# "Expert" Point of View: How to write a successful proposal?

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Boğaziçi University

# Background

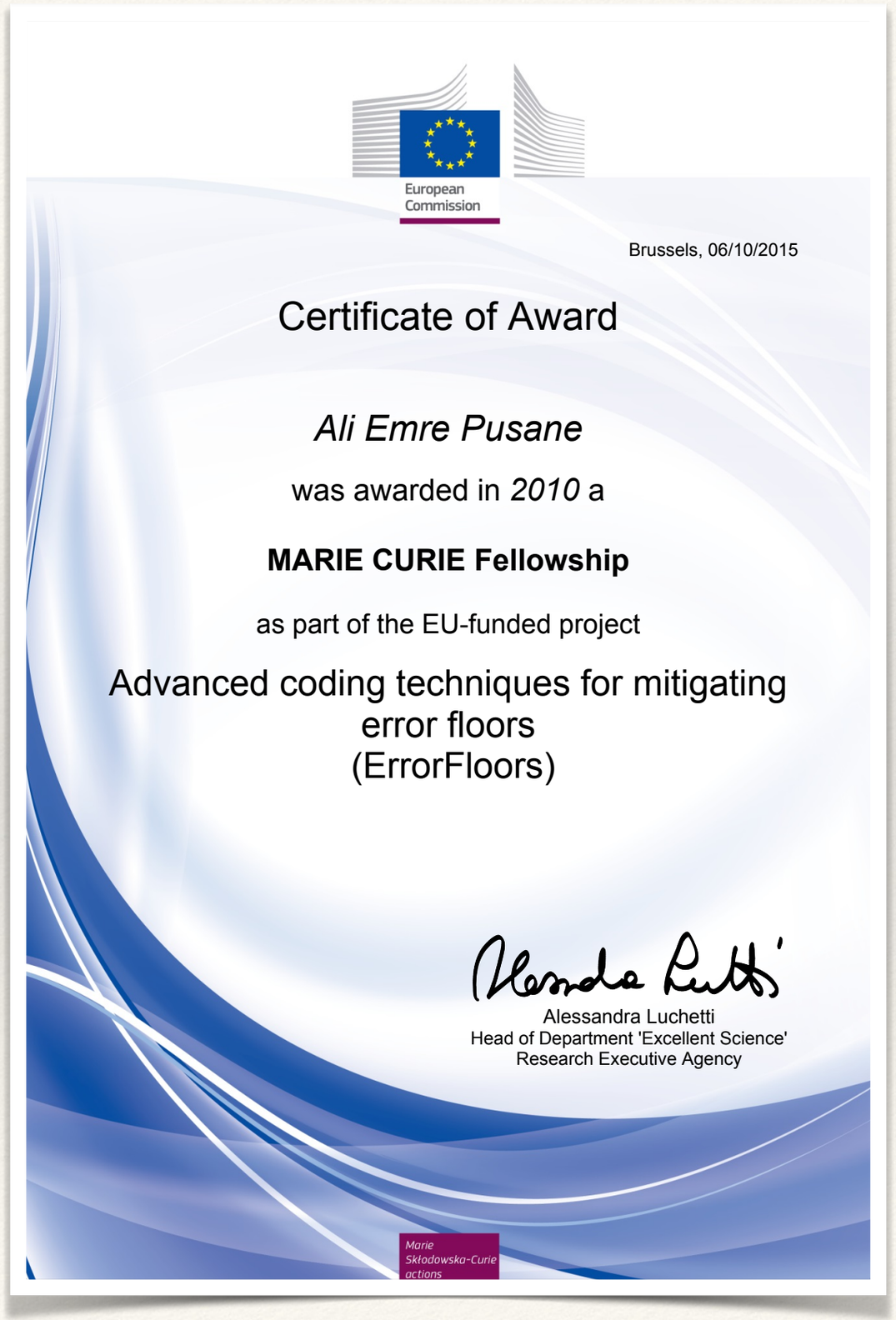
**Professor of Electrical and Electronics Engineering**
**Boğaziçi University**

