



#HorizonEU



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



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From researcher's perspective to the European point of view: how to meet expectations of European evaluators

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Agenda



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perspective

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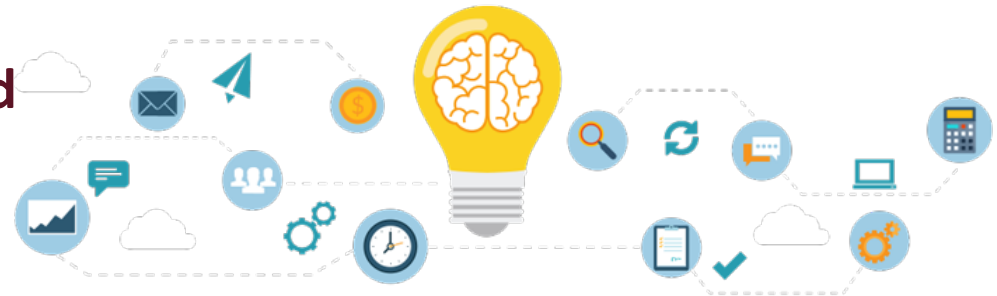


From the funder perspective

Starting point

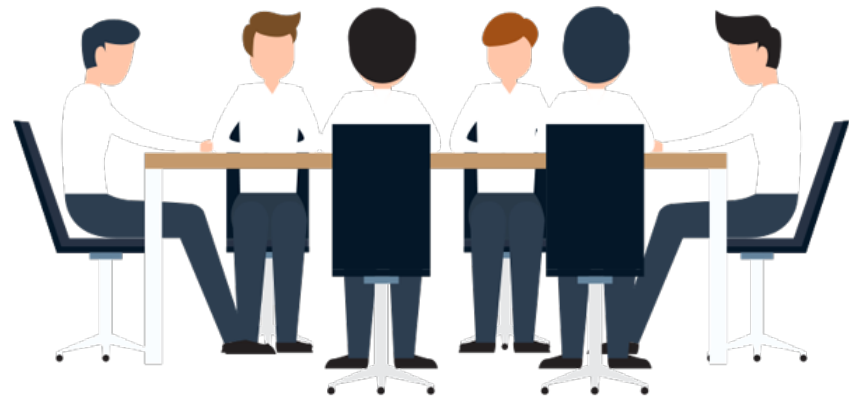
- **Awareness of the funding context**

- **Matching EU objectives and focussing on expected impacts**



- **In depth awareness of evaluation criteria and process**

- **Interdisciplinarity and integration between different competencies**



Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe

Vision and objectives



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Horizon Europe, the ninth European Research and Innovation Framework Programme (2021-2027), is the EU's key funding instrument for research and innovation, with a budget of € 95.5 billions.



HORIZON EUROPE



fuel EU's **scientific and technological excellence** and the strengthen the European Research Area (ERA)

**Science
& technology**



tackle policy priorities, including **green and digital transitions** and Sustainable Development Goals

