# UKRO Horizon 2020 Condensed

## Applying for Funding

Every researcher will have a different approach to the application process and a different experience of applying for European research grant funding. This factsheet gives pointers on particular things to bear in mind when applying for Horizon 2020 funding. The list is not exhaustive but is intended as a helpful resource to assist in the application process.

The factsheet is written particularly with collaborative funding applications in mind but much will also be applicable to mono-beneficiary applications.

All documents referred to are available through the Horizon 2020 **Reference Documents** section of the European Commission Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.

## Before starting the application

### Context and relevance of project

Applicants are advised to ensure that they are familiar with the aims and aspirations of Horizon 2020 before beginning an application in order to understand the context of their particular call topic and therefore the relevance of their proposed project. Good sources of information are:

- **Introduction to the Horizon 2020 Work Programme**. This sets out the general orientation of the overarching Horizon 2020 in any given period, and will refer to the overarching policy priorities which the programme as a whole is intending to address. Not only will familiarity with the programme provide an understanding of the scientific context of a call, but also awareness of cross-cutting issues important to consider when writing an application: examples are the innovation agenda, the expected multi-disciplinary problem-solving approach, the importance of socio-economic and humanities disciplines, gender issues and responsible research and innovation (RRI).
- **Introduction to the particular part of the Work Programme** (e.g. 'Societal Challenge 1: Health, Demographic Change and Wellbeing') in which the call topic features. This will refer to any more specific policies driving that particular area of the programme. There are also likely to be sub-headings and introductory texts for each grouping of topics, which can also provide direction. This is particularly important with the new design of the Participant Portal, which makes it very easy to read topics in isolation. Going back to the full relevant part of the Work Programme – which can all be found in the 'Reference Documents' section of the Participant Portal - can provide important contextual information.
- **The topic itself** may also refer to a particular strategic document which will help to determine where the topic came from, e.g., from a Joint Programming Initiative's Strategic Research Agenda, from a European Technology Platform, etc.
- Finally, don't forget **UKRO's factsheets** on each area, which point you towards some of the more important policy drivers behind the calls.

### Understanding the call topic

Everything in the topic description is important. Applicants are advised, in particular, to consider:

- The nature of the challenge posed by the topic;
- The scope of the topic – to ensure that their project approach (including the make-up of the project consortium) responds to any specific listed requirements.
  These may include:
  - Involvement of a particular type of stakeholder;
  - That the project should be industry led
  - An international (beyond Europe) component
  - The use of a specific data source
  - The need to particularly address gender or responsible research and innovation in the proposal
  - Addressing social sciences and humanities (SSH) involvement
- Whether their proposed project will satisfy the impact requirements of the topic. Assessors have been asked to pay particular attention to this in 2018-2020 calls.
- The funding vehicle for the topic – a description of what is expected from different funding vehicles can be found in the General Annexes to the work programme.
- The budget window given projects in the topic. Although it is not mandatory to stick within the estimated budget window for a topic, it does give a steer as to the appropriate duration / scale of the project and size of consortium which might be expected.

Applications which ignore large elements of the topic description are not likely to be successful, although it is possible that addressing most issues, but not all will receive favourable evaluation, provided the application justifies such approach, which in addition must be allowed in the topic text. It is unlikely that forcing a favourite project to fit a call topic will be successful.

### Meeting eligibility criteria

Standard eligibility criteria for call topics are listed in the General Annexes to the Horizon 2020 Work Programme. European Research Council (ERC) eligibility is given in the ERC work programme and eligibility for Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) is given separately in the MSCA conditions section of the Horizon 2020 work programme.

Any additional eligibility criteria relevant to a specific call topic will be given in the “Topic Conditions” and “Call documents” section for that topic.

A proposal will not be submitted for evaluation if it does not meet all eligibility requirements.

### Who do you need in a consortium?

For collaborative bids, the general rule is that you need at least three legal entities from three different EU Member States or Horizon 2020 Associated Countries. Once you have this ‘core’, you can add additional partners from the same countries, from other EU Member States / Associated Countries, or from ‘third countries’. Bear in mind that only third countries listed in annex A to the Horizon 2020 Work Programme are automatically eligible for funding. Even if a topic suggests, for example, that a partner from Brazil would be advisable, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they will be eligible to receive EU funding.

In addition to the eligibility criteria, you need to think about the requirements of the topic. Does it suggest that you need partners from a particular geographical region, sector or discipline? How might your partners contribute not just to the research but also to the impact required in the topic description? Do you need to include end users, industrial representatives, policy-makers or NGOs? Is your consortium appropriately interdisciplinary in order to address the topic? How will you ensure that any research outcomes will be exploited fully?

