


BEFORE YOU SUBMIT: PART 1

Proposal readiness checks for Horizon Europe 2025–2027 from Nexuswelt






A practical guide for coordinators, partners and proposal teams preparing EU-funded projects – covering policy fit, results, widening, consortium logic and partner input.



 EU Funding & Innovation Agency 

EU Funding & Innovation Agency | Nex...

Nexuswelt supports Horizon Europe, Chips JU and Digital Europe projects through...

-  **Policy Fit**
-  **Results**
-  **Widening**
-  **Consortium Logic**
-  **Partner Input**

Why This Matters Now

Horizon Europe 2025–2027: A Shifting Landscape

Horizon Europe 2025–2027 is moving toward broader, less prescriptive and more flexible calls. The 2025 Work Programme introduced more open topics, shorter descriptions and more lump sums, while the 2026–2027 Work Programme continues simplification – with a shorter work programme, more lump-sum funding and more two-stage evaluation topics.

This means applicants have more freedom – but also more responsibility to show a clear logic.

Evaluators need to understand:

- Why this project fits the topic
- Why this consortium is credible
- What results will be created and who will use them
- How uptake will happen
- How impact will continue after the project

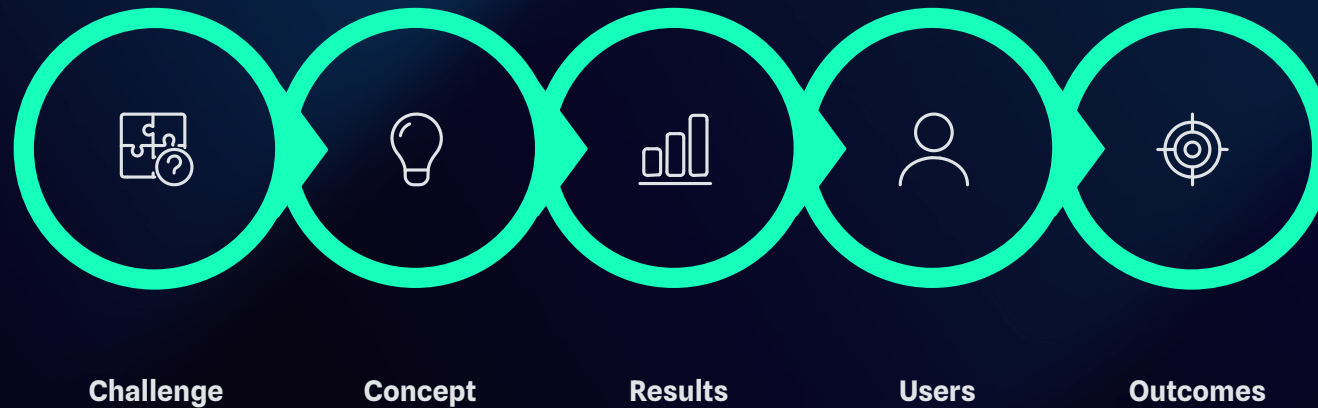
The Core Question

A strong proposal does not only answer "what will we do?" It answers "why this, why now, why this consortium, and what will change?"

- More freedom = more responsibility to demonstrate clear logic to evaluators.

1. Expected Outcome Fit

Do not only copy the call text. Check whether your proposal clearly links every element of the impact chain.



This chain should be visible not just in the impact section, but across the concept, work plan, partners and CDE logic throughout the entire proposal.

⚠ Weak example: "Our project contributes to the expected outcomes of the call and supports innovation in Europe."

✅ Stronger example: "The project contributes to the expected outcome on AI uptake in manufacturing by validating a trusted quality-control tool with SMEs, industry clusters and regional innovation actors."

📄 What partners should prepare: Each partner should explain how their task contributes to at least one expected outcome. Expected outcomes should not appear only in the impact section – they should be visible across the concept, work plan, partners and CDE logic.

