Proposal Design

How to give support

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Proposal Design

Is it straightforward ? Is it easy ?

What is a good and successful proposal ?

Explain the philosophy to your clients !

The Philosophy for writing successful proposals:

- The philosophy is generic (applicable to all projects).
- It is independent of the subject or topic.
- It is independent of the funding source.
- It is independent of the programme.

The philosophy is simple …..
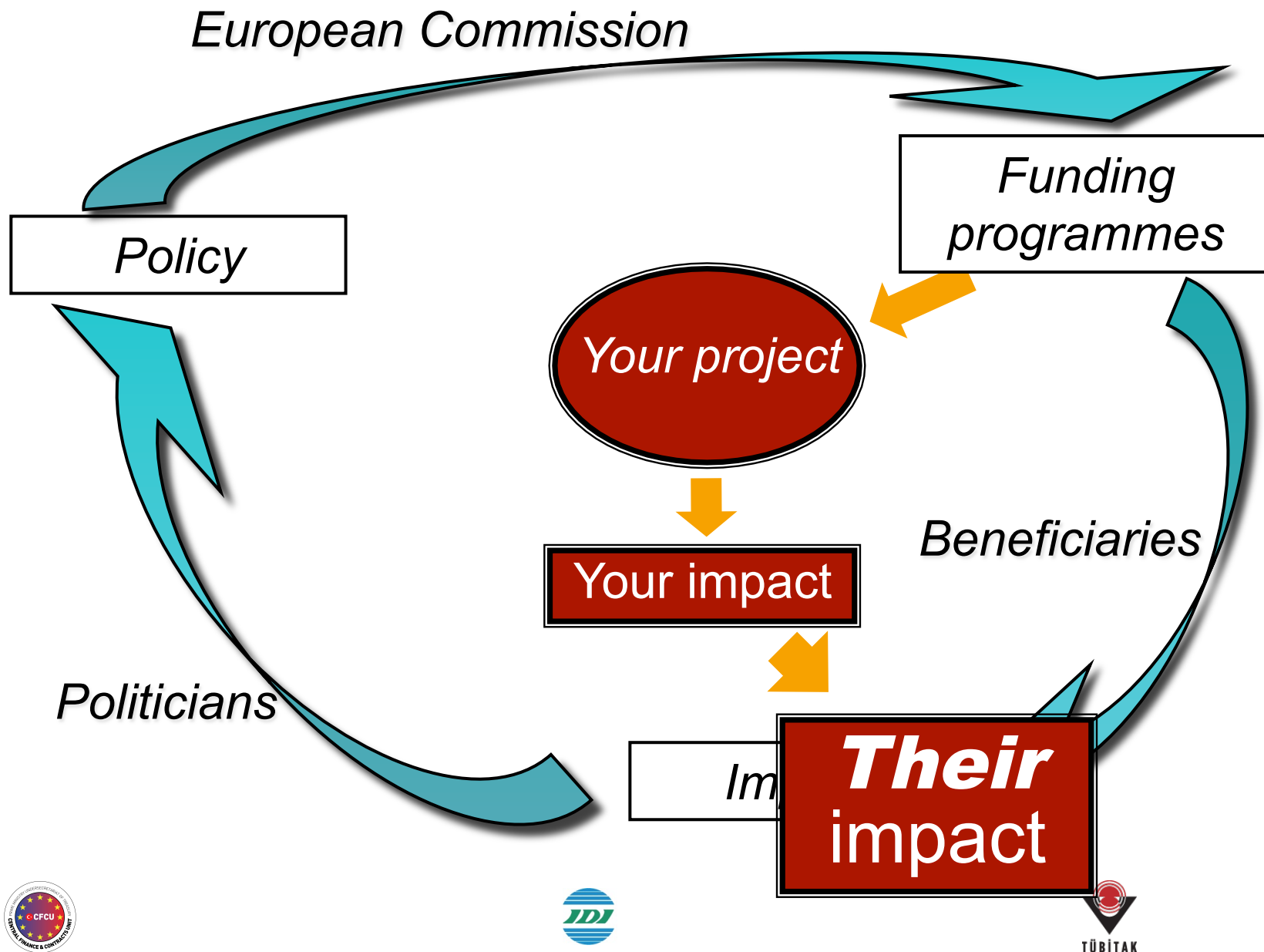
Philosophy for writing EU project proposals:

- Your philosophy is to know what to do to convince the funding source to give you the money.

