

EID –Weaknesses from ESRs of 2015 Proposals

What causes a proposal to fail badly? Below Threshold Proposals (<70 marks)

Criterion 1 - Excellence

1.1 Quality, innovative aspects and credibility of the research programme (including inter/multidisciplinary and intersectoral aspects)

Typical Weaknesses:

- The proposal objectives are too broad and imprecise.
- The project is too focused on specific product/technology development.
- The research objectives have not been clearly identified and the research program does not illustrate how those objectives are going to be met.
- The state-of-art in the field is not covered sufficiently to properly evaluate the project's innovation and originality.
- The originality and innovation beyond the state of the art of the research program is not convincingly demonstrated.
- The timeliness of some of the future possible uses of the research are not fully demonstrated.
- The research methodology and approach description is too generic. The methodology is not sufficiently described and there is a complete lack of details on how the research objectives will be achieved.

1.2 Quality and innovative aspects of the training programme (including transferable skills, inter/multidisciplinary and intersectoral aspects)

Typical Weaknesses:

- The description of the training programme is very brief and does not include sufficient information on training courses or other activities related to training.

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- The training objectives are too general and too related to the academic environment.
- The complementarity of network wide training events with programmes offered locally (local training) is unclear.
- The lack of network-wide training events limits the ESR's opportunity to widen their expertise.
- There is a lack of detail on what specific training will be provided at the network-wide training events – only event titles are listed.
- The training does not clearly specify the ESR's training in general business and production management concepts, rather it is limited to training in the business model of the non-academic partner.
- Transferable skills training program is insufficient. For example, training in non-technical skills (entrepreneurship, management, leadership etc.) are not adequately addressed.
- Network-wide training events are mainly organized by one partner (the academic partner), and the other three partners do not contribute significantly.
- The role of the non-academic sector in the training is not adequately described or not sufficient.
- ECTS training course allocation and training assessment methods are not clear.

1.3 Quality of the supervision (including mandatory joint supervision for EID and EJD projects)

Typical Weaknesses:

- The quality of supervision is not convincingly demonstrated; specifically, details on the quality of the supervisory staff from the non-academic partner are limited.
- Some co-supervisors from non-academic beneficiary participants do not demonstrate former experience in supervision.
- The individual ESRs have not been assigned to named supervisors.
- The supervision is mainly carried out by the academic partner and the interaction between the participants is therefore limited.
- The supervision procedures and guidelines are briefly and insufficiently detailed. There is no clear general supervision plan and supervision guidelines are not evident in order to make the supervision adequate for all involved ESRs.
- Minimal arrangements for joint supervision are described but there are no specific arrangements to coordinate supervision jointly, such as meetings or joint events to efficiently supervise the PhD candidates. All proposed measures are on a yearly basis and take place through the Supervisory Board. No actions such as meetings, weekly or monthly reports, or group meetings with both supervisors are described.

1.4 Quality of the proposed interaction between the participating organisations

Typical weaknesses:

- The contribution of all participants to the research and training programme are described in generic terms. The interaction and contribution of some participating organisations to the research and training programme are insufficiently detailed.
- The synergies between organizations are shallowly described and not fully exploited.
- The training experience of the different partners is described but the interaction between partners and how this is going to provide an enhanced level of training is not sufficiently specified.
- The contribution of all participants to the programme is limited by the fact that the training programme is mainly carried out by the academic participant.
- There is a serious lack of description of the industrial training that is a key point for this action. For example, the duration of stay in academic and non-academic sectors is not mentioned.
- The proposal does not adequately describe how the ESRs will be exposed to the different research environments made available by the consortium. The secondments for the ESRs are not clearly defined; especially training at the non-academic beneficiary is insufficiently described.

Criterion 2 - Impact

2.1 Enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources, skills, and working conditions to realise the potential of individuals and to provide new career perspectives

Typical Weaknesses:

- The impact of the proposal on the training of the ESRs will be limited as the research area is rather narrow and the training component in the project is weak.
- The impact of the multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral competences on the ESRs career perspectives is not clearly demonstrated.
- The rationale for delivery of the relevant researcher skills appropriate to the research sector of the proposal is not adequately provided.
- The detail provided on the inter-sectoral careers and employment prospects awaiting the graduating ESRs is not well developed.