In terms of European added value, it is important to show that it is a genuinely 'European' project, with the funding and activities spread out between partners from the different countries represented in the consortium; but equally, it is important to ensure that you have the best partners in terms of the activities that you have described, and to show that each is making a valuable contribution. There is little point in adding a 'token' partner that is actually contributing very little in order to tick a perceived box relating to geographical spread.

## Finding partners

The most obvious starting point is to think about **people with whom you already have direct or indirect connections**. People with whom you or other partners have already worked are the safest bet. Think broadly about institutional links as well as your own personal ones.
Another good idea is to look at the **CORDIS database of previously-funded projects**. This is a good idea in any case, to gain an idea of the projects that have already been funded in each area; but in addition, each project description lists a named co-ordinator and list of partner institutions on each project, which can give you an idea of the people who have already experienced success within your field.

**Events, conferences and workshops** can be invaluable for building connections, as can **official European Commission Information Days** relating to the calls, which often include brokerage sessions in which those intending to submit projects make presentations with the hope of finding additional partners. Even if you cannot attend these in person, event websites will increasingly publish lists of attendees / project presentations, which can be a valuable resource. For early information and updates on relevant events in your discipline, sign up to receive email alerts from the **UKRO Portal**.

**European Technology Platforms** are industry-led stakeholder groups who help to shape the European research and innovation agenda in their respective areas of expertise. Reading their strategic agendas can help to inform bids in the more industrial sections of Horizon 2020, and they can provide valuable networking opportunities and enable the identification of potential industrial partners. Also useful in this respect are **European Innovation Platforms** (EIPs), which aim to bring together all relevant actors working in a particular area. There are currently five EIPs – more details can be found on the ERA Learn **website**.

Also useful in terms of connecting with industry is the **European Enterprise Network**; universities can use them find companies for their Horizon 2020 bids; while at the same time companies often use them to find universities to join/coordinate their projects. This matchmaking is done through a **Partner search database** featuring projects and technologies that need partners; the EEN can also occasionally contact potential partners in other countries directly.

**Partner Searches** are also available through various NCP groupings, the Research Participant Portal, the Informal Group of RTD Liaison Offices (IGLO) of which UKRO is a part, and the UKRO portal. We do advise applicants, however, to use these sparingly and with caution, and to ensure that any potential partners recruited in this way are clear of what is expected of them.

### Coordinator/Project partner roles

Project consortia must decide who will lead (coordinate) the application. The coordinator will be responsible for leading the project if it is selected for funding including managing project finances, monitoring compliance and representing the Consortium vis-à-vis the Commission. Partner beneficiaries are responsible only for delivering their part of the project and managing their share of the funding.

Normally, assessors will be looking for experience of managing large-scale grants from the Co-ordinator, which is something to bear in mind when making the decision as a consortium.

## The application

### Process

All applications must be submitted through the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal using templates and forms provided for the particular topic. Applicants without an EU Login (formerly ECAS) account will need to first create one through the “Register” button in the top right corner of the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal. To start an application and to access the relevant application templates the “Submission Services” tab should be used against the specific topic on the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal. It is the project coordinator’s responsibility to submit the application. The coordinator must therefore initiate the submission process and then give all project partners access to the online form.

### Deadline

Call deadlines are absolute. Missed deadlines (for whatever reason) will mean that your project will not be evaluated. UK researchers should note in particular that call deadlines are in Brussels time: UK time is one hour behind Brussels time so a 5 p.m. Brussels deadline will mean 4 p.m. UK time.

To avoid last minute submission problems and a missed deadline, it is strongly recommended that:

- The administrative section of the application is completed well before the deadline
- The main part of the proposal (the technical annex) is uploaded on the system and the application submitted as soon as a workable draft is available
- Any required attachments are uploaded to the application well before the deadline

The application text can be refined (and administrative data changed) and the application resubmitted an unlimited number of times up to the call deadline. Submission may fail if any mandatory administrative data is incomplete or if mandatory attachments are missing. Submitting early will enable required action to be taken before the call deadline.

The submission system can slow down close to deadlines and there is no appeal for missing a deadline in the event of local systems failure or power cuts.

### Structure and format

Templates are provided for the main part of the application. Page limit and format guidance is given. This should be followed: material that exceeds given page limits will be marked as such and evaluators are instructed not to consider it.

Applicants should ensure they are aware of the standard application admissibility criteria – contained in the General Annexes to the Work Programme – and any topic specific admissibility criteria (which will be given in the topic conditions and documents).

