Tips for ending up with a successful H2020 proposal

Experience sharing from the UM Cure 2020 project

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UM Cure 2020
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New Therapies for Uveal Melanoma

- Rare intraocular tumour, with 5 cases per million individuals/year
- Most frequent eye cancer in adults
- Current treatments for primary UM are effective, however up to 30% of patients develop metastases most often in the liver.
- Despite recent significant insights into the genetic molecular background of primary UM (driver mutations and alterations responsible for oncogenesis and progression), very little is known about the metastases of UM, which are invariably fatal.

Overall goal of the project = develop new therapeutic approaches to treat metastatic UM
The application process
Two-stage

Call PHC-14-2015 “New Therapies for rare diseases”

- Deadline Stage 1 application: October 14, 2014
- Information on positive evaluation: January 27, 2014
- Deadline Stage 2 application: April 21, 2015
- Information on funding: August 26, 2015
- September > December 2015: Grant Agreement negotiation
- January 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2016: Official project start
Statistics for PHC-14-2015 Stage 2

• 121 proposals received
• Above threshold = 52 (43%)
• Short-listed (success rate) = 10 (8%)
• Reserve = 3
• Coverage of the topic = YES
Three major keys of success

1. Insure your project fits to the topic description 100% & keep EU “buzzwords/keywords” in mind

2. Carefully build your consortium of partners

3. Get help from someone knowledgeable and able to devote the necessary time to the proposal preparation (and beyond)
1. Fitness to the topic description

Specific challenge: (...) Specific problems posed in therapy development for rare diseases include the small and dispersed patient populations (...).

Scope: Proposals may address one or more of the following: development of new or improved therapeutic approaches, for repurposing of existing therapies, as well as for preclinical research, animal model development and good manufacturing practice (GMP) production. Proposed treatments to be developed may range from small molecule to gene or cell therapy. (...) Selected proposals should contribute to the objectives of, and follow the guidelines and policies of the International Rare Diseases Research Consortium, IRDiRC.
1. Fitness to the topic description

Impact: This should provide:

- **Advancing the development of new therapeutic options** for patients living with rare diseases.

- In line with the Union’s strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation, **proposals should contribute towards IRDiRC objectives**.
  
  - **overarching IRDiRC objective** = develop 200 new therapies for rare diseases by 2020
  
  - **guidelines and policies of IRDiRC** = includes the involvement of patients/patients representatives, sharing of data and resources, dissemination to all relevant stakeholders ...
WP5
New clinical trials / Dissemination

WP1
Biobank of patient samples

WP2
Testing of single and combo approaches

WP3
Novel models, including transgenic models (zebrafish, mouse)

WP4
UM metastases characterisation ('omics and microenvironment)

WP6 - Coordination & Project Management
**WP1 – European UM Biobank Network**
Homogenising UM referral centres biobanks SOPs & Prospective collection of UM patients samples

**WP2 – Preclinical evaluation of biology-driven therapeutic approaches**
First phase based on current disease knowledge and models
Second phase with new hypotheses (WP4) & new models (WP3)
Innovative peptidic approach: Peptides in development & Design of new peptides based on WP4

**WP3 – Development of next generation preclinical models**
Mouse PDX/CDX and GEMs, *in vitro*, and zebrafish ZF and GEM models

**WP4 – Characterisation of UM metastases**
Generating better knowledge on metastatic UM and new target hypotheses for WP2

**WP5 – Dissemination & Implementation through clinical trials initiation**
Communication tools, UM patient network, Dissemination to Pharma for initiation of clinical trials

**WP6 – Coordination & Project Management**


Jan. 2019

Beyond the project

Dec. 2020
EU buzzwords/keywords

Use these words wherever relevant in your proposal:

- The ones identified in the topic text.
- Others such as Innovation, Gender balance, Gendered Innovation, Dissemination, Open access, Data management, Stakeholder, End user, **Ethics**, Exploitation...
2. Your Consortium

Equilibrium to find between:

- Institutions from different regions of Europe
- Academic vs. SMEs
- Patient associations/representatives
- Any additional requirement in the text of the call (e.g. regulatory, economic aspects)
- Track record in the field (and networked partners) vs. “outsiders”
- Innovative partners
- Complementary expertise / Trans-disciplinarity to meet the call’s needs
- Test their reliability during proposal preparation

Build a dream team
Consortium of EU experts in UM

- **4 UM referral centres** across Europe, Comprehensive Cancer Centre or University Hospitals: IC, UoL, LUMC, JU
- **3 Research Institutes**: CRUKMI, LU, UNITN
- **2 biotech or diagnostics companies**: PT and PG
- **1 Foundation**: CF
- **1 patient network**: MPNE
- **1 project management company**: SSC

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3. Get help from someone who knows and has time

Why?

- Applications to Horizon 2020 are very specific and you will benefit from someone having experience in writing such proposals, in particular for Sections “Excellence” and “Impact”.
- It takes much time to write and fine-tune + obtain the necessary information from all partners, in particular for Sections 4 (Members of the Consortium) and 5 (Ethics and Security issues)!!

- Number of days (8h/day) spent on Stage 1 application = 8.5 days
- Number of days spent on Stage 2 application = 31 days
- 2 F2F meetings (1st before Stage 1, 2nd upon starting Stage 2 prep)
- Stage 2: Weekly TCs during 2 months to finalise the work plan
- Number of days spent on negotiation of the Grant Agreement and Consortium Agreement = 20 days
3. Get help from someone who knows and has time

- It is even more important now that there is no “real” negotiation with the Commission anymore, projects are funded as they are.
- If possible, also ask someone “external” to the Consortium to review the proposal and proofread the English.
- Write simple.
Good luck, and thank you!

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• Specific objectives:
  - **Better characterise UM mets** by collecting patients’ samples and establishing a European UM virtual biobank registry (WP1);
  - Evaluate single drugs or combinations in preclinical models to **identify novel therapeutic options for treatment of metastatic UM** (WP2);
  - **Further develop relevant in vitro and in vivo models** to better understand the mechanisms of UM oncogenesis and progression and evaluate promising therapies (WP3);
  - Decipher genetic alterations and dysregulated signalling pathways in metastatic UM, and the characteristics of UM immune landscape, to **identify novel targets and biomarkers** (WP4);
  - Ensure **wide-spread dissemination and maximal exploitation of the results**, in particular through the initiation of UM-dedicated clinical trials, and through the networking and empowerment of UM patients across Europe (WP5).

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