Health NCP Net

Info Session for NCPs: Special Webinar on Blind Evaluations in Horizon Europe - Q&A

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On 28 February 2023, the European Commission held a virtual info session for National Contact Points (NCPs) about "blind evaluations in Horizon Europe".

Although this event was aimed at NCPs, the recording and slides are openly available and are also useful for Horizon Europe applicants.

This document, provided by NCPs, will provide you with background information, links to the European Commission presentation and a list of questions raised during the Q&A session including the exact time in the video where each question is answered.

The aim of this document is firstly to help Horizon Europe applicants and secondly to help Health NCPs provide the best possible advice and support in order to assist applicants prepare high-quality grant applications. This document is provided for information only.

It has been written as part of the HNN 3.0 project, a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Commission. The goal of this project is to support the services provided by Cluster 1 Health NCPs across Europe helping applicants to access Horizon Europe Health calls, lowering the entry barriers for newcomers and raising the average quality of the submitted proposals.

Info Session for NCPs: Special Webinar on Blind Evaluations in Horizon Europe

The event webpage includes the agenda, the PowerPoint slides and YouTube recording of the presentation and subsequent Q&A (which starts at 12:37).

- Blind evaluation is being piloted by the European Commission for all two stage calls in the 2023-2024 Work Programme, except one call in the Widening Work Programme. The pilot will initially be in Clusters 1, 4 and 6.
- Blind evaluation will **only be used for the first stage** of two-stage calls.
- The second stage of two-stage calls will not use blind evaluation.
- There will be a NEW admissibility criterion: applicants submitting a proposal under the blind evaluation pilot must not disclose their **organisation names, acronyms, logos nor names of personnel** in **Part B** of their first-stage application.
- Slides 8 and 9 in the Commission presentation (from 15:38 in the recording) give some examples of statements which would result in the proposal being inadmissible.
- The table below lists the questions raised during the Q&A with relevance to the health sector, including the time stamp for the exact time in the video where each question was answered.

Useful Additional Resources

- The **standard application forms** contain additional guidance related to the blind evaluation pilot. Applicants should always refer to the application form for their actual call topic, available when they register to submit a proposal. The standard versions on the Funding and Tenders portal are:
  - RIA and IA Stage 1 (Research and Innovation Action and Innovation Action)
  - CSA Stage 1 (Coordination and Support Action)
- The Horizon Europe Proposal Evaluation briefing (guidance for evaluators) has been updated to cover blind evaluation.
- General Annexes to 2023-24 Work Programme.

Question	Link to answer
How can experts assess the capacity of the partners to perform the work proposed (implementation)?	12:37
How can applicants support the state of the art or Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of a proposal without citing their own publications or projects?	13:00
Can we mention governmental bodies by name in a blind evaluation proposal?	13:33
How to manage if we have to mention the location of a pilot plot or type of farm, or a climatic area?	13:58
How to insert references to publications	14:28
Proposers very often have unique infrastructure and/or data etc. How should one put these to part B without revealing oneself?	19:41
The Excellence chapter still demands reference to products on the market, and reference to patents and publications	21:50
Blind evaluations were used before in framework programmes and abandoned. What is the reason for the reintroduction? Why were they abandoned the last time?	23:25
How can evaluators fully judge the excellence of the proposals if a lot of info needs to be described in a general way (to avoid revealing the applicant's identity)?	25:24
What about references to literature/previous publications and previous projects?	26:51
Will applicants receive feedback explaining why their proposal was judged inadmissible (in the case they do not meet admissibility criteria for blind evaluation)?	27:21
How to describe "national or international R&I activities whose results will feed into the project and how that link will be established" in Excellence?	27:53
Who will decide if a proposal is inadmissible? The Commission or the evaluators, who know the area?	28:29
Is it acceptable to indicate (in part B) from which countries consortium members come from and which disciplines they represent?	30:07

