

MCSA APPLICATIONS: EVALUATION PROCESS & EVALUATION CRITERIA

Filippos A. Aravanopoulos, Ph.D.

Professor of Plant Genetics

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Structure of this Presentation

- Setting the stage
- The Evaluation Process
- The Evaluation Criteria
- Scratching beyond the surface:
evaluations in two Actions (IF, ITN)
- General comments for all Actions
- Take home messages

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) have supported **more than 100 000 researchers** so far



MSCA researchers

(all projects combined)



8 Nobel laureates



1 Oscar winner*

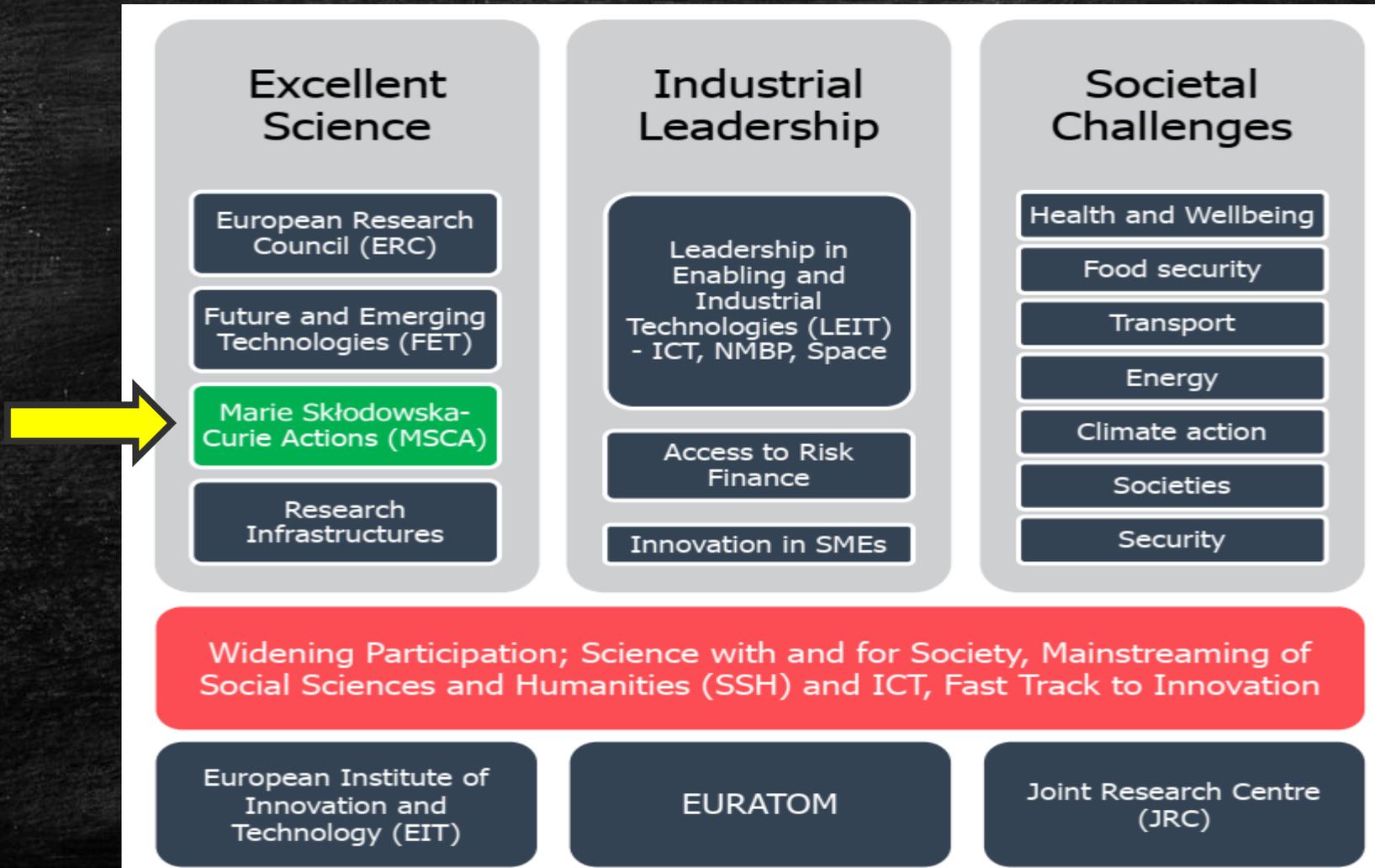
* A team of software developers involved with MSCA won an Academy Award in 2006 for their work on visual effects software
<http://europa.eu/lqK83Yg>



European
Commission

Research
Executive Agency

The three pillars of Horizon 2020



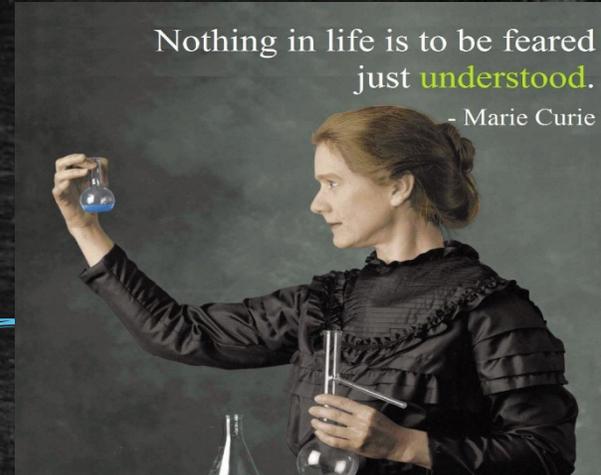
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

RATIONALE

"Ensure excellent & innovative research training as well as attractive career & knowledge-exchange opportunities through cross-border & cross-sector mobility of researchers to best prepare them to face current & future societal challenges"

Nothing in life is to be feared
just **understood**.