2.2 Contribution to structuring doctoral / early-stage research training at the European level and to strengthening European innovation capacity, including the potential for:

- a) **meaningful contribution of the non-academic sector to the doctoral/research training, as appropriate to the implementation mode and research field**
- b) **developing sustainable joint doctoral degree structures**

Typical Weaknesses:

- The contribution of the non-academic partners is not adequately described.
- The contribution of the non-academic sector to the doctoral / research training is mainly focused on showing the sector's needs to the ESRs.
- It has not been convincingly demonstrated that this EID will contribute more broadly to structuring doctoral research training in Europe.
- The proposal fails to demonstrate that it contributes to structuring doctoral training at European Level. The structure of the training program is not sufficiently described. Only a list of the local training activities is given.
- The proposal does not adequately demonstrate that it will strengthen European innovation capacity.
- As a result of its specific product/technical focus, the project's contribution to doctoral training at a European level and strengthening of European innovation capacity is likely to be modest.
- The proposal fails to demonstrate how it enhances research and innovation.

2.3 Effectiveness of the proposed measures for communication and dissemination of results

Typical Weaknesses:

- The description of the dissemination measures is vague, limited in scope and does not provide sufficient details.
- Even if some general measures have been described, a communication, dissemination and exploitation strategy with clear objectives, target groups and results is missing.
- The targets for peer-review scientific publication are not presented clearly enough.
- Concrete plans and mechanisms for exploitation of the results in industry are not clearly presented.
- The IPR issues are not adequately addressed.
- Beyond engagement with social media, there are insufficient outreach type activities for the general public.

Criterion 3: Implementation

3.1 Overall coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources (including awarding of the doctoral degrees for EID and EJD projects)

Typical Weaknesses:

- A comprehensive work-plan structure with clear objectives and specific tasks is missing. The tasks given are merely a broad description of the techniques used.

- There is serious lack of coherence; the work plan is organised in a very large number of work packages, which makes the allocation of tasks confusing.
- The work plan lacks verification and iteration aspects.
- The work packages for training and for dissemination/exploitation are very generic and tasks descriptions are minimal.
- The role of some of the participants is not specified in the work packages.
- Responsibility for the work packages is not evenly distributed. The non-academic beneficiary is responsible for only 1 out of 6 work packages. In addition, the 5 remaining work packages are managed by the same person.
- The list of deliverables is extensive and includes a lot of reports creating a considerable administrative workload that will be detrimental to the management of the project.
- The deliverables are presented too generally.
- The list of milestones is too extensive.
- The milestones are not sufficiently structured to follow the project in an efficient way.
- The individual research projects include only a very limited amount of information.
- The research work to be carried out during the secondments at the non-academic partner is not described in sufficient detail.
- One or more of the ESR positions do not meet the qualifying rule of 50% of time in the non-academic sector.

3.2 Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including quality management and risk management (with a mandatory joint governing structure for EID and EJD projects)

Typical Weaknesses:

- Insufficient detail is provided on the proposed governing structure to be put in place. The composition, tasks and duties of this structure are not adequately described.
- The consortium management lacks clarity and the qualification and number of members on the independent advisory board is inappropriate with regard to the size of the project and the number of ESRs.
- The role of the independent advisory board is not clearly explained.
- The management structure does not include a Supervisory Board that coordinates coordination of the scientific and the project activities.
- The contribution of the private sector to the implementation of the project is not properly presented in the proposal.
- The balance of management activities vs. supervision of the ESRs is inadequate, with far too much time devoted to management instead of supervising the researchers.
- As described the progress monitoring and evaluation is based on yearly milestones rather than a function of regular ongoing interaction and assessment.
- Monitoring of progress is not precisely described. A schedule for reviews is not given.
- Practical arrangements ensuring that all ESRs will spend 50% of the time in non-academic institutions are not properly described.

- The mutual recognition of training is not properly described; it is unclear if the institutions of the academic partners recognize the long training obtained in another country and how it fits into their doctoral degree requirements.
- The fact that the ESRs are expected to manage their own research and training budget is not justified.
- Measures proposed for the implementation risks are very generally described.
- Research risk management is poorly described, in particular it does not sufficiently address potential scientific risks in the proposed project.
- The strategy for IPR management including a clear plan is not sufficiently described.

