

## **Horizon Europe (Pillar II) Applicant Resource**

### **1) Overview**

- Horizon Europe is the European Commission (EC) research and innovation program (€95.5 billion, 2021 to 2027).
- Canada is an Associated Country for Pillar II. University of Guelph researchers can lead consortia, apply directly through the EC Funding & Tenders Portal, and receive EC funding under call-specific conditions.

### **2) Key Resources**

- Work Programmes and call documents (2026 to 2027): [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/horizon-europe-work-programmes\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/horizon-europe-work-programmes_en)
- Funding & Tenders Portal (search calls, submit proposals): <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/>
- EC Online Manual (preparation, submission, GAP, reporting): <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/OM/Online+Manual>
- EC Reference Documents (Programme Guide, Model Grant Agreement, templates): <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/reference-documents?programmePeriod=2021-2027&frameworkProgramme=43108390>
- ISED Horizon Europe applicant resources and Canadian NCPs: <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/horizon-europe>; <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/horizon-europe-applicant-resources>

### **3) Acronyms**

- CA: Consortium Agreement
- CSA: Coordination and Support Actions
- DEC: Dissemination, Exploitation, and Communication
- DNSH: Do No Significant Harm
- EC: European Commission
- ESR: Evaluation Summary Report
- EU Login: Personal account for EC Portal access
- GA: Grant Agreement
- GAP: Grant Agreement Preparation
- GEP: Gender Equality Plan
- IA: Innovation Actions
- ISED: Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada
- KPI: Key Performance Indicator

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- NCPs: National Contact Points
- PIC: Participant Identification Code
- RIA: Research and Innovation Actions
- WP: Work Package

### **4) Roles and Responsibilities**

#### Coordinator (Lead PI)

- Proposal submission and Portal validations
- Consortium management and governance set-up
- Legal and financial validations during GAP
- GA negotiation with the EC
- Distribution of EC funds to beneficiaries per the CA
- Compliance oversight and consolidated reporting
- Single point of contact with the EC

#### Partner (Beneficiary)

- Technical contributions and delivery of tasks
- Compliance with GA obligations on reporting, ethics, security, open science, and DNSH

### **5) Deciding Whether to Coordinate**

This section sets out important considerations associated with coordination in Pillar II.

#### 5.1 Administrative and Legal Responsibility

- Coordinator is the single EC contact for submission, GAP, and project management.
- Coordinator ensures consortium-wide compliance with ethics, security self-assessment, GEP eligibility, open science requirements, DNSH, and all GA terms.

#### 5.2 Consortium Formation and Governance

- Typical consortia: 8 to 12 or more partners across multiple countries for 3 to 5 years.
- Governance structure required: decision body, change-control, and conflict resolution clauses defined in the CA.
- Expect on-boarding, partner replacements, and amendments.

#### 5.3 Budget and Payments

- EC pays the Coordinator; the Coordinator disburses to beneficiaries per the CA.
- Coordinator manages consolidated financial reporting and audit readiness.
- Audit certificate is mandatory if any single beneficiary receives €430,000 or more; include audit costs at proposal stage under Other direct costs.

#### 5.4 Workload and Timeline

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- Allocate 6 to 12 months to plan and prepare a competitive proposal, including consortium formation, Part A and Part B completion, and internal reviews.
- If funded, coordination continues through periodic reporting and any GA or CA amendments across the 3 to 5 year project term.

### 5.5 Risk and Accountability

- Reporting or compliance failures can delay payments, trigger audits, or require repayment.
- Coordinator’s administrative and reputational risk spans all beneficiaries.

## 6) Finding Calls and Building a Consortium

- Identify calls under Pillar II in the Funding & Tenders Portal and read Work Programme topic documents.
- Minimum composition is typically at least three independent legal entities established in at least three different EU Member States or Associated Countries.
- Partner search tools:
  - CORDIS: past projects and participants, <https://cordis.europa.eu/>
  - Enterprise Europe Network (EEN): partner matchmaking, <https://een.ec.europa.eu/>
  - EURAXESS Partnering: profiles and connections, <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>
  - Subscribe to ISED’s Horizon Europe Secretariat [email distribution list](#) for information on matchmaking events and other updates to the program.

