



FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU START YOUR EU PROJECT PROPOSAL JOURNEY

A winning path for companies to envisage their first European project proposal

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At G.A.C. Group, we are resolutely practical: we asked our 2000 private sector clients what they knew about European projects and our team of experts in the field accompanied them in their first steps towards this “new world” which represents certain challenges but above all many opportunities. Let’s share the lessons learned from our experiences.

Many organisations throughout Europe have heard about European Commission (EC) funded projects related to Research and Innovation. It sounds like an interesting opportunity to access funding whilst taking your research activities to the next level, deploying your technology to new sectors or creating awareness of your company’s products and possibly finding new clients and research partners.

Indeed, « European Research, Development and Innovation (R&D&I) projects » offer great opportunities – but the competition is fierce and « getting in » requires both considerable efforts and expertise to prepare a successful project proposal.

Are you ready ? And do you have the relevant pre-requisites to prepare a winning proposal ?

We share our thoughts through five key questions you should ask yourself before you start your EU project proposal journey.

Read on... and get in touch with us so we can support you and improve your chances of success!

Of course, if you have already a first EU projects experience, we are equally happy to support you.

For more details click [here](#)



Did you know ?

The previous European Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP), Horizon 2020, has between 2014 and 2020 allocated some €34.42 billion to fund 6 288 collaborative projects that address both research and innovation). There are also many other funding schemes, in addition to collaborative projects. Previously, such projects were mostly aimed at research results and were related to relatively low TRL (Technology Readiness Level): they were far from the market. Nowadays, the focus of the main funding programmes is shifting towards supporting closer-to-market research and development activities – good news for businesses!

This is the case of the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, launched in spring 2021: the part of the Programme that will support industrial and closer-to-market research and development was allocated 56% of €95.5 billion, the entire budget of the Programme!

The following five questions will help you understand some pre-requisites and opportunities of a collaborative EU project.

1. Does your current activity, at least partly, have a European scope or do you wish to extend your activity to such a wider market ?

European projects are of course a way to access public funding but becoming involved is only relevant for **companies** with an interest in deploying their technology, solution or service towards a market that is larger than their home market (country) or for **organisations** that wish to be involved in cross-border networks, exchange good practices with larger communities or access information from other demonstration sites or use cases. If this is not the case, you might consider other sources of financing, such as national or regional sources, specific schemes for SME support, etc. European collaborative projects per se **have to involve at least three partners from three different countries, so cross-border collaboration is a must.**

2. Are you ready to share information about your R&D with external parties ?

EU projects are often **collaborative projects**. This means that different organisations tackle a European challenge together, **each player bringing in its expertise and experience**.

A collaborative project can involve academic and research partners, as well as small and larger companies, networks, innovation intermediaries such as cluster organisations, other end users and many more. It is a great way to enhance especially academia-industry relations, or to establish connections to companies with complementary activities, or to strengthen relationships with some of your partners. But, in order to be successful, collaborative projects must be a **platform for open exchanges** and all involved partners must accept to share at least the most important aspects related to the work.

A consortium agreement is set up before the beginning of each project that sets the ground for the collaboration. Sensitive data can generally be kept confidential if this is agreed with partners from the beginning and does not hinder the consortium to reach its overall project goal. If you are not ready for collaborative projects, there are other schemes.

Did you know ?

The text of the consortium agreement is suggested by the project coordinator, often based on the available templates (**DESCA template**) and reviewed by the project partners-organisations. In other words, you will have an important word to say about how you wish to deal with Intellectual Property Rights, confidentiality and other issues.

3. Does your company offer or plan to offer a solution, technology or service that goes beyond the state-of-the-art ?

Representatives from companies working on innovation topics will naturally respond with a « yes (of course) ». But when we ask for details, such as the **distinguishing factors from competitors**, but also for the aspects that could block you from getting to an upper maturity level, some more efforts and considerations need to be taken into account. And these are really necessary to defend « your » solution or technology in the proposal.

An EU project proposal is prepared in response to an open call which specifies the scope and expected outcomes on a defined topic, described through a short call text.