Society



boost Europe's **innovation uptake, competitiveness and jobs**

Economy

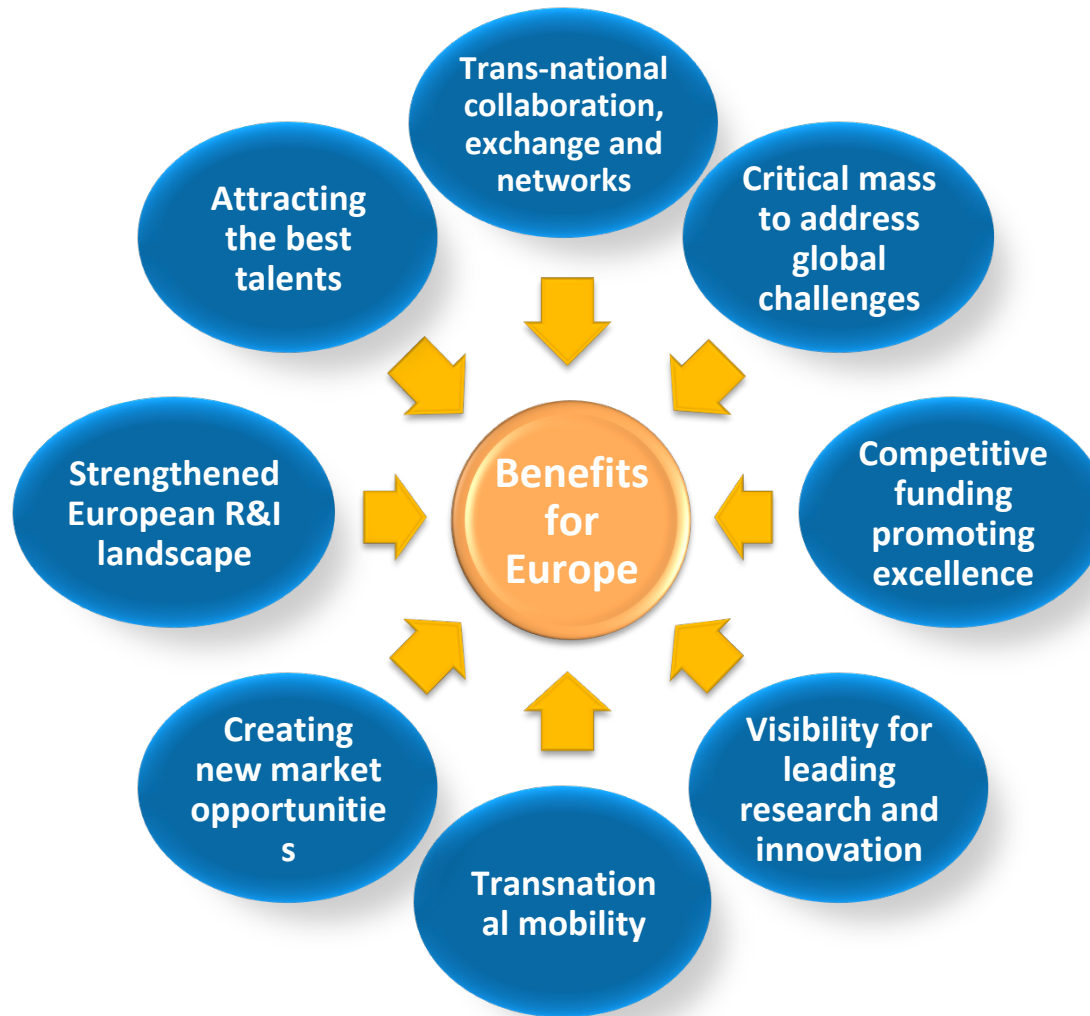


European
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Added value expected from Horizon Europe



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Horizon Europe: overall structure



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Pillar 1 Excellent Science

European Research Council

Marie Skłodowska-Curie
Actions

Research Infrastructures



Pillar 2 Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness

Clusters

Health
Culture, Creativity and Inclusive
Society
Civil Security for Society
Digital, Industry and Space
Climate, Energy and Mobility
Food, Bioeconomy, Natural
Resources, Agriculture and
Environment

Joint Research Centre



Pillar 3 Innovative Europe

European Innovation Council

European innovation
ecosystems

European Institute of
Innovation
and Technology

Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area

Widening participation and spreading excellence

Reforming and Enhancing the European R&I system



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Focus on Impact



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Objective IMPACT

The calls are grouped by destination, which identify the expected impact (Sc. - Tec.- Eco.- Soc)

Cross-cutting IMPACT

- Ethics and Integrity
- Open Science
- Gender Dimension
- Integration with SSH e multidisciplinary approach

Targeted IMPACT *i.e.* *Cluster Health*

- **Staying healthy** in a rapidly changing society
- Living and working in a **health-promoting environment**
- Tackling diseases and **reducing disease burden**
- **Ensuring access** to innovative, sustainable and high-quality health care
- Unlocking the full potential of **new tools, technologies and digital solutions for a healthy society**
- Maintaining an innovative, **sustainable and globally competitive health-related industry**

Horizon call general approach



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- **Calls are challenge-based, and therefore more open to innovative proposals**
 - Calls are less prescriptive - they do not outline the expected solutions to the problem, nor the approach to be taken to solve it
 - Calls/topics descriptions allow plenty of scope for applicants to propose innovative solutions of their own choice
- **There is a greater emphasis on impact, in particular through each call or topic impact statements**
 - Applicants are asked to explain how their work will contribute to bringing about the described impacts
 - During the evaluation, you are asked to assess this potential contribution
- **There is more emphasis on innovation**
 - Horizon 2020 supports all stages in the research and innovation chain including non-technological and social innovation and activities closer to the market
- **Proposals may bring together different disciplines, sectors and actors to tackle specific challenges**

The added value of a Horizon project

Projects need to demonstrate:

- How their objectives and planning are **targeted to the needs/problems and opportunities of end-users;**
- Complementarity with existing research and **best practices;**
 - ➡ What is the project added value? Avoid recycling projects: repetition or continuation of former projects.
- Sufficient involvement of **key actors with complementary types of knowledge** (scientific and practical) should be reflected in the composition of the project consortium to reach the project objectives and make its results broadly implemented.
 - ➡ Include partners beyond scientists, such as end users.
 - ➡ Consider the involvement of multipliers to strengthen impact.

Fundamental information sources and relevant documents



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- **Work Programme** (Policies, strategies, objectives, destination/expected impacts, etc.)
 - **The description of the TOPIC**
 - **Applicant guidelines** (if available)
 - **Part B form template**
 - **Self-assessment form** (if available)
-
- **But also... policy documents by the European Commission**

From WP to specific topics



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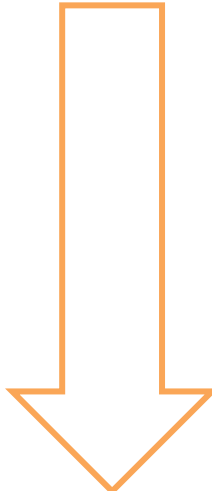
**What to carefully
analyse within a
topic?**

- **Specific Challenge**
- **Scope**
- **Expected Impact**
- **Type of Action (RIA, IA, CSA)**
- **Available budget and
indicative request per project
proposal**

An example: from the WP to the topic



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- 
- **Work Programme** - Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment
 - **Destination** - Fair, healthy and environment-friendly food systems from primary production to consumption
 - **Call** - Fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food systems from primary production to consumption
 - **Topic** - HORIZON-CL6-2021-FARM2FORK-01-15: Transition to healthy and sustainable dietary behaviour



The evaluation process

Relevant principles of the evaluation process



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Dal punto di vista
del proponente



**ABILITY TO
COMMUNICATE**

Objectivity

- Each proposal has to be evaluated only on the basis of the text of the proposal



