



IDEALIST NCP PROJECT

Contract n° 101070043

IDEAL-IST BRIEFING #3

APRIL 2022

Horizon Europe is complex. The Idealist project helps NCPs navigate their way through these complexities. The Briefings are a part of Ideal-IST Work Package 2: Outreach, with the cooperation of many NCPs.

Briefings are sent periodically to all Digital NCPs and will contain information we think relevant for you and your customers in Horizon Europe.

NOTE: We cannot guarantee that this information is 100% accurate. We receive information from reliable sources, we take good notes, but you never know....

Briefing number 2 imparted some information on the Commission's comments regarding the proposals that were evaluated for the 2021 Digital call, along with some wisdom garnered through our own perusal of ESRs, panel reports etc. In this Briefing we will consider some other comments on Horizon Europe proposals, not just the Digital topics. Our grateful thanks to partner FFG in Austria for their input.

OVERALL

- Overall, we see good quality ESRs, detailed feedback, good scientific expertise
- Comments are often structured well along the evaluation criteria and sub-criteria; this leads to the assumption that there is structured guidance / checklist available to evaluators
- Comments are often detailed and refer to specific parts of the proposal (often citing parts/concepts in the proposal; no "hollow" phrases)
- The evaluators also touch on the context of the concerned the topic and Destination (e.g. Green Deal, strengthening of the European SME landscape etc.)
- Usually, evaluators differentiate between minor / major shortcomings and provide hints on what they found good ("This is a strength", "This is good", "This is excellent")
- Even for low rated proposals, the evaluators listed some strengths/positive aspects. And vice versa, for some top-rated proposals with maximum scores, sometimes minor weaknesses were described
- On tied proposals (overall and per criterion) the ranking will sometimes be performed based on the gender balance, where the target is a balance of 50:50 (f/m) and the data source is the "researchers table" in Section A. There is no information yet on how people self-identified as third gender are

counted. Additionally, the problem that “innovators” are often not included in the table by the applicants.

- Integration of Third Country partners (with/without funding) needs to be well justified with a clear benefit for Europe and there is no alternative European organisation (e.g. the third country partner is owner of a specific, unique, and needed data set or tool)

CHAPTER 1 – EXCELLENCE

- Criticism often on scientific and conceptual aspects (e.g. “soundness of the experimental component of the proposal overall not convincingly demonstrated”)
- Lack of measurability and missing baselines for Key Performance Indicators (KPI) often criticised; overall emphasis on metrics (e.g. “objectives are clear and pertinent to the topic, but they are not sufficiently well formulated in a measurable and verifiable way”)
- Weaknesses in ambition (e.g. “not sufficient ambition”, “only incrementally beyond state of the art”)
- In technological topics, criticism that start or end TRL details are missing or availability of TRL for some components is not convincingly described (e.g. “feasibility of reaching the expected TRLs is not well described for the proposed solutions”)
- Gender dimension in the proposed work needs to be well thought through, better to cover it than not (e.g. “gender not sufficiently considered in patient recruitment” vs. “gender dimension not addressed, which could be pertinent to some of the case studies; however, this is not necessarily negative as such considerations are not mandatory.”).
- Ethical considerations often well received (e.g. “Ethics-task + dedicated roles where feasible and reasonable”)
- Consideration/integration of Social Sciences and Humanities is specifically checked for (e.g. “contribution of SSH not explicitly identified”, “SSH expertise in Advisory Board not sufficient”, “SSH integration not convincingly argued”)
- Open Science and research data management aspects need to be implemented in a practical manner and tuned to the project idea (“Open science practices are insufficiently demonstrated” or “...OA methodology is only minimally and in little depth”; “Data will only be available upon request at the end of the project, criteria for sharing not defined”)
- Several comments on missing or inadequate contribution to new standards or consideration of existing standardisation efforts
- Addressing cross-cutting issues or not directly topic-related issues need details like methods used, expertise provided (e.g. AI, digital twins)
- Concerns on the Co-creation/Co-Design (especially with citizens where feasible) (e.g. “means for collecting potential inputs from citizens and the civil society are not sufficiently described” or “proposal lacks information on the way citizens will be involved”, “Citizens and the wider public in general are considered as end users, however, the methodology does not clearly explain how it takes into account their perspective in the proposed work”, “Measures proposed for widening participation are passive”)
- Major target groups need to be well integrated already in the concept (e.g. “Patient engagement needs to be adequately presented as well as clinical sampling”)

- State-of-the-art needs to be presented as well as a clear description of how the project links to previous projects and how this knowledge will be used. Especially former or running EU-funded projects in the same field (“It is not always clear how these interactions with other policies/initiatives will be made”)
- Positive remarks regarding well described use cases (“Use cases are very well described, they include detailed user stories for different user groups”)

