

NATIONAL AGENCY
FOR INNOVATION AND RESEARCH

LUXINNOVATION



GET READY FOR HORIZON 2020

A brief and simple introduction to how to develop your idea, prepare your proposal and conduct your EU-funded research and innovation project

DISCLAIMER

The purpose of this guide is to provide basic information on Horizon 2020. It is making no claim to be exhaustive and is not an official document of the European Commission. The publisher has tried to ensure that all information is accurate but cannot be held responsible for the use that might be made of the information, for omissions or for any mistakes that might appear. Documents of the European Commission prevail.

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Contents	
Disclaimer	2
Editorial	4
Introduction	5
European research projects: Rationale and general information	5
Why participate in EU projects	7
Preparing a European research and innovation project	8
Calls for proposals	8
Work Programmes, calls and topics	8
Challenge, scope, and impact	10
Partner search	14
Formal criteria	14
Proposal drafting	18
Proposal submission	19
Part A – Administrative Part	19
Part B – Technical Annex	21
Evaluation	22
Criteria and scores	22
Evaluation procedure	22
A few words on evaluation	24
Common mistakes	24
Becoming an expert evaluator	26
Grant negotiation and signature	27
Project implementation: follow-up	28
Highlight: Opportunities for researchers	29
European Research Council	29
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions	30
Ready?	31
Annex – Essential resources	32

EDITORIAL

The European Union has been funding research and innovation projects for over thirty years. EU-funded projects have proven to offer excellent opportunities to obtain international experience and peer recognition, grow one's professional network and conduct projects that require expertise which only an EU-wide pool of people and organisations can provide.

European research and innovation funding is allocated through framework programmes that cover a period of several years. The current framework programme Horizon 2020 covers the period 2014-2020.

With each financing period, the framework programmes have become more complete – but also more complex. Many organisations are eligible under the current framework programme Horizon 2020: universities, research centres, SMEs and large companies, but also cities, associations and individual researchers. For those with no or little previous experience, it is often a huge challenge to understand what and how to do in order to apply for funding.

A vast body of information exists but can be complex, confusing or very time-consuming to go through. In order to help prospective applicants, the European Commission has initiated a network of National Contact Points (NCPs) that can provide information and support to actors in each country interested in Horizon 2020 projects. Luxinnovation, the National Agency for Innovation and Research, has been appointed as NCP for Luxembourg. Building on our decade-long experience of EU funding programmes, we are able to respond to questions on where to get up-to-date information on programmes and calls for project proposals, what programmes are the most suitable for you and where and how to find European partners.

This practical guide will follow the step-by-step process from an idea to a running EU-funded project. We hope you find it useful. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information and individual support.

The Luxembourg NCP team

INTRODUCTION

EUROPEAN RESEARCH PROJECTS: RATIONALE AND GENERAL INFORMATION

The European Union supplements national efforts to support research and innovation by a dedicated policy. In fact, besides agriculture and regional development, research and innovation is a major field where the EU provides funding in close cooperation with Member States. This cooperation should prevent duplication of efforts and allow smarter allocation of resources with the ultimate aim to make Europe as a whole a hub for scientific excellence and economic growth.

Decisions about funding priorities, budgets, and other provisions are made on a multiannual basis. The legal basis for EU research policy, established by the EU's decision-making process, is the current **Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020**. Launched in January 2014, it will run until 2020. The overall budget, adjusted for inflation, is about €80 billion, which corresponds to approximately 10% of the overall EU budget for this period.

Horizon 2020 encompasses many different funding schemes and covers a wide range of domains. The main part of the programme is composed of three priorities focused on:

- fundamental science;
- the modernisation of European industry; and
- “societal challenges”

These three “pillars” and their focus on both science and innovation are complemented by other funding mechanisms. These include public-private partnerships between the EU, the Member States and industry, so-called Joint Technological Initiatives (JTIs) which issue calls mainly – but not only – targeting members of these partnerships, as well as co-funding mechanisms for national programmes, such as the Eurostars programme for innovative SMEs. The European Institute of Technology (EIT) and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC) are also funded by Horizon 2020. However, in this guide, we will focus on the main Horizon 2020 programme covered by the three priorities listed above.

Based on the original legal basis for Horizon 2020, thematic priorities and budgets for the programme are elaborated by the European Commission in cooperation with stakeholders and Member State representatives, and published in biannual Work Programmes. These documents are accessible on a centralised webpage, the Horizon 2020 Participant Portal.

Horizon 2020 funding is allocated following competitive calls on specific topics. Funding is provided on the basis of reimbursement of eligible costs. Projects are typically carried out by international and at times inter-sectorial (i.e. including partners from both the private and public sectors) project teams (so-called consortia) during a period of around three years. Each project is led by a coordinator, who orchestrates the set-up of the project proposal and later on ensures the link between the European Commission and the project participants.

Some Horizon 2020 funding schemes, however, do not require the set-up of an international consortium. The European Research Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, for example, allocate grants to researchers on an individual basis. These so-called “bottom-up” programmes leave participants much leeway in choosing their research domain and project focus.