Accuracy

- The only references of the evaluation are represented by the criteria set by the EU



**ATTENTION
TO THE RULES**

Overview of the evaluation process



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———— Eligible proposal

———— Minimum 3 "experts"
(evaluators)

———— Individual evaluation
(remote)

- Evaluator => Write IER
- Rapporteur => Write CR (save)



———— Consensus
(central)

- Rapporteur => Write CR (submit)
- Evaluators and Rapporteur => Approve CR



Individual evaluation



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- Each proposal is evaluated by **at least 3 evaluators, up to a maximum of 5**
- Proposals are **assessed individually without discussing them with other involved evaluators** (Huge responsibility: by their comments and suggestions, evaluators can emphasize the value of a proposal!)
- For each criterion is given **a score**, keeping into consideration the comments related to the subcriteria
- For each subcriterion is given **a comment**. It focuses on strengths and weaknesses of the proposal
- Much attention given to the **page limit**

From the individual assessment to the consensus group phase



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- Each evaluator drafts an "**Individual Evaluation Report (IER)**" and submits it (pdf format)
- For each proposal he/she **examines the other two "Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs)"** especially for those proposals for which he/she has been identified as "Rapporteur"
- He/she gets ready for the consensus phase, **identifying** both the aspects on which the experts have already agreed and MOST OF ALL **the diverging comments**

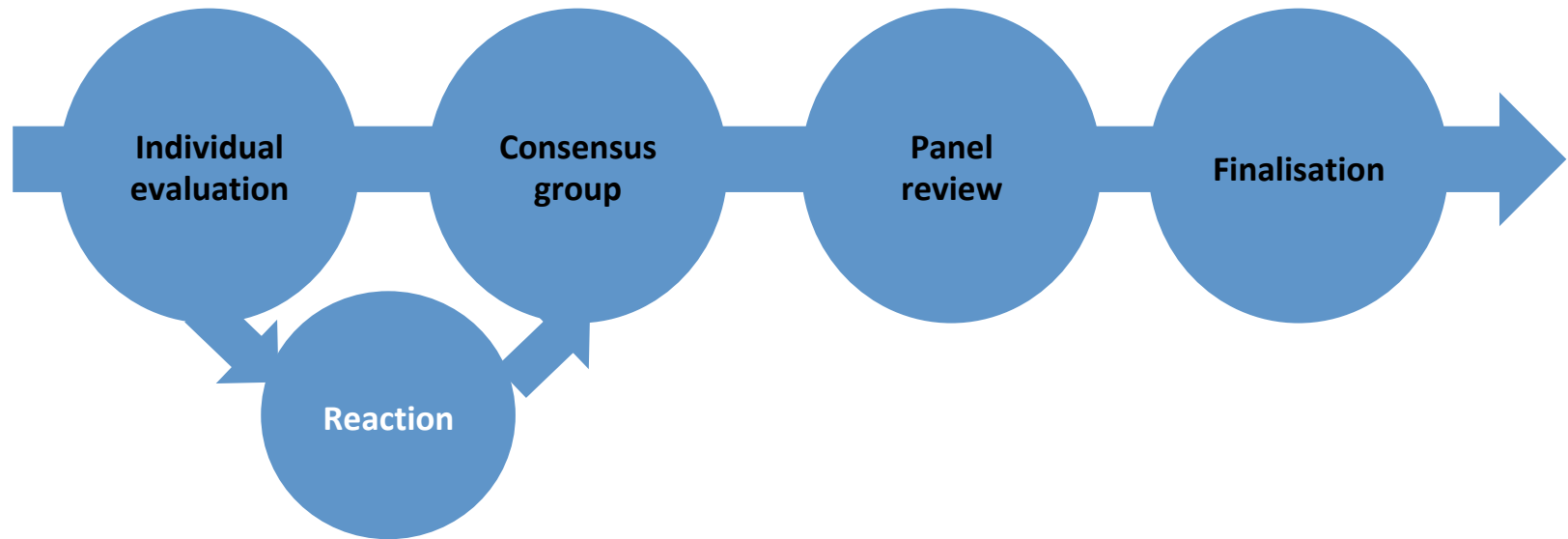
Consensus group: the most challenging phase



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- Each consensus starts from the **individual evaluations**, but ...
- It is not enough to reach an average of the scores given by each evaluator
- For each proposal a **Rapporteur** is identified, he/she is in charge for **drafting the consensus report**: it represents a "clear and justified" overall assessment of the proposal
- A consensus is required on **scores and comments**
- Keep in mind that evaluators involved have different backgrounds

New pilot phase



Right-to-react (Rebuttal)

- **Objective is to increase transparency**, to correct any factual or major misunderstandings by experts at an early stage, and provide more detailed feedback to applicants
- **Applicants will send their reactions** to draft experts comments
- **Experts will take applicants' reaction into account** before finalising their final assessment

Two different approaches



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Top-down calls

- ✓ Relevance and alignment to the topic
- ✓ Particular attention to the impacts expected from the topic, as described in the WP
- ✓ Measurability of specific impacts

Bottom-up calls

- ✓ Organization in different evaluation panels
- ✓ Originality in the choice of the research topic
- ✓ Strategic is the choice of the evaluation panel

Evaluation criteria in the top down approach (RIA and IA)



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EXCELLENCE

- ✓ Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives, and the extent to which the proposed work is ambitious, and goes beyond the state-of-the-art.
- ✓ Soundness of the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, inter-disciplinary approaches, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content, and the quality of open science practices including sharing and management of research outputs and engagement of citizens, civil society and end users where appropriate.

