How to Succeed in Getting an MSCA Individual Fellowship?

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Boğaziçi University – MSCA IF GF Fellow
Institute of Environmental Sciences

About
My Academic Background

B.Sc. Environmental Engineering

MARMARA UNIVERSITY

2009

M.Sc. Environmental Biotechnology

İTÜ

2012

Ph.D. Study in UBC as TUBITAK PhD Fellow

UBC

2015

Ph.D. Environmental Biotechnology

İTÜ

2018

MY MSCA-IF JOURNEY

An exciting research project granted in MSCA-IF-2018 call

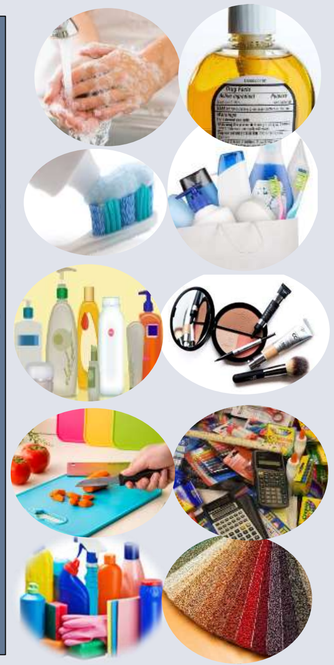
An Innovative and Energy-Efficient Radio Frequency Pretreatment on Emerging Micropollutants and Transformation Products in Anaerobic Sludge Digestion for Waste Reuse

Project acronym: RADIOFREPOLIS

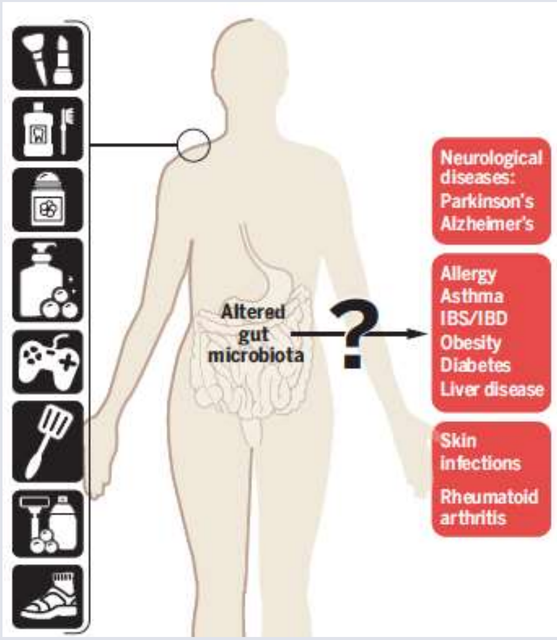
What is RADIOFREPOLIS?

We intend to move towards non-toxic environment

Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products (PPCPs)



BIOSOLIDS for land application



EMERGING MICROPOLLUTANTS persistent in the ecosystem through to the human body

Reason: Uncontrolled release of emerging micropollutants via sludge to the environment is creating a critical risk to human and ecosystem health.

RADIOFREPOLIS intends to investigate the occurrence and transformation of *target micropollutants (PPCPs)* by applying an innovative and energy-efficient *Radio Frequency Sludge Pretreatment* followed by *anaerobic digestion* for moving towards non-toxic environment.

Yee, A.L. and Gilbert, J.A. (2016). *Science*, 353, 6297.

Halden, R.U. (2014). *Environmental Science & Technology*, 48, 3603−3611.

My MSCA-IF Journey

Learn by experience

MSCA – IF - 2018

MSCA – IF - 2017

Pre-evaluation

Seed to success!