2. Policy Agenda Fit

Horizon Europe 2025–2027 is guided by three strategic orientations

Green Transition

Clean industrial transition, regional resilience, sustainable ecosystems

Digital Transition

AI uptake, trusted digital technologies, competitiveness, strategic autonomy

Resilient Europe

Competitive, inclusive and democratic Europe; enlargement and reconstruction where relevant

Check whether your proposal connects to relevant EU priorities:

- Clean industrial transition
- AI uptake and trusted digital technologies
- Competitiveness and resilience
- Strategic autonomy
- Democracy and inclusion
- Critical technologies
- Regional innovation ecosystems
- Enlargement / reconstruction where relevant



Weak: "The project supports the digital transition."



Stronger: "The project supports the digital transition and European competitiveness by helping manufacturing SMEs adopt trusted AI-based inspection tools, with validation in both established and widening innovation ecosystems."



Takeaway: Do not only name EU priorities. Show how your results support them in practice.

3. Result Clarity

The European Commission's dissemination and exploitation guidance focuses on **project results**: outputs generated during implementation, such as innovative solutions, algorithms, proof of feasibility, new business models, policy recommendations, guidelines, prototypes, demonstrators, databases, datasets and networks.

Check whether your proposal names concrete results:

Prototype / Demonstrator

Pilot Report

Dataset / Methodology

Software Tool

Policy Brief


Guideline / Training Toolkit


Standardisation Input

Exploitation Roadmap

Business Model

Validation Report

 **Weak:** "We will develop innovative solutions for sustainable mobility."

 **Stronger:** "We will deliver a pilot-ready mobility data platform, a validation methodology, a policy brief for regional authorities and an exploitation roadmap for mobility operators."

 **Takeaway:** If results are vague, dissemination, exploitation and impact will also be vague.

4. Target Group Logic

Dissemination means making results available to the people who can best use them – for example the scientific community, industry, policymakers and other relevant actors. But generic lists are not enough.

Instead of writing only...

- Industry
- Policymakers
- Public
- Researchers

Make target groups specific:

- Which industry segment?
- Which policy level?
- Which public authorities?
- Which end users?
- Which research community?
- Which investors or multipliers?
- Why do they need the result?



Weak example: "Target groups include industry, policymakers and citizens."



Stronger example: "Regional energy agencies will use the guidelines; SMEs in the building sector will test the tool; municipalities will receive recommendations for renovation planning."



Takeaway: Target groups should not be a list. Each target group needs a role in the impact pathway.

5. Consortium Geography

Horizon Europe Widening Countries & Associated Countries



Check your consortium geography:

→ Is the consortium too concentrated in Central or Western Europe?

→ Does geography support pilots, users, policy relevance, dissemination or uptake?

→ Are widening countries included where they add value?

→ Are enlargement / reconstruction / regional resilience dimensions relevant?

Useful examples by country/region:

- **Cyprus:** Eastern Mediterranean links, regional innovation, EU project management, widening logic
- **Ukraine:** Resilience, reconstruction, digitalisation, energy, security, agriculture, health, innovation capacity
- **Western Balkans:** Enlargement, regional transformation, environment, digitalisation, infrastructure, capacity-building
- **Romania / Bulgaria / Croatia / Greece / Baltics / Poland:** Widening ecosystems, pilots, smart specialisation, regional uptake

Takeaway: Geographical balance should not be decorative. It should strengthen European added value and uptake.

6. Widening Role Quality

Widening should not be symbolic. A widening or emerging ecosystem partner should contribute something visible and meaningful to the project.



Pilot Site

Real-world testing ground in a widening region



Stakeholder Access

Regional stakeholders, public authority links, industry networks



End-User Validation

Validation of results with real users in context




Dissemination Channels


Regional reach, exploitation pathways, capacity-building logic



Policy Relevance

Regional policy links, knowledge transfer, reconstruction relevance

 **Weak:** "A partner from a widening country is included but has no clear role in impact or uptake."

 **Stronger:** "A Cypriot partner leads stakeholder engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean, while a Ukrainian partner contributes use-case validation linked to reconstruction and resilience needs."

 **Takeaway:** If widening partners are important for impact, this should be visible in the work plan, partner role, budget and CDE strategy.