## 7) Proposal Structure

A Horizon Europe proposal contains Part A in the Portal and Part B as a PDF upload. Both are evaluated.

### 7.1 Part A (Portal Forms)

- Administrative data for the Coordinator and beneficiaries
- Valid PICs and EU Login accounts
- Budget tables per partner
- Ethics and security questionnaires
- Call-specific declarations

### 7.2 Part B (PDF Upload)

- Follow the call-specific template and page limits; excess pages are not evaluated.
- Sections below are common for collaborative RIA or IA proposals; CSA templates are similar with emphasis on coordination measures.

## 8) Evaluation Criteria

Proposals are scored 0 to 5 for Excellence, Impact, and Implementation.

Thresholds and weights vary by call, action type, and stage and are indicated in call documents and the Programme Guide.

#### Excellence

- Objectives: clear, measurable, achievable in duration; mapped to Expected Outcomes in the call text.
- State of the art and ambition: evidence-based; explain how your approach goes beyond current knowledge.
- Methodology: design choices, interdisciplinarity, SSH integration where relevant, gender dimension in research content, data quality and reproducibility, and open science practices.
- Evaluation focus: clarity and pertinence of objectives, ambition beyond state of the art, and soundness of methodology.

#### Impact

- Expected Outcomes and impacts: explicit mapping to how results deliver Expected Outcomes and contribute to programme impacts.
- Impact pathways: KPIs, baselines, targets, timelines, responsibilities.
- Barriers and mitigation: non-generic analysis with concrete measures.
- Dissemination, exploitation, and communication: audience-tailored messaging, channels, ambitious KPIs, geographic coverage, IPR alignment.
- Evaluation focus: credibility of pathways and measures to maximize outcomes and impacts.

#### Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation

- Work plan: Work Packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, dependencies.
- Resources: person months per partner and Work Package; budget justification aligned to work.
- Consortium: roles, complementarity, value chain coverage for uptake.
- Risk, quality, and data management: technological, user-related, and business risks with triggers and mitigations; DMP timing; ethics and security governance.
- Evaluation focus: coherence of the plan, appropriateness of resources, partner capacity and complementarity, and risk coverage.

### **9) Writing a Strong Proposal**

Use structured evidence and cross-checks.

- Align objectives directly to Expected Outcomes; provide a table mapping outcomes to Work Packages, deliverables, timing, and KPIs.
- Provide SMART objectives with baselines and targets; distinguish new activities from existing work; specify countries and contexts.
- Justify ambition beyond state of the art with citations and comparative analysis.

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- Link each method and activity to objectives and deliverables; specify sample sizes, geographic coverage, instrumentation, data pipelines, quality assurance, and sensitivity analyses.
- Integrate SSH expertise and the gender dimension where relevant; show how insights affect design and outcomes, not only participation counts.
- Provide impact pathways that identify users, adoption steps, and intended changes; tailor DEC plans with quantified reach and conversion KPIs.
- Balance person months and budgets across partners; justify any concentration; link deliverables to objectives and KPIs; expand risk registers with triggers and mitigations.
- Ensure consistency between Part A budget tables and Part B person months and tasks; confirm compliance items in Part A before submission.

### 10) Budget and Funding Model

- Direct costs: often reimbursed at 60 to 100 percent depending on action type.
- Indirect costs: flat 25 percent of eligible direct costs.
- Audit: independent audit certificate is mandatory if any single beneficiary receives €430,000 or more; include audit costs in Other direct costs.
- Currency: budgets and payments are in euros; plan for exchange rate risk.