**Education:**

- B.Sc.  in Electronics and Communications Engr. (ITU)
- M.Sc. in Electronics and Communications Engr. (ITU)
- M.Sc. in Electrical Engineering (Univ. of Notre Dame)
- M.Sc. in Applied Mathematics (Univ. of Notre Dame)
- Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering (Univ. of Notre Dame)

**MSCA experience:**

- Fellow (2010-present)
- Expert (2013-present) in the ENG and MAT panels (CIGs, IFs, and PFs)


European Commission

Brussels, 06/10/2015

Certificate of Award

*Ali Emre Pusane*

was awarded in *2010* a

**MARIE CURIE Fellowship**

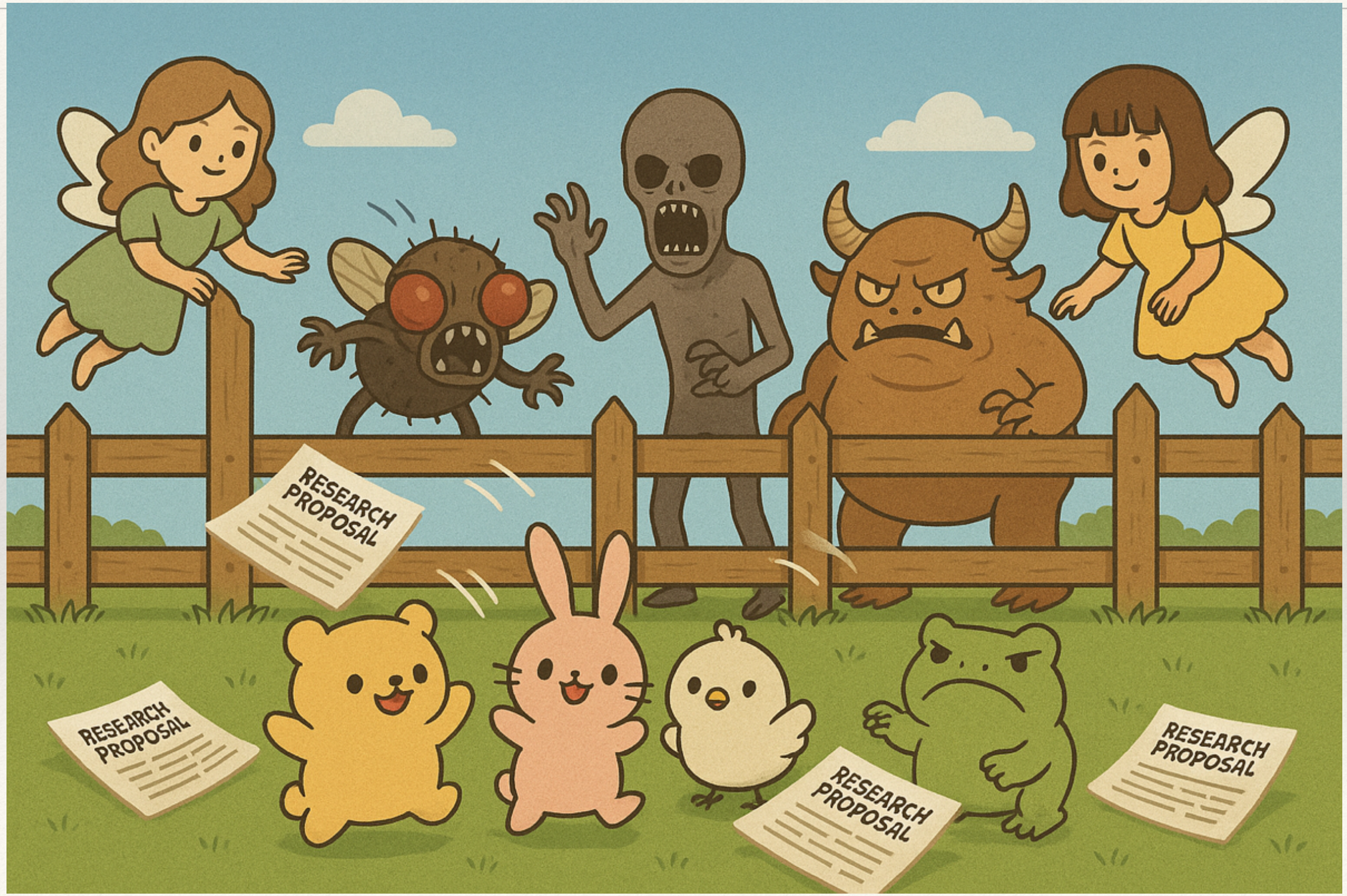
as part of the EU-funded project

Advanced coding techniques for mitigating error floors
(ErrorFloors)