7. Consortium Complementarity

Evaluation also looks at the quality and efficiency of implementation – including the work plan, resources, risks and the capacity and complementarity of the consortium. The question is not *"how many partners?"* – it is *"why exactly these partners?"*



Research Excellence

Scientific rigour, methodology, publications and datasets



Industry Validation

SME and market perspective, deployment logic, standardisation links



Widening Ecosystem

Regional knowledge, emerging ecosystem pilots, uptake pathways



Technical Development

Capacity to build, test and iterate on solutions




Public-Sector Access


Policy access, end-user involvement, pilot legitimacy



CDE Expertise

Communication, dissemination, exploitation and impact pathway management

 **Weak:** "The consortium includes 12 partners from 8 countries."

 **Stronger:** "The consortium combines research excellence, industrial validation, public-sector access, widening-region pilot ecosystems, and a dedicated CDE partner to support communication, stakeholder engagement and exploitation."

8. Partner Input Pack

SAVE THIS SLIDE

Before submission, every partner should provide the following information to the coordinator. Generic partner input creates generic impact – specific partner input makes the proposal more credible.

Every partner should provide:

- 2–3 concrete expected results from their work
- Relevant target groups and users
- Stakeholders they can reach
- Events, networks or platforms they can access
- Possible publications, standards or policy links
- Exploitation potential: scientific, commercial, policy or societal
- Risks or barriers for uptake
- Realistic person-months and budget needs
- How their work connects to EU priorities or regional needs

Partner type examples:

University

Datasets, publications, scientific dissemination, methodology

SME

Market need, business case, user access, exploitation potential

Industry Partner

Validation, deployment logic, standardisation links

Public Authority

Pilot access, policy relevance, user legitimacy

Association

Community reach, multipliers, stakeholder engagement

CDE Partner

Communication strategy, dissemination route, exploitation support, impact pathway

✓ **Takeaway:** Generic partner input creates generic impact. Specific partner input makes the proposal more credible and the consortium logic visible to evaluators.

Check 9: Communication Route

Communication is **not the same as dissemination**. Communication explains the project and its value to wider audiences – it should help people understand *why* the project matters, not only announce that it exists.

1

Clear Core Message

Is there a single, compelling message that non-experts can understand?

2

Purposeful Channels

Are channels chosen for a reason, not just listed as defaults?

3

Milestone Linkage

Is communication tied to project milestones and key moments?

4

Partner Contribution

Are partners contributing content from their own work packages?

✗ Weak Example

"We will communicate through a website, social media and newsletters."

✓ Stronger Example

"We will use visual explainers, use-case stories and targeted LinkedIn updates to help non-experts, regional stakeholders and industry actors understand the project's relevance and expected results."



A channel list is not a communication strategy. You need **audience, message, timing and purpose**.

Check 10: Dissemination and Exploitation Route

The Commission describes dissemination and exploitation as key activities to **diffuse knowledge, increase uptake of R&I results** and demonstrate generated impact. Exploitation focuses on actual use of results – commercial, societal, political, scientific or public-knowledge use.



What & Who

What result will be shared? Who needs it? In which format and at what stage?



Purpose & Follow-up

For what purpose is it shared? What follow-up is expected after dissemination?



Post-Project Adoption

Who could use or adopt the result after the project ends?

✗ Weak Example

"Results will be widely disseminated through workshops and publications."

✓ Stronger Example

"The validation methodology will be shared with municipal planners through two thematic workshops, a practitioner guide and follow-up discussions with pilot cities."



Dissemination moves results to the right people. Exploitation explains **how those results can be used**.

Check 11: Budget and Lump-Sum Realism

Lump-sum funding is becoming much more important. In the **2025 Work Programme**, lump sums represented more than **35% of the budget**; for 2026–2027, around **half of the call budget** is expected to use lump-sum funding.

CDE Coordination

Person-months for CDE coordination and partner PMs for technical input

Events & Travel

Stakeholder workshops, travel and event costs, final event or demo activities

Materials & Media

Website, design, video or visual materials, translation and localisation

Outreach & Exploitation

Policy or industry outreach, exploitation support, widening partner engagement

✗ Weak Example

The proposal promises 10 workshops, videos, policy briefs, stakeholder consultations and a final event, but gives very few PMs and almost no budget.

