



How to write a successful Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellowship proposal (Europe)

2022/2023

Chiara Gallese, Ph.D., CIPP/E, Attorney at Law

About the author: Chiara Gallese is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Department of Mathematics and Geosciences of the University of Trieste. She graduated in East Asian Economic and Legal Languages and Institutions (2001-2006) at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and in Law (2007-2012) at the University of Padua. In 2015, she passed the bar exam. She obtained her PhD at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice in 2017. Between 2017 and 2021, she worked as an attorney and privacy consultant for multinationals and banks, obtaining the international CIPP/E certification. In 2021 she worked at the Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands, collaborating with the Eindhoven Artificial Intelligence Institute and the Eindhoven MedTech Innovation Centre; since 2022 she has been a Guest Researcher at the Electronic Engineering department. She is part of the COST action "DigForASP - Digital forensics: evidence analysis via intelligent systems and practices". Her research focuses on AI & Law, AI Ethics, and Data Protection. In 2023 she was awarded with a MSCA fellowship. She is a member of IEEE, ACM, IAPP, SIFD, and Mensa International.

Introduction - My experience with MSCA

I prepared my successful proposal between September 2021 and August 2022, and I submitted it in September 2022. The results came on the 13th of February 2023.

My funded project was about the ethical re-use of health data in the public sector (DataCom), SOC panel, but I initially wrote a completely different project, focused on Trustworthy AI. In fact, with the help of my supervisor and colleagues, we decided to focus on another topic, and the decision was the right one. It took a lot of time to select the right project, I first had to write eight potential topics.

The writing process was long, stressful and time consuming, especially because during the first five months of writing I was employed full time by a different university and I had to write during my spare time and on weekends. In addition, I had a toddler and a kid that required a lot of attention, so I really had to find a balance.

Writing a good proposal takes a lot of time and you will need a lot of revisions and rewriting, especially if you hire an external company specialized in EU projects, that will surely spot errors, inconsistencies, and points that need to be clarified. You will need to work closely with your Research Support officer, who will help you with the writing project.

The peculiar feature of EU projects is that you need to learn the “projectese” language and understand the small details that will make a difference for reviewers.

I decided to write this guide to help other people like me.

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First steps

You might think that writing a good proposal is all that you need to be selected for funding, but this is not the whole truth. The preparation of a winning proposal starts way before you start writing.

Before you even open the proposal template, you need to select a host institution and contact your potential supervisor and the Research Support Office. This takes a lot of planning, as many professors do not have time to help you in the writing process and they might say no. I asked 4 different professors in my alma mater (close to my parents and my husband) before I gave up and selected a different institution. I was lucky enough to win a small fellowship in my host institution during the writing process.

Many of the information you will find in this guide are also valid for EU and other non-EU projects, as the general principles are always the same.

Step one: gather information about the program

Read all online resources you can find about the program (eligibility criteria, template, guidelines, etc.).

Participate in online forums and groups, so that you can understand every aspect of the procedures. This will help you in every step of your journey. For example, remember that if your proposal gets a score below 70, you won't be allowed to resubmit it next year.

Step two: select your area of research

Before you can contact your potential supervisor and host institution you need to choose your preferred area of research (e.g. criminal law, civil law, international law, etc.), the one you have more academic or professional experience. In my case, I chose IT law.

The selection of the research area should be done in the view of increasing your chances of being funded: for example, it's better not to choose an area that has been already funded by MSCA in the recent past. Check online in the Cordis portal all the past funded proposals in MSCA and ERC. If you find one that is related to your project, be sure to mention it in your proposal.

Step three: select your host institution

Subsequently, you can select a host institution which has more experience in the field than others (e.g., they have already won EU projects in your field). Search in different EU countries selecting the best in your area.

Remember that the profile, equipment, infrastructure of the host institution pay a significant role in the final score.