The topic is generally broad enough to allow the consortium to define the envisaged project on the basis of the partners' competences, needs and strategies - but a thorough project concept needs to be prepared that demonstrates not only an appropriate methodology for the implementation of suggested project activities, but also how the envisioned approach **responds to the topic challenge and goes beyond what has been done so far and shows true European added value and excellence across all evaluation criteria.**

Did you know ?

The European Research and Innovation Framework Programmes have, since their creation in 1984, undergone numerous changes in terms of focus areas, call structure, types of funded projects, as well as conditions of participation/funding. The just launched Horizon Europe Framework Programme aims at supporting the implementation of several EU strategies, namely those related to a **digital, green et resilient** Europe. This means that the individual call texts correspond to a specific challenge related to these strategic aspects. Horizon Europe is an impact-driven programme: besides addressing challenges on a scientific, societal and citizen level, project proposals should always consider to tackle also the **United Nations Global Development Goals.**

More info [here](#)



4. You do not have a solution, technology or service beyond the state-of-the-art ? There are other ways to participate !

If you have a **business interest related to the call topic**, but you don't wish to act as a solution provider (then you shall have technological know-how and want to improve it, or to develop it starting from existing foundations), you can still profit from the development as an **end user**! In this case, you can offer a **use case to the future project** - plant, system, installation, and other options are possible – for example, for cities it could be an area to test energy efficient buildings.

We are getting regularly requests to suggest use cases in different calls: why not yours? In this case, the generic technology may be tailored in the project to your needs and application, taking into account your specificities.

Did you know ?

In addition to implementing part of your roadmap, one of the important motivations for industrial firms to join collaborative proposals is technology watch – understand new developments in the topic of business interest, compare problems, learn from others. But there are many other motivations – from market test to identification of smart staff, such as PhD students or freshly graduated engineers to hire! And remember that for your staff it could be an important incentive – to make a deep dive in the topic, to meet other developers.

By the way, did you know that there are 14 partner organisations on average in collaborative research and innovation projects funded by Horizon 2020 in 2014-2020? Not all project partners develop the same technology, but all partners address the challenges of the call.

5. Do you have staff members with scientific expertise and strong English language capacities, as well as a network of academic partners, beyond your home country ?

An EU project proposal is based on a thorough and innovative concept that is generally prepared internally, involving all consortium partners, in order to define the overall project idea and how it will be implemented. It is common good practice to gather here the points of view from both academic / research partners and industry players.

The proposal document itself contains several distinct sections: **excellence** (which includes for example the project aim and objectives and how the project will go beyond the state of the art) – **impact** (which describes the pathway from the objectives set to the activities suggested for the implementation to the expected results) – and **implementation** (which provides details on the work plan, suggested activities, deliverables and milestones).

Scientific and/or technical expertise is thus a relevant skill for the first part, whereas **English language skills are obviously necessary** both for the proposal writing and for the exchanges with consortium partners.

Did you know ?

The G.A.C. EU project team has been involved in the proposal preparation of EU projects for several decades. Our staff members have EU-wide networks (and beyond), both in the research community and in the private sector and we collaborate with numerous networks, cluster organisations and policy makers on different levels.

But G.A.C. also works as project partner, invited by our network: just in 2021, **we have started, or are starting soon, three Horizon 2020 collaborative projects, with a total project budget ranging from 1 mln to almost 15 mln €!** This insider perspective is obviously helpful when we provide support to clients for the proposal preparation.

Our network of partners regularly enquires about demonstration / use cases from industry. This might be your first step into an EU project.

We think that a **winning proposal**, besides **bringing together excellent partners** from various backgrounds and combining their skills, also includes a **touch of creativity** – the little dot on the i that can stand out in evaluations. This is why our team is experienced in **different co-creation approaches**, using Design Thinking, Lego® Serious Play® and other techniques that we implement both in the proposal preparation phase and of course in our projects.



