

## Secrets to success with project proposals

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### Preface

This guide is a development of a document “Secrets to success with FP7 REGPOT proposals”, written whilst working for the Serbian former Ministry of Science and Technological Development as the Director, Consultative Bureau for International Projects from 2008 to 2011. It was put together specifically to help Serbian scientists improve the quality of their proposals for the FP7 REGPOT scheme, which at that time was the most popular sub-programme of FP7 for Serbian scientists.

This original document has now been modified to make it more general in its approach and philosophy for writing project proposals, though many of the examples come from the FP7 REGPOT sub-programme. The advice is based on experiences of reading proposal drafts written by Serbian scientists, discussions with them and evaluation summary reports (ESRs) for their submitted proposals.

The approach of this document is to focus largely on the philosophy needed for success rather than just advice on how to fill in the application forms. It aims to help put the applicants within the minds of the proposal reviewers and the funding programme managers to ensure that what is written is what **they want to read** and not what the **applicant wants to write!**

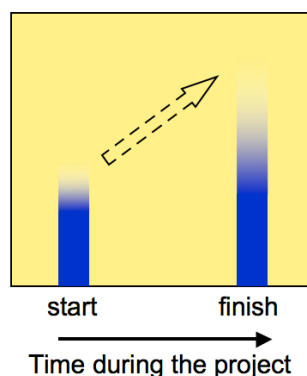
This guide accompanies the Balkan Security Network ([www.balkansecurity.net](http://www.balkansecurity.net)) European Project Proposal (EPP) training course PowerPoint™ presentation ‘Excellence in EU Project Proposal Writing’, also available as a YouTube video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jSQU-\\_tdA4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jSQU-_tdA4). I hope you find the “Secrets to success ....” useful.

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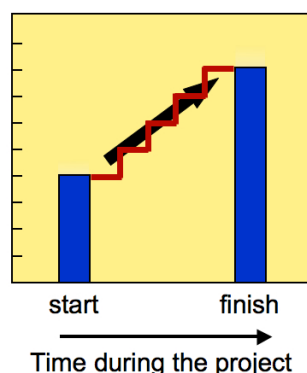
## 1. Introduction

Despite its length, you are ***strongly advised*** to read ***all*** of this document before you start putting your proposal together. By far the biggest problem with proposals occurs because applicants do not read and respond to the information and advice provided by the funding programme background documents, proposal call information and Guide for Applicants! Thus, for example, the majority of questions asked by Serbian scientists on aspects of FP7 projects could have been answered by reading the Work Programme and/or Guide for Applicants!

This document provides advice on how to convert failure:



- a proposal with a poorly-defined vertical axis and lack of detail describing the activities, into success:



- a proposal with a well-defined vertical axis and sufficient detail to describing the activities.

The proposals that are able to do this most convincingly (and with good value for money) will be the proposals that get funded. Even with a score of 4.5 out of 5 for each section of your proposal, this may not be enough for success! Thus, for the FP7 call in 2011 for REGPOT proposals, even 14.5/15 (perfect scores of 5/5 for two sections) was not always enough for success!!!

This document will illustrate how you use the information given in the funding scheme background documents, proposal call and Guide for Applicants to provide the necessary information in your proposal. It will also give examples of the amount of detail needed to define the activities (steps up the ladder in the success figure above). Some examples of ESR comments will be given to illustrate particular problems with submitted project proposals.

Page 28 onwards describes your organisational strategy, giving advice with examples on what you need to write to achieve success. It will be useful for the person (or people) who will write the proposal to ask everyone else contributing to the project to provide text to particular proposal form headings that can then be combined to provide most of the

information needed for each section of your proposal. Once this information is available, you can start writing the proposal itself.

A **successful** proposal is one that **gets the money!**

A **successful** proposal for EU funding has to overcome many challenges **to get the money**. So, getting a **successful** proposal needs the right **philosophy!**

You need to have the necessary **philosophy** to understand what is needed and the way the EU programme managers and proposal evaluators will assess your project proposal. This guide to writing project proposals tries to get you into the right frame of mind to know what to write and how to write it.

## **2. Philosophy of success**

Although much of the advice given in this document is based on the text for a typical FP7 project proposal, the choice of EU programme to illustrate what is needed for success is not important, because ....

- the beauty of the **philosophy** is that it is generic, meaning that it is applicable to every project, whatever the funding source or project aims. Thus, the **philosophy**
  - **is independent of the type of project,**
  - **is independent of the scale of the project,**
  - **is independent of the subject or topic of the project,**
  - **is independent of the funding source for the project,**
  - **is independent of the programme within the funding source.**

Your objective in writing your project proposal is not just to describe what you want to do, **but to persuade the funding source to give you the money!** Why should they decide to give the money to **you** when there will be lots of other good proposals they could select **instead of yours?** So, you have to learn how to be **competitive!** Indeed, for FP7 project proposals, because the competition was usually very strong, you needed to be **very competitive**, targeting your proposal to be **the best** that the evaluators read. It will be just the same for Horizon 2020.

So, a key word, a key concept to remember is **competition**. To get the money, your proposal has to **compete** successfully against maybe several hundreds of other proposals all wanting to spend the same money that you want! Be aware that **competition** for EU-funded projects is usually extremely strong, especially in the EU's major R and D funding programme FP7 (and its sequel Horizon 2020, starting 1 January, 2014). Thus, for FP7 REGPOT-2009-1 proposals (institutional capacity-building projects), of the 312 proposals submitted, only 16 (5.1%) were on the Mainlist (entering contract negotiations for funding) and all of these proposals scored at least 14.0 out of 15. This means at least one perfect score of 5 out of 5. So, if you do not succeed in getting **perfect** scores for at least one of the evaluation criteria (3 criteria for REGPOT proposals, each worth up to 5 points), **your proposal will more than likely fail.**

Therefore your **philosophy for success** is to know how to make your project proposal **the best** that the evaluators will read: to get the maximum score for every one of the evaluation criteria. So, you need to know how to write your project proposal to make it **impossible** for the evaluators to take off any marks from your score; this typically means getting 5 for each section of the proposal. Target your proposal to be the **only** one that is worth funding! To achieve this, your proposal will need to have something really special about it, so do not say the same things that everyone else will say!

In the rest of this document, occasional negative ESR comments on FP7-REGPOT proposals are given in **red text** to show where a project proposal has failed to provide adequate information in response to essential proposal requirements. For example, in relation to making your proposal special:

['Standard dissemination activities are included: web page, participation at conferences, three workshops including also brokerage events. The level of detail in description of these activities is not sufficient. Detailed and concrete plans to engage relevant stakeholders on the national and international level are missing.']

Assuming that your proposal satisfies the eligibility criteria, it is the proposal evaluators (a number of people like you, selected by the funding body, but probably with previous expertise in assessing proposals) who will decide whether your proposal succeeds or fails.

[For some funding schemes, such as IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) proposal evaluators go on a training course to be given guidance on what to look for when evaluating project proposals. Usually, this means making sure the applicants have responded to requirements of the funding scheme (policy documents, specific requirements of the call and guide for applicants), ensuring enough detail is provided to justify statements and ensuring good value for money.]

The evaluation score needed for your proposal to succeed will vary with the funding scheme. Even in FP7, occasionally a proposal scoring less than 12/15 was funded, whereas in rare cases a proposal winning 15/15 would not be funded, if funds allowed only one proposal to be funded and two got maximum scores.

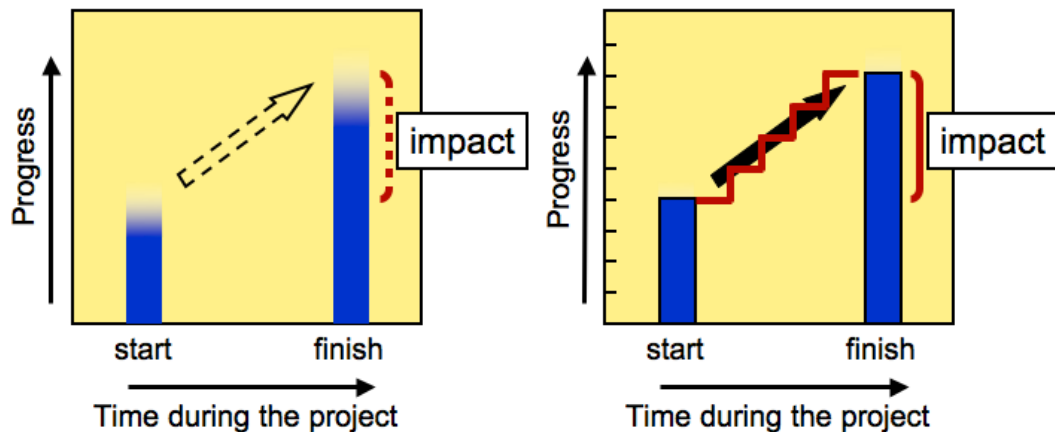
Therefore, for your proposal to be the **best** one, the rare one that gets that maximum score of 15 marks (or whatever the maximum score is for your particular funding programme), **your** proposal has got to be the one giving the best definition of

- where you start from
- where you will get to
- how you will get there
- evidence of progress
- value for money (impact/cost)

In other words, your **philosophy for success** is to know how to get rid of the “*fog*” at the top of the blue bars in the figure that indicate the beginning and end of your project, doing this for as little money as possible (impact/cost), so that your project will be both the **best-justified** and the **best value for money**. If another proposal claims to do a project like yours with the same impact but for 20% less money, for example, then **you won't get the money**.

['The value for money potential is very low, as there is no single statement ... justifying what will be achieved with so much funding.'  
'Therefore it is not possible to justify that the ... project team, consisting of 14 research groups from 7 departments, will give value for money.']

So, in the figures below (page 5), you need to know how to convert the typical “*fog*” of failure on the left into the clarity and definition for success on the right. Here the vertical axis is presented as a measure of project **Impact**. The more **impact** you can build into your project proposal, the more likely your proposal is to succeed in getting the money - note that for Horizon 2020, more emphasis will be placed on achieving impact for your projects than was the case for FP7. However, you will need to justify your claimed project **impact** by giving the evidence in the words you write in the proposal. More on this later.



So, how do you do this?

### **3. Every word has a meaning**

Your starting point, assuming you decide to go ahead (see page 29), having identified a suitable funding source to develop your idea, is to read carefully the relevant background documentation for the funding scheme on programme objectives, objectives of the call and the Guide for Applicants. And your **philosophy for success** at this stage is to know how to interpret those words - to get inside the minds of the programme developers to understand what *they* want you to achieve with *their* money.

Go through all these documents and highlight the key words, phrases and sentences that you will need to respond to to ensure that *your* proposal does what *they* want you to do. Here is an example taken from an FP7 Work Programme document (FP7-REGPOT-2010). Text highlighted in yellow with accompanying numbers [1, 2, etc] indicates *statements* that would be *essential* to take into account when writing the proposal. Only the first 17 highlighted statements are shown here. The whole document was 5 pages, giving a total of 97 different types of statement, each of which would need some text writing somewhere in the project proposal, either as part of the project needs analysis, objectives, concept note, state-of-the-art, activities, outcomes, impact or as something else that would be required for the proposal application form.

#### **“Programme Objective**

**Stimulating the realisation of the full research potential of the enlarged Union by unlocking and developing existing or emerging excellence in the EU's convergence regions and outermost regions, and helping to strengthen the capacities of their researchers to successfully participate in research activities at Community level.**

#### **I. CONTEXT**

Europe is not making the most of its research potential and resources located in less advanced regions remote from the European core of research and industrial development. Indeed, the Convergence and Outermost regions research actors may find difficult to play their role and find their place in the ERA, because they are facing problems of brain drain, infrastructure, economic and institutional organisation [1] or lack of appropriate access to finance. This action will allow research entities in these regions – whether in the public or private sector - to reinforce their excellence and creativity [2] while taking advantage of the knowledge and know-how existing in leading research organisations of Europe. Hence, they will contribute actively to the regional or European economy and social welfare [3] and will become dynamic actors of the European Research Area (ERA) within the enlarged Union [4].

#### **Approach for this year**

The action aims at strengthening the potential of *research entities established in the Convergence and Outermost regions of the European Union* (EU) that need new

knowledge and support to realise their development. It will help to enhance the capacity of their researchers to successfully participate in research activities at EU level [5]. It will therefore tackle a variety of challenges such as 'brain gain' [6] through networking with other European world class research players [7] and industry [8], upgrading of relevant RTD infrastructure [9], recruitment of experienced researchers [10] and institutional mobilization [11] as well as dynamic contribution to the regional or European sustainable socio-economic development [12].

