



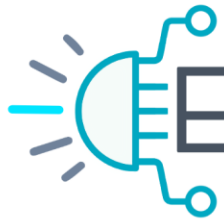
Anastasios Tsakas

Bolina Labs, Greece

Strengthening participation in European Research and Innovation programmes:

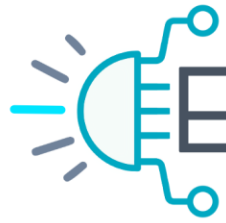
Practical lessons from proposal development and innovation support activities

First Annual Meeting, MC2 and CG2
14-15/07/2026, Krakow



- Our experience and perspective in EU funding
- Why participation in EU funding remains challenging
- What successful applicants do differently
- Lesson #1: Start from the call, not the idea
- Lesson #2: Consortium quality matters
- Lesson #3: Impact is not an afterthought
- Training and Knowledge Transfer
- Q&A Session





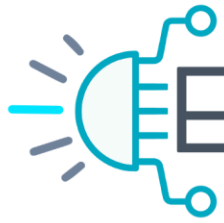
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Our experience and perspective in EU funding



Anastasios Tsakas
Innovation Consultant | Founder, Bolina Labs

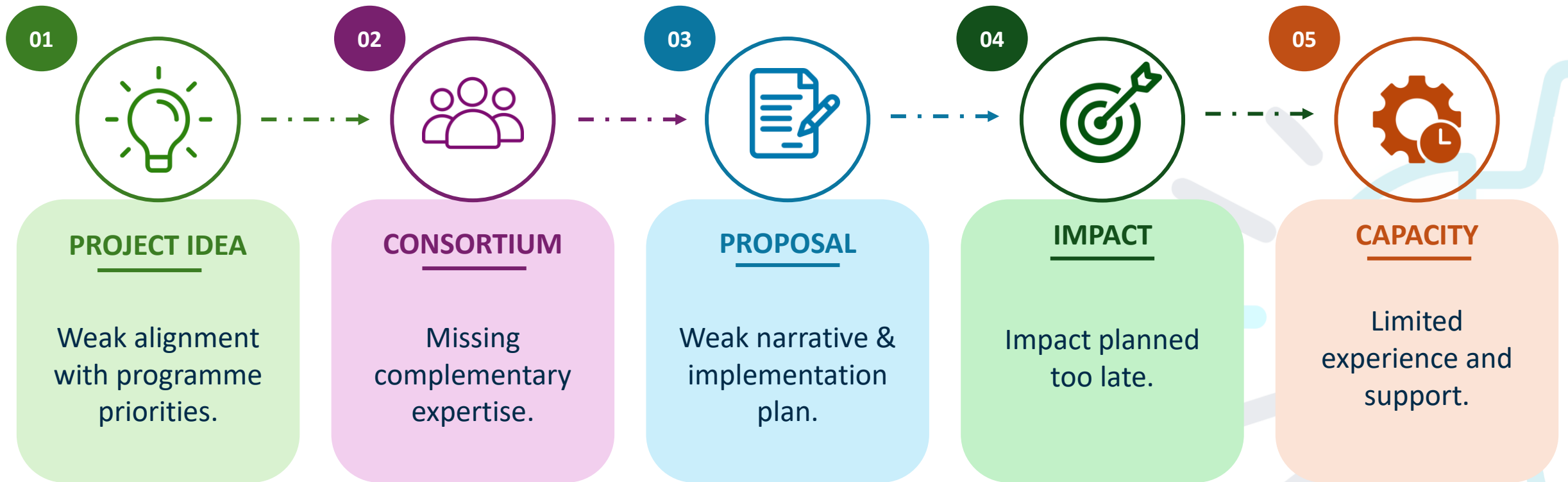
- Supporting **research organisations, deep-tech SMEs, and innovation clusters** in securing European research and innovation funding
- Experience across **Horizon Europe, Horizon 2020, EIC (Pathfinder, Transition & Accelerator), Erasmus+, and cascade funding** programmes
- Expertise in **proposal development, consortium building, project management, and stakeholder engagement**
- **PhD Candidate in Photonics** (Optical PUFs), University of Patras, Greece



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Why excellent ideas fail to become funded projects

Why many proposals fail



Proposal success depends on more than scientific excellence: it requires **strategic planning**, **collaboration** and **effective communication**.