I recommend calling on the phone the Research Support Office first, so that they can suggest names of potential supervisors or ask the department if they are willing to host candidates. They will also illustrate their talent acquisition programs and courses to train potential fellows. This will save you a lot of time. For example, my host institution had a fellowship to support me and 8 other candidates in the writing process.

Step four: select your supervisor(s)

The supervisor's profile is an important part of your proposal and their CV can influence the final score, so you need to choose wisely. It is more important that they have experience with grants and supervision than the fact that they are famous scholars. It's also important that they are willing to help you in writing.

It might take a few attempts before you find the right one, that's why it's better to start searching a year in advance.

The supervisors during secondments are important too, make sure you contact them in advance.

Step five: select the topic with your supervisor

The specific topic is extremely important, as it will make the difference and draw the line between winning or not being funded. Your supervisor is the expert in the field, so you should find an agreement with them about the best topic that can get you funded.

Selecting the right topic is a delicate balance between different elements, as it should be, ideally:

- novel: advancing the state of the art
- urgent: responding to a present need
- relevant: interesting for EU Member States
- fundable: not likely to be covered by national fundings
- in the EU agenda: relevant for strategic areas

It is clearly stated in the program documents that the EU might select a proposal that had slightly lower scores but it is relevant for their agenda than a proposal which is perfectly written but presents a topic that is not interesting for them. Their opinion might make the difference as the score to be funded can be only 0.1 points higher than that of non funded proposals. The opinions of reviewers is important, but it is not the only element taken into account while deciding who to fund.

You can read online papers and testimonies about the review process.

If possible, enroll in relevant courses

Experienced universities pay for several preparatory courses for potential fellows, such as:

- EU projects writing
- English writing
- Academic writing

I believe that participation in these courses can make the difference. I strongly recommend that you enroll in a well known course, such as those of Yellow Research.

If possible, ask for some examples of successful proposals in your specific area of research

I was only able to read a single successful proposal in a related area (I am in the law field, the proposal was in political science), that was funded one year before. An extremely kind colleague, whom I didn't know before, agreed to send me her proposal.

It was extremely helpful in understanding the whole structure, the level of detail required, the degree of interdisciplinarity, the effort in the Gantt chart and WP, and the CV structure. Although the template changed in the meantime from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe and the structure and requirements were different, I think that without this example I wouldn't have been successful.

The support office in your host institution has a lot of funded proposals that they can show you as an example. They might show you only parts or the whole proposal. Unfortunately, in my case I was only able to take a look at a couple of Gantt charts.

In the next few months I will share my proposal on my ResearchGate account.

If possible, hire an external company to review your proposal

Experienced universities often hire specialized companies that are experts in reviewing EU project proposals.

They will check not only grammar, but also the content, such as the Gantt chart and WPs, the efficacy of your writing style, the balance between different parts of the proposal, and in general how much you included the key elements for a successful proposal (in "Projectese").

Your National Contact Point might also be available to review your proposal.

Of course, research officers from your host will review your proposal multiple times and help you with writing each section.

The writing process

Part B1

I will describe below how I structured my proposal. The headings of the subsections are my own, you can change them as you like.

Remember: the 10 pages limit is **strict**. You can balance the number of pages as you wish between each part, but remember that their score is weighted differently. The Excellence part makes half of the total score.

I. Excellence part (6 pages)

1.1 Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives

1.1.1 Introduction and objectives

In this section you should first introduce the problem you will solve with your project and how it is a priority/interest for the EU. The language should be concise, clear and understandable by laypeople. I used 23 lines for this part (character size 11, Times New Roman, margins 1,5 cm, see:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-for-m/af/af_he-msca-pf_en.pdf).

Then you should describe your overall objective of your project. I used 4 lines for this.

Subsequently, you should describe your project goal taking into account the intersectoral/interdisciplinarity of the project connected with your secondments and methodology.