- Marie Curie



Evaluation Process

Evaluation Panels

Proposals are read by at least 3 disciplinary experts

Distribution of awards across 8 Panels is proportional to the number of proposals received

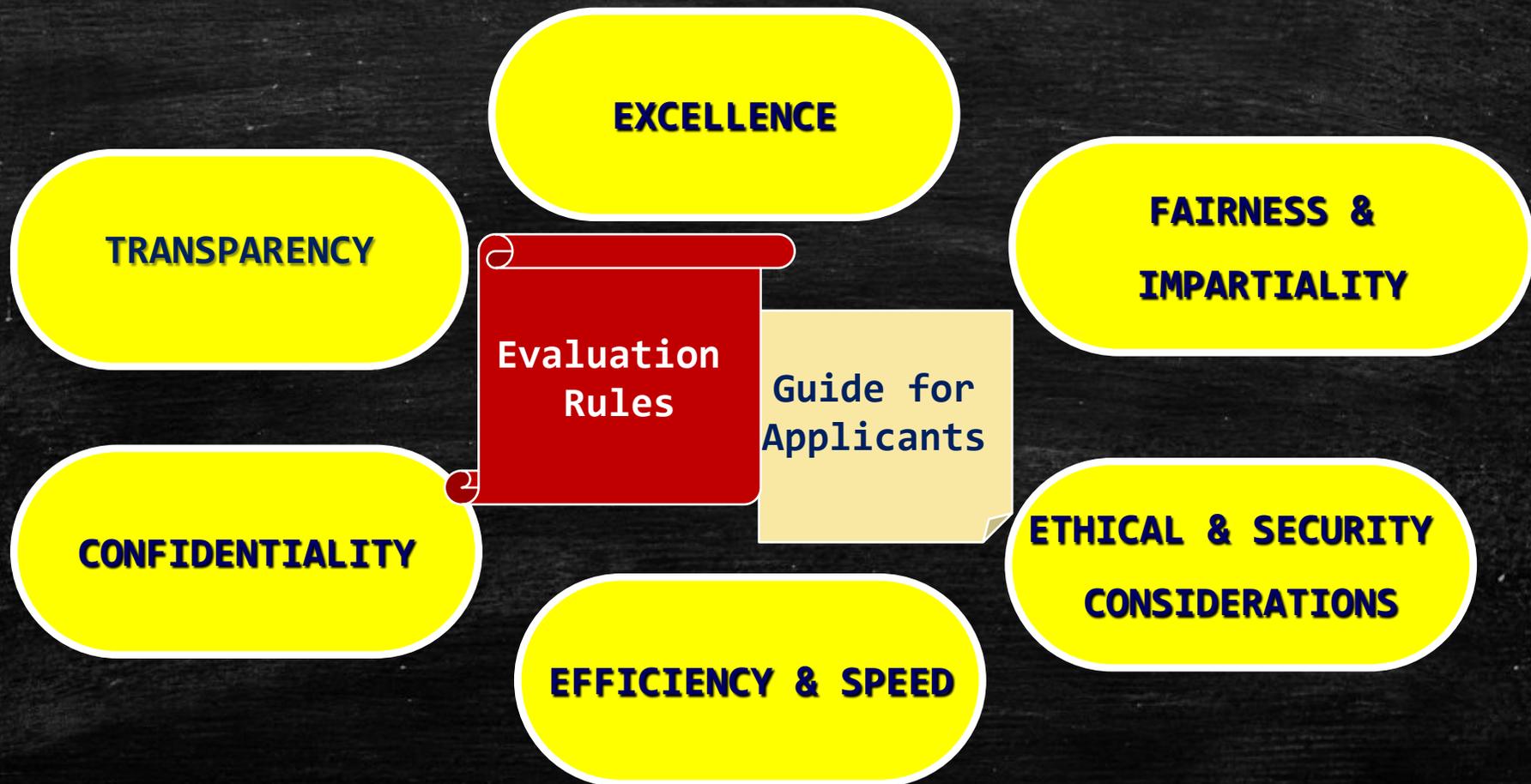
- Chemistry (CHE)
- Physics (PHY)
- Mathematics (MAT)
- Life Sciences (LIF)
- Economic Sciences (ECO)
- ICT & Engineering (ENG)
- Social Sciences & Humanities (SOC)
- Earth & Environmental Sciences (ENV)

Also (IF):

3 Multidisciplinary Sub-panels:

- Reintegration Panel (RI)
- Society & Enterprise Panel (SE)
- Career Restart Panel (CAR)

Evaluation Process - Basic Principles



Actors in the Evaluation Process

Evaluators

- ❑ Evaluation of proposals in a fair & independent way
- ❑ Submission of individual evaluation reports
- ❑ Participation in Consensus discussions / Approval of Consensus Reports

