

Recommendations for Simplification proposed by Research Managers and Practitioners at research organisations in Finland

Here we present recommendations to simplify applicants' and beneficiaries' participation in EU R&I Framework Programmes, collected by a Community of Practitioners in Finland. Our self-governed community is formed from Research Managers and Administrators from both pre-award and post-award teams across higher education institutions and research organisations, and works closely with the *Finnish Association of Research Managers and Administrators Finn-ARMA*. The network's core mission is to promote co-operation, exchange information and enhance the professional development of its 240 individual members.

Research Managers outside Finland will be invited to support these recommendations to advance their implementation.

RM Roadmap National Ambassador Dr. Jörg Langwaldt at Tampere University, Research and Innovation Services (jorg.langwaldt@tuni.fi), welcomes enquiries on the given recommendations, or questions on concerning further information on these readily implementable measures for simplifications of EU R&I Framework Programmes.

The community of Research Managers and Practitioners at research organisations in Finland greatly appreciates your kind interest and support in welcoming recommendations to simplify the EU R&I Framework Programmes for all actors. Please share and discuss the recommendations within your network. Thank you.

THEME 1: Work Programme development

Description of simplification need: The multi-actor process of the Work Programme can produce ambiguous call and topic texts, which in turn can cause confusion for potential coordinators and partners, and excessive communication across parties and higher demand on NCPs for clarification. While the [Topic Q&As](#) section in the Funding & Tender Portal offers a channel to post questions and requests for clarification, responding to these questions not only requires time, effort and resources by the European Commission, but also sometimes does not generate clear or concrete solutions to complex or detailed enquiries. Furthermore, more developed calls have better potential for initiating great advancements beyond the state of the art and current knowledge base will improve the competitiveness of the EU.

Recommendation 1: To reduce the ambiguity of the call texts the Programme Committee could be supported by a sounding board composed of relevant experts.

Recommendation 2: In order to clarify the current state of the art, and contributions of previously funded R&I projects to the knowledge base, the development of the Work Programmes could be enriched by AI-facilitated mapping of current knowledge gaps and the knowledge generated by R&I projects and the advancing State of the Art.

Recommendation 3: In relation to the Topic Q&As section in the Funding & Tender Portal, a more targeted and elaborate feedback mechanism for applicants prior to submission deadline would democratize the programme and increase overall efficiency for all involved.

Recommendation 4: Horizon Europe Pillar 2 Work Programmes could include more advanced cross-referencing between closely related top-down calls in the different Work Programmes (i.e. the Clusters) to inform potential applicants on topically related calls. This would facilitate the matching of applicants' project ideas and available funding opportunities.

THEME 2: Application stage (Part A and Part B)

Simplifying of application forms

Description of simplification need: Currently, applicants are asked to provide repetitive and potentially unnecessary information in Part. For example, if an organisation has a specific department involved, the address of the department currently needs to be added twice – this could be streamlined and the department address entered only once to make the form more conducive overall. Additionally, contact persons telephone number are asked (even if not as a mandatory field). For the sake of minimising personal data collected, the collection of phone numbers seems unnecessary. The LEAR can as ultimate representative of an organisation ensure that at Grant Agreement Preparation (GAP) the leading contact is established in the exceptional case of an outdated or unresponsive email contact.

Recommendation 5: Required redundant and repeated information in Part A should be removed, and collection of non-relevant personal data minimized.

Part A - Researchers involved in the proposal

Description of simplification need: Depending on the targeted use of the information collected by the European Commission, it would be best to automatically display the table

only for legal entities registered as higher education institution or research organisation. Non-research performing organisations (businesses, NGO's, etc) are distracted by this table. On this note: The formation of an extensive person registry without any communication of the intended use (such as tracking of research careers) causes concern. In addition, this collection of the personal data at the proposal stage might be just a burdensome effort, when the team members are finalised in the GAP phase. Since no data on the researchers' career advancements has been published, the intention and reason for the personal data collection remain unclear. It be sufficient to simply request the numbers of researchers in the different career phases (e.g. #2 of category A, #4 of category B, etc.).

Recommendation 6: The purpose of the researcher table should be more clearly indicated. The table should be only visible to legal entities registered as higher education institution or research organisation. Alternatively, collection of such data could be omitted in proposal phase and done during the GAP phase.

Advancing from project to institutional level

Description of simplification need: The *Gender Equality Plan* initiative of the European Commission induced necessary institutional changes, streamlined practices and reduced time invested by applicants at proposal stage. This good practice could be replicated regarding Open Science and research data management. The European Commission and national funders have developed detailed guidelines on these issues and applicants are summarizing essential elements of research data management in the proposals.

Recommendation 7: Public institutions could have a single *General Data Management Plan* for Horizon Europe associated with their organisational profile on the Funding & Tenders Portal, which incorporates open science and FAIR principles applied at institutional level. At application stage, beneficiaries could be asked to answer the following question:

<p><i>Does the organization have a General Data Management Plan covering the elements listed below?</i></p>

In Horizon Europe, Part B Section 1.2 could still contain a short data management subsection, such as a table that lists the key outputs and how they'll be managed, plus a subsection on e.g. citizen science, if relevant.

Ethical issues

Description of simplification need: In Part B, the elements Robust use of AI and Do no significant harm principle relate to ethics, while there is an ethics Self-assessment in Part A. It would be clearer to have all ethics-related issues in Part A.