For example, I wrote: *"To build this new framework, I will develop and test in intersectoral practical environments the innovative concept of "Ethical Commodification": the possibility of exploiting personal data in an ethical way for the public good, in accordance with data subject's expectations and needs and taking into account the risks associated with the exploitation of anonymized data sets, focusing on 3 MS, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands (see 1.2 for selection criteria). In order to reach this objective, DataCom has a strong interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach, bridging law, ethics, and computer science, taking into consideration the needs of the public sector and those of citizens. To ensure the successful implementation of these project goals, the University of Turin (UT) is the most appropriate venue thanks to the guidance of Prof. ... (name of supervisor), his team (such as Prof. ...), and his network (such as Prof.). To strengthen my skills and acquire an intersectoral method, two secondments are foreseen: from M5 to M7, I will be hosted by the (acronym) a public medical research center, seminal for this project because of the involvement of industry and public hospitals. From M10 to M12, I will be hosted by the ... Dept. of the University of ... (acronym), where I will refine my*

interdisciplinary skills in anonymization techniques and the risks of reidentification, on which this Dept. is a leading expert thanks to prof. ...".

Make sure to add references to your host institutions websites (especially to funded projects) and cite relevant literature in this section (I had 11 footnotes).

Finally, you should list and briefly describe your specific objectives. Mine were:

"In order to reach this urgency DataCom focuses on the following specific objectives: SO1) developing a "New EU Framework of Ethical Commodification", by examining the existing theoretical frameworks of re-use of health data based on desk research complemented by the findings of SO2 (WP1, M2-12); SO2) mapping the actors involved in health data re-use (i.e. health care public servants, researchers, professional/patients associations of 3 selected MS), to assess their needs and knowledge about the consequences of health data handling and re-use on citizens (surveys, interviews and focus groups, see 1.2) (WP2, M6-15); SO3) promoting awareness strategies among public servants in the 3 selected MS, drafting the manual "Guidelines for public bodies to responsibly re-use citizen's health data" (D3.1, M18) in order to provide them with the appropriate means to exploit data in a privacy-preserving and ethical way (WP3, M15-22)."

Throughout the proposal, I used cross references in Microsoft Words to each section and other relevant elements (milestones, objectives, WPs) and I constantly referenced to WPs, months, and objectives in every part of the proposal.

1.1.2 State of the art and innovative aspects

In this part you should demonstrate to reviewers that you know how your research question is positioned among the relevant literature, even the opinions that are contrary to your own, and how your project will solve a debate, a problem, or propose a new framework, while at the same time training you as an independent researcher. Make sure you cite seminal works of leading scholars.

For example you can divide it in two (or more) sections and describe both leading theories in your field and their shortcomings that you will solve with your project. It is important to give a broad overview because it will create the theoretical background for your project and justify the need to investigate your research questions.

The questions you need to address are, for example:

- what are the relevant academic articles for my research question?
- what is the opinion of leading scholars on this topic?
- why my project is relevant in this discussion?
- what advancements will I bring?
- how useful will be my research outputs?

I cannot give you more detailed tips because this section is very discipline-dependent.

I used one whole page for this part and it took me several time to complete a preliminary literature review.

1.2 Soundness of the proposed methodology

1.2.1 Methodology

In this part I described what methodological basis each objective had and how I would carry them out. This part is very discipline dependent but in general you should not focus on a single methodology but mix more than one, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, desk research, ecc.

You should also explain why you chose specific secondments and host institutions.

Remember that each choice should be scientifically justified, for example:

- explain what criteria were employed in selecting the case studies or the countries you are studying (e.g., MSSD, similar legal systems, etc.);
- explain why your sample is significant (size, quality);
- explain how you will select your research participants (e.g., Patton's purposeful sampling);
- explain why you need interviews or focus groups;
- explain the type of method you will use (e.g., Kestemont legal methodology, process tracing);
- explain where you will find sources, samples, respondents, etc.;
- explain who you will ensure gender balance and diversity and how you will avoid sample biases.