Many factors determine whether a project proposal is evaluated positively and funded, but one major aspect is the European added value. Projects must demonstrate that their ultimate outcome will help address problems that are common to many European countries.

WHY PARTICIPATE IN EU PROJECTS

Participating in EU projects requires planning and determination, but can provide five major benefits: excellence, networks, impact, funding, and outreach.

- **Excellence:** EU funding is competitive, and obtaining an EU grant proves that the applicant's maturity and skills measure up to the European, or even international, competition.
- **Networking:** Due to their transnational nature, EU projects can be a privileged way of growing one's network by working together with relevant players in one's field
- **Impact:** Certain scientific, economic or societal issues cannot effectively be addressed on national level only. This is particularly true in a small country such as Luxembourg. In these cases, a trans-European partnership considerably increases the chances for success.
- **Funding:** Horizon 2020 funding rates and budgets are advantageous. Funding rates have been increased compared to previous framework programmes, with reimbursement of up to 100% for direct costs for research actions, 70% for innovation actions and 25% for indirect costs.
- **Market outreach and investment:** To bring innovative products and services that have been designed within a project to the market, Europe-wide partnerships can be advantageous. Participating in international consortia helps the project gain more visibility and credibility vis-à-vis potential investors.

PREPARING A EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROJECT

Preparing a European research and innovation project is a process that requires careful planning, from identifying relevant calls to finding partners, drafting the proposal and submitting it on time. It is also important to understand financial and administrative issues that will have to be handled during the project. This section will briefly introduce you to these various steps. Aspects such as intermediary reporting, communication and dissemination activities or audits also need to be foreseen.

A word on strategy

Participation in an EU research and innovation project is a major undertaking for an organisation. For successful participants, the project participation is generally part of the organisation's overall strategy, with management firmly endorsing the approach and overseeing the process. A global assessment of the organisation's capabilities and ambition is worth the while before investing time and resources into the preparation of proposals, or before reaching out to potential partners.

CALLS FOR PROPOSALS

Horizon 2020 is implemented through calls for project proposals. This procedure ensures transparency and non-discrimination in the allocation of European funds¹.

WORK PROGRAMMES, CALLS AND TOPICS

Each thematic Horizon 2020 area is managed through a specific Work Programme. Work Programmes (WPs) are prepared by the European Commission. These documents implement political objectives voted by the EU Parliament and the Council.

Under Horizon 2020, Work Programmes are adopted for **two-year periods** and specify the calls for proposals that will be published during this time. Although details such as budget, deadlines or even specific topics can still be modified for the second year covered, the two-year programmes provide **better visibility** of forthcoming funding opportunities and help researchers and businesses plan activities more in advance than under previous framework programmes.

For 2014-2015, the Horizon 2020 Work Programmes are made up of 18 documents. These include one general introductory, one general annex and thematic programmes that present various funding opportunities and calls for proposals. The 18 documents are the following:

¹ Article 11, Rules for Participation

Number of Annex to Work Programme	Document Title	Part of Horizon 2020
1	General Introduction	
2	Future and Emerging Technologies	
3	Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions	Excellent Science
4	European research infrastructures (including eInfrastructures)	
5	Introduction to Leadership in enabling and industrial technologies (LEITs)	
5.i.	i. Information and communication technologies	
5.ii.	Nanotechnologies, Advanced materials, Advanced manufacturing and processing, Biotechnology	Industrial leadership
5.iii.	Space	
6	Access to risk finance	
7	Innovation in SMEs	
8	Health, demographic change and wellbeing	
9	Food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine and maritime and inland water research and the bioeconomy	
10	Secure, clean and efficient energy	
11	Smart, green and integrated transport	Societal Challenges
12	Climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials	
13	Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative and reflective Societies	
14	Secure societies – Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens	
15	Spreading excellence and widening participation	Spreading excellence and widening participation
16	Science with and for society	Science with and for society
17	Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation	Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation
18	General Annexes	

A call for proposals is often an umbrella for several sub-calls or “topics” as in the following example:

Call	Topics
Digital Security: Cybersecurity, Privacy and Trust (DS-2015-1)	The role of ICT in Critical Infrastructure Protection (DS-03-2015)
	Secure Information Sharking (DS-04-2015)
	Trust eServices (DS-05-2015)

Participants have to select and respond to the specifications of a particular topic.

The definition and actual drafting of calls for proposals and topics is a long iterative process. The European Commission might take into account expert and stakeholder advice and input from delegates from each Member State and Associated Country. The final call text is the end product of this negotiation and careful drafting and re-drafting process.

CHALLENGE, SCOPE, AND IMPACT

It is important to know what the funder’s expectations of projects to be financed are in order to address them convincingly in your project proposal. In order to define these expectations, each call topic provides information according to the same structure: “specific challenge”, “scope” and “expected impact”.