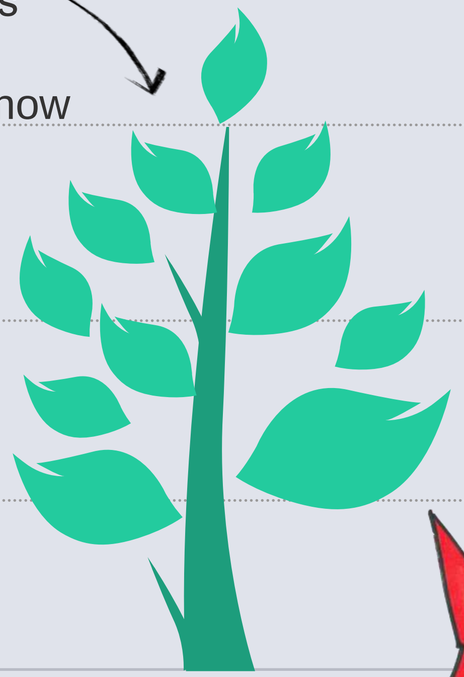
Your idea starts to form as project proposal. Use official resources to understand the structure and use official template to work on your draft!

Pre-application Preparation
Start at least 3 months earlier than the call deadline!

Learn by experience!

Evaluation Summary Report is your resource to see your proposal's weaknesses.
You have more time now and you know more about MSCA-IF proposals!

MSCA – IF – 2017
Score: 87/100
Seal of Excellence by EU
Threshold Award by TUBITAK



MSCA – IF – 2018
Score: 94.6/100
Global Fellowship Granted by EU
Success Award by TUBITAK

MSCA-IF PROPOSAL TIPS

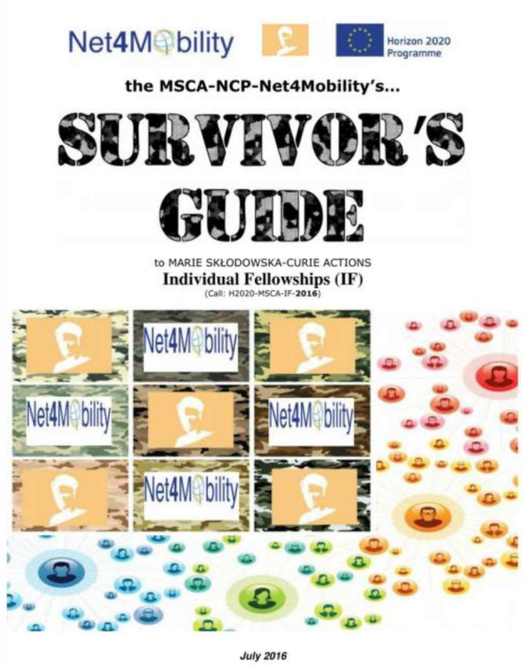
Useful Documents
General Tips & Tricks

The Secrets of My MSCA-IF Story

MSCA-IF Proposal Template

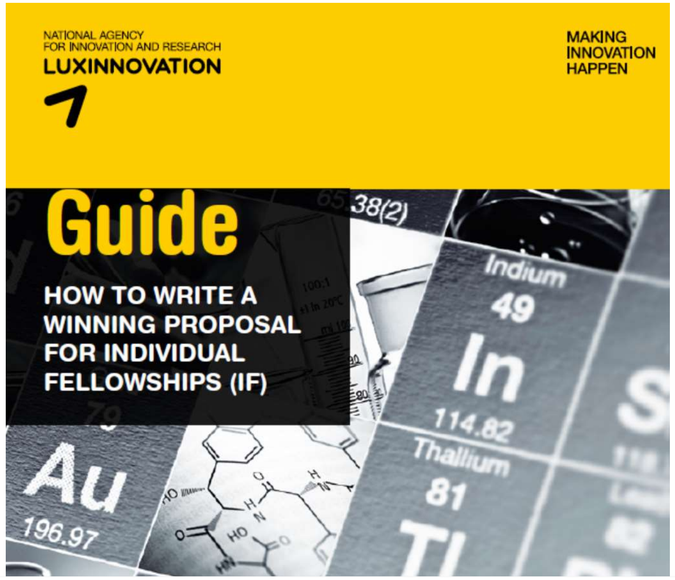
MSCA-IF Official Site

Net4Mobility+ Documents



https://www.net4mobility.eu/ncp-doc.html

LUXINNOVATION
How to Write a Winning Proposal



https://www.luxinnovation.lu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/How-to-write-a-winning-proposal-for-Individual-Fellowships.pdf

