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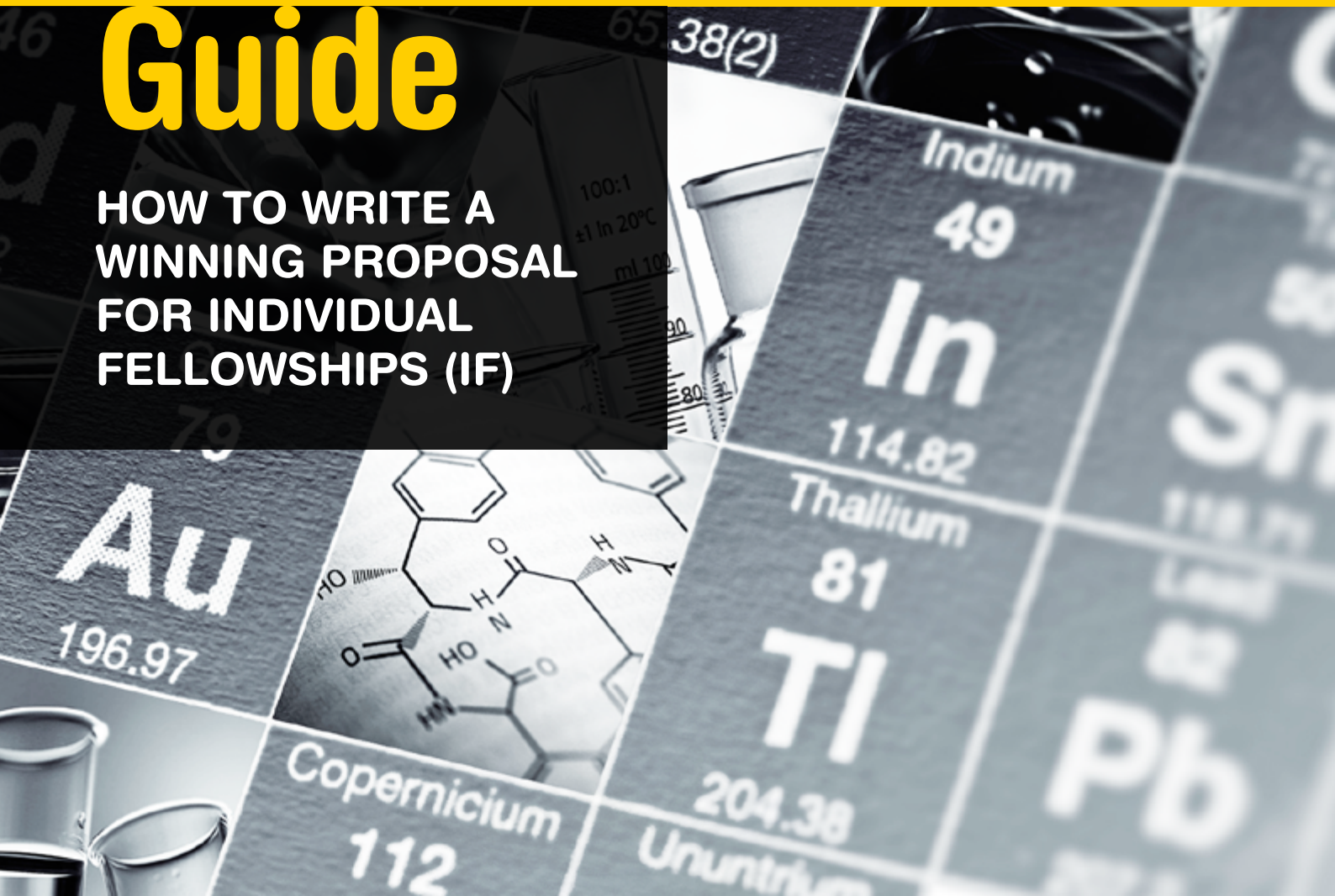
Guide

HOW TO WRITE A WINNING PROPOSAL FOR INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIPS (IF)



Guide

HOW TO WRITE A WINNING PROPOSAL FOR INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIPS (IF)

EVIDENCE FROM EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORTS

NOVEMBER 2014

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Horizon 2020 National Contact Point Luxembourg

THANK YOU

Thank you to Morgane Griveaud, for help with research and drafting, Lena Mårtensson, who edited the document, and Smadar Hirsh, for her valuable remarks on the content.

DISCLAIMER

The purpose of this guide is to provide basic information on how to write a successful Individual Fellowship application. It makes 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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EDITORIAL

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions provide training and career and knowledge-exchange opportunities through mobility programmes for researchers and research staff. The Actions are part of Horizon 2020, the European Union's framework programme for research and innovation for the period 2014-2020. The Marie Curie Individual Fellowships (IF) allows researchers to diversify their competence by working on an individual project in a university or company abroad. The IF only addresses so-called Experienced Researchers (ER): those who, at the time of the call deadline, hold a PhD or have at least four years of full-time equivalent research experience.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme – or MSCA in short – is included in the "Excellent Science" part of Horizon 2020, which indicates the high standards required from researchers to be awarded grants.

The programme is considered a success: over 80,000 researchers have benefited from it since its inception, and the programme continues to attract a large amount of applications to each annual call for proposals. This means that the competition for funding is fierce.

In order to be successful, it is therefore crucial to know how to make a proposal stand out from the crowd. The intrinsic quality of the planned research project and the applying researcher's credentials are certainly key factors for success. Knowing how evaluations are carried out, what evaluators are instructed to look for in a proposal or what central elements must be addressed to achieve high marks is, however, equally important.

This guide will walk you through the IF proposal submission template, briefly summarising each section. It will advise you on key aspects to keep in mind in order to write a successful proposal. This advice is based on our analysis of comments taken from a sample of real evaluation results, the so-called Evaluation Summary Reports. In order to provide concrete examples, the guide highlights positive and negative remarks made by evaluators, illustrating how they evaluate each part of the proposal.

We hope you find the reading useful in preparing your own IF proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to have further information and individual support.

NCP Horizon 2020 Luxembourg

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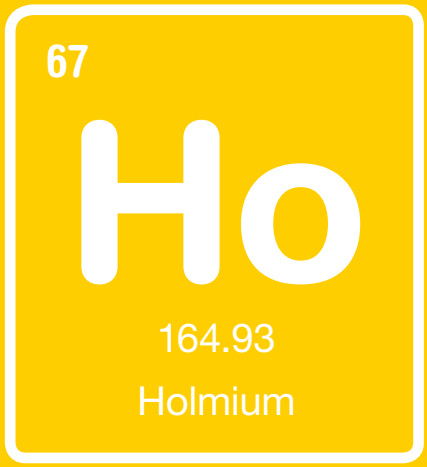

HOW AN INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIP PROPOSAL IS EVALUATED

THE MSCA PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCEDURE

The European Commission has put into place well-structured and efficient procedures to ensure that proposals are being evaluated in an impartial and expert way.

There are three funding award criteria in Horizon 2020: Excellence; Impact; and Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation[1]. These criteria also apply to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. Each criterion is scored by evaluators from 0 to 5. In order to be eligible for funding, a proposal must score 3.5 out of 5 for each individual section, and reach an overall score of at least 10 out of 15. However, when summed up, criteria are weighted differently, with excellence being the most important one. The different aspects of the excellence, impact and implementation criteria are given below.

