



# Access 4 SMEs

National Contact Points for Innovation



## **TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION FAST TRACK TO INNOVATION**



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This report was produced under the framework of Access4SMEs, the official network for Horizon 2020 National Contact Points (NCPs) for Small & Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Access to Risk Finance (ARF). ACCESS4SMEs' main objective is to provide support and specialized services to the network of SMEs and ARF NCPs.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The ‘Tips for successful application- Fast Track to Innovation’ is a guide created in order to assist those companies and all potential organizations who are looking to submit an application to the [EIC Fast Track to Innovation \(FTI\) call](#) of Horizon2020. The aim of this document is to help companies better understand the requirements and the rules of this instrument, as well as providing tips and advice.

FTI is part of the European Innovation Council (EIC) pilot and serves as an innovation support scheme. It targets industry-driven consortia who are seeking market uptake of ground-breaking innovations. Thus, connecting all types and sizes of innovators from across Europe.

The “Tips for successful application” is provided for information only, and reflects solely the view of the authors. This guide has been written as part of the Access4SMEs project, a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Commission, with the goal of empowering the network of Horizon 2020 National Contact Points (NCPs) for Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Access to risk finance (ARF). More specifically, the project is focused on identifying and sharing best practices in applying to SME-dedicated instruments in Horizon 2020.

The authors of this guide are Horizon 2020 NCPs who interact regularly with FTI applicants. This guide is based on the needs of these companies who interact with NCPs. The recommendations appearing in the document also include feedbacks received both from FTI evaluators employed by the European Commission and beneficiaries who won the FTI grant. The guide should be useful for anyone who wants to submit to Fast Track to Innovation, and receive general tips regarding submission to the program.

The document includes special remarks and recommendation from winning FTI coordinators and beneficiaries: highlights in **orange** from a research scientist at an Institute of a National Research council, in **blue** are from a large company and in **purple** from an SME.



Special gratitude goes to the interviewees, the FTI winners, who gave their time and shared their valuable experience about the process of winning and leading an FTI project:

- **Coordinator:** Gabriele Bolognini, IMM Institute of National Research Council, “Pervasive Ubiquitous Lightwave Sensors”- PULSe (Italy).
- **Beneficiary:** Thomas Prinz, ProLeiT AG, “Full-scale demonstration of a flexible inline production concept for breweries, drawing on water hydraulics”- HYDRACTFLEX (Germany).
- **Coordinator:** Tanya Gottlieb , MeMed Diagnostics, “Fast tracking market adoption of a novel immune-based diagnostic for improving antibiotic stewardship: automation, piloting and health economics”- AutoPilot-Dx (Israel).

## ESSENCE AND OBJECTIVES

*“Innovation is fostered when new ideas can emerge and easily translate into socioeconomic value, shaping new markets and laying the foundations of a stronger, hightech industrial base for Europe.”* (From the EIC work program, P. 23)

The Fast Track to Innovation program funds **breakthrough innovation projects**, in **small industrial consortiums** (3-5 participants). This program helps to **accelerate the market up-take** of projects, by providing funding to innovative ideas and **co-creation**, for all types of entities, in different sizes and across Europe.

The FTI scheme targets relatively mature **technologies, processes** and **business models**, which need final development and a **“last push”**. It supports actions undertaking innovation from the **demonstration stage towards market uptake** (no more than a 3 year time frame). **Eligible actions** could be: piloting, test-beds, systems validation in real-world working conditions, validations of business models, pre-normative research, standard-setting, etc.

Projects are encouraged to be **interdisciplinary** cutting across **different sectors and technologies**. **Complimentary backgrounds, knowledge and skills** can foster a **co-creation** of innovative ideas that tackle societal challenges.

FTI is in pursuit of company growth and development, of all the members of the consortia, which can strengthen Europe’s industrial leadership. As such, participation by **industry** (private for profit entities) is mandatory. The involvement of industry in the consortium would help create a **close to market** project that in the end ensures the **commercial up-take**.

## CALL CONDITIONS FOR FTI

- A **consortium** must consist of 3-5 participants and must be from at least three different states of the EU or Associated Countries. Participants are legal entities, minimum 3 from 3 different countries, **independent of each other** (see the definition independence in the [rules of participation](#), article 8).
- **Industry** involvement is mandatory:
  - Allocation of at least **60%** overall budget to industry; or
  - **Min. 2** industry partners out of a consortium of 3-4; or
  - **Min. 3** industry partners out of a consortium of 5
- All subjects are eligible for submission (it is a **‘bottom-up’** scheme).
- Maximum grant per consortium from **1 to 3 million Euros**.
- All consortium members established in EU Member States or in [associated countries](#) to Horizon 2020.
- [Technology Readiness Level](#) (TRL) is at least at **TRL 6** (or similar phase of development in non-technological innovation). That means a demonstrator of the innovation is available and works in a “real life” environment.
- The intention is to bring the TRL up to level 8 (system complete) and to start commercialization within three years from the beginning of the project.

