H2020 Thematic Oriented Training

"Secure Societies Calls"

H2020 Proposal writing
Secure Societies in H2020 (i)

- **Less is more (and a clear structure is even more).** The reviewer needs to be convinced in the first couple of pages of the full proposal. He/she still needs to be able to identify easily the answers to questions that those first pages raise. Make sure that all texts serve a purpose, that reviewers can easily distinguish key points and that the overall structure of the full proposal is logical and easy to comprehend

- **Be as specific as you can. General statements of the type** *" ...The draft plan presented herein contains measures to be implemented both during and after the project. These measures will address the full range of potential users and uses including research, commercial, investment and environment and are tailored to the specific technical, market and organizational issues addressed. The aforementioned draft plan will be then updated through project execution. Concerning dissemination of results, such activity will be conducted under the dedicated tasks in WP7, as agreed to by all members of the consortium. Three main target audiences for the dissemination of project results have been identified: 1) Scientific community; 2) Industry; and 3) General audience. As for those audiences the main aim is to provide free access to the information in order to wider impact. ..."* **are hated by the reviewers!!!**

- **Do not include statements** such as "this is of tremendous importance to disaster resilience" – the word "tremendous" is pretentious and out of proportion

- **Do not make claims** you cannot support via references to bibliography

- **Use as many relevant references** as you can, especially when referring to the state-of the-art and to existing similar work, initiatives and efforts

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For a successful proposal, many elements must come together. Large consortia, with partners that each have their own (political and technical) agendas, complicate the process. And this process is limited to just a couple of months. Leadership is key to a successful outcome, especially by the coordinator (it also helps keep stress levels low).

- First, reassess the initial idea and its fit to the objectives of the call. Fit the idea to the objectives not the other way round!

- Determine whether the consortium and the goals of the project need to be refined.

- Proceed with a Concept Note: an extended summary of the project with purpose, objectives, methodology to use, relation to existing work and envisaged capabilities required (i.e partner organisations)

- Then, develop a proposal implementation plan, in which you make provisions for delegating key parts of the full proposal. This also means drawing an early project implementation plan via Workpackages (Wps), which can be delegated to WP leaders for further development.

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Circulate the Concept Note and the initial implementation plan to the consortium for comments and contributions

- Only then, start producing texts by expanding the Concept Note. Pay attention to the first one to three pages. Evaluators have limited time to read your proposal – some of them may even suffer from proposal tiredness" resulting in a limited attention span. Your exposition should not generate questions which remain unanswered: these are the first weaknesses which the evaluator will notice.

- In parallel, develop the business plan (if appropriate) and the consortium management strategy

- Repeat the above process as many times as necessary, until it converges to a satisfactory proposal

Note 1: The competition is stiff! No proposal can be successful (rate of 1:9 in H2020 in general), unless it contains meaningful contributions by all partners and meaningful roles for all partners (no passenger partners – too dangerous

Note 2: Include a realistic estimate of costs. In H2020 there is no negotiation after a proposal is selected for funding, therefore the reviewers are free to penalise for over/under financed tasks.

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Good Practice Tips:

- You should make it clear to all partners that they should all contribute. Be in regular contact with all, and do not hesitate to (threaten to) remove a partner who refuses to do so. The success of the proposal depends on cooperation and collaboration.

- Form an inner circle of key partners who are willing to offer more to the proposal and consult with them frequently on all issues.

- H2020 proposals demand more emphasis on exploitation and dissemination. There have been accusations and evaluations of past European R&D Framework programmes, which stated that there was poor applicability of their results and no follow up leading to commercial products. As a result, there can be no successful proposal of the type "Innovation Action" without a realistic, convincing for the evaluators initial market assessment and business plan.

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Good Practice Tips:

Remember that all three parts of a proposal, i.e.:

- Excellence, Impact, Implementation
- are equally important for success.

- A common mistake is to have a good idea, well-conceived, well-described as far as its novel and technical aspects are concerned, which can bring top marks regarding Excellence. Resting on your laurels at this point, may impair your judgment on what is further required, resulting in reduced quality for the other parts. This may also be the result of assigning other chapters to partners, without exercising careful quality control.

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Good Practice Tips – Excellence

- **State your objectives clearly** and in relation to the objectives of the topic in the workprogramme. Do not allow overlaps in your objectives – state them so that they complement each other.

- **Give measurable (to the extent possible and more so if proposing an Innovation Action) indicators** which can be used to evaluate the achievement of your objectives

- **Methodology**: be precise, specific to your own goal and give details. DO NOT resort to titles only:

  - Example 1: …Optimal control of the position of the camera will produce fast tracking and superior performance…

  - Example 2: …Prediction of the path using the extended Kalman filter of Beer1 and identification of the parameters of the disturbance due to wind via least squares will feed the Hamilton-Jacobi optimal control strategy recently developed by Baru2. The method can potentially result in 30% faster tracking, compared to existing laboratory approaches3…

Good Practice Tips – Impact

Most commonly, the chapter on Impact is responsible for the failure of a proposal. In combination with the factor above, many proposals treat this chapter with generalities – which could be stated for every proposal independent of theme. Another negative factor is the absence or non-specificity of an exploitation-dissemination plan:

- **Look for the features of your subject and its specific impact** in relation to those stated in the work-programme description.

- **State the exploitable aspects of your (envisaged) product** – not those of the general area

- **Find and state specific means and channels of dissemination**; do not refer merely to "publications in scientific journals and conferences"

- **Quantify anything you can** – include any metric (or Key Performance Indicator) able to offer a measure of achievement of a stated goal in the project

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Good Practice Tips – Implementation

- **Look for inconsistencies in the sequence of the timeplan for workpackages and tasks.** A project management software tool (such as MS project or various Open Source ones) will allow dependencies among tasks and reduce the possibility of error.

- **Be specific in the descriptions of tasks, do not resort to generalities which could apply to any project.** In fact, the description of tasks can serve as an extension of the methodological part (Excellence), where you show that you already have determined a way on how to tackle the research or innovation problem. Frequently, successful proposals, in the Excellence chapter, contain references to the Implementation chapter for further detail.

- **Explain the use of the resources the project requires** with realistic effort and equipment estimates (important for H2020)