Each proposal is submitted to one out of eight scientific panels depending on the research field addressed. Besides the eight main panels, there are two multidisciplinary ones: the Career Restart Panel (CAR) and the Reintegration Panel (RI). This panel structure ensures that proposals are read by evaluators who are knowledgeable about each proposal's knowledge field.

List of evaluation scientific panels

Chemistry (CHE)

Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC)

Economic Sciences (ECO)

Information Science and Engineering (ENG)

Environment and Geosciences (ENV)

Life Sciences (LIF)

Mathematics (MAT)

Physics (PHY)

1 Article 15, Rules for Participation

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS: INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIPS

Excellence	Impact	Implementation
Quality of innovative aspects and credibility of the research (including inter/ multidisciplinary aspects)	Enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources, skills and working conditions to realise the potential of individuals and to provide new career perspectives	Overall coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources
Clarity and quality of transfer of knowledge/training for the development of the researcher in light of the research objectives	Effectiveness of the proposed measures for communication and results dissemination	Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including quality management and risk management
Quality of the supervision and the hosting arrangements		Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)
Capacity of the researcher to reach or reinforce a position of professional maturity in research		Competences, experience and complementarity of the participating organisation and institutional commitment
50%	30%	20%
Weighting		
1	2	3

Table 1 Evaluation criteria

WHO ARE THE EVALUATORS?

Horizon 2020 proposals are evaluated by independent experts. Any natural persons can register in the evaluator database and be selected to evaluate proposals within their field of expertise. When choosing evaluators for a call, the European Commission puts special emphasis on gender balance and a fair representation of experts from all relevant fields and sectors. Incidentally, acting as evaluator is considered a very effective way to learn first-hand about the European funding process and gain insight into state of the art topics in the research field of one's interest.

Three evaluators draft individual evaluation reports for each proposal. A consensus report, the so-called Evaluation Summary Report (ESR), establishes the proposal's final grade. Proposals are then ranked according to their grade. Funding will be provided to eligible projects in descending ranking order according to the available budget for each panel.

How evaluators know what to look for in a proposal

The European Commission provides all evaluators with a briefing, to ensure that everybody understands the task at hand and that all are on the same page. The proposal template sometimes refers to these briefings, in phrases such as: "Experts will be strictly instructed to disregard any references [to the outcome of previous evaluations]."

According to their instructions, evaluators will look for certain key references in the proposals. It is therefore crucial to provide structured and complete information for all sections of the proposal template. When drafting your proposal, it is recommended to use keywords to demonstrate that you are familiar with the programme's rationale and objectives, such as "the development of the researcher's career", "the development of leadership skills", "the mutually beneficial relationship between the host organisation and the researcher" or "citizen engagement".

In the following pages, we will examine in detail which these key words are and how they can be woven together into a solid proposal.

THIS GUIDE'S METHODOLOGY

This guide follows the structure of the IF proposal submission form template[2]. The proposal template is an essential tool to know what aspects have to be covered in proposals, and in what order. Each section in the guide highlights quintessential ingredients of a good proposal for each sub-section of the proposal template. These lessons are illustrated by real remarks from evaluators, taken either from successful proposals, or from ones that did not obtain funding[3]. We have looked into around 40 Evaluation Summary Reports of Marie Curie proposals submitted under the 2013 Intra-European Fellowships for Career Development (IEF), International Incoming Fellowships (IIF) and International Outgoing Fellowships for Career Development (IOF) calls which were part of the former 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP7). These are now all subsumed under the Individual Fellowship grant.

The evaluation criteria used in FP7 have slightly changed under Horizon 2020. Until 2013, proposals were evaluated according to five criteria, now subsumed into three. However, the rationale of the programme remains the same.

2 Proposal submission form template, IF 2014: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/call_ptef/pt/h2020-call-pt-msca-if_en.pdf

3 A project that is not funded is not necessarily insufficient. As funding is distributed to eligible projects according to a ranking list, the fact that a proposal was not selected for funding might only means that other proposals scored higher marks. However, for the purposes of this guide, we will distinguish between funded and non-funded projects as an indicator of quality.

TABLE 2 CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN FORMER FP7 AND NEW H2020 CRITERIA

Former FP7 criterion	New H2020 criterion
S&T Quality	Excellence
Researcher	part of Excellence: “capacity of the researcher to reach or re-enforce a position of professional maturity in research”
Implementation	Implementation
Impact	Impact
Training	part of Impact: “enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources”

Some aspects in the guide may seem to repeat themselves. These redundancies are deliberate, as many aspects can indeed be found in various evaluation criteria. This allows the reader to consult the guide in a non-chronological order.

Evaluation results from the 2014 call under Horizon 2020 were not available when this document was drafted. We plan to publish a revised version of this guide, taking into account evidence from 2014 evaluation results. In addition, evaluation criteria have been rephrased, and two new panels[4] have been created. In a future edition, we will analyse how these changes might affect the appreciation of proposals, and what advice can be derived from it.

4 Both panels are multidisciplinary: The Career Restart Panel (CAR) addresses individual researchers resuming research in Europe after a career break. The Reintegration Panel (RI) is open to researchers returning to Europe to reintegrate in a longer term research position.

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THE PROJECT PROPOSAL

The proposal is composed of two main parts, the Administrative forms (Part A), and the actual Research proposal (Part B).

PART A

Part A is composed of five sections:

- **General information:** this is where you write the title of your proposal and choose a project acronym. You will also choose by which panel your proposal should be evaluated. You will provide free keywords as well as 2000-character abstract.

- **Administrative data of participating organisations:** Here you will link your proposal to your future host institution in the proposal submission IT system, and specify the host department's and your supervisor's contact information. You will also include information on yourself. You can add your Researcher ID (ResearcherID[5], ORCID) if you have one. As MSCA is a mobility programme, you will have to indicate your places of residence for the five years preceding the call deadline.

- **Budget:** The budget table for MSCA is one of the easiest to fill out in the whole Horizon 2020 programme. By indicating the duration of your project, the unit costs for the researcher and the institution will be calculated automatically.

- **Ethics:** The approach to ethics in Horizon 2020 is rigorous and well defined. At the proposal stage, the ethics assessment is a self-declaration. Applicants complete an "Ethics Issues Table" (in Part A). If ethics issues are flagged, the applicants will have to complete a more in-depth Ethics Self-Assessment (in Part B). Proposals selected for funding will furthermore pass an Ethics review procedure[6].

- **Call-specific questions:** Sundry administrative questions concerning the call.

As this part is of an administrative nature, we shift our focus to the research proposal in Part B.

PART B

Part B is the actual proposal.