## AWARD CRITERIA, SCORING AND THRESHOLD

The three main criteria used to evaluate the innovative aspects of a project proposal are:

**Excellence, Impact and Implementation.** The **threshold** to be considered for funding is **13** - the threshold for 'Impact' and 'Excellence' is 4, for 'implementation' it is 3.

### EXCELLENCE

*Does the innovation have the potential beyond the state of the art in its field? Can the innovation move to **market take-up** within maximum 3 years? Is the timing right for this innovation (**stage of development**)?*  
(25% WEIGHTING)



### IMPACT

*Are the business model and **commercialization strategy** well thought through? How sound are the financial planning and projections for market take up? How will your action strengthen **competitiveness and growth** of all partners in your consortium? Which user needs have been identified?*  
(50% WEIGHTING)



### IMPLEMENTATION

*Does the consortia have the **capability and motivation to implement the innovation** proposal? Are they **complementary** to each other? Do you have an effective innovation management scheme that allows the consortia to exploit new opportunities?* (25% WEIGHTING)



FTI Evaluators examine submissions according to these three main criteria, with reference to points in the [FTI self-evaluation form](#).

During the cut-off of 2015-2016 and 2018, about 75% of evaluators were from the business sector, where 25% were affiliated with the academic/research world. The FTI Evaluators divide almost equally with regard to gender, about 45% were females.

The result of the evaluation will be announced 3 months after the cut-off date.



# HOW TO CREATE A WINNING CONSORTIUM

## GENERAL

- Many winning projects consist of consortia of 4 beneficiaries, 2 of them usually are SMEs.
- The average amount of funds received is approximately 2.2M Euros, for two year projects.
- Members of a consortium are required to **conclude a consortium agreement**, prior to the signature of the grant agreement.
- The partners in the consortium should **meet face-to-face** before submission, in order to know each other.
- All partners should **contribute** to the project- keep in mind when allocating tasks that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources fulfil such role.
- Ensure all partners **benefit** from the results (either in IP, or knowledge or new developments for portfolio).
- Visit the [FTI Data hub](#) to learn about winning FTI projects.

## BUILDING THE CONSORTIA

- **Prior knowledge and connections** of the consortia partners is desirable. Do not randomly pick participants just to meet the consortium criterion.
- Actors with an **important role in commercialization** are encouraged to take part, such as cluster organizations, end-users, industry associations, incubators, investors, and the public sector. Including start-ups with groundbreaking ideas that could create new markets is welcomed.
- A winning consortium is one that has **partners along the value chain** (R&D, manufacturing, service and commercialization) and has clear market vision and a clear plan of how to actually commercialize the innovation. For instance, a consortium of academia and industry can help"... fostering the transfer of novel research outcomes from the laboratory into real-world product & system development".
- A consortium should have a good **mix** of technical competences, market knowledge and commercial abilities; including companies, at least one, that will **guarantee and be fully committed** to secure entrance of the solution(s) of the project in pre-identified markets.
- Try to give evidence of the partners **complementarity** and to extent to which the consortium, as a whole, brings together the **necessary expertise**.

## CHOOSING A COORDINATOR

- According to a research institute, industries "can take a great advantage in joining a project coordinated by an expert academic partner for several reasons, the main ones given by the expertise in project coordination and activity managing, by the attention to deliverable quality, timing, and novel content in project activities, and, last but not least, in the capability of a public academic project coordinator in being a **solid and reliable financial partner**, especially for management and distribution of project funding to all beneficiaries".
- An SME can be a coordinator, but it must pass a [Financial Capacity check](#) and have **financial stability** and the necessary resources.
- (Sometimes SME coordinators carry out technological aspects of the project and put less emphasis on marketing and dissemination; therefore "If a coordinator (SME) is not fully dedicated for dissemination, have at least one partner be attributed with the role of marketing and commercialization").
- A good coordinator can be an entity that has **prior involvement in EU projects**, thus being familiar with the EC procedure (GAP, evaluation process during the project, financial checks and audits).