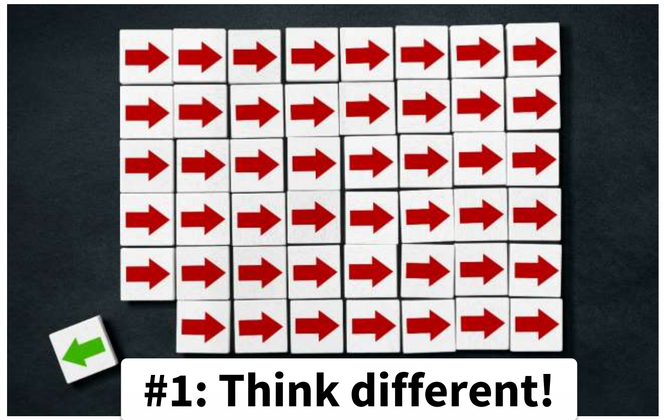
What worked for me?

General Tips & Tricks

The Secrets of My MSCA-IF Story

A Novel Research / Approach

9,830 proposals were submitted in MSCA-IF 2018 call. Your chance will increase if your proposal scientifically innovative and appropriate.



#1: Think different!

Scientific Research Team

You have to show the expertise and experience of the supervisor(s) on the research topic proposed.

You also need to demonstrate that you will be part of a team so that all parties gain maximum knowledge and skills from the fellowship.

#2: A good research team is an asset!

EU Strategies and Priorities

The proposals should demonstrate the relevance of the projects to problems, in the EU and beyond.

Ideally, projects should be “timely and relevant” not only to the scientific domain, but also to citizens at large.

#3: Be timely and relevant!

What worked for me?

General Tips & Tricks

The Secrets of My MSCA-IF Story

Firmly believe that you can!

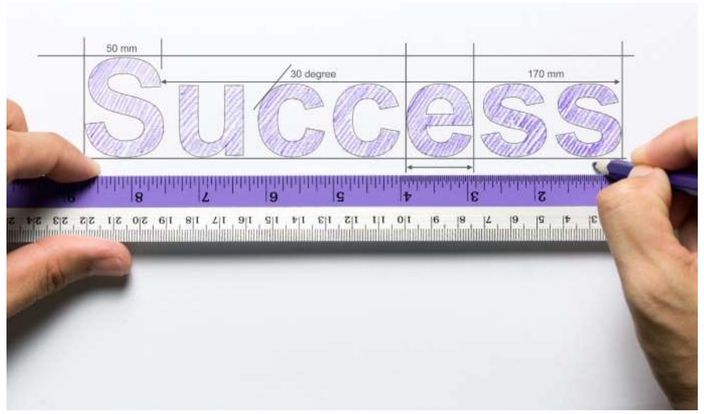
This is a journey and you need to be ready for ups and downs! You may fail at first attempt but instead you may use the experience and feedback for the second attempt.

#1: Yes, you can!

Access to pre-evaluation support

Nobody is perfect, so it is always better to have an expert eye to go over the proposal. A pre-evaluation support can help you to discover your proposal weaknesses! NCPs (TUBITAK in TR) pre-evaluation funding support helps you to get these supports.

#2: But, you need expert help!



Proposal perfection

Proposal should be very well connected in each section and also should be consistent as total. You have only 10 pages to tell your dream research project and it fills up very quickly. Use acronyms and in-proposal references where possible.

#3: Details that matter!

