EARMA

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH MANAGERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Position paper for the public consultation on the past, present and future of the European Research & Innovation Framework programmes 2014-2027

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About EARMA

EARMA represents the community of Research Managers and Administrators (RMAs) in Europe. Our members work in industry, academia, the public and private sectors. We work with the EU Commission, national and international funding agencies. EARMA provides a networking forum, a learning platform, and a place to share experiences and best practice among RMAs throughout EARMA and in the wider RMA community.

EARMA is an active member of the wider international RMA community and is a founding member of the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS).

Our members work at the forefront of building the European Research Area. We form the interface between research funding organisations and the scientific community, bridging cultural and legal differences between countries, and between academia and industry, contributing to policy consultations, and managing the smooth running of research projects.

For further Information, please visit **earma.org**.

Position paper for the public consultation on the past, present and future of the European Research & Innovation Framework programmes 2014-2027

INTRODUCTION

The European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA) welcomes the opportunity to provide our unique perspective and input to the public consultation on the past, present, and future of the European Research & Innovation (R&I) Framework programmes 2014-2027. Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 have been instrumental in realising European research and innovation excellence. As the representative organisation of more than 300 European research performing organisations (RPOs) and research funding organisations (RFOs), we have been directly involved in the smooth implementation of Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, and their predecessor Framework Programmes. As the interpreters of EU funding in our diverse organisations we advocate for the voice of the researcher, both their positive experiences and their pain points. We bring a wide range of perspectives from all parts of the research and innovation ecosystem from our transnational membership.

HORIZON EUROPE IMPLEMENTATION AND SIMPLIFICATION

The unique perspective of the EARMA membership comes from our focus on maximising participation of our member institutions and organisations in European R&I programmes. Therefore, successful implementation of Horizon EU programmes by the European Commission (EC) is sought. The European Research Management community is involved in every step of a successful Horizon Europe project from ideas generation, research development, proposal submission, grant management to post-award and impact, guiding and supporting our researchers and innovators throughout.

A standout objective for Horizon EU was simplification. It was aimed at reducing administrative burdens for applicants and beneficiaries. This was a very welcome ambition for the EARMA community. Recognising the different tensions that must be managed by the EC and the effort they place on this simplification objective, there remains opportunity for significantly more progress. Categorised observations from EARMA members demonstrate this.

CALL DESIGN

It has been observed that the Call scope and outcome coupled with requirements have expanded. The Call texts, while broadly similar to Horizon 2020, are more difficult to comprehend and increasingly it has been noted that projects are expected to meet a higher number of policy priorities. An unintended consequence is that these expanded requirements, higher number of priority targets and expected impacts have become more difficult to fully address within the new proposal template. This has meant that the reduction in page count has become a hinderance for applicants. **We recommend a review of the proposal template taking account of the increased requirements from a user/applicant perspective**.

BOTTOM-UP

We note the comparative lack of such initiatives in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) and we encourage the EC to continue to enable the leadership of these disciplines with specific funding opportunities. We would suggest that a more bottom-up inclusive approach to projects which link to general priority areas would facilitate more innovative thinking in any domain and the participation of SSH communities which would substantially enrich and enhance current cultural and societal challenges. At present, the Work Programmes are overly prescriptive. **We recommend the inclusion of a "bottom-up" pilot in Pillar 2 for collaborative projects as a general practice and for SSH, in particular.**

TIMING

Significant delays to the finalisation of Horizon Europe Work Programmes have caused tight timelines in the proposal preparation phase and thus the lead in times (typically December-March) are insufficient. **We call for more pre-work programme planning to enhance the quality of proposal submission**.

The time and effort for proposal submission remains significant in terms of resources, with an often-uncertain outcome due to the fierce competition. For example, it is estimated that approx. 50% of ERCs projects are not funded due of budgetary constraints, notwithstanding their quality. This is not something that can be easily fixed but shows the need for the EC to strongly advocate for a sufficient budget so that it can fund more projects in the same call. This is particularly important vis-à-vis the Council and European Parliament. **EARMA will support the EC in securing adequate budgetary commitments in Horizon Europe and successor programmes**.

We consider the "time to grant" to be in line with acceptable practice. The care and effort that is put into evaluation feedback is much appreciated. **We encourage the EC to ensure that evaluators can and do provide an adequate level of specific detail**. The EC/European Research Executive Agency (REA) should refrain from advocating for generic feedback which is unhelpful. The EC/REA may also reconsider their practice of not asking evaluators to provide suggestions for improvement.

LUMP SUM MODEL

The roll out of the Lump sum model has added another layer of complexity and additional workload to the pre-award proposal submission process. Specifically, budgets per partner per work package must be more definitively constructed as funding cannot be transferred amongst partners, work packages without an amendment to the contract. As funding is linked to activity delivered, an unintended consequence has been that there is an artificial construction of work packages to allow funding to flow rather than linked to the logical flow of the research itself. **We recommend the use of Lump Sum models for smaller consortia, cooperative and support actions (CSA) or higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) projects only**.

