Idealist2018 Project

ICT 2015: Evaluation workshop

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ICT NCPs Network | Ideal-ist

The ICT NCP Network - active since 1996!

Ideal-ist is an international ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) network, with more than 65 ICT national partners from EU and Non-EU Countries, such as Associated States, Eastern European Partner Countries (EEPC), Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPC) and other countries like Guatemala, Bolivia, Argentina, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Uganda and Canada.

Ideal-ist offers

- expertise in **proposal writing and project management**: A network of over 65 National Contact Points (NCPs) in the ICT theme and the organisations for whom they work support proposers.
- **long-standing experience in EU Framework programmes** (Ideal-ist was established 1996)
- a unique **quality labelled partner search tool** to connect newcomers and experienced researchers
- an international **Quality team to support proposers** e.g. to better focus proposals
- Ideal-ist information services: Newsletter, press releases, Work Programme information and a **Toolbox** for proposers that includes tips and expanded information on topics.
- **Brokerage events** to pre-schedule meetings at big events

Our further services

Ideal-ist supports **Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs), Academia, Non-profit Organisations, larger Companies and public Administration, Newcomers, Research Organisations and consultancies** in

1. interpreting the ICT work programme of Horizon 2020
2. submitting project ideas in line with the Challenges & Objectives of Horizon 2020
3. finding the right partners for their project
4. joining as partners to other proposals
5. joining on-going projects via competitive calls launched by project coordinators

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Section 0. Introduction

Individual experts evaluating calls in Horizon 2020 were invited by Ideal-ist 2018 to participate in a panel discussion on their experiences centering around impact and innovation at ICT 2015 on the 21st of October, 2015. The experts were sent a briefing document ahead of the event with a series of potential discussion points (see Annex 1) to review. The theme of the session was "Innovation and impact: the deadly duo". Each section of the discussion was begun by the moderator posing a question or topic. The experts responded on how they dealt with the question from their evaluation experience.

Participants in workshop panel:

Paul Drath, Moderator. Extensive experience in EU supported research.

- Shavit Avshalom. Israel. Experience as an evaluator in FP6, FP7, H2020, extensive experience in international evaluation and screening processes of R&D projects. .
- Nicola Ciulli. Italy. Experience from FP6, FP7, H2020 (in all areas, from FET up to FTI / SME Instrument)
- Irena Pavlova. Bulgaria. Experience as an evaluator and reviewer in FP6, FP7, CIP, H2020 ICT LEIT
- Edwige Pissaloux. France. Experience as an evaluator from Excellent Science (FET, MSCA), Societal challenges (Health), Industrial leadership (ICT, NMP+B)
- Eugene Sweeney. UK, Experience as consultant, evaluator and rapporteur in FP6, FP7 and H2020 (IPR, Innovation and ICT) and practical experience of exploiting research and IP.
- Maaike Margrete Visser Taklo. Norway. Experience as an evaluator from FP6, FP7 and ICT LEIT

Around 200 people attended the workshop and there was a line outside the room to enter.

Section 1. The discussion

The moderator posed a series of questions or topics to be discussed by the experts. The experts responded on how they dealt with the question from their evaluation experience.

1.1 Question 1: FP7 research programme and H2020 research and innovation, just politics? Or is there a real difference?

The evaluators felt that, although politics certainly were involved in the formulation of H2020, there is a real policy change. Projects are more impact oriented than before with some instruments placing increased emphasis on commercialisation. Many proposers are not prepared for this new orientation and continue to approach topics from a more researcher-focused perspective (although this is still relevant in some areas, e.g. FET and MSCA).

Because of this change of focus, project proposers must demonstrate a proactive approach to impact and not just discuss potential contributions to it. Impact and innovation should be addressed throughout the life cycle of the project and beyond. It is essential to describe how a project will lead to the achievement of the impact required in the topic description.