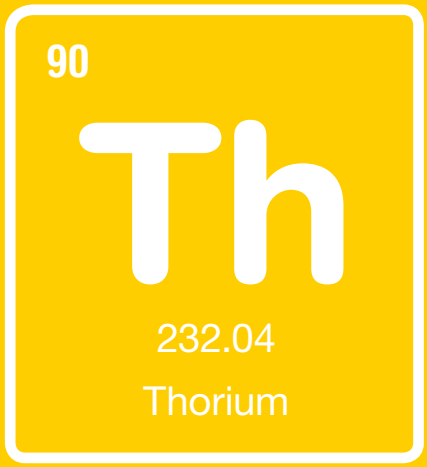
Excellence	Impact	Implementation

Applicants must follow a pre-defined structure in this section. It is important to respect the page limit: the main part (sections 1 – 4) should not exceed 10 pages. These sections include a summary of the proposal, and one section for every evaluation criterion, as mentioned above

5 These are unique identifiers that allow researchers to avoid name ambiguities, reference their publications and keep track of citations. www.researcherid.com, orcid.org

6 For more information: Ethics Self-Assessment Guidelines: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/ethics_en.htm

Ethics Issues Table template: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/ethics-eit_en.pdf



THREE IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROPOSAL

Besides hints on each evaluation criterion, three lessons apply to the proposal as a whole.
They emerge as a common thread in each evaluation report analysed, and are worth keeping in mind.

General lesson 1: It is vital to elaborate on each and every point of the evaluation criteria

Evaluation reports seem to follow the same template, and keywords are recurring. It is therefore essential to address each specific criterion as defined in the next chapters. Just like a doctor, the evaluator will spot the weak points of the proposal and those that the applicant has deliberately or inadvertently omitted. Evaluators will give high marks to proposals which are complete, coherent and detailed.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The proposed project is **very concise and clearly outlined**."
- "The proposal is **comprehensively described**."

General lesson 2: Strengths may not outweigh weaknesses

Each evaluation report highlights both strengths and weaknesses. In fact, the strengths of the proposal will be acknowledged even though the overall proposal is deemed insufficient. The strengths of your proposal might not make up the weaknesses.

Negative (and positive) things evaluators had to say (non-funded projects):

- A project scored 3 out of 5 in the Excellence criterion because "The originality of the research [was] not justified in sufficient detail", even though "the aim of the proposal [was] timely" and "the state of the art [was] well argued".
- Another project scored 3.2 out of 5 in the Impact criterion due to the fact that "the proposal [failed] to demonstrate the benefit for the mobility to ERA, [and] more details should [have been] provided concerning intra-European and industrial benefits." Even though "the competencies acquired during the fellowship could have [had] a significant impact on the future career prospects of the applicant" and the proposal's "outreach activities [were] very good and [would have had] a positive impact on the general public."

General lesson 3: Perfection is possible

It is possible to submit a flawless proposal. Good drafting and the conscientious treatment of all aspects do not escape the evaluators' attention.

What evaluators had to say:

- "**No weaknesses** were identified. This is a very high quality research proposal."
- "This is an **outstanding proposal**, well written and clearly aligned with the FP7-IEF aims."

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EXCELLENCE

EXCELLENCE: THE CRITERION

The first and foremost aspect of the excellence criterion is **the quality, the innovative aspects and the credibility of the research** to be conducted. For MSCA fellowships, inter- and multidisciplinarity are part and parcel of "excellence" and should be addressed in this section.

This part includes an introduction, a description of the state of the art, the research objectives and an overview of the action. You should also mention the research methodology and approach, and the type of research and innovation activities proposed.

Highlight here why your project is original and innovative. Explain the contribution that the project is expected to make to advancements within the project field. Describe any novel concepts, approaches or methods that will be employed.

Emphasise how your high-quality, novel research is likely to open up the best career possibilities for you as Experienced Researcher (ER), as well as new collaboration opportunities for the host organisation.

A second criterion is **the clarity and quality of the transfer of knowledge.** This part also includes training to foster the researcher's professional development. In fact, the project should account for a two-way knowledge transfer:

- The ER should gain new knowledge from the hosting organisation(s) during the fellowship through training.

- The hosting organisations may also benefit from the previous experience of the researcher.

Therefore, it is useful to outline the researcher's capacity for transferring previously acquired knowledge to the host organisation.

MSCA has been a favourite programme for more senior profiles. Arguably, the importance of this transfer of knowledge is greater the more experienced a researcher is. However, Horizon 2020 marks a shift towards a programme open to a large spectrum of career stages, from four years of research experience onwards. At whatever stage you are, it makes sense to discuss the issue of transfer of knowledge – demonstrating your awareness of its importance.

You should also elaborate on the quality of the supervision and the hosting arrangements. In particular, bear in mind the following questions:

- What are the qualifications and experience of the supervisor(s)? What is their level of experience, their track record of work, their main international collaborations, their participation in projects, publications, patents, and so on? Show that the researcher is well integrated within the hosting organisation(s) so that the fellowship can be mutually beneficial.

- How do the hosting provisions foster career development?

Finally, the capacity of the researcher to **reach and re-enforce a position of professional maturity in research** is part of an "excellent" proposal. Indeed, "fellowships will be awarded to the most talented researchers as shown by their ideas and their track record"[7].

EXCELLENCE: THE EVALUATION

How is then the excellence criterion treated in real-life evaluations, and what lessons can be distilled?

The lessons below emerge from the perusal of 2013 Evaluation Summary Reports.

Lesson 1: Research quality is the bedrock of excellence

A major lesson emerges: the basis of the excellence criterion is the research quality and the soundness of the research objectives, as well as the methodology and approach to be used. Demonstrate the research methodology, making reference to encouraging preliminary results or synergies with other grants. Show how your project will use a cutting-edge approach, how it addresses a scientific challenge and how the research methodology is appropriate to address all of this. The proof of excellence often lies in the scientific challenge of the project and the relevance of the topic to science.

7 Proposal template, Section 2.4

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The proposed research is of **very high quality** utilising cutting-edge approaches."
- "Encouraging **preliminary results** are shown."
- "The **approach is perfectly suited** to achieve the objectives."
- "The research objectives are clearly formulated and are adequately outlined against the state of the art."
- "There is a **synergy** with a recent ERC Advanced Grant awarded to the host."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The proposal is **vague in terms of working methods**, theories and scientific hypotheses."
- "The proposal does not provide sufficient information to demonstrate that the research project has the **potential to be applied more generally**."
- "The proposal does **not present sufficient data** to assess the advantages and drawbacks of the proposed methods."
- "The aims of the research project are described in **too generic terms**."

Lesson 2: Be one of a kind (originality and state of the art)

It is crucial to demonstrate the state of the art, and then argue how the project relates to it. Show the potential of the project to shift the knowledge frontier. An original and innovative approach is highly appreciated! However, being innovative is not to be confused with "innovation" – MSCA funds research projects, while researchers with innovation projects focusing on market applications should consider submitting their project to other programmes of Horizon 2020.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "It is an innovative and very interesting proposal with the **potential to make a significant contribution** to the field."
- "This is **high-risk, high-impact** research."
- "The project is **original and innovative**, and the timeliness matches the European and international research areas."
- "The project is innovative and appropriate, as incises in a **field of great interest and novelty** and growth."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The advancement of the state of the art that the project is expected to make **lacks detailed justification**."
- "While [the proposed research] may have innovative aspects, these simulations are **relatively standard** in scope."
- "The innovative aspects are not clearly outlined since **an existing technology will be tested**."
- "The originality of the project is **difficult to evaluate**."

