ITN Proposal Evaluation: Advice for a Successful Application

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Expert Evaluator of Marie Curie ITN Proposals

A successful applicant understands the nature and objectives of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN actions

Excellent Science

- The Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN actions, together with European Research Council (ERC), Future & Emerging Technologies and Research Infrastructures, constitute the "EXCELLENT SCIENCE" Pillar (Pillar 1) of Horizon2020.

Training Networks

- Innovative: Innovative Science & Training program
- Training: ***Focus on Training the next generation of Excellent European researchers***
- Networks: High-quality Networks that include strong Industry-academia cooperation in doctoral training

A successful application respects the objectives of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN actions and addresses all the relevant criteria

Objectives

- Train talented young people to create the next generation of innovative and entrepreneurial European researchers
- Provide complementary skills matching both public & private sector needs
- Promote researchers mobility across sectors, countries and disciplines

Expected impact

- Improve the researcher career prospects
- Structure EU high-quality initial & doctoral training
- Enhance industry-academia cooperation in doctoral training

Proposal Scoring: Very good is not good enough

0 - The 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.
The proposal broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses;

3 – GOOD.
The proposal addresses the criterion well but with a number of shortcomings;

4 – VERY GOOD.
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5 – EXCELLENT.
The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Evaluation Criteria*

	Threshold**	Weight	Priority in case of *ex aequo*
Excellence (Includes Research & Training)	-	50%	1
Impact	-	30%	2
Implementation	-	20%	3

* The evaluation criteria have changed in the Horizon2020 ITN: Instead of the FP7 Marie Curie ITNs 4 evaluation criteria (S&T quality, Training, Implementation and Impact), the Horizon2020 ITN proposals will be judged on 3 criteria (S&T quality & Training have been merged into the single EXCELLENCE criterion).

** Unlike FP7, in the evaluation of the Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie there are NO THRESHOLDS for the three individual evaluation criteria.

- However, a 70% threshold will be applied to the total weighted score.

Evaluation Criterion 1: EXCELLENCE

RESEARCH PROGRAM

◆Original, high-quality, innovative and credible research program as the research training ground for the early-stage researchers.

◆Appropriateness of the proposed research methodology and approach.

◆Inter-disciplinary / multi-disciplinary dimensions of the research program.

◆Significant and credible intersectorial component (Contribution of the private sector and, where relevant, other socio-economic actors in the research program).

TRAINING PROGRAM

◆Quality and innovative aspects of the training program.

◆Training in transferable skills such as: ethics, grant writing, entrepreneurship, management, communication, IPR management, exploitation of results, research policy, etc.

◆Quality of the supervision

a) Qualifications and experience of supervisors,

b) Proposed joint supervision,

c) Non-academic contribution to supervision.

◆Quality of the interaction between the participating organizations, targeted and meaningful secondments, etc.

The dimensions of EXCELLENCE

Inter-sectoral dimension (examples):

- Inviting researchers working in industry or other socio-economic actors to deliver courses on entrepreneurship, exploitation of research results, ethics, patenting, etc;
- Mentoring of doctoral candidates by researchers and/or experts from industry or from other socio-economic actors;
- Exposing researchers to various socio-economic actors gathered in a single campus or hub;
- Offering placement opportunities for several weeks or months to young researchers to develop their research projects at the premises of future employers.

International dimension (examples):

- Offering possibilities to take courses abroad;
- Developing partnerships and/or joint degrees with other research institutions or companies in different countries.

Inter-disciplinary dimension (examples):

- Proposing common courses or projects to doctoral candidates from different disciplines;
- Bringing together doctoral candidates in multi-disciplinary projects involving different research teams from the same or different institutions;
- Offering laboratory rotations or visits.

Evaluator's feedback on EXCELLENCE: Some common criticisms

- **The description of the state-of-the-art in the field is not comprehensive and the originality and innovative aspects of the proposal are not documented.**
- **Superficial or unconvincing description of the research methodology.**
- **Lack of synergies between the proposed individual projects.**
- **Insufficient interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary dimensions of the research training program.**
- **Unsatisfactory presentation of the intersectorial aspects of the network & the role(s) of the industrial partners in research & training activities.**
- **Inadequate exposure of the ESRs to another sector and lack of meaningful secondments.**
- **Insufficient network-wide and complementary skills training.**
- **Unsatisfactory quality of supervision.**

Evaluation Criterion 2: IMPACT

- Contribution of the proposed training programme to:

  - structure training at the doctoral level with the acquisition of key skills needed in both the public and private sectors;

  - improve career prospects and employability of researchers;

  - stimulate the creativity and entrepreneurial mindset of researchers at the doctoral level.