- Your philosophy is to learn how to be competitive (your proposal will not be the only one).

Philosophy for writing EU project proposals:

So, what is the first step to make your proposal the best ?

Understand the reasons for funding programmes !

Proposal Design Philosophy

The most important question you have to ask yourself now:

- Do the scope and the impacts described in the call match your own line of research, innovation or development ?

If not, do not try to squeeze your ideas into some EU objectives.

The proposal will never be fully convincing and achieve a top ranking position.
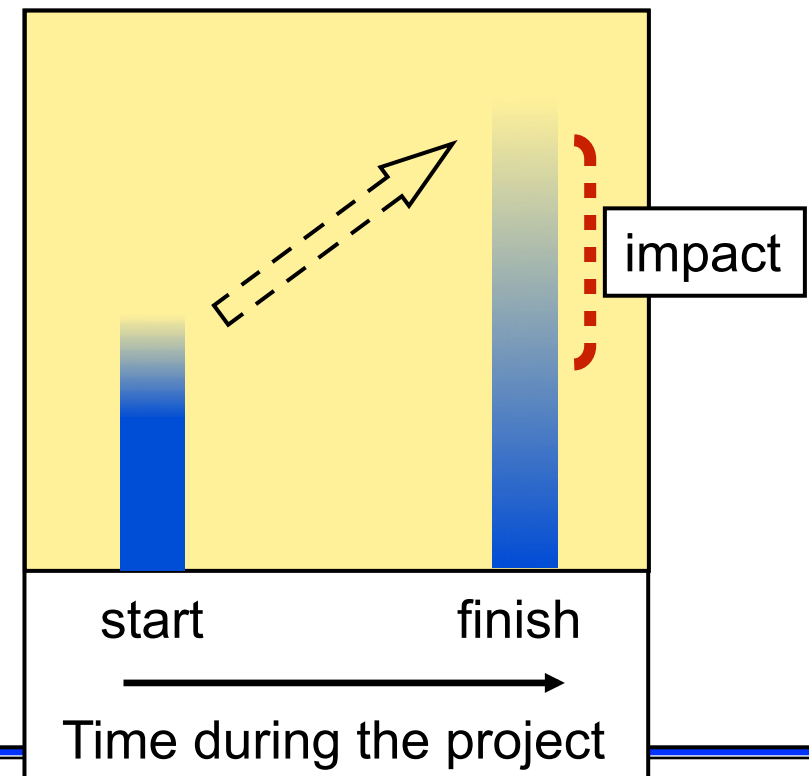
So, your project needs to have significant impact.

You need to know how to convert this:

The format for a proposal that is going to fail -

- Poor definition of starting point (no needs analysis).
- Poor definition of finishing point (poor impact analysis).
- Poor definition of how to get to the finishing point (description of activities).