❑ Rapporteurs

- Drafting & submission of Consensus Reports
- Leading of Consensus Report discussion

Chair & Vice-Chairs

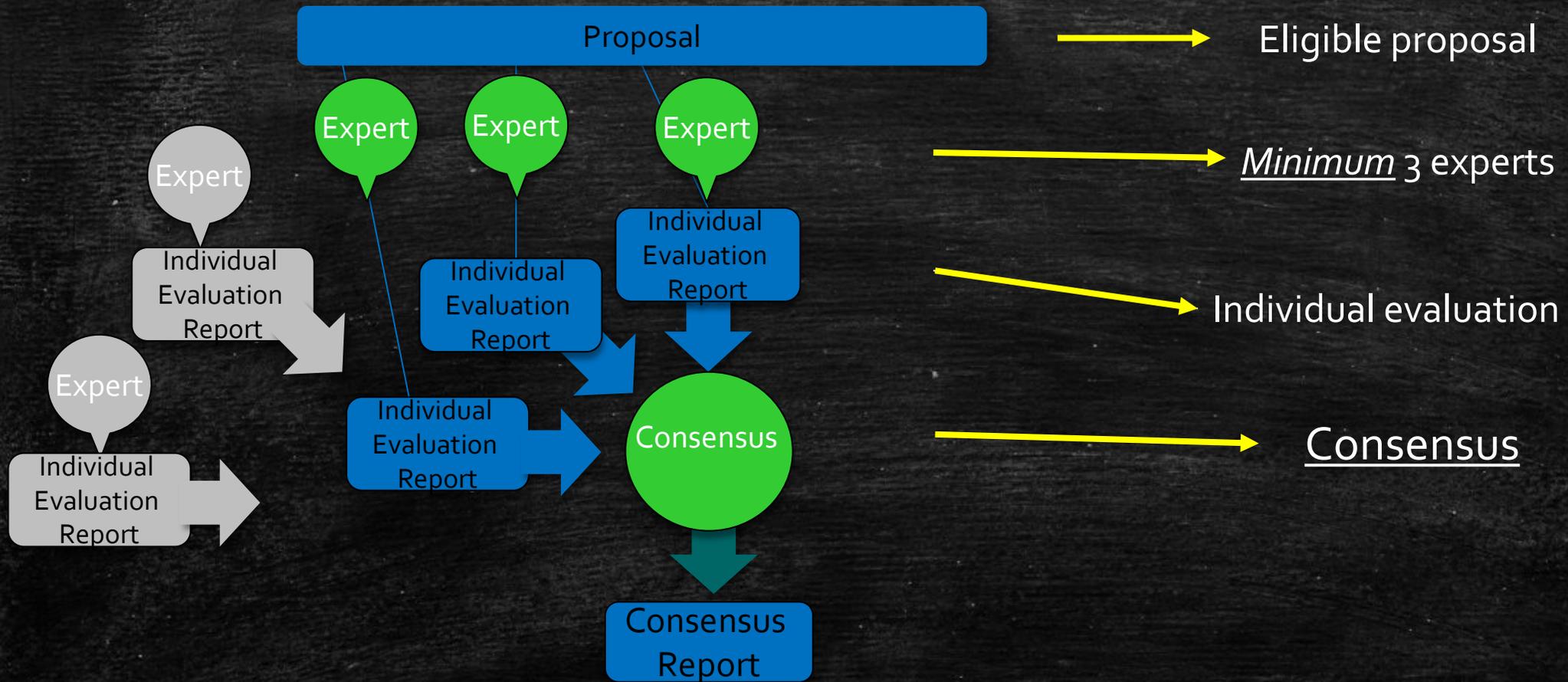
Assistance in evaluation management & monitor progress

- ❑ Do not evaluate proposals; assist/monitor/supervise evaluators/rapporteurs
- ❑ Quality check individual / consensus / evaluation summary reports
- ❑ Participate in the central Panel Review

Independent Observer

- ❑ Observe the overall evaluation process, may contact C/VCs & experts
- ❑ Provide advice / improvement suggestions to the REA