Adding small details, such as how you will follow research data management best practices, can make the difference in having a high score.

In this section you should also add the deliverables connected to each objective.

1.2.2 Interdisciplinarity

This part describes how your methodology benefits from multiple disciplines, e.g., Law & Sociology, Law & Ethics, Law & Computer Science, and why.

I think that mixing three different disciplines is a good balance.

I wrote just 9 lines for this part.

1.2.3 Gender dimension and diversity

This part pertains to the non-discrimination principle and can be described even in STEM disciplines. You should search on Google scholar "discrimination in [name of your discipline/topic/methodology] and address those issues. For example, it is known that in

interviews differences might arise between different categories or groups, and that minorities are often discriminated against.

It is essential that you make a literature search on this topic, otherwise you could miss some important issues that are already known to researchers in different disciplines (gender studies, bioethics, sociology, etc.). I have seen many STEM researchers puzzled by this requirement, joking about how physics (or chemistry, engineering, etc.) does not have any diversity issue, but this just demonstrates their ignorance regarding EU project writing.

You can see some examples of gender and diversity issues in the STEM here:

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/33b4c99f-2e66-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

You should ask yourself questions like “will my research project affect groups or individuals in the research phase or after publication of results?”.

This part was 9 lines long in my proposal.

1.2.4 Research data management and open science

This part is pretty standard in every EU project. You should basically make a summary of what you will write in your Data Management Plan, and how you will deal with privacy and IP. For more information look, for example, here:

<https://scienceeurope.org/our-priorities/research-data/research-data-management/>

You can ask your data steward or research officer to help you with this section.

Make sure you mention the FAIR principles and open access.

I wrote 13 lines for this part.

1.3 Quality of the supervision, training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

1.3.1 Training of the fellow

In this part you should list all the areas in which your knowledge will be expanded and how your supervisor and hosts will do that. Remember that training is a fundamental part of MSCA. You should take the opportunity to describe your supervisors’ experience, knowledge, and capability of supervising students.

For example, you should mention:

1. Courses on specific research subjects
2. Courses on Gender and diversity
3. Courses on academic writing
4. Experience in project management and RDM
5. Supervision of students

6. Teaching activities
7. Conference organizing
8. Experience in research ethics & privacy compliance
9. Experience to be able to apply to advanced funding

Be very specific, mentioning title of the courses, instructors, months.

1.3.2 Transfer of knowledge to the host

Here you can describe how you will involve your host/colleagues in your network, how you will explain to them your project and experience with MSCA. The knowledge you will transfer depends on your past experiences.

You should include a couple of seminars for department colleagues and with invited speakers. Remember that all information in your proposal should be very detailed (write the titles, topic, target group size, and months of seminars).

You can for example schedule a workshop in which you will help PhD students in writing a MSCA proposal.

1.4 Profile of the fellow (CV)

In this section you should summarize your CV highlighting your skills, experience, and accomplishments. You can cite your publications and awards or funding you received.

You should mention how many students you supervised, how many people you communicated your research with (e.g., Meet me tonight workshops), and where you went visiting abroad.

Do not be shy and humble, try to highlight your uniqueness.

Be very specific (h-index, citations, name of journals, numbers, names).

II. Impact part (2 pages)

2.1 Training plan

Describe your host institution and supervisor concrete capability of expanding your skills and help you become tenured (or work outside academia). Write if this fellowship will help you with a career restart after inactivity, maternity or non-academic jobs.

Be very specific, list detailed career objectives. Mention that your supervisor will help you in writing the Career Development Plan. Explain why your host is the best place for your training (e.g., mention specific courses about career development).

2.2 Dissemination and communication

This part is very common in EU projects and it's very similar to other Horizon programs.

You should be very specific and include a table detailing your strategy and target audience (with numbers) of scientific dissemination, communication to the public/institutions/companies.

Mention explicitly names of conferences and journals you will use as means for disseminating your results.