- **Specific challenge:** this text sets the scene, describes the problem and context to be addressed and explains why European action is needed in the field concerned.
- **Scope:** This section outlines what actions are expected in order to solve the challenge. Projects should neither deliver too much nor too little. The text might also mention explicitly that certain actions are “out of scope”. In addition, this section provides an indication of the ideal project budget. However, this project budget serves as a guideline only, and the text itself systematically states that the submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts are not ruled out.
- **Expected impact:** In a certain way, “impact” is the motto of Horizon 2020: funded projects should result in concrete, meaningful and Europe-wide benefits to many stakeholders, thereby solving pressing issues faced by many. Knowing what the outcome, or impact, of your project is expected to be can help you focus your project on what is relevant to the policymaker.

It is important to follow the call specifications as closely as possible – make sure that you have understood all terms used in the text and have looked up any reference mentioned. Typically, this is where the National Contact Point can guide if you have doubts.

TYPE OF ACTION

Call topics also specify what type (or types) of actions are applicable for projects to be funded. Horizon 2020 covers the whole innovation value-chain, from fundamental research to market replication.

Various funding instruments or “types of action” exist in order to meet the different needs of such projects. The applicable type of action is pre-defined for each call topic.

The most common types of action are “**Research and Innovation Action**”, “**Innovation Action**” and “**Coordination and Support Action**”.

Some types of action	Characteristics
Research and innovation actions	<p>Aim to create new knowledge or explore the feasibility of a new or improved technology, product, process, service or solution.</p> <p>Possible activities: Basic and applied research, technology development and integration, testing and validation (through prototypes, laboratories, or simulated environments)</p>
Innovation actions	<p>Aim to produce new or improved products, processes or services.</p> <p>Possible activities: Prototyping, testing, demonstrating, piloting, large-scale product validation, market replication</p>
Coordination and support actions	<p>Aim to support research and innovation.</p> <p>Possible activities: standardisation, dissemination, awareness-raising, networking, policy dialogue or mutual learning</p>

Horizon 2020 also adds some new schemes, such as:

- **The SME Instrument**² targets innovative SMEs that would like to grow their business, especially internationally.
- **Fast Track to Innovation**³ is a new scheme that will be tested as a pilot in 2015. It supports innovative projects from the demonstration stage through to market uptake. This instrument provides important funding (up to €3 million) to small consortia of up to five participants.

A description of all types of action can be found in the General Annex D⁴.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/sme-instrument>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/doc/call/h2020/common/1615113-part_18_fti_v2.0_en.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-ga_en.pdf#page=8

FINDING CALLS THAT FIT YOUR PROJECT IDEAS

All Horizon 2020 calls for proposals are published on the **Participant Portal**⁵, a one-stop-shop website that is available since January 2014. The Participant Portal provides all information needed for responding to a call: its opening and closing dates, its overall budget, the relevant Work Programme and all other documents related to the call. Calls can be searched and filtered using various parameters, such as open, closed or forthcoming calls as well as keywords. Another way to learn about open or forthcoming calls is to consult the Work Programme of a specific domain.

The sheer amount of calls, domains, and funding instruments under Horizon 2020 can be quite overwhelming, and it is not always easy to “cut through the maze” and identify calls that match your plans and needs for funding. The following points can serve as a guideline for identifying calls of your interest:

- **Be clear about what you are looking for.** What is your field of expertise, what are your capabilities and what type of project would you like to initiate or join?
- **Contact the management of your organisation** to make sure that your project idea is in line with their overall strategy. If your organisation has internal support staff dealing with European projects, make sure to speak to them as well.
- **Scan open calls** per domain or use a keyword search. Consult Work Programmes by performing keyword searches.
- **Ask trusted partners** if they have identified relevant calls or even are preparing a project proposal.

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/home.html>

- **Contact your National Contact Point** to help you identify themes, understand requirements and keep up to date on EU policy development in your field and relevant events (info days about calls for proposals).
- **Plan your timing:** in view of the deadline, do you have enough time to take on the preparation of a competitive proposal?
- **Subscribe to the topic's RSS feed**, if available, to receive updates, such as new FAQs, that are periodically uploaded to the call page.
- **Check if you can benefit from national subsidies** for preparing a Horizon 2020 project proposal. In Luxembourg, the "Fit4Horizon2020" scheme helps especially small companies shoulder the upfront investment in time and money necessary to submit a competitive proposal⁶.

A word on timing

How long does it take to prepare a Horizon 2020 proposal? It is difficult to give a standard answer. Sufficient time must be allocated to finding partners, exchanging and even meeting with them, distributing tasks and roles, and setting up a project budget. Finally, the proposal must be drafted, reviewed and submitted in the European Commission's online submission system. In view of this process, applicants should count on at least three to four months for the whole process.

⁶ <http://horizon2020.lu/Toolbox/Fit4H2020>

PARTNER SEARCH

A large majority of Horizon 2020 calls requires the set-up of teams, so-called **consortia**, with partners from various countries. Typically, consortia can include a large variety of members (academia, large enterprises, SMEs, associations, etc) with different backgrounds. Putting together a consortium that includes partners whose expertise complements one another is an important success factor for your proposal.