Alessandra Luchetti
Head of Department 'Excellent Science'
Research Executive Agency

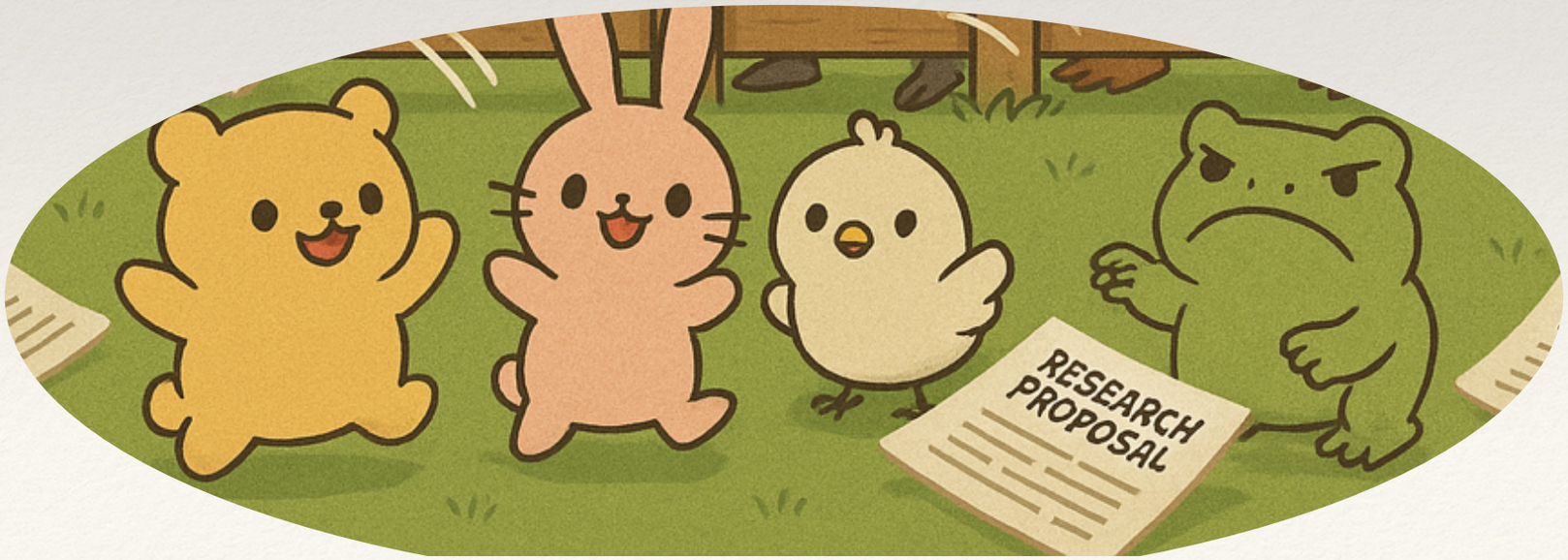
Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions

