

EU Research Trends

It is here now! Horizon 2020. There is no turning back. A few more hiccups of a formal character but it has been approved by the Council and the European Parliament and is now official. Tomorrow (11 December) we will see the first calls for proposal with deadlines end of March/early April.

Among the smaller hiccups is that DG Competition doubts whether the 70 % financial support to SME's is legally possible according to competition laws (although they have not raised this issue before). However, if - as expected - it will be adopted anyway in today's council meeting, a solution will have to found afterwards.

It should be noted that already announced deadlines for this call and the process in general are expected to be kept - for the vast majority. One reason for this being that the Commission is obliged to reply to applicants within five months from the call deadline, which makes changes rather difficult.

Work programmes

A gentleman's agreement between the Commission and the Council about making quite a few changes in the 2015 work programme (whereas the 2014-work programme naturally is fixed) makes it recommendable not to rely too much on the text for 2015 as it is now. New topics are not expected but changes in the text and concerning the balance within the topics is expected to be adjusted.

Concerning the work programmes, a more regular process is to be expected for the rest of the life span of Horizon 2020. During the last eight to nine months, the Commission has had to execute the work with preparing two work programmes where it normally takes around one (academic) year to prepare one work programme. Adding to this, the process has been new and ever changing and many more DG's have been involved than previously known. No doubt, the Commission has been under tremendous work pressure over the last year and in particular since September. This also explains why the Commission has exploited the legislative loophole, which is that Horizon 2020 has not been officially adopted until now in order to evade the normal comitology process.

The future work in the Commission

Due to the work overload in the Commission (as mentioned above) or more specifically in DG RTD, there seem to be no real plan for the further process (for the process after the calls tomorrow and in early 2014). However, what is expected is that DG RTD in early 2014 will focus on the amendments for the 2015 work programme. After the summer break 2014, work is expected to begin with the 2016-17 work programme as well as the next strategic programme. A more normal work process is expected with the publication of the 2016-17 work programme to be published during summer 2015.

A major reshuffle is presently taking place in DG RTD so far involving 14 leading positions and during 2014, it is foreseen that another 40 leading positions (out of around 70 in total) will be involved. A new organisational chart is being worked out (temporary so far), which I am in possession of and can distribute, if anyone is interested.

Because around 55 % of the budget will be implemented during agencies (ERC, REA and EASME) - that is receiving the applications, evaluate the work programmes etc. - around 300 positions will be moved from DG RTD to the agencies during 2014.

First wave of applications - what to expect?

The [participant's portal](#) has already been launched and most information is accessible although the work programmes will not be available until tomorrow, 11 December. The financial guides are generally not yet ready and it is questionable when they will be. Most sources predict some time 'before Easter.' However, a guide for applicants should be available already by now or at least very soon.

The application system as such is mostly as we know it from FP7 - slightly adjusted to e.g. fit the new topics. B2 and B3 (implementation and impact, respectively) have changed places to reflect the new emphasis on impact. In reality, it only means that the evaluators will read the impact part slightly before the implementation part.

During the last calls under FP7, we experienced a few problems (during some calls) with applications that were slightly longer than the allowed page limit. This *should* have been changed in the new system in order *not* to make the application ineligible if exceeded but only to leave out the actual excess pages. In the longer run, the system should become able to warn the applicant when the number of pages allowed is being exceeded.

The system has been tested during a Marie Curie call where it managed to receive approximately 5,000 applications during the last hour before deadline. It is however - as always - advisable *not* to wait until the very last minute to apply.

Evaluation of the applications

The evaluation criteria, which are mentioned in annex H in the General Annexes, have in reality not really changed since FP7. This is one of the biggest question marks regarding Horizon 2020, as I myself and many others together with me, fail to see how this is going to work in practice with the new interdisciplinary approach. We are yet to see if the first round of calls will bring about any change in this area.

A few minor changes however, should be mentioned: If two - or more - projects obtain the same amount of points during the evaluation, the amount of the budget dedicated to SMEs will be the decisive factor. In the unlikely case that this is also even, the gender distribution will be pivotal (due to the famous article 16 originally suggested by Danish MEP Ms. Britta Thomsen).

When it comes to projects with the very same points overall but distributed differently, the preference will be as follows: Topic coverage, excellence and then

impact. This is actually the same as under FP7. However, one could easily argue that it has changed considerably since topic coverage under Horizon 2020 (with its much wider coverage) inevitably will play a much bigger and hence more decisive role than during FP7. It is however difficult - on the basis of this - to foresee whether a very narrow or a very wide application will have the greatest chance of success. Nevertheless, it is definitely something all applicants should consider carefully.

Unlike FP7, it is not foreseen that there will be room for many negotiations afterwards. The application should stand as it is. This is also partly due to the new time pressure. Although there has been much talk about whether or not suggestions of merging projects - as we know it from FP5 and FP6 - would reappear, this is not foreseen and not very likely so far.

Likewise, with the question of geographical distribution within the projects, which has played a certain part in e.g. FP6 and a smaller role in FP7. It is not even mentioned in Horizon 2020 and should not be considered much. During the last years of FP7, it became clear that this was a trend of the past, even in practice. We even saw several pure Nordic or North European consortia. However, there might be specific calls, which have certain demands of geographical distribution or which need to include a certain country or region. When it comes to the innovation part, it might also be more relevant with a wider geographical distribution.

Excellence is the most important criteria and should not be compromised. It will be difficult to win on another criterion what will be lost on the excellence criteria, if compromised.

Call for evaluators

The Commission presently has an open call for evaluators. Former FP7 evaluators are to receive an e-mail to be asked whether they are interested in continuing and informed how to register anew. It is important to remember that Horizon 2020 is not just a continuation of FP7 and apart from registering according to the new topics, it is important to have some 'horizontal' skills when it comes to e.g. gender, research mobility etc. I would therefore advise to consider carefully what to tick off when applying. An applicant's success can easily depend on one's ability to prove such competences (and document them).

It is foreseen that the panels will consist of a minimum of five people or even more due to the more interdisciplinary approach of Horizon 2020 and the need for more horizontal knowledge as well.

A maximum of evaluation days will be decided upon and it is foreseen that 25 % of evaluators *used actively* will be changed every year (thereby getting a more passive term for a year or two). Registration as an evaluator can be done on the [participant's portal](#) under "experts" in the top menu.

Comments or questions should be directed to [Kirstine Magoola](#)