# TIPS FOR WRITING A GOOD PROPOSAL

## GENERAL

- Think of the evaluator as if she/he is an **investor!**
- Write the abstract as a pitch: **Problem – Solution – Competitive Advantage**
- The evaluator is looking for an excellent consortium: interdisciplinary and industry-driven.
- The consortium must have a clear **business plan and commercialization strategy** for **market potential, business opportunities, market up take**. Try to give credibility of the proposed methodology.
- Highlight increase in **turnover (ROI), employment, private investment**- specifically projecting these factors for the following 3 years.
- Do not just argue but prove - use **concrete evidence**. Always use data and evidence rather than abstract and self-claimed statements.
- Proposals should be technology oriented, highly innovative, but with an emphasis on market description (trend).
- **Pleasant reading**
- Let the evaluator have a good time reading your proposal as a continuous interesting **coherent story**.
- Review and polish the language; avoid repetitions. Simple and clear wording.
- Give answers to the questions in the **evaluator’s “checklist” and the work program**.
- Add **links** where necessary.
- Talk in **EU’s language** – for example, make reference to the TRL of your innovation.
- **Appearance** is not less important than the content! You never get a second chance to make a first impression!
- Use **pictures, graphics and diagrams** to describe processes; market segmentation etc. but remember - **realistic figures**.
- Maintain font size, margins and numbering of chapters and sections
- Delete guidelines in the template
- Use appealing **acronyms** and introduce them
- Don’t exceed the page limit of **30 pages**
- Make sure your proposal is in line with the **key concepts** of FTI:
- **Ground-breaking innovation**
- Beyond **state-of-the-art**, disruptive, game changing, world beating products (processes and services)
- **Scale-up, growth** (in Europe and globally)
- Specify the expected **Impact** on market and partners of the consortium, in qualitative and quantitative terms (turnover, job creation, market size, **IP management**, sales, ROI, profitability)
- Pay particular attention to IP protection and ownership - **‘Freedom to operate’, regulatory and standardization** issues.
- Possible impacts on **sustainability or climate change**, in particular, or other cross-cutting objectives of Horizon 2020, must be highlighted.
- Visit the FTI Data hub to learn about winning FTI projects.

## EXCELLENCE

- Discuss the product – its technology and innovation. Present **ambitious, game-changing innovation** that is better than the state of the art.
- Highlight **interdisciplinary approaches**.
- What are the market/customers **pain points and unmet needs**? Prove that a customer is suffering from a problem (and quantify the losses) and prove that your solution would lessen its pain.
- Emphasize **not only technological innovation but also innovation in usage**; for potential users who right now don't have a similar solution in the market.
- The project must be in **TRL 6 or up** - How did you reach this TRL? Why is the optimal timing now? Describe your next moves - How will your solution reach the market?
- Make sure your project's objectives and activities are directed towards **market uptake within 36 months**.
- Have a high degree of **novelty** that comes with a high chance of either success or failure. Measure results and success, but provide **risk management**.
- Describe how **sex and/or gender** analysis is taken into account in the action's content.

## IMPACT

- Identify **needs\demand\pain points** of customers, end-users; **segment them**.
- Evaluators are looking for **validation and traction from the market- 'Willingness to pay'**. Show potential customers and channels you are currently interacting with or that expressed their interest (**LOI**).
- Include commercial aspects, a mature market analysis, a **business plan** - **BM** Business Model, **PM** Pricing Model, **RM** Revenue Model, a clear **go-to-market strategy**.
- Provide factual and substantiated growth projections. Present **achievable and reliable commercialization plans** to support the financial goals and projections.
- Put emphasis on **describing your competitors and the alternatives** alongside your **competitive advantage**.
- Clearly describe the expected **impact in both qualitative and quantitative terms**. Identify other impacts the results can have, i.e. **societal, environmental, political**. Show who the project outputs, as well as dissemination and exploitation, would contribute to the expected impacts described in the proposal.
- Analyze the market in Europe, detail how your product is relevant to Europe, and discuss European goals and regulations if relevant. Have a **clear European and global dimension**.

▪ Show **clear roles and responsibilities** of everyone in the consortium, exhibit each partner's **own exploitation route and interest** in the commercialization of the project results.

▪ Ensure clear **intellectual property** protection and management.

▪ Describe market **barriers, obstacles, framework conditions**, and the **strategy** to overcome them. According to a research scientist "...the project must also take into account issues of non-technical nature... i.e. taking into account possible conflicts and competition with other industrial stakeholders (e.g. competing companies, suppliers as well as distributors), ensuring clear intellectual property protection, drawing clear agreement between partners regarding future exploitation of project results and so on".

▪ Enhance innovation capacity and integration of new knowledge.