FORMAL CRITERIA

The formal criteria for setting up a consortium are straightforward: it must be composed of **at least three partners from at least three EU Member States or Associated Countries**. Legal entities must be independent of each other to be considered as different partners. Each consortium must include a coordinating organisation, referred to as the “coordinator”.

Associated Countries to Horizon 2020⁷

Associated Countries can participate in Horizon 2020 under the same conditions as legal entities from the EU Member States. As of 10 July 2014, ten countries have concluded Association Agreements:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Israel, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Turkey

The association of **the Faroe Islands** is expected to be adopted and signed before the end of 2014. The association of **Switzerland** is currently on hold⁸.

THE COORDINATOR

The coordinator has a very specific role among the project partners. This role is usually carried out by an experienced organisation well versed in EU-funded projects that has the capacity to take on the overall project management. Legally speaking, it has financial obligations defined under the Horizon 2020 Rules of Participation⁹. The coordinator must ensure general compliance with the Grant Agreement. Accordingly, it receives and distributes the project funding among the other consortium members, as specified in the Grant Agreement. The coordinator should also ensure that the communication between the partners is efficient and reports to the Commission on the progress of the project are submitted on time¹⁰.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/3cpart/h2020-hi-list-ac_en.pdf

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/3cpart/h2020-hi-list-ac_en.pdf

⁹ Regulation (EU) No 1290/2013

¹⁰ Rules of participation, Article 25

Grant Agreements

A Grant Agreement is the contract signed between the coordinator and the European Commission (or a relevant Agency, such as REA, the Research Executive Agency). It defines, among other things, the action, grant amounts and eligible costs, the rights and obligations of the parties, reporting and auditing. The Grant Agreement follows a template prepared by the European Commission services, the Model Grant Agreement. There is also a commented version of it, the Annotated Model Grant Agreement. All documents can be found on the Participant Portal, in the reference document section¹¹.

HOW TO JOIN A CONSORTIUM – AS A PARTNER

The following points might be helpful if you are looking for a consortium that you could join as one of the project partners:

- **Prepare a convincing document** that describes your organisation and competences, what you can bring to a consortium and which call(s) you are targeting. Be clear about your expertise and how you can contribute to a project.
- **Tap into your professional network.** Some of your professional acquaintances may be planning to submit a proposal.
- **Set up a profile on a partner search site.** These are domain-specific websites dedicated to Horizon 2020 calls for proposals – such as Ideal-IST for ICT and Net4Society for Social Sciences and Humanities – or on the CORDIS partner search tool¹².
- **Follow LinkedIn Groups** related to Horizon 2020 where partner searches are published occasionally, or let your network know about your partner search.
- **Solicit your NCP.** Your National Contact Point can distribute your search to their European counterparts.
- **Participate in brokerage events.** For certain calls, Europe-wide or local brokerage events are organised where participants can pre-arrange meetings and talk to a large number of potential consortium partners in a short time.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/reference_docs.html

¹² <https://cordis.europa.eu/partners/web/guest/home>

HOW TO BUILD A WINNING CONSORTIUM – AS A COORDINATOR

All of the above hints apply. In addition, the following points should be kept in mind:

- **Explain your idea clearly** – draft a convincing document that presents your project idea, your competences and the competences that you are looking for in potential partners.
- **Argue your case** – demonstrate your excellent knowledge of the subject at hand, your ability and willingness to launch a European project, as well as your managerial and personal skills.
- **Tap into your network** – recruit project members whose know-how you can assess and fit into the project.
- **Spread the word** – publish a partner search on dedicated websites, your own website or on LinkedIn.
- **Check out past EU projects in the domain of your targeted call.** Partners in these projects are likely to be central players in this field. Information on past projects is mostly readily available on the European Commission websites. Most projects also have their own websites.
- **Make sure you are on target** – during the proposal phase, coordinators are not encouraged to contact the European Commission, but it is still possible to obtain clarification on doubts you might have concerning the general scope of the call. National Contact Points can ask questions on the behalf of proposal coordinators. Questions should, however, be general and concern the interpretation of the call text. European Commission Project Officers (staff in charge of calls) are reluctant to answer questions that are very specific to one Horizon 2020 proposal.

WHERE YOU CAN GO ALONE – CALLS NOT REQUIRING CONSORTIA

Not all Horizon 2020 funding schemes require that proposers set up consortia with several partners:

- **Coordination and Support Actions** can be submitted by one legal entity established in a Member State or associated country only¹³.
- **The SME Instrument** only requires one SME from a EU Member State or associated country to submit a proposal.
- **European Research Council (ERC)** grants fund single Principal Investigators working in a host institution in a EU Member State or associated country (for more information, see the chapter on the ERC).
- **Individual Fellowships**, which are part of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, address individual researchers (and their host institutions) (for more information, see the chapter on the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions).

¹³ Some Coordination and Support Actions, such as the National Contact Point networks, de facto need consortia to submit a project

PROPOSAL DRAFTING

Proposals must be complete, providing all administrative data, the proposal description and any supporting documents mentioned in the call as well as references such as past publications or a list of relevant past projects. It is important to respect the maximum number of pages, as excess pages might not be read.