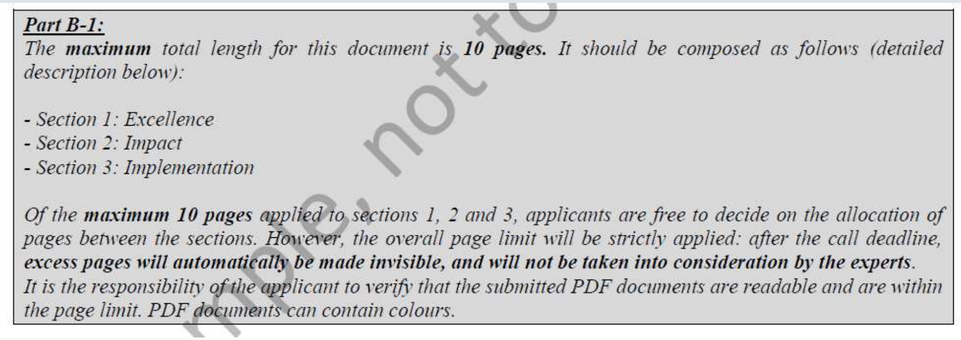
Proposal Structure

How to distribute sections?

Page Numbers Move Fast.

In **Part B-1** you have only **10 pages**, so you need to be smart to share each required details. You are advised to use proposal sub-heading structure as it will match the evaluation template.

In **Part B-2** there is no total page limitation, however keep attention to sub-heading page limitations.



Part B-1:
*The **maximum** total length for this document is **10 pages.** It should be composed as follows (detailed description below):*

- Section 1: Excellence
- Section 2: Impact
- Section 3: Implementation

*Of the **maximum 10 pages** applied to sections 1, 2 and 3, applicants are free to decide on the allocation of pages between the sections. However, the overall page limit will be strictly applied: after the call deadline, **excess pages will automatically be made invisible, and will not be taken into consideration by the experts**.*
It is the responsibility of the applicant to verify that the submitted PDF documents are readable and are within the page limit. PDF documents can contain colours.

Section 1: Excellence

I've used **6 full pages** to explain Excellence part including tables and figures. This is the part, you convince about your research, hosts, trainings and potential to reach maturity

50% of marks

Section 3: Implementation

I've used almost **2 full pages** to explain implementation plan of proposed research, including WPs, Gantt Chart and implementation facilities.

20% of marks

30% of marks

Section 2: Impact

I've used almost **2 full pages** to explain Impact part including tables. This is the part, you convince about impacts of proposed research, including dissemination, exploitation and communication activities.

Excellence
Part B-1 Section 1

1.1 Quality and credibility of the research/innovation project; level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary and gender aspects

- ***Introduction:*** A brief text to introduce the research proposal/project with the facts of proposal followed by answers to key questions.

- ***State-of-the-art (SoA):*** Sharing the current level of knowledge on the research area and explain the connection between SoA and research objectives.

Questions to reply:

Why your project is important now?

How do current legislatives address the issue?

What do you offer to solve the issue?

Excellence
Part B-1 Section 1

1.1 Quality and credibility of the research/innovation project; level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary and gender aspects

- ***Objectives and overview of the action:*** Explain the research objectives which will be carried out during the project. Each research objective is connected to specific research work package (WP).
- ***Research methodology:*** Explain how the research should be carried out, however not go in WP deep details as you will do that in Section 3.
- ***Originality and innovative aspects of the research****:* Explain why your project worth funding.
- ***Interdisciplinary and gender dimension:*** Demonstrate how you will take consideration interdisciplinary aspects and gender dimension in the project.

Excellence
Part B-1 Section 1

1.2 Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

- Explain how to **gain new knowledge** and how to **transfer knowledge to the host**.
- Create tables to summarize the **ToK activities**.

- It is key to mention the **Personalized Career Development Plan** (PCDP) and show planned training activities are part of PCDP.