Fewer proposals for the closer-to-market Innovation Actions (IA) compared with those for Research and Innovation Actions (RIA) may be a consequence of this policy. Another clearer indication is the increased percentage of proposals achieving below threshold scores in the evaluation. Many experts in scientific domains have trouble understanding impact in a business or socioeconomic context. In this case it is particularly important to identify and reflect upon the appropriate policy documents. For those instruments closer to the market, it is important also to consider factors such as the market (size, growth, dynamics, value chains), positioning (with respect to competitors, alternative technologies, etc.), key USPs (why your solution is better than others); and barriers and enablers (standards, regulations, IPR freedom to use).

To succeed in presenting a holistic picture of impact, a proposal must include people from a broad spectrum of disciplines, not just science and technology, but from the whole "value and delivery chain", where value does not always need to be financial.

1.2 Question 2: Definition of innovation. What do you consider as innovation?

Here there was a wide range of options. The panel agreed that the definition of innovation[1] depends greatly on the instrument used. What may be innovative in the SME Instrument is not innovative enough in FET. It is also necessary to understand that innovation depends on

[1] There are many definitions of innovation, but the one now accepted by ISO is as given below (re invention vs innovation), the key terms being that an innovation (the noun) is something new which is «used» and delivers a «benefit».

An «innovation process» is the set of interrelated activities which transforms the new idea into an innovation.

The EC Reference Terms do not include, nor are clear on several innovation and impact related terms used in H2020. For example: «innovation» is described as a process, when it is in fact a noun («an» innovation).

There is no definition for «innovation potential», «innovation capacity» or «innovation management», or «impact».

context. Something that is innovative in the SC1 (Health) may not appear innovative to an ICT researcher. Another important consideration is that the innovation addressed in ICT is often evolutionary, not revolutionary. The tricky part is that some ICT innovation is evolutionary in terms of technology, but revolutionary in terms of market impact.

Generally innovation was understood to be something that involves risks or barriers which will be overcome in the project. The project must explain how this will be done. One important distinction is that *invention* and *innovation* are different. Innovation is something new that when used will deliver a benefit (financial, environment, social…). An invention is not necessarily used. It is something that simply exists. Another evaluator noted that you need money to do research, while innovation will make money and will bring socio-economic benefits out of the results of research.

Moderator Paul Drath poses a question to the panel.

1.3 Question 3: What do you make of the impact criteria for evaluation? Is it clear?

The panel agreed that the first step in any proposal is to address the required impact for each topic in the work programme. Proposers must state to which extent, how and why the project will respond. The Commission has done a good job describing what impact they want, but constructing the answer is harder.

Since the impacts are broad, the most important task for the proposer is to demonstrate how the project plans to achieve the topic impact(s). Too often proposers do not respond in a reflective and solid manner. This description must be explicit, not implicit, and solidly anchored throughout the proposal. It should explain how the project will solve issues of impact and how their efforts can be measured during and after the project.

It may be useful to make references to common “political” papers describing the road maps for EU technologies (such as white/green papers, OECD papers, European Studies, etc.) Numbers on market size and what the results of the project can do in the market are important. It was suggested that proposers write part 2.2 (draft exploitation and dissemination/communication plan) first and 2.1 (expected impacts) will follow (see template).

The draft exploitation and dissemination/communication plan is a mechanism for proposers to address the path for achieving impact in the project. Real world needs should be considered and addressed in an appropriate model. Evaluators must be convinced there will be significant payback, whether monetary or otherwise. "Business" models and related elaborations are not necessary in all projects; many RIAs end up with technology that needs to be taken up by the next link in the value chain and that might be the first step in the exploitation strategy. So knowledge of the key players is vital, because having a strategy to actively involve them demonstrates a potential for success. Scales such as TRLs are now an accepted way to describe the scope of a project such as at what TRL was the project when started and at what TRL the delivered results are when it is complete.[2] These TRL points capture the basic difference between research-oriented instruments (characterized by a low-TRL background and a mid-TRL result) and business-oriented instruments (with a mid-TRL background and a high-TRL result).