The time and effort needed to prepare a proposal vary according to your role: each participant has to provide budget calculations and a draft description of the work they plan to conduct under their part of the project to the coordinator. The coordinator also has to ensure the overall coherence of the project proposal. As a participant, you might be work package leader, task leader or contribute to tasks.

The proposal should not only reflect the technical quality of your project, but also how well partners have thought through the project. Communication and trust between project partners are key factors for a successful project, and it is important to show how these aspects of the collaboration between the partners will be handled.

It is crucial to understand the call expectations in order to draft a winning proposal. Consultants specialising in EU R&D and innovation projects can be invaluable partners during the proposal preparation stage. You might also want to participate in a proposal-drafting training.

Entities established in Luxembourg have the opportunity to apply for the national subsidy **Fit4Horizon2020** that can cover all or part of the costs of such external help. You can also apply for the annual training on Horizon 2020 proposal writing, organised in Luxembourg.

Horizon 2020 proposals are submitted in English only. Your final document should be **proof-read and edited** to correct language mistakes and check its overall coherence. Solicit your peers or your National Contact Point for this feedback.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

To be considered eligible, a proposal must be **submitted electronically** before the deadline through the Submission Service available on the Horizon 2020 Participant Portal. A proposal must be “readable, accessible and printable”¹⁴. Go to the call topic of your choice to access the submission platform.

For a first-time submission, you need to register your organisation, obtain an identification number¹⁵ and appoint a representative¹⁶. The proposal submission is entirely paperless¹⁷.

The first step is thus to create an account on the Participant Portal to log in and manage your information. Horizon 2020 proposals have an administrative part (**Part A**) and the Technical part describing the actual project (**Part B**). A template of all parts can be found on the Participant Portal¹⁸.

PART A – ADMINISTRATIVE PART

This part contains four main sections that need to be filled in online.

- **General Information:** this part contains the project title, the foreseen project duration, keywords to be associated with the proposal, the project acronym and an abstract. Furthermore, under “declarations”, you will have to pledge that all information is correct and complete.
- **Participant & contacts:** This section includes contact information of all organisations participating in the proposal.
- **Budget:** The proposal also needs to include a budget table, outlining an estimated budget for each participant. You need to be familiar with the cost categories used in Horizon 2020, such as “direct personnel costs”, “other direct costs”, “direct costs of sub-contacting” or “indirect costs. Multiplying the sum of these costs by the reimbursement rate will give an indication on the EU funding that can be obtained for the project. The estimated project budget can differ from the “requested grant”, for example when you have partners on board that are not eligible for funding (such as partners from countries that are not associated to Horizon 2020).
- **Ethics:** Horizon 2020 puts special emphasis on ethical issues. Indicate whether your project touches upon ethical issues, such as research on living beings (human embryos, human cells, humans, animals) or the environment, or if it involves personal data or has potential military applications (dual use). This test is a self-assessment. Activities that do have ethical implications must be mentioned in the part of the proposal called “Description

¹⁴ Annex B to the Work Programme:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-ga_en.pdf

¹⁵ The so-called PIC number

¹⁶ The so-called LEAR, or Legal Entity Appointed Representative

¹⁷ With the exception of the appointment of the legal representative

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/reference_docs.html#h2020-call_ptef-pt

of the Action”. Further checks might be done once the project is considered for funding (ethics checks and audits can be realised at any time during the project). A description of the procedure concerning ethics is described in the Horizon 2020 online manual¹⁹.

A word on budget categories and costs

Horizon 2020 applies six main budget categories.:

- direct personnel costs
- subcontracting costs
- costs of providing financial support to third parties (if option applies)
- other direct costs
- indirect costs
- specific categories of costs (if option applies)

The budget categories are described in more detail in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement.

Furthermore, the distinction between **direct and indirect costs** is important. “Direct costs” are those that can be directly linked to the implementation of the project. They are reimbursed at 100% or 70% depending on the type of action. “Indirect costs” are costs that necessarily occur during the project but that cannot be attributed to it directly (overhead). They are reimbursed with a 25% flat rate of the eligible direct costs²⁰.

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/ethics_en.htm

²⁰ Model Grant Agreement, Article 6.2

PART B – TECHNICAL ANNEX

This part gives all information that allows the evaluators to decide if the project will be funded or not. Beside a list of all participants and references, it is structured around the **three main evaluation criteria: excellence, impact and implementation**. Each section comes with helpful guiding questions. Answer these questions in your proposal, giving as much detail as possible. It is also important that you make sure to respect the maximum page limit.

Standard Layout of Part B

1. Excellence
 - a. Objectives
 - b. Relation to the Work Programme
 - c. Concept and approach
 - d. Ambition
2. Impact
 - a. Expected impacts
 - b. Measures to maximise impact
3. Implementation
 - a. Work plan – work packages, deliverables and milestones
 - b. Management structures and procedures
 - c. Consortium as a whole
 - d. Resources to be committed
4. Members of the consortium
 - a. Participants (applicants)
 - b. Third parties involved in the project
5. Ethics and security
 - a. Ethics
 - b. Security

You can submit and edit information online. Only the last version submitted before the call deadline will be considered by the evaluators.