I underlined the future collaboration with *Dr. Mustafa Berke Yelten* to create a complementary multidisciplinary project **using the knowledge I will gain in outgoing phase**.

ToK to the ER:
- Skills to develop
- Knowledge gap for required skill
- Initial action / Training with Estimated start timing (Month)

ToK from the ER:
- Knowledge item
- Acquired in
- Audience
- Actions planned
- Benefits to host

Excellence
Part B-1 Section 1

1.3 Quality of the supervision and of the integration in the team/institution

- ***Qualifications and experience of the supervisors:*** A brief text to introduce the outgoing and return host supervisors including their publications (h-index) & supervisory track record**,** awards, projects, collaboration history and their experience on the research area.

- ***Qualifications and experience of the advisory board:*** To improve output and success rate of the action, I've formed a scientific advisory board for my project.

Scientific Advisory Board

Dr. Aysen Erdincler
BOUN – Supervisor
Turkey

Dr. Cigdem Eskicioglu
UBC – Supervisor
Canada

Dr. Emine Cokgor
ITU
Turkey

Dr. Hélène Carrère
INRA
France

Dr. Mustafa Yelten
ITU
Turkey

Dr. Thomas Johnson
UBC
Canada

1.3 Quality of the supervision and of the integration in the team/institution

- ***Hosting arrangement at the host(s):*** Mention how you will be easily integrated into research environment for each specific host. Briefly describe how the outgoing host will support practical arrangements and how the return host will support the re-integration.
- ***Collaboration opportunities offered by the hosts:*** Explain how the project has potential to create new collaboration links for you. Remember that the focus of MSCA-IF is the development/maturity of the researcher.

Host Institutions

Outgoing Host (24 Months)

Return Host (12 Months)

Excellence
Part B-1 Section 1

1.4 Potential of the researcher to reach or re-enforce professional maturity/independence during the fellowship

I've told my scientific story as researcher in this section.

- This is the part, you need to assure the evaluator **that you are real and can do this proposal**.
- Demonstrating your previous **leadership, awards and key skills** by referencing Section 4 (CV) is also required.

Questions to reply:

What is your scientific story to date and what/which skills led you to this point?

Why you are the best person to do this fellowship to achieve your research results and career goals?

Impact
Part B-1 Section 2

2.1 Enhancing the future career prospects of the researcher after the fellowship

- Explain how **new skills, collaboration links and experience** will **improve your academic/scientific career** after the fellowship.
- It is always better to be specific instead of using generic sentences.

"She will develop experience and knowledge on novel RF technology which can be used by different researchers on projects which can create additional career opportunities for the ER. The EU companies (e.g. companies registered to The Confederation of European Waste-to-Energy Plants) can carry this technology to next stage and she may have opportunity to coordinate new research and patent applications in collaboration with industrial organizations."

"*Having opportunity to continue to use these facilities will improve the ER's working conditions and increase her potential to implement further independent and mature research projects about the fate and behavior of EMPs in WWTPs with respect to different ecosystems and human health (Section 1.4).*"

Key to mention:

Proposed Research's Contribution to the development and career advancement of the researcher