1.4 Question 4: What is an exploitation strategy?

The evaluators felt that any good exploitation strategy must anticipate the go-to-market plans, i.e. the direction between the goal of the project, the plan that for how the goal will be reached and how the results will be used after the project.

How will the IPR be used? To help evaluators understand, it was suggested that as much information as relevant should be supported by graphics, illustrating use throughout the value chain. Each partner should have their own plan for using the knowledge gained in the project and the results (the so called exploitable assets) accordingly. This should be reasonably clear at the beginning of the project.

Many have difficulties with the word exploitation. Exploitation can be commercial but if "use" is considered as an alternative word, then there is more nuance. Different target groups may use project results in different ways, but all are part of a route to market(s) (lead user, early adopters and mass market).

In contrast, views on the interpretation of dissemination and communication varied. Most felt that dissemination together with exploitation should be covered in the plan to get the results into use and so achieve impact. You have to always define the target groups, your rationale and objectives for targeting them, the way you will target them and get feedback, and the strategies for the use of the results (exploitation).

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[2] In Societal Challenge 1 (Health) For Health, TRLs are not used, even though clinical trials phases 0-4 correspond to TRLs 5-9

In the proposal template, Section 2.2a asks for a draft exploitation and dissemination plan, whereas 2.2b is about the measures which will be used to communicate information about (a) the project, and (b) the project results.

In the H2020 Reference Terms, «dissemination» is defined as «The public disclosure of the results by any appropriate means ...» and «communication» seems to be defined as a process (more confusion!!), but it does mention communication measures: i.e. «Communication on projects is a strategically planned process, that starts at the outset of the action and continues throughout its entire lifetime, aimed at promoting the action and its results. It requires strategic and targeted measures for communicating **a**bout (i) the action and (ii) its results to a multitude of audiences, including the media and the public and possibly engaging in a two-way exchange."

The panel from left to right: Shavit Avshalom, Irena Pavlova, Nicola Ciulli, Maaike Visser Taklo, Eugene Sweeney and Edwige Pissaloux.

1.5 Question 5. Do evaluators agree on impact?

Impact and exploitation are interpreted differently due to the knowledge and background of the evaluators. Therefore it is imperative that a proposal is written in such way that everyone understands. Evaluators must see the benefit of funding your particular project.

The process of a proper briefing and consensus meetings are very important to evaluator agreement and common understanding on many definitions. The consensus meeting is where differences are taken into account and discussed, where the understanding of words emerges.

Proposers should be aware that between consensus and panels there might be a cross-reading phase where a subset of the evaluators read and (sometimes) discuss/compare

subsets of proposals (clustered in terms of subtopics, similar scores, etc.). This gives the panel the chance to have some knowledge of all the projects being considered in the topic panel meeting. Such an exercise is important when ranking projects with the same scores. It is wise to use key words relevant to the call and the evaluation criteria so that evaluators can search the document to assess the evaluation criteria quickly - e.g. “risk management” or “IPR”. However, it should be clear that the topic panel seldom change scores by more than 0.5 points.

1.6 Question 6. Intellectual property rights: should they be addressed in the proposal?

The panel felt that consideration of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) from the very beginning of project development is a prerequisite for successful exploitation of project results. It is also important for the project itself. So the proposal should contain a clear and explicit common strategy to ensure there is no misunderstanding during the project and after, and to demonstrate to the evaluators that the consortium knows what it is doing. The strategy must be specific. A consortium cannot say simply, for example, that it will use “open source” without specifying the type of licensing terms envisaged, because these terms can have a significant impact on commercialisation. Too often there is standardised text cut and pasted into a proposal without any acknowledgement of what is special for that particular proposal.