What I wrote was:

"I will develop a detailed dissemination and communication plan (D5.1, M1) in WP5, where each WP activity will be given quantitative indicators to support measuring their progress and it will set out the high-level objectives for the project dissemination, identifying different target groups, and specific measures to reach them. The communication activities will aim to demonstrate the possibility of responsible secondary use of health data, in order to generate trust in public institutions among citizens. An important communication target will be primary and secondary school students. Concerning dissemination, thanks to my extensive academic and non-academic network, it will be possible to disseminate through presentation of rough ideas in a dedicated workshops for discussion with peers (T5.7, M4); presentation of preliminary results in a dedicated conference (such as Privacy Forum 2023, D5.5); then, presentation of results in a full open access journal (D5.3, M16), such as International Data Privacy Law, and finally, presentation of the manual/guidelines and final results to EU and national institutions (such as the Italian Data Protection Authority, T5.5, M19). Other dissemination activities which will be pursued are invited seminars at universities and an article within a special issue in the Journal of Digital Technology and Law on the new EU Ethical Framework (D5.2, M22). Channels to disseminate the research results also include the following: web-based communication (e.g., short videos on the research topics on the dedicated project website, D5.4, M2); social media posts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, ResearchGate), webinars, blog posts (T5.3); courses, workshops and seminars at other universities, such as ... and ... (T5.4, M5); direct dissemination to the non-academic world (Meet me Tonight, D5.2, M15), e.g., through newsletters and activities organized also for non-academic organizations (such as a seminar on Data Protection at ... - D4.3, M10) and Public Administration (such as Courts, EU institutions, Courts)."

Strategy	Possible Venue/ Host Institutions	Target group	Months
D-Scientific seminars (Expected size: 250)	UT; Privacy Forum; University of West Switzerland; Istituto Europeo di Oncologia	Scientific community (Data Science, Law and social science)	M24
D-n. 2 Papers, n. 1 Book	International Data Privacy Law, Journal of Digital Technology and Law, Giappichelli Editore, Springer, or Wiley	Scientific community, Public servants	M 16, 21, 22
D-Online course lectures and webinars (Expected size: 800)	Turin University; Eindhoven University of Technology; Milano-Bicocca University; University of Barcelona	Bachelor's and Master's students	M5
D-Webinars, conferences, courses	International Association of Privacy Professionals; Associazione Nazionale Forense; Catharina Hospital (Eindhoven);	Industry sector, hospitals, start-ups Expected size: 100	M10
C- Website, newsletter, social media, Meet me tonight	Turin University, Carlo Cattaneo LIUC University	General public, schools Expected size: 900	M15
C- Talks sharing final findings	Autorità Garante per la protezione dei dati personali; Tribunale di Padova, Hospital, European Commission	Public Institutions, policy-makers Expected size: 50	M24

2.3 Impact

This part was the weakest in my proposal (and in other projects I participated in), so don't rely on it, seek other sources. Thankfully, the impact of my project was self-evident even to laypeople, so the reviewers did not pay too much attention to the way I phrased this part. I now realize that being so obvious I forgot to express it.

I included 4 different impact sections, detailing the effect on stakeholders.

Some sources can be found here:

<https://shannonchance.net/2020/08/12/msca-impact-2-1/>

<https://enspire.science/how-to-approach-the-horizon-europe-impact-section-for-collaborative-projects/>

<http://rpk-centrum.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2015/01/How-to-write-a-winning-MSCA-proposal.pdf>

2.3.1 Scientific impact

This section is to show that your research will be beneficial for your colleagues and that it will advance the state of the art in your field.

Make sure to address how your project is in line with the EU's priorities (be specific).

If your results will be important to professional categories (doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.), mention it.

Mention also if other researchers will likely use your results for future research projects.

2.3.2 Social impact

In this part you should mention how many people will be impacted by your projects (approx. number), and in what way. What would the lay people learn from your project? How would their life be better thanks to your project?

