foRMAtion

Lesson 3 - Funding proposals and evaluation criteria

Keywords

- European funding proposals
- Pre-award RMAs
- Excellence, Impact and Implementation
- Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation
- Deliverables and Milestones
- Consortium
- Common elements in funding proposals
- Persuasive writing

Learning Objectives

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⑱ ⑲ ⑳

Scan for complete LOs

Go to the exercise

https://learningapps.org/watch?v=p3w2yensn22

Go to videos

Part 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lC7xPEii7VE&t=2s1s

Part 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJsnuBj_5jc&t=7s

Introduction - What does a European funding proposal look like?

A **funding proposal** is often the result of months of preparation to gather the right team and formulate a project that really meets the demands of a specific **call for proposals** and has a funding potential.

When you prepare a funding proposal, your paramount goal is to be funded! However, this is not always the case, as the whole process is very competitive. Indeed, the **success rates** of most funding programmes fall below 20%, meaning that, at best 20, proposals out of 100 submitted will receive funding. To a certain extent, applying for funding by **submitting a grant**

(or funding proposal) is like playing a game: you play according to the rules, which imply designing a project that meets the **evaluation criteria** at its best and accept that only the best proposal(s) submitted in the same round of competition win(s). Sometimes luck also plays a role. When several high-quality proposals are submitted but there aren't enough funds available to finance all of them, then luck may be a bonus - but only if your proposal is already excellent and very well written!

There are different types of funding proposals. Those presented by a single organization are known as **single beneficiary proposals**. These include **individual fellowships** (to apply for a **fellowship)**, **travel grants** or **project proposals** meant to be carried out by a **single team of researchers at a single institution**.

Often European proposals require that multiple organizations, located in different countries, take part in the same project. These organizations form a **consortium,** in which one beneficiary is the **project coordinator** and the others are the **consortium partners**. Proposals involving consortia require substantial time for **networking activities**. In pre-submission stages a great deal of time is invested in contacting potential partners and negotiating their participation in the proposal and, subsequently, if the project is approved for funding, a lot of networking activities are required.

Pre-award RMAs can play a very important role in assuring that high-quality proposals are submitted by **addressing the evaluation criteria** and complying with the admission's conditions for the given call. It goes without saying that the applicants should be experts on the topic of the Call for Proposals and should contribute to the scientific/technical sections of the proposal. However, proposals require applicants to provide much more information than just the technical and scientific details of the proposed project. RMAs can specialise in **supporting applicants with the non-scientific parts of the proposal**. This kind of input is valuable as it can actively contribute to the proposal's probability of success!

European funding proposals

A complete proposal must contain a lot of information in order to be selected for funding, as it needs to meet compliance requirements and address all evaluation criteria. What does a European proposal look like?

Most **Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe** proposals share the same structure and are organized according to three selection criteria: **Excellence**, **Impact** and **Implementation**. These criteria are defined and detailed to correspond to the challenge of each call for proposals; thus the evaluation criteria are specific for each call.

Generally, the proposal is divided into two components: **Part A** contains the **administrative details** of the proposal and of its partners while **Part B** contains the **technical description** of

the proposed actions (Annex 1 to the Grant Agreement (Description of the Action: https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/gap/doa/h2020-doa-ria-ia-csa_en.pdf).

Part A contains:

- General information on the proposal (including an **Abstract**)
- Declarations
- Administrative data of all partners
- Budget
- Ethics (and Security) issues
- The Call's specific questions/challenges (if any)

Part B is divided into two parts containing, respectively:

- **sections 1, 2 and 3** and
- **sections 4 and 5.**

The first three sections are the core of the proposal, describing the action, and are structured according to the selection criteria.

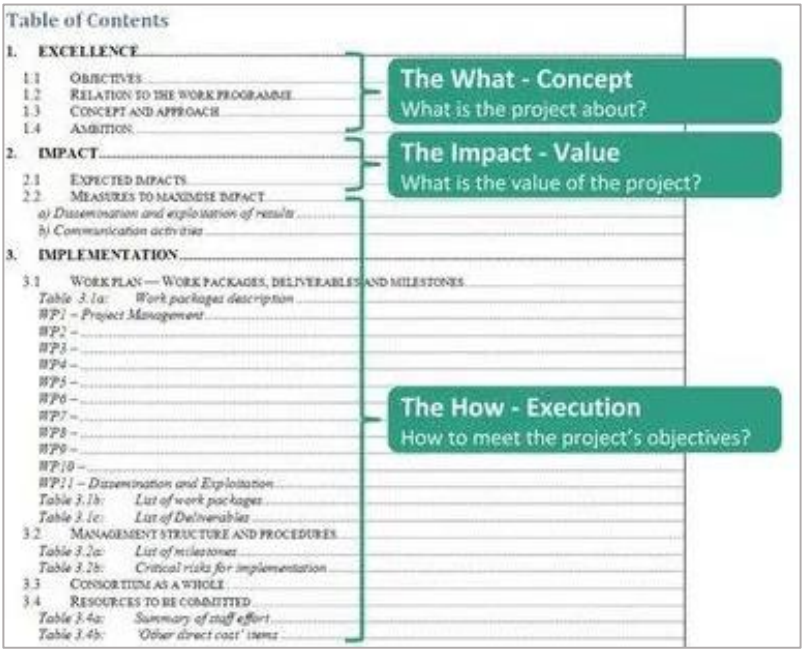

Figure 16 - Table of contents for Part B
(source: https://enspire.science/horizon-2020-proposal-template-guide-understanding-the-inner-logic-and-structure/)

These three key sections are:

Section 1 - Excellence

Section 2 - Impact

Section 3 - Implementation

The remining sections are:

Section 4 - Members of the consortium

Section 5 - Ethics and security.