Lesson 3: Make your project count for others

The main objective of MSCA is to improve researchers' careers through mobility and individual fellowships. However, evaluators are pleased when proposals demonstrate the relevance of the projects to political, economic or societal problems, in the EU and beyond. Ideally, projects should be "timely and relevant" not only to the scientific domain, but also to citizens at large.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The project is **timely and in line with the current European research trends** and societal needs."
- "The potential high impact to the chemical industry **adds arguments to the scientific relevance**."
- "The project is relevant for scientific, political and socio economic reasons with the **aim to achieve a common EU migration policy**."
- "The **benefits that will be gained** [...] at European Community level are convincingly described."
- "The project addresses an important and **persisting question**."

Lesson 4: Do not hide your light under a bushel

MSCA targets researchers with a proven track record of high achievement relative to their age and career stage. Your proposal should reflect what makes you an "excellent" researcher. Be proud of your independent work. Evaluators will also take a close look at the impact of your previous research, as well as the audience that it has reached. This is the moment to sell your accomplishments, experience, knowledge, skills, or international impact to the evaluators.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The candidate is experienced in the field as demonstrated by an extended CV that includes **several high impact publications, awards and lectures and extensive teaching**.
- "The clarity in describing the major accomplishments of the applicant with regard to the scientific career shows the **capacity of the applicant to communicate results** to the scientific community rapidly."
- "The applicant has a very strong publication record, including **numerous first-author contributions**, also demonstrating the capacity for independent and original thinking."
- "The publications and other achievements are of very good quality and the proposal and references give evidence that their **contributions are well regarded by peers**."
- "A comprehensive CV chronicles **academic achievements**, professional activities, **awards** and **excellent scientific publications**."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The publications record of the applicant, even though extensive, is **limited in scope and impact**."
- "The applicant's publication record features **only a small number** of international publications."
- "The independent thinking capacity of the fellow is not clearly demonstrated. For instance, among 5 publications that have been co-signed by the fellow, he is first author of only two."
- "The independent thinking and leadership potential are not yet sufficiently demonstrated taking into account the stage of the career reached."

Lesson 5: Expertise and skills, two sides of the same coin

Your research project will be driven by the expertise you have gained in your previous projects. Evaluators look for candidates who are knowledgeable about their research field. However, what matters more than bullet-proof expertise are leadership and organisational skills that you have put to the test in your career, and how you have conducted research projects so far.

While independent thinking and research leadership no longer appear as formal sections in the proposal outline since 2014, they resurface in other ways. "Examples of leadership in industrial innovation" may, if applicable, be included in your CV. Furthermore, the capacity of the researcher to reach, and re-inforce, a position of professional maturity in research[8] conveys the idea of potential formerly referred to as "leadership and independent thinking".

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "Wide ranging experience and initiatives are indicative of someone with **clear leadership abilities** and independent thinking skills."
- "The **experience of the applicant with regard to the proposal is excellent**, the knowledge and expertise in the area **guarantees** the capacity to develop most part of the proposal."
- "The applicant's experience is of quality; it is **well documented** and **clearly explained**."
- "A detailed CV is provided that amply demonstrates prior credentials in both **active research and teaching/mentoring**, as well as securing grant funding and having undertaken **previous mobility periods**."
- "The applicant's fundamental background in chemistry will match this project **even if** he can't yet be described as an expert in catalysis or in synthetic chemistry."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The proposal **fails to convince** that the applicant has the level of independent thinking and leadership qualities needed to act as the principal investigator and coordinator of the proposed research."
- "The leadership qualities are not supported by presentations to **national/international meetings** and by the applicant's ability to **receive independent grants**/funding."
- "The proposal **does not provide sufficient evidence** that the applicant has experience in important aspects of the proposal such as advanced sensor design and computer sciences."
- "The **quality of the teaching** experience is described in insufficient detail."

8 Standard Proposal Template, 2.4

Lesson 6: A merry host makes merry guests

Evaluators not only look into the track record of the researcher, but in equal measure into the track record, the research expertise and the international recognition and networks of the host institution. Demonstrating the good quality of the host justifies the choice of this organisation over another. In the same vein, the good quality of the scientific team might be just as important as the profile of the host organisation itself.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The host institute provides a **very good environment** for the proposed research."
- "The scientist in charge is of **outstanding quality and a leader in the field**."
- "The host's high reputation in the fields is fully demonstrated with **track records given**."
- "The host organisation has **leading expertise** in the field."
- "The quality of the scientists is clearly demonstrated, and their **capability to supervise** […] is documented."

Lesson 7: Stepping outside the box

It seems that one characteristic of excellent researchers is that they are prepared to work in new scientific environments in order to further their own knowledge and inform their research. This means, inter alia, that your research should be multi- or inter-disciplinary and that you are ready to learn from and share expertise with your host. Widening your academic and professional horizon is also an important step towards professional maturity.

Lesson 7.1: Connect the dots (multi- and interdisciplinarity)

Project proposals must show that projects will be implemented across borders, both in the literal and the figurative sense. Good proposals bring together methods from various disciplines into a fruitful and relevant cooperation. Proposals that do not address these aspects will not escape negative remarks. The proposal must show your interest in other disciplines and mention those that will benefit most from your research. Multi- and inter-disciplinarity is essential in demonstrating your openness to research outside your comfort zone.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The **project is multidisciplinary**, including observational and instrumentation aspects."
- "The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspects of the proposal are **very well focused**."
- "The project builds on the researcher's former research but will also **involve new areas of expertise and subject of study** and thus support development to professional maturity."
- "The **diversity of the publication topics** reflects the researcher's capacity of acquiring new knowledge."

Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, as used in Horizon 2020, can be defined as follows:

Multidisciplinarity: Each discipline attempts to explain the same phenomenon from its own viewpoint resulting in independent stories.

Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity looks at some phenomena from different viewpoints but tries to integrate the explanations thus producing connecting stories.

Lesson 7.2: Learn, grow, and share

Evaluators will assess your potential to "reach professional maturity". Demonstrate that you have the potential to enhance your knowledge through the project. Your proposal must show that the host will add value to your research. On the other hand, your potential for professional maturity will also be evaluated by how your project and expertise will affect the host organisation.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "Implementation of knowledge achieved during the fellowship will result in **a significant improvement in the career perspective** of the applicant."
- "The applicant has an **outstanding potential** to reach a position of professional maturity. The candidate convinces by putting forth a clear professional plan and strategy to return to their home country to continue research as a group leader, hence **build up on the acquired experience**."
- "The fellowship as planned will make a **very significant contribution to career development**, in particular strengthening the researcher's ability to publish in leading international journals."
- "**Implementation of knowledge** achieved during the fellowship will result in a significant improvement in the career perspective of the applicant."

- “The proposal justifies very clearly both **benefit and necessity of acquiring know-how** in cutting-edge methodology, broadening of complementary skills as well as the significance of expanding the network of international contacts with leading researchers in the field.”

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- “The proposal has not thoroughly indicated **how the proposed work would add further to the current level of professional maturity** of the researcher.”

- “**Specific career goals are not clearly outlined** which question the potential to reach a position of professional maturity after the fellowship.”

- “Although there is good potential for the applicant to acquire new knowledge and transferrable skills, the potential to specifically **acquire new research skills is not sufficiently demonstrated**. For example, the applicant is already familiar with some of the research techniques proposed in this project.”