Evaluation process – For one proposal



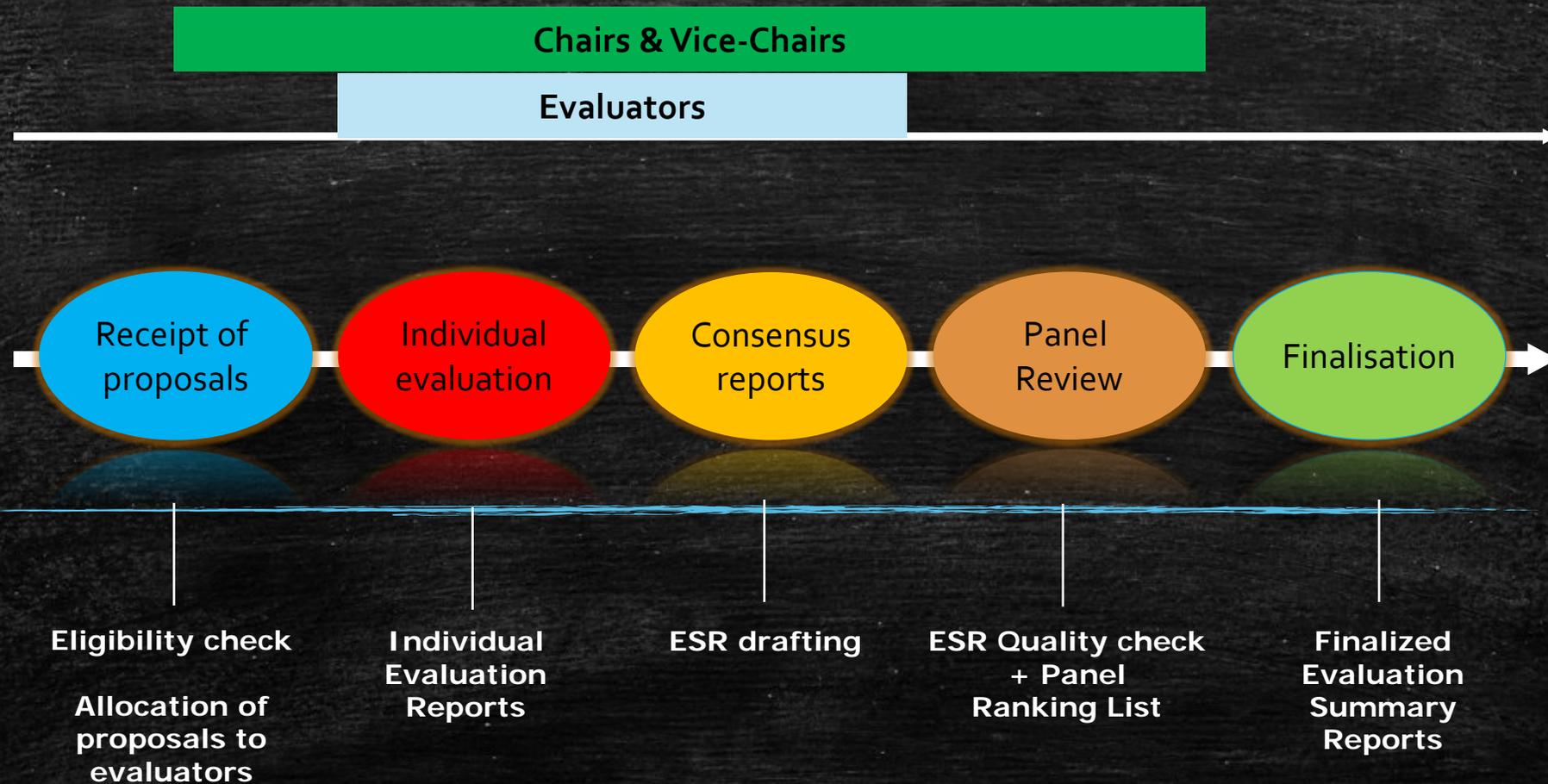
Individual evaluation

- Proposal evaluated against the evaluation criteria.
 - As submitted - not on its potential if certain changes were to be made.
- Excess pages are indicated with a watermark & are **NOT** read.
- Level of relevance of the proposal to the Call.

Consensus evaluation

- Discussion on the basis of the individual evaluations; it is not just a simple averaging exercise.
- Aim is to find agreement on comments & scores.

Evaluation process – All proposals



The Panel review

- Ensures the consistency of comments & scores given at the consensus stage.
- Endorses the final scores & comments for each proposal.
- Prioritises proposals with identical total scores.
- Recommends a list of proposals in priority order.

Evaluation Criteria

Score descriptors

0 –	Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1 – Poor.	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2 – Fair.	Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
3 – Good.	Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4 – Very Good.	Proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5 – Excellent.	Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