Recommendation 8: Part B section 1.2: The subsections on Robust use of AI and Do no significant harm principle, could be incorporated into Part A. The latest available Part B template indicates omission of Robust use of AI and Do no significant harm principle.

Tailoring of Part A to the respective topic

Description of simplification need: In certain application types, some pieces of information would be better suited to Part A than Part B.

Recommendation 9: In Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU) proposals, the yes/no questions on the sources of feedstocks at the beginning of the proposal should be incorporated into Part A.

Reduction of mandatory information and their transfer from Part B 2.2. to Part A

Part B 2.2. Measures to maximise impact - Dissemination, exploitation and communication

Description of simplification need: Guidelines provided by the European Commission and respective Executive Agencies on Communication^{1 2} and Dissemination³ in Horizon Europe projects and the accumulated knowledge of practitioners have resulted in best practices and de facto standards used by applicants to design dedicated Communication and Dissemination activities. Currently, it leads to generic standard texts in Part B 2.2, repeated in most proposals.

Recommendation 10: To simplify and to focus on innovative and project-specific measures, we recommend to list in Part A common communication and dissemination measures as an opt-out selection.

This standardised opt-out list will inform newcomers to the programme on de facto best practices while ensure flexibility by opt-out option. Applicants will still be invited to highlight such measures, activities, target groups and KPI truly specific & innovative and relevant to the proposed project in a free text field in Part A or Part B section 2.2, whichever is serving best the external experts evaluating proposals.

Lump-sum: Transfer of mandatory information from Part B section 3.1 to Part A Budget table

Description of simplification need: In general, any enforced repetition of information given in the proposal package should be avoided. Concerning Lump-sum funded topics, several

¹ https://rea.ec.europa.eu/communicating-about-your-eu-funded-project_en

² https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/managing-your-project/communicating-and-raising-eu-visibility_en

³ https://rea.ec.europa.eu/dissemination-and-exploitation_en

resources-related information needs to be provided across Part B and Part A, leading to unnecessary sources of data transfer errors.

Recommendation 11: Lump-sum Part B, section 3.1 All resources related tables (see 3.1f to 3.1i) in Part B should be integrated into the mandatory Lump-sum Excel Spreadsheet to automatically ensure the correct figures are presented and to simplify Part B. This simplification would refocus Part B on the project S&T content and make the evaluation of the budget and resources more straightforward.

Tables to be omitted from Part B are: Table 3.1f: Summary of staff effort; Table 3.1g: ‘Subcontracting costs’ items; Table 3.1h: Purchase costs’ items (travel and subsistence, equipment and other goods, works and services); Table 3.1i: ‘Other costs categories’ items (e.g. internally invoiced goods and services).

Part B Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions - Doctoral Network

Description of simplification need: In MSCA DN proposal preparation, applicants are instructed to provide information in Part B2, which are commonly given in Part A.

Recommendation 12: Streamline contradicting practices and guidance across different instruments:

It would be a simplification to adhere to one common practice for applicants and rather instruct the evaluators to read the relevant information in Part A. Likely, the tags in Part B and appropriate IT-tools could be applied to generate a post-submission compilation of Part A and Part B tailored to the specific topic of the call.

MSCA DN Guide 2024 “Please note that, in part A, associated partners do not need to fill in the role of participating organisation in the project. This information however will need to be described in the relevant sections of parts B1 and B2. Please also note that, in part A, neither the beneficiaries nor the associated partners need to fill in the list of up to five publications, relevant previous projects, or significant infrastructure. This information however will need to be described in the relevant sections of part B2.”

THEME 3: Evaluation process

Description of simplification need: Regarding Lump-sum funded projects. Justifications for personnel costs in personnel categories and their comparison against Dashboard data from earlier funded Horizon Europe proposals is exceedingly excessive work to justify something that does not represent the actual costs and will not be reported as it is a lump sum funding.

Recommendation 13: For the sake of simplicity, the personnel costs should be presented per worker as currently incurred and not compared against data from other beneficiaries' previous estimates.

THEME 4: Project management

Description of simplification need: Applicants to Horizon Europe lack an official and transparent guidance on the applicable reporting periods. This causes unnecessary and ill-planned project management regarding timing of meetings of governance bodies in sync with reporting periods. Furthermore, without defined knowledge of the number of reporting periods, it isn't possible to reliably calculate the prefinancing. The latter is of special concern in Lump-sum funded projects and to smaller organisations such as SMEs and NGOs. The reporting period rules should be communicated for Horizon Europe, or at least be Work Programme/Topic specific, and not remain on open issue to be resolved by the Project Officer in the Grant Agreement Preparation (GAP). Any avoidable modifications to the Work Plan in the GAP phase must be avoided to reduce Time to Grant.

Recommendation 14: Transfer best practices across Executive Agencies and streamline practices between the different Executive Agencies, especially in light of the triennial Evaluation of the EU Executive Agencies (REA, CINEA, HADEA, ERCEA, EISMEA and EACEA).

The European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) has published a transparent table (see below) showing the respective number of reporting periods and timing for different project durations.

 Please use the below table when planning Reporting Periods for your project:

Project duration	Number of periods	RP1 duration	RP2 duration	RP3 duration	RP4 duration
12	1	12	-	-	-
18	1	18	-	-	-
24	2	12	12	-	-
30	2	12	18	-	-
36	2	12	24	-	-
42	3	12	12	18	-
48	3	12	18	18	-
60	4	12	16	16	16

Contact: Dr. Jörg Langwaldt, Senior Specialist, Tampere University, jorg.langwaldt@tuni.fi