IMPACT

- ✓ Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the work programme, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions due to the project.
- ✓ Suitability and quality of the measures to maximize expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.

QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

- ✓ Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.
- ✓ Capacity and role of each participant, and extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.



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Comments and scores

Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Very Good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.

Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

The proposal **fails** to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

5

Excellent

4

4.9
↑
↓
4.0

Very Good

3

3.9
↑
↓
3.0

Good

2

2.9
↑
↓
2.0

Fair

1

1.9
↑
↓
1.0

Poor

0



**From the evaluator
point of view**

The starting point



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- *When is a proposal good? When it facilitates the evaluator's work*
- *Evaluators do really hate verbosity, unclear language, bad layout, meaningless illustrations, small print, platitudes, etc.*
- *The first two pages are critically important – if you lose the evaluators' attention there, you are lost!*

Abstract: an accurate and compelling text



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**Why is
important?**

Why now?

Why you?

Impact?

Where to start from to draft the proposal



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- **Align** with the rationale of the **policy context** and expectations
- **Justify** research objectives against the state of the art
- Identify the **research aim/goal** and consequently the **objectives**
- Propose **measurable key performance indicators** for **each objective** listed in the proposal

Project proposal: justification of objectives against the state of the art



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Demonstrate the research importance

*"X is an **important** European **widespread** phenomenon/problem"*

Situate the research in the available literature/context

"Extent literature states Y and Z about X."

Problematiser literature/current background to make space for contribution

*"**However**, knowing Y and Z **is not enough**. X is a **more complicated** phenomenon. **It involves also** W, which **we know less about**"*

Explain how the research addresses problematisation...THE OBJECTIVES

*"**I aim to** investigate W. To reach this aim I shall address the following **research question**... Relying on **an innovative approach**, I shall achieve the following **outcomes**.... This will **impact** on our understanding of X in the multiple ways: ..."*

Goals and Objectives

Goal

- A statement that describes in broad terms what will be done or achieved in long term
- Is overarching in relation to the objectives
- Is more ambitious than objectives can be

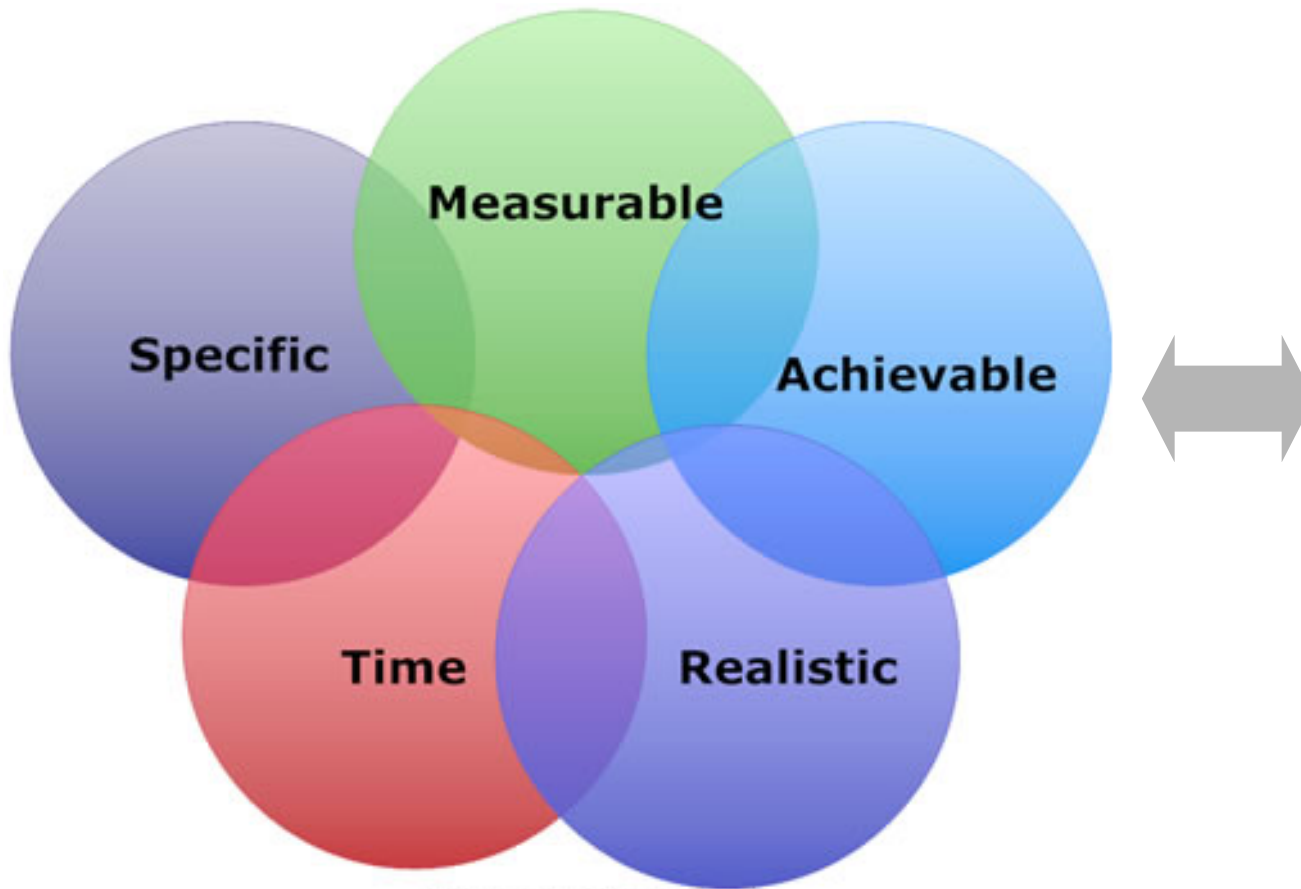
Can't be validated as is

Objective

- A statement in specific and measurable terms that describes what the PI or consortium will know or be able to do
- Consider to use S.M.A.R.T or SMARTER written objectives