# Main actors & their resources

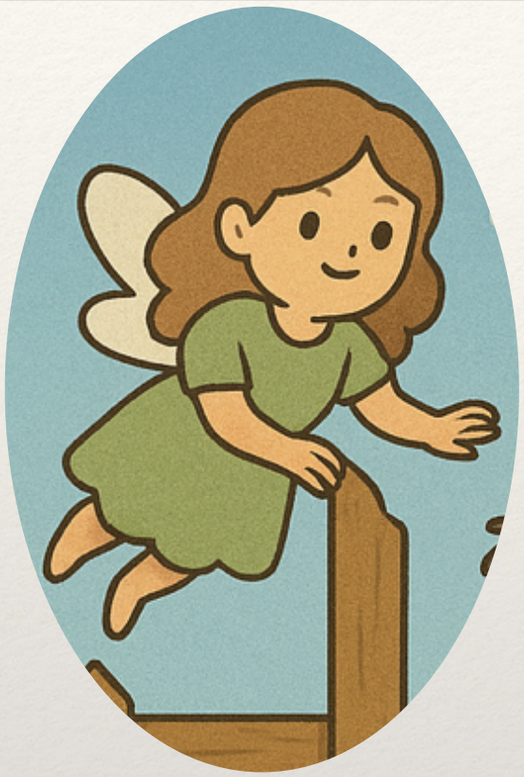


# Main actors & their resources

**Researchers** equipped with
- a brilliant idea!
- a desire to establish a strong research program in Europe



# Main actors & their resources



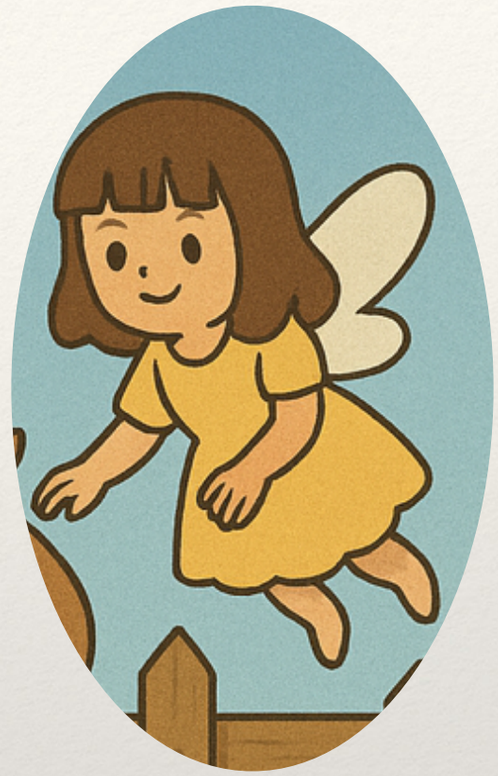
**NCP is always with you through**

- Call conferences
- Manuals detailing proposal submission
- Proposal templates
- Sample proposals
- Frequently asked questions
- Pre-evaluation support