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IMPACT

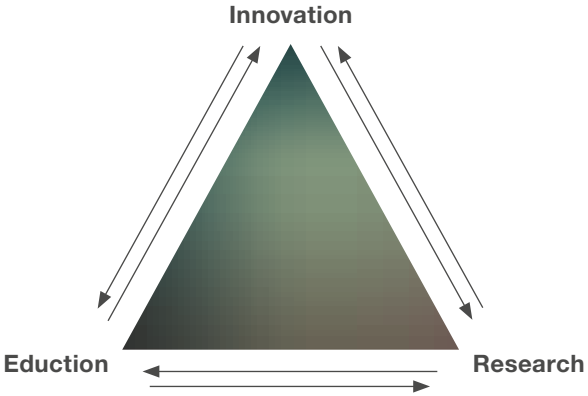
IMPACT: THE CRITERIA

There are two reasons why European projects should have a real impact: firstly, to justify the public subsidies granted to projects, and secondly, because the EU's goal is to reach its policy objectives: to complete the "European Research Area" and to foster "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" in the Innovation Union.

In MSCA, the impact that your project should achieve is threefold:

- **It should have an impact on your career.** This is what is meant by the enhancement of "research- and innovation-related human resources, skills, and working conditions" that should help you "realise [your] potential" and "provide [you] with new career perspectives".

- **It should have an impact on the European society and economy**: In order for your project to have a positive effect on European society, people must be able to learn about its results, in a language understandable even to non-specialists. Your proposal should therefore include a strategy on communication and public engagement, and refer to the dissemination of research results. Ideally, the project should help improve "European competitiveness" in a broad sense, by solving topical challenges or helping advance a technology with market potential.



- **It should "advance research", "foster innovation" and "promote the research profession to the public":** In this part, the economic rationale of the Innovation Union shines through. This is a reference to the "knowledge triangle", which describes the interaction between research education, and innovation, all essential components of a knowledge-based society.

Since 2014, the "training" criterion used under FP7 is incorporated into the "impact" one of Horizon 2020.

IMPACT: THE EVALUATION

In view of the above specifications, how do they translate into real-life evaluations, and what lessons can be distilled from them?

Just as above, these lessons emerge from the perusal of 2013 Evaluation Summary Reports.

Lesson 1: Be clear about the objectives of your research training

Thorough planning is half the battle. Evaluators put great emphasis on the clarity with which the "research training objectives" are explained. Demonstrate good planning skills by specifying the objectives of your project in terms of research training, and tie these objectives to corresponding activities. Make your objectives credible and specific.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The research training objectives and the corresponding activities are **well presented and clear**."
- "The research training objectives are **broken down into components** and described clearly."
- "The research training appears **rich and well planned**."
- "The training activities are well described and have **specific, important and credible scientific objectives**, complementing the researcher's background."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The description of the training objectives **lacks detail**."
- "Precise focus on the **relationship between the research project and the training objectives is missing**: each research training objective presented is not fully justified by one aspect of the research proposed."
- "The training needs identified **are largely generic areas** of science and technology; this is far too large and general, given the time span of the project."
- "The proposal does not give sufficient information on how this **generic training** would feed into specific scientific questions in the research programme."

Lesson 2: Link the project to a bigger picture – your career

The objective of Individual Fellowships is to "catalyse significant development in [researchers'] careers". The proposal should therefore make clear how, if awarded, the fellowship would contribute to your career development. To illustrate the boost that your professional development will obtain from the grant, you can make reference to the networking opportunities that will lead to future collaborations, or the new skills and the more interesting profile that you will gain thanks to your project.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The proposal demonstrates convincingly how the fellowship will **contribute to the development of the applicant's career**, particularly in terms of international links and potential future international collaborations."

- "The proposal clearly describes how the completion of the project and **the acquired skills will improve the career prospects** of the applicant."

- "The contribution of the fellowship to the **developments of the long-term career** of the applicant is clearly presented."

- "Excellent networking opportunities available through this mobility will reinforce the **candidate's future professional development**."

- "The impact of competencies acquired during the fellowship on the **future career prospects** of the researcher is well described."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "It **is not comprehensively explained** in the proposal how the training provided will influence the researcher's career development."

- "Much of the work to be done is a continuation of previous work of the applicant, which **limits its impact on their career**."

- "There are **no concrete plans** or specific considerations on the career development of the fellow."

- "The proposal describes a series of contributions to the researcher's career development, but inadequate information has been presented to **assess these claims**."

Lesson 3: Justify your claims

Many evaluation comments bemoan the fuzziness of some claims or elaborations. Evaluators can spot inconsistencies, omissions or missing links between the suggested means and the targeted end. Make sure to justify your claims and focus on specific, rather than generic, actions and skills.

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The relevance and quality of transferable skills offered are **not substantiated**."
- "The selection and exact role of the host for providing the training is **not sufficiently well justified**."
- "The proposal is **not very clear** concerning the additional research training to be received."
- "Although the project will strengthen the applicant's knowledge with relevant new competencies, they are **not described in sufficient detail**."
- "The proposal describes a series of contributions to the researcher's career development, but inadequate information has been presented to **assess these claims**."
- "The impact of the proposed outreach activities is presented but **not fully justified on the basis of information provided** in the proposal."
- "The proposal **does not give sufficient information** on how this generic training would feed into specific scientific questions in the research programme."
- "The development of a breadth of collaborations is a particular strength, but in many other areas **the route to impact is vague**."

Lesson 4: Do not shy away from industry

The MSCA programme addresses research performed in both the academic and the non-academic sector. Where relevant, cooperation with the private sector can give the proposal an important edge. In the new programme, the link to "industry" is expressed in the encouragement of "cross-sector mobility".

Involving industry in the project can help guide the research project onto a more meaningful path. Incidentally, secondments to the non-academic or academic sector, respectively, are welcome, being now the default option in the IF scheme.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "Research training as well as **exposure to the industry sector** and relevant associations is adequately demonstrated."
- "The intensive collaboration and scientific exchanges of the host group with visitors from industry are relevant arguments to guarantee that the project is of **high relevance to the chemical industry**."
- "The relevance of the training and the **exposure to the industrial sector** is displayed in detail and shows a high potential for this grant to contribute to the fellow's career development."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "**Stronger ties with industry** would be beneficial."
- "Exposure of the researcher to the industrial sector is **not sufficiently elaborated**."
    - "Potential collaborations with industry partners have not been sufficiently well addressed."

Lesson 5: Contribute to European excellence and competiveness

Europe prides itself on the good quality of its research system, but one should not rest on one's laurels. Each and every EU-funded project should be an ambassador of European excellence. Ideally, this knowledge also translates into innovation or technology that can improve the continent's economic performance.

It is true, however, that these issues has somewhat faded into the background with the new Horizon 2020 programme. Still, we do recommend including some references to this European dimension in the proposal.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "It is well demonstrated that the combination of both the host's and the fellow's expertise contributes to **European excellence**."

- "If accomplished, the **EU scientific excellence and competitiveness** will be greatly enhanced."

- "The expected research results have some potential to contribute to **European excellence and European competitiveness**."

- **"Competitiveness** is illustrated by potential patents."

- "The extent to which the project will increase **European competitiveness** is clearly described."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The project's contribution to European excellence and European competitiveness is **not sufficiently demonstrated**."

- "The contribution to European excellence and European competitiveness regarding the expected research results are **not convincingly illustrated**."

- "The proposal does **not sufficiently clarify the impact on European competitiveness**."

- "The potential practical applications of the project outcomes and the contribution to European excellence and competitiveness by increasing scientific knowledge in the field are **not adequately addressed**."

