FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
Innovative Training Networks (ITN)
Call identifier: H2020-MSCA-ITN-2014
Closing Date: 09 April 2014 at 17:00:00
(Brussels local time)

Batch number: 1
Date: 05/03/2014

All questions and answers are also published on:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/index.cfm?pg=faq

European Commission

CONSORTIUM

Q1: Can organisations from Other Third Countries participate in ITN?

A: Yes. Participation of Other Third Countries in ITN is possible both as beneficiary and as a partner organisation.
To be considered as beneficiary and receive funding from the EU, Other Third Countries (OTC) are divided into two groups:
1) Those listed in the Annex A of the Work Programme may receive funding on the same terms as the EU Member States and H2020 Associated Countries provided that the minimum participation requirements have been met.
2) For those OTCs *not* listed in the above mentioned Annex A of the Work Programme, the funding of organisations from OTCs can be permitted in exceptional cases, if endorsed by the expert evaluators and if one of the two following conditions is met:

- the participation is deemed essential for carrying out the action;
- such funding is provided for under a bilateral scientific and technological agreement or any other arrangement between the Union and the country in which the legal entity is established.

In view of the launch of Horizon 2020, many of the existing S&T agreements between the EU and third countries will expire and are therefore in the process of being renegotiated. Consequently, applicants wishing to include organisations from Other Third Countries not listed in Annex A of the Work Programme in their consortium should for now focus on demonstrating that their participation is essential for carrying out the proposed project. This will be assessed by the experts during the evaluation.
This will be based on the judgment that the participation of the entity in question in the project offers clear benefits to the consortium. These benefits may include, for example, outstanding competence and expertise, access to research infrastructures, access to geographical environments, access to data, etc. This should remain an exception and must be duly justified by the proposers.

Q2: Can partner organisations in ITN be from the same country as the Coordinator?

A: Yes, *partner organisations* can be from any country, any discipline and any sector.

Q3: Is there a recommended number of partner organisations in ITN?

A: No. This will depend on each individual research training programme and on each partner organisation's added value to the programme.

Q4: Is non-academic sector participation essential in an ITN proposal?

A: Yes. A meaningful exposure to the non-academic sector is considered essential. As ITN aims to improve the employability of researchers through exposure to organisations in both the academic and non-academic sectors, an essential part of any ITN is the involvement of organisations from different sectors. For EIDs, note that the participation of the non-academic sector as a beneficiary is an eligibility criterion. The quality and degree of involvement of organisations from the non-academic sector will be assessed by the expert evaluators according to the evaluation criteria.

Q5: Are external representatives (referred to as "any stakeholders") in the supervisory board compulsory in an ITN proposal?

A: No. The participation of external stakeholders (e.g. future employers) in the supervisory board is not compulsory. However, such an involvement of external stakeholders can be very beneficial as they can bring added value to the supervision of the training programme.

Q6: Must all partner organisations be involved in the supervisory board in ITN?

A: Yes. The supervisory board will be composed of representatives of all beneficiaries and partner organisations and may also include any other stakeholders of relevance to the training programme, including those from the non-academic sector. It is also considered best practice to include a representative from among the recruited ESRs.

Q7: Can the consortium consist only of research organisations and companies? How will the PhD degree be awarded?

A: In ETNs it is possible that consortia are composed of research organisations and companies only, as ETN is not limited to the doctoral training. However, this set-up is very rare. Generally in almost all ITNs there are universities among the beneficiaries.
For EID the participation of at least one beneficiary awarding doctoral degrees is mandatory.
For EJD: the participation of 3 beneficiaries which are academic institutions entitled to award doctoral degrees and located in 3 different Member States or Associated Countries is mandatory. For more details please see the Guide for Applicants.

Q8: Does ITN allow for mono-site consortia?

A: No, this is no longer the case in ITN under H2020. However, mono-site doctoral programmes can now be co-funded under the MSC COFUND action. Please refer to the Work Programme at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/main/h2020-wp1415-msca_en.pdf

Q9: Can universities not offering doctoral degree programmes apply for ITN (all 3 modes). If yes, how should the typical consortium look like?