IMPACT

The emphasis on impact aligns with the **EARMA Thematic Group on Impact** given that Horizon Europe supports key EU policies and the priorities of the von der Leyen Commission. Practically, however, the "Pathways to Impact Table" in the proposal template is cumbersome and difficult to complete. There is a need for further training and practice. **We request the EC to provide a range of best practice impact examples from the first rounds of Horizon Europe. Finally, evaluations must include a realistic judgement of feasibility of the pathways presented**. This is because an unintended consequence of the current model is that applicants are driven towards unrealistic impact pathways.

GENDER EQUALITY

We welcome the inclusion of the requirement for each partner to have a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in place at an institutional level and as part of the institutions' policies. However, the requirement to complete the Researcher Table in Part A of the proposal (used as part of the evaluation sub criteria of gender balance among

researchers in a consortium) risks the token inclusion of researchers in the consortium to achieve "gender balance". This can lead to artificial consortia where people are added for the purpose of balance as opposed to their expertise. The Researcher Table is also unnecessarily cumbersome to complete with a focus on gender balance and is not necessarily a true picture of the consortium composition post-award. **We would recommend periodical assessment and implementation reporting on the practical outcomes of the inclusion of the Researcher Table as a means to capture this information**.

MISSIONS

The missions were seen as a new way of realising innovative research challenges. At this stage, it is too early to evaluate their success. National involvement and complementary financing will also be required if the objectives are to be fully achieved. However, due to a lack of transparency, it is unclear how Member States contribute towards the Missions and if there are real synergies between European and national strategies. This also speaks to an overall need to have better synergies between programmes at both national and EU level. Whilst there is provision for such synergies, we are not seeing them actualised and this may be due to a lack of understanding of how this could be achieved. We are also uncertain how our members can participate in the Mission calls. It would appear that initial calls have received little attention from the scientific community, despite widespread EC communication on the Missions. **We would welcome more clarity on the implementation of the Missions in Horizon Europe**.

PARTNERSHIP AND JOINT PROGRAMMING

The Partnerships and Joint Programming have become more complex with a less than transparent process. The implementation is complex for RMAs and again points towards a "closed shop" which is not open to new entrants. Transparency, accessibility, and governance of these partnerships should be improved. In particular, the process to join a partnership can be somewhat unclear for universities and research centres. **We would welcome more clarity and a better understanding of strategic programme decision-making at national and EU levels**. In terms of accessibility, co-funding can be a barrier due to inconsistencies in Member State/regional co-funding which may impact on project feasibility. **We would suggest a minimum amount of co-funding per Member State to be agreed at call design stage**. There is a need for clarity and transparency in Member State participation of institutional partnerships and joint programming.

FROM POLICIES TO WORK PROGRAMMES

OPEN SCIENCE

Open Science has been positively designated as the "modus operandi" of Horizon Europe. However, the Open Science policy has progressed according to the principle of evolution not revolution. **We encourage the EC to take further steps in the following areas, whilst continuing to support the implementation of open science**:

- ★ **Data gathering to determine the tangible level of Open Access to publication and FAIR data in Horizon Europe**.
- ★ **Recommend the establishment of a Research Data Management Helpdesk, similar to the Dissemination Booster and the IP Helpdesk to ensure the long-term preservation of research data generated with EU funding**.
- ★ **To commence a consultative foresight process on the future of Open Science**.

REFORM OF RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

As signatories and members of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) Constitutive Assembly, EARMA strongly welcomes the EC's endorsement of reform of research assessment. **We support Europe in realising its potential to become a global leader, not only in Open Science but towards fostering an inclusive research culture**.

WIDENING

Through its coordination of the WIDERA funded RM ROADMAP project, EARMA welcomes increased participation of widening countries. Widening is a welcome and necessary policy direction; however, more progress is necessary. The WIDERA calls, whilst well received, for example, may not fully serve to achieve these aims due to the lack of sufficient resources and investment from the Widening Member States. **We would welcome a meaningful review of widening measures to determine success with the inclusion of the widening partners and potential co-creation**.

SYNERGIES

A welcome initiative of Horizon Europe was the move towards greater synergies between the various EC funded programmes. Continuation of this initiative and strives towards increased synergies is essential especially in achieving widening and ERA policy actions. **We recommend the further strengthening of synergies among the various EU funding programmes with a more bottom-up and less prescriptive approach to priority areas to deliver innovation**.

