

To Apply, or Not to Apply

We answer your frequently asked
Horizon 2020 questions



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Horizon 2020 proposal development requires a substantial investment of time, network capital and financial resources. Our advice to prospective applicants? Fill up on information, share the risks and rewards with your partners, and always, always exercise rigour in your proposal execution.

Horizon 2020 is, is not?

Horizon 2020 is the European Union's funding programme for research and innovation. Its value, in crude monetary terms, is almost €80 billion, which is to be spread over a seven-year period (2014-2020). Its goal? To enable the EU to become an innovation union, whose citizens, economies and ecologies are able to thrive because good ideas are put to work. More specifically, Horizon 2020 funding aims to enable the EU to deliver excellent science,

industrial leadership, and to tackle its societal challenges. "Horizon 2020 funding is designed to foster new research and innovation and is very competitive," says Melissa Plath of the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. "It is not a development aid fund."

Am I eligible to apply to Horizon 2020 if I am based at an institution in Africa?

Horizon 2020 funding calls generally have unique eligibility requirements. Some calls even seek participation by particular countries. For example ISSI.5.2014.2015 (Supporting structural change in research organisations to promote Responsible Research and Innovation) is particularly interested in attracting partners from North American, BRICs and Asian countries. It is important to remember that the Horizon 2020 programme is open.

"African partners are eligible to apply in most of the calls, not only those where Africa is mentioned," says Plath. "All the information you need to apply is available on the CORDIS website."



CORDIS = Community Research and Development Information Service

Horizon 2020 calls appear to the research community in the form of "work programmes". Work programmes are accessible via CORDIS on the Horizon 2020 website (<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/>).

How do I explain the strategic benefit of my Horizon 2020 application investment to my seniors?

Masahudu Fuseini of the Science and Technology Policy Research Institute in Ghana says Horizon 2020 collaboration is about mutual growth and exchange. "It will afford both continents the opportunities to learn and share knowledge, from both ends." Teaming up may also result in capacity strengthening and improved research productivity. "Africa and the EU have the opportunity to support and strengthen their research capacities and output by joining forces," says Constantine Vaitsas of the FORTH/PRAXI Network in Greece. "Research should not be fragmented in any case, and the EU funding instrument for research and innovation [Horizon 2020] has been designed to support cooperation with international partners."

*By its design,
Horizon 2020
supports
international
cooperation*



Masahudu Fuseini
CSIR-STEPRI



Constantine Vaitsas
FORTH/PRAXI Network

What key requirements should I pay attention to in developing my proposal?

Strong partnerships matter

A proposal must originate from a robust consortium of partners. "It is very important to remember that three partners from three different EU countries is a basic requirement for most calls," says Plath. "Consortia will be judged on the partnership itself: Can the particular grouping of partners do what they say they're going to do? Can they achieve what's required to deliver impact? And so on. Knowing your strength as a partner ensures that you understand and can make an argument for why you, in particular, should be part of the consortium." Vaitsas echoes the important role of individual partner organisations. "The consortium may be evaluated as a whole, but every partner must have a clearly defined role that adds value to the project."



'Trust your gut'

Forming a Horizon 2020 proposal writing partnership from scratch can be extremely challenging. "In general, African researchers hoping to prepare a proposal would benefit from working with partners who are already familiar with the EU funding frameworks. This may mean joining a pre-existing consortium or it may mean contacting such a partner directly," says Plath. She adds: "Partnerships work best if there is trust between the partners. This trust is formed from previous experience. I would advise prospective applicants to consider working with partners they already know and trust. This is of course not to say that new and fruitful partnerships cannot be formed during the application process."

Melissa Plath

Proposal rigour is essential

Horizon 2020 proposals must stage their arguments extremely convincingly. "Some of the main challenges proposal writers face is that they fail to understand precisely the specific requirements of the call, or fail to make a strong case to support the technology argument, scientific excellence argument,

or the potential impact of their proposed work," says Vaitsas. "The pre-requisites of each call must be followed religiously, and failure to meet these requirements *will* lead to the disqualification of an application," Fuseini adds.

Innovation, uptake are key

"Horizon 2020 has a strong challenge-based approach with emphasis on innovation with continuous support for R&D," Vaitsas says. "Researchers have considerable freedom to come up with innovative solutions, but proposals must show **how** they bring together different technologies along the entire innovation chain," he adds. But it is also about uptake. "The relevance of a technology to potential users is critical to articulate in your proposal," says Fuseini.

Submit your application and ALL the needed documents on time



Other key terms

Impact: Pay attention to expected impact in Research and Innovation Actions (RIA) and especially in Innovation Actions (IA), where this must be precisely addressed. The expected impact is outlined in the Horizon 2020 Work Programme for each topic.

Technology Readiness Level: In the Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenges pillars of Horizon 2020, the proposed project idea must begin from a Technology Readiness Level, or TRL, of 3-4, and **not** from the concept stage, as in FP7.

Constantine Vaitsas

Parting thought

Good luck!