Lesson 6: My host is my castle

Reference to different features of the host organisation, the host team and the scientist in charge are frequent in the evaluation reports. The experience, network and commitment of the host organisation are important elements of a good proposal. Not only should the host provide a good match with the project's scientific ambition, but it should also show its experience in mentoring and tutoring scientists. At any rate, proposals should be prepared in close cooperation between the future fellow and the host team. This cooperation shines through in proposals receiving good marks.

Lesson 6.1: Commitment of the host: ability to provide mentoring and tutoring

To the evaluator, the genuine commitment of the host team is evidenced by the provisions it has put in place to accompany the researcher and devoting time to act as mentor and tutor.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The host's expertise in **training, mentoring and tutoring** researchers is clearly outlined in the proposal."

- "This section depicts an **outstanding organisation of the host to mentor** experienced researchers together with a high expertise of the host scientist in tutoring post-doctoral fellows."

- "The host institution has demonstrated **excellent experience of mentoring** and supervision of researchers; essential in house support will be available."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The **tutoring** provided by the host institution is too shortly addressed."

- "The Host group members do not convincingly demonstrate high expertise and experience in the **training and mentoring** of researchers."

- "The measures taken by the host for providing quantitative mentoring/tutoring are **not sufficiently detailed** as they are mainly focused on meetings with the applicant's supervisor."

- "The quality of the mentoring/tutoring is **not suitably demonstrated** as the frequency of the meetings with the supervisor does not match the amount of knowledge that will be acquired by the researcher during the project."

Lesson 6.2: Quality of the host: experience in researcher training

Again, experience in supervising experienced researchers is a token of the host's commitment to the project.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The host has already **experience in training post graduate researchers**, and some evidence on the host institution general measures and plans for researcher training is provided."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The proposal **does not clearly demonstrate the expertise** of the host in training researchers."

Lesson 6.3: Relationship with the scientist in charge

Ideally, MSCA fellows should not work as satellites, disconnected from everyday business of their host institution. Instead, they should be a valuable part of their new team. Close interaction between researchers and their hosts strongly increases the chances of success.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The role of the supervisor and their collaborators is **explicitly described** for achieving the training goals identified."

- "The fellow will receive **training through interactions** with the host group and scientist in charge."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The day-to-day training of the fellow by the scientist in charge is **not sufficiently well emphasised**."

Lesson 7: See beyond the end of your nose

Just as Marie Skłodowska left her home country Poland to study in France, the homonymous European fellowship aims at broadening the researcher's horizon by foreseeing training in more generic skills, and, with mobility as a key requirement, by giving the opportunity for a real change of scene.

Lesson 7.1: Gain "transferable and complementary skills"

Transferable skills make for a well-rounded character and professional profile. The project should further your expert knowledge, but it should also help you become a better manager and an independent leader.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The relevance and quality of additional research training as well as of **transferable skills** offered are clearly demonstrated."
- "The **transferable skills** offered are relevant."
- "The researcher will obtain **transferrable skills** that will help them to complete the project's tasks at the home institute."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The description of the relevance and quality of additional research training and **transferable skills** is **too condense and of general nature**."
- "The relevance and quality of transferable skills offered are **not substantiated**."
- "The additional training and transferable skills are **insufficiently described**."

Lesson 7.2: Make the mobility genuine

MSCA is above all a mobility programme. Even though researchers who have lived in their destination country for a maximum of 12 months prior to the call deadline are still eligible, there should be some argumentation as to why a certain country or organisation has been chosen.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "A very detailed description of the **benefits of the mobility** to this host and European Research Area is given."
- "The mobility in the European Research Area is **beneficial for the candidate**."
- "The mobility is genuine."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The explanation confirming that **the mobility is genuine** is not completely clear."
- "The applicant is already working for the host institution (holding a two years contract since January 2013) and the proposal **does not sufficiently clarify the benefit** and the additional skills/knowledge that will be gained with the proposed fellowship."
- "The **selection and exact role of the host** for providing the training is not sufficiently well justified."

Lesson 8: Contribute to the European Research Area

According to European policy makers, a unified research area in Europe is an essential building block of a competitive Europe. In an optimal European Research Area (ERA), researchers, scientific knowledge and technology can circulate freely.

To realise this objective, the Communication of the European Commission on ERA[9] defines several priorities. They include transnational co-operation, an open labour market for researchers and optimal circulation of scientific knowledge.

A MSCA fellowship can contribute to these ambitious goals, as it brings together researchers from various parts of Europe (and the world), creating "synergies" across national research agendas.

Lesson 8.1: Take your knowledge back with you

ERA is also about harmonising conditions for research across European Member States. Therefore, transfer of knowledge from the host institution to the fellow's organisation of origin is favourably looked upon by the evaluators.

With the new programme, this may be especially relevant to the "Global Fellowship" option, where the fellow is bound to return to a European host institution. However, transfer of knowledge is also important in the case of secondments to the private sector, for example.

9 COM(2012) 392 final of 17 July 2012

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The competences acquired during the project will help the candidate to **transfer knowledge and skills**, and to establish a new research field in the **fellow´s institution of origin**."
- "The researcher clearly describes how the fellowship will be beneficial to the **research in his home country**."
- "The researcher convincingly describes his role in establishing close links between his **home institution and the host**."
- "The fellowship will help **establish research links** between the host laboratory and the applicant's previous laboratories."

Lesson 8.2: Work together across borders – during and after the project

According to the Horizon 2020 decision[10], "all Horizon 2020 priorities and specific objectives should include an international dimension." This strong emphasis on cross-border cooperation is also reflected in the evaluators' great appreciation of projects that foster and sustain international partnerships.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "Collaboration within European projects and with international partners is outlined, which has the potential of advancing research and robotic applications **in Europe**."
- "The expected outcome of the project will **strengthen collaboration** between researchers in France and Germany."
- "The project will support and deepen existing **international collaboration**."
- "The possible **future cooperation** and collaborations are well pointed out."
- "The development of **lasting cooperation** and collaboration with other countries is adequately presented."
- "The project will represent a basis for **fruitful international collaboration**."
- "A broad set of **collaborations across Europe** and beyond would be developed as a result of this project."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The effort aimed at increasing the collaborations with other countries is **not sufficiently described**."
- "The potential to develop new long lasting cooperation and collaboration with other countries is **not clearly described**."
- "The proposal **does not demonstrate** that the project will lead to the creation of new long term collaborations between the host and other countries."

10 Council Decision of 3 December 2013, (2013/743/EU)

Lesson 9: Reach out (Outreach, communication, dissemination)

Your project results should be made available to the public –to both academic circles and the general public. To do so, "suitable public outreach activities" should be foreseen in the proposal. This should help make scientific career more attractive – and improve acceptance of potentially disruptive new solutions among citizens.

Being concrete pays off. Who is the target audience of each activity? In what way will they engage with the project results as presented in your communication material? How could you measure the results of these communication activities? Aim to provide clear answers to these questions.