impact

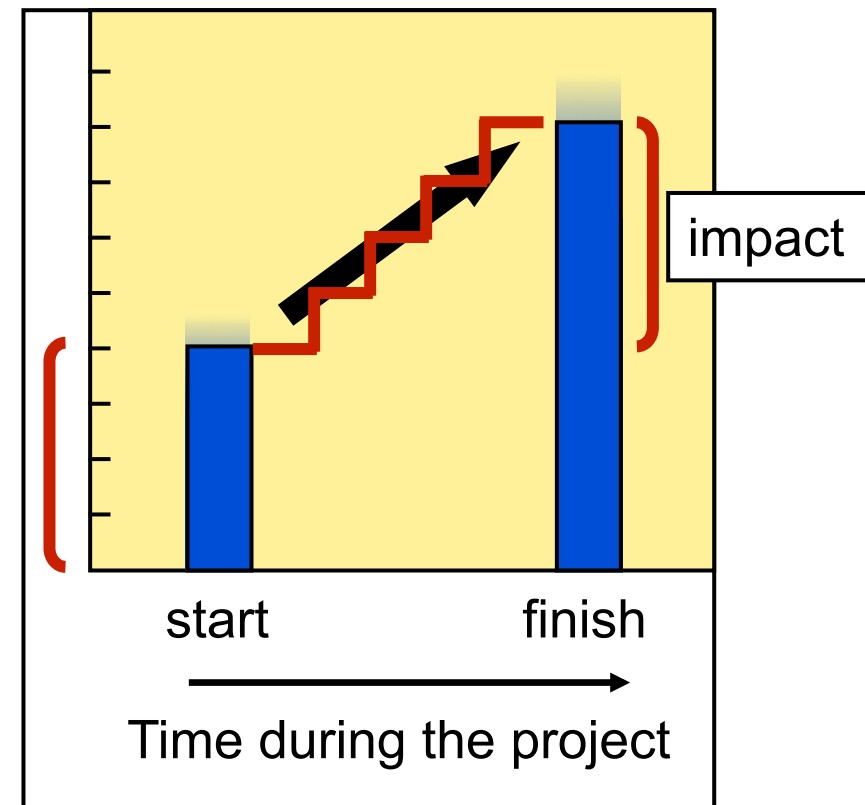start   finish

Time during the project

Into this:

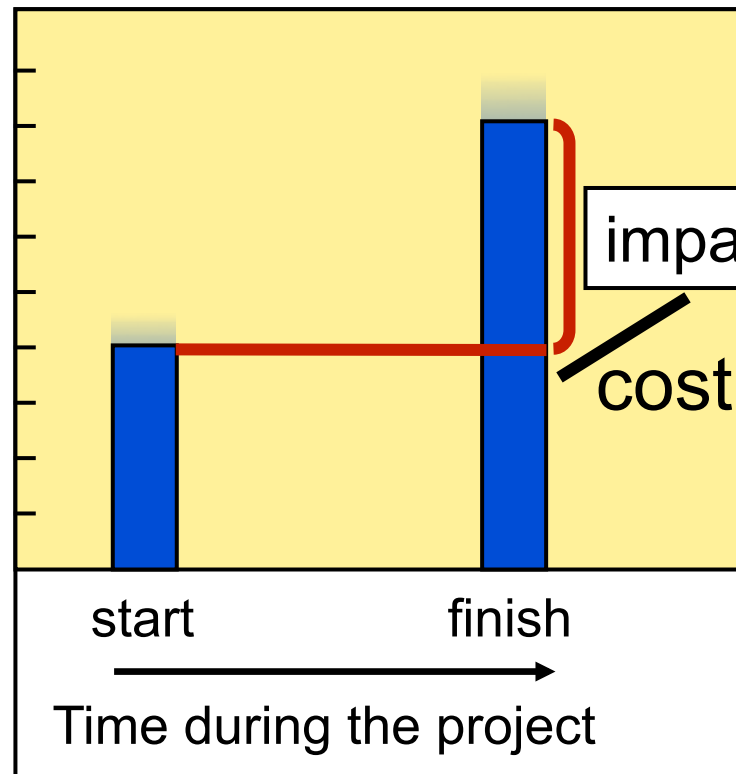## The format for a proposal that is going to succeed -

Your proposal has to give clear definitions of
- where you start from
- where you will get to
- how you will get there

i.e. description of the activities (the steps up the ladder) and evidence of progress.

impact

start   finish

Time during the project

And one more criterion you need to satisfy:

The funding you are asking for needs to be well justified!