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

a) meaningful contribution of the nonacademic sector to the doctoral/research training
b) developing sustainable joint doctoral degree structures (for EJD projects only)

- The contribution of the training program towards the policy objective of enhancing public-private sector collaborations in terms of research training.
- Where appropriate, mutual recognition by all partners of the training acquired, including training periods in the private sector.
- Where appropriate, plans for exploitation of results.
- Measures for communication and dissemination of results (Impact of the proposed outreach activities, etc.).

The dimensions of IMPACT

Innovation & human resources dimension (examples):

- Train researchers in skills needed in both the public and private sectors;
- Show how the provided training will enhance the competitiveness and the career prospects of the early-stage researchers;
- Describe how European competitiveness will be enhanced through the innovative aspects of the project.

European doctoral structuring dimension (examples):

- Establish long-lasting collaborations between European Academic Institutions;
- Ensure mutual recognition of the training acquired by all partners (including industry).

Communication & dissemination dimension (examples):

- Show how the European collaborations in the ITN helps achieve scientific excellence, contributes to competitiveness and/or solves societal challenges;
- Show how the outcomes will be relevant to everyday life, help introduce novel technologies, create new jobs etc;
- Promote results to decision makers.

Evaluator's feedback on IMPACT: Some common criticisms

- **The network benefits to the researchers' career prospects are not sufficiently highlighted.**
- **Lack of clear description of the Network's contribution to European scientific excellence, innovation and competitiveness, especially in areas relevant to both the public and private sectors.**
- **Inadequate demonstration of the Network's contribution to building long-lasting collaborations between European institutions.**
- **Insufficient attention to enhancing public-private sector collaborations on research and training.**
- **Absence of clear plans for exploitation of the results and protection of IPR.**
- **No clear measures to ensure dissemination of the Network's results and a lack of outreach activities to educate the general public on:**

a) The benefits of the research training program, and

b) The EU contribution to the project.

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Evaluation Criterion 3: IMPLEMENTATION

- Convincing description of the Network's Capacities, in terms of partner expertise / human resources / facilities /infrastructure etc.
- Exploitation of complementarities and synergies among partners in terms of research and training
- Private sector involvement at the highest possible level and sufficient evidence of commitment.
- Appropriate management structure and proper task distribution, including demarcation of responsibilities, rules of decision making, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) handling, etc.
- Clear description of the Networking and dissemination of best practice activities between partners.
- Clarity of the plan for organizing training events (both local and network-wide such as workshops, training courses, conferences, etc.)
- Comprehensive Work Package description including work plan, timetables, Gantt chart, contingency measures, etc.
- Informative list of the fellows' projects (including the partners involved).
- Provision of lists of deliverables and milestones to allow monitoring of the Network activities progress.
- Description of the recruitment strategy with appropriate timetable.

a) Transparent advertisement and competitive international recruitment based on merit,

b) Equal opportunity recruitment

c) Apply European "Charter for Researchers and "Code for Recruitment"

The dimensions of IMPLEMENTATION

Capacities dimension (examples):

- Partner quality, expertise, facilities & infrastructures;
- Exploitation of complementarities and synergies among partners;
- Private sector involvement and evidence of true commitment.