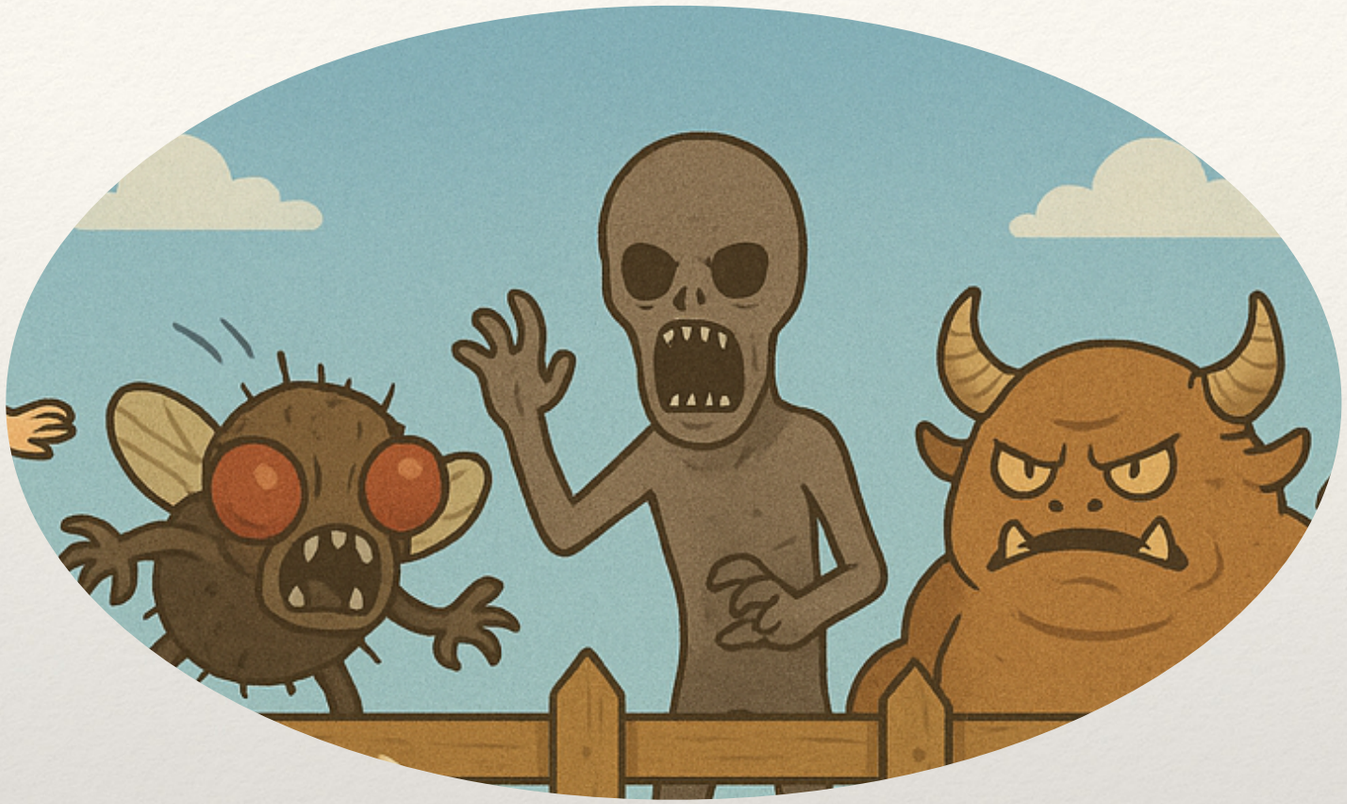
# Main actors & their resources

**REA coordinates the whole process and guarantees a fair evaluation of your work!**

- Call coordination
- Guides for both applicants and expert evaluators
- Transparent processes for each step of evaluation