New skills will be acquired by research and added value of the fellowship

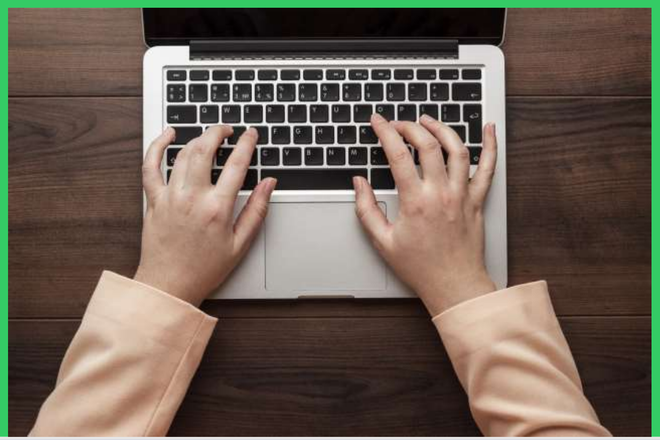
Impact
Part B-1 Section 2

2.2 Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results

- ***Impact of action results**:* An introduction about the important and tangible outputs of the research project.
- ***Vision for dissemination and exploitation of action results**:* Dissemination & exploitation activities and management structure/approach. A table to detailing the planned activities.
- ***Exploitation of results and intellectual property**:* What is the expected benefits of exploiting and how you will exploit your results? It is key to describe potential commercialization and how IPR will be managed.

Dissemination methodology and activities:

- Activity
- Target Audience
- Where/When
- Metrics



Impact
Part B-1 Section 2

2.3 Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences

- Explain the communication activities plan.
- It would be better to **state the primary target and main message for communication activities**.
- You need to be specific instead of using generic sentences as it can be seen as superficial by the evaluators.

“Planned visits and public community actions in Table X, will help to connect science to youth in a gender inclusive way and motivate them to follow science related careers. All communication activities will be managed as part of WP X (Section 3.1)”

Communication methodology and activities:

