

Insights from an Expert Evaluator- for MSCA – Doctoral Networks: Crafting a Winning MSCA Doctoral Network Proposal

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Marie Skłodowska-Curie
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MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS
2026 CALLS CONFERENCE
MSCA 30TH ANNIVERSARY IN TÜRKİYE**

16 APRIL 2026 İSTANBUL

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Standard Doctoral Networks (DN) :

Focus: Interdisciplinary, international, and inter-sectoral training.
Key Feature: Meaningful secondments across sectors.

Industrial Doctorates (DN- ID)

- *Focus:* Deep integration with the business/non-academic world.
- *Key Feature:* Doctoral Candidates must spend at least 50% of their time in the non-academic sector. Joint supervision is mandatory.

Joint Doctorates (DN- JD) :

- *Focus:* Highly integrated institutional cooperation.
- *Key Feature:* Leads to joint, double, or multiple doctoral degrees. Requires a joint governance structure.

Evaluator's Tip: A mismatch between the chosen modality and the actual work plan is a critical weakness. Don't force a Standard DN into an Industrial format just to sound innovative.



Individual Evaluation Report

Consensus Report

Ranked List

➤ **The Human Element:**

Evaluators are experts, but they are also reading multiple extensive proposals under strict deadlines.

➤ **The Golden Rule:**

We look for evidence, not just assertions. The proposal must defend itself; we cannot make assumptions on behalf of the applicant.

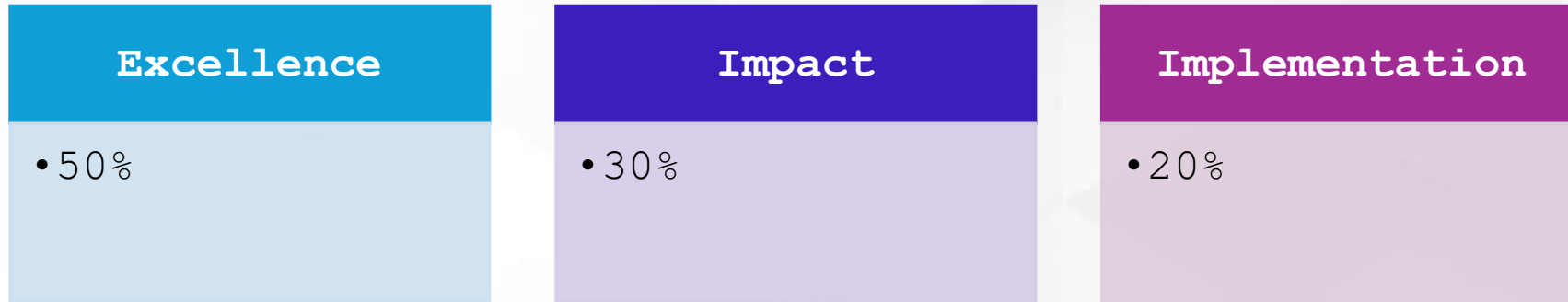
Key takeaway:

Make the evaluator's job easier.

Clarity, logical flow, and strict adherence to the proposal template are your first steps to success.

Deconstructing the Criteria

The Weighting:



The Reality Check:

- Excellence gets you to the **threshold**; Impact and Implementation **secure the funding**.

The Winning Formula:

- A cohesive narrative, not isolated chapters.
- *Scientific Excellence* → *Drives Targeted Training* → *Creates Measurable Impact* → *Supported by Flawless Implementation*

➤ **The Science (Originality & Methodology):**

- Research objectives must be groundbreaking yet methodologically feasible.

➤ **The Rigor (Precision Matters):**

- Evaluators look for absolute consistency in scientific terminology.
- *Example:* Distinguishing correctly between "aggregation" vs. "agglomeration".
- Careless terminology is a red flag for overall scientific quality.

➤ **The Training (The Core Mission):**

- DN is fundamentally a **training program**, not just a research grant.
- The "Triple-i" dimension (International, Interdisciplinary, Inter-sectoral) must be deeply integrated into joint governance and supervision.

➤ **The Core Trajectory:**



➤ **Career Perspectives:**

- ! Define *specific* skills acquired, not generic promises.
- ! How will this network definitively elevate their employability?

➤ **The "Big Three" (Often Confused):**

- ! **Communication:** Engaging the general public.
- ! **Dissemination:** Sharing results with scientific peers.
- ! **Exploitation:** Commercial use or shaping policy.

➤ **The Evaluator's Benchmark:**

- ! We demand measurable, realistic impacts—generic statements will cost you points.

✓ The Network Synergy:

✓ Justify Every Partner (The "Why" Factor):

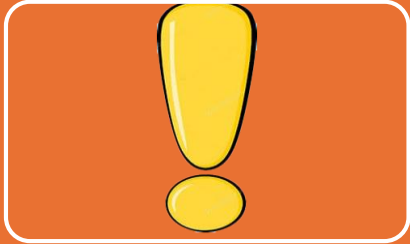
- Avoid listing; explain the *absolute necessity* of each specific institution and SME.

✓ Beware of "Passengers":

- Partners included solely to tick a geographical or inter-sectoral box will severely damage credibility. Every partner needs a robust role in the Work Packages.

