RES briefing note 16: Horizon 2020 Masterclass, 14th Mar 2014

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> *This note highlights some of the tips and tools from Sean McCarthy's (Hyperion) masterclass to senior colleagues on writing a competitive Horizon 2020 proposal (Sussex, February 2014). Presentation slides from the class are available in electronic format from your RDO. A library copy of Sean McCarthy's handbook is available for browsing in our office and for sale at www.hyperion.ie*

The one page proposal: a tool for developing your research idea

The role of the one page proposal

→ To discuss the idea with your RDO / colleagues – does it fit? Where?
→ To discuss the idea with the Project Officer for the topic in Brussels
→ To help select and think about the appropriate panel and evaluators
→ To attract / find / discuss the idea with potential partners (be careful of your competitors!)
→ The one page proposal will be the essence and *starting point* of your proposal

The structure of a one page proposal

1. Official call number (if available) / Work Programme or Funding Scheme
2. Title of the proposal and acronym. Think of the title as the *slogan* for the project, it could be used in a sentence and be self-explanatory. If the title is the *slogan,* the Acronym is the '*Brand*', it makes sense in relation to the project and the title. The title should be based on the *expected impact* of the call. It is usually written last.
3. Objective: what are you planning to do
4. Background: why are you doing it (see the 5 key questions below)
5. Results: who wants them (Impact)
6. Phases: how the work will be done (Science)
7. Consortium: who will do the work
8. Cost / Duration: How much it will cost and duration

Five key questions

Evaluators do not spend much of time on each proposal. Answer these questions in your abstract, and in the first *15 seconds* of your proposal**.** Use them to develop your one page proposal. If you cannot address these 5 key questions is an indication that the idea is not suitable for Horizon 2020 and its chances of success are limited :

1. Why bother? (what problem are you trying to solve?)
2. Why is this / should this be European priority? Could it be solved at National level?
3. Is the solution / Is the knowledge already available?
4. Why now? (why was this not done before / why would it happen if this research was not done now?) *– this is the killer question*
5. Why you? (are you the *best* people to do this work?)

Tips for a successful proposal

Sell, don't tell. Make the evaluator feel your passion. In addition to having an excellent idea which is the basis of any successful proposal, researchers must *sell* the concept to the evaluators.

Have the evaluator and the evaluation criteria at the forefront when writing the proposal. Write your proposal around the evaluation criteria. Use the Self-Evaluation forms which show the questions the evaluators will mark you on. Understand the mind of the evaluator by becoming one (register as an expert on the Participant Portal).

Select the best partners and have an experienced coordinator. Finding a good Scientific Coordinator and a Research Manager is essential. Choose carefully: does the coordinator have previous Framework experience? Newcomers to EU research are advised to start as partners and gain experience from working as part of a consortium rather than leading one.

Educate the Evaluator by far the most important secret in writing any proposal. A proposal and a scientific papers are radically different beasts. A scientific paper is reviewed purely in the scientific content. The content of a H2020 research proposal is scientific, political, economic, and social, plus it includes a comprehensive project management section. It is essential to educate all of the evaluators (with facts and figures) on ALL of these issues. (with the exception of ERC where excellence is the only evaluation criteria). Use the **Five Key Questions**.

Make friends. EU research is all about being out there, building relationships. Build your networks through conferences, scientific networks, expert groups, associations, or previous projects. EU funds research networks for this reason: see COST actions.

Avoid general statements. For example:' *This proposal will improve the competitiveness of SMEs in the EU*'. A better one would be: '*This e-learning system will help Small and Medium Enterprises in rural areas of the EU to adapt to new EU legislation in Health and Safety*'.

Treat each section as if it is the most important section. The main part of the proposal (Part B) have three main sections: Scientific Excellence, Implementation and Impact. There are also three additional questions: ethics, gender and security issues. This is not like an exam (answering some questions and attempting others). Each section must be treated seriously.