- Target Audience
- Key Message
- Channel/Activity
- Timeframe
- Metrics

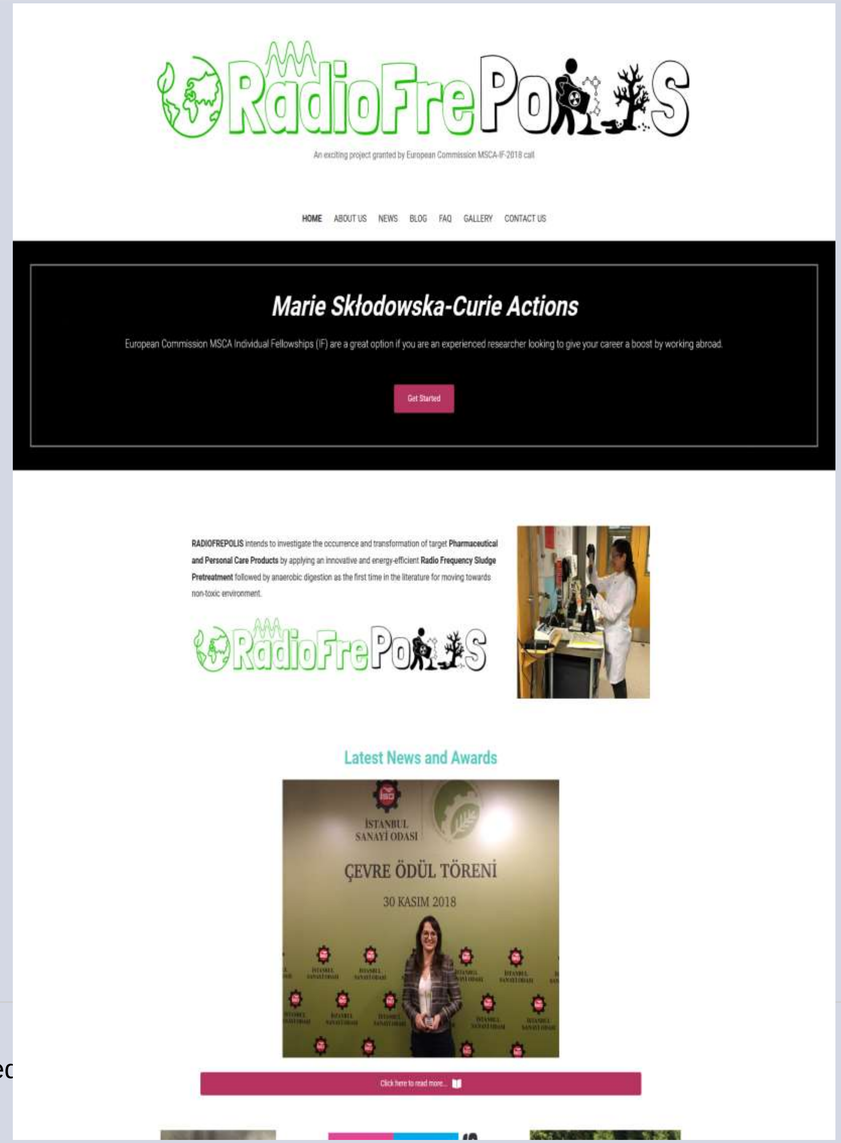
Impact
Part B-1 Section 2

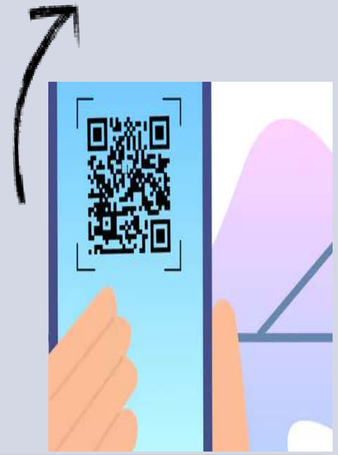
www.radiofrepolis.com

2.3 Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences

It is good to have a striking acronym for your research, branding matters to impress!

It is important to note that, evaluators cannot use any external information, document or website while evaluating your proposal.





Implementation
Part B-1 Section 3

3.1 Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources

- Explain the **WP structure** and the **calculations for person/day and budget**.
- This is where you need to specify all details about **Work Packages** and also provide a **Gantt Chart** to visualize your overall project.

WP 1: An Analytical Method Development for Monitoring of Target Micropollutants in Sludge **Starting date:** 2nd month/**Duration:** 10 months

T1.1: Imp… EPA-821-R-08… matrix.

T1.2: Dev…) with combined…

De1.1: UH… trix is completed - Month 11 (***Objective 1 is accomplished***).

Your task and deliverables with estimated time

Table 11. Gantt chart of RADIOFREPOLIS (WP: Work package, De: Deliverable, M: Milestone).

Month / WP	The University of British Columbia (UBC)																							Boğaziçi University (BU) - Global Fellowship											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
WP1										De1.1	M1.1																									
WP2									M2.1										De2.1	M2.2	M2.3															
WP3																								De3.1									De3.2	M3.1		M3.2
WP4	M4.1[a]																															De4.1				M4.2
WP5	De5.1[b]	M5.1[c]																																		M5.2
WP6		M6.1																						De6.1												De6.2

Key to mention:

Limit the total number of WPs to 6-7.

Have a separate WP for Management, Dissemination, Communication activities.

Gantt Chart should show total project time, you can remove unnecessary part.

Implementation
Part B-1 Section 3

3.2 Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including risk management

- Explain how to **manage the research project** including all stakeholders, such as TTO and Scientific Advisory Board.

“In addition to email and face-to-face communication (weekly meetings), video meetings will keep both parties involved in the research. It will be a key factor for decreasing transition time to implement the transferred technology and knowledge into EU after completing outgoing phase.”

- It is key to show how you will follow/**monitor overall progress**, especially how you will **manage the risks**.
- Share the **risk management** plans and also identify some risks that may affect the progress of deliverables.

Risk, mitigation and contingency plan:

- Risk
- Mitigation
- Contingency plan
- Risk probability and impact

Implementation
Part B-1 Section 3

3.3 Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)

- Explain how the host(s) offers **required infrastructure** and collaborative environment **for** the career advancement, trainings, professional maturity and **effective implementation**.
- Mention about the **key infrastructure necessary for the research** and training activities.

