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MSCA-Individual Fellowship

The point of view of an evaluator

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Basics

- **Deadline September 9th 2020**
- Applicants need a doctoral degree or at least four years' full-time research experience
- You submit a research proposal, including your CV.
- The proposal is written jointly with your chosen host organisation

A triadic relationship

“The proposal should be prepared by the researcher in cooperation with the host organisation, which is represented by the main supervisor of the proposal.”

The proposal has to make very clear that the collaboration researcher/supervisor is “**symbiotic**”

The host institution has to provide the **perfect environment** for the collaboration and benefit in some way from it

Evaluation Criteria

Excellence	Impact	Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality and credibility of the research (“multidisciplinary”)• Quality and background of applicant and host• Two-way transfer applicant/ host• Quality of the supervision and integration with the institution• Suitability to foster the maturity/independence of the researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Future career• Dissemination of the results• Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work plan• Tasks and Resources• Structures and Procedures• Institution environment
50%	30%	20%

Evaluation Criteria

- The proposals are pre-screened to check the eligibility
- All criteria are ranked 0/5 (0: unsuitable, 5: excellent)
- Eligible proposals are evaluated by 3 independent referees
- One of them is the "rapporteur" that coordinates the reports and homogenises the scores
- Only the proposals above 85% get the "seal of excellence" and are eligible for funding
- Unfortunately, those actually funded are less (ranked $\geq 92-93\%$)

How to write

A good proposal is like a tasty dish: only the overall impression remains but every single ingredient is crucial

- **Beware the keywords!!** “A first draft assignment is done automatically by matching the keywords of the proposals with the expertise of the evaluators”
- **Don't be obsessed by title and acronym** The evaluator is eager to read the proposal and does not pay much attention to the title (as long as it is not misleading or overselling)
- **The abstract must contain all the relevant information** Usually the evaluators are busy and you must capture their attention with the initial part (I don't need to eat the whole egg to understand that it is rotten)

How to write

- **Tell a story** You must write a consistent story that describes the state of the art and explains how you are going beyond it.
- **Describe clearly the steps** If the evaluator has to struggle to understand what you want to achieve and how you will do it, (s)he will possibly miss some points. Make his/her life easier and list clearly the various phases.
- **Detail your research** Don't give the impression that you do not have a clear view of the roadmap of your research. Explain clearly the techniques and the tools that you are planning to use and cite the latest literature in the field.
- **You are the leader** Your supervisor should coach and advise you but don't give the impression that (s)he will give the directives and you will execute them. The project should be firmly in your hands.

How to write

- **Cite the state-of-the-art and latest literature** Every good project starts from the literature overview. Citing outdated or irrelevant papers (or missing fundamental ones) gives the impression to be "out of business"
- **Ease the work of the evaluator** You could structure the text and the work packages so that the referees have at hand the answers for the questions of the evaluation form.

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“High-risk-high-gain”

A very delicate equilibrium



- The project must be interesting and innovative but also feasible
- Show that you are aware of all the technical details
- Describe possible risk-mitigation strategies

“Multidisciplinary”

Applicants must indicate at submission stage in which of the eight scientific areas their research topic fits best.

- Chemistry (CHE)
- Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC)
- Economic Sciences (ECO)
- Information Science and Engineering (ENG)
- Environment and Geosciences (ENV)
- Life Sciences (LIF)
- Mathematics (MAT)
- Physics (PHY)



The choice of the scientific area is also important to ensure an optimal allocation of experts for proposals' evaluation.

(verbatim from the H2020-guide)

“Multidisciplinary”

A multidisciplinary proposal is very appealing but it intersects many fields (econophysics, mathematical biology, dynamics of crowds and populations, biofluidmechanics) and calls for the evaluation of experts from different communities.

It is difficult (unlikely) to write a fully defensible and rock solid proposal that is ranked at the needed excellent level if different communities are involved.



Try to target a single scientific community in which you feel comfortable and that is likely to accept you and your supervisor.

Is it worthwhile?

Possibilities of funding are `lean'; is it worthwhile?

Definitely yes!

- The grant is prestigious and highly rewarding.
- It is often a strong endorsement for the career.
- It is a strong incentive to become independent and to venture into an exciting project.



Is it worthwhile?

You can try more than once and, even if eventually you were not granted:

- You can use the project for other calls
- You met up your mind and plan what you would like to do for the next couple of years
- While writing you can understand what you have already achieved and what you miss



Be a little fatalistic

The competition is tough and at the end a choice has to be made among excellent projects

- Sometimes it is a matter of nuances
- The personal taste of the evaluator might play a role
- A bit of luck helps (although luck can be helped)

Things are not always deterministic and predictable: I have seen bad proposal granted and nice ones killed

Conclusions

- The deadline is approaching fast and you should have already started to write (or at least plan) the project
- Choose carefully the host institution and the supervisor; they should be complementary to you for the project and viceversa
- Write carefully, every details matter (but don't be paranoid with commas and conjunctions)
- The first part must wet the appetite of the evaluator and keep him/her attached to the story
- Trying and writing is worthwhile anyway, you make up your mind and decide what you would like to do in the near future.