EVALUATION

CRITERIA AND SCORES

Experts will evaluate project proposals on the basis of three criteria: “excellence”, “impact” and “quality and efficiency of the implementation”²¹. Each criterion is scored on a scale of 1 to 5. You must score at least 3 in each criterion and have a total sum of at least 10 for all criteria together to be eligible for funding. The importance (weighting) of these criteria may vary from one programme to another.

Table 1 Horizon 2020 Evaluation criteria - brief description

Excellence	Impact	Quality and efficiency of implementation
Clarity and pertinence of the objectives	Expected impacts as described in the topic	Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan
Credibility of the approach	Enhancing innovation capacity	Appropriate allocation of tasks and resources
Soundness of the concept	Strengthen the competitiveness and growth of companies	Complementarity of participants
Ambition, innovation potential (beyond state of the art)	Dissemination of project results	Appropriate management structures and procedures
Min 3 out of 5	Min 3 out of 5	Min 3 out of 5
Min 10 out of 15		

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

After having submitted your proposal, your part of the proposal work is done. The European Commission, or REA, the Research Executive Agency, will now take over and will evaluate your proposal. Expect to hear back from them about **five months after the call deadline**. If your proposal is selected, another **three months** may pass until the grant agreement (GA) is signed and your project can start.

Your proposal will be evaluated by independent experts selected from a database. At least three experts will individually read and score your proposal²². The experts will then meet in a consensus group and elaborate a consensus report where they agree on a common position, comments and scores. A Commission moderator will join these meetings to ensure impartiality.

²¹ Annex H of the Work Programme

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-h-esacrit_en.pdf

²² For the first stage of two-stage procedures a minimum of two experts may be used in certain cases.

The Commission will put together a final ranking list. The budget available for the call will be distributed according to this list. A **priority order for proposals with the same score** may be established according to the procedure given in the Work Programme.

The Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) gives important feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

It is important to know that evaluation is done “as is”: Proposals must be mature and complete, as there will be no possibility for significant changes to the content, budget, or consortium composition once your proposal is selected for funding. This was not the case previously, when “negotiations” helped improve or adapt the project proposal even after the submission date. These new rules should help shorten the period between the call deadline and the launch of the project (time-to-grant), from about 12 to 8 months.

A FEW WORDS ON EVALUATION

Due to the competitiveness of the Horizon 2020 programme, evaluations follow a certain code and priorities that have emerged over the years. There is certainly more than one good way of drafting a proposal. However, the following good practice has emerged.

What evaluators expect

- **Concrete and credible projects:** the idea has to be “beyond state of the art”, but also achievable with concrete milestones, translating “outcome” (of the project) into “impact” (on a societal level);
- **The clearer, the better:** a clear description of what will be done, by whom, when, and how;
- **Mind the form:** deliver a high-quality, proof-read proposal using simple, consistent language;
- **Resubmit your proposals:** It is possible, and sometimes even expected, to resubmit proposals that were interesting and of good quality but that could not be funded in a previous call for proposals, either because some aspects of the proposals needed to be improved or because, in spite of their high quality, there was not enough budget to fund all excellent projects.

COMMON MISTAKES

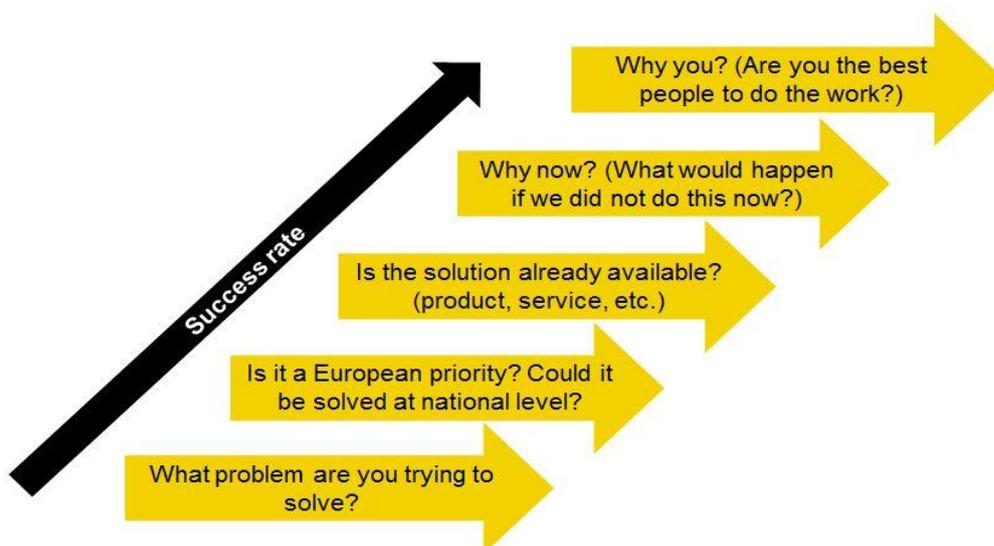
- Good scientific objectives and explanations, but **other parts are neglected** (impact, implementation, risk assessment, etc);
- **Poor or unclear match between the project and the call:** researchers push their own “research agenda”;
- **Lack of cooperation** and trust is evident from the proposal;
- **Lack of editing** and proof-reading;
- **Unclear relationships between work packages;**
- **Unclear budget:** no budget included, the budget exceeds limits, or the budget is not adequate for foreseen partners.