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Think about presentation and the layout of the proposal. Use diagrams to explain complex concepts. Proof-read and check for spelling mistakes and overall flow of the narrative.

Writing style. Evaluators are from different EU countries, and in many cases English is their second (or third) language. Also, an evaluator has to read up to 15 proposal in a short period. Text should be written in simple plain English. Sentences should be short. Use diagrams an tables to explain concepts. Use quotations to support arguments, and put them in *italics*. **If there is an important sentence in the middle of a paragraph highlight it so the evaluator concentrates on it.**

Different parts of the proposal are written in different styles:

Abstract	Journalistic style
B1: Science	Scientific language
B2: Impact	Journalistic style
B3: Implementation	Management style

Writing the proposal: a timeline from call to deadline

Writing a proposal is a project, it must be managed and coordinated: planning, preparing, writing. Coordination and management of the process is crucial. The Coordinator is usually the researcher who is promoting the idea. The project is divided in work packages (WPs) , usually between 6 and 9. Each WP leader would usually be responsible for writing the text relating to their WP.

On average, it takes about **350 hours to write** a successful H2020 bid. This is a possible timeline:
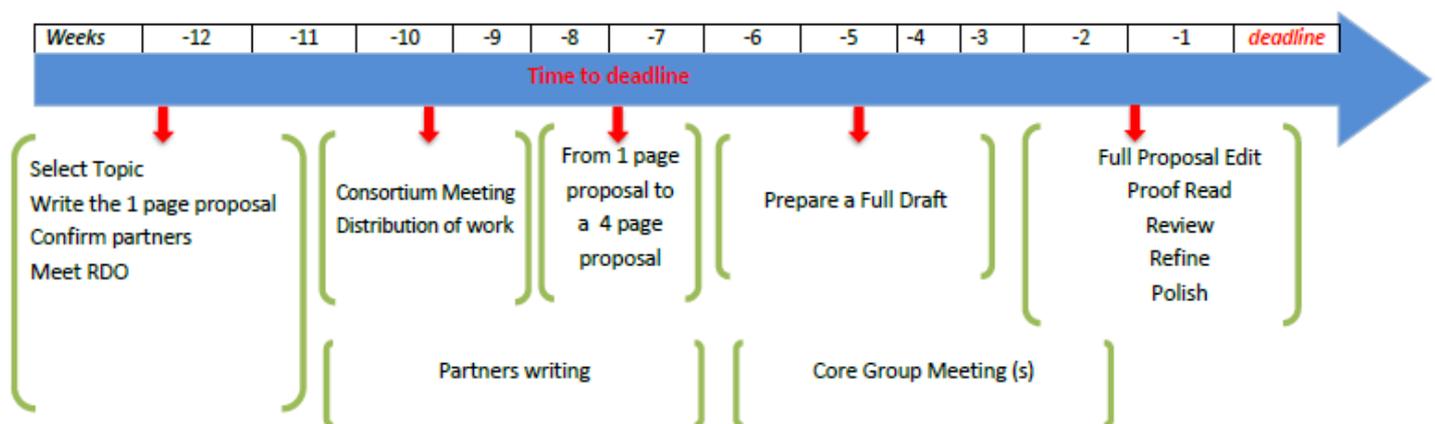
Where to find partners – a word of caution

CORDIS, UKRO website, Net4Society, LinkedIn, are possible gateways to find potential partners. However, the advice is to work with **reliable** partners with a *proven* record who you may already know through your networks. A collaborative proposal is a great effort and sizeable time investment. If funded consortia projects are huge undertakings. Work with partners you can trust. If a partner cannot be bothered to attend a proposal planning meeting , will they be reliable for getting the job done if the project is funded?

Acknowledgments, Hyperion course website and further information

The contents of this note are from Sean McCarthy's course and its accompanying manual*: 'How to Write a Competitive Proposal for Horizon 2020'* available at www.hyperion.ie

The webpage designed to support the course is www.hyperion.ie/h2020-proposalwebsites.htm

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