What happens if one of the evaluators identifies a participant on its own. How would that case be handled?	31:56
So for unique innovators (that are clearly identifiable by their innovation) it is not possible to apply?	34:23
If this is a pilot, what will happen in the future - next calls? Are there already any plans?	35:56
Annex F on blind evaluation refers to Horizon Europe Programme Guide for further details. But blind evaluation is not mentioned here. Do you plan to update it?	36:41
It seems not sufficiently clear when a proposal can be judged inadmissible (discrepancy general annexes vs. appl. form). Can the Commission give more guidance?	37:13
Is rebuttal mechanism in use?	39:30
"Partner 3 is *A* leading company in Spain for wind turbine installation" would be acceptable instead?	40:25
Aren't you afraid of getting a lot of proposal with fake statements? You cannot prove they are wrong if you don't know if a specific partner has the capacity.	42:17
Will there be any redress procedure on inadmissibility?	43:16
The 'Guide for blind evaluations' in the application form seems to go further than what is set out in the new admissibility criteria (Gen. Annexes). It indicates 'In addition, names of proposers or their organisations should not be potentially identifiable indirectly' & creates uncertainty for applicants.	43:29
How are the rights of the applicants ensured during the pilot? A lot seems unclear and proposals could be declared inadmissible by unclearly defined criteria.	44:50
Will the evaluators be trained to handle blind applications?	46:32
You plan to analyse this pilot - can you provide us more information? When can we expect results of this analysis?	47:01
Is there experience of blind applications from other major grant-awarding bodies that helped/inspired the Commission's approach?	48:36
What do you expect will be the success rate from stage 1 to stage 2? Around 30%? (This question is not specifically related to the blind pilot)	49:13
What happens if a topic you chose for blind evaluation is not suitable for such an evaluation? E.g. most or all applicants are not able to disguise themselves?	49:39
Will there be similar instructions like developed for COST Actions, where anonymity is required?	53:09
This seems like a lot of extra work for the Commission for questionable benefits...are there statistics on perceived or real biases or a need for this pilot?	53:46
On the slides "The consortium includes the largest research institute in France" is inadmissible. Would "The consortium includes one of the largest…" be ok?	55:27

However, a unique asset is also part of excellence	56:08
Will the European Commission publish a guide as it did for lump sums? With examples and counter-examples of eligible formulations (as for the COST guidelines)?	57:30
Out of curiosity, have you ever written any applications yourself?	57:57
Could the guidance for evaluators on blind evaluations be made public (and well before the call deadlines) as this will be useful for applicants too? Thanks.	58:18
How will potential bias be excluded when choosing the evaluators if the applicants are anonymous? Will this be addressed by the commission beforehand?	59:30
I'm afraid that good applications will be declared inadmissible because of this pilot. It will be really hard not to reveal oneself unintentionally.	1:00:22
If an expert evaluator has a strong suspicion of a partner's identity, will this be verified by a project officer?	1:01:08
If Part 1 is blind then applicants must include all the identification information in the second part? Seems like more work.	1:02:07
In order to show the soundness and impact of the proposals, If applicants introduce mention to the countries involved, would that be considered as inadmissible?	1:02:49
Major changes between first stage and second stage were always discouraged…	1:03:17
Will the European Commission be monitoring if the trial puts people off applying (also for any rejected, if that puts them off applying again - they wasted time writing their proposal)?	1:03:50
For the question one "unique infra, data etc." you can´t answer properly but application may be declared inadmissible!	1:05:36
Some of the details of the partners have to do more with the credibility of the proposal (in Excellence section) than with the consortium composition	1:06:53
Do you have any statistics - how many projects were rejected due to the inadmissibility?	1:07:34
Provide examples on how to write that Partner A will develop something without using the name and at the same time prove that they are capable to do it.	1:07:49
When template refers to link project to any national international research activity, how can this be made without indicating project's acronyms? Suggestions?	1:08:28
…or a manufacturer of modular build smartphones?	1:09:22
Could you reformulate the inadmissible examples given in the presentation, into admissible ones (for example the Spanish wind turbine producer, etc.)?	1:09:43
Have you already dealt with redress? In case yes, could you say more (was it successful)?	1:10:09

Will a first analysis be done before Cluster Health has the 1st stage deadline in September?	1:11:11
What do you mean by a "dynamic threshold"? If one topic receives a lot of proposal, will the budget for this topic then go up? (This question is not specific to blind trial call topics, it relates to all 2-stage calls)	1:13:04
Submitting "overoptimistic", inflated application may not be the way to secure funding in the second stage, but will cause for better applications not passing	1:14:59
Could you specify where these guidance on blind evaluation are available?	1:16:16
Don't you think that the scope of a major industrial or health project is different from a COST network?	1:17:11
Does the extension of 3 pages for business case in Part B for blind evaluation calls concern the 1st stage or 2nd stage?	1:17:33
e.g. electrical vehicles with sport design (& one prototype in space)	1:18:27
Do the experts evaluate in such a way that the identity of participants is not known to them?	1:18:43
Documentation for blind evaluation is not sufficient. A lot cross-ref. between Specific Cond. in WPs, Gen. Annexes A, F, E, and finally to HE Prog. Guide. And in Prog. Guide, blind evaluation is absent.	1:18:57
Will the identity of applicants be revealed to evaluators after the evaluation is completed?	1:18:28

The concept and development process of this document belongs to the HNN3.0 network and is based on official information provided by European Commission experts.