### Evaluation considerations

When drafting a proposal researchers will want to be aware of the criteria that will be applied at evaluation stage. An explanation of the evaluation process and general evaluation criteria are given in the General Annexes to the Work Programme. Also included is an explanation of how projects will be differentiated in the event of same score ranking after evaluation.

In general, for collaborative projects, there are three assessment criteria: Excellence, Implementation and Impact. These are normally given equal weighting, other than in ‘Innovation Actions’, where the Impact section is weighted at 1.5. For some topics additional evaluation criteria apply. Where this is the case these are explained in the topic conditions and documents.

Applicants may like to note the following points particularly:

- The number of pages allocated to a specific area in the application template does not necessarily correlate directly with the importance of that area in the evaluation process. Care should be taken to address all evaluation criteria appropriately
- Project budgets should be realistic for the work proposed: If budgets are deemed inappropriately high by evaluators this will be reflected in a reduced score under the 'Implementation' heading

A set of project self-evaluation forms has been provided on the Participant Portal. It is highly recommended that applicants use these for in-house and/or peer group review of their projects before final submission.

Some tips to bear in mind when drafting the different parts of the application:

- **Excellence:** In Horizon 2020, 'excellence' refers to both research and innovation excellence. Some things to think about are: How well does the proposal fall within the topic scope? How 'frontier' or cutting edge is the research? How 'innovative' is the project? Will it make a significant contribution and progress existing knowledge? Are disciplinary boundaries being crossed (where appropriate)?
- **Implementation:** Have you fully justified your budget? Does your consortium match with the activities in the proposal and have an appropriate balance of sectors? Do you have a sound decision-making mechanism? Do you have an advisory board?
- **Impact:** Have you shown convincingly exactly how the project will achieve the impacts set out in the topic description? Have you thought about the academic impact – publications? Conferences? Data-management? Have you thought about the socio-economic impact – growth? Job creation? Potential market size? Management of IP? Regular review of exploitation potential? Policy outputs? Social benefits? Have you addressed public engagement? A communication / media / social media strategy? Involvement of user groups? Education? Finally, is impact addressed and reviewed throughout the project, or is it simply 'bolted-on' in the last few months? The former tends to score more highly than the latter!

## Costing

Funding for collaborative projects under Horizon 2020 (and ERC projects) for participants from the academic sector is 100% of direct costs plus an indirect overhead of 25% (indirect costs are not paid on subcontracting costs). Best estimates of costs calculated through partner institutions' usual costing tool are usually sufficient at application stage.

The Annotated Horizon 2020 Model Grant Agreement provides full details of eligible costs and how these will be calculated during a successful project's life. These will include

- Staff time – permanent and new staff including students
- Depreciation cost of equipment, consumables
- Meeting costs
- Travel

Costs that are sometimes overlooked, but which, in principle, are eligible include:

- Audit costs
- IPR-related costs

- Open access publishing (during the lifetime of the grant)
- Project manager/administrator
- VAT – if not otherwise recoverable

If the project is likely to need any element of subcontracting, applicants should make this clear in the project budget. Subcontracting costs incurred in a funded project may be disallowed if not described in the project budget; full information on subcontracting is available in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement. Applicants should note particularly that subcontracting is **not** permitted between beneficiaries on a grant; and core activities of the project cannot be subcontracted.

Application coordinators may wish to note that the funding rate for profit-making partners in collaborative projects depends on the funding vehicle for the specific call topic (applicable rates are given in the descriptions of funding vehicles in the General Annexes to the Horizon 2020 Work Programme). All partners on the proposal should agree the approximate budget distribution for the project before the submission of their application.

Note that a different financial regime applies to MSCA actions. Some other elements of Horizon 2020 also have different funding rules – e.g. prizes.

## Open Science

Open access is mandatory across Horizon 2020. Full information including implications for the content of applications is given in guidance accessible through “Horizontal Aspects” under “Horizon 2020 Grants Manual” on the Horizon 2020 Reference Documents page.

## Gender

Gender equality is a horizontal theme running through Horizon 2020 – this refers to both gender balance of project teams, and the gender dimension of project research content. Applicants will need to address this when drafting applications. The Commission’s position is set out in **the Gender section** of the Participant Portal Online Manual.

## Institutional approval of participation in a project proposal

It is strongly recommended that coordinators ensure they have approval at the correct institutional level for the participation of researchers from their partner institutions in the project. This will avoid potential difficulties at the award stage. In addition, the administrative part of the application now includes a declaration that the coordinator has the explicit consent of all applicants to their participation in the proposal.