The following questions can provide you with a useful framework against which you might check your research project proposal. The more these questions are addressed in your proposal, the higher your chances are for success.

- What problem are you trying to solve?
- Is it a European priority? Could it be solved at national level?
- Is the solution already available?
- Why now? What would happen if we did not do this now?
- Why you? Are you the best person to do this work?

From idea to project

Questions to be addressed in the project abstract



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BECOMING AN EXPERT EVALUATOR

Individuals with expertise in one or various fields can apply to work as evaluators of Horizon 2020 project proposals. Evaluating projects can have various benefits:

- It is a privileged way to gain insider knowledge about the evaluation process, allowing you to better prepare future project proposals yourself.
- It is also a unique opportunity to gain insights about the state-of-the-art in your field of work (experts will, however, not be selected for a certain call for proposals if conflicts of interest may occur).
- Evaluators are remunerated for their efforts with a daily allowance.

You express your interest to be selected as evaluator by setting up a profile on the Participant Portal²³. A certain notoriety, previous involvement in European conferences and other events as well as prior experience with framework programme projects are considered as advantages for prospective evaluators. Candidates from industry or from certain geographic areas, as well as women, are particularly encouraged to apply.

Evaluators work on a personal basis and do not represent their organisations. The registration as expert evaluator is continuously open.

²³ <http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/experts/index.html>

GRANT NEGOTIATION AND SIGNATURE

The European Commission services will prepare a Grant Agreement that will be signed by the European Commission and the project coordinator. Project participants join the contract by signing accession forms.

To allow smooth communication, each organisation participating in a Horizon 2020 project needs to distribute certain roles.

- First of all, each organisation appoints a **Legal Entity Appointed Representative (LEAR)**. This representative is the unique point of contact for the European Commission. Designating a LEAR is the only procedure that requires to submit a document in paper form (blue-ink procedure). It is only done once for all Horizon 2020 project in which the organisation might participate. The LEAR can, in turn, authorise legal and financial signatories within the organisation. To appoint a LEAR, follow the procedure outlined in the Horizon 2020 online manual²⁴.
- As a second step, the LEAR appoints individuals within his or her organisation who can sign grant agreements or amendments (**Legal Signatories**), and financial statements (**Financial Signatories**).
- From that pool, contact persons from each organisation select signatories for the project at hand (**Project Legal Signatories** and **Project Financial Legal Signatories**).²⁵

The signature of the Grant Agreement is an **electronic process**: a digitally sealed PDF document is made available on the Participant Portal. The entitled signatory is notified by e-mail and can sign the agreement electronically after having logged in. Conversely, the European Commission authorising officer signs the Grant Agreement electronically. Then other project partners sign the accession form²⁶.

It is also recommended to sign a **consortium agreement** that will govern the relations among all project participants. Contrary to the Grant Agreement, there is no official consortium agreement template. Several templates, such as DESCA, have been elaborated for Horizon 2020 consortium agreements²⁷.

²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/grants/applying-for-funding/register-an-organisation/lear-appointment_en.htm

²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/grants/from-evaluation-to-grant-signature/grant-signature_en.htm

²⁶ For more information on the process, read our FAQ: <http://www.horizon2020.lu/Toolbox/FAQ/LEAR-and-Electronic-Signatures>

²⁷ <http://www.desca-2020.eu/>

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: FOLLOW-UP

REPORTING AND AUDITS

During the lifetime of a project, participants have certain duties vis-à-vis the European Commission. One main obligation is reporting. Project participants need to keep records on time spent by staff on the project (timesheets) and on how financial resources are being spent.

A project can be subject to audit during its implementation or up to two years after the final payment of the Commission grant. Ineligible costs detected during an audit can be recovered or deducted from the next payments.

FINANCING DURING YOUR HORIZON 2020 PROJECT

Funding for Horizon 2020 projects is based on the reimbursement of actual costs. However, in order to provide beneficiaries with an initial cash flow, certain amounts are paid out already at the beginning of the project. This is called the **pre-financing payment**. It is transferred from the European Commission to the coordinator, who then dispatches it to the project partners. The amount to be transferred to each partner will have to be outlined in the Grant Agreement. A certain amount of the pre-financing is transferred to a “Guarantee Fund”²⁸, a fund that insures against financial losses due to defaulting beneficiaries. The pre-financing can be reclaimed if costs that are subsequently declared turn out to be ineligible.