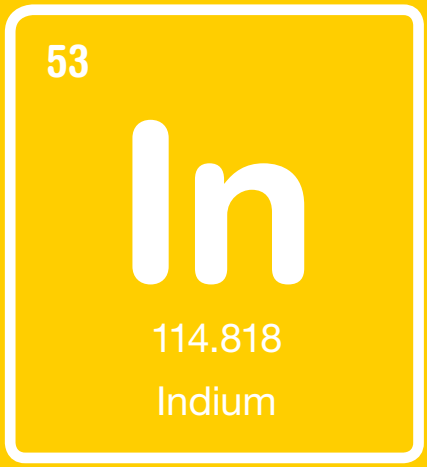
Possible communication activities include articles for the press, workshops and public lectures as well as academic and non-academic publications. Possibilities are limitless and imagination can pay off – smartphone apps, websites or webinars, or any other medium or format, can help fulfil the requirement to communicate to the general public about your project results.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "Outreach activities are very good and will have a positive impact on the general public."
- "The described outreach activities such as public lectures and workshops (including for policy makers) and academic publications, are adequately illustrated and valuable."
- "The project proposes a very interesting set of outreach activities."
- "A set of feasible outreach activities is given; their implementation and impact are adequately described."
- "The outreach activities are described in detail and include knowledge transfer to undergraduate students, press articles and workshops."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "Very limited outreach activity is planned. Personal initiative, objectives and measures in the outreach activity are not considered in sufficient detail."
- "The impact of the proposed outreach activities is presented but not fully justified on the basis of information provided in the proposal."
- "There is no mention of benchmarking or **measurement of success** for outreach activities."
- "The outreach plan is rather vague and lacks detail of **how** the public would be engaged through each activity."
- "The plan for outreach activities contains **only general possibilities**; their content is not related to specific outcomes of the research."



IMPLEMENTATION

As for Excellence and Impact, the lessons below regarding the “implementation” criterion emerge from the perusal of 2013 Evaluation Summary Reports.

IMPLEMENTATION: THE CRITERIA

In this section of the proposal, you will demonstrate the overall **coherence and effectiveness** of your project's work plan, especially concerning the allocation of tasks and resources.

You can view the implementation plan as the tool that will help realise the "impact" required as explained above. A Gantt chart works best. It should describe work packages, major deliverables (outputs) and milestones, as well as secondments, if you plan to do any.

Work package	Technical units of the project plan
Deliverable	Output of the action (report, software, etc.)
Milestone	Control points that help keep track of the progress

Who will manage the project, and how? Are quality management and risk management foreseen? Provide clear descriptions of the project organisation and management structure, including the financial management strategy and progress monitoring mechanisms.

Your work plan should take into account risks that might endanger the project outcomes and include contingency plans in case these risks occur. The Gantt chart might also include references to progress monitoring, risk management and intellectual property rights (IPR).

The physical infrastructure and institutional environment of your host institution should be appropriate. The legal entities concerned by the proposal and their main tasks should be described. Explain why the fellowship has the maximum chance of a successful outcome, given the chosen environment.

What are the competences and experience of the participating organisations? How do they complement each other? Are they committed on an institutional level? The fellowship should be mutually beneficial, both for the researcher and the host organisation. If secondments are planned, the role of the partner organisations in which these secondments will take place should be described.

IMPLEMENTATION: THE EVALUATION

"Credibility and feasibility are key" could be the basic lesson for this part of your proposal. All sub-criteria in this part should be credible and feasible.

When using a creativity technique called the Disney Method, participants are encouraged to discuss an issue from the perspective of the spectator, the dreamer, the realiser and the critic. The implementation part of your proposal resembles the realiser's view – your ambitious project is put to the test of reality. Present a well-rounded and sound implementation plan.

Lesson 1: Ambition is good, but do not be too bold

Ambition is admired in a research project. The implementation plan, however, should be realistic.

Lesson 1.1: Organise your project in a structured, reasonable and practical manner

You need to draft a plan which follows a certain timeline and respects specific requirements of your research in regards to time (when?) and space (where?). Do not plan to finish a lab trial in two months if you know that it cannot be done in three. As experts, evaluators will know what is feasible and what is not. Therefore, do not over-charge your work plan, nor rush from one task to another. Instead, be honest with yourself, and organise your time and responsibilities in a reasonable manner.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "Despite the ambitious nature of the project a **credible timeline** has been demonstrated."
- "The feasibility and credibility of the project are **convincingly evidenced**, and a detailed work plan, indicating **concrete and measurable work packages**, research results, and outcomes, is provided."

- "The work-plan is credible, **comprehensive and well-structured** for both periods at the outgoing and return institutes."

- "The work plan is **well laid out, detailed**, very clear and feasible."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The overall work plan is **overambitious**."

- "The work plan illustrates a very ambitious schedule: although a realistic work plan is provided, it does not sufficiently describe **break-up of tasks** planned for relevant interim evaluation of outcomes/experiments."

- "The time given to recruiting and interviewing the sample of firms appears **limited** and the transcribing of interviews is **not adequately illustrated**."

- "A very ambitious project at an appropriate institution, but the description of actually **how the desired aims would be achieved** is not very clear."

- "Despite the clear contingency plan, aim 1 will be very challenging and the proposal does not convincingly demonstrate that **sufficient time has been allocated** for its completion."

Lesson 1.2: Be certain of where you are going

Work plans should always be accompanied by as many task deliverables and project milestones as necessary. These help evaluators follow your project's itinerary. Even though results might be uncertain, the general direction of the project should be clear. Deliverables and milestones are very useful to help you avoid straying from your initial objectives. Additionally, they are essential for monitoring the project's advancement. Evaluators will hence want to see that proper monitoring activities are put in place in accordance with the project's key events.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The **technical objectives** of the implementation plan are clearly identified."

- "A very detailed work plan is given, **which includes milestones and deliverables**. Project is highly feasible and credible."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "The milestones are not explicitly defined for a **proper project progress monitoring**.

- "The proposal lacks details in **key performance indicators**."

- "The work plan is presented in terms of key events, but it is not clear **'how' these will be managed, monitored and achieved**."

- "Some concerns about the feasibility of WP2 and WP4 arise due to **insufficient validation activities**."

Lesson 2: Host and householder

The project can only be properly implemented if the host institution supports you in every step. It has to facilitate your integration and the realisation of your project in its facilities, oversee your research's advancements, ease administrative burdens and be ready to make use of the knowledge you will bring to the institution.

Lesson 2.1: Implementation support

Show that your host institution was the best choice you could have made concerning the support it will provide you during the implementation of the project. Implementation support ranges from administrative assistance to management support, such as supervision of the project. Good support will enable the implementation of knowledge gained during the project. For this reason, it should also be evidenced in the proposal how the transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host, or others, is planned.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The host institution has a **remarkable experience in hosting MC fellows**."
- "There is evidence in the proposal about the practical and administrative **arrangements already made for the implementation and management of the research project**."
- "The practical arrangements … are comprehensively described, including **regular meetings and training and a very good management structure**."
- "The European return host's qualities and **capabilities to absorb and make use of the experience gained** by the returning researcher are clearly described."
- "On the return phase the applicant will be in a very **good position to implement the knowledge** and expertise acquired."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "Supervision arrangements described for the implementation and management of the research project (e.g. monthly meetings with the main supervisor and e-mail reports every trimester) provide **insufficient evidence on the availability of effective support from the supervisors**."

- "There is **insufficient information** concerning practical and administrative arrangements and support for the hosting of the applicant."