Horizon 2020 was instrumental in enabling funding for areas which were not considered a priority in national and regional systems. The H2020 SWAFs projects have enabled the sustainable development of key aspects of the ERA policy agenda. The SWAFS provided the framework and foundation to fund projects on R&I-related activities for European Universities Alliances. **We strongly recommend the re-establishing of a Science with and for Society SWAFS like action line in Horizon Europe and successor programmes**.

Many EARMA partners are members of the European Universities Alliances which constitutes an EARMA Thematic Group. The lack of sustainable and collaborative funding models, beyond the current WIDERA calls, risk inefficient accumulation of efforts to date. **We call for a long-term collaborative (DG RTD, DG EAC) funding instruments to enable sustainable European Universities to deliver upon their vision**.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The EU Framework Programmes have delivered significant benefits and added value not only to the research and innovation ecosystem in Europe but also to global society at large. Clearly the association of several countries to the Framework Programmes showcases their attractiveness as a manifestation of EU soft power. The EU must further capitalise on the attractiveness of the Framework Programme by continuing to widen the number of associated countries.

A promising start has been made with the association of New Zealand and Canada soon. **We welcome greater clarity and confirmation of associate country status for smooth proposal preparation**. EARMA has extensive links with our sister global research management associations through **INORMS** including **NCURA**, **NORDP**, **SRAI**, **SARIMA** and **ARMS** within more established research systems and **we welcome increased funding for international cooperation and global reach**.

CONCLUSION

It is vital that the development of the future R&I priorities include the EARMA community as a key stakeholder.

EARMA is a vital, rich, and diverse community representing Research Managers and Administrators who strive in their activities to improve research quality overall. We welcome the European Commission's efforts towards a larger European budget for R&I as we fear that the current budget will not be able to deliver upon the set goals.

EARMA strongly recognises and endorses the dialogue on the new European Research Area and notably the inclusion of Action 17 which is tailor-made for the needs of the RMA community in Europe. It reflects the EU's intent to strengthen the strategic capacity of Europe's public research performing and funding organisations. We call for funding to meet the needs of our community: the uneven distribution of RMA networks and expertise across Europe, the need for training, new skills, networking opportunities and the lack of recognition of the profession of research managers, research administrators or research support staff, to name a few titles.

EARMA is fully committed to continuing to co-create the future of Horizon Europe and successor programmes. We are ready to work with the European Commission and stakeholders to ensure that these programmes deliver on their goals in a sustainable way to achieve meaningful impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON NEXT PAGE

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Call design: We recommend a review of the proposal template taking account of the increased requirements from a user/applicant perspective.

Bottom-up: We recommend the inclusion of a bottom-up pilot in Pillar 2 for collaborative projects as a general practice and for SSH, in particular.

Timing: We call for more pre-work programme planning to enhance the quality of proposal submission.

Timing: EARMA will support the EC in securing adequate budgetary commitments in Horizon Europe and successor programmes.

Timing: We encourage the EC to ensure that evaluators can and do provide an adequate level of specific detail.

Lump Sum model: We recommend the use of Lump Sum models for smaller consortia, cooperative and support actions (CSA) or higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) projects only.

Impact: We request the EC to provide a range of best practice impact examples from the first rounds of Horizon Europe. Finally, evaluations must include a realistic judgement of feasibility of the pathways presented.

Gender equality: We would recommend periodical assessment and implementation reporting on the practical outcomes of the inclusion of the Researcher Table as a means to capture this information.

Missions: We would welcome more clarity on the implementation of the Missions in Horizon Europe.

Partnership and joint programming: We would welcome more clarity and a better understanding of strategic programme decision-making at national and EU levels.

Partnership and joint programming: We would suggest a minimum amount of co-funding per Member State to be agreed at call design stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

Open Science: We encourage the EC to take further steps in the following areas, whilst continuing to support the implementation of Open Science:

- ★ Data gathering to determine the tangible level of Open Access to publication and FAIR data in Horizon Europe.
- ★ Recommend the establishment of a Research Data Management Helpdesk, similar to the Dissemination Booster and the IP Helpdesk to ensure the long-term preservation of research data generated with EU funding.
- ★ To commence a consultative foresight process on the future of Open Science.

Reform of research assessment: We support Europe in realising its potential to become a global leader, not only in Open Science but towards fostering an inclusive research culture.

Widening: We would welcome a meaningful review of widening measures to determine success with the inclusion of the widening partners and potential co-creation.

Synergies: We recommend the further strengthening of synergies among the various EU funding programmes with a more bottom-up and less prescriptive approach to priority areas to deliver innovation.

Synergies: We strongly recommend the re-establishing of a Science with and for Society SWAFS like action line in Horizon Europe and successor programmes.

Synergies: We call for a long-term collaborative (DG RTD, DG EAC) funding instruments to enable sustainable European Universities to deliver upon their vision.

International cooperation: We welcome greater clarity and confirmation of associate country status for smooth proposal preparation.

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