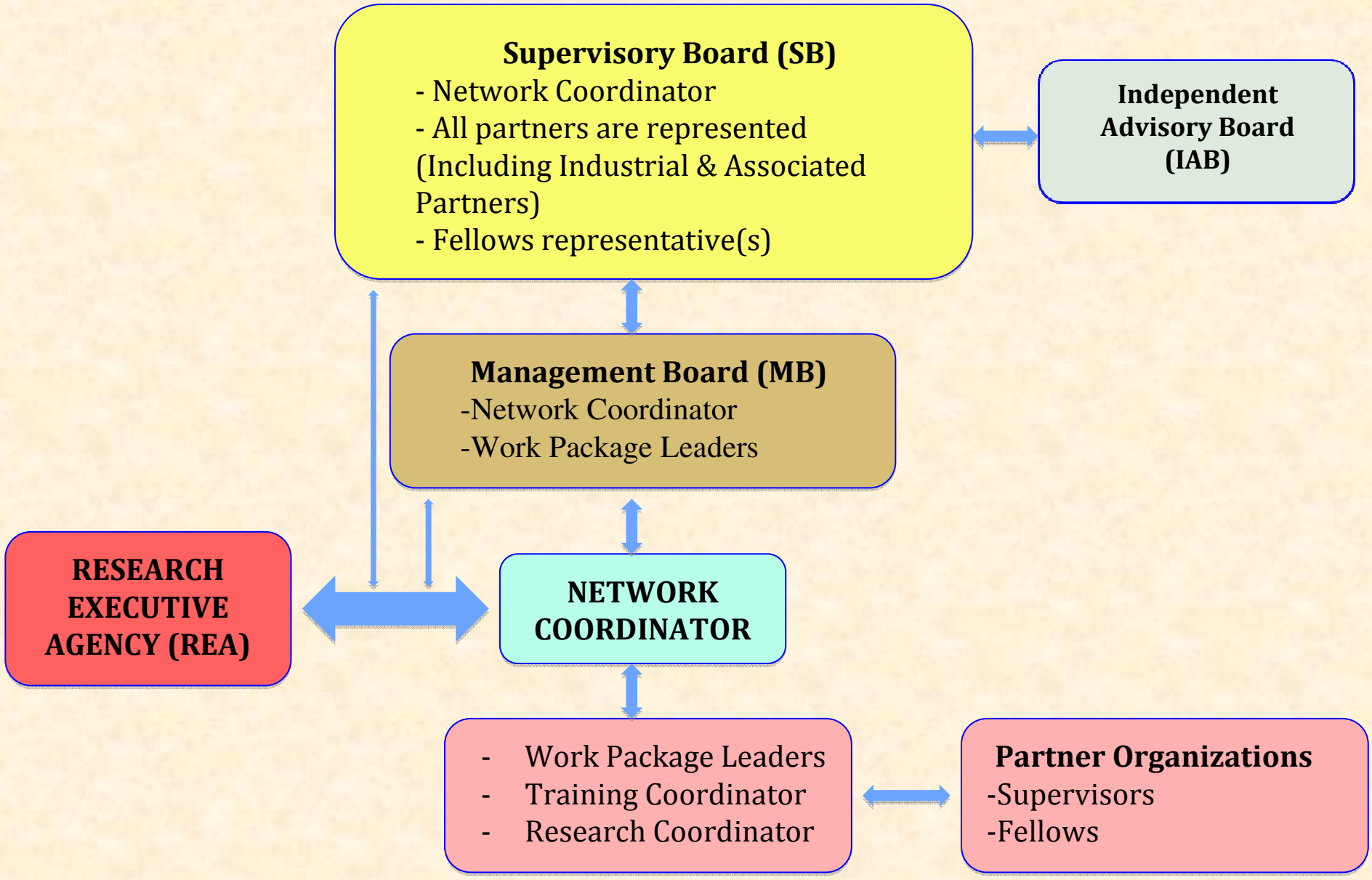
Network structure dimension (examples):

- Clear and functional management structure with well-assigned responsibilities, task distribution, clear rules of decision making, etc;
- Comprehensive description of the Networking activities, including dissemination of best practise activities between partners;
- Thorough plan for organizing training events (workshops, courses, etc.)

Research & Training management dimension (examples):

- Well-designed, functional Work Packages;
- Informative and realistic work plan, complete with a realistic time table, lists of deliverables and milestones, contingency measures for risk mitigation and Gantt chart;
- Informative list of the fellows' projects;
- Transparent recruitment strategy.

Management Structure (an example)



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Evaluator's feedback on IMPLEMENTATION: Some common criticisms

- **Poorly described Work Plan lacking a credible time plan, and/or deliverables, and/or milestones, and/or Gantt chart, etc.**
- **The credibility of the Work Plan is low due to the lack of contingency planning for potential pitfalls and possible failures.**
- **No description of the individual ESR projects is provided.**
- **The presentation of the management structure, including the decision making process, is inadequate.**

REMEMBER:

Very good is not good enough in proposal scoring

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To achieve an excellent score, make sure that your proposal:

1) Convincingly & comprehensively addresses ALL the evaluation criteria and subcriteria.
2) Presents all the strengths of your network, including its inter/multidisciplinary aspects, the strong industrial participation, its well-defined management structure and the solid networking activities.
3) Convincingly highlights all the innovative aspects of the proposed research, against the background of the state-of-the-art in the field.
4) Places high emphasis on the training aspects of the network (research training activities, soft-skills training, network organized training events, good balance between local and network-wide training activities, intersectoral training, well-planned, meaningful secondmends, etc.).
5) Creates long-lasting collaborations between academic and industrial institutions aimed at building novel doctoral training programs
6) Pays attention to IPR protection issues and does not ignore the potential commercial value of the results.
7) **Includes high-quality dissemination and outreach activities**

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Communication & dissemination of the results and outreach activities

- **It is not well-known that each year the Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN actions provide nearly HALF A BILLION Euros, from the EU budget, for the funding of innovative and excellent research training networks**
- **The EU wants this fact to be communicated to the European general public and its decision makers**
- **The European public should be aware of the results of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie-funded research and their potential implications for solving societal and health issues, promoting the public's well-being and safety, introducing novel technologies, improving competitiveness and creating new jobs, etc.**

Thank you for your attention

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