# Main actors & their resources

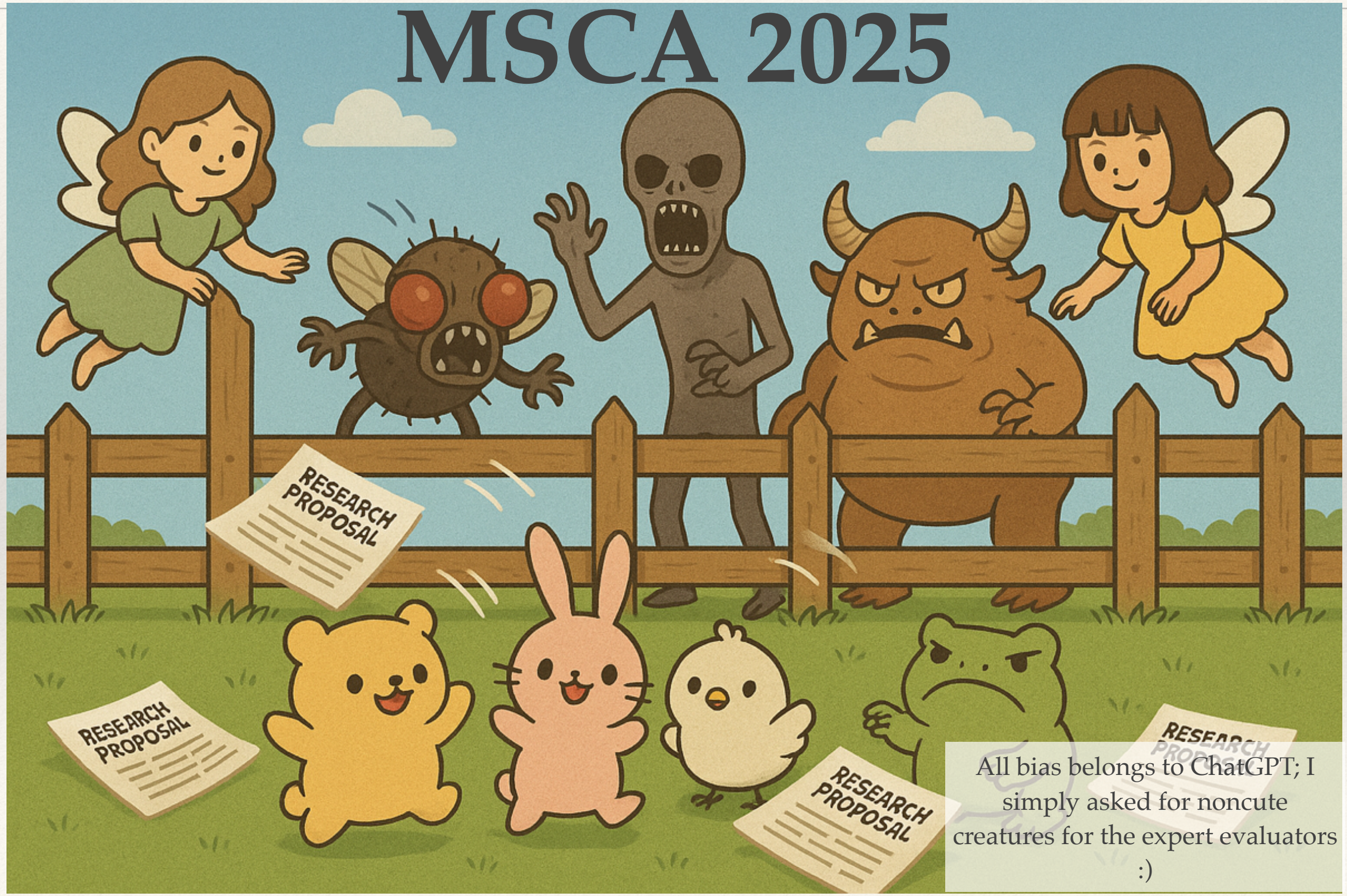


**Expert evaluators are out to get you :)**

They are equipped with

- Expertise in the proposal area
- Have access to high-quality learning materials about the call details
- Have easy access to very experienced Vice-Chairs
- Manual for evaluators
- Assessment grid

# Main actors & their resources



# Preparing a successful proposal

- No single trick to achieve this;

  Every **researcher/proposal/host** combination is unique

- Goals have significantly changed over the years!

# Preparing a successful proposal

- Consider the proposal scoring method

1. **Excellence** - weighted 50%
2. **Impact** - weighted 30%
3. **Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation** - weighted 20%

- Useful information -- if it were 10 years ago!

# Preparing a successful proposal

- Pusane vs. Pusane in 2010 (Özlem's 83.40 vs. Ali's 82.60)
  - *S&T Quality:* The research methodology consists of a combination of existing methods; **originality should be further clarified**.
  - *S&T Quality:* The design part of the **methodology is not clearly described**. The channel specification and the corresponding engineering requirements are important factors in this respect.
  - *Researcher:* The researcher has not yet established an independent research course.
  - *Researcher:* The applicant's leadership qualities have yet to be clearly established.
  - *Implementation:* There is **inadequate information supplied on the host's infrastructure and resources**.
  - *Implementation:* Phase 1 is too long given the researcher's experience on the subject.
  - *Impact:* The potential of **transfer of knowledge to the host is not adequately described**.
  - *Impact:* **Contribution to European excellence is not fully convincing**.
- **I was able to get away with these *major* weaknesses!**

# Preparing a successful proposal

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of eligible proposals | 1428 proposals | 162 proposals | 1560 proposals | 966 proposals | 1966 proposals | 196 proposals | 1032 proposals | 1912 proposals | 60 proposals | 15 proposals | 109 proposals | 107 proposals | 143 proposals | 10 proposals | 110 proposals | 436 proposals |
| Cut off score for funding* | 93.6 | 92.0 | 94.8 | 95.2 | 94.2 | 91.4 | 92.0 | 94.2 | 95.0 | 92.0 | 96.4 | 95.2 | 96.0 | 92.8 | 95.0 | 96.0 |
| Score equal to or above | EF-CHE | EF-ECO | EF-ENG | EF-ENV | EF-LIF | EF-MAT | EF-PHY | EF-SOC | GF-CHE | GF-ECO | GF-ENG | GF-ENV | GF-LIF | GF-MAT | GF-PHY | GF-SOC |

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/HORIZON-MSCA-2024-PF-01-01

- 9303 EF + 1057 GF = 10360 proposals in 2024 vs. 8039 in 2023
- Criteria score distribution is not important. You simply cannot afford to have more than a *minor* weakness.