3.3 Appropriateness of the infrastructure of the participating organisations

Typical Weaknesses:

- The appropriateness of the infrastructure of the participating organizations in terms of training activities is insufficiently presented.
- The capacities of the private and the academic sector are not sufficiently detailed raising questions whether the facilities are available for the planned training of the recruited fellows.
- The participants' infrastructure and equipment needed for the project is not sufficiently described.
- The number of employees in some of the non-academic beneficiaries is missing in the table for non-academic beneficiaries at the start of the proposal.

3.4 Competences, experience and complementarity of the participating organisations and their commitment to the programme

Typical Weaknesses:

- It is not sufficiently demonstrated that the consortium has the adequate research expertise to carry out a crucial part of the research programme.
- The proposal does not convincingly demonstrate that the competence and experience of the personnel from the non-academic partner allocated to the project are sufficient for the tasks described.
- The proposal does not include sufficient information on the exploitation of participants' complementarities.
- The utilization of the complementarities among the partners is not maximized for the benefit of the ESR training.

What causes a proposal to just miss the funding cut-off? Below Cut-Off Proposals (> 88 marks but not funded)

General comment: As we move to the top part of the ranking list, the comments from the evaluators become more specific, particularly in relation to the research theme/topic, and the comments become more “picky”. However, there remains some considerable overlap between the “weaknesses” identified in the below threshold proposals and those close to the funding cut-off.

Criterion 1 - Excellence

1.1 Quality, innovative aspects and credibility of the research programme (including inter/multidisciplinary and intersectoral aspects)

Specific Weaknesses:

- The state-of-the-art is not adequately supported by appropriate literature references.
- The state-of-the-art is not sufficiently detailed for all individual projects.
- The research programme is moderately innovative, because it is based mainly on the optimization of previously developed strategies.
- Some methodological aspects are not explained in sufficient detail or are not clearly addressed.
- The multidisciplinary aspects are not sufficiently highlighted.

1.2 Quality and innovative aspects of the training programme (including transferable skills, inter/multidisciplinary and intersectoral aspects)

Specific Weaknesses:

- ECTS are indicated in only a few cases, and the allocation mechanism is not convincingly presented.
- The training activities providing the highest number of ECTS credits are not sufficiently detailed in terms of content.
- The training program lacks details on specific activities both for local training and for non-academic training.
- The absence of specific network wide training program limits the quality of transferable skills training, which in the proposal is planned just at local level within existing programs.
- The training on transferable skills is not sufficiently detailed.
- The combination of adjacent ESR-specific courses and workshops results in rather long training sessions.
- The overall timing of the training courses is not sufficiently detailed.

1.3 Quality of the supervision (including mandatory joint supervision for EID and EJD projects)

Specific Weaknesses:

- Some supervisors have limited previous experience in tutoring PhD students.
- A good experience in mentoring and PhD training is not clearly demonstrated for all the non-academic supervisors.
- The quality of the supervision from the non-academic participants is insufficiently presented.
- The measures for joint supervision are not stated clearly enough.
- Previous experience in student mentoring of the non-academic supervisors and their ability to host five ESRs is insufficiently documented.

1.4 Quality of the proposed interaction between the participating organisations

Specific weaknesses:

- It is unclear how the partners which have complementary expertise, will directly benefit from the proposed network and exchange know-how and/or materials.
- Previous collaborations between the beneficiaries are not well described.
- The diversity of the technical experience of the non-academic beneficiaries is not clearly demonstrated.
- The secondments plan is not fully detailed in relation to the training programme.

Criterion 2 - Impact

2.1 Enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources, skills, and working conditions to realise the potential of individuals and to provide new career perspectives

Specific Weaknesses:

- The project is very ambitious and challenging and there is a significant risk that some objectives will not be achieved, which would have a negative impact on the ESRs' career prospects.
- The proposal lacks information about the progress of career development after ESRs achieve their PhDs.