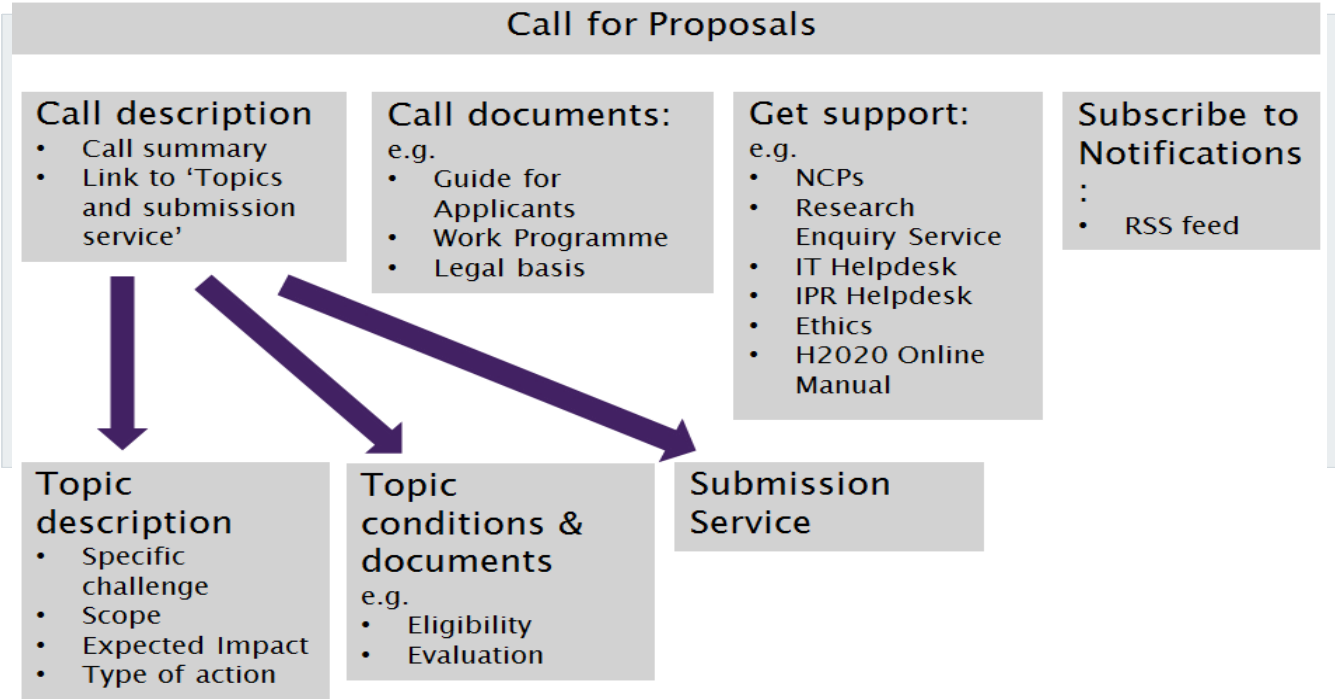
## Two-stage applications

Many Horizon 2020 calls are operating a two-stage application process, the first stage of which is submission of summary information on a short-form template. There may be little time between notification of success at first stage and the deadline for second stage submissions.

Note that applications are not supposed to change substantially between stages one and two; changes in budget or the partnership do not normally constitute a substantial change, but the Commission may penalise second-stage proposals where the conceptual basis or methodology has completely changed, objectives of the work have been significantly altered, or where advance beyond the state of the art has been significantly reduced.

## Support

The Commission does not provide pre-submission checks on proposals. Guides for applicants are provided only for MSCA and ERC calls. The Commission position is that sufficient information is provided for potential applicants in the work programme and in call and topic specific conditions and documents available through the Participant Portal. Furthermore, detailed information on how to apply and manage a grant can be found in the Horizon 2020 Online Manual. The Commission's recommendation is that for advice on proposal content-related issues applicants should consult the relevant National Contact Points. A list of National Contact Points is provided through the Support tab on the home page of the Participant Portal. A glossary of terms and FAQs, many of which relate to specific calls and topics, are also available through this tab. For ease of reference, the schematic below shows where to find information when accessing the Participant Portal through a specific call.




### More information:

- All documents referred to in this factsheet are also available through the Horizon 2020 Reference Documents section of the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal at: **ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/reference_docs.html**
- Sign up to the UKRO Portal to stay up to date on Horizon 2020 general developments, calls, events and results: **ukro.ac.uk**
- For specific questions, contact your UKRO European Advisor.