A: Some universities of applied sciences cannot award doctoral degrees but they do carry out research.
- For ETN the action does not require to provide doctoral training. Therefore such universities of applied sciences may participate as beneficiaries.
- For EID and EJD, such universities of applied sciences may also participate, however they do not count as one of the academic beneficiaries required for the minimum eligibility rules as they are not entitled to award doctoral degrees.

Q10: In line with the MSCA WP definition and according to the Proposal Submission System (SEP), my entity (a museum) is classified as an academic sector entity because it has a non-profit research organisation status. I believe it should be classified as a non-academic sector entity. What should I do?

A: The validation is managed centrally for all H2020 beneficiaries. If you believe that the validation is incorrect, the Legal Entity Appointed Representative (LEAR) of the organisation can ask for a correction and changes in the organisation's legal classification through the participant portal. The access can be found in "My Personal Area" at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/home.html

Q11: Is a Participant Identification Code (PIC) mandatory in form A during proposal submission?

A: Yes. Every entity must have at least a draft PIC number. If an entity does not yet have a draft PIC number, it can be obtained easily by following the instructions at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/index.html

PROPOSAL PREPARATION:

Q12: Can an organisation submit a proposal to each of the three ITN modes?

A: Yes. However, applicants must demonstrate that, should they receive funding for more than one project, they have the capacity to participate in each project to the extent indicated in the proposal. In addition, the proposals cannot be overlapping since double funding is not permitted.

Q13: Can an organisation submit the same proposal to each of the three ITN modes?

A: Yes. However, applicants are required to separately submit a proposal to each of the three implementation modes: ETN, EID or EJD. Since the eligibility requirements and objectives of the three modes are different, the same proposal may not be eligible and/or sufficiently tailored for specificities of each mode. Furthermore, double-funding of the same research and/or researchers is not permitted.

Q14: Are re-submissions of FP7 ITN proposals allowed?

A: Yes - with some limitation. The rules allow for resubmission of a proposal to a H2020 ITN call when it has been submitted to FP7 ITN call in the two previous years. It is very important to note that the ITN action objectives and its evaluation criteria under H2020 have been substantially revised compared to FP7. Therefore, the applicants are advised to update their proposal accordingly. It is important to keep in mind that each evaluation is conducted independently from any previous one and proposals will be evaluated against the evaluation criteria of the current ITN call in H2020.

Q15: What is meant by "Independent Research Premises" in the table under section 5. "Capacity of the Participant Organisations" of Part B of the proposal?

A: The principle is that each beneficiary has premises – own or rented – to host the fellows, e.g. a newly established campus company/university spin-off that neither owns nor rents premises yet would not be considered to have independent research premises. However, please note a company in an incubator facility made available free of charge would be considered to have independent research premises.

Q16: Why is it necessary to select descriptors in the proposal part A during submission of the proposal?

A: The descriptors will play a role in the identification of the most suited experts to evaluate the proposal. To help to select the most relevant descriptors, a document providing a breakdown of each research area into a number of descriptors can be found on the call page on the participant portal:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/calls/h2020-msca-itn-2014.html#tab2

Q17: How should individual early-stage researcher (ESR) projects be structured and described?

A: ETN should be constructed as a joint research training programme. The individual projects form the research component. The proposal has also to describe the network-wide trainings consisting of research specific and complementary skills training. In addition the fellows may use local trainings since they are typically enrolled in the local PhD programme/doctoral schools. Please follow the Part B proposal template for training and proposal structure.

Q18: How/where is it possible to get more information on the Open Research Data?

A: As participation in the Open Research Data pilot is optional, ITN projects can freely choose to do so; in such a case a data management plan will be required. The decision to participate or not does not affect the evaluation of the proposal. The Data Management Plan will be published on the Participant Portal as soon as it is available. Meanwhile please refer to the ITN Model Grant Agreement art. 29.2 and 29.3:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/reference_docs.html#h2020-mga-msc

Q19: Should Table 2.1 Work Package List only contain the scientific/technical work packages or should it also include non-technical work packages such as Consortium Management or Dissemination/Communication?