CHAPTER 2 - IMPACT

- The “Project’s pathways towards impact” are a new way of describing the project impact under Horizon Europe and are more complex than in Horizon 2020. It is important to differentiate between referring to the “Expected outcomes” of the topic text, and to the “Expected impacts” of the Destination introduction. Both count, and should be addressed separately, and in a realistic way (no exaggerations). Many proposals did a very good job with this, but many also confused the two points, or addressed them inadequately (e.g. “one expected outcome only partially addressed”, “unclear how broader impact will be achieved”, “distinction between expected outcomes and wider long-term impacts not clearly specified”, “some claims are exaggerated”, “likely an overstatement”, “missing wider impact”, “impacts section is generic, lacking sufficient, detailed information on how the proposal will contribute to the outcomes specified in the topic and the wider impact of the Destination”)
- Credibility of KPIs and target numbers are often unclear, or scale and significance are not sufficiently explained. But: sometimes also judged as “overambitious/unrealistic”. Include baseline values whenever possible (e.g. “no quantitative estimate”, “lacks clearly defined and measurable key performance indicators”, “no KPIs for DEC activities or lack of quantitative targets”, “proposal provides insufficient quantification”, positive: “starting point (baseline) and the expected targets are clearly defined”)
- Potential barriers and mitigation measures criticised for lack of detail, and missing mitigation measures (e.g. “significant barriers not well addressed”, “insufficient consideration of key barriers and associated mitigation measures”, “potential barriers successfully identified, but no specific mitigation measures are provided”)
- Dissemination channels criticised for not being tailored to the project (e.g. “strategy is generic and does not describe well the specific target groups”, “pathways to policy makers largely focus on conventional academic outputs and trade fairs, limiting potential”, “specific dissemination measures for decision makers not clearly identified”, “multi-stakeholder approach not sufficiently demonstrated – e.g. limited involvement of industry stakeholders and patient engagement”)
- Exploitation is assessed in detail in both IAs and RIAs (e.g. “potential industrial exploitation of project outcomes not convincingly presented”, “assets suitable for exploitation and IP management not sufficiently explained”, “exploitation plan too generic, no specific strategies for exploitation during the project”, “lacks value chain and market in Europe”, positive: “the five key markets were already identified, and total value estimated -very good!”)
- Communication not well elaborated, and/or not distinguished well enough from Dissemination (e.g. “distinction between dissemination and communication measures is not always clear”,

“Communication measures to reach out to society are inadequate to have sufficient impact”, “It is not specified how the key messages of the project will be communicated to the end-users, as language barriers are likely to occur”)

- IP Management is carefully looked at, often criticised for being too generic/standard phrases (e.g. “strategy for intellectual property management lacks detailed description”, “shared results in IP not sufficiently addressed”, “IP management not presented”)
- The evaluators often looked at the sustainability of results, after the project ends (e.g. “it is not credibly presented whether the results of this project will be further used beyond the project's lifetime”, “who will host and sustain the knowledge platform after project ends”)
- The summary table 2.3 is an important overview tool for the evaluators, and may be looked at first to get a first impression

CHAPTER 3 – QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

- Consortium expertise is checked for the match with project needs (e.g. “Practical expertise from industrial/commercial partners is under-represented in the consortium”, “expertise and capacity in open science for some consortium members missing”, “shortcoming in terms of competencies, clarity of role and commitments”, but also “adopters, AI expertise, good mix of industrial and academic is present”)
- Partners from third countries critically checked (e.g. “reasons for including Swiss partner not fully elaborated”, “critical role of Swiss partner only partially described”)
- Criticism on little interaction between partners towards a common endeavour and roles of partners (e.g. “individuals strong, but it lacks detail on how they would work together in a collaborative effort”, “role of each participant not sufficiently clear in relation to each WP”, “involvement of different partners in the different tasks is indicated but their role is not always sufficiently specified”)
- Work plan thoroughly checked for consistency (e.g. “work plan has inconsistencies within and across work packages”, “some deliverables are not sufficiently elaborated”, “work plan is presented in a complex way, which is not very effective”, “linkages between the different work packages are also not convincingly presented. This is a significant weakness.” positive: “sufficient number of 29 deliverables, of which 21 are for public access. This is excellent.”). Alignment of work plan with objectives not sufficiently described or work plan overly complex (tune structure to the real needs of a project)
- Evaluators assess with more emphasis if deliverables and milestones are suitable for checking the progress of Work Packages and the project overall
- Very detailed check of risks and contingency plans, this was a common source for criticism (e.g. “risks associated with some technologies selected in the project are insufficiently considered”, “some risks are underestimated”, “risks not sufficiently addressed”, “does not address pertinent critical risks”, “risks and contingency plans not sufficiently elaborated”, “mitigation measures not convincing”)
- Criticism on the efforts of projects, even for project management, budget per partner (e.g. “underestimation of efforts per WP”)
- Subcontracting: there are comments on missing or insufficient justifications for subcontracting