



ENRF Briefing Note

“How to get ready for a Horizon 2020/ FP9 submission” What we learned from the Virtual Horizon 2020 Summit!

The funding Expert Academy has held a Virtual Summit on Horizon 2020 (H2020), with more than 1.000 people following the sessions aiming to explore several topics concerning H2020 grant proposals. Among others, they focused on the following themes: European Research Council (ERC) grant proposals for individual researchers in academia, best practices on SME instrument, grant applications for collaborative projects, dissemination strategies in H2020, use of English language, and visual aspects.

During the first session, Yasmine Wachs, Senior Consultant, Enspire Science, provided tips and best practices for successful ERC grant proposals. These grants are awarded to individual researchers, mainly in academia, and differ in categories, depending on the seniority of the applicant:

- Starting grants (2<PhD>7 years)
- Consolidator grants (7<PhD>12 years)
- Advanced grants (beyond 12 years from the PhD)
- Synergy grant, that can support from 2 to 4 applicants from all categories
- Proof of concept, for applicants with ongoing ERC projects

This session focused on the first two types of grant: European Research Council (ERC) grant proposals for individual researchers in academia & Future and Emerging Technologies (FET).

The ERC grants are awarded to research projects disruptive in the area, with the aim to propose something that has not been proposed yet. The conceptual high-risk (risk on the vision of the project, rather than on its implementation) is greatly welcomed, balancing the low risk/not ambitious project, with a too highly risk one. ERC projects are expected to address important challenges and to be non-incremental: the project does not have to be a follow up of past projects, but to express significant advancement in research. In parallel, the applicant needs to demonstrate the right tools and experience to take on the challenge. The ERC wants to avoid more time and material projects: novel methodology should be only used if necessary to develop new questions, and non-previous work. It is also important to avoid the “fishing expeditions”: projects where targets are not detailed and framed. In addition, it is crucial to justify the resources use and not to recycle past applications to other funding schemes: ERC searches uniqueness. The ERC is not a collaborative project, even if team members are not intended as collaborators. External collaborators can be involved for particular expertise on a later stage, but the primary goal for the participant is to show his own capacity. In line with their side role, significant budget expenditure for the collaborators should be avoided. The ERC projects are expected to deliver hypothesis-driven research. The hypothesis needs to be high-risk and to structure the project. It should enable advancement of project, be consistent with observation and, be conducive of further enquires (open end). On the ERC candidate profile, he/she needs to have international visibility and scientific impact (network and international collaboration, and high-impact publications).

Finally, Wachs presented the ERC-FET open path, a collaborative project setting the baseline for a radically new line of technology and its future uses, by establishing its proof-of-principle and foundation scientific underpinning. The project is based on a bottom-up approach and high-risk project, differing from the ERC for the inclusion of 4 - 5 partners in a consortium from different disciplines. This grant is limited to technology-based projects.

As regards the SME Instrument, Mr Bernd REICHERT, Horizon 2020 SME Instrument EASME director, explained that the SME instrument is positive as it attracts a lot of innovative companies, even if some are not yet 100% operational to go to the market. But they still have the feeling that this is not reaching out massively young start-ups to grow. A lot of people do not know yet SME Instrument. Anyway, the budget for the SME Instrument increases every year with more than 50m Euros, enabling it to support more companies. So, whatever is the SME content, market, it can come to the SME instrument. What is expected is to see a bit more of fin-tech, education

tech, med-tech. Within this context, it is important EFN and ENRF focus on 'entrepreneurship', nurses having their own business (eg in community care).

An interesting section has been held on the collaborative projects Research and Innovation Actions (RIA) and Innovation Actions (IA). **This section appears to be particularly useful for EFN/ENRF projects, as the IA grants relates to industry and NGOs involvement, rather than to a research participation.**

Eloise Keating, Co-founder of Modus Research and Innovation, has provided an overview of how the excellence and implementation sections of a project proposal should look like. With regard to the excellence section, this should cover the following content:

1. Objectives

- State the problem, identify the solution offered, present the plan (details in the next section)

2. Relation to the work programme

- Show to the evaluator that you are fit for the call: use the text of the proposal as basis and address how to solve it.

3. Concept and methodology

- Overall concept: use a diagram to describe the main ideas, models and assumption of the project and how they work together to deliver the objectives and results;
- Positioning of the project: use a table to illustrate your expertise at the moment (ex: your technology readiness level);
- National and International research and innovation activities linked with the project: include only previous projects relevant to the call, projects that show existing collaboration among the consortium partners, other initiatives which your project will engage with;
- Methodology: explain the rationale behind the choice of methods, support your choice. Don't use old method if the topic requires a new one.