✓ Letters of Commitment:

- Generic, copy-pasted templates are a major weakness.
- Letters (especially for Joint Doctorates) must be highly detailed and specific to the proposal.



The Disconnect

- Work Packages that do not logically align with the stated scientific objectives.



The "Tourist" Secondment

- Secondments must be meaningful, perfectly timed, and directly relevant to the specific project.
- *Red Flag*: Treating mobility as just a mandatory trip.



Ignoring the Non-Academic Sector

- MSCA champions diverse career paths.
- A beautifully designed, entirely purely academic network will struggle to score well.

✓ **The Visual Contrast: Readability is a Strategic Advantage:**

- Structure your narrative: use bolding, clear sub-headings, and bullet points to guide the evaluator's eye.

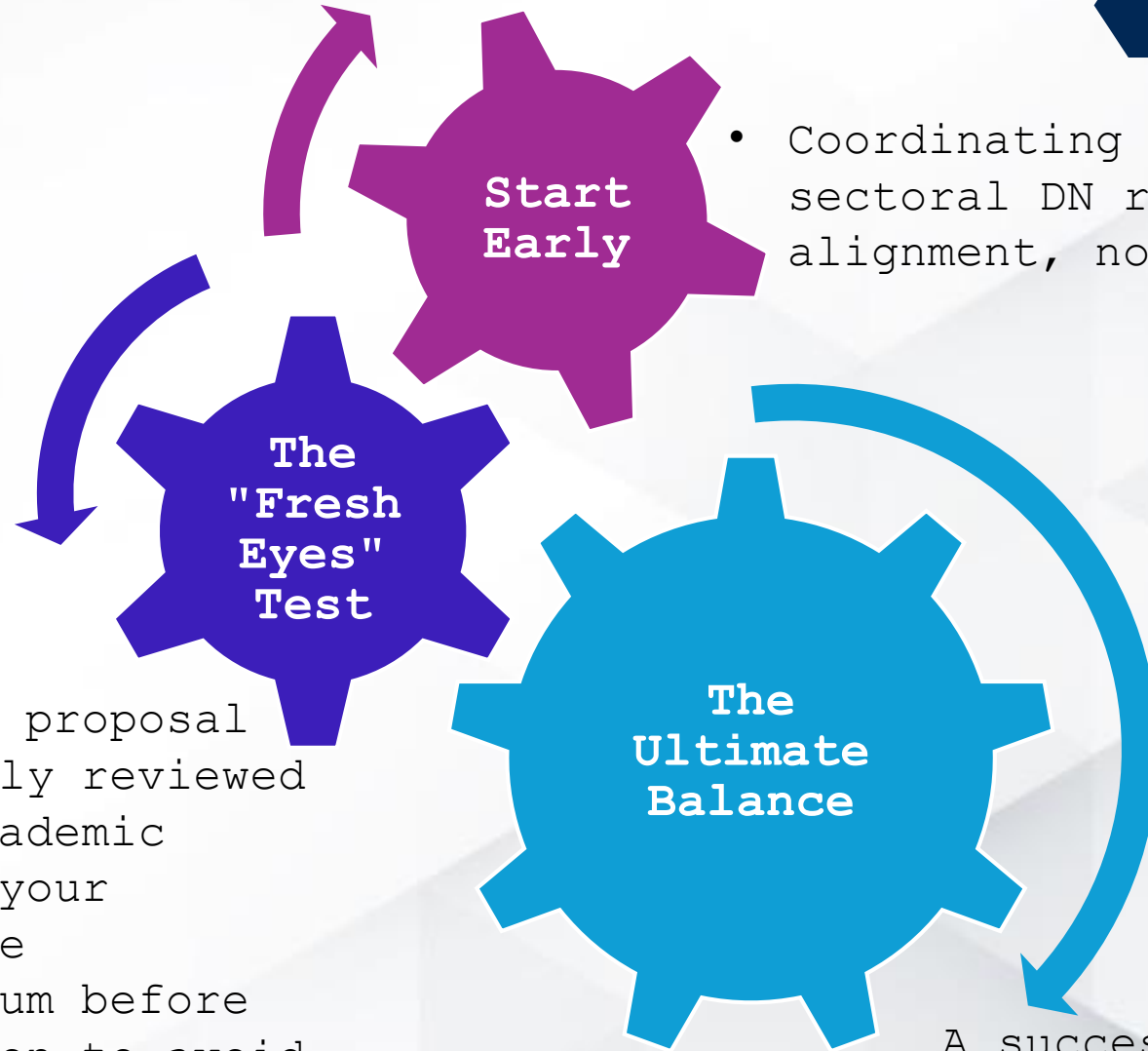
✓ **The "Three-Read" Penalty:**

- If an evaluator has to read a methodology paragraph three times to understand it, the proposal will lose points.

✓ **Your True Audience:**

- Write so that an expert in a *neighboring* field can fully grasp the brilliance of your idea.

Conclusion & Final Advice



- Have the proposal rigorously reviewed by an academic outside your immediate consortium before submission to avoid the "echo chamber."

- Coordinating a multi-national, inter-sectoral DN requires months of partner alignment, not weeks.

A successful DN = Groundbreaking Research wrapped in an Unparalleled Training Program for the next generation

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Q&A

Thank You!

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Questions? *Evaluation mechanisms,
proposal structure, consortium building,
etc.*

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