Will your project stimulate to create a new law or to modify existing ones?

Mention the fact that your results will be known to the general public thanks to your dissemination activities (reference to the relevant proposal section).

2.3.3 Economic impact

Here you should write about how much money the EU will save or earn thanks to your project. You should use numbers and concrete data (e.g., "the industry of X is worth XXX million Euros...", "thanks to [Project Acronym] companies will save XXX million Euros", "XXX new jobs will be created"), and provide a source to your claims.

2.3.4 Exploitation of results

In this part you should mention how your project will lead to the creation of patents, start-ups, or can be otherwise exploited by industry. Include the fact that you will use the results to carry on a follow-up project.

III. Implementation part (2 pages)

3.1 Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation

3.1.1 Risk management

In this section you should write the risk assessment, listing all major risks, their likelihood, their impact on your project, and the corrective measures you will implement to mitigate them. For example:

- risk of not getting enough respondents
- risk of not having enough time to write
- risk of COVID-19 that might delay your secondments
- risk of not having positive results
- risk of not reaching enough people in your dissemination activities

Some corrective measures might be hiring a student assistant, employing a specialized survey company, and conducting interviews remotely.

3.1.2 Working plan and gantt chart

This was the most difficult part for me to write, as you need to list all Working Packages, tasks, deliverables and milestones.

I suggest that you describe each activity planned in your proposal as a task, then add 3 deliverables and only one milestone per WP.

I think that 6 is a good number of WPs. The first one should be the management activities (bureaucracy), the last one dissemination; in the middle you can put activities such as desk research, fieldwork, or experiments. From last year you cannot include them only in tables, but you must describe each of them in the core text.

Each deliverable and milestone should be referenced multiple times across the whole proposal (e.g., in the methodology part you can add "(D2.3)" near the description of your deliverable). To make it easier to understand, I used MS Word cross-references connected to each WP, objective, and such.

For each WP, you should calculate the person-month effort.

My WP structure was as follow, after multiple rewriting:

WP1 Desk analysis (SO1, M2-12, Effort: Fellow 5; Supervisor 0.2 PMs)

T1.1 - Desk research: legal sources review and analysis; T.1.2 - Health data anonymization sources analysis

D1.1 - "Ethical Health Data secondary use" collection (M12)

MS1.1 - Desk analysis completed (M11)

WP2 Qualitative Research and fieldwork (SO2, M6-15, Effort: Fellow 6, Supervisor 0.4 PMs)

T2.1 - Survey with public servants (Spain); T2.2 - Interviews with public servants (Netherlands); T2.3 - Interviews with citizens (Italy); T2.4 - Coding and analysis

D2.1 - Survey text (M6)

MS2.1- Academic Fieldwork completed (M15)

WP 3 New Framework Developing and testing (SO3, M15-22, Effort: Fellow 6; Supervisor 0.6 PMs)

T3.1- Explore causal relationship; T3.2- Triangulate data; T3.3- Perform Focus Group with stakeholders; T3.4- Analyze findings

D3.1 - "New EU Framework of Ethical Commodification" (M18); D3.2 Guidance manual (M20)

MS3.1 - New framework tested (M22)

WP4 Training (M1-18, Effort: Fellow 2; Supervisor: 1.4 PMs)

T4.1- Training on Ethics; T4.2-Training on anonymization techniques; T4.3- Training on career development; T4.4-Training on diversity; T.4.5- Meetings with Advisory Committee; T4.6- Meetings with Supervisor

D4.1- Career Development Plan (M1); D4.2-MSCA Guidance Workshop (M2); D.4.3-Seminar on Data Protection at XXX Hospital (M10); D4.4- Seminar on Health Data Privacy (M21); D4.5 - Project Workshop at UT (M23)

MS4.1- Training progress report completed (M5)

WP5 Communication and Dissemination (M1-24, Effort: Fellow 4; Supervisor: 1.2 PMs)