Can be validated as is

Definition of the objectives



**The applicants
need for aligning
their own
objectives to EU
objectives!**

IMPACT:

Dissemination – Exploitation - Communication



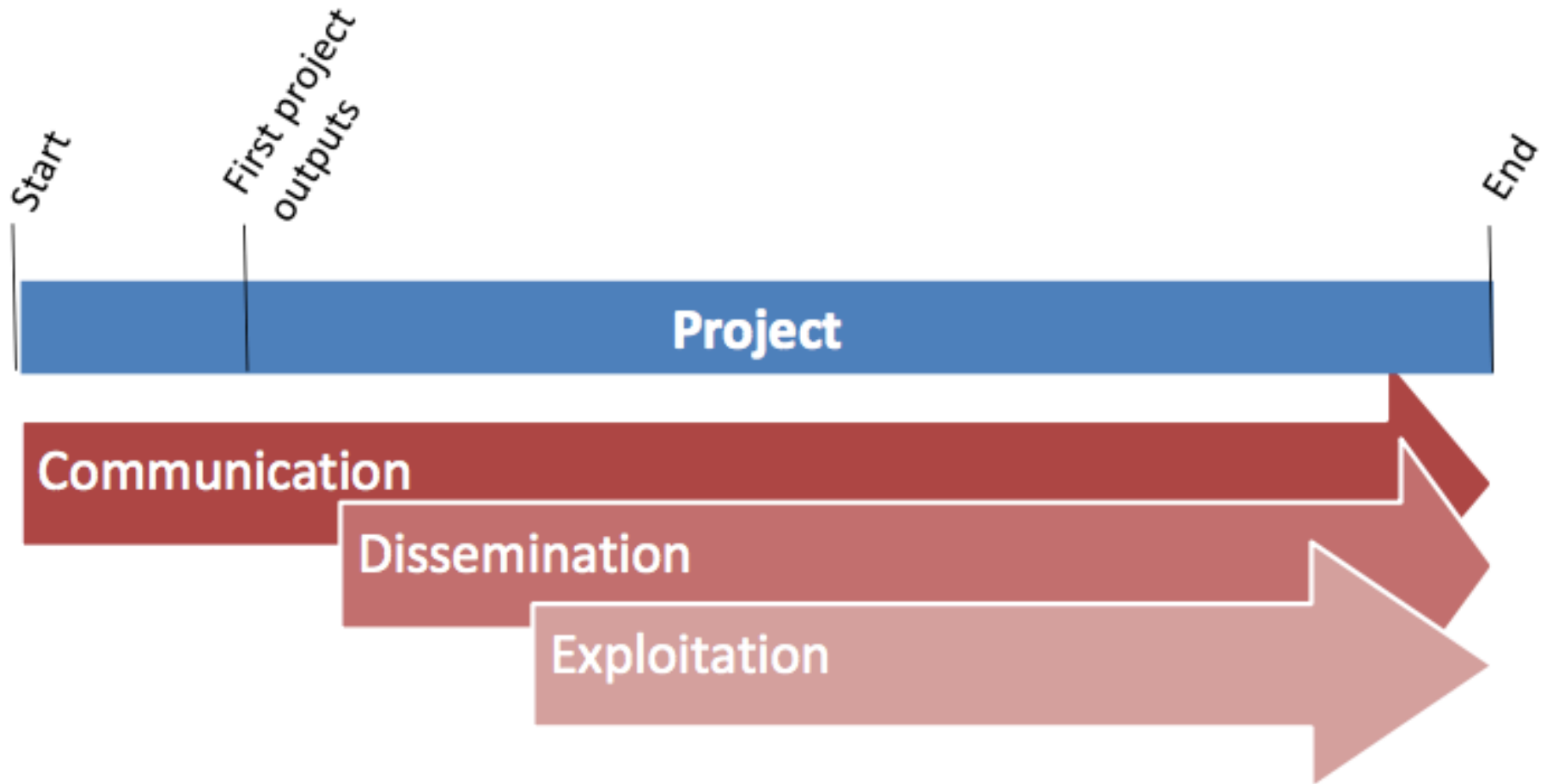
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- **Dissemination** is a **process of promotion** and awareness-raising making research results known to **various stakeholder groups** (like research **peers, industry** and other **commercial actors, professional organisations, policymakers**) in a targeted way, to enable them to use the results in their own work.
- **Exploitation** is the **use of the results during and after** the project's implementation. It can be for **commercial purposes** but also for **improving policies**, and for **tackling economic and societal problems**.
- **Communication** means taking strategic and targeted measures for promoting the **project itself** and **its results** to a **multitude of audiences**, including the media and the public, and possibly engaging in a **two-way exchange**. The aim is **to reach out to society as a whole** and in particular to some specific audiences while **demonstrating how EU funding contributes to tackling societal challenges**.