Lesson 2.2: Infrastructure

Just as important as the host's capacity to support your project's development is its infrastructure. It should provide the best environment for you to undertake your research. In other words, the proposal should describe how you plan to make use of the host organisation's facilities (be it a laboratory or library) and how they best suit your project.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The fellow will have access to **outstanding equipment**, collaboration network and high level academic associations."

- "Very high-quality facilities are present in the host university and they are **adequate for the aims of the project**."

- "The infrastructure and the facilities of the host laboratory are clearly described and demonstrate that the technical environment is **top-level to perform the proposed experiments**."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "It is **not clear exactly what roles** the two laboratories will play in the delivery of the experimental plan."

- "The proposal does not clearly describe how the infrastructure at host institution and the projects of the host scientist will be **used to support the project**."

- "The quality of the host's infrastructure is **not assessed against the specific needs** set out for the execution of the project."

Lesson 3: Build yourself a safety net

In our case, a safety net means a contingency and an IPR plan. Indeed, it is critical for researchers to know how they will react to unforeseen situations. This is why risk management must be addressed. Which parts of the work plan could turn into a stumbling block? What is your plan B, if this happens? Intellectual Property (IP) management is another key aspect of the implementation plan that requires consideration, as it could delay or jeopardise your research.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The researcher included a **convincing risk assessment**."
- "A very ambitious and detailed work plan is included together with the measures to check the progresses and **risk mitigation**."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "There is no risk analysis. The candidate does not foresee any contingency **actions in case of major impediments** in the development of the proposed research."
- "Intellectual property rights issues that may rise from the project are **not adequately addressed**."
- "The **feasibility and credibility of the project are undermined** by the lack of convincing preliminary results, work plan, contingency plans and attention to potential IP issues."

Lesson 4: Think about your network

Integrating the host organisation's team may allow you to tap into their networks as well. Their collaborative links may inspire you to undertake a secondment, for example. International research collaborations are particularly interesting. Examples can include previous participation in European projects, staff exchange or co-publications. Collaborations may also include the industrial sector.

Positive things evaluators had to say:

- "The **international collaboration** of the host institution is impressive."
- "International collaborations of both outgoing and return host **offer manifold options** for the fellow to advance the scientific career."
- "The host's experience in international collaborations is significant; it includes participation in **several European projects**."
- "The **involvement of industry** is addressed."
- "The proposal very clearly describes the high quality of the host's [...] large number of international **collaborations both with academia and industry**."

Negative things evaluators had to say:

- "No detailed information is provided on the exact topics of the international collaborations of the scientist-in-charge and of their **relevance for the proposed projects**."
- "The **benefit of existing collaborations** for the applicant and the project is unconvincingly explained."

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FURTHER PROPOSAL SECTIONS

Sections 5 to 7 of the proposal template are not included in the maximum page limit of 10 pages indicated earlier. These sections are also crucial for the overall good evaluation of your proposal. They concern the following specific issues:

Section 5 – CV of the Experienced Researcher

The CV includes the standard academic and research record. References that can be included in the CV are listed in the proposal template. Its purpose is to show the fellow's track record and major relevant achievements. Besides publications in peer-reviewed journals and citations they have attracted, other credentials may be included according to the field: granted patents, monographs, invited presentations, research expeditions, membership in the steering committee of international conferences, leadership in industrial innovation, or prizes and awards.

The suggested outline for the CV can be found in the standard proposal template[11].

Section 6 – Capacity of the Participating Organisations

Each participating organisation fills in a form (max one page), giving details on the supervisor, involved research premises, and the organisation's experience.

Section 7 – Ethics issues

For the EU, ethics is an integral part of research. Considering potential ethical implications of the project even at proposal stage not only ensures legal compliance, but can also improve the quality of the research. All Horizon 2020 projects undergo an ethical assessment called the Ethics Appraisal Procedure.

As stated in the proposal template, applicants should proactively demonstrate their awareness of European and national legislation and fundamental ethics principles. Ethics issues should be identified and proactively addressed in the proposal.

Ethics issues are based on a self-declaration at proposal stage. A more thorough procedure may be triggered once the proposal is selected for funding. More information on the ethics appraisal procedure, checks and audits can be found online in the H2020 Online Manual on the Participant Portal[12].

11 Proposal template, p.24

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

HOW TO CHOOSE A HOST INSTITUTION

To obtain a MSCA grant, researchers must submit their application in cooperation with a host institution of their choosing. In order to meet the mobility requirement, this organisation must not be in the country they currently live or work in.

As a seasoned professional, you might already have a favourite institution in mind. In this case, you would contact them and, if they are interested in hosting you, prepare a proposal together.

However, you might be unsure about the destination or about which organisation to contact. There is currently no central place where universities, research centres or companies can express their interest to host researchers with an IF grant. However, some organisations take a pro-active approach, trying to be visible and catch the attention of qualified researchers. One platform for host organisations to advertise their interest in hosting a MSCA fellow is Euraxess.

Euraxess

Euraxess is a pan-European job search website for academia. It includes a “Marie Curie Actions” filter. Some organisations, such as Trinity College Dublin or the University of Zilina, Slovakia, are already using this platform to attract fellows. As a general rule however, relying on one’s own networks seems to be more conducive to success. You can choose to put your eggs in many baskets, by checking Euraxess as one major academia job search site, while also referring to your own contacts.

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ALL LESSONS LEARNED

The main lessons to keep in mind when preparing your MSCA IF proposal are the following:

The proposal template is divided into clear sections. A first main advice to keep in mind is to elaborate on each and every point of it. Following the template will also help you identify your project's strengths and weaknesses, and guide your thoughts. Diligence pays off: complete proposals are acknowledged as such and rewarded high grades.

ON EXCELLENCE

A perfectly crafted proposal can supplement your project idea, but not replace it. The research quality criterion is the most important one. Demonstrate how your project is original. Showcase your own expertise and the match between the host organisation's profile and distinctions and your project. Stepping outside of borders brings genuine added value to the proposal: a project that bridges various disciplines, the academic and non-academic sector is appreciated. Finally, the fellowship is best used not only to further technical expertise, but also to help you acquire more generic skills.

ON IMPACT

Planning with the end in mind pays off: be explicit about the objectives of the project. One of these objectives is the advancement of your career. Another is the link to a wider – European – agenda. Science should be accessible to a wider audience: the communication on your project's outcome to the general public is important.

ON IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation plan of the project should be realistic. The project should foresee a timeline, work packages, milestones and deliverables. Mention how, in practical terms, your host organisation provides support structures that you can use for your project, or how you will tap into its network to add value to your project. Finally, do address potential risks that could affect the project and how you would handle them.

Your Horizon 2020 National Contact Point is available to provide you with further support to help you prepare a successful proposal.

ANNEX: READING AND REFERENCES

Horizon 2020 Participant Portal – for all information, updates, submission

Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions Work Programme 2014-2015

Horizon 2020 Rules for Participation, Regulation (EU) 1290/2013

Marie Curie Model Grant Agreements

Individual Fellowship proposal templates

From Face to Face, Portraits of Marie Curie Fellows, European Commission, 2012

Fact Sheet IP management in Marie Curie Actions, IPR Helpdesk, August 2012

Horizon 2020 Helpdesk (Research Enquiry Service) (or contact your National Contact Point)

Register as an Horizon 2020 evaluator

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