On the grounds of the past experience, the *Research Potential* action will focus on **high quality research entities [13] of significant scientific size [14]** to ensure the highest impact of the Community intervention. These research entities, public or private, should demonstrate a high quality of human, material and organisational capacity [15], allowing hosting several new experienced researchers and engineers [16] from the country concerned and abroad [17]. Their research potential increase will be realised in **close cooperation with at least 3 European outstanding research 'partnering organisations' [7]** in the same S&T domain ...."

[Note, the text emphasised in *italics* and **bold** was like this in the original document. Only the colour highlighting and insertion of numbers has been added here.]

Having identified and highlighted what you believe to be key statements in your own funding source background documentation, your next step is to interpret what these statements are implicitly telling you to write. So, below are interpretations for the 17 statements highlighted in the Work Programme extract above.

#### **4. Interpretation of highlighted statements**

Again, examples of negative ESR comments on proposals are given below interpretations of statements to show where a project proposal has failed to provide adequate information in response to the statement.

##### **[1] brain drain, infrastructure, economic and institutional organisation**

Make sure you say something about how your REGPOT project would tackle each of these aspects, especially emphasising how the project would improve the capacity not only of the researchers taking part but also the institution as a whole.

Examples of negative ESR comments relating to brain drain and economic aspects:

['It is not clear enough how producers, end-users, policymakers, etc., would use the R&D results in the future.']

['There is not enough evidence in the proposal on the way that additional collaboration with European Institutions will be conducted and how the brain drain issue is resolved.']

##### **[2] excellence and creativity**

You have to provide the evidence in the appropriate section(s) of the proposal to show that you are **already** doing excellent research (a centre of excellence, at least in Serbia, that is maybe already 90% of the way to being competitive with the best in Europe). That means not only a list of recent good quality publications, but evidence that you, and each researcher contributing to the REGPOT project, have a research **programme** and have made recent progress with your various research programmes, with key findings summarised. **Include reference citations in the text.** Identify what was novel or exciting about your research findings that would justify your and other researchers' **creativity** - innovation skills.

Note that a **centre of excellence** would already be expected to have research collaborations with a number of good quality EU research institutions. Therefore, you should also identify present and past international research collaborations of staff taking part in the REGPOT project, together with a short description of what that collaborative research was about and its achievements in terms of new discoveries, publications and patents, etc. Again, scientific

publications from the collaborative research should be cited in the text and evidence of collaborative achievements and full reference details given at the end of the relevant section.

[Information is given about collaborations but not about the research activity. Publication of each senior researcher is not given in the proposal.]  
 '... but there is no information on the previous research record of the Centre.']

### [3] they will contribute actively to the regional or European economy and social welfare

You need to describe how your present or planned research will contribute to the regional or European economy and social welfare - even if that is not immediately obvious to you! This means you need to show that your research is not completely fundamental, but is helping to solve problems that are important for Serbia, the region, Europe as a whole and that the problems are relevant for the aims of FP7 research programmes: to make European science more competitive with the rest of the world, to contribute to increasing the wealth of Europe, helping to overcome societal problems, climate change, improving health, the environment, or whatever.

You have to make it clear that there is a societal need for your research (at least in the longer term, if not immediately).

[It is not clear enough how producers, end-users, policymakers, etc., would use the R&D results in the future.]  
 'The potential impact on regional social and economic development is not evident.']

### [4] will become dynamic actors of the European Research Area (ERA) within the enlarged Union

Here is an opportunity for you to impress the evaluators with your mission and vision to become amongst Europe's most effective and competitive research groups in the areas of science to be covered by your REGPOT proposal. This could be given as a **mission statement** at the end of the first section of the proposal. If you already have a strategic research plan you may be able to use some text from this to emphasise how dynamic your research activities are, directed towards taking your science and scientists into the ERA.

Here's an example of a **Vision for Research** that you might have in a strategic research plan: The vision for research of the institution is:

- to become the leading research institution in the area of bla, bla, bla (areas of science) in the region
- to improve research competitiveness within the ERA by the year 20..., when full membership of Serbia in the EU is planned by the government
- to make the research more relevant to the needs of Serbian society and all the institution's stakeholders

This vision will be realised through the following research objectives:

1. Raising the international profile of our research
2. To become national leader in research in the areas of bla, bla, bla (areas of science)
3. To promote and develop entrepreneurship, public engagement and science awareness activities
4. To improve continuously the quality of our research

[The project will clearly upgrade the scientific status and the capacities in research areas of the Centre. However, it will not fully contribute to its integration in the ERA.]  
 'The impact would be good in the local context, but not more widely.']

### [5] enhance the capacity of their researchers to successfully participate in research activities at EU level

This means that your proposal will target the sustainability of your research activities **beyond the end of the project (very important)** to allow your researchers to contribute successfully



to collaborative research projects at the EU level. Note - “successfully” means you should plan to include training on how to write better proposals yourselves and how to broaden as far as possible your research links with other European research institutions to provide you with many opportunities to be invited to join as a partner in other FP7 research consortia. The success rate for FP7 collaborative research proposals is only around 10-15% on average, so that means you need to be invited to join at least 8 research consortia to have one successful!!

Although there will obviously be other funding sources possible for some areas of collaborative research (see point [59]), you need to emphasise FP7 and therefore to identify collaborative research opportunities provided by existing FP7 Themes and topic areas (use those already published in current and previous calls as a guide to appropriate research areas - see page 93 for FP7 Themes, activities and areas).

['The sustainability after the end is not visible in the programme.'

'Wider effects on regional, national or European research are not described appropriately apart from mentioning existing collaborations.'

'It cannot be seen how the research entity's visibility on a European scale will be increased.')

#### [6] challenges such as 'brain gain'

This is a key criterion of these REGPOT calls, to appoint incoming expert researchers, ideally from other European (or advanced) countries. These researchers are expected to bring in new research expertise and skills, new research ideas, new ways of thinking, and expertise in research management (see point [80]). Therefore, you should attempt to identify and persuade relevant scientists from the Serbian diaspora (or elsewhere) to be appointed in your institution as part of the activities of your project. Identifying and getting the agreement of an incoming research expert should be done **before the proposal is submitted** and not as an activity within the project itself.

If you are unsuccessful in getting someone to agree, then at least say this in the proposal, giving the actual names of scientists you contacted as evidence that you have tried your best to satisfy the criteria for the REGPOT call.

According to the definition of an experienced researcher for the FP7 Marie-Curie human capacity programme, this is a post-graduate scientist who has spent at least four years doing research. This in most countries would mean that the person already has a PhD degree. If your proposed incoming expert researcher does not yet have a PhD degree, then the person should have at least four years post-graduate research experience.

You **must** write something about 'brain gain' in your proposal even if you can't find anyone to come (see also point [91]).

['Recruitment of experienced Serbian researchers from abroad seems to be very difficult, and is not planned in the budget.'

'The recruitment of incoming experienced researchers is not planned: only five unemployed young researchers will be recruited and trained with no clear devoted tasks and scientific objectives.')

#### [7] European world class research players

You have to provide the evidence that your proposed partner institutions are world-class research players (see point [63] where it says “outstanding research 'partnering organisations' elsewhere in the Union”). So, do not choose your partners only on the basis that you may have collaborated with them previously. Your partner institutions **must** provide you with evidence to show that they are among Europe's 10 best institutions for the type of research for which you need them. Many European countries have a regular research quality assessment exercise. This could be used as evidence of the quality of their research.



Your partner institutions will also be expected to provide training to your research staff, so get your proposed partner institutions to give you evidence of their expertise in training visiting staff.

Information on the quality and suitability of the your partner institutions would be put in the relevant sections of your proposal.

[‘Excellence of the partnering organisations and their role in applicant’s RTD capacity building is not explained well enough.’]

#### [8] industry

The Commission is very keen to strengthen the links between research academia and industry (commerce, large companies and small-medium enterprises - SMEs), so you should aim to include some sort of partnering with at least one institution from industry; ideally one that could be used to help exploit your institution’s future research discoveries. Your industrial partner does not need to be Serbian, but could be an existing partner institution of one of your ‘world class research’ European partners. Your industrial partner could provide training in aspects of entrepreneurship, needs of industry, competitiveness, market demands, cost-benefit analysis, protecting intellectual property (IP), patenting, for example.

[‘The proposal does not give plans to involve key actors and stakeholders in the specific research sector such as the relevant Ministry, and the industrial sector.  
‘There is limited effort to facilitate the project output to the industrial sector.’]

#### [9] upgrading of relevant RTD infrastructure

Although REGPOT projects are opportunities to upgrade relevant RTD (research and technological development) infrastructure (equipment), this must be justified in your proposal by explaining what the improved infrastructure will be used for. Too many scientists ask for the latest (and most expensive) technology just because it is an opportunity to buy expensive equipment. The need for the equipment **must** be adequately justified, and that includes providing research need and sustainability to keep the equipment constantly in use after the REGPOT project is finished, and providing all the necessary resources (consumables, software licences, etc) that are needed to run the equipment every day.

The equipment must be seen by the evaluators to be an essential, logical (and obvious) part of your planned research programmes. That is why you need to describe your current research (point [2]) in terms of a **research programme** (and not just a list of projects and research publications) with a **mission** and **vision**. This will then allow you to justify the purchase of relevant equipment as a long-term need.

Nevertheless, the Commission is expecting you to ask for relatively major items of equipment to improve the future quality of your research, so do not restrict your equipment purchases to small items: refrigerators, freezers, balances and hotplate-stirrers, for example!

[‘it is not evident that the instruments selected in the project are critical to the described research direction.’]

[‘It is not certain how the acquired equipment will be utilised and in which projects it will be engaged.’]

[‘The equipment requested is often of basic type which is not in line with the call.’]

#### [10] recruitment of experienced researchers

Ensure that your recruitment of researchers is based on bringing in staff with existing research experience (at least four years post-graduate research). Although it may be possible to include one or two PhD students amongst your staff to be hired, as well as experienced researchers, the focus should be on hiring experienced research staff. If you plan to hire too many PhD students, you will get negative ESR comments:

['the intention to recruit young researchers is not in line with the call's requirement for experienced ones']

'Three young researchers will be employed, but there is no indication what will be their experience ....']

#### [11] institutional mobilization

Make sure your REGPOT project also provides a strong engagement of your research organisation as a whole, to exploit existing institutional resources, maybe by including training activities on site to improve the effectiveness, usefulness, productivity, etc of institutional resources you already have.

Also use the REGPOT project as an opportunity to get research groups within your institution working together instead of working independently, perhaps by organising visits to a partner institution to see how complementary research teams can work side by side on the same research project to give critical mass to solving a particular problem. Maybe you could plan seminars or workshops for all institution staff to attend to encourage internal interactions.

['The total research effort seems to be limited (only 9 researchers and 4 PhD are involved), ...']

'... the scientific focus of this group of researchers is rather low. Therefore, the critical mass is not or will not be present in the research groups ...']

#### [12] dynamic contribution to the regional or European sustainable socio-economic development

As for point [3], note that your research capacity, to be improved through the project, should provide sustainability for additional research staff and help to retain existing staff to support socio-economic development - strengthening Serbia's science base, competitiveness and opportunities to contribute to the ERA at both regional and European levels, bla, bla, bla.

['In the field of economic and social development, the impact of the proposed project is less clear, as basic materials research does not necessarily lead to development of industries.']

#### [13] high quality research entities

As in point [2], you have to convince the evaluators that your institution as a whole (and not just one or two successful research groups) is a high quality research entity. It will not be sufficient to say that your institution has been doing good quality, successful research for many years! Use all the suggestions given for point [2] to convince the evaluators. Note that the words in the Work Programme are emphasised in **bold**. This means you **must** concentrate on providing the evidence in the first section of good research quality for the institution **as a whole**.

['The SWOT analysis ... fails to demonstrate the scientific strengths of this entity.']

'The equipment requested and ... indicate that they are at the beginning of their effort to reach European recognition.'

'However, scientific excellence of the research groups involved in the project is not high enough to meet the objectives of the action.']

#### [14] significant scientific size

To qualify to be of significant size, you need at least 10 experienced researchers, defining them as those staff already with a PhD degree and who are permanently employed (for example do not include a visiting post-doc from Croatia, etc.). Although experienced researchers are defined for FP7 Marie-Curie Fellowships as researchers with at least four years experience, even if your Masters and PhD students have been doing research for more than four years, they are unlikely to be regarded by the Commission as permanent staff.