4. Ambition

- Use a table to compare the state of art and how your project would improve it. Make it measurable and specific. Do not apply an impartial review article of the state of art, highlight the gaps and how to fill it. This section is a link with the impact section.

As regards the abstract, it must encapsulate the most important aspects of the project and should include: goals and scope of the project, a brief description of the method, and hypothesis and expected outcomes.

The implementation section should cover the following content:

1. Workplan

- Overall structure of the workplan: aim and objective, list of work packages, identify the leaders, define the deliverables, define the milestones, define the task, identify the risks and mitigation strategy, impact, budget, management and excellence – encapsulate the content of your next sessions;
- Gantt chart;
- Detailed work description: make it clear, establish tasks how linked to the partner and how (use table);
- List of deliverables and milestones: what are the outputs? (KPIs) how do you measure progress? What are the main decision points?

2. Management structure

- Organisational structure: decision making, bodies, conflict resolution, monitoring;
- Innovation management: aspects to consider: opportunities research, commercialisation;
- Critical risk: identify, quantify, mitigate and the risk.

3. Consortium as a whole

- How do partners complement, their expertise, how they work together, how they cover the spectrum of activities

4. Resource to be committed

Some final useful tips:

- try to fit your idea to the call
- fit the consortium to the call, establish roles before inviting partners

- respect guidelines, language style, formatting and page limit, don't use too much text

Concerning the impact section of the project, Rita Clancy is the owner of EURIDA Research Management, clarified that it is important to link it to the excellence session, and to stress the EU added value of the project. She added that the impact has to be quantified and indicators set where possible, and that the exploitation has to be strong. To build a good impact session, it can be useful to analyse the expected impact as set out in the call. The contractor can prepare a table with three columns: impact set out in the work programme / barriers to the expected impact/ how the project contributes to the impact. Furthermore, the session should include a stakeholders table, to explain which actors will benefit differently from the concept and their possible role in the project. Include a SWOT diagram with influence and interest of stakeholder.

During another presentation on Impact, speakers argued that mostly the impact is difficult to show because results will be available in long term, therefore it is useful to provide what can be measured, and an instrument to do it. For beginners, it is crucial to networking: search for external support to evaluate the proposal, and to have fit for purpose partners. In addition, some useful tips can be found in the webpage fasttrackimpact.com, under the section "[Resources](#)" it is possible to find free documents (e.g. free templates) with examples of past projects, and a list of [tips](#) to write a good impact session.

Finally, an input on the collaborative projects RIA and IA has also been provided by Xavier Aubry, EC expert, Founder of Zaz Venture. He focused on the role of the evaluation panel, how to build a consortium, and how to write a proposal.

On the first topic, he specified that the evaluators come from research, academia and business environment. It is important to address all of them with the proposal and not to stick too much on the research or business criteria, or the other evaluators will not understand it. He also suggested to avoid lengthy introductions, repetitions (it seems that the proposal runs out of content), frequent references, missing details (page numbers, table content). He added that evaluators pay attention to the profile of the consortium partners (linkedin profile, role in their companies), therefore it is crucial to make sure that their description is correct.

Regarding the consortium composition and research of partners, he advised to search through the network, look through the CORDIS database, post on H2020 discussion board, request support from EEN or NCPs. He clarified that the composition should be tailored to the grant application.

In particular, the RIA grant focuses on scientific and technical excellence, where a high innovation level is required. The consortium should be research or industry driven, and its objective should not be only research related, but address how it can benefit jobs and growth.

The IA grant focusses on impact, with an extensive attention the business plan. More than half of the consortium should be industry driven, with limited space for research.

Furthermore, there should more involvement in the proposal of "end-users", especially when required by the call, in RIA is very advised to use them, not for IA.

When writing the proposal, it can be useful to prepare a story line with the following elements:

- Describe the vision – long term objectives beyond the project
- Describe the objectives to be achieved within the proposal
- Describe the results to be produced within the project
- Describe the expected impact – consequences of the project describe how to achieve it
- Describe the exploitable results
- Give importance to KPIs: ambitious, realistic, specific, innovative, measurable, relevant, attainable, and time-bound.

Further advices have been provided on the three phases of the impact session - communication, dissemination and exploitation - by Emma Buchet, International Cooperation Manager at Sparks & Co Communication Agency for EU projects. She highlighted that it is important to develop a communication strategy during the proposal writing, by including all its details (final event, communication events) or the Commission will not see it as part of the contract.