T5.1- Dissemination to scientific community; T5.2- Dissemination among stakeholders; T5.3- Communication to general public

D5.1- Dissemination and Communication Plan (M1); D5.2-Meet me Tonight workshop (M15); D5.3- Article 1 on Health Data Commodification risks (M16); D5.4- Article 2 on the New EU Framework (M22); D5.5- Conference on Ethical Health Data Commodification (M24)

MS5.1- Project website online (M2)

WP6 Management activities (M1-24, Effort: Fellow 1; Supervisor: 0.2 PMs)

T6.1- Privacy and Ethics assessment of the project; T6.2- Financial management; T6.3- Data management

D6.1- Data management plan (M1); D6.2- Risk management plan (M3); D6.3 – DMP and RMP update (M13)

MS6.1- Privacy and Ethics compliance completed (M24)

Online you can find some examples:

<https://www.marufsanni.org/msca-fellowship/>

<https://shannonchance.net/2020/08/14/msca-implementation/>

https://www.upf.edu/documents/8055591/213727092/MSCA_judit.pdf/a758fa63-fa52-6848-3da6-397e768f84fb

In this section you must also include a Gantt chart, which is basically an Excel table in which you insert deliverables and milestones in the 24 months. Use different colors to make it more readable. The Gantt chart was really difficult to me, I rewrote it multiple times.

My Gantt chart:

	Months:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
WP 1	Desk analysis											MS1.1	D1.1												
WP 2	Qualitative Research						D2.1									MS2.1									
WP 3	New Framework Developing																		D3.1		D3.2		MS3.1		
WP 4	Training	D4.1	D4.2			MS4.1					D4.3											D4.4		D4.5	
WP 5	Communication	D5.1	MS5.1													D5.2	D5.3							D5.4	D5.5
WP 6	Management activities	D6.1		D6.2											D6.3										MS6.1
	Secondments					ES					NL														Short visits in IT

You can find many good examples online, for example:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273393117 Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship successful application - HumanScapes - H Orengo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273393117_Marie_Curie_Intra-European_Fellowship_successful_application_-_HumanScapes_-_H_Orengo)

https://lbi-cy.com/?page_id=1030

3.2 Quality and capacity of the host institutions and participating organisations

3.2.1 Organization and management structure

In this section you should describe how you and your supervisor will manage the project. You should mention that your supervisor will guide you and help you in being on track.

Elements to be included can be for example:

- how often you will meet with your supervisor

- what office will assist you with the grant management
- if you want to set up an advisory committee, how often you will meet them, who are the members
- how often you will revise your career development plan

3.2.2 Profile of the host institution

This part should be written together with your host institution's research officers. You should describe your host (be precise with numbers, such as how many students, how many projects won, rankings, awards, etc.).

You should describe the support structure of your department and write that they will help you with communication, management, bureaucracy, ethics, etc.

It is also important to mention the equipment they will provide to you (office, desks, PC, library, software, etc.) and that they will support you during relocation.

Part B2

1. Your Cv

Although the suggested length of your CV is 5 pages, I wrote 10.

Make sure to include:

1. Work experience
2. Education
3. Talks
4. Service
5. Publications
6. Career Breaks
7. Awards and fundings
8. International collaborations

I used tables to make the text clear. Within the international collaborations, I also included non-funded proposals I co-authored.

Remember to be, as always, very specific, including numbers (of supervised students, of publications, h-index, citations, participants in your dissemination activities, papers you reviewed or were assigned to you as an editor, etc.), amounts (of grants or projects you participated in, etc.),

2. Host institution

This part is usually standard and written with the help of the host. It's similar to 3.2.2.

You need to describe what type of organization it is, its equipment and research structure, how many PhD students they have, etc.

3. Ethics information

Do not underestimate this part: it's your chance to add everything you couldn't add in the B1 part, such as academic integrity, privacy, informed consent, gender balance, protection of vulnerable groups, impact on stakeholders, inclusion criteria for your research participants.