Note that although the eligibility criteria refer only to the size of the research institution, evaluators will expect to see around 10 of these experienced researchers also to be involved

in the REGPOT activities. You may, perhaps, be able to reduce this number to eight from your institution without criticism, provided that you include (add) at least 1 incoming expert researcher.

['According to the information provided, this centre has limited experience and a rather small size.'

'However, the action plan and work packages are very narrowly focused to only one of its departments, therefore it lacks the scale, which is aimed at in the current REGPOT call.'

'As 8 small groups with 1 or 2 senior scientists (+ PhD students) are involved in the proposal with no evidence of a previous cooperation between them, the overall strategy of the proposal is not convincing.']

#### **[15] high quality of human, material and organisational capacity**

Not only do you need to convince evaluators that your institution already does high quality research, but you need to show that your institution already has a good level of material resources (already well-equipped with modern equipment), and that it has the organisational capacity and existing expertise to manage a complex international project (including a competent, efficient and responsive accounting system).

Remember that the REGPOT programme is not designed for raising the research standard of currently non-competitive research institutions and scientists, but is targeting those research institutions already shown to be centres of excellence in Serbia to make them European centres of excellence.

['The team leader does not show international publications on his short CV.'

'The equipment requested and ... indicate that they are at the beginning of their effort to reach European recognition.']

#### **[16] hosting several new experienced researchers and engineers**

You need to show that your institution has the organisational capacity to host an expanded number of researchers - enough bench and office space, equipment and computing facilities for the extra staff, as well as adequate consumables to support the research they do.

['There is no detailed description of the present research infrastructure in terms of equipment and staffing of the institution.'

'There is no planning for consolidation of training or how the newly-trained and recruited researchers will put their skills into practice.']

#### **[17] from the country concerned and abroad**

The wording here implies that you may plan to employ a (limited) number of new researchers from within Serbia as well as from abroad. Maybe these could include PhD students who have already had several years (at least 4) doing research for their Masters degrees.

### **5. Concluding background documentation comments**

Although the examples given here come from the Work Programme for an FP7 project proposal, the principle will be the same whatever the funding scheme (IPA, Youth-in-Action, Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus Mundus, Horizon 2020, etc.). Read carefully through the background documentation, and call for proposals and highlight those points that you will need to respond to in your project proposal text somewhere. For a large-scale multi-partner project *there will be a lot of points to highlight!*

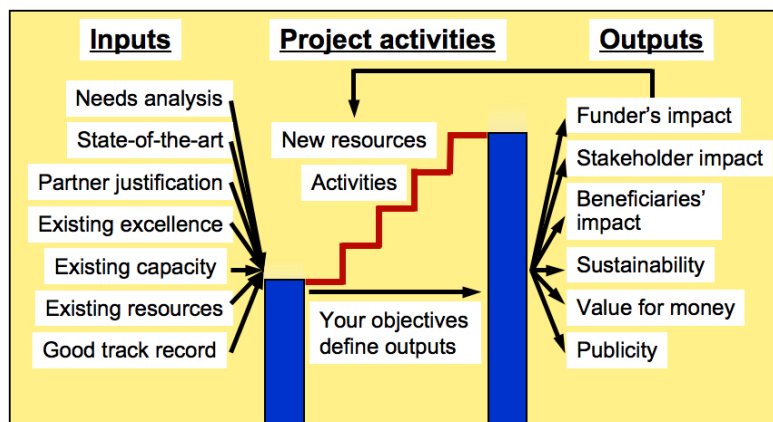
In your case, for the interpretations explained above, you go through the same process for your funding scheme documentation, replacing "you" with "I" or "we". Then tick off your list of numbered statements as you gradually write the text of your proposal. That way you won't leave out any important points.

Every phrase and sentence of the documentation is there for a reason. The more success you have in identifying those key statements, interpreting what they tell you to write, and then writing in your proposal the text that addresses each of these key statements, the more likely it is that your project proposal will be funded.

This is a key component of the **philosophy for success**, so the advice given above in interpreting what those phrases and sentences mean in terms of what you write should help you to ***get the money!*** The more you ignore the advice on identifying, interpreting and writing text for each of your background document statements, the more you risk losing marks towards your final evaluation score. On the other hand, putting something in your proposal for every one of the many statements you identify cannot guarantee you success, but together with aspects of the **philosophy for success** described below, it will give you the best chance possible!

## **6. Writing the text of your proposal**

The figure below describes your project proposal pictorially, and the arrows show the flow of information that you need to describe in your proposal to give sufficient definition to the first bar (**inputs** into your proposal text), the second bar, equivalent to your project objectives, which define the **outputs** you plan for your project, and then for achieving those outputs you need to describe all the activities carried out and new resources created during the project. Once you have completed these descriptions, that will be most of the text of your proposal completed. Sections usually requested but not included in this figure are description of project management and project budget breakdown. FP7 proposals also had sections on horizontal issues such as gender aspects and ethical considerations.



Therefore, for your proposal you will need to write text to describe **inputs**, **outputs** and **project activities**. **Inputs** that define your first blue bar include:

- **Needs analysis:** this is essential to justify why your project is needed. There has to be a problem to be overcome, a weakness or deficiency to correct, or some other good reason why your project is essential to carry out. It will also help to identify any other existing projects to which yours will either be complementary (to give added-value) or, if already completed, explain how your project will build on or capitalise on the achievements (overcome the failures or weaknesses?) of completed relevant projects. You could also include any relevance to existing EU policies, or strategy documents - EU, regional and local, depending on the type of project.
- **State-of-the-art:** not always required as such, but it is definitely useful to describe where your starting point is compared with what is happening elsewhere (other countries, or other parts of your country). This is especially important for European RTD and innovation

projects, where you are likely to be competing with the best of the rest in Europe, so your science or innovation needs to be competitive on the European scene, which means ***you have to be familiar with*** and to describe the latest developments in your subject area, internationally.

- Partner justification: every partner in your consortium has to be there to make a specific contribution to meeting your project objectives, and you have to demonstrate that every partner has the required skills, experience and capacity to carry out their role in the project. Partners should be complementary in terms of contributing complementary skills/expertise or covering similar activities in complementary environments/circumstances. More than one partner appearing to be doing the same work for no obviously beneficial reason will be seen as just wasting the funding scheme's money, thereby decreasing your chances of getting it!
- Existing excellence: you have to prove to the evaluators that you are sufficiently competent to lead the project, with evidence of project management experience, or at least if this will be your first EU project, evidence of project management skills demonstrated by giving a detailed account of your plans for project management. You also have to demonstrate that each of your consortium partners is sufficiently competent to achieve what is planned for them in the project. In the case of a scientific research project, existing excellence means evidence of good quality research (competitive on the top European scene) provided by references to scientific publications, and for individual scientists/researchers evidence of excellence in the form of measures of esteem (publications, prizes, awards, patents, achievements, etc).

Note - in the case of a research project, or any project to be funded by FP7 or Horizon 2020, if the research you propose or evidence you give of previous research is not competitive with the best in Europe, your proposal is unlikely to be funded, **however much you are able to respond to the advice in this document**. The EU (and any other international research funding source) ***will not fund poor quality, uncompetitive research***.

- Existing capacity: give information on your administrative capacity to manage a multi-partner project. Is your finance department sufficiently familiar with EU project accounting procedures? Will you and your existing staff be able to give the new project all the person-months it needs? Show that all of your partners also have sufficient existing capacity to do the work planned. This leads on to Existing resources.
- Existing resources: some EU project funding sources ask you to describe your existing resources, so that they can judge whether any requests for new resources (equipment, vehicles, computers, etc) are justified.
- Good track record: you are more likely to get the money if you can demonstrate that you (and the partners in your consortium) have done this before and achieved the planned project outcomes - success breeds success. This means providing evidence that your previous projects have had a significant ***impact***. If you do not yet have a track record of project management, then focus on describing other relevant management experience, and give enough detail elsewhere in your proposal to demonstrate to evaluators that you know how to manage a multi-partner project consortium.

This list is by no means exhaustive and the points described above will probably need to go in different sections of your proposal. However, the list gives you a good flavour of the sort of **inputs** that you will typically be expected to describe in your EU-funded project proposal.

Your project **outputs** will be determined by your objectives, which will consist of narrower beneficiary-specific objectives and broader funder-targeted objectives (to ensure your project

achieves the impact expected by the funding organisation). **Outputs** defining the second bar include:

- Funder's impact: here is an example of expected impacts, for FP7 REGPOT projects -
  - Better integration of the selected research entities in the European Research Area as a whole (**long-lasting partnership with research groups elsewhere in Europe [ii]**);
  - Upgrading the RTD capacity and capability (human potential: **number of new researchers and training of research staff [iii]**, **improvement of research management [iii]**, **scientific equipment [iv]**) as well as **the quality of research [v]** carried out by the selected research entities;
  - Improved research capacity for **increased contribution to regional economic and social development [vi]**;
  - Improvement of the potential of the selected research entities to **participate in FP7 projects [vii]** and **other important European programmes [viii]**.

So, as explained for the highlighted statements interpreted previously, you have to say something in your proposal about **every** one of the funder's expected impacts for projects (as demonstrated by the eight highlighted impacts above). If you don't write text to demonstrate that every expected impact will be achieved (for example you say nothing about improving research management **[iii]**), then you risk losing valuable marks during your proposal evaluation and ***you won't get the money!*** Therefore, even if you cannot think of anything obvious to write about one or other of the expected impacts, such as increasing your institution's contribution to regional economic and social development in a REGPOT project, for example, **you have to invent something to say**, either as an immediate project impact or as a longer-term impact, however big a challenge this may be for you!

['It cannot be seen how the research entity's visibility on a European scale will be increased.'

'A detailed description of the contribution to the regional capacity building is missing.'

'The proposal does not describe how the proposed activities will have an impact at the European and International levels.']

- Stakeholder impact: assuming you have been through the process of identifying your different types of project stakeholder, you need to say something about how your project will impact on each of your stakeholder groups, even if only to keep them informed of project progress and achievements through e-newsletters, or regular project meetings, for example.

['It is not clear enough how producers, end-users, policymakers, etc., would use the R&D results in the future.'

'The proposal does not give plans to involve key actors and stakeholders in the specific research sector such as the relevant Ministry, and the industrial sector.']

- Beneficiaries' impact: this should be the easiest output for you to describe as this is why you put your project idea together. Try to quantify wherever possible how great the impact on your project beneficiaries will be (expected economic benefit in monetary terms, expected number of people to be given new skills, expected size of a new database, expected publications arising from a research project, etc.).

['It is unclear how an upgraded RTD capacity in terms of human potential and strategic partnership will be achieved.'

'The additional research capacities to be gained and the exploration of research from this proposal are not clearly stated.']

- Sustainability: say something about what will happen after the project money stops coming in. A large number of project proposals fail because they don't provide any or at least any *convincing* evidence of sustainability beyond the end of the project. Build in aspects of training both for your staff and for project beneficiaries, as new skills will



always be sustainable. Say how these new skills will be exploited in the future to provide sustainability. Maybe include activities in the project to prepare further project proposals to build on the progress and achievements of this project. Look for other ways to maintain the momentum achieved from this project, and especially any ‘multiplier’ opportunities. The catchphrase “training the trainers” would be a good example of a project multiplier activity.

[‘The sustainability after the end is not visible in the programme.’]

‘Measures to make results sustainable beyond the project funding have not been fully explored ... - dissemination actions need to be planned throughout the project duration and beyond to create a durable impact.’]

- Value for money: make sure you have justified all of your activities as being essential to achieve all your project objectives and have also calculated a realistic cost (meaning as low as you can **objectively** make it!) for each activity, or you **won’t get the money**, as explained above. Programme administrators will typically divide the person-months you plan by the total project cost to get an approximate cost per person-month. If your average cost per person-month looks too high, then your proposal will be in trouble! A very large proportion of proposals for EU funding get negative ESR comments for aspects of the budget. Here are just a couple of examples:

[‘The value for money potential is very low, as there is no single statement ... justifying what will be achieved with so much funding.’]

‘Therefore it is not possible to justify that the ... project team, consisting of 14 research groups from 7 departments, will give value for money.’]

- Publicity: you have to describe an effective dissemination strategy for your project, so that every one of your stakeholder groups is kept informed on a regular basis of project outcomes and achievements. If nobody knows what you are doing on the project, then your impact will be zero, so **why give you the money!**? The European Commission provides a good web sight aimed at helping scientists with their dissemination strategies. Many aspects of this Guide to Successful Communications for research and innovation projects would be relevant for any EU-funded project. This Commission guide can be accessed at the web address: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/science-communication/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/science-communication/index_en.htm).