### 11) Compliance Requirements

- **Security and ethics:** All proposals require EU security and ethics self-assessments. Where risks are identified (e.g. dual-use or misuse potential, sensitive information, human/animal data, personal or third-country data), mitigation must be described. The Commission may apply ethics review or security scrutiny, with requirements monitored during the project.
- **Institutional eligibility (GEP):** Higher-education institutions and research organizations must have a compliant Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in place by grant signature. This is an institutional eligibility requirement and may be subject to Commission checks.
- **Open Science:** Open access to peer-reviewed publications and FAIR research data management are mandatory. A Data Management Plan is normally required early, with deposition in trusted repositories where appropriate (“as open as possible, as closed as necessary”).
- **Environmental safeguards (DNSH), where required:** Some topics require demonstrating compliance with the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle, showing that activities do not materially harm EU environmental objectives.
- **Reporting and monitoring:** Horizon Europe uses structured, portal-based reporting (deliverables, milestones, and periodic technical and financial reports). These requirements are generally more intensive than Canadian funding norms and should be planned for.

## **12) Submission and Timeline**

- Submit through the Funding & Tenders Portal before the deadline in Brussels time; late submissions are not accepted.
- An ESR is typically issued about six months after the deadline.
- GAP and GA signature usually follow within EC timelines, often up to eight months from the deadline.

## **13) If Funded**

- GAP: EC validates legal and financial data, finalizes budgets and annexes, and prepares the GA.
- GA: defines scope, budget, payments, reporting cadence, audits, IP, ethics and security obligations, open science, DNSH. Payments normally flow to the Coordinator, who distributes funds to beneficiaries.
- CA: private contract among beneficiaries; sets governance, decision-making, IP background and foreground, access rights, publication rules, funds distribution, change-control, partner exit or entry, and dispute resolution. Must align with the GA.
- Reporting and audits: periodic technical and financial reports during the project and a final report at project end; audits may occur during or after the project. Timesheets and cost evidence must meet GA rules.

## **14) Internal Requirements**

- University of Guelph Participant Identification Code (PIC): 998804927
- Internal notice: submit an OR-5 and notify Research Services at least four (4) weeks before the EC deadline. College-level reviews may require additional lead time.
- RSO Contacts:
  - Carolyn Osborn, Director, Research Support Services: [cosborn@uoguelph.ca](mailto:cosborn@uoguelph.ca)
  - Rachel Lee, Senior Grants and Contracts Specialist: [rachell@uoguelph.ca](mailto:rachell@uoguelph.ca)
- Research Alert: <https://www.uoguelph.ca/research/alerts/content/european-commissions-horizon-europe-pillar-2>
- Confirm PICs and EU Login accounts for all partners.
- Complete Application Package: Part A (including compliance items - ethics and security questionnaires, open science, etc.) and Part B (within page limits).
- Budget: Must include audit costs if any beneficiary will receive €430,000 or more, and must include applicable indirect cost rate (25% of the eligible direct costs)/

## **15) FAQ Highlights**

- What is GAP? EC process to validate legal and financial data, finalize budgets and annexes, and prepare the GA in the Portal.

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- What is the difference between GA and CA? GA is the contract with the EC; CA is the contract among beneficiaries and must align with the GA.
- What are success rates? Institutional summaries referencing EC rules indicate success rates around 18 to 22 percent; actual rates vary by call and year.
- What is the audit requirement? Mandatory audit certificate if any single beneficiary receives €430,000 or more. Include audit costs at proposal stage.
- What should Canadians know before deciding to coordinate? Expect high administrative load, legal accountability, financial oversight, and reputational risk for 3 to 5 years. Ensure consortium-wide compliance and robust governance before committing.
- Are CSA rules different for funding? Some CSA topics restrict who can be funded; exceptional funding for third countries may apply in narrow cases. Always confirm in the topic text and General Annexes.

### **16) Lessons Learned**

#### Common shortcomings

- Objectives unclear or over-ambitious for project duration
- State of the art and ambition not sufficiently evidenced
- Generic barrier analysis and mitigation measures
- Under-specified regulatory uptake pathways
- Imbalanced person month and budget allocation
- Generic risk registers without triggers and specific mitigations

#### Recommended fixes

- Map objectives to Expected Outcomes and KPIs
- Provide citations and comparative analysis for state of the art and ambition claims
- Detail barrier mitigation tailored to local context, connectivity, policy and market conditions
- Link deliverables to objectives and KPIs; balance resources across partners
- Expand risk registers with trigger points, owner, timeline, and mitigation actions