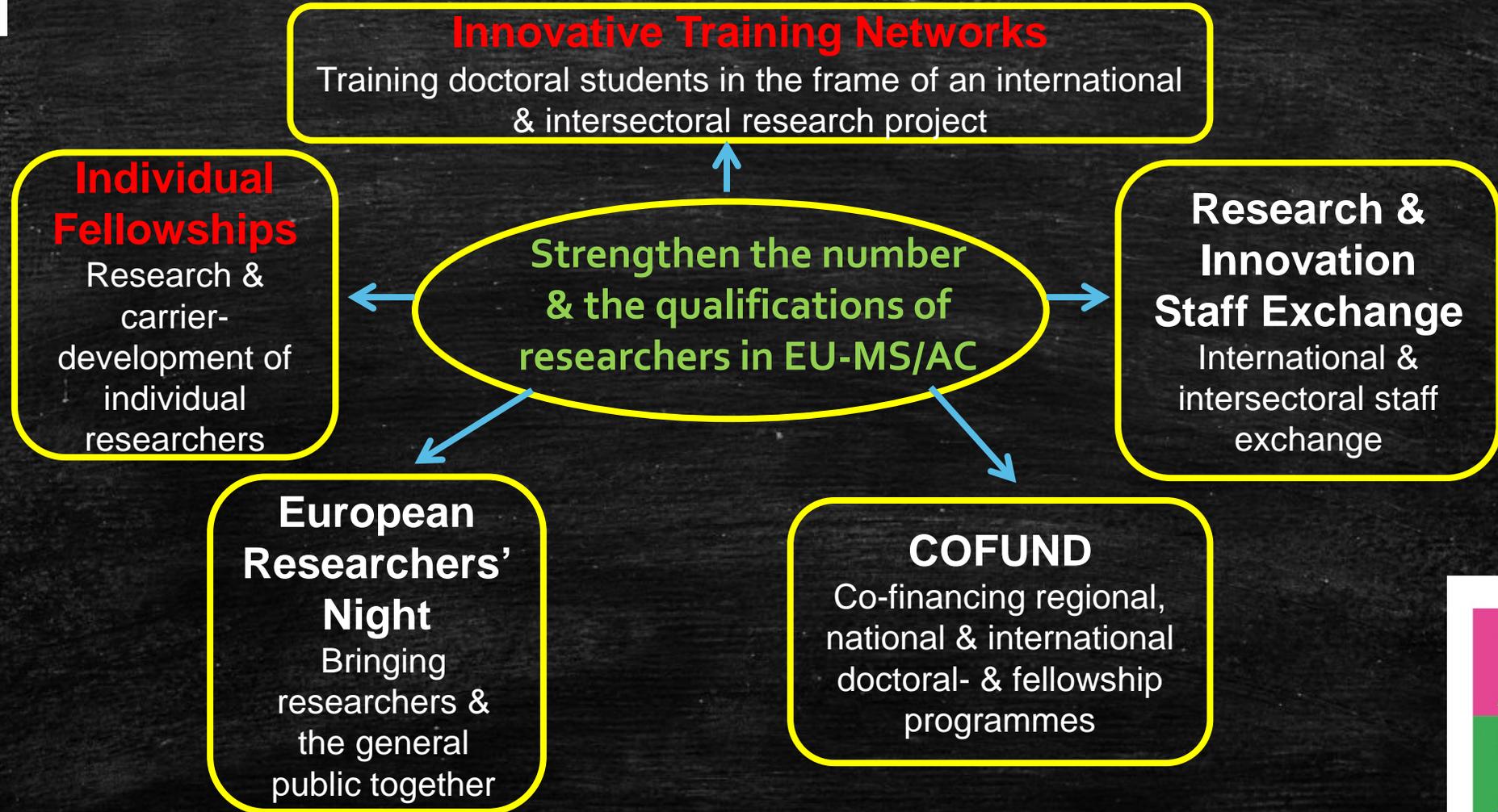
▶ Full mark range, 0.0 – 5.0 with decimals

Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	Weighting	Priority (<i>ex-aequo</i>)
Excellence	50%	1
Impact	30%	2
Implementation	20%	3

- ▶ Application form reflects evaluation criteria.
- ▶ Overall threshold of 70%; No individual thresholds; ... **but may need 90+% to get funded !!! VERY GOOD IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH!**
- ▶ Evaluation Summary Reports provide feedback/score/funding decision.
- ▶ No restriction on resubmissions (= same supervisor, host, researcher).
- ▶ Similar H2020 funded project must be indicated (avoidance of double funding).

Five MSCAs for your choice



MSCA Individual Fellowships

Post-doctoral fellowships for outstanding researchers

European Fellowships (EF):

- International mobility within or into EU Member States (MS) & Associated Countries (AC).
- Experienced researchers of any nationality.
- Applicants must not have resided or carried out their main activity in the country of the host organisation for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately prior to the call deadline.

Global Fellowships (GF):

- International mobility from Member States (MS) & Associated Countries (AC) to a third country.
- Experienced researchers of any nationality: nationals of EU countries & long-term residents.
- Must not have resided or carried out their main activity in the country of the 3rd country organisation for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately prior to the call deadline.

Evaluation Criteria / Sub- criteria

- Criteria indicate questions.
- You provide answers.

IF: Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowships		
Excellence	Impact	Quality and efficiency of the implementation
Quality and credibility of the research/innovation project; level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary and gender aspects	Enhancing the future career prospects of the researcher after the fellowship	Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan , including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources
Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host	Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results	Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures , including risk management
Quality of the supervision and of the integration in the team/institution	Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences	Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)
Potential of the researcher to reach or re-enforce professional maturity/independence during the fellowship		
50%	30%	20%
Weighting		
1	2	3
Priority in case of ex aequo		

EXCELLENCE: Quality & credibility of the research/innovation level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary aspects & gender aspects

- What is your Research Proposal & why should it get funded:
 - Have **clear, focused research objectives** & provide overview.
 - Make it clear **why the project is novel**, ground breaking or cutting edge (up-to-date state-of-the-art).
 - **Detail** the planned **methodology** & approach.
 - What will be its contribution & **how will it advance the area.**
 - Highlight all **inter- & multidisciplinary** aspects.
 - Explain **how the project will open up career & collaboration opportunities** for the researcher & host.
- **Clarity:**
 - Evaluators will be experts, but maybe not down to the level of detail you are, **develop your project idea.**
 - Bring the project to life; make sure it is easy to follow.

EXCELLENCE: Quality & appropriateness of the training & of the two-way transfer of knowledge (ToK) between the researcher & the host

- Two-way interaction between researcher & host(s):
 - What **new knowledge** & skills will the **researcher develop**?
 - What **existing knowledge** & skills will the researcher **bring to the host(s)**?
- Training-through-research:
 - The research project makes up the focus of the Fellowship, but should be framed in the context of **comprehensive but focused training for the researcher**.
 - Training in terms of **multi/interdisciplinary expertise, intersectoral experience & transferable skills**
 - For GF, identify how the skills/knowledge gained during the outgoing phase in third country will be transferred back to Europe.
 - (Meaningful) secondments form an asset.