A: Good practice is to add separate work packages on management, dissemination, communication & public engagement and on training.

Q20: Should the proposal Section 2 (Excellence) include information about individual research projects or should this be indicated in Section 4?

A: In section 2.1 in the table you can indicate the ESR involvement. Depending on your project set-up, you may generally describe the involvement of the researcher in a particular work-package. Table 4.1.d will provide a more detailed description of the individual research projects. Please ensure consistency between the two tables.

Q21: What is the role of invited visiting researchers mentioned in 4.1 of the "Guide for Applicants"? How can their related costs be reimbursed?

A: Visiting researchers are **not compulsory** within ITN projects. They usually are outstanding researchers in their field and their role is typically to provide specific training to the researchers, contribute to summer schools, share their experience, etc. Regarding the reimbursement of their costs, they do not receive allowances foreseen for the ESRs recruited by the project (living, mobility, family). However, their travel and subsistence costs can be covered by the Research Training Activities category.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION:

Q22: Are the expert evaluators allowed to read excess pages?

A: No. The evaluators are instructed to disregard any pages over the 30-page limit for sections 1 to 4 of part B of the proposal. The page limit rule is clearly explained in the Guide for Applicants and will be strictly enforced.

Q23: Will the evaluation of the EID and EJD differ from that for ETN modes?

A: All EID and EJD proposals will be evaluated by experts in the scientific field(s) of the proposal like in ETN. In all cases, the evaluation criteria will be used by the experts according to the implementation mode as indicated in the Work Programme. EID and EJD proposals will be ranked in two separate lists, since there is a specific budget allocation for these two implementation modes in the Work Programme. Therefore, EID proposals will only compete against each other and not against ETN or EJD proposals. The same principle applies to EJD proposals. ETN proposals are ranked according to the scientific panel.

BUDGET:

Q24: How will the ITN call budget be distributed?

A: The call budget distribution is indicated in the relevant Work Programme. EID and EJD proposals will be ranked in two separate lists since there is a specific budget allocation indicated in the Work Programme. For ETN, the proposals are ranked under eight major panels (areas of research). The budget for ETN is allocated to each of these panels in proportion to the number of eligible proposals submitted to the panel.

Q25: What happens if more researcher-months are requested than the maximum indicated in the ITN Guide for Applicants?

A: For MSCA funding**,** the 540 person months is the upper limit which may not be exceeded in ETN, EJD and EID with a minimum of 3 beneficiaries, while 180 person months is the upper limit for EID with two beneficiaries. If the proposal contains person months in excess of these limits, the applicants run the risk of negatively affecting the evaluation of their proposal in the absence of a clear indication that own sources will be used to finance the excess person months.

Q26: Is the EU contribution calculated the same way for EID and EJD compared to ETN mode?

A: Yes. All researcher unit costs (monthly living allowance, mobility allowance, family allowance) and institutional unit costs (research, training and networking costs, management and indirect costs) are calculated in the same way for the three modes.

Q27: Are applicants required to indicate the amount of the estimated EU contribution in the ITN proposal?

A: No. The EU contribution will be automatically calculated from the information provided in Part A of the proposal.

Q28: Will partner organisations in ITNs be reimbursed for the costs of training and/or hosting of seconded researchers?

A: Yes. Costs incurred by partner organisations can be reimbursed by a beneficiary. The costs are then covered by the EU contribution under the cost category relevant for the activity/ies carried out by the partner organisations.

Q29: Is there any limitation on the percentage of budget for reimbursements for partner organisations from one EU country?

A: No. The limitation of the budget is linked only to beneficiaries.

Q30: Are the costs related to face to face meetings, joint workshops between doctoral candidates and their supervisors (like travelling) eligible?

A: Yes. These costs can be covered by the institutional unit cost “Research, Training and Network Costs”. For more details, please see the Guide for Applicants.