Timing within project duration



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Communication strategy: targets and channels



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Who

- **Who needs to know** and how will you reach each specific audience?
- From scientific and professional community **to interested layman**

Be specific, public in general is too broad

Channels

- **How appropriate are the channels** to reach the objectives for the audience targeted
- Does it scale: **do you reach an appropriate size** of audience efficiently
- **Why does the channel allow you** to target precise stakeholder groups
- Identify **who within the host institute has the knowledge and expertise to support you** in realizing the Communication strategy?

*The most frequent weaknesses,
according to evaluators*

EXCELLENCE - Weaknesses



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The state-of-the-art of the research topic is very generic and the **contribution that the project is expected to make to advance the state-of-the-art** within the field is not carefully prepared

The choice of the partner institutions included in the research is not well justified

The proposal does not provide **neither specific goals nor clear, well defined or measurable target outcomes**

The **methodology is not presented in detail** especially with regard to the method to be used to progress towards the achievement of the research goals. The proposal plans multiple analyses, but it is not made clear how these will be linked together

Interdisciplinary and innovative aspects of the proposed research are not sufficiently presented

EXCELLENCE - Weaknesses



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Gender aspects of the area to be researched are not sufficiently taken into account

The planned case studies are often focused on specific problems and circumstances of particular countries, with consequent **doubts about the actual replicability of the project results** to the whole EU

One of the key activities is the engagement and participation of the relevant actors in the chain. However, the strategy to maintain the **equilibrium among the stakeholders is not well described**

IMPACT - Weaknesses



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The impact section **lacks specific and measurable indicators**

The proposal **does not sufficiently justify its optimistic plan to disseminate concepts** and results to be developed during the project through scientific publications by participants.

The question of the expected impact of the proposed dissemination measures is insufficiently addressed with respect to **professional organisations and policymakers**

IMPACT - Weaknesses



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The plans related to activities to reach non-specialist and non-scientific audiences are not satisfactorily presented and their **benefits to society** not clearly explained

Outreach activities are considered but are addressed in an insufficient way. In general, the expected impact of the proposed communication measures has been given little attention. **Insufficiently detailed information is provided about the non-academic audiences to be addressed** and the concrete measures to address them

The issues of **dissemination and communication are overlapping** in the proposal

IMPLEMENTATION - Weaknesses



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The **deliverables and milestones are not defined** with sufficient specificity

There is not a **clear chronogram** by tasks

The details of the **work packages are not sufficiently explained**.
So the **feasibility** of WPs is not demonstrated.

The quality of the proposed **interaction between the participating organisations** is insufficiently demonstrated...

IMPLEMENTATION - Weaknesses



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The **relationship between work packages** has some weaknesses, e.g. it is not clear how the tasks in WP1 and 2 relate to the tasks of WP4

The proposal mainly concentrates on **defining the infrastructure of the coordinating institution**

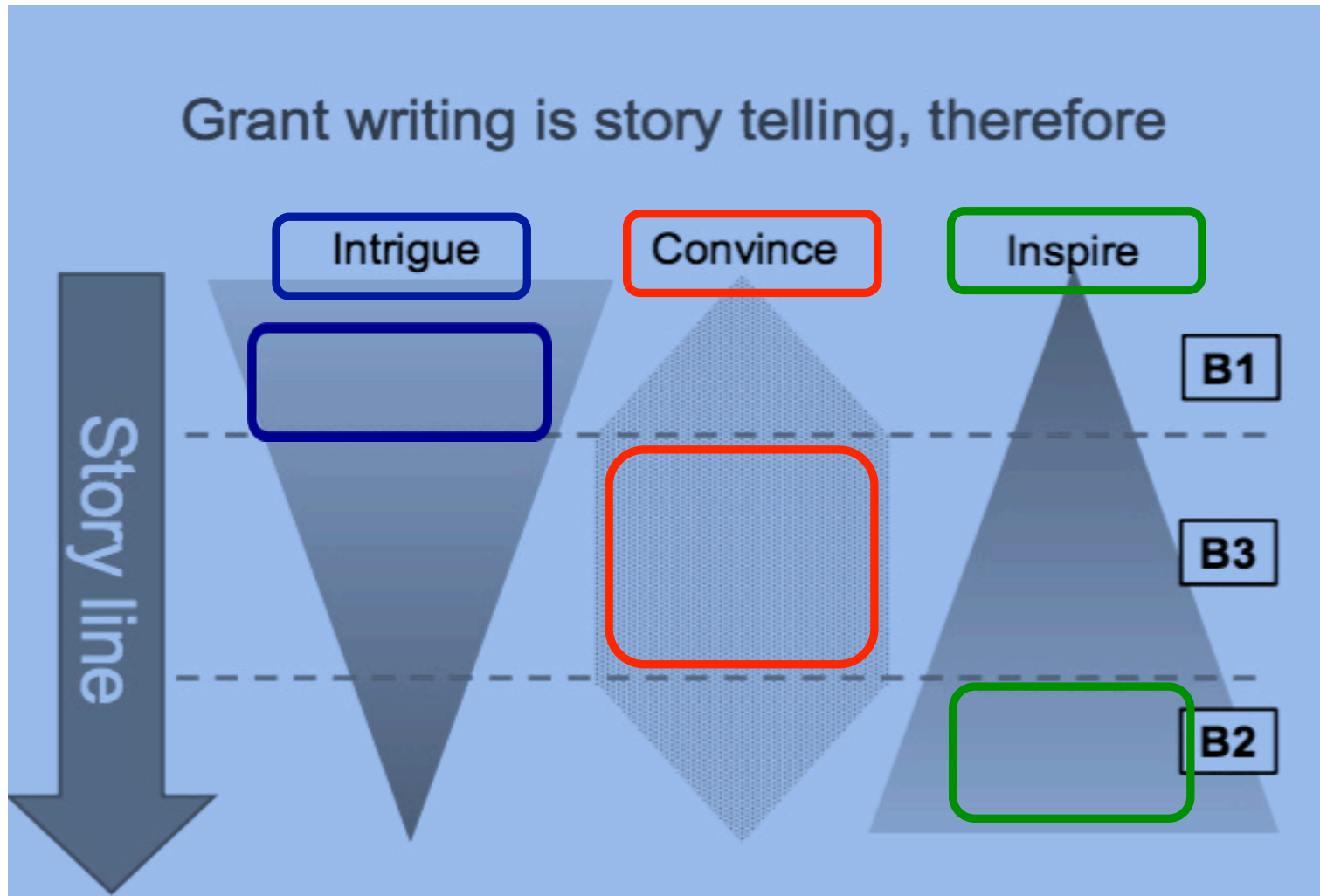
The management structure is not described with sufficient detail