EXCELLENCE: Quality of the supervision & of the integration in the team/institution

- Qualifications & experience of the supervisor(s)(both for GF):
- Include **evidence of supervisor's qualifications / experience** to ensure success of the Fellowship on the research topic (participation in projects, publications, patents, relevant results, international collaborations & experience in supervising (e.g. no. of postdocs, PhDs mentored).
- Will others in the Host provide mentoring? → description.
- Hosting arrangements, in terms of integrating the Fellow:
- Measures to ensure the **successful integration of the Fellow & ToK**.
- Is there an institutional Research Development Strategy? How does it fit in the proposal?
- What would be the **Career Development Plan** of the applicant? Does it fit well to the Host?
- For GF describe both outgoing / incoming phases & their interconnectivity.

EXCELLENCE: Capacity of the researcher to reach & re-enforce a position of professional maturity/independence

- Show that the **candidate has an excellent track record** for their level of experience (publications, patents, conference papers, chapters, monographs).
- **Highlight all relevant experiences**, including teaching, supervision, or work with industry/non-academic partners.
- The CV can be used for reference to gain space in the proposal, but highlight major relevant achievements.

Convince the evaluators that the **researcher is right for the Fellowship** project & that they will develop & grow during the training:

- **Clear outcome** of the Fellowship, e.g. attain leading independent position, or resuming research career after a break.
- Demonstrate the **capacity for independent thinking & leadership**.
- Explain how the Fellowship will have a **highly significant positive impact on the researcher's career** (link to comprehensive training).

IMPACT: Enhancing the potential & future career prospects of the researcher

- Detail the **expected impact** of the Fellowship (training & research) on the researchers career **after the Fellowship**:
 - What are the researcher's professional goals & how will the Fellowship contribute.
 - Experience of a new country, culture & way of thinking.
 - Development of **new skills**, including those which are transferable.
 - New experiences in new sectors through secondments, e.g. new competences that will be acquired.
- Be precise as to **how this will all be achieved** through the project.

IMPACT: Quality of the proposed measures to exploit & disseminate the action results

- Ensure **dissemination** of results are **appropriately targeted** to peers, e.g. scientific, or industrial community. Describe the planned dissemination & exploitation activities:
- How will research results be transferred to potential users, scientists, society? **WHERE do you target to publish** (which Journals)? **WHERE do you plan to present** (which Conferences)? **Open Access** levels?
- If appropriate, present commercialisation plans, consider **IPR arrangements**.
- Concrete planning for dissemination & exploitation should be included in the Gantt Chart.

IMPACT: Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences

- Prepare a **detailed communication strategy** & timeline (included in the Gantt Chart) to create awareness of the performed research. Do not copy from other projects/proposals – this is NOT a “one-fits-all” exercise!
- Have **clear communication goals**, objectives & defined audiences.
- Use the right media & means, if possible use dissemination partners & multipliers.
- How relevant is this research to citizens’ everyday lives in the short, medium & long term?
- How will the Fellowship contribute to a European “Innovation Union” accounting for public spending?

IMPLEMENTATION: Coherence & effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks & resources

- The project **Work Plan should be clear & realistic** & show how the desired impacts will be achieved.
- Use a **Gantt Chart** using time elapsed by month to show:
 - Work Packages titles (for EF there should be at least 1WP);
List of major deliverables(outputs);
 - List of major milestones (control points);
 - Secondments (if applicable).
- Work Packages** can be included for all activities, *i.e. research, management, training.*
- Explain how the work plan & **resources mobilised** will ensure success.
- Explain why the amount of **person-months** is appropriate to achieve the Objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION: Appropriateness of the management structure & procedures, including risk management

For entities with a link to the beneficiary, what is their involvement & how will organisation/management & risk mitigation be addressed with them.

- Describe the organisation & management structure in place, including **progress monitoring mechanisms**, to ensure success.
- What research/administrative risks might endanger the success of the project & what are the planned contingencies/mitigation measures (**risk management plan**)?

IMPLEMENTATION: Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)

Demonstrate commitment by providing the researcher with that needed to successfully complete the Fellowship.

- Global Fellowships: Similar description for the outgoing third country host;

- Did third country Partners provide a letter of commitment (Part B, section 7)?

- Describe the **infrastructure, logistics, facilities** that will be available to the researcher & **necessary to ensure the successful implementation** of the project.

- Describe the **active contribution of the beneficiary & partners** (if appropriate) to the proposed **research & training** activities;

- Why is it an appropriate place to conduct the Fellowship;

- Do they have experience in the research field / hosting Fellows;