Key to mention:

Do not list all equipment/ laboratories in your host(s)

List the key infrastructure/ equipment required for your research by proofing your host is capable for your research

Part B-2 Sections

Section 4: CV of the experienced researcher:

- Can be maximum 5 pages and should include all necessary information mentioned in proposal template.
- If you don’t have PhD degree, you also need to fill a specific table shows your academic qualifications counting towards the Total Full time postgraduate research experience.

Section 5: Capacity of the Participating Organisation(s):

- It is one page for each host and you need to fill-out the format mentioned in proposal template.

Key to mention:

You will not be evaluated from B-2 however it will be used as reference by evaluators.

Be sure that any information provided in Part B-1 is consistent with Part B-2

Part B-2 Sections

Section 6: Ethical Issues:

- All applicants are required to complete an Ethics Issues Table (EIT) in the Part A of the proposal
- Applicants who flag ethical issues in the EIT also have to complete a more in depth Ethics Self-Assessment in Part B.

Section 7: Letter of commitment (GF only):

- A letter of commitment of the partner organisation (hosting the outgoing phase in a Third Country) must be included in Part B-2 to ensure their real and active participation.

Key to mention:

You will not be evaluated from B-2 however it will be used as reference by evaluators.

Be sure that any information provided in Part B-1 is consistent with Part B-2

EVALUATION FEEDBACK

ESR Feedbacks
Strengths and Weaknesses

Criterion 1 - Excellence
Score: **4.60** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 50.00%)

Strengths:

- The use of radiofrequency to improve anaerobic digestibility and methane potential of sewage waste is scientifically sound and innovative.

- The objectives of the research are clearly presented.

- The research methodology is appropriate and well described.

- The transfer of knowledge acquired by the researcher in the third country institution to the return host institution is clearly defined and is beneficial for the host institution as well as for the European research framework.

- Measures for training activities are clearly defined.

- The third country host supervisor has great qualifications and experience in the research sector of the proposal.

- Hosting arrangements are well organised both at the third country and return host institutions.

- The researcher has a good experience in the field of the proposal, as shown by the activities and track record described in the CV.

- The proposal clearly shows that the researcher's past experience and what gained during the outgoing phase would contribute to reinforce the researcher's professional maturity.

Weaknesses:

- Interdisciplinary aspects are not convincingly demonstrated.

- The experience of the host supervisor regarding mentoring of postdoctoral fellows is not sufficiently detailed.

ESR Feedbacks
Strengths and Weaknesses

Criterion 2 - Impact
Score: **4.90** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 30.00%)

Strengths:

- The experience and skills acquired during the fellowship would help to improve the future career prospects of the researcher.

- The proposed research complies with crucial objectives on circular economy defined at European level.

- Measures for dissemination of the results are detailed and appropriate .

- The proposed actions for communication of project activities are effective and targeted to reach different audiences. Some of the activities are foreseen both at the outgoing and at the return institutions.

- Measures for the exploitation of the results and management of the related IPR are well presented.

ESR Feedbacks

Strengths and Weaknesses

Criterion 3 - Implementation

Score: **4.80** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 20.00%)

Strengths:

- The work plan is very well described, including activities both within the outgoing and return phases.

- The Gantt chart is included and it covers all the planned activities, including a complete description of deliverables, milestones and secondments.

- The management structure is well described and appropriate for the implementation of the action. Administrative risks management is fully detailed and credible.

- The contribution of the third country organisation is clear, convincing and would have a positive effect on the success of the action.

- The support of a scientific-technical advisory board would considerably improve the relevance of the action.

- Infrastructure and facilities offered both in the outgoing and in the return host organisations are suitable for the good implementation of the action.

Weaknesses:

- The risk related to the determination and quantification of emerging pollutants during the anaerobic digestion process is understimated.

Thanks and Good Luck 👍

**“Life is not easy for any of us.
But what of that?**

We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves.

**We must believe that
we are gifted for something,**

and that this thing, at whatever cost,

must be attained...!”

Marie Skłodowska-Curie

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