Not clear and well defined mitigation measures related to the risk management are provided



Tips for candidates

Right approach to the evaluators



What do the evaluators expect?



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Credibility

- Convincing and feasible idea

Concreteness

- Specific concepts (not generic statements)
- Who will do what, when and how

Consistency

- High quality text and horizontal connections throughout the project

Communication

- Clear description of all the project tasks
- Make the proposal readable
- Straight message to the evaluators

To be credible and concrete



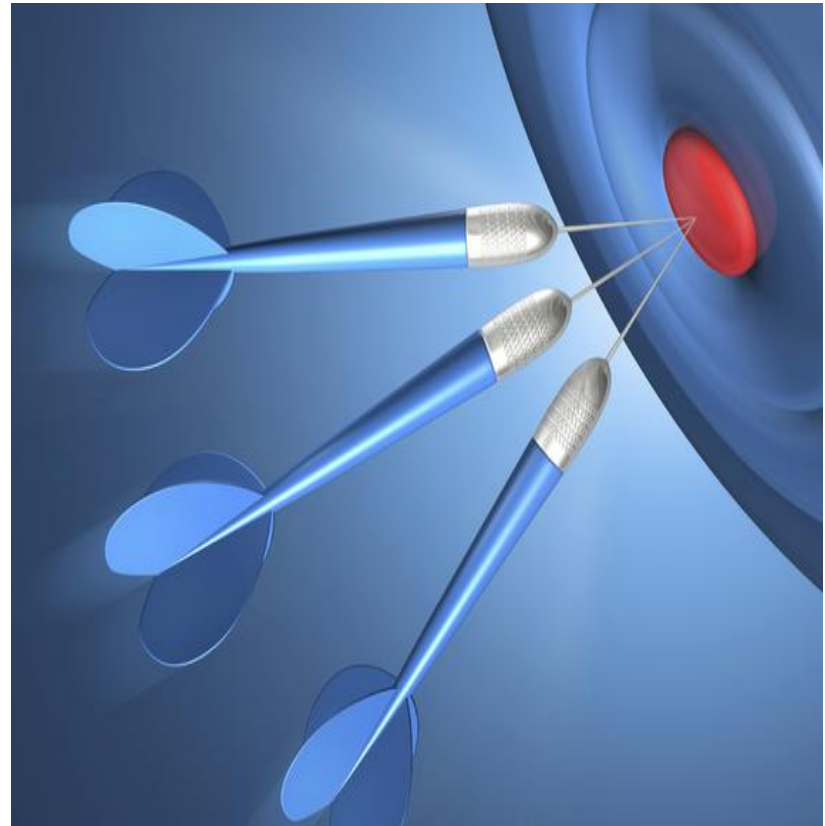
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- **You have a plan**
“*We shall*” sounds better than “*We might*” or “*We could*”
or “*We would like*”
- **Avoid adjectives like “*some*”** and ending a sentence with “*and so on*”
- **Detailed and justified description** of the activities in your plan