Your project must be publicized to all its stakeholders, in the country, region and beyond. So, as well as project meetings, conferences, and workshops with poster and oral presentations, make sure you will disseminate your activities to local, national and international media. Maybe you could have regular press releases to advertise your project, its progress and how it can help national and international society/economy/scientists/policy-makers, etc. Media communications will be important, so try to identify and name someone in the proposal to be in charge of this. Consider a media training course as a project activity to ensure staff can communicate with non-specialists to explain their work and its importance for your country/EU, etc. Alternatively, maybe one of your consortium partners could be included specifically for their expertise in dissemination activities (publicity in the form of press releases, leaflets, media interviews, e-newsletters, etc.).

An important means of communication nowadays is a project website. Many websites of Serbian institutions are not very informative or dynamic, and information on individual projects is often limited to only a summary and partner names, and never updated! Your project could be an opportunity for someone to be appointed to upgrade your institution’s website and make it more informative to people both nationally and internationally, which means text in English as well as the local language. You should include a search engine on



your website. Also, note that a project website as a page within your institution's website will give you more search 'hits' than a stand-alone project website.

Maybe you could include a discussion board on your website where people can write 'blogs' on relevant subjects (consumer concerns, new products, topical relevant news items, etc), or perhaps an electronic newsletter on your website. You should consider building in links to other major institutions relevant for your project areas of interest?

This is where saying the same things that everyone else says will not win you any prizes in the form of ***money for your project!***

[‘Methods for the dissemination of the new knowledge (website, annual bulletins, media, etc.) are too general, and are not appropriate to approach regional users and industry.’

‘Standard dissemination activities are included: web page, participation at conferences, three workshops including also brokerage events. The level of detail in description of these activities is not sufficient. Detailed and concrete plans to engage relevant stakeholders on the national and international level are missing.’

‘The dissemination activities are appropriate but not sufficiently detailed or planned.’

‘Dissemination mechanisms foreseen in the project are likely to impact [only] to some extent on general public awareness.’

‘It is unlikely that these two events will be sufficient to widely disseminate the project results.’]

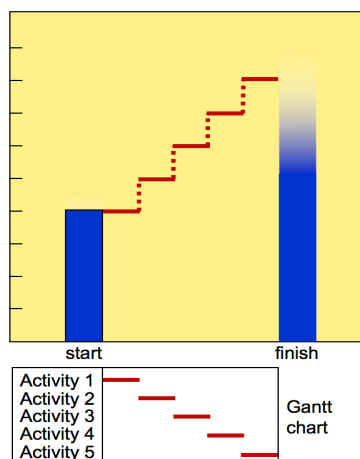
Your **project activities** (the work to be done and creation/buying of new resources to facilitate this) determine the extent to which you will get from your starting point (short blue bar) to the target end point when the project funding stops (tall blue bar). Your description of these activities must convince evaluators that the height of that bar is realistic and well-defined.

Think about the definition of a project:

A project **is a series of activities** aimed at achieving specified objectives. So, by definition, if you don’t describe your activities then the evaluators will have no idea whether you will achieve your stated objectives or not. The **activities** are what you will ***do*** during the project to achieve your project objectives [the steps up the ladder joining the two bars in the figure].

Therefore, just like giving definition to the first and second blue bars in the figure by describing all the relevant project **inputs** and **outputs** above, a key component of your **philosophy for success** is to give sufficient definition to your activities to remove any possibility of “***fog***” there as well.

In the figure below, each of your activities is shown as a red bar in the Gantt chart of time lines. If you don’t give sufficient definition to each of those activities then the vertical axis of the series of steps in the figure loses definition and you create “***fog***” in the right-hand blue bar. “***Fog***” means your proposal will not be **the best** and you ***won’t get the money!***



How will you prevent any “*fog*” in the steps (and thus in the second bar) as you describe the project activities? Consider the types of information about your activities that you will need to provide to the evaluators. You need to describe the activities with enough detail for evaluators to know that:

- you know what to do (giving evidence of previous relevant experience and skills)
- your methods are appropriate to achieve your project objectives (they will clearly achieve the desired outcomes in the time planned)
- your methods are quantitatively appropriate (enough person-months, but not excessive) to achieve all your project objectives
- you clearly have (or will have, if funded by the project) all the resources needed to achieve all the project outcomes in the time planned
- you have identified problems and planned to overcome them (risk analysis demonstrated)
- your project finishing point will be significantly further advanced than your starting point (***impact***).

A common problem for evaluators when reading descriptions of the planned activities (work or tasks to be done) is that the applicants say only *what* will be done and nothing about *how* they will be done. It is *how* you will do something that will determine whether you achieve that task output/result or not, so it is largely what you say on *how* you will do the work that will determine the amount of fog in the right-hand blue bar. The greater the fog the lower your chances of ***getting the money!***

Doing and presenting a risk analysis of your planned activities is particularly important. Evaluators and EU programme administrators, from previous experience, will often have a good idea of activities that inherently carry significant risks. Therefore, failure to demonstrate you have carried out **your own** risk analysis will put your proposal at risk of ***not getting the money!*** However, on the other hand, identifying any activity as having a high risk of failure or only partial success is likely to raise questionmarks in the minds of the evaluators. Why should they give you money for a high-risk project?! So, by their very nature, avoid any high-risk project activities.

For example, consider statement [6] above: **[6] challenges such as 'brain gain'** and the accompanying interpretative comment “Identifying and getting the agreement of an incoming research expert should be done **before the proposal is submitted** and not as an activity within the project itself.” If you make no attempt before proposal-submission to find any incoming expert but plan to do this during the project, then the evaluators would regard this as a **high-risk** activity with negative consequences for your proposal evaluation (***you don't get the money!***)! Project activities to find incoming experts and then persuade them to emigrate to Serbia (!) were written in to several Serbian REGPOT proposals, and none of those proposals was funded.

## **7. Challenges to overcome**

Your **philosophy for success** includes knowing how to avoid or overcome four typical challenges:

- 1) to read and implement the instructions!
- 2) to make statements with enough supporting evidence to convince evaluators.
- 3) to give sufficient detail of the activities that will be carried out.
- 4) to be consistent in what you write in different parts of your proposal.

So, bear these four challenges constantly in mind while you write your proposal. Here is advice on how to overcome them.

### 1) Implementing the instructions

This is so easy to do in theory, but apparently so difficult to carry out in practice!

Your **philosophy for success** is to keep the funding programme administrators and your proposal evaluators happy! That means do what the funding source documentation either **explicitly** or **implicitly** advises you to do. Those documents include:

- Relevant EC/regional/local policy documents,
- Funding programme objectives and expected impacts,
- Specific call documentation and expected project impacts,
- Guide for Applicants,
- Evaluation criteria.

While EC policy documents have no specific instructions as such to be followed, the more your proposal includes statements that the project will contribute to fulfilling specific EU policy objectives, such as “we must all be able to **obtain the skills needed** to live and work in the information age.” [European Union policy statement on Information Technology, [http://europa.eu/pol/infso/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/pol/infso/index_en.htm) - Bridging the digital divide], in a project on improving skills/efficiency/innovation in a particular sector, the better your proposal will be judged.

Funding programme objectives and specific call objectives, together with their expected impacts, give you **implicit** instructions on what to write, as shown in the 17 statements highlighted in the FP7-REGPOT Work Programme example above. So, go through these documents to identify all the statements that you need to respond to, as demonstrated for REGPOT projects. If you fail to respond to these **implicit** instructions, then you *won't get the money!* Do not assume that you can ignore them and do it *your way* successfully! Unfortunately, many people do.

The EU wants your proposal to succeed! So, to help you succeed, each funding programme will provide a detailed Guide for Applicants that gives specific instructions on what you need to write in each section of the application form. The following text comes from the introduction to the Guide for Applicants for an FP7 funding scheme:

“The **work programme** provides the essential information for submitting a proposal to this call. It describes the content of the topics to be addressed, and details on how it will be implemented. The work programme is available on the CORDIS and Participant Portal call pages. The part giving the basic data on implementation (deadline, budget, additional conditions etc) is also posted as a separate document (“call fiche”). You must consult these documents.”

Note the word “must” in the last sentence of the introduction to the Guide. This is not a polite invitation for you to consider doing this if you have time! Writing your project proposal is **not** like the typical D-I-Y approach to putting together a kit of parts for a bookcase - if all else fails, read the instructions!

This particular FP7 Guide gives 11 web and email addresses specifically for help, advice and clarification of what you need to do to write and submit your proposal. So, don't be afraid to use them. It goes on to provide 10 pages of information and instructions on how to complete the main body of the text. The introduction to these instructions is as follows:

#### “Instructions for drafting ‘Part B’ of the proposal

##### **Coordination and support actions (Supporting)**

A description of this funding scheme is given in section 2 of this Guide for Applicants. Please examine this carefully before preparing your proposal.

This annex provides a template to help you structure your proposal. It will help you present important aspects of your planned work in a way that will enable the experts to make an effective assessment against the evaluation criteria (see annex 2). Sections 1, 2 and 3 each correspond to an evaluation criterion. The sub-sections (1.1, 1.2 etc.) correspond to the sub-criteria.

**IMPORTANT: Page limits:** remember to keep to the page limits where these are specified.

The minimum font size allowed is 11 points. The page size is A4, and all margins (top, bottom, left, right) should be at least 15 mm (not including any footers or headers).

Please remember that it is up to you to verify that you conform to page limits. There is no automatic check in the system!

Ensure that the font type chosen leads to clearly readable text (eg. Arial or Times New Roman) and that part B of the proposal shall be readable, accessible and printable.

As an indication, such a layout should lead to a maximum of between 5000 and 6000 possible characters per page (including spaces).

The Commission will instruct the experts to disregard any excess pages. **[NOTE!]**

Even where no page limits are given, or where limits are only recommended, it is in your interest to keep your text concise since over-long proposals are rarely viewed in a positive light by experts."

Note the Guide for Applicants statement "The Commission will instruct the experts to disregard any excess pages." and for some of the FP7-REGPOT calls the Guide said:

"Please present your plans as follows:

i) Describe the overall strategy of the work plan (*maximum length: 1 page*)."

While most scientists followed these instructions, others did not and wrote two or more pages to describe their overall strategy. So, anything over 1 page would have been disregarded by the expert evaluators! Therefore, any key evidence or justification for your project on these disregarded pages would mean that your proposal fails and you ***don't get the money!***

Every EU funding scheme will provide the evaluation criteria as part of the documentation available to applicants. Although these would be **explicit** instructions specifically for the proposal evaluators, they are also **implicit** instructions for you. You have to know the criteria for evaluating your proposal. Sometimes, however, the evaluation criteria give you relatively little help because many aspects of your proposal are assessed in a single criterion (such as FP7), but for other funding schemes the evaluation of your proposal is broken down into minute detail, giving you a much better feel for what you need to write to satisfy each of those secondary criteria. The IPA Adriatic-Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) programme is an example of the latter. Their Guidance Notes on proposal evaluation start as follows:

#### "GUIDANCE NOTES

This document is aimed at assisting the applicants before finalizing their Application form and Final Application form in order to self evaluate if their project focuses on the described aspects so that they can meet better the quality criteria."

What follows in the GUIDANCE NOTES is a text version of the Assessment Form spreadsheet, part of which is illustrated below, on the next page. Here is excellent quality information **implicitly** instructing you on what you should write in each section of your proposal, because these are the exact criteria upon which the evaluators will be evaluating your proposal. So, if it is a statement or question given in the evaluator's Assessment Form spreadsheet, then you have to say **something relevant** to this statement/question in your proposal. Fail to do this and ***you won't get the money!***

1st Step Quality Assessment Form					
Project code:			Priority:		
Project acronym:			Measure:		
Lead Applicant (name in English)			Theme:		
Sections/ criteria n.	Criteria	What needs to be assessed?	Points	Totals	Assessor's comments
<b>A</b>	<b>Strategic relevance</b>	<b>What needs to be answered?</b>			
<b>a.1</b>	Does the project contribute to achieving general and specific objectives of the concerned Strategic Theme in the Programme area? (max 5 points)	Is the strategic project clearly in line with the relevant Strategic Theme? Are the compulsory specific objectives and additional specific objectives, those not foreseen in the ToR, (if present) well developed? Does the strategic project demonstrate how it will contribute to the achievement of the general and specific objectives of the Strategic Theme? Will the strategic project proposal provide a significant and sustainable contribution to solving the problems/needs identified in the relevant Strategic Theme? Are the target groups relevant to the Strategic Theme identified?		<b>0</b>	
<b>a.2</b>	Is the project in compliance with the relevant EU policies and horizontal issues? (max 5 points)	Are the project objectives and results coherent with Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies and will contribute to their implementation? Is the project coherent and compatible with the horizontal issues (e.g. equal opportunity and non discrimination, sustainable development, other as: integration, human resource development, innovation, information and communication technology, etc)? Is the project in accordance with the EU sector policies (such as regulations, directives, etc) ? Is the project in accordance with the EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY? Does the project contribute to the implementation of relevant EU policies?		<b>0</b>	
<b>SECTION A TOTAL</b>				<b>0</b>	

Each sub-criterion is scored either 0, 0.5 or 1, according to whether the applicant has not satisfied, only partially satisfied or wholly satisfied the criterion. Thus a maximum score for the illustrated sections, **a.1** and **a.2**, would be 5. There are **19** sections in total. Note, for example the last two sub-criteria in section **a.2**. If this was the funding scheme for your proposal, then here are clear instructions for you to ensure that you have read and written text to respond to the EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY, and have also read and written text to show your project will contribute to implementing the relevant EU policies. Despite this advice and support, some IPA Adriatic-CBC applicants wrote nothing to respond to several sub-criteria, guaranteeing that they immediately lost valuable marks!