RECRUITMENT:

Q31: Has the definition of Early-Stage Researcher (ESR) changed from FP7 to H2020?

A: No, the definition of Early-Stage Researchers (ESR) has not changed. ESRs shall, at the time of recruitment by the host organisation, be in the first four years (full-time equivalent research experience) of their research careers and have not been awarded a doctoral degree. Full-time equivalent research experience is measured from the date when a researcher

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obtained the degree which would formally entitle him or her to embark on a doctorate, either in the country in which the degree was obtained or in the country in which the researcher is recruited.

Q32: Can Experienced Researchers be recruited in ITN?

A: No. Unlike under FP7, Experienced Researchers cannot be recruited in any of the ITN modes: ETN, EID and EJD in H2020.

Q33: Is it mandatory to appoint fellows for the maximum 36-month period under the - EID and the EJD modes?

A: Although not mandatory, these modes are essentially designed to fund doctoral research programmes and therefore Early-Stage Researchers should generally be appointed for the maximum 36-month period. Shorter appointments would have to be carefully explained and justified and would be assessed by the expert evaluators during the evaluation procedure.

Q34: What is the recommended role of organisation in ETN, when it does not wish to recruit?

A: If an organisation in ETN does not recruit, its tasks (such as offering secondment opportunities and/or training) is identical to that of a partner organisation. Therefore, such an entity should participate as a partner organisation.

Q35: Project duration is normally 4 years. Are longer or shorter durations possible? If EID and EJD are doctoral programmes, why can Early-Stage Researchers only be appointed for a maximum of 36 months when many will take longer than this to complete their PhDs?

A: Project duration is a maximum of 4 years. This gives the consortium sufficient time to recruit the fellows and to appoint them for the maximum 36-month period. Shorter durations of the grant agreement are theoretically possible but not recommended, since experience has shown that a project duration of 4 years offers the consortium a useful margin for manoeuvre.
In those countries where the duration of PhD study is formally 4 years, additional funding from other sources should be secured by the participant in order to fund the 4th year of doctoral studies.

Q36: Shall the beneficiaries provide full-time contracts to the researchers?

A: As a rule the researcher should be recruited under a full-time contract. Part-time employment must be agreed in advance by the REA and is allowed only for personal or family reasons of a researcher. Part-time employment for professional reasons is not allowed.

Q37: What is the definition of the date of recruitment and how does the mobility rule apply to it?

A: The time of recruitment is when the appointment of the fellow is formalised. As there are differences in the procedure of employment between countries, the definition of this date remains flexible. It can be either the date on the formal letter offering the position under the project, the start date of the work under the project or the date of signature of the contract. However, it has to be kept in mind that it is the employer (= beneficiary) who is finally responsible for verifying the eligibility rules. The employer has to ensure that sufficient evidence of eligibility is kept for any potential check or audit.

Q38: How is the family status taken into account during the recruitment and is it possible to modify it in the course of the project (e.g. if a researcher has a child)?

A: Family is defined as persons linked to the researcher by (i) marriage, or (ii) a relationship with equivalent status to a marriage recognised by the legislation of the country where this relationship was formalised; or (iii) dependent children who are actually being maintained by the researcher. The family status of the individual ESR is determined at the time of recruitment and does not change during the lifetime of the project.

Q39: Is it compulsory for the ESRs enrolled in a PhD to defend their thesis within 3 years?

A: No. In EID and EJD the researchers must be enrolled in the doctoral programme. In case of EJD it shall be a joint doctoral programme leading to the award of joint, double or multiple doctoral degrees. However, in cases when a doctoral degree is awarded after 3 years or even after the end of the project the REA may check if the commitment to provide doctoral training was fulfilled.

SECONDMENTS :

Q40: Are secondments in ETN mode important?

A: Yes. Secondments are strongly encouraged and expected. They will be assessed by the expert evaluators under the criterion "training". Secondments should not, however, exceed 30% of a fellow's recruitment period.

Q41: Is it possible to arrange secondments to partner organisations in the same country where the PhD is hosted?

