MSCA PF: Tips and insights

Dr Linas Eriksonas

PhD (Aberdeen)

Baltic MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships Inspiration Day, 18 May, 2023
MS Teams meeting

Content

1. Issues and challenges

2. Three success factors

3. Critical aspects in proposal preparation

4. Common mistakes related to Excellence

5. Common mistakes related to Impact

6. Common mistakes related to Implementation

7. References and useful links

Issues and challenges

Contradictions within MSCA calls:

1. **No predefined research field or topic** *yet the use of pre-defined (level 1 and 2) keywords for assigning to the panel and evaluators*

2. **Emphasis on the novelty of knowledge and skills generation** *yet expectation of the continuation with previous, ongoing research*

3. **Expectation of international, inter-sectorial and interdisciplinary projects***, yet increasingly more weight is attached to the supervision at a host institution within a very narrow and highly specialized field*

Success factor 1: the host institution

- HEI's research performance, measured by the number of publications and citations, as well as the amount of research income earned from industry.

- HEI's international outlook, measured by the international-to-domestic student and staff ratios, international collaborations, and joint degree programmes.

- HEI's size and the student-staff ratio are also important factors.

- Additionally, the location of the university, the appeal of the nearest city, language, infrastructure, and cost-of-living may also influence the potential of the university as an MSCA host.

Success factor 2: the supervisor

- The supervisor's experience in hosting MSCA grantees

- The quality and capacity of the host institution and participating organisations

- The administrative support available to the researcher, the research group/environment, the hosting arrangements, the integration of the researcher into the research team/environment, the access to research/technical infrastructure

- The quality and capacity of the participating organisations, the infrastructure and equipment available to the researcher, and the overall management structure and monitoring actions.

Success factor 3: going beyond SOA

- Demonstration of ambition to go beyond the state-of-the-art

- Big ideas, clear aims and objectives, ambitious research targets

- A good story describing what the project is all about, pinpointing the research problem, explaining why it has not been solved yet, describing the novel idea to address the challenges, defining the overall aim and objectives, and explaining the impact

- The use of up-to-date references, including those from the researcher/supervisor, to demonstrate excellence and support that the researcher/host is the right person/organization to do it.

Critical aspects in proposal preparation

The most critical aspects of preparing a successful MSCA project proposal are:

1. Ensuring the quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives, and going beyond the state of the art.

2. Developing a sound methodology, including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects, and quality of open science practices.

3. Ensuring quality of the supervision, training, and two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host.

4. Demonstrating the researcher's professional experience, competences, and skills.

5. Planning for dissemination and exploitation activities, including communication activities

Common mistakes: Excellence

- Not providing enough detail in the introduction, aims and objectives section.

- Not highlighting the gap in current knowledge that the project aims to investigate.

- Not demonstrating how the project will progress the research beyond the state of the art.

- Not addressing the gender dimension and other diversity aspects in the research content.

- Not describing how research outputs will be made publicly available.

- Not describing how research data will be managed in line with the FAIR principles.

- Not providing enough detail about the qualifications and experience of the supervisor(s).

- Not describing the training activities and two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host organization.

- Not describing the expected skills and experiences that will be developed during the fellowship.

- Not providing enough detail about the plan for dissemination and exploitation activities, including communication activities

Common mistakes: Impact

- Not providing a clear identification of the research contribution to the scientific, societal and economic areas.

- Not adequately estimating the scientific medium and long-term impact of the project.

- Not discussing the impact on other science areas in enough detail.

- Not sufficiently addressing the expected scientific impact beyond the immediate scope of the proposal.

- Not discussing the broader impact of the project on the scientific community in enough detail.

- Not providing quantified estimates of the project scientific, societal and economic impact.

- Not including career development plan, data management plan and plan for the dissemination and exploitation of results in their respective WPs and in the Gantt chart.

- Not explaining how the research, training and career planning will be monitored and how the quality of deliverables will be assured.

- Not identifying specific risks that could delay the progress of deliverables and including a contingency measure(s) for each risk plans.

Common mistakes: Implementation

- Not providing enough detail in the Gantt chart

- Not providing a clear timeline for the project

- Not providing a clear description of the research methodology

- Not providing a clear description of the interdisciplinary aspects of the project

- Not providing a clear description of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects

- Not providing a clear description of open science practices

- Not providing a clear description of research data management and management of other research outputs

- Not providing a clear description of the qualifications and experience of the supervisor(s)

- Not providing a clear description of the planned training activities and two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host organization(s)

- Not providing a clear description of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills

- Not providing a clear plan for dissemination and exploitation activities, including communication activities (including clearly identified target groups_

References and useful links

- Baumert P, Cenni F, Antonkine ML (2022), Ten simple rules for a successful EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral (MSCA) fellowship application. PLoS Comput Biol 18(8): https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1010371

- Falk MT, Hagsten E. Potential of European universities as Marie Curie grantee hosts. High Educ. 2021; 81(2):255–72.

- MSCA participants (stats): https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1OqeqpHOOUGGI4_xvdWZ7aKm-etoj1f6q/edit?usp=share_link&ouid=106205776863033011180&rtpof=true&sd=true

- MSCA Keywords: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jSTyD9-x54V9kHjP0r6scTD8nBspwWTF/view?usp=share_link

- Manual for evaluators (2018): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iyBl7Cz33PK-1CPYgUf1HaSFP0H3SvwF/view?usp=sharing