Section 1 - Excellence

This section calls for the use of non-specialist language to explain the need for the project. Jargon should be avoided. Several aspects will be assessed here, including the novelty, the relevance, the timing of the proposed idea and the challenge that the approach represents. Figures, research data and statistics can (and should) be used to support the ideas and the approach described in this section.

Generally, section 1 is divided into the following headings:

- **1.1 Objectives**
- **1.2 Relation to the work programme**
- **1.3 Concept and methodology**
- **1.4 Ambition**

Section 2 - Impact

This section describes the sum of the influences and effects that the project is expected to have on all its potential target groups (**stakeholders**) and the impact anticipated on the project's field of action.

Generally, Section 2 is divided into the following headings:

- **2.1 Expected impacts**, including those listed in the Work Programme topic, but also the barriers and framework conditions involved in the maximization of impact.

- **2.2 Measures to maximise impact** requires a detailed description of three key measures:
  - **Communication** = How project impacts will be shared with society.
  - **Dissemination** = How project results will be shared with others.
  - **Exploitation** = How project results will be used and passed on.

Section 3 - Implementation

This section deals with the actual roadmap and workplan of the proposal, which must detail project objectives very clearly.

Generally, Section 3 is divided into the following headings:

- **3.1 Work plan**

The overall proposed work plan is generally divided into **Work Packages**, which represent the given set of tasks to be performed to address each of the project's **goals**. Each Work Package is expected to produce and yield several **Deliverables**.

Deliverables are **multi-format project outputs** (*e.g., documents, reports, technical diagrams, brochures, lists, literature reviews, software milestones or other building blocks of the project*) that must be produced at a given moment during the project's timeline.

The work plan and the deliverables should all be organized in a **Gantt Chart** or via a details project timeline.

- **3.2 Management structure, milestones and procedures**

The **Management Structure** describes the governing bodies of the project, outlines the decision-making rules and the details the frequency of project meetings and internal communication moments among partners of the consortium. This activity is only relevant for large projects involving several organizations.

Relevant milestones should also be defined. Milestones are steps in the project that help assess the **project's progress**. They may correspond to moments when a key deliverable is issued, for example.

- **3.3 Consortium as a whole** describes the composition of the consortium's team/partners, emphasizing the added value of performing the project together.
- **3.4 Resources to be committed** details the budget needed to carry out the project.

Section 4 - Members of the consortium

This section describes each consortium partner. It includes a brief description of the institution and the individuals contributing to the project. Generally, this section does not have a page limit.

Section 5 - Ethics and Security identifies

This section includes all ethical and security issues raised by the project and should provide an explanation about how they will be addressed. Generally, this section does not have a page limit.

Common elements in funding proposals

What has been described up to now is a **common structure of a European proposal**. Other funding agencies, national or international, utilise other types of structures, which might also be simpler. In any case, there are common elements in all proposals formats, and being familiar with one type of funding proposal will make it easier to identify similarities and differences in other types of proposals. Some contents are required in any type of proposal.

A typical proposal structure usually includes:

- Title.

- Summary or abstract.
- State-of-the-art, describing the need for the project, similar studies, preliminary results, expected impacts and ambition.
- Main question and work objectives.
- Workplan, including methodology, timeline, deliverables, milestones, budget, description of team/institutions, management aspects, risk analysis and contingency plans, security and ethics.

Learning and using the appropriate terminology

The European funding documentation is full of **specific vocabulary and terminology**. Some terms **describe the underlying policies** that shape a given call. Examples include terms such as *Circular Economy*, *Green Deal*, *Cross-Cutting issues*, *Frontier Research*, *Open Science*, *Responsible Research and Innovation*, etc. In grants, it is important to understand what the funders' terminology means and to use and **'recycle' the funders' wording** in the project proposal to help evaluators easily match the information required by the evaluation criteria to the actual contents of the proposal.

Other 'European' terms used are linked to the **vocabulary coming from European funding** itself, such as *call for proposal*, *deadline*, *redress procedure*, *coordination and support action*, etc. Some of this vocabulary is introduced in this module, but there are plenty of words to master and this takes time and might be discouraging when one is attempting to assemble a funding proposal for the first time. Also, when one applies to other funding agencies, terms describing the same actions may be completely different. For example, in the American NIH vocabulary a *call for proposals* is an *announcement* and deadline is known as *due date* (https://grants.nih.gov/grants/grants_process.htm).

Writing to persuade

The **writing style** of a grant is also very important and can be an influencing factor in the successful obtainment of funds. When writing about research, it is important to explain complex concepts in simple ways. Thus, one should choose an **effective and understandable writing style** using simple phrase structures, common words, and short sentences and paragraphs.

The aim of writing a grant is primarily to get funds, thus the grant's text needs to be convincing. A **persuasive writing** style is always an asset. This means using subtle techniques to make your text stand out from the others. Often advertising-like and marketing tones can be inspiring.

Persuasive writing tips include:

- choosing active present and future tense verbal forms over passive voices to show action;
- using *I* or *we* when indicating the main candidate or his/her team to 'own' the performance in the project;
- repeating key concepts throughout the text;
- highlighting the proposal's benefits early on;
- making the proposal visually attractive by using simple infographics;
- breaking the text up into clear headings;
- using short paragraphs;
- avoiding an overuse of font weight tools such as **bold** or *underline*.

Bibliographic references

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