Some more general comments

Gender aspects require your attention

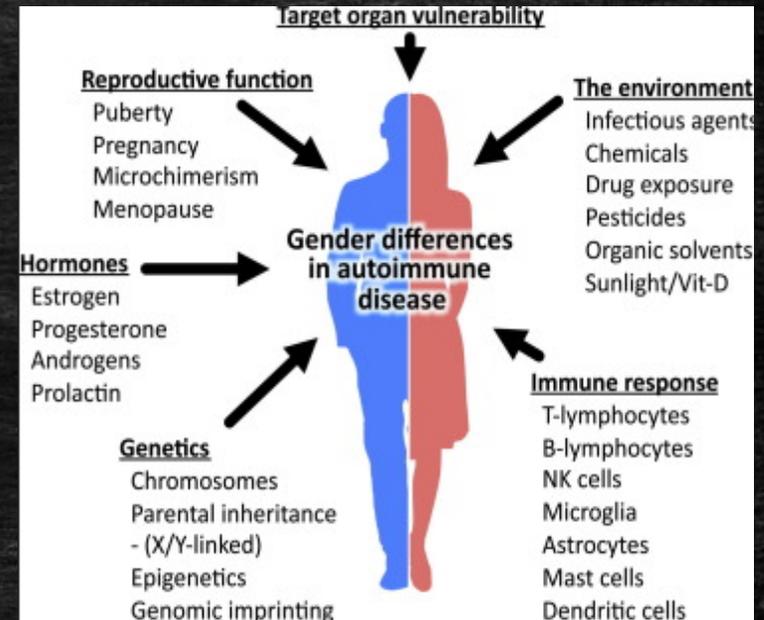
- Relate to EU policies on Gender Equality – cross-cutting priority in Horizon2020:
- Equal opportunities (among seconded staff & decision-makers/supervisors).
- Gender dimension in the research content (e.g. subjects or end-users).
- Gender dimension in project management & networking.

• Gender balance in the team may not directly applicable e.g. in IFs,



BUT

• Gender aspects in the research / gender dimension of the research subjects are.

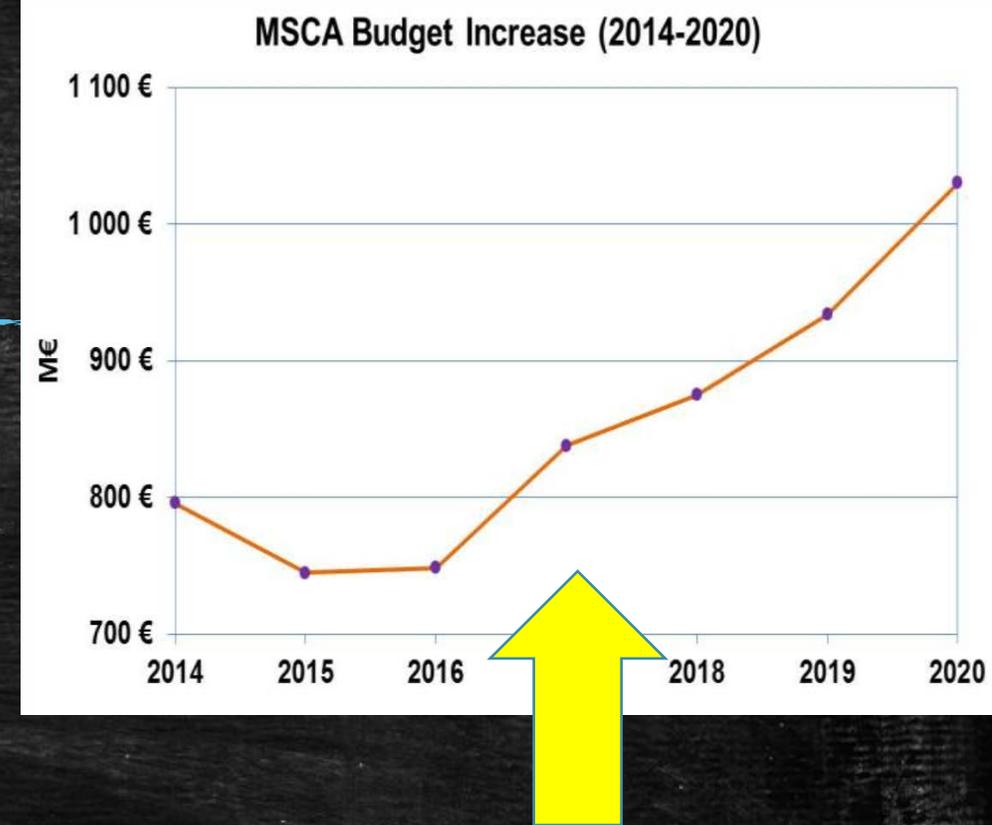


The **Manual for Evaluators** states that:

"A topic is considered gender relevant where human beings are involved as subjects or end-users & it can be expected that its findings will affect groups of women & men differently. In such cases, applicants should integrate gender issues as part of their proposals. Evaluators should consider this under 'excellence' (sub-criterion 1.1)."

Be careful on Dissemination & Outreach

- ▶ The yearly MSCA budget will surpass **ONE BILLION EUROS** next year. **The European public & the decision makers should be aware** of the MSCA results & impact on societal challenges (health, food security, clean energy, environmental protection, climatic change, security, competitiveness, job creation, etc.).
- ▶ The Commission relies on your high quality social networking, dissemination & outreach activities to reach this goal → make sure your proposal fully meets this challenge!