A: Yes, it is. In those cases please remember that the international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary dimension is an important part of ITN.

EUROPEAN JOINT DOCTORATES (EJD):

Q42: What is the objective of EJD European Joint Doctorates?

A: EJDs have the objective of promoting international, intersectoral and multi/inter-disciplinary collaboration in doctoral-level training in Europe through the creation of joint doctoral programmes, leading to the delivery of joint, double or multiple doctoral degrees. At the crossroads between higher education and research, they are an excellent instrument to promote the development of, and create bridges between, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. This will be achieved by promoting greater structural co-operation between universities in terms of programme design and mutual recognition of qualifications.

Q43: What is the difference between a joint and a double or multiple degree in EJD mode?

A: A joint degree refers to a single diploma issued by at least two higher education institutions offering an integrated programme and recognised officially in the countries where the degree-awarding institutions are located. A double or multiple degree refers to two or more separate national diplomas issued by two or more higher education institutions and recognised officially in the countries where the degree-awarding institutions are located.

Q44: Is joint supervision mandatory in the EJD mode?

A: The joint supervision of fellows is mandatory, as is the creation of a joint governance structure with joint admission, selection, supervision, monitoring and assessment procedures. The participation of beneficiaries from the non-academic sector is highly encouraged.

Q45: Will it be checked whether the doctoral degree has actually been awarded in EID and EJD modes?

A: Fellows recruited under EID and EJD must be enrolled in the doctoral programme and are expected to complete their studies and for EJD receive the joint, double or multiple doctoral degrees. A formal commitment to award joint/double/multiple doctoral degrees is required in the proposal. Since the doctoral degree may be awarded after the EID or EJD project has finished, it may not be feasible in all cases to check during the project lifetime as to whether the final degree was actually awarded. However, such checks may take place after the conclusion of the project.

Q46: Can EID and EJD modes have more flexible programme content than ETN mode?

A: Yes. The evaluation criteria of EID, EJD and ETN will be applied according to the objectives of the implementation mode in question, which are described in the Work Programme. While ETN should be constructed as a joint research training programme where recruited fellows may be enrolled in various local doctoral programmes, EID and EJD proposals should demonstrate a coherent doctoral programme in which all fellows participate. The doctoral programmes should contain all common features described in the Work Programme for the training programme, including individualised research projects.

Q47: Can former applicants to Erasmus Mundus programme apply to the EJD mode?

A: Yes. Please note that previous applications are not considered as resubmissions. When designing your project please take into account the MSCA ITN implementation and budget structure.

Q48: Are two countries sufficient or is it necessary that the doctoral degree is accepted in all countries involved in an EJD project?

A: The doctoral degrees awarded within EJD shall be recognised at least in two different countries.

EUROPEAN INDUSTRIAL DOCTORATES (EID):

Q49: In a EID mode, can a research institution act as coordinator?

A: Yes. It is possible to propose a research institution to act as a coordinator. However, it should be kept in mind that the minimum requirement of the academic sector participation in an EID is to include at least one beneficiary that can award doctoral degrees. Since the ESR's enrolment in a doctoral programme is a requirement for EID, the proposal will have to clearly describe the role of each participant in the programme.

Q50: In an EID mode, what would be the benefit of being employed by more than one of the participants? How would the 50% rule then be monitored and enforced?

A: It is up to the participants to decide if the employment will be provided by one or more participants and if one set-up is more feasible than the other. Bear in mind the effects such a decision has on the country correction coefficient applied to the living allowance of the fellow and the time he/she spends in different countries.

The recruited researchers must spend at least 50% of their time in the non-academic sector (at beneficiaries or partner organisations). The time period spent in the non-academic sector has to be declared in the reports. If requested, the participants should be able to provide auditors with evidence (e.g. lab note books, travel documents) of the time spent by the researchers in each location.

Q51: Can NGOs be partners together with academic institutions?

A: Yes. If it is the only non-academic sector beneficiary, the applicant must check that the legal validation result is consistent with the non-academic sector definition in the MSCA work programme.