- Communication is a way to achieve your project's objectives with different audiences: identify carefully your audience. The communication should be based on raising awareness of the project itself as well as of its challenges, what it aims to address.

- Dissemination it is part of the communication strategy: publish your scientific results and spread it to the audience to receive feedback further dissemination in a domino effect. To this purpose, use social media, e.g. twitter to measure the impact of the strategy (likes, retweet). Some useful tools can be leaflets and press releases to be spread via social media and classic press. To contact the press, target the type of press related to your project topic.
- Exploitation: getting the market to take on your research, it is the selling part. This strategy needs to feed into the previous two.

On the flow and style of the English language in a Horizon 2020 proposal, Gavin Lucas, Founder of The Paper Mill, explained how to prepare a good grant proposal in three stages:

1/ Planning: Thought experiments before starting

- Need - What the societal need does your proposal address? How will your research benefit society? Does it round the reality? – “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” – Key to have always this in mind!!
- Aim – New state of knowledge after the project? (this needs to be clear immediately from the introduction of the proposal); end goal of the project?; How the project advances science and society?
- Objectives – Specific steps to achieve the aim (Roadmap)? Orient the reader, guide the structuring/writing of the proposal.

2/ Structuring: Organising the ideas

- Write as little as possible – Create the structure before the content.
- Use the objectives as a guide to write the proposal – connect them to all the sections of the proposal (including the work packages) & use consistent language and order of ideas: key to use the information in a consistent language & order.
- Seek consensus first – involve colleagues in planning the grant; Explain your scientific story and structure; ask for feedback. All this will make the writing process shorter.

3/ Writing: content of proposal

- Writing in EN – Disorganised ideas are the biggest problem;
- Ownership – Avoid words as: aim to/try to/could contribute to/likely to – this transmit uncertainty to the proposal. The text need to convince the evaluator that we are confident with our writing and our ideas; use assertive language: I/we will...; show previous work and expertise;
- Unnecessary complexity – Omit unnecessary and complex words/sentences; make writing more active and easier to read. Important to re-read a project proposal and see if the wording used is necessary to make the scientific message across.

Another hint on the style of the proposal has been provided by Jernej Zupanc, EC Expert, Visual Communication Strategist and Trainer. He focused on the visual design and its importance to convey messages. He stressed that is crucial to simplify, do not use too much information if not necessary, and to use a good percentage of visual: not more than 5 pages with only text out of 30. Finally, he provided 7 tips to prepare figures:

- Every figure should have a message: convey a message in the image
- Tailor the writing to the audience (consider the type of evaluators)
- Use a graphical abstract
- Make figures easy to read – intuitive and simple
- Use colours to add meaning, not to fancify
- Enable scanning – fast reading: make sure that main messages are highlighted (titles, bold...)

Finally, Gary Bridgeman, H2020 expert, has presented some tips for convincing and motivating a team for any European challenging programme. He explained that when coordinate a team, it is fundamental to establish interdependence task, as:

- Pooled Interdependence – Standardise ways of working, use specifications, define processes, define outputs (strategy clear – specify room size, suppliers, budget, list of attendees, etc.)
- Sequential interdependence – Strong planning and accurate scheduling of tasks and outputs (correct end up between each involved person)

- Reciprocal interdependence – Continuous communication flows, group meetings, multiple integrators.

Then he listed some best practises to maximise efficiency:

- Keep your team size to under 10 people
- Central coordination & communication
- Have clear goals, and vision/expectations
- Minimize link in communication: common information effect is more credible than unique information.
 - Don't: increasing discussion; separating information review & decision; increasing team size; increasing the volume of information; making people accountable
 - Do's: setting norms of debate (how you discuss the things) and critical thinking vs consensus; frame things as problems to be solved; promote expertise differences to the team; minimize status differences; pay attention when unique information comes up & discuss it; ask information; ask to repeat; speak up
- Focus on goal completion when assigning labour
- Assign tasks based on the level of commitment
- Try to preserve equity across the project and not within work packages.

He concluded by saying that it is important to set common goals, expectations and views. People need to seat down and see what they expect from the project programme (H2020 or any other one). It is crucial to keep in mind that it is not about what H2020 can do for you but what you can do for H2020/research.

Furthermore, talking from a Researcher perspective, Nik Claesen, from the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA - <http://www.earma.org/>) gave an overview on what EARMA is doing and how this relate to H2020 and the upcoming FP9.

Seeing the H2020, as a good programme, with good elements, as ERC (aiming the Universities to get a lot of publicity), EARMA sees the operational & administration side of H2020 not 100% ok, with some issues with personnel costs and internal invoicing, which has been a problem the Commission has worked on with the community. But overall, if we look at H2020 landscape of international programmes, quite proud of what has been put forward as EU funding mechanism.