The evaluation criteria for FP7 Coordination and Support actions (such as REGPOT) are shown in the table immediately below the general information on proposal evaluators and procedures shown here:

#### "1. General

The evaluation of proposals is carried out by the Commission with the assistance of independent experts.

Commission staff ensures that the process is fair, and in line with the principles contained in the Commission's rules.

Experts perform evaluations on a personal basis, not as representatives of their employer, their country or any other entity. They are expected to be independent, impartial and objective, and to behave throughout in a professional manner. They sign an appointment letter, including a declaration of confidentiality and absence of conflict of

interest before beginning their work. Confidentiality rules must be adhered to at all times, before, during and after the evaluation.

In addition, an independent expert will be appointed by the Commission to observe the evaluation process from the point of view of its working and execution. The role of the observer is to give independent advice to the Commission on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, on the way in which the experts apply the evaluation criteria, and on ways in which the procedures could be improved. The observer will not express views on the proposals under examination or the experts' opinions on the proposals.

The Commission establishes a list of experts capable of evaluating the proposals that have been received. The list is drawn up to ensure:

- A high level of expertise;
- An appropriate range of competencies;

Provided that the above conditions can be satisfied, other factors are also taken into consideration:

- An appropriate balance between academic and industrial expertise and users;
- A reasonable gender balance;
- A reasonable distribution of geographical origins;
- Regular rotation of experts

In constituting the lists of experts, the Commission also takes account of their abilities to appreciate the industrial and/or societal dimension of the proposed work. Experts must also have the appropriate language skills required for the proposals to be evaluated.

Commission staff allocates proposals to individual experts, taking account of the fields of expertise of the experts, and avoiding conflicts of interest.

### **Evaluation of proposals**

At the beginning of the evaluation, experts will be briefed by Commission staff, covering the evaluation procedure, the experts' responsibilities, the issues involved in the particular area/objective, and other relevant material (including the integration of the international cooperation dimension).

Each proposal will first be assessed independently by at least three experts."

<b><i>Evaluation criteria applicable to Coordination and support actions (Supporting)</i></b>		
<b>S/T QUALITY</b>  "Scientific and/or technological excellence (relevant to the topics addressed by the call)"	<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>  "Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management"	<b>IMPACT</b>  "Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soundness of concept, and quality of objectives</li> <li>• Quality and effectiveness of the support action mechanisms, and associated work plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures</li> <li>• Quality and relevant experience of the individual participants</li> <li>• Quality of the consortium as a whole (including complementarity, balance) [only if relevant]</li> <li>• Appropriateness of the allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (staff, equipment ...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution, at the European [and/or international] level, to the expected impacts listed in the work programme under the relevant topic/activity</li> <li>• Appropriateness of measures for spreading excellence, exploiting results, and disseminating knowledge, through engagement with stakeholders, and the public at large.</li> </ul>

The proposals are evaluated against the pre-determined evaluation criteria shown above. Evaluation scores are awarded for each of the three criteria, and not for the sub-criteria. The



sub-criteria are issues which the expert should consider in the assessment of that criterion. Each of the three criteria has a maximum of 5 marks and half marks are allowed. Thus the maximum score for many FP7 proposals is only 15, so you cannot afford to lose even half a mark for any of the three criteria.

Description of the evaluation process for FP7 Coordination and Support actions continues thus:

#### **“4. Individual evaluation**

This part of the evaluation will be carried out in Brussels.

When scoring proposals, experts must *only* apply the above evaluation criteria.

Experts will assess and mark the proposal exactly as it is described and presented. They do not make any assumptions or interpretations about the project in addition to what is in the proposal.

Concise but explicit justifications will be given for each score. Recommendations for improvements to be discussed as part of a possible negotiation phase will be given, if needed.

The experts will also indicate whether, in their view, the proposal raises research ethics issues.

Signature of the IER also entails a declaration that the expert has no conflict of interest in evaluating the particular proposal.

Scope of the call: It is possible that a proposal is found to be completely out of scope of the call during the course of the individual evaluation, and therefore not relevant. If an expert suspects that this may be the case, a Commission staff member will be informed immediately, and the views of the other experts will be sought.

If the consensus view is that the main part of the proposal is not relevant to the topics of the call, the proposal will be withdrawn from the evaluation, and the proposal will be deemed ineligible.

#### **5. Consensus meeting**

Once all the experts to whom a proposal has been assigned have completed their IER, the evaluation progresses to a consensus assessment, representing their common views.

This entails a consensus meeting to discuss the scores awarded and to prepare comments.

The consensus discussion is moderated by a representative of the Commission. The role of the moderator is to seek to arrive at a consensus between the individual views of experts without any prejudice for or against particular proposals or the organisations involved, and to ensure a confidential, fair and equitable evaluation of each proposal according to the required evaluation criteria.

The moderator for the group may designate an expert to be responsible for drafting the consensus report ("rapporteur"). The experts attempt to agree on a consensus score for each of the criteria that have been evaluated and suitable comments to justify the scores. Comments should be suitable for feedback to the proposal coordinator. Scores and comments are set out in a consensus report. They also come to a common view on the questions of scope.

If during the consensus discussion it is found to be impossible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspect of the proposal, the Commission may ask up to three additional experts to examine the proposal.”

Note the text highlighted in yellow above: proposals will be assessed by the expert evaluators solely on the basis of reading the words in your proposal. If you have missed something important out, the assessors will not guess what you might have said, which means you probably ***won't get the money!***

By the time you have read your funding programme's evaluation criteria, you should be able



to judge for yourself whether each of the criteria in your project proposal genuinely deserves to be scored as **Excellent**. Another way of looking at this is to ask yourself the question “Will anyone else be able to write a **better** text for this section than mine?” Your answer needs to be “No!”

## 2) Giving the evidence

The **philosophy for success** assumes that *nothing* is obvious to the evaluators! “Many years of successful research” and “we have published many papers in leading journals” are useless statements to make without **supporting them with the evidence**, for example with further explanatory text, footnotes or references at the end of the section. As said above, evaluators will not fill in for themselves anything important that you have left out. **You have to assume they know nothing about the value of any training or equipment or the importance or relevance of your areas of expertise in science, manufacturing, education, or whatever it is.** As they are instructed to judge the value of a proposal strictly according to the words they read, they will not [at least *should* not] take into account any previously known good reputation or track record of you, your staff and organisation or any EU partners *if that information is not also given in the proposal*. So, for example, if you don’t describe clearly why a specific piece of equipment is needed for the project, *the evaluators will assume it is not needed!*

Giving sufficient evidence for your statements also requires you to be intelligent in implementing the instructions in the programme documentation. Every word of the programme documents has a meaning. Here is an example of providing evidence for a statement from just one of the points highlighted on pages 3-8 above:

‘Their research potential increase will be realised in **close cooperation with at least 3 European outstanding research ‘partnering organisations’** ....’. Just this one highlighted part of one sentence has five statements in it for which you will need to provide supporting evidence:

1. ‘**close cooperation**’ - you must *give the evidence* to demonstrate that the cooperation will indeed be close, by describing a number of major interactions between your institution and each partnering organisation, and not just token cooperation by a single short visit and exchange of a few emails, for example!

[‘The impact at international level is not clear and it is probably very low since the project does not promote an important international cooperation (networking).’]

[‘The envisaged collaboration with the 6 selected European Universities is not detailed, only generic fields of cooperation are provided.’]

2. ‘**at least 3**’ - you must respect the minimum number of cooperating organisations stated in the eligibility criteria, and it is probably better to include at least four or more organisations. If you do decide on only three partnering institutions, then you will have to *give the evidence* that only three organisations can provide all the skills, expertise, commitment of sufficient (diverse) staff resources, and future project opportunities (“through close cooperation”) to enable your institution and each of your 10 or more research groups “to become actively integrated in the ERA.”

[‘Moreover, the partners are all in one EU country, so the application does not comply with the specifications of the Call.’]

3. ‘**European**’ - a trivial matter to *provide the evidence* that your partnering organisations are in Europe, but it does mean that you cannot have only two European partnering organisations and your long-time partner institution from Canada, for example!

[‘In addition some of the targeted organisations and invited researchers are located outside the EU Members states or associated countries.’]

4. ‘**outstanding**’ - only one word, but it will require *several pages* of text from you to **give all the evidence** that each of your partnering organisations is indeed **outstanding**, and not just another average-quality European organisation! By definition, the majority of organisations will be average, so **your** partner organisations have to give you all their measures of esteem to convince the evaluators that they really are **outstanding**: all their Nobel prize winners, notable patents, awards, other prizes, high numbers of visiting workers, track-records in training, publications in Nature and Science, as well as an above-average number of good-quality publications per year, etc ...!

['Excellence of the partnering organisations and their role in applicant's RTD capacity building is not explained well enough.'

'The quality of partnering institutions is only conjectural as apart from the names of key researchers and the names of organizations no further relevant information is given.']

5. ‘**research**’ - your partnering organisations have to give you **the evidence** that research is a major strength throughout the organisation, and not just a strength for one or two research-oriented staff. Thus many European organisations have a reputation as centres of excellence for research, some for both research and teaching, but other organisations are more known for their focus on teaching than for their research. So, **give the evidence** that your chosen partnering organisations do indeed have reputations for good quality research in depth.

### 3) Giving enough detail

How much detail do you need to write? It depends! Adjust the amount of detail you give to describe the work/activities/tasks to be done according to:

- the project scale,
- the project type,
- your level of experience in writing project proposals,
- your success rate for getting them funded, and
- the space available in the application form for giving the information.

If this is your first project proposal, i.e. you have no previous track record of success, then you will need to provide more detail of each activity than if you are leading a project consortium that has already established a track record of success for large-scale collaborative international projects.

Here is an example of increasing detail to describe two conferences on dissemination activities. You could say:

- We plan two stakeholder conferences to discuss the issues.
- We plan a 3-day international stakeholder conference in Belgrade in year 1 and another 3-day event in Budapest in year 2 ...
- We plan to invite key Ministry representatives and EU experts.
- We plan to discuss key problems of treatment success rates on day 1 and to present potential solutions implemented in EU states on day 2...

Each item adds another layer of detail to the original statement. You have to decide which level of detail is appropriate, but you must convince evaluators that objectives will be achieved.

Another typical project activity would be a training visit. Thus, compare ‘typical’ examples 1) and 2) of texts describing training activities, below, with text 3):

- 1) Planned training activities, held by the EU training centres and universities, will enable the researchers to use an ABC machine in selected topics of interest to our Centre.
- 2) One of our young R&D scientists will spend one month in project year 1 at Institute X in Paris to be trained in how to use an ABC machine.

- 3) Our institute currently has no ABC machine, though we plan to buy one in project Year 1, as it is essential to develop the diagnostic tests of Objective 4. Thus, 1 of our talented scientists will work in the institute of Dr X in Paris for 1 month immediately before commissioning the ABC machine. Dr X has used ABC since 1998 and she has two machines, one of which is regularly used to train visiting workers. Upon return to our institute, the young R&D scientist will help commission the new ABC machine and give training in its use to others to ensure dissemination and sustainability of the newly-acquired expertise.