²⁸ 5% of the maximum grant amount. The guarantee fund

HIGHLIGHT: OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCHERS

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL

The European Research Council provides attractive grants to individual researchers (principal investigators) at various stages of their career, to pursue individual projects at the frontiers of knowledge. There are three main instruments, corresponding to the researchers' level of experience: Starting Grant, Consolidator Grant and Advanced Grant. A fourth instrument, the Proof of Concept Grant, is dedicated to previous ERC grant holders only.²⁹



Contrary to other Horizon 2020 programmes, scientific excellence is the only criterion for the award of ERC grants. Projects can come from any field of research.

As an organisation enjoying much autonomy, the European Research Council is governed by a Scientific Council and managed by an Executive Agency, but is accountable to the European Commission.

ERC grant applications are evaluated on an A-B-C scale. The number of applications is high and success rates rather low. **An “A” grade is required to be eligible for funding.** In order to curb the amount of applications, applicants having received a “B” grade in their evaluation may not apply the coming year. Applicants with a “C” are excluded from re-applying for two years.

The ERC website offers a wealth of information on past projects, funding schemes and the evaluation³⁰.

²⁹ <http://erc.europa.eu/funding-schemes>

³⁰ <http://erc.europa.eu/>

MARIE SKLODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions provide grants to support individual research works either within a network of organisations or for standalone projects. Both junior (“early-stage”) and experienced researchers are eligible. All research domains are eligible. The programme is open to both the academic and the non-academic sector.

Early-stage researchers	In the first four years (full-time equivalent) of their research career and not awarded a PhD at the time of their recruitment to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie project concerned
Experienced researchers	Should at the call deadline hold a PhD degree or have research experience of at least four years (full-time equivalent)

There are three main Marie Skłodowska-Curie schemes:

- **Innovative Training Networks (ITNs):** At least three organisations from at least three EU Member States or Associated Countries form a network to train junior researchers who will work on their individual projects. Project partners can either offer general training or fully-fledged PhD-programmes. Networks should publish job offers to eligible researchers online.
- **Research and Innovation Staff Exchange:** Just as in ITNs, at least three organisations from at least three EU Member States or Associated Countries form a network. They can then second staff to research projects abroad for periods of 1 to 12 months.
- **Individual Fellowships:** Individual experienced researchers submit their applications together with host organisations abroad. Funding covers projects between 12 and 24 months, and even 36 for stays outside of Europe.

In all cases, researchers must move from one country to another (mobility requirement) during the time of their grant.

READY?

We hope that this overview helps you submit your proposal successfully! Below is a summary of the main steps:

- 1. Strategy:** Define to what extent participating in an EU research and innovation project can be part of your organisation's overall strategy. Does the management endorse the approach? Does your organisation possess the capabilities to run/participate in a Horizon 2020 project or is it able to obtain them? Are you willing to provide the initial investment of time and resources to prepare the project proposal?
- 2. Work Programme and topics:**
 - a. **For "top-down" programmes** (with pre-defined themes): Download the Work Programme and browse through the calls and topics that interest you. Focus on the topic that best fits your project ambitions. Familiarise yourself with the topic's requirements and deadlines. Subscribe to the topic's RSS feed, if available.
 - b. **For "bottom-up" programmes** (without thematic restrictions): Download the Work Programme and familiarise yourself with requirements and deadlines. Subscribe to the topic's RSS feed, if available.
- 3. Partners:** If applicable, look for partners that bring in complementary expertise to your project (if you plan to be the coordinator), or offer your competence for projects in the making (if you plan to join a project as partner).
- 4. Project set-up and proposal drafting:** Describe your project convincingly by defining tasks, work packages, milestones and deliverables. Make sure that you answer all questions in the proposal template and that your proposal responds well to the three evaluation criteria excellence, impact, and implementation. If you use external expertise to prepare the project proposal, apply for national aid to cover costs of this phase.
- 5. Submission:** Create an account on the Participant Portal to submit your proposal online before the deadline.

The National Contact Point at Luxinnovation is available to provide you with further advice and guidance concerning all the aspects of Horizon 2020 projects described in this guide. Do not hesitate to contact us to discuss your project ideas and proposals.

Good luck!

ANNEX – ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

[Horizon 2020 Participant Portal](#)

This website contains all information relevant to participating in Horizon 2020 calls for proposals

[Horizon 2020 Online Manual](#)

European Commission resource on each step of the Horizon 2020 project cycle

[Horizon 2020 – In Brief](#)

40-page pocket format information brochure on Horizon 2020 funding priorities and practical issues

[European Commission – Horizon 2020](#)

A general introduction to the Framework Programme, focusing on each area

[Luxembourg – Horizon 2020](#)

Website of the Luxembourg National Contact Point for Horizon 2020

[Seventh Framework Programme \(FP7\) projects](#)

Searchable database on past EU-funded research and innovation projects

Partner Search

A few links to partner search websites online

<http://horizon2020.lu/Toolbox/Partner-Search>