Last but NOT least: Ethics

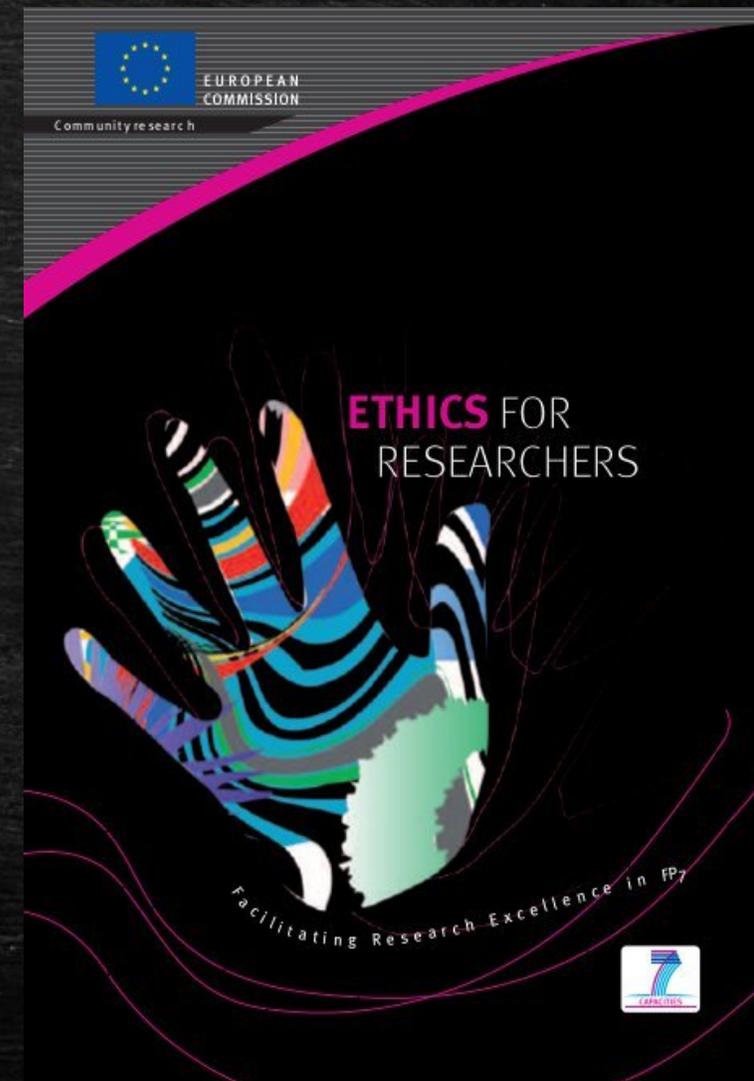
ETHICS: Self-assessment in Part A & strategy in Part B. Provide detailed strategy.

- Crucial for all research domains - need to identify any potential ethical issues & describe they will be addressed.

- All proposals considered for funding subject to Ethics Review.

- Read the Ethics Self-Assessment Guidelines.

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf



Will you be among the “chosen few”???

Success rates IF Call 2017

	Submitted	Evaluated	Selected for funding	Success rate in %
Standard-EF	7.154	7.065	1.029	14,6
EF-CAR	329	322	46	14,3
EF-RI	539	533	78	14,6
EF-SE	209	204	58	28,4
GF	858	833	137	16,4
Altogether	9.089	8.957	1.348	14,8

Let's recap a few points...

Help the evaluators & make their life easy

- **Success is in the detail**: a 0.1 score difference may separate success from failure:
- **Address** well the main objectives, **demonstrate** the excellence, **show** the innovation capacity & the potential impact.
- **What** is the aim of the project? ● **Why** is it important?
- **What** will be achieved?
- Use **clear & concise language** – no blah-blah; explain terms, provide evidence.

Help the evaluators & make their life easy

Overall presentation matters...

- Each **statement should contain specific info** (if possible applicable, quantifiable)
- Use **tables, colours, graphs & schematic representations** of concepts & information you want them to see & understand.
- **One picture is 1000 words** (but do not overuse).
- Check **consistency** across the whole proposal.
- Avoid repetition, **highlight key information**.
- Use the Gantt Chart well.



Sum up & take home messages

- **Why do you apply?** - Clarity of your goals
- Read all Call documentation, i.e. the **Work Programme**, relevant **EU Policy** documents & especially the **Guide of Applicants** - your "*Holly Book*".
- Consider carefully **ALL evaluation criteria** (& sub-criteria): - **IMPACT & IMPLEMENTATION** will make half of your mark, so they deserve half of your time. What is the **IMPACT** to be achieved **during the project**, what is the **potential IMPACT** that can materialize **after the project**.
- **Long-lasting collaborations** are an asset: fellow-institution(s) - IF; academia - industry (ITN); universities-research institutes-industry - COFUND.
- **Meet your planned supervisor/fellow(s)** & discuss the proposal in length.

Sum up & take home messages

- Your MSCA proposal is not your thesis or your best paper; besides its solid science, policy, industry economy & society should be addressed.
- Do not be too modest about your CV, but do not exaggerate either – be authentic.
- MSCA is not (only) research; it is training through research! Therefore present:
 - research training activities,
 - transferable skills training,
 - 3-i training (where applicable),
 - carefully chosen, meaningful secondments.
- Ask colleagues “in the know” to review - proof read your drafts; substantial criticism does you a favour!
- Very good is not good enough! Think excellence & innovation, or do not apply.
- Start early & arrange to spend lots of time on your proposal; submit early!

Acknowledgements

- Christos Panagiotidis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Emily Taylor, University of Cambridge
- REA Training Sessions, Webinars, Evaluator/VC Briefings

THANK YOU