There is much more detail in example 3) to describe what is planned to be done, and furthermore, to demonstrate that the training is needed and that it will be completed with genuine **success**! Thus, the opening sentence in **blue** provides a needs analysis for the activity; the text in **black** describes what will be done during the visit, and the final text in **green** provides the impact and sustainability for the training visit.

It is the detail that you provide that will determine whether your proposal is the **best** that the evaluators read. However, giving enough detail may often be a challenge, however much you may want to do this, because of page, word or character limits in certain sections of the application form. For example, many sections of Part B of FP7 application forms have page limits, and some sections of IPA application forms have character limits (which include spaces). For on-line application forms it is impossible to exceed these character limits.

So, how do you give the necessary detail/evidence/justification that you want to give when you have page or, especially, character limits? Start by writing your ideal text for the section, and if it exceeds the length limits then go through the following process to reduce the length to fit in:

- a) delete unnecessary words: check that you do not give the same information twice anywhere. You would be surprised how often you can find sentences or phrases that repeat information. Also cut out any words or phrases with no genuine information content, such as *'it is significant to note the fact that'* and *'it should be borne in mind in this connection that'*, and so on. Another common phrase that may be deleted is 'in order', and often 'a' and 'the' can be deleted (sometimes by converting the associated noun to a plural).
- b) reduce word lengths: replace long words with short words ('got' instead of 'obtain', for example). This is particularly helpful for relatively short texts with character limits, such as a proposal abstract.
- c) change sentence constructions: in most cases this will be the best way of saving words or characters as the English language is so flexible, allowing many different ways of saying the same thing. For example instead of:  
 "..., and calculation of the annual means to identify ...", use this shorter version:  
 "... Calculating annual means to identify ...", which has 3 words less. Admittedly, an intimate knowledge of English syntax is a decided asset for this, though with practice it can be mastered.
- d) prioritise information: as a last resort, if you are still over the page or character limit, then prioritise each piece of information according to how essential you feel it will be to give to evaluators to achieve the maximum score for that section of the proposal, then delete the phrases/sentences with the lowest information content/value.

*If you are given, for example, a page limit of six pages for a section, is it OK to write only three pages?* Ask yourself the question "Why have they given me a six-page limit?" The answer is because the funding programme developers have considered that you will need up to six-pages to provide enough detail and enough evidence to convince the evaluators. Therefore, writing only three pages probably means you have missed something out that

should be there to strengthen your arguments *to get the money!* You probably need to add more detail to existing statements, or new types of information to ensure that *every* possible opportunity has been taken to convince the evaluators that you will achieve what you say you will do. If you have been given six pages, then you should probably be filling up at least five of them with information, detail, evidence and justification.

#### 4) Ensuring consistency

The last of the four problem areas to avoid in your **philosophy for success** is to ensure **consistency** in what you say throughout your proposal. It is *very easy* for you to make mistakes in consistency because you write the text bit by bit over several weeks or months, but evaluators read your whole proposal in just a few hours, and for them any inconsistency will be easy to see:

‘The total budget presented in Part A differs from that in Part B of the proposal.’

Here are two examples of inconsistency present in drafts of REGPOT proposals:

1. Improving staff management skills was given as one of the project objectives, but no activity was described specifically to improve staff management skills. So, make sure that for every project objective you provide some text as an activity in a WP somewhere that specifically targets the achievement of that objective. Don’t leave it to the evaluators to guess how this will happen!
2. Setting up a project website was not listed as an activity in any WP (typically it would occur in a WP describing either management or dissemination), yet ‘the project website’ was stated under Impact in Section 3 as a major resource for disseminating project progress and outputs! Therefore, if you refer to a project resource (website, database, new skills, etc.) at the end of the proposal under Impact, make sure you have described an activity to create that resource in a previous section of the proposal.

A typical sequence of statements to justify doing any activity in your project would be

- i) identify the need to do something
- ii) create an objective to satisfy that need
- iii) describe the work to be done to achieve that objective
- iv) give the impact of achieving that objective/need.

To be consistent you have to make sure text for all four of these components is in your proposal somewhere.

Achieving consistency in what you say throughout your proposal is a major challenge, so constantly check what you have said elsewhere in the proposal, especially getting near to the submission deadline when you are trying to fit the person-months and budget to the activities, and vice versa. Qualitative and quantitative changes to activities are frequently necessary during this process and inconsistencies in the texts can easily arise.

[‘... there are inconsistencies in the presentation of project objectives. The longer term objectives of the institute are confused with the short term objectives of this proposal. As a result, it is difficult to link objectives with relevant tasks.’

‘The description of management is elaborated in detail but there is no consistency between the text and the management structure sketch.’

‘Person Months allocation per WP is not consistent between individual tables for WP and the Work Package list ...’]

#### **8. Keeping evaluators awake and in a good mood**

Before you write any text for your proposal, put together a glossary (collection) of key words that will impress the evaluators, such as:

- dynamic

- innovative
- cutting-edge
- dedicated
- enthusiastic
- state-of-the-art

Then, use these words every so often as you type the text. Indeed, the background documentation and Work Programme itself will often several words that you should try to include here and there, such as **unlocking, excellence, reinforce, creativity, dynamic actors, synergies, up-scaling, "innovation engines", leading-edge.**

Keep the evaluators in a good mood by giving them a well-presented document free of simple spelling mistakes, with **consistent** formatting. Make sure to use your word processing software's 'spell-checker' (setting the computer language to English first!) before submitting the final document.

[Furthermore little care was given to the presentation of the proposal (spelling errors, graphics hardly readable) which makes the reading difficult.]

First impressions are important. An applicant who has not done any effective quality control of the text will shout "lack of care" at the evaluators. Evidence of lack of care putting your proposal together will imply to the evaluators either that you are not good at quality control and are likely to display lack of care in carrying out the project, or that you ran out of time for final quality control through bad planning of proposal preparation, so your time management skills may not be good enough to manage a large collaborative project effectively and on time. Either way, if you give the evaluators an impression of lack of care, ***you won't get the money!***

Take a notebook with you all day every day, so you can write down a good phrase, or a good idea, wherever you happen to be, even in the bath! An alternative might be to carry a 'dictaphone' (or mobile telephone with recording facilities) with you constantly to make sure you can record your thoughts. If you don't, there is a high probability that by the time you get back to typing your proposal, the brilliant idea of yours you had last night in the bath will have gone!

As stated above, use the **actual words** and **phrases** given in the Work Programme, Call and other programme background documents, to emphasise that your project takes account of these criteria. Also give occasional quotations taken from relevant (EU) strategy documents [using quotation marks and a reference to the source], as this is all evidence for the evaluators that you have done your homework and have identified official needs for what you plan to do.

As you gradually write the text of the proposal define any abbreviations in a list at the beginning. It is very easy to forget to define abbreviations in the text on first mention, and evaluators will find it frustrating to find a definition for an abbreviation given several pages after the abbreviation was first used - a frequent example of lack of **consistency**!

Part of your **philosophy for success** is also to keep your evaluators awake and focused on the facts in your proposal while they read it. Many proposals are just boring to read because of the style and presentation. So, make sure your proposal will be different; like a good book making the reader eager to turn the page to see what happens next. Therefore, it is very important to format your text to make it easy for the evaluators to read. Do not make your sentences or your paragraphs too long or the evaluator will lose focus on the key point(s).

Make it clear when one paragraph ends and the next begins, so avoid using the example of this sentence to start your paragraphs! Either use an indent or clearly separate the text between paragraphs, as used here:

- use subheadings, indents, underlining, etc and break up the text with tables or pictures occasionally, where possible, as shown in two example pages given below.

Note that some fonts are easier on the eyes at 5 pm in the afternoon than others. Information is often easier to assimilate (take in and understand fully) when written in *sans-serif* fonts such as Arial and Helvetica compared with Times and Times New Roman fonts. All this is designed to keep the evaluator's attention, even late in the afternoon when he/she gets to your proposal.

#### SMARTWHEAT Part B page 74 of 84

- drug-induced recombination between wheat and alien chromatin
  - detailed gene-based marker mapping of a yield QTL on 7AL
  - testing a candidate gene for the 7AL yield QTL effect
  - association mapping of yield QTL effects on 7AL in common and durum wheats
  - testing a candidate gene for *Lr19* in durum wheat
  - transfer of *Lr19* alien resistance gene to other wheats using cisgenics
  - allelic variation in *Yp* genes amongst alien species
  - effectiveness of particle bombardment as a vehicle for alien gene transfer
  - effects of *H. chilense* introgressions on durum wheat pigment contents
- Other spin-out publications on techniques and integrative aspects of the science are expected. Aspects of the science developing during the project will also be presented at scientific meetings and through existing EU dissemination platforms, such as the COST Action Tritigen.
- We expect aspects of the SMARTWHEAT science to impact beyond the immediate confines of research on wheat. The alien gene transfer technologies using drug-mediated induction of homologous pairing and recombination and particle bombardment are likely to have application in other crop species, not just within the gramineae, where alien gene transfer has a potentially major role to play in improving the crop.
- The research proposed for SMARTWHEAT is strongly aligned with several goals of the European Technology Platform 'Plants for the Future' strategic research agenda 2025:
- 1.2.1 Develop and produce sufficient ... plant raw materials,
    - deliverable 1.1 – *Diverse and affordable raw material for food*
    - deliverable 1.2 – *Plant raw materials with improved characteristics for producing nutritionally enhanced and more attractive food*
  - 3.2.1 Improve plant productivity and quality
    - deliverable 1.1 – *Identify key drivers of plant yield productivity and stability*
    - deliverable 1.3 – *Climatic changes and plant tolerance to non-biotic factors*
  - 3.2.2 Reduce and optimise the environmental impact of agriculture
    - deliverable 2.2 – *Improve tolerance and resistance to pathogens and other biotic factors*
    - deliverable 2.4 – *Reduce the utilisation of water resources and fertilisers*
  - 3.2.3 Enhance biodiversity
    - deliverable 3.4 – *Improve crop and tree biodiversity through the introgression of traits from wild relatives*
    - deliverable 4.1 – *Creating segregating populations from core collections and mapping agronomic traits through QTL analysis*
    - deliverable 4.1 – *Introgression of specific loci into elite varieties*
    - deliverable 4.1 – *Perform conventional breeding for yield and agronomic performance*
  - 5.2.1 Public and consumer involvement
    - deliverable 1.1 – *Knowledge of plants*
    - deliverable 1.2 – *Improve mutual trust between the public and plant sector community*
- P3 has staff on the ETP Steering Council and is well placed to ensure dissemination of SMARTWHEAT's science through the 'Plants for the Future' technology platform.

#### Economic impact

With the dramatic doubling in grain prices during 2007 and subsequent fluctuations that have been a feature of the grain markets so far this season, it will be difficult to quantify the precise European economic benefit of the project. However, the economic consequence of increases in yield delivered through just one of the targeted traits for improvement, disease resistance, would be expected to be significant. A recent CIMMYT quotation [Plant Breeding News, 1 Oct 2006, 1.12] sums it up:

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"Every dollar spent on *all* wheat research at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico, has generated \$27 in benefits when measured *only* from the resistance it has produced for *one* disease (leaf rust) in *one* type of wheat (spring bread wheat). This is a benefit of \$5.36 billion (in 1990 dollars)."

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Assuming the same prices and disease incidence/control approaches against leaf rust each year in Spain, employing SMARTWHEAT advances would thus deliver potential annual savings of around €76 million. The same calculations could be done for other European countries where leaf rust is a problem, and for which *Lr19* would provide effective natural resistance. Therefore an effective source of resistance to leaf rust for European wheat varieties could potentially provide economic benefits of hundreds of millions of euros every year – a major, and guaranteed impact on Europe's economy.



Fig. B3.1.1. Plots of a durum wheat line having a 7Ag terminal segment carrying *Lr19* (left), and the corresponding line without *Lr19* (right). Inset images show typical leaves from the two plots.

The effectiveness of *Lr19* in providing protection against leaf rust is illustrated in Fig. B3.1.1, for trials by P2 in 2007. The year 2007 was a bad year for leaf rust in several regions of Italy, associated with generally high summer temperatures which encourage pathogen development. In the absence of chemical fungicide protectants, micro trials conducted around Italy on advanced breeding lines carrying *Lr19* delivered yields, on average, 66% greater than controls (Table B3.1.1) under heavy rust epidemic (West coast). No yield penalty was observed under mild or absent leaf rust pressure (East coast and North).

Table B3.1.1. Yield performance of *Lr19*-carrying durum wheat recombinant lines compared to adapted varieties used as controls (2-3 per locality; control means = 100).