What successful applicants do differently

Three mindset shifts observed across European funding programmes

1

**Think strategically
before writing**



Instead of

"We have a great idea. Which call should we apply to?"



Successful applicants ask

"Which challenge does this call aim to solve, and how can our expertise contribute?"



Key message:

Strategy precedes proposal writing.

2

**Design the consortium
around project objectives**



Instead of

"Who can we invite to join?"



Successful applicants ask

"Which expertise, stakeholders, and end users are needed to deliver the expected impact?"



Key message:

Strong consortia are intentionally designed.

3

**Build the impact pathway
from day one**



Instead of

"We'll write the impact section later."



Successful applicants ask

"Who will benefit, how will change occur, and what evidence will demonstrate success?"

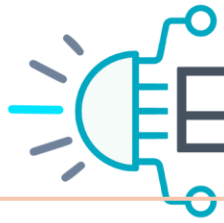


Key message:

Impact drives project design; not just the proposal narrative.



Across different European funding programmes, successful applicants consistently adopt these **strategic approaches**, regardless of the funding instrument or organisation type.



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Lesson #1: Start from the call, not the idea

COMMON APPROACH



Great technology



Find a suitable call



Write the proposal

VS

SUCCESSFUL APPROACH



Analyse the call



Understand the expected outcomes and impacts



Position your idea as the solution



Develop the proposal



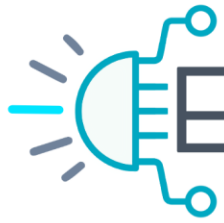
PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Read the **Work Programme** before defining the project.
- ✓ Build the project around the **expected outcomes**.
- ✓ Demonstrate how your solution **addresses the identified challenge**.
- ✓ Use the **language of the call** throughout the proposal.

KEY MESSAGE



Competitive proposals are driven by **programme priorities**; not by technology alone.



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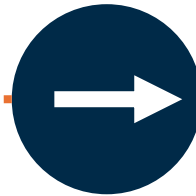
Lesson #2: Consortium quality matters

*A successful consortium is **intentionally designed***

INSTEAD OF ASKING:



“Who can **participate**?”



ASK:

“Who is **needed** to achieve the project’s objectives and expected **impacts**?”



CHARACTERISTICS OF STRONG CONSORTIA



Complementary expertise



Committed partners



Relevant stakeholders



End users



International collaboration

AVOID

- ✗ Partners with **overlapping roles**
- ✗ Partners **included** only because of **previous collaborations**
- ✗ Missing **industrial** or **user** perspective
- ✗ **Unclear responsibilities**



KEY MESSAGE

Strong consortia are built around **project objectives** and **impact**; not existing networks.



Lesson #3: Impact is not an afterthought

Think about impact before writing the proposal

START WITH



Who benefits?



What problem is solved?



How will change occur?



How will success be measured?



How will results continue after the project?

STRONG IMPACT PATHWAYS INCLUDE



Target users

Clearly identified groups who will benefit.



Measurable outcomes

Quantified results to demonstrate change and value.



Dissemination

Effective communication to reach and engage relevant audiences.



Exploitation

Turning results into practical use, uptake or market value.



Sustainability

Ensuring long-term impact beyond the project lifetime.

COMMON MISTAKE

WP1

WP2

WP3

WP n

IMPACT SECTION

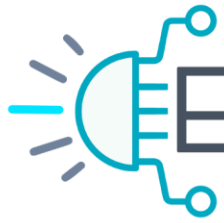


Writing the Impact section after completing the technical work packages.



KEY MESSAGE

Impact should **drive project design**; not simply complete the proposal template.



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Training and Knowledge Transfer

From individual expertise to community capacity



Building proposal development capacity



TRAINING

Proposal-writing workshops

Webinars and online learning

Practical guidance and templates



MENTORING

One-to-one coaching

Proposal peer review

Experience sharing



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Communities of practice

Good practice exchange

Reuseable resources



KEY MESSAGE

Proposal development is a transferable skill that can be strengthened through **continuous learning**, **mentoring**, and **collaboration**.



Acknowledgements

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COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.

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Thank you!

Building stronger proposals starts with stronger collaboration.



Questions?

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Let's stay in touch!



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