2.2 Contribution to structuring doctoral / early-stage research training at the European level and to strengthening European innovation capacity, including the potential for:

- a) meaningful contribution of the non-academic sector to the doctoral/research training, as appropriate to the implementation mode and research field**
- b) developing sustainable joint doctoral degree structures (for EJD projects only)**

Specific Weaknesses:

- The contribution of the project to structuring doctoral research training is limited to some extent by the relatively narrow scope of the research.
- ECTS are indicated in only a few training events, limiting the recognition at EU level of the training and for the ESRs' PhDs.
- It is not sufficiently demonstrated how the project will structure doctoral training at EU level.
- There are no clear plans on how to sustain the collaboration after the end of the project.
- The contribution of the non-academic sector to the doctoral training is not described in sufficient detail.

2.3 Effectiveness of the proposed measures for communication and dissemination of results

Specific Weaknesses:

- Dissemination activities are not effectively addressing the non-academic community.
- The dissemination of the results is not envisaged in open-access scientific journals.
- The regulation that two publications are required in peer reviewed journals for rewarding a PhD degree does not necessary guarantee the quality or the level of the publications or of the research to be carried out by the ESRs.
- The number of expected peer-reviewed scientific papers and the number of channels for communication of the project results is unrealistic given the constraints related to the inter-sectoral nature of the project.
- The description of outreach and dissemination activities lacks necessary measurable details/quantifiable targets.
- Most outreach plans follow a generic pattern and include a limited description of measurable details.
- The possibility of commercial exploitation by all members of the consortium is not clearly addressed.
- Given the strong contribution of the private sector for this programme, IP issues and management is insufficiently addressed in what concerns publication of results in a timely fashion for ESR doctorates, which has an impact on the career of the ESRs.

Criterion 3: Implementation

3.1 Overall coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources (including awarding of the doctoral degrees for EID and EJD projects)

Specific Weaknesses:

- Work Packages and ESRs individual project packages are insufficiently detailed.
- The list of milestones and deliverable lacks measurable details for an effective external monitoring of progress.
- The work package tasks are not described in full detail.
- The description of the individual research projects is not presented in sufficient detail.
- The deliverables are not specified in sufficient technical detail.
- The milestones do not properly capture the progress of the project.

3.2 Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including quality management and risk management (with a mandatory joint governing structure for EID and EJD projects)

Specific Weaknesses:

- The management structures are very much controlled by the non-academic partner in the project.
- The management structure seems to be complex relative to the size of the network. The functional organisation of the management committee and its interaction with the supervisory board is unclear.
- The role of the management team is not clear enough and the management procedures are not described in sufficient detail.
- No effective conflict resolution procedure is provided; this could be problematic, given also that joint supervision of each fellow by supervisors from different entities is foreseen.
- The decision making mechanism and conflict and resolution management are not adequately described in the proposal.
- Quality management is not sufficiently addressed in the proposal.
- The financial management strategy is not clearly specified.
- The time frame of establishing and following up the ESR personal career development plan is vague in the proposal.
- The proposed recruitment strategy is not practical. In particular, criteria for excellence are unclear.
- The very short recruitment phase has not been justified.
- Although well-defined risks and the related contingency plans are presented, risk management does not consider all critical issues (such as researchers dropping out).
- The contingency planning for challenging aspects of the individual research projects is not adequately presented.

- The risk management plan is too general and does not clearly address the risks that could be encountered in the research work.

3.3 Appropriateness of the infrastructure of the participating organisations

Specific Weaknesses:

- The description of the infrastructure and hosting capacity of the non-beneficiary is not fully detailed.
- The description of some of the essential instrumentation for the proposed research is insufficient
- Not all beneficiaries state adequately that they have independent research premises.

3.4 Competences, experience and complementarity of the participating organisations and their commitment to the programme

Specific Weaknesses:

- The complementarity and involvement of the partner organizations is not sufficiently presented and justified throughout the proposal. The unique competencies of the partner organisations crucial for the project, and not available at the beneficiary organizations, are not sufficiently described.
- The commitment of the different participating organizations is not sufficiently explained.
- Time commitment of the supervisors and involved leading scientists are not precisely described, particularly for the non-academic beneficiary.
- The human resources of the non-academic partner as described in the proposal are not fully adequate in order to ensure efficient implementation of the project.