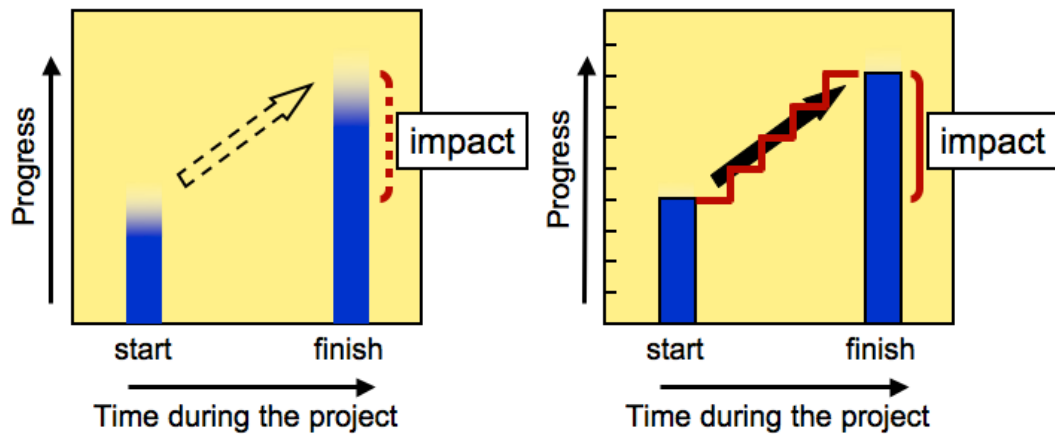
	Localities		
	West-Coast	East-Coast	North
<i>Lr19</i> + lines vs. controls	166**	101 <sup>ns</sup>	102 <sup>ns</sup>

Nevertheless, these economic impacts would be present only if resistance to the disease is not readily overcome by the pathogen. A major problem for breeders, which discourages many from turning to alien species for sources of disease resistance is the speed and frequency with which single gene resistance can be overcome by the pathogen. Although an average time for disease resistance genes to remain effective is difficult to give, breeders agree that around 5-20 years is a realistic range. However, a strategy to extend the useful

Pages 4-11, above, showed you how to read and interpret the policy document (Work Programme) to ensure that what you write is competitive. This section of the “Secrets to Success” document on your **philosophy for success** showed you how to put together your proposal to make sure it will be the **best** that the evaluators will read. Only if you can do that will you guarantee to **get the money!** If you have understood this section, then you understand the philosophy of being successful at writing project proposals.

So, to summarise, the **philosophy for success** is to know how to convert the left-hand figure, below, into the right-hand figure by removing the “*fog*”, whilst giving best value-for-money:





The rest of this document focuses on organisational aspects of putting your project proposal together, using an FP7 REGPOT proposal as a typical example of a multi-partner international EU-funded project.

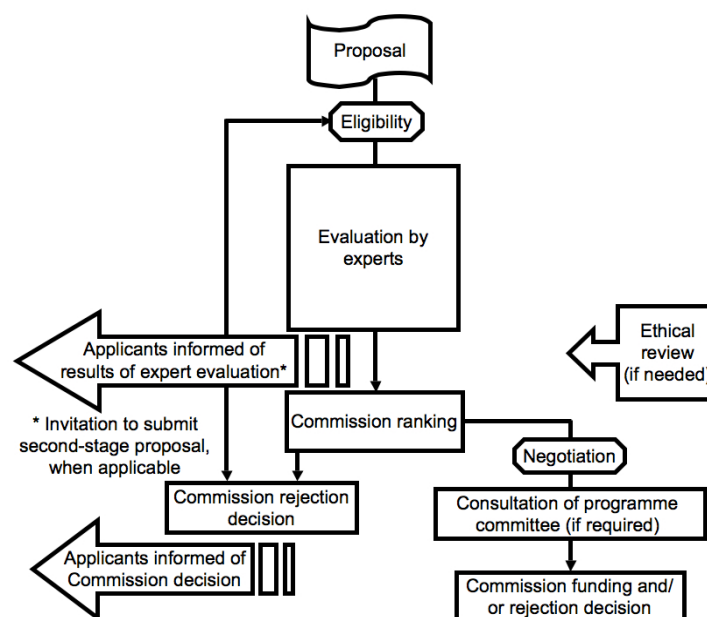
## 9. Organisational strategy

This section is concerned with deciding whether you go ahead with a proposal for a multi-partner international project, and if you do, then advice on how you organise your time to make sure that everything comes together by the call deadline.

### *Do you go ahead?*

You need to consider the following factors:

- Can you (and colleagues) commit enough time to put together a competitive project proposal? For a multi-partner international EU project you should plan to give yourself at least three months to get everything completed by the submission deadline, and preferably up to six-months to include concept planning, gathering background information, carrying out a needs analysis and identifying potential consortium partners.
- Can you satisfy all the eligibility criteria of the call for proposals? Once you have submitted your proposal and the call deadline has been reached, the evaluation process will start with a technical analysis of eligibility criteria, as illustrated below for FP7. These



criteria will vary for different programmes and sometimes also for calls each year within a programme. The text for an FP7-KBBE call eligibility criteria is typical:

For this call, a proposal will only be considered eligible if it meets all of the following conditions:

- It is received by the Commission before the deadline given in the call fiche
- It is complete (i.e. both the requested administrative forms and the proposal description are present)
- The content of the proposal relates to the topic(s) and funding scheme(s), including any special conditions set out in the relevant parts of the work programme
- The proposal complies with the EC contribution threshold indicated for each topic in the work programme and the call fiche
- It involves at least the minimum number of participants given in the call fiche

Your project idea has got to fit into the needs of the funding scheme. Thus, several FP7-REGPOT proposals have been rejected each year as ineligible, because the activities (the description of the work to be done, which has sometimes differed from the applicant's stated project objectives!) were not going to result in achieving the funding scheme's 'Expected impact'. In the example above, if you don't have at least the minimum number of participants given in the call fiche, then your proposal will get rejected at the start of the evaluation procedure, shown in the figure above. Other funding schemes include a particular mix of partner types (industry, governmental, non-European partners, etc.) as eligibility criteria. So, if you know you can't meet the eligibility criteria for the funding scheme, do you want to waste your time by writing a proposal that **won't get the money!**

- Can you put together a winning consortium of partners with sufficient 'Expected impact'? Simply satisfying the minimum requirements for the funding scheme is not usually (indeed, rarely) enough **to get you the money**, because the level of competition in most EU funding schemes is very high. This means almost certainly that another proposal submitted at the same time as yours would have a better consortium of partners, to achieve better 'Expected impact' than yours. For many FP7 collaborative research projects, the minimum number of partners for proposal eligibility has been three partners in three different member states or associated countries. In one FP7 theme for collaborative research projects in 2012, of nearly 400 proposals submitted the smallest consortium of partners to get funding was **six** (two proposals) and the average consortium size for success was almost 17 partners! So, can you find at least five other partners **well distributed around Europe**? The more of Europe your consortium represents, the greater your 'Expected impact' is likely to be. If you can't achieve this, you are **unlikely to get the money**.
- For a research project, a crucial question you need to ask when thinking about putting a project proposal together is "Will the research be evaluated as being competitive with the best in Europe?". If the answer is 'No' or 'Unlikely' then think seriously whether you should go ahead at this time. For FP7, it has usually been the quality of the proposed research that has had a predominant influence on evaluators' views on a proposal, most of the evaluators being practising researchers themselves and often expert specifically in your subject area. In general, if they don't like the science, it doesn't matter how good the rest of the proposal is; it is **unlikely to get the money**.

### *Timetable of events*

Some steps in the timetable of events described below will inevitably happen sequentially, but many will happen in parallel, and frequently recurringly, so do not take the numbered order shown on pages 32-37 as 'gospel'. Many steps in the proposal preparation phase will need to be revisited as new information comes in, new ideas develop, or problems are

identified - a typical one being that your first calculation of the total project cost will be over the maximum allowed by the funding source!

1. Assuming you have decided to bite the bullet and go ahead, you are strongly encouraged to start putting together your project ideas before the call is officially published. Calls for many EU programmes are published once a year, so knowing when previous years' calls were published will usually be a good guide to when the next call will be published. Other programmes may publish calls twice a year. If you wait until the call is published you may be too late to put together a good quality proposal. For example, many of the main calls in FP7 were published each year during July. That means for many scientists that they can't do anything substantive in putting a proposal together until September, when people get back from their holidays. This is valuable time lost, increasing the risk of a poor quality proposal that *won't get the money*! Note also point 10 below: a lot (*a lot*) of time can be wasted just waiting for email replies from others, whose level of commitment and appreciation of the concept of urgency may differ from yours!

2. Once you know the date of the proposal submission deadline prepare a draft 'Action Plan' for yourself for putting the proposal together, based on the suggested timings shown here (below). Make sure you allow for time lost by other "essential" activities: state holidays, birthday celebrations, family holidays, conference absences, teaching commitments, etc! Start with the submission date and work backwards, allowing at least 1-2 working days to complete everything before the "Submit" button needs to be clicked.

3. Having identified a suitable funding source and call topic, start developing your initial idea on what *you* would like to do into a project concept targeting what the *funder* would like you to do. At this stage that would include a list of suitable objectives (to target as much of the 'Expected impact/outcomes' as possible, together with a list of potential project partners that you could approach.

4. Next, put together your team who will help you (hopefully) to put everything together. You need to decide who will write the proposal and what support will be available from others for this. Although it is possible for one person to do everything, firstly that person will need to commit themselves essentially full-time for several months to putting the proposal together; and secondly the expression "two heads are better than one" applies, meaning that others may also be able to contribute useful ideas and information. Within your organisation, however, it is better for only one person to do all the writing, with other members of the team helping to provide information that will need to be written into the proposal. If key sections of the proposal are written by different people, inconsistencies will be inevitable.

5. Start gathering together the relevant call documentation, and other documents you know you will need to find the evidence for all those **Inputs** listed in the figure on page 12: needs analysis, state-of-the-art, partner justification, existing excellence, capacity and resources, and so on. This is where your team can help to identify, download and read the necessary background documentation (strategy and policy documents, funding programme topic areas, etc).

6. Items 2 to 5 are likely to take at least a month to sort out, with a number of team meetings to compare notes and discuss who needs to do what, who knows what and who knows who. It will also be helpful during this early period to meet as many of your planned project consortium members as possible. Face-to-face meetings with partners of an international consortium will obviously have cost implications, but at least communicate verbally (telephone, Skype, ...) to discuss and describe what each partner is expected to contribute, both to the proposal and to the project.

7. These meetings, email exchanges and discussions within your team and with consortium

partners are likely to continue during the whole process of proposal preparation, and as the deadline approaches, the need for getting quick replies from consortium partners increases. Make sure your consortium partners are aware of the urgency and importance of constant communication.

8. As soon as you have collected all the information from documents and other partners that is needed to define your first bar in the figure on page 12, and you have decided on your project objectives, according to the expectations of the funding scheme, then start developing your strategy to achieve maximum 'Expected impact' for your project. This will help you identify the activities you will need to describe. Once you know what sort of activities are required to achieve each of the project objectives, then you put together a suitable Work Breakdown Structure (Work Package in FP7) where you will describe all the activities/tasks/work to be done during the project. A separate Work Package (WP) for each project objective (plus other Work Packages for project management, dissemination and any other obligatory Work Packages required by the funding scheme) will help you to be consistent in describing how the project will achieve its objectives. Evaluators will appreciate this.

9. Once you have identified the scope of the activities and you have a reasonable idea of who is going to do what, you are in a position to think about a project budget. If the balance of activities amongst partners is likely to be similar for everyone, then identify a target maximum project budget to aim at (taking into account the amount or proportion that the funder will provide and how much co-financing partners will need to provide). Take off around 10% for contingencies (to distribute as necessary to partners nearer the final stages of proposal preparation), then divide the remainder by the number of partners. Tell each partner this is their budget that they should work to, and prepare your battle dress to defend yourself from the inevitable 'slings and arrows' of complaint that will come your way! Remind partners, if necessary, that without all your efforts nobody will get *any* money!

10. You will find that the longest part of the whole process of putting your proposal together will be identifying what information you need and then getting it - looking up documents on the internet and reading them, waiting for your colleagues and research partners to reply to email requests for information, as well as arguing over objective priorities and how to achieve them, and then how to achieve them for the available budget. The shortest time is for actually typing the text of the proposal!

11. Nearer the deadline (around two weeks to go), put someone in charge of testing the electronic proposal submission system and learning how to use it.