# Things to pay attention to

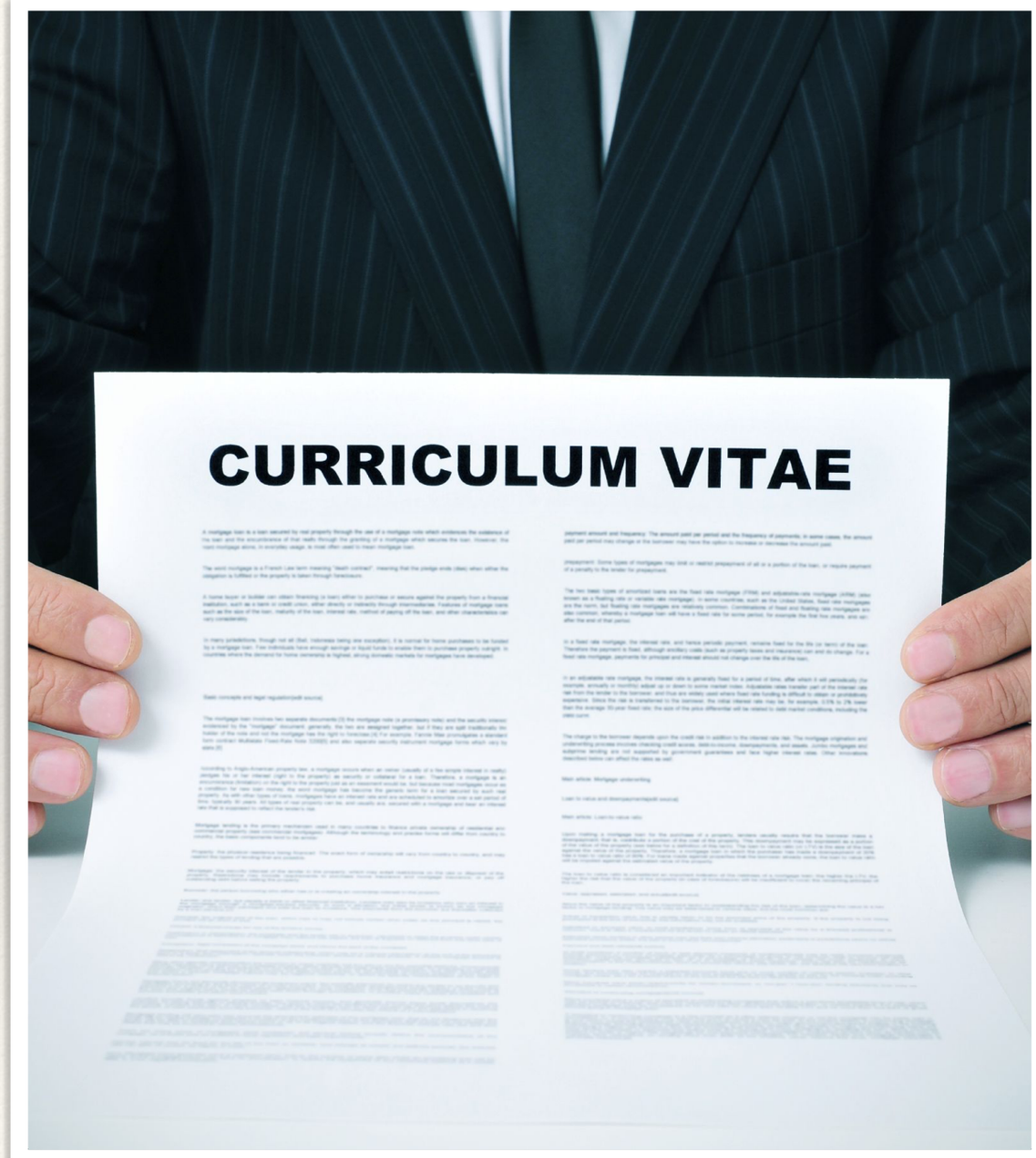
The use of the **Assessment Grid** is highly recommended to ensure that all sub-criteria are covered in the evaluation of a proposal.

Manual for Evaluators

- *"The evaluators have to assess each sub-criterion."*
- The researchers then need to make sure they address these sub-criteria.
- A common issue in proposals from Turkiye until recently.
- One quick trick is to use subsection headers for each sub-criterion!