Photos: Lego® Serious Play® co-creation workshop in the frame of an EU project

Winning an EC-funded multi-million innovation project is difficult, **but your chances for a “win” are enhanced if certain good practice rules are followed in the construction of the consortium and proposal preparation.** This logic is followed by G.A.C. The key elements are summarized below, but when we support a client for an EU proposal, we share of course many more details during the project preparation.

Broadly speaking, the EC multi-million projects funded under Horizon Europe calls must be:

- (1) ambitious;
- (2) innovative and go beyond the state of the art ;
- (3) technologically complex and challenging, at least with regard to some demonstration cases (where relevant) ;
- (4) respond to the challenge addressed by the EC call ;
- (5) covering all dimensions indicated in the EC call ;
- (6) build on existing initiatives and bring them to an upper level ;
- (7) allow for wide uptake and replication (where applies) ;
- (9) have a “cherry on the cake”, to be distinguished from competitors ;
- (10) able to demonstrate results of high impact and sustainability through adapted business plans.

Are you ready ? We are !

Why we can support you for developing a winning proposal

G.A.C. Group is an international innovation management consultancy with 200+ permanent staff members, established in 6 countries. We aim to support our clients and partners following the slogan "Innovation & Performance for Impact" and this is particularly true for the preparation of an EU project proposal.

- The G.A.C. EU projects expert team has participated some **50+ projects funded under FP7 and Horizon 2020**, either as a coordinator, proposal coordinator or partner. We have staff who coordinated 10 projects funded under the EC Framework Programmes.

- We work on diverse sectors such as the digital economy (ICT, IoT, Big Data, 5G, ...), health/e-health, energy, process industries, space, the green and circular economy and many more. **We have specific expertise on cross-sector value chains and facilitating international cooperation.**

- G.A.C. builds on its strong winning experience, compared to the 10% average success rate of EU project proposals announced by the EC: in 2020, **we had a 33% success rate**. Our company has a unique database of proposal evaluation summaries from more than 100+ proposals where G.A.C. or our clients and partners were involved: we implement a continuous learning process and take both positive and negative feedback into account in the proposal preparation.

- G.A.C. works with clients and partners from across the entire quadruple helix spectrum, supporting inter-regional and international collaboration for innovation: we work with small and large companies, cluster organisations, innovation support actors (incubators, accelerators...) and networks, research organisations, academic partners and policy makers... **We foster university industry cooperation, business incubator management, support to start-ups and much more.**

How we work

Our EU projects team has the experience and expertise to work on various topics and we have internal expertise on a large variety of technologies and industrial sectors. This means we have access to the relevant networks to set up a high-level consortium.

- When we accompany a client for the development of an EU project proposal, we involve our internal expert staff members and provide you with a dedicated contact person who will be your privileged contact.

- A winning proposal is prepared by a team with complementary competences: this is why G.A.C. guides the process but contributions of all partners will be required. G.A.C. will guide the process, set up a timeline, indicate the needed contribution, combine them and finalise and submit the proposal.

Our EU financial and administration team can also ensure that you are aware of all the relevant reporting and audit rules.

- In our technical projects, when not provided by the coordinator, we work with scientific advisors with sound track record of winning EC projects.

Example of our support to clients

SOLIDEO (Planner for the Olympic Games in Paris, 2024) has decided to engage into European projects (through different funding programmes: H2020, Horizon Europe, LIFE, Urban Innovative Actions) to highlight at a European level the French know-how and the innovations developed especially for the Olympic Games (related to construction, climate change adaptation and biodiversity preservation). They have chosen G.A.C. to support them from 2020 to 2024.

Our mission has started with weekly meetings with the SOLIDEO core team in order to best understand their activities and needs and target the appropriate European funding programmes. Through an active funding opportunities watch and the drafting of targeted presentations (on specific funding programmes, calls etc.), we facilitate the discussion between the SOLIDEO core team and the companies they work with to make them participate in European projects. Once a call is identified, we support SOLIDEO in finding partners or a consortium and writing the proposal. The journey to European projects allows SOLIDEO to challenge the companies they are working with and their own projects to be at the fore-front of European innovation and ensure the application of state-of-the-art solutions.



