes beyond support – it is a form of shared leadership. It ensures that even in periods marked by disruption and uncertainty, ambitious international research can continue to generate knowledge, build partnerships, and contribute to the global academic community.