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

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Agenda

1. From the funder perspective
2. The evaluation process
3. From the evaluator point of view
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
Horizon Europe
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: overall structure

Pillar 1: Excellent Science
- European Research Council
- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
- Research Infrastructures

Pillar 2: Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness
- Cluster:
  - 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

Bottom-up approach
Top-down approach
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 strenghten impact.
Horizon call general approach

- **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 structure of the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part A</th>
<th>Part B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• General Information and Abstract</td>
<td>• Excellence (objectives; relation to WP; concept and methodology; ambition; interdisciplinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Administrative data of participating organisations including the</td>
<td>approaches, gender dimension, open sciences practices and engagement of citizens, civil society</td>
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<tr>
<td>role of each one</td>
<td>and end-users where appropriate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Budget Table</td>
<td>• Impact (credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts; measures to</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Researchers table – needed to follow up researchers careers (HE</td>
<td>maximize the expected outcomes and impacts as set out in the dissemination &amp; exploitation plan,</td>
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<td>indicator)</td>
<td>including communication activities)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Self-declaration on gender equality plan (not part of the evaluation)</td>
<td>• Implementation (work plan; risks; consortium and necessary expertise)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ethics self-assessment table and explanations (now moved to Part A)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Security questionnaire</td>
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The page limits and sections subject to limits are clearly shown in the application form on the Participant Portal electronic submission system. The page limit applies only to Part B. For the RIA/IA this limit is set at 45 pages. For CFS the limit is set at 30 pages. Excess pages will be automatically made invisible, i.e. will not be evaluated.
Collaborative projects: fundamental information sources and relevant documents

- **Work Programme** (Policies, strategies, objectives, destination/expected impacts, etc.)
- **The description of the TOPIC**
- **Applicant guidelines** (if available)
- **Part B template** (Project structure)
- **Self-assessment form** (if available)

- **But also… policy documents by the European Commission**
An example: from the WP to the topic

- **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
From WP to specific topics

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
The evaluation process
Overview of the evaluation process

STEP 1
REA Staff

- RECEIPT OF PROPOSALS
- ADMISSIBILITY and ELIGIBILITY CHECK

STEP 2
External Experts

- BRIEFING
- INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION
- CONSENSUS PHASE
- PANEL REVIEW*
  - Evaluators prepare the Individual Evaluation Reports
  - Rapporteurs prepare the draft Consensus Reports
  - Evaluators discuss the draft Consensus Reports

STEP 3
REA Staff

- FINALISATION
- FINAL RANKED LIST
- INFORMATION TO THE APPLICANTS
Basic principles of the evaluation process

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

From the candidate point of view:
- Ability to Communicate
- Attention to the Rules
Two different approaches

Top-down calls (2nd Pillar)
✓ 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 (1st Pillar)
✓ Organization in different scientific evaluation panels
✓ Strategic is the choice of the evaluation panel
✓ Originality in the choice of the research topic

Collaborative projects
RIA – IA - CSA

Individual projects
MSCA - ERC
Evaluation criteria in the top down approach

**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, interdisciplinary 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.
### How evaluators assess EXCELLENCE

| Objectives                                                                 | Are the project’s **objectives clear and pertinent to the topic?**  
|                                                                           | Are they measurable, verifiable and realistically achievable?  
|                                                                           | *Is the proposed work ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. ground-breaking R&I, novel concepts and approaches)* – **not for CSA**  
| Methodology, concept and approaches                                      | *Is the scientific methodology* (i.e. the concepts, models and assumptions that underpin the work) clear and sound?  
|                                                                           | *Is it clear how approaches from different disciplines will be brought together and integrated* in pursuit of the objectives?  
|                                                                           | *Are open science principles implemented as an integral part of the proposed methodology?  
|                                                                           | *Are gender dimension aspects well considered in the proposed approaches?* – **not for all topics, CSA**  
| Cross-cutting aspects                                                    | **Multi-Actor** - A form of responsible research and innovation, aims to make the R&I process and its outcomes more demand-driven, reliable and relevant to society  
|**SCOPE OF THE TOPIC & BUILDING ON PREVIOUS ACTIVITIES**
### How evaluators assess IMPACT

| Pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts and scale and significance of the contributions | Is the **contribution** of the project towards the **expected outcomes of the topic** and the **wider impacts**, in the longer term, as specified in the Mission introduction, credible?  
What is the contribution to each topic outcomes? Are the **scale and significance of the project’s contributions estimated and quantified** (including baselines, benchmarks and assumptions used for those estimates)?  
Are **potential barriers** identified (i.e. other R&I work; regulatory environment; targeted markets; user behavior) and realistically addressed?  
Are the **target groups of results** well identified and relevant? |
| Measures to maximise expected outcomes and impact | Are the proposed **dissemination, exploitation and communication measures** suitable, proportionate to the scale of the project and of good quality?  
Are the **target group for these measures correctly identified and relevant** (e.g. scientific community, end users, financial actors, public at large)?  
Is the **strategy for the management of intellectual property** properly outlined and suitable to support exploitation of results? |

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE TOPIC**
| **Work plan, risks, resources** | Is the **work plan** of good quality and effective? Does it include quantified information so that **progress can be monitored**? Does it follow a **logic structure** (for example regarding the timing of work packages)? Are the **resources allocated** to the work packages in line with their objectives and deliverables? Are **critical risks**, relating to project implementation, identified and proper risk **mitigation measures** proposed? |
| **Capacity and expertise** | Does the consortium match the project’s objectives, and **bring together the necessary disciplinary and inter-disciplinary knowledge** (including on relevant horizontal aspects)? Do the partners have access to critical infrastructure needed to carry out the project activities? Are the **participants complementing one another** (and cover the value chain, where appropriate)? Does each of them have a **valid role, and adequate resources** in the project to fulfil that role? |
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.
From the evaluator point of view
• 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

Why is important?

Why now?

Why you?

Impact?
Where to start from to draft the proposal

• **Align** with the rationale of the *policy context* and funder 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
Vision and objectives of the project

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

• **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
...feasibility of the project
The most frequent weaknesses, according to evaluators comments
EXCELLENCE - Weaknesses

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.
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.
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**.
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.
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...
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.
To conclude: the right approach to the evaluators
Thanks for your attention!