How to write a competitive research proposal in H2020?

Quick Guide
The secret of a good proposal

It is important to have:
- a relevant and important research question
- an original idea that addresses the research question
- a good description of the project proposal from which it is clear what can be done (feasibility) and what results you want to achieve (impact)
- proof that you are the right person at the right place

„Build your case“

- Description of the problem, research questions and their relevance
- State of the art and existing solutions
- What are the gaps in the state-of-the-art knowledge?
- Is the proposal timely and important? Why is your project interesting?
- Why to do it now?
- What is your proposed solution?
- What do you want to focus on, what are your goals?  
  › impact
- What is your approach?
- Why are you the right person?
- Expected outcomes and impact
- What is the added value of the project for your field?
Structure of the project

- Problem: relevant research question
- Current solution: state of the art, literature and background
- Expected results: impact
- Approach: work plan and methodology
- Your solution: aim
Structure of the project

**Originality**

- What has already been done? > a short summary of the literature of the topic/field
- What is unique about your project?
  - Preliminary data
  - Approach / methodology
  - Available data and resources
  - Expertise of individual team members
  - Your experience
- Why is your approach to solving the problem better than previously used approaches?

**The backbone of the proposal**

**Overall aim**

**Hypothesis, specific objectives**
- list no more than 4 specific objectives or those related to what you are going to do

**Approach: work plan and methodology**
- how are you going to achieve the objectives
- what methodology are you going to use
- workplan and distribution of the roles and responsibility within the project
Structure of the project

„Smart objectives“

Feasible work plan

Demonstrate feasibility:

- Clear aim-specific aims-approach-method
- Preliminary study and data
- Access to resources, equipment and data
- Experience and importance of cooperation
- Risk management – have a backup plan
- Clearly described work plan
- Realistic time planning › Gantt Chart
**Layout:**

- Split into **subsections**, use clear **headlines**, look at the **formatting** of the application, whether it is somehow restricted
- Clearly **visualize** objectives, hypotheses
- **Separate paragraphs** consistently, so that the text is **easy to read**
- Use pictures, charts if appropriate
- Use a **consistent structure**

**Get your message across:**

- Start each new part of the text summarizing the **phrase** for the layman
- Be very **explicit**: end each paragraph with the specific point you want to relate to the individual criteria
- After the statement always mention the **expected results** and future perspective
- Link the objectives / research questions clearly with the research plan and **keep it as simple as possible**
Present yourself

Right person...

- Study achievements
- Research experience
- International activities
- Other relevant academic activities
- Scholarships, grants and awards
- Publications

...right place

- Supervision, leadership
- Research group
- Resources: access to data and equipment

ACADEMIC

FUNDER (European Commission)

Focus on describing matching interests in proposal
Focus on the reader

Well written proposal

Obtain the interest:
- Title
- Summary
- Acronym

Convince the reader:
- Clear and feasible approach
- Fit the approach with research questions
- Expected results
- Societal relevance and impact
- You are the right man for the job

Build your case:
- A real scientific problem
- Scientific content
- Your original idea / hypothesis
- Clear objectives / research goal

Don’t forget the details:
- Budget
- Use the form as intended
- Lay-out
- Language
Project officer will check the eligibility criteria

Preselection by a panel committee (summary, CV, research impact)

Review report is reviewed by a whole panel committee

Review by referee (whole proposal)

Recommendation for funding
Panel members:

- Not necessarily experts in your field
- Rank the best projects
- Must read about 30 proposals

Tips:
- Write a summary that will be understood even by a scientist who is not directly in your scientific area

Your referee:

- Expert in your field
- Consider possible reasons to reject the proposal
- May not read the proposal in one go

Tips:
- Demonstrate you are perfectly familiar with your area
- Clear structure of the proposal (objectives › approach › methodology)
- CV – be humble, but self-confident, admit your weaknesses and show how to come across
Focus on the reader

**Problem**
- relevant research question
- **Why is it important?**

**Current Solution**
- analysis of state of the art
- **What is missing?**

**Your Solution**
- What's your idea?

**Approach**
- Work plan and methodology

**Expected Results**
- Impact
- What is added value of your research?
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