My ethics part was several pages long, I included information on how I will follow research integrity guidelines and legal compliance. I described informed consent documents and how I will approach respondents. I also mentioned mitigation measures to avoid sample bias or discrimination towards vulnerable groups.

Abstract

The abstract has a limit in characters, so you need to be very concise. I structured my abstract in the following way:

1. Introduction of the problem (4 lines)
2. Information on how your project will solve the problem (4 or 5 lines)
3. Information about the methodology and interdisciplinarity (3 lines)
4. Information about why your host and supervisor are the best to train you (1 sentence)
5. Information on how the fellowship will help you in your future career (1 sentence)

"The EU has recently enhanced the potential of health data in the EU digital market by promoting a number of initiatives and new regulations to facilitate data sharing and re-use among public institutions: the forthcoming provisions of the Digital Strategy Corpus of law. These, in combination with pre-existing rules and practices of health data exploitation, might sharpen the risks for citizens, for example allowing public bodies to exploit big data sets - to make detrimental decisions regarding the access of certain patients to health care (e.g., in the case of insurance-based systems). In this context, academic analysis is urgently needed, as well as suggesting a revision of the new regulations to EU policy-makers to facilitate responsible data sharing. DataCom aims at building a new framework to facilitate an ethical secondary use of health data held by public bodies, with the aim of improving accountability and enhancing responsible re-use. To build it, I will develop and test in intersectoral practical environments the innovative concept of "Ethical Commodification": the possibility of exploiting personal data in an ethical way for the public good, in accordance with the data subject's expectations and needs and taking into account the risks associated with the exploitation of anonymized data sets, focusing on 3 Member States, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands. In order to reach this objective, DataCom has a strong interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach, bridging law, ethics, and computer science, taking into consideration the needs of the public sector and those of citizens. To ensure the successful implementation of these project goals I will conduct my research at the University of Turin's Law Department, with the guidance of Prof. Ugo Pagallo, a leading scholar.



This project will prepare me to become a tenured scholar and obtain advanced funding, strengthening my academic profile and allowing me to establish my own research group."

The submission process

Panel choice

Make sure you select the right panel, keywords, and research areas. This will be used to select reviewers and can make a difference for your proposal. Select all the elements that might increase your chances.

Take into consideration the different disciplines involved in your project (interdisciplinarity).

Host information

In the portal, your host institution will add information about their facilities and equipment, and on past projects funded by the EU.

Ethics

Here you will add a summary of the ethics part of the B2 template.

Waiting for the results

The waiting months can be stressful and you might feel anxious and re-read your proposal multiple times in order to find weak spots or spelling mistakes.


Online forums and groups are very useful, as you can find support from your peers and read experiences from past years.

Remember, it's very difficult to get funded at the first try, and each year there are different chances. One year you might compete with 10.000 other researchers, one other only with 8.000. The Global fellowship is much easier to get, as they compete with 1/10 of EF applicants (or even less).

In 2020, there were 11.390 eligible proposals and only 1636 were funded (14%), while in the ERC Starting Grant program there were 3248 eligible proposals and only 436 were funded (13%). You can see the statistics here:

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dashboard/sense/app/acca8e11-2235-4d15-ab0d-be30331e7b79/sheet/9ccb6c45-f749-4b6a-aecd-eeb2868d5916/state/analysis>

Being unsuccessful does not mean you are a bad researcher or a failure, it's very similar to a lottery system.



I have known ERC winners who never succeeded in obtaining a MSCA fellowship, so don't feel bad if you are not selected!

When I applied, I was aiming at reaching just the Seal of Excellence. It was just luck that allowed me to get that 0,1 points to rank higher than others, even those in the reserve list.

If you got the seal of excellence, there are many funding opportunities around. Be proud of yourself, you did great.

Your time will come, keep on applying to different funding schemes and don't give up.