# Beginning of the evaluation journey

- The curriculum vitae is the first stop in an expert's journey towards your perfect research
  - Address key accomplishments
  - Do not waste ~~space~~ time
  - Be prepared for a diverse expert pool



# Tips for a successful proposal

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. ***Excellence*** | Although the core of the proposal, do not use all your space on this!<br>(5.0 in Excellence + lower in other criteria = low overall score) |
| 2. ***Impact*** | Impact on career perspectives should be clear.<br>Dissemination/exploitation/communication should be very clear.<br>Do your best with scientific, societal, economic impact. |
| 3. ***Implementation*** | There is no reason not to score a 5.0 for this criterion. |

# Tips for a successful proposal

*1. **Excellence***

*1.1 Quality and Pertinence of the Project's Research and Innovation Objectives*

- A perfect balance for project objectives that are doable (credibility sub-criterion) and imaginative (innovative aspects, creativity).
- Can move a little further to the innovative (risky?) side if you can demonstrate a strong academic background (builds confidence in the expert)
- SoTA is critical; need to convince the "expert" expert evaluator that you are confident in your knowledge on this domain.

# Tips for a successful proposal

*1. **Excellence***

*1.2 Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary aspects, gender dimension, open science practices)*

- Methodology should be clearly shown; no place for vagueness or a 'kervan yolda düzülür' approach :)
- Is the proposal interdisciplinary? No problem if it is not, but if it is, it should be clearly discussed how these disciplines will be brought together.
- Is the gender dimension relevant? No problem if it is not, but you should then demonstrate this.
- Are open science practices in place? Go beyond open-access publications.
- Are the AI systems under consideration technically robust? My CNN code that classifies cat and dog pictures is not expected to get out of control and start harming people, but need to discuss why that is so :)

# Tips for a successful proposal

*1. **Excellence***

*1.3 Quality of the supervision, training, and the two-way transfer of knowledge*

- When the proposal template calls for a two-way knowledge transfer, it means it!
  - We traditionally think of MSCA PF as a great benefit to the researcher; it has to be one for the host as well!
  - Both parties must bring something to the table (in case of GF, knowledge from the third country is the most precious one and it has to be transferred to Europe!)

# Tips for a successful proposal

*1. **Excellence***

*1.4 Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competence, and skills*

- Only few get these prestigious fellowships, have to prove (in combination with the CV) that you belong to the select few!
- You might have an amazing background -- on another field :(

# Tips for a successful proposal

*2. **Impact***

*2.1 Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to their skills development*

- Think of more long-term for this sub-criterion. How will this fellowship (if granted) affect your career **during and after** the fellowship duration?

# Tips for a successful proposal

*2. **Impact***

*2.2 Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts (dissemination, exploitation, communication activities)*

- The financial source is the people; they need to know what you are doing with their money!
- Dissemination, exploitation, communication to the public, IPR, etc.

# Tips for a successful proposal

*2. **Impact***

*2.3 The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, societal and economic impacts*

- No need to exaggerate. Give a fair evaluation of the expected scientific, societal and economic impact.

# Tips for a successful proposal

*3. **Implementation***

*3.1 Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages*

*3.2 Quality and capacity of the host institutions and participating organisations, including hosting arrangements*

- A little bit more mechanical portion of the proposal - keep things on the simple/safe side.
- Risk management is often overlooked, but is a critical part of this criterion.

# Final tips

- **Sample 1 - 94.40**
  - *Impact:* The societal and economic impacts of the proposed research are not sufficiently developed.
  - *Impact:* The magnitude, importance and credibility of the expected impacts are not sufficiently substantiated and they are generic.
  - *Implementation:* The number of deliverables and milestones is not convincing, considering the project's duration. This is considered as a minor shortcoming.
  - *Implementation:* Research and administrative risks are not sufficiently identified in the proposal.
- **Sample 2 - 96.80**
  - *Excellence:* The measurability of some of the research objectives is insufficiently discussed in the proposal.
  - *Excellence:* Not enough details are presented on how open science practices will be implemented.
  - *Impact:* The societal impact of the proposal is overestimated.

Good luck!