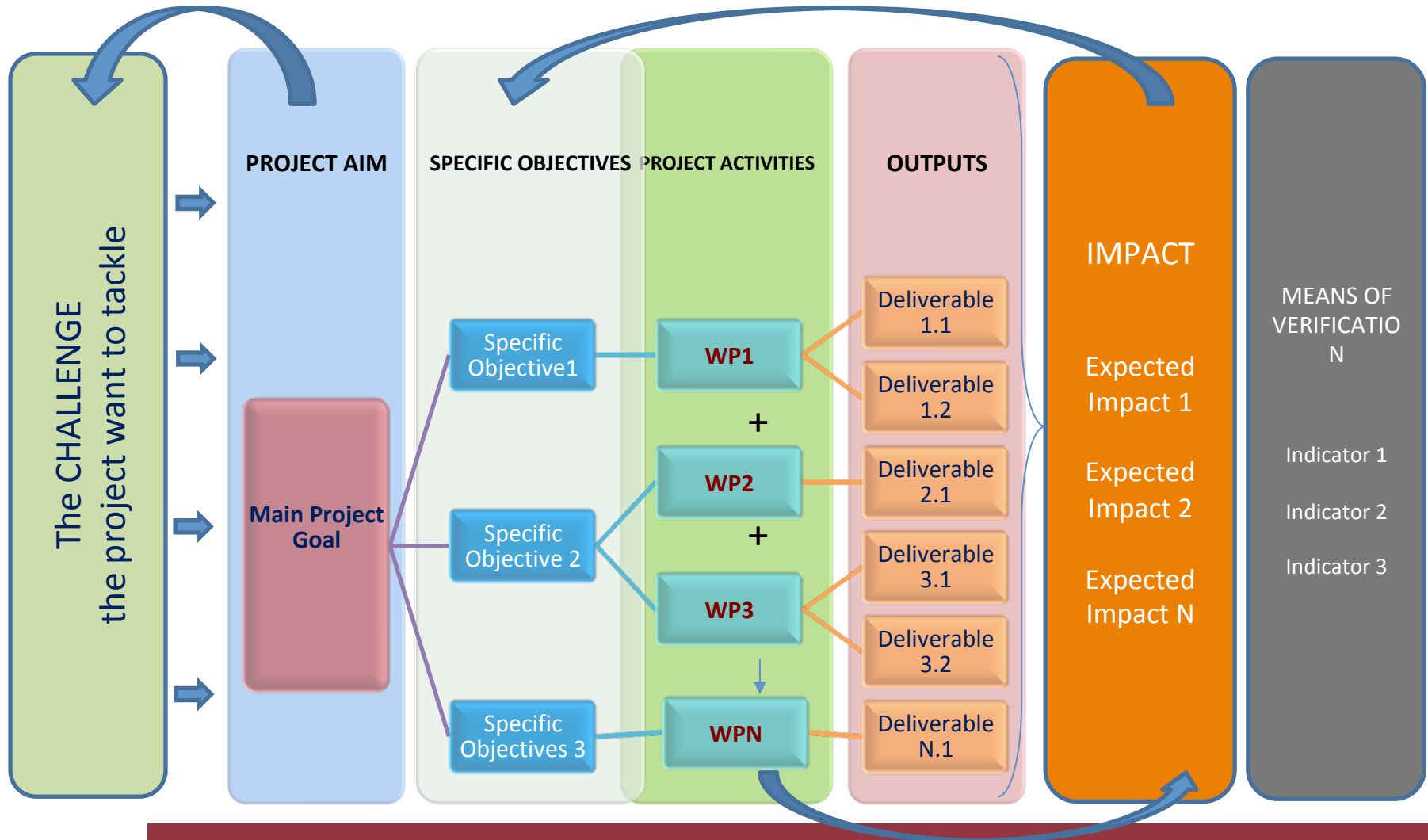
To be coherent

The project should include a **cross-cutting connection...**

- *from the overall goal to the specific objectives*
- *from the objectives to the applied methodology*
- *from the objectives to the work plan and the deliverables*
- *from the expected results to the expected impact*



Consistency in the project rationale



To clearly communicate: be concise



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- Use **sub-sections**
- Rely on **graphs and tables**
- Use **short sentences** and express one aspect per sentence
- Use the **active form**
- Respect **page limits**

Tips for candidates (1/3)

Change perspective

- *Your proposal must be written in order to solve European problems identified in EU policies (**never give the impression that you are writing a project because trying to get funding!**)*



Clarity

- Fluent and concise English
- Make the text clear and well-structured
- **Use short paragraphs and highlight key steps of the project, outline the concepts and key words (BOLD)**
- Make the **proposal readable**: the evaluator has a few hours to analyse the proposal

Tips for candidates (2/3)



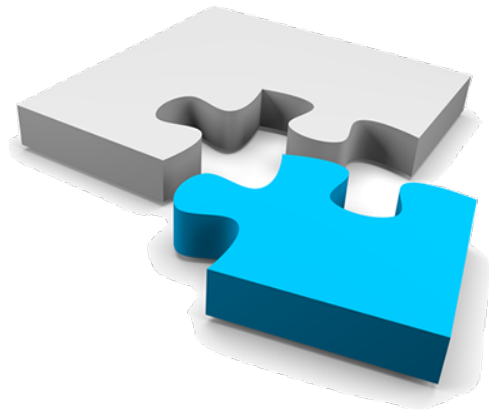
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Formal aspects

- Proposals must strictly adhere to the requirements stated in the **call** and in **the specific topic**
- Include only information relevant to the project
- **Answer all the points listed in the form**

Original and Innovative aspects

- Carefully analyse the state of the art research in the field
- Point out the **added value of the proposal** and explain why the project is innovative and **original**
- Attention to the clear description of the research methodology
- **Highlight interdisciplinary** and intersectoral aspects



Tips for candidates (3/3)

Psicological aspects

- Do not assume that all three evaluators are hardcore experts in the specific scientific field
- **Do not annoy the evaluator with technicalities** but let's try to accompany him/her throughout the proposal contents
- **Do not use incomprehensible acronyms:** the acronym should refer to the basic concept of the project

The strategy

- **Get prepared** well in advance (**long-term strategy**)
- Involve in the drafting of the proposal **BOTH the scientific and administrative staff (well balanced activities ARE a MUST)**
- **Ask to an external** (not involved in the project) **to read the proposal**
- It is strongly suggested to read carefully the results of the evaluations (ESR)





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***Thanks
for your attention!***

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