The discussion of IPR issues in the proposal should focus on three basic aspects: the background knowledge/IP elements needed for the work in the project (who owns them, how they can be accessed, at what costs, during and after the project); the results/IP elements generated by the project (who will own them, how they will be shared and remunerated in case of multiple rights, how they will be protected); any regulatory/standard aspect that can favour or hamper the work during the project and the exploitation of results after its end. The first element (background) would best be covered in a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) signed by consortium members before the proposal is submitted and mentioned in the proposal.

Section 2. Top Tips

The moderator requested that each of the experts give their top tips for evaluators. The tips are not in any order.

1. Write with constant feedback from earlier evaluators. In other words, a good proposal has usually been read by several people outside the consortium.
2. Sign a non-disclosure agreement as soon as possible.
3. Be consistent from the beginning to the end and repeat the same story from the beginning to the end.

   Be consistent in all the sections - starting from the objectives, going through the innovation, impact and implementation the message should be one and the same.
4. Show how the success of the project will be measured.
5. Include aspects of impact and innovation in the objectives.
6. Support the impact (exploitation and dissemination) with concrete activities in the work plan and show how they will be measured.
7. Write the right things in the right section. – sometimes the text related to the innovation or to the impact can be found in other sections.
8. Don't write something anyone could have written, particularly don't just repeat the call text.
9. Build an easy to read and understand proposal. An evaluator will not necessarily read line by line. Evaluators only get paid for limited time to read the proposal and write the evaluation report.
10. Excessive information is a deadly sin (as is missing information). Write information once and later rather give a reference than repeat.
11. Point out where you contributed to a reference in the state of art and excellence.
12. Cannot sell a bad proposal in a good package. Must have both!
13. Justify things. Conquering the world is easy to say, explaining how to do it is harder.
14. There must be risk in a project (seen in relation to the call text and the TRL levels). Evaluators look for risk consideration in all aspects from management to science to impact. How the project will deal with risk, what is the level of the risk, and how it can be managed and mitigated is the key. Incremental risk analysis should be included.
15. Innovation aspects need to be addressed in all 3 sections, but in Section 1 (Excellence) it is Innovation Potential, Section 2 (Impact) it is innovation capacity, and in Section 3 (Implementation) it is Innovation Management.
16. When writing a proposal, look at the template and the evaluation criteria simultaneously.

Section 3. Questions from the audience

After the expert panel discussion, the moderator requested questions from the audience.

3.1 What is valid exploitation for academic researchers?

The proposal must demonstrate how what is being done will have a deliverable impact to something. For research exploitation this might be for use by the next step in an ecosystem but there must be a vision of where it will go next since not every research leads to a product.

As previously stated, it depends upon the instrument.

3.2 Do evaluators take into account high cost countries when they see the budget?

It is clear to most evaluators that they cannot comment on personnel costs, only on the balance of work and the amount of person months (effort) dedicated for the proposed amount of work. Direct costs however are carefully examined. There should be good explanations for high direct costs.

3.3 The ESRs are becoming more difficult to interpret, why is this?

Picking evaluators is an art and there are political aspects or framework-defined constraints, for example gender balance or a certain number of new evaluators for each call. Therefore the "best" evaluators (in technical terms) may not always be chosen. But the briefings are quite detailed so there is some leveling. Mix of personalities and disciplines is also important. Usually there is editing of the ESRs so that scores reflect what is said in the comments. However, it is clear that sometimes this might go too far (too many comments are deleted and in the end the comments do not well reflect the score, but this is not as it should be).

3.4 If I choose to be creative in the way I structure my proposal, somewhat different from the template, will I be penalised?

There was slight disagreement here among the evaluators. Some felt that if the necessary information was there, it was okay. Others felt that since the evaluations are done against criteria, being too creative can make the process more time consuming and cumbersome. Most felt that when you are reading several proposals in a short amount of time, evaluators prefer to see things according to the template as it makes their work less complicated.