One of the points, to be looked at for FP9, and at this crucial time for Europe and the world, is getting this budget across the line, making sure that we invest enough money in research and innovation programme. **Investment will pay back after a while!**

But we need to be aware that it is not the European Commission that sets the budget, nor so much the European Parliament, even if they are both involved and have a role to play. But in the end, to set the budget we are also looking at the Member States and at the Council, to make this all happen.

We need to make sure we translate that importance also to the national representations and to the Council Ministers that will be setting the budget and make sure that we are heard there. The community has also a role to play in this.

Sometimes, coming from the Academic world we are not that happy to interfere in politics and policies, we want to do our research in a good way and we think that this research will be appreciated and therefore we get a lot of funding for it. This is something we must be aware of and take other actions to present ourselves in the right way. With FP9, that will have a larger budget than H2020, it is key to have at least what we have had with H2020. Hope that a lot of politicians and policy-makers will see the immense value that can come from this, not only in science, but also in bringing together players from across countries and setting up the European Research Area, or at least in making this a better reality. It will be difficult with the current global and EU politics, which will be influencing this. It is all to be played for and we need to be attentive and persistence as a scientific community.

Main challenges for researchers in developing a successful H2020 project proposal: We expect our researchers to do research and collaborate with industry, education, university, governments, communication, etc. to get EU funding they need to couple that and be experts in proposals writing, exploitation, etc. **So, are we training our**

researchers their all lives to know a bit of everything or to have an impact on the state of the art and change our society? For EARMA, it is the second option.

But then it is important to simplify, make sure the red tape goes away, and the process is more linear, more trusted. Researchers need to be supported in the right way, and guided on topics such as ethics proposal writing, project management, etc. by experts who are doing that and support them in the right way, so they can do research. One crucial element is that the research manager & administrator must be confident, trained in the right way, and be able to play up to the level of the excellent researcher. You need to create a proposal writing machine, which in a structured way can deliver good research proposals, that can support and make it that the researchers can really do research. That's where EARMA is important, as it helps in getting this kind of people, with knowledge and high qualified skills, that can support researcher in the right way, by training them, showing them what is out there, by building a network and by keeping them at that level, by giving them the right information. So, structuring the proposal writing process, in a kind of standardised tool, is key to move forward. It is very good to see what others are doing and bring ideas for yourself. So, you can do things in a more concrete and professional way.

Networking: A key element for a winning H2020 proposal, is networking. Internal networking – with the colleagues within the organisation, and external networking – potential partners, experts that can evaluate your proposal, consultants and professionals that can support in developing the proposal, EC Officers that can provide some feedback on the call of proposals. Seen that in most projects you are in a collaborative model proposal. It is key to link what you are doing, and make sure you understand the policy context at EU level but also at national level. Link with key stakeholders, etc. and make it happen.

To make it all a success, EARMA has launched a certification programme for European research managers, aiming to bring the people to the level needed to be able to help in having a successful proposal. It is a training programme (of 1 year, 1 ½ year) for more experienced people (not yet junior people & not targeted to researchers) to make sure they have all the competencies and skills needed for a project proposal writing and managing. This is a kind of quality guarantee within the research ecosystem.

Finally, working on the Bohemia Study, launched by the EC (DG Research) - a foresight exercise aiming to ensure the next EU research programme (FP9) is equal to the challenges of the 2020s, that started 1 ½ year ago, to finish end of the year, Andrea Ricci from ISINNOVA, explained that in preparing the next funding programme (FP9) (Bohemia study), they are taking into account several scenarios, but not reinventing the wheel.

The study (that is based on a Delphi survey (150 questions) to see what could be the FP9 priorities, is seeing what already exists, and analysing meta-scenarios bringing the change, possible only if we are able to recognise the seeds of change that may already be there but need to be worked upon. **To do that we need to have courageous and ambitious anticipatory capacity.**

European funding should support the mission and the vision of an organisation, a community, etc., and the best way to make someone endorse this mission & vision is by making policy-makers to be part of the process of formulating this vision. Many policy-makers have very limited time to dedicate to different tasks, but to make it intrinsic it is key to provide them with short and up to the point information, and give them tips/mini scenarios enabling them to understand our mission/vision (as for health sector), and see if they endorse it.

ENRF Briefing Note – October 2017

European Nursing Research Foundation (ENRF)

Registration Number: 0533.978.961

Clos du Parnasse 11B, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 511 34 84 - Fax: +32 2 512 35 50

Email: enrf@enrf.eu