MSCA-IF: my experience

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Time travel: back to May 2015

- I was just completing my 2nd postdoc in Cancer Signaling (2010-2013)
- What had I done before?
  - Postdoc in Neurodegenerative diseases (2010-2013)
  - Ph.D. in Pharmacy (Neurodegenerative diseases, 2010)
  - B.Sc. in Pharmacy (2002)
- My long-term goal: a faculty position in Greece

European Commission

Still in May 2015: What should I do next?

- A 3rd postdoc seemed the most obvious choice
- Prerequisites for my 3rd postdoc:
  - Massively improve my CV
  - Self-financed
  - Mobility

Why I chose MSCA-IF

- Prerequisites for my 3rd post doc:
  - Vastly improve my CV – MSCA-IF are among the most prestigious fellowships
  - Self-financed - MSCA-IF cover salary, overheads and part of the research costs
  - Mobility – MSCA-IF are by definition mobility programs

Why I chose MSCA-IF

- Prerequisites for my 3rd post doc:
  - Vastly improve my CV – MSCA-IF are among the most prestigious fellowships
  - Self-financed - MSCA-IF cover salary, overheads and some research costs
  - Mobility – MSCA-IF are by definition mobility programs
- Added benefit: Preparing the application is a very useful experience

Preparing the proposal: how to start

- Read carefully all the available material
- Familiarize with the template and the platform
- Seek help
  - On-line guides, webinars, FAQs etc
  - Past candidates
  - National contact points
  - Grant offices

Preparing the proposal: what to propose?

- Try to propose something related to the Horizon2020 research priorities
  - Or at least bend it a bit, so that it becomes related!
- Choose the appropriate (*i.e.* less competitive) panel
- Always keep in mind that MSCA-IF is about providing researchers with "excellent training and career development"
  - It is science (and other actions) for the sake of the candidate, rather than science for the sake of science

Preparing the proposal: selecting the host

- Try to find the best hosting institution for your research
  - The supervisor/research group/institute are evaluated
  - Scientific merits, mentoring skills and opportunities to develop soft skills are taken in consideration
- Ideally the host group should be complementary to the candidate
- Think about secondments
  - Secondments are useful for both training and networking

Writing the proposal: excellence

- Scientific excellence is a prerequisite
  - However excellent science may not be enough
- Be realistic about what can be done in the time-frame provided
- Describe how the candidate and the host will benefit from the fellowship
- Research and training activities should help the candidate grow

Writing the proposal: impact

- It is imperative to describe how the fellowship will help the candidate grow
- Describe in detail all the communication and outreach activities
- Remember the open-source requirement
- Take care of the IP management

Writing the proposal: implementation

- Keep track of "lost time"
- Prepare for the worst: contingency plans
- Include non-scientific work packages (management, dissemination etc)
- The Gantt chart is actually important

Writing the proposal: general rules

- Don't be afraid to participate

- Answer all the questions in the template

- Allocate enough time to prepare the proposal

- **Don't be afraid to participate!**

Time travel: September 2015

Proposal submitted

- Strengths:
  - The research plan was solid and the complementarity with the host was clear
  - The impact on my career was clearly defined and dissemination and public engagement plans were prepared
  - The workpackages, deliverables and Gantt chart were detailed
  - I left no question unanswered and meticulously followed instructions
- Weaknesses:
  - My CV was mediocre
  - The dissemination and public engagement plans were "boring"
  - Milestones and contingency plan were vague

Time travel: January 2016

Results are out

- Total score: 94.6%
  - Excellence: 4.6/5.0
  - Impact: 4.9/5.0
  - Implementation: 4.8/5.0

Time travel: April 2018

All good things come to an end

- Throughout the MSCA-IF I:
  - Grew scientifically
  - Improved my soft skills
  - Created new collaborative networks
  - Got some really interesting results

Thank you for your attention