Note that for research projects from FP7 and its successor Horizon 2020, every participating institution in the consortium will need to have a PIC (Partner Identification Code) number. If you or any partner does not have a PIC number, you (they) are strongly advised to apply for one on Cordis as soon as possible: [http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/pp\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/pp_en.html). However, before you do this, you should search on the Cordis website to check whether your institution already has been given a PIC number at the following web address: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/appmanager/participants/portal?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=searchorganisations#wlp\\_searchorganisations](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/appmanager/participants/portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=searchorganisations#wlp_searchorganisations). If you want to search the Cordis PIC number database, remember to search for both local language and English versions of your institution name! If not, you may end up by registering your institution a second time with the Commission, *which has already happened in Serbia (twice)*. Further, if this happens, the consequences are *immense* administrative problems sorting out with the Commission which version of the PIC administrative details will be used if your proposal gets to the Mainlist for grant negotiations. Your institution PIC number for FP7 is expected to

remain the same for Horizon 2020. Other EU-funding programmes for 2014-2020 are not expected to require a PIC at present.

Once you have a PIC for FP7 or Horizon 2020, filling in Part A of your proposal (the administrative details) in the EPSS becomes much easier - you enter your PIC at the beginning and the majority of boxes in Part A are filled automatically! Using the PIC for your institution also ensures that you do not enter inconsistent or incorrect information in Part A.

12. Familiarise yourself with the Check List advice in the Guide for Applicants to make sure you prepare everything you need in good time. The Check List for some funding schemes says ‘**Do you have the agreement** of all the members of the consortium to submit this proposal on their behalf?’. As soon as you have identified who all your consortium partners will be, and identified how they will contribute to the project, you should make sure that the relevant authorized person from those partner institutions sends you a letter agreeing to take part in your project and identifying what staff and resources will be made available for the project. As a signature and institution seal would be expected on this letter to guarantee its authenticity, you will need to ensure enough time for the original to arrive. It can then be scanned, appended to your proposal document and then the whole document converted into a single pdf file for uploading into the Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS).

13. Writing the main text of the proposal can start as soon as you have completed items 1 to 8 above. It is probably sensible to write sections of the proposal in the order in which they occur in the application form. Once you are writing the text and need to insert information that is not immediately available, a good way to use the time effectively is to insert “??” where the information is missing, and continue writing. Every so often, search your document for “??” and fill in the missing information as it comes to you.

As you type each section, it is good practice to put the corresponding text of the Guide for Applicants underneath the section heading, so you can constantly remind yourself of what you need to write. If you do not do this, you may forget to say something that you are expected to do. For example in section 3.1 of the FP7 REGPOT programme, the guidelines say:

### **3.1 Expected impacts listed in the work programme**

Describe how your project will contribute towards the expected impacts listed in the work programme in relation to the topic or topics in question. Mention the steps that will be needed to bring about these impacts. Explain why this contribution requires a European (rather than a national or local) approach. **Indicate how account is taken of other national or international research activities. Mention any assumptions and external factors that may determine whether the impacts will be achieved.**

Without this text visible at all times, you may forget to say something about taking account of other national research activities, and you may forget to respond to the instructions highlighted in red which require you to mention any assumptions and external factors that may prevent the impacts being achieved.

As you identify what activities you need to do, make a note in the corresponding WP to describe the detail of the activity once you get to writing the text of all the WPs. Also note in the section on expected impact whether you need to say anything about the impact of the activity. That way, you will ensure you are consistent in what you write across the various sections of the proposal. Also, for research projects in FP7 and Horizon 2020, ensure consistency in the budget items between Parts A and B. This was a problem particularly for some FP7-REGPOT proposals!

**[The total budget presented in Part A differs from that in Part B of the proposal. Also, certain figures given in work packages are different from those presented under**

### Resources to be committed.']

14. For many EU funding schemes, especially FP7, the description of project impact and dissemination activities comes at the end of the proposal. Make sure that the proposal section(s) on expected project **impact** are not left to the last minute - many scientists find they are “running out of steam” and running out of time by the time they reach the final section on **impact**, so they don’t say as much as they should in this section. It is still worth in most cases **one third** of the total ESR marks, so it is just as important to do a good job on the text of the section on **impact** as it is for the other proposal sections.

15. If you write the proposal yourself, try to give yourself deadlines for completing each section of the proposal. For example, if targeting one of the FP7-REGPOT proposals, calls were published in July, with submission deadlines typically at the end of the year. Thus, for a deadline of 7th December, the following timetable for writing the proposal would have been appropriate (following several project concept meetings during July and August):

<u>Project section:</u>	<u>Target completion date:</u>
Part A abstract	Sep 5
Section 1.1 (Concept of the project)	Oct 5
Section 1.2 (Activity descriptions and WP tables)	Oct 19
Request letters of intent from EU partners	Oct 20
Section 2.1 (Management and risk analysis table)	Oct 26
Section 2.2 (probably only 1 page of text)	Oct 28
Section 3.1 (Expected impact)	Nov 4
Section 3.2 (Dissemination)	Nov 7
Section 2.3 (Consortium of partnering organizations)	Nov 11
Test that the EPSS works OK	Nov 11
Section 4 (Gender aspects)	Nov 18
Section 1.2 Gantt and PERT charts	Nov 22
Section 1.2 Milestones and deliverables tables	Nov 28
Section 1.2 Person-months	Nov 30
Section 2.4 Resources and budget	Dec 1
Add partner letters of agreement	Dec 3
Make a pdf version of all of Part B to check file size	Dec 3
Revisit the project abstract for Part A	Dec 4
Proof-read everything and check for consistency	Dec 5
Convert to pdf format and upload into the EPSS <b>before the deadline!</b>	

Once you have uploaded a complete version of the proposal, you can continue to make improvements to it until the deadline by uploading updated versions which will automatically replace previous versions.

[Note that the dates suggested above do not take account of weekends, but indicate the number of days needed to complete each section.]

Section 2.3 (describing the consortium partners and their roles in the project) should be completed after sections 3.1 and 3.2 (on impact and dissemination) as it will take some time to get all the necessary feedback from discussion with your partners on their roles within the project as well as their strengths, previous experience, etc, and complete the section on use of resources (personnel, equipment and financial) (section 2.4 in many FP7 proposals) near the end as this will need all the person-months to finalise all the personnel costs and other budget items. In contrast, you should know without a lot of discussion and calculation how your project will achieve the necessary Impact, typically Section 3 of FP7 proposals. These

proposal components are likely to be retained for Horizon 2020.

Note that for FP7, the administrative details given in Part A could be completed independently of Part B, as completing Part A is all done online through the EPSS. In this example above, the EPSS could be tested during the second half of November.

16. As soon as the main text of the proposal has been written, any images inserted, Gantt and PERT charts are available, and scanned letters of agreement from EU partners have been received, do a test conversion to a single pdf file to check that the file size does not exceed the limit allowed by the electronic submission system (10 Mbytes for the FP7 EPSS). You don't want to discover that your pdf file is too large at 16.00h on the submission deadline date! Note: you may need software to merge pdf files into a single document as Word will probably save each section of a document ('section break') as a separate pdf document.

Here are the timelines for a proposal for a large collaborative research proposal for FP7 (budget maximum up to €6 million):

FP7-KBBE-2009 DROUGHTWHEAT collaborative research proposal timelines (16 partners):

- 25 Feb 2008: First (confidential) WP draft for KBBE-2009 released - a very suitable project topic identified.
- Feb - end Apr: No interest in it as the result of a previous year's KBBE-2008 proposal was awaited.
- 29 Apr 2008: Informed that the KBBE-2008 proposal was unlikely to be funded - 11/15, above the threshold but probably low ranking, so need to wait for clarification.
- 3 Jun 2008: First email to a colleague suggesting a proposal for KBBE-2009 - topic identified and potential partners suggested.
- 18 Jun 2008: First draft of WP titles, and outline of WP tasks/partners.
- 18 Jun 2008: First draft of PERT diagram (subsequently extensively changed)!
- 24 Jul 2008: Call officially published, and final text very slightly different.
- July - end Aug: Holidays and thinking time, clarifying ideas.
- 9 Sep 2008: First email to the current potential project partners (8) asking for feedback and information for background and research contributions.
- Sept-Nov: Lots of email correspondence discussing partners and their science as well as collecting over 200 files of electronic background information.
- 29 Nov 2008: First draft of abstract, list of definite partners, list of partners to be asked, WPs with list of task headings, summary text of *needs analysis*.
- 5 Dec 2008: Start writing the full text of the proposal, with description of the concept.
- 7 Dec 2008: More detail to content of Work Packages and who will do what but still only 3 pages.
- 7 Dec 2008: First information to partners on budgets: the target for each to aim at.
- 9 Dec 2008: Project Advisory Board members suggested.
- 16 Dec 2008: Stock-taking of project activities so far - still **lots** of partner activities to sort out.
- 17 Dec 2008: Final project consortium partner (number 16) agreed to join.
- 19 Dec 2008: Starting to write the section on project Implementation (management, partner, consortium details).
- 24 Dec 2008: Now 102 pages of text.
- 29 Dec 2008: Starting to gather information to give 'added value' to the project impact (identifying EU institutions that would benefit by interacting with the project).
- 1 Jan 2009: Internal discussion on the proposal title to fit the acronym.
- 2 Jan 2009: First draft of all 9 WPs completed - lots of queries to clarify. Proposal eventually, after several problems, registered on the electronic submission website.
- 7 Jan 2009: Changed project length to 4.5 years instead of 4 - same budget.
- 11 Jan 2009: Parts 1 (the science and work to be done) and 2 (implementation) of the proposal essentially completed. Part 3 on Impact still to do.



- 12 Jan 2009: Tables of project Deliverables and Milestones completed. Tidying up missing information on partners, adding evidence for statements, etc. First calculation of total project person-months based on partner information.
- 13 Jan 2009: Administrative details of partners, including person-months and budgets, completed.  
First draft of the proposal uploaded into the electronic proposal submission website (only section 3 on Impact to tidy up).
- 15 Jan 2009: Constantly updating the submitted text to include feedback from partners, mainly for section 3, and some corrections of other sections.  
Final corrected version with 121 pages uploaded at 16.39.
- 15 Jan 2009: Submission deadline 17:00:00 Brussels time.
- 15 Jan 2009: Celebrate submission at a local restaurant.
- Epilogue: 27 Apr 2009 - ESR received from the Commission: score 13/15, ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>.  
Only one proposal funded!

Note that towards the end of the process, a second person was working almost full time on the administrative information for the proposal, which, because it had partners from around the world with several widely-differing time zones, led to many administrative difficulties, especially in achieving efficient partner communication. Despite coming third in the topic rank list of proposals, the result was ***no money!***

Although this is a genuine example, this timetable is not to be recommended! A total of 121 pages completed in only six weeks is unrealistic for the large majority of people to contemplate, especially if they have a full-time job! Nevertheless, for a large international project it illustrates realistically how long the whole process is likely to take between the first information on likely topics for a call and the proposal submission date - nearly one year.

## **10. Concluding remarks**

Once you have finished all the text, some final comments before you submit it: get your wife/husband/girlfriend/mother/cousin/man-next-door to read through the proposal because ***they*** will actually read the words whereas very often ***you*** will read what you expect to read!

Remember to go back and revisit your proposal abstract! Does it still summarise everything you plan to do? Then, when you have done that, think about what you wrote and answer the following five questions:

- Have you read all the instructions ***and implemented them?***
- Have you given sufficient evidence to justify all your statements?
- Have you given sufficient detail to activities to convince the evaluators that the project will achieve what you say it will achieve?
- Have you checked that the text of every section of the proposal is consistent?
- Have you justified adequately all your budget items to give good value for money?

If the answer to any of those questions is **not** 'Yes', then it is **unlikely** that you will get one or more perfect scores of 5/5 (or however proposals are scored for your funding scheme) and it is ***unlikely your proposal will be funded!***

Once your proposal gets to the evaluators, by the end of reading it the evaluators need to be saying -

- 'This looks a good quality proposal with very competitive ideas from applicants who **followed all the instructions.**'
- 'This is an excellent project concept, clearly justified and implemented with a **convincing amount of detail.**'
- 'It looks as if the proposed project will be managed competently, and will have a **significant impact.**'

- ‘It also looks **excellent value for money!** Indeed,...’
- ‘It looks the ***best*** proposal that I have reviewed. So..’
- ‘I shall give it a ***maximum score*** in every section, and..’
- ‘I recommend ***they are given the money!***’

If you can achieve this, then you have mastered the **Secrets to success with project proposals.**

Fingers crossed for you all!

Steve

Belgrade, September 2013.