An important concept for every researcher to understand!

- In an R&D project you can achieve impact only through S&T Excellency !

- Where you start from: a well-founded understanding and description of the state-of-the-art

- Where you will go to: a clear description of how your results will go beyond the State-of-the-Art

- How you will get there: Ensure the quality and effectiveness of the S/T methodology and associated work plan.

Major Problems

Four major problems are evident in proposals:

1. Irrespective of their intelligence, people are unable to read and implement instructions!

2. Statements are made without any supporting evidence so evaluators are not convinced.

3. Insufficient details are given of activities that will be carried out to convince evaluators.

4. The text of different parts of a proposal is not consistent, so evaluators get confused.

Not reading instructions

- Ensure you do what the guidelines want you to do, which means read the instructions carefully (every page)!

- Read the funding objectives, eligibility criteria and impact expected of projects as well as any Guide for Applicants, and then do exactly what is required.

- If your ideas don't match the objectives then quit !

- The instructions are not that difficult to implement.

No evidence for statements

- Be intelligent in implementing the instructions. Every word of the call objectives has a meaning.

Here's an example from an EU Work Programme: "… close cooperation with at least 3 *outstanding* European partnering organisations". [Their italics, not mine!]

"outstanding" - so you must provide the evidence!

So do not write "Our three European partners are outstanding" and expect evaluators to believe you!

Not sufficient detail for justification:

Compare these two examples:

"One of our young R&D scientists will spend one month in project year 2 at Institute X in Paris to be trained in how to use an ABC machine."

Needs analysis

Activity description

Impact analysis

"Our institute currently has no ABC machine, though we plan to buy one in project Year 1, as it is essential to develop the diagnostic tests of Objective 4. Thus, 1 of our talented scientists will work in the institute of Dr X in Paris for 1 month immediately before commissioning the ABC machine. Dr X has used ABC since 1998 and she has two machines, one of which is regularly used to train visiting workers.

Upon return to our institute, the young R&D scientist will help commission the new ABC machine and give training in its use to others to ensure dissemination and sustainability of the newly-acquired expertise."

So, make sure you define the activities sufficiently to give the evidence that objectives will be achieved.

Inconsistencies

Ensure consistency in what you say throughout your proposal. For example:

- If you refer to improving staff management skills as a project objective, make sure you describe activities somewhere in the rest of the proposal to achieve this!

- If you refer to a website dissemination activity, make sure your project website is already described in a previous section of the proposal!

- It is very easy to make mistakes in consistency because you write the text bit by bit, but evaluators read your whole proposal in just a few hours.

How much detail is needed to convince evaluators?

- Adjust the amount of detail you give to describe the work/tasks to be done according to the project scale and type.

- A small-scale project for your first proposal (e.g. a staff training visit) would need more description of day-to-day activities than a large international collaborative project by experienced staff.

Once your proposal gets to the evaluators …

By the end of reading your proposal the evaluator needs to be saying
- 'This looks a good quality proposal, with very competitive ideas from proposers who followed all the instructions.'
- 'This is an excellent project concept, clearly justified and implemented with a convincing amount of detail.'
- 'It looks as if the proposed project will be managed competently, and will have a significant impact.'
- 'It looks the best proposal that I have reviewed. So..'
- 'I recommend the proposal to be funded!'

Some essential rules:

- Choose the right instrument for your idea

- You are going to need consistently high marks on all criteria

- Use the Guidance Notes for Evaluators !

- Make sure your Project Workplan reflects the promises you make in the rest of Part B

- Use all the help you can get (and don't wait till it's too late)

Some final remarks …

- You can learn to present a good proposal in the best possible way.
- But no amount of creative writing will disguise an inadequate proposal.
- Are you really fully in scope of the strategic objective ?
- Will your project have a significant impact ?
- Is it scientifically and technically excellent ?
- Is your consortium competent and complete ?
- Do you have a well-worked out project management plan ?
- Do you have all the resources you need ?