## IMPLEMENTATION

- When writing your proposal, note that the grant **fits the entities' strategy**, meaning “their industrial interest is clearly coinciding with the outcomes of the projects”. Consortium members should be complementary to each other.
- Have an **interconnection between tasks and deliverables**. You can include, for instance, a project management table and an organizational table, detailing in each the team members and their roles. Thus embodying the beneficiaries' common goals.
- Check **consistency** of your work plan - share of resources, appropriate levels between partners, weight of person-months between major work steps.
- Work Plans must consist of tasks regarding market uptake, market introduction and dissemination.
- The tasks distributed should be in **correlation** with the person months and should be **realistic**. I.e. a partner should not be given a task which is somewhat unlikely to accomplish.
- Costs must be **reasonable**, with competitive selection; how were they chosen and the scope of their work.

## MEMBERS OF THE CONSORTIUM AND THIRD PARTIES

- Convince the evaluator that the consortium has the **operational capacity and capability to execute the project** at hand. The consortia must describe their technical competence in parallel to their commercial capability.
- Describe the **resources** that are available to the consortium - the facilities, manpower. Mention **awards and grants** previously awarded to the beneficiaries.
- Mention critical people in your organisation. Also, **Letters of Intent or letters of support** from stakeholders & contributors.
- **Subcontractors** have to be justified and properly explained. Include procedures to ensure '**Best value for money**' (high focus).

## ETHICS AND SECURITY

- If Ethics and or Security are relevant answer elaborately on the matter.
  - For help use the [Ethics self-assessment](#).
- If Ethics and or Security are not relevant - briefly explain why that is the case.

## FTI vs ACCELERATOR PILOT

The European Innovation Council (EIC) provides funding, advice and networking opportunities for cutting edge innovation. Under the EIC pilot, there are two support schemes for **close to market innovation**:

- 1) FTI - Fast Track to Innovation
- 2) Accelerator pilot (named SME Instrument before)

Both instruments are dedicated to solutions that can **create new markets or disrupt existing ones** and boost (rapid) scale-up and competitiveness of European businesses. These two programs are separated and different from one another. Yet they do have some similarities.

See below tables comprised of the **differences and similarities** of FTI program versus the Accelerator pilot.

### FTI VS ACCELERATOR PILOT- MAIN SIMILARITIES

	Fast Track to Innovation	Accelerator pilot
<b>Topics default</b>	Open topics	Open topics
<b>Project duration</b>	Approximately 12 – 24 months	Approximately 12 – 24 months
<b>Funding rate</b>	70% (non-profit facilities: 100% )	70%
<b>Novelty</b>	High degree of novelty	High degree of novelty
<b>Stage of development</b>	Entry level: TRL 6 and up ( Demonstrator Level )	Entry level: TRL 6 ( Demonstrator Level )
<b>Subcontracts</b>	Yes, possible	Yes, possible

### FTI VS ACCELERATOR PILOT- MAIN DIFFERENCES

	Fast Track to Innovation	Accelerator pilot
<b>Number of beneficiaries</b>	3 - 5 partners	Single applicant
<b>Applicant characteristic</b>	Any legal entity, such as, companies (SMEs, large companies), universities, research institutions, end users, etc.	Profit-oriented SMEs
<b>Funding</b>	1-3 million euros	0.5 - 2.5 million euros
<b>Type of funding</b>	Grant	Grant + Equity (Optional)
<b>Evaluation process</b>	A one-step remote evaluation	A two-step evaluation: 1. Remote evaluation 2. Jury interview in Brussels
<b>Duration until commercialization</b>	3 years from the project start date	Around the end of the project (no specific amount of years required)
<b>Main objective</b>	Support of near-to-market innovation activities; reducing time from idea to market ('last push'); sharing knowledge and collaboration (co-creation)	Fuel international growth of participating SMEs, marketing of a disruptive product, process or service

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Contact your** National contact point **NCP** for additional advice and support schemes.
- **Use this guide**, as well as, the **WP, evaluator checklist, useful links of EC and EASME** and **Access4sme website**.
- After refusal, revised requests may be re-submitted.
- **USE your ESR** - FTI applicants receive in their ESR individual comments with regard to the major weaknesses of their proposal.

## PARTNERS

Agenzia per la Promozione della Ricerca Europea (APRE) – ITALY (co-ordinator)

Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnológico Industrial (CDTI) – SPAIN

Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft mbH (FFG) – AUSTRIA

Instytut Podstawowych Problemow Techniki Polskiej Akademii Nauk – POLAND

ISERD, Israel Innovation Authority – ISRAEL

Deutsches Zentrum fuer Luft – und Raumfahrt e.V. (DLR) – GERMANY

Norges forskningsråd – NORWAY

Bpifrance – FRANCE

Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas (FORTH) / PRAXI Network – GREECE

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GIS – TransferCenter Foundation – BULGARIA

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