Horizon Europe - Building a Consortium

Winning a Horizon Europe grant is a great opportunity and achievement. Success, at the application but also the project implementation stage, depends to a large extent on the quality of the consortium. This factsheet offers some advice on how to make a start on creating the right consortium, where to look for partners or find out about consortia that are forming and what to keep in mind when selecting partners. Finally, it provides some best practices for leading or working within a consortium.

Consortium basics

For most projects (or 'types of action') the minimum requirement is to have at least three legal entities, independent of each other and each established in a different EU Member State or Associated Country. **As a novelty in Horizon Europe, at least one of the three partners must be based in a Member State.** Furthermore, some topics may have different eligibility conditions and require the participation of more, or specific types of participants (e.g. organisations based in non-EU countries in areas where international cooperation is mandatory).

However, most projects in Horizon Europe will have more than the minimum number of partners required. What the right number is will depend on the requirements of the project topic, the expected outcomes/impacts, the activities proposed and the available budget.

What are the rules in Horizon Europe?

Our dedicated factsheet on the **legal and financial basics in Horizon Europe** contains more information on funding rules for different types of organisations and from different countries.

Finding partners

A Horizon Europe project will typically last between 3-5 years and come with a lot of responsibility to deliver on outcomes and budget. It is important to ensure that each partner in a consortium is trustworthy and that there is clarity on what the project will achieve, who and how will contribute what and when. All partners need to understand that there will be a need for flexibility, and agility in case things change during the project.

Work with those you know and trust

Often, the best starting point is to think about **colleagues and peers with whom you already have direct or indirect links.** People with whom you or other partners have already worked are the safest bet, provided they help you build a convincing consortium that will impress the evaluators at the same time.

So, think broadly about institutional links as well as personal ones. While the first choice will almost invariably lie with partners you have already worked with, Horizon Europe calls will often require an interdisciplinary and/or inter-sectoral approach and a proposal must show that the consortium is well-equipped to meet the expected impacts as well as the scientific criteria.

Meet the scientific and impact and implementation criteria

While there are no geographical evaluation criteria as such, topics might specify certain priority areas or even specific countries (within or outside the EU). This will not always require including a partner from that country or region, but the proposed project will be evaluated on how it will address the requirements. Under the evaluation criterion "Quality and efficiency of the implementation" the role of participants and capacity of the consortium are specifically evaluated: *"Capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise".*

Joining consortia and finding new partners

Is it possible to find out which consortia are already forming for a particular call topic?

Sometimes but it is not easy as it is not necessarily in the public domain unless a consortium advertises for partners at brokerage events or on partner search platforms. A researcher might be able to find out that consortia for a particular call are forming via their contacts or networks in their area of research.

The European Commission offers a **partner search tool on the Funding & Tenders Portal**. This allows you to launch a partnership request related to a specific call for proposals and publish the research profiles of individual researchers and organisations. It can also be used to search for partners who have expressed an interest in a particular call or area.

My Person Profile

In early 2021, the Commission introduced a new optional '**My Person Profile**' functionality on its Funding & Tenders Portal. It allows any user to create a public profile to advertise their expertise among potential project collaborators using the partner search tool. Thanks to this function of the Portal, researchers can create their public profiles and post expertise offers/requests under the Horizon Europe topics that they are interested in.

Other approaches and resources:

- Find out who was successful in the past

CORDIS database of previously funded projects: Doing this is always a good idea, as it helps to understand what work has been previously undertaken and funded under FP7 or Horizon 2020. The database provides information about projects by area but also includes who coordinated or was a partner on a given project.

- Find out through networking

Events, conferences and workshops can be invaluable for building connections, as can the **official European Commission information days** relating to the calls, which often include brokerage sessions in which those intending to submit projects make presentations in the hope of finding additional partners. Even if you cannot attend these in person, event websites will often publish lists of attendees/ project presentations, which can be a valuable resource. For early information and updates on relevant events, sign up to receive email alerts from the **UKRO Portal**.

European Technology Platforms are industry-led stakeholder groups that help to shape the European research and innovation agenda in their respective areas of expertise. Reading their strategic agendas can help to inform bids in the more industrial sections of Horizon Europe, and they can provide valuable networking opportunities and enable the identification of potential industrial partners. Also useful in this respect are **European Innovation Partnerships** (EIPs), which aim to bring together all relevant actors working in a particular area.

Also useful in terms of connecting with industry is the **Enterprise Europe Network**; universities can use this to find companies for their Horizon Europe bids; at the same time, companies often use the network to find universities to join/coordinate their projects. This matchmaking is done through a partner search database featuring projects and technologies that need partners; the EEN can also occasionally contact potential partners in other countries directly.

Partner searches are also available through various networks of National Contact Points (NCP), for example in the areas of health, ICT; nanosciences and nanotechnologies, materials and new production technologies; smart green and integrated transport; energy; climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials; and social sciences and humanities.

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2

Coordinator/Project partner roles

Project consortia must decide who will lead (coordinate) the project. The coordinator will typically take a leading role in preparing and submitting the proposal, representing the consortium vis-à-vis the Commission, monitoring compliance on the project, and being responsible for the distribution of project finances, record keeping and reporting. Many of the practical arrangements are laid down in a Consortium Agreement. Normally, evaluators will be looking for the experience of managing large-scale grants and capacity, which is something to bear in mind when deciding as to which institution should act as the project coordinator.

Project partners will usually work on their assigned work package(s), submit input (e.g. reports) to the coordinator, both at the application stage and during the lifetime of the project, and generally contribute to the smooth and successful implementation of the grant (i.e. support the coordinator in fulfilling their obligations).

Beyond that, it is possible to involve organisations in less formal ways, for example by including them in project advisory groups, stakeholder fora, dissemination and impact networks, etc.

Meeting with partners to discuss the proposal

We recommend meeting with potential collaborators to discuss what the different expectations are and ensure every partner understands the budget and how Horizon Europe can be used, as well as IPR arrangements and consortium governance. This may require resources (e.g. travel funds). The obvious source for these is your institutional budget, but external funders may also be able to help. For example, BBSRC offer 'European Partnering Awards' for existing BBSRC grant holders to cover travel and subsistence costs to develop and submit Horizon Europe bids. Moreover, you may wish to use UKRO's meeting room in central Brussels, available free of charge to staff from subscribing institutions.

Consortium composition on lump sum projects

Building a consortium for Horizon Europe **lump sum projects** is no different to creating one for projects using actual costs. However, having the right type of consortium partners for lump sum projects is of particular importance, since the EC makes payments only upon the completion of the individual work packages (WP). If a WP is delayed, for example, because of an inexperienced or defaulting project partner, the payment for the other beneficiaries involved in this WP will be delayed as well. This is different from how the EC has made payments on Horizon projects using actual costs until now and will become even more important as lump sums are rolled out more widely across Horizon Europe.

More information

Useful websites and resources
- **Partner search facility on the Funding & Tenders Portal**
- **My Person Profile guidance on the Funding & Tenders Portal**
- **European Technology Platforms**
- **European Innovation Partnerships**
- **Enterprise Europe Network**
- **ERRIN network** - Space for connecting members and external organisations interested in applying to a call under European R&I programmes

UKRO Portal
- **UKRO Portal** (subscriber access required)