✓ Stronger Example

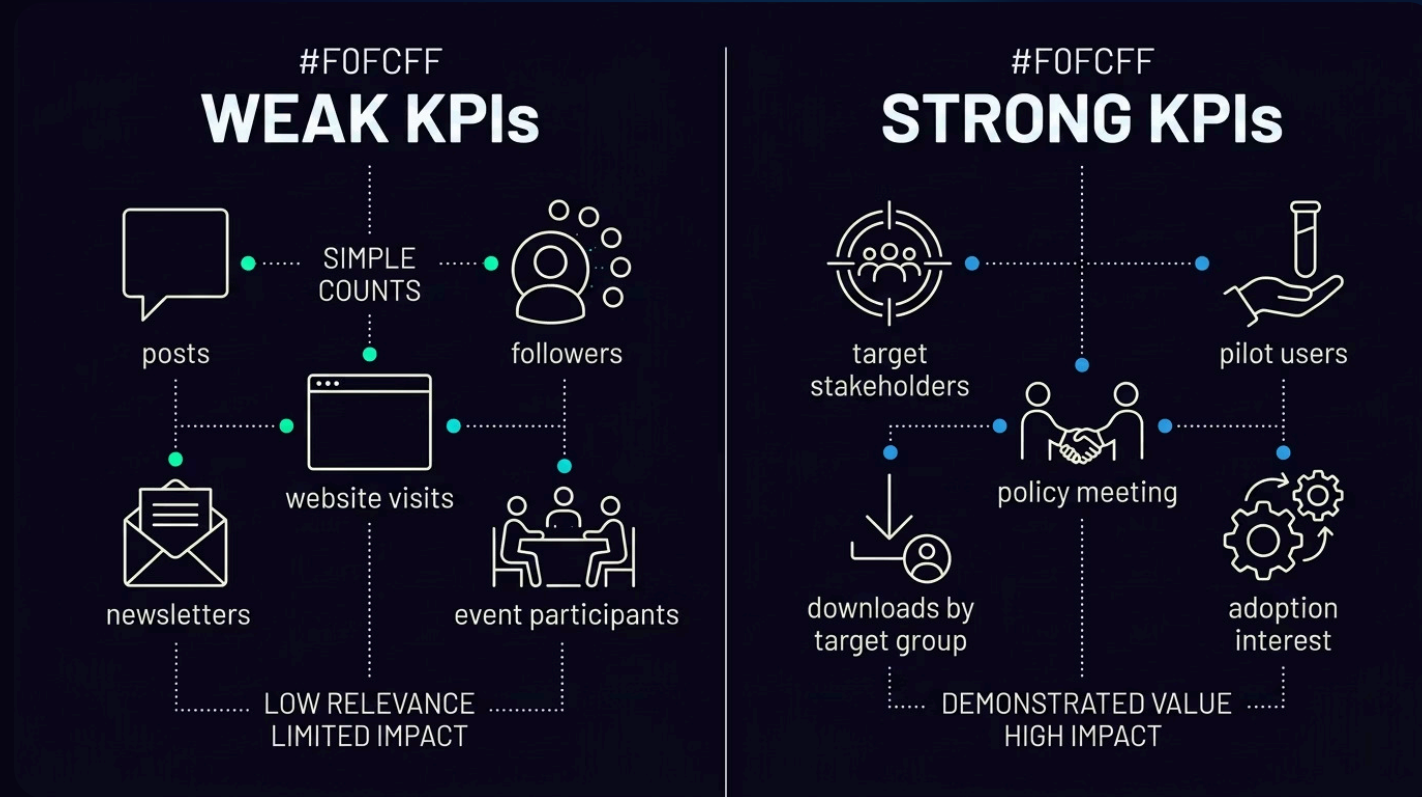
CDE tasks, partner responsibilities, PMs, event costs and deliverables are aligned with the promised impact activities.



Ambitious impact with no resources looks unrealistic – **especially under lump-sum logic.**

Check 12: KPI and Evidence Quality

Do not rely only on visibility metrics. The difference between weak and strong KPIs is the difference between showing **effort** and showing **impact potential**.



✗ Weak KPI Example

"20 LinkedIn posts and 2,000 website visits."

✓ Better KPI Example

"Three stakeholder groups engaged in validation activities, two follow-up uptake discussions initiated, and one policy brief discussed with relevant public authorities."

③ Activity KPIs show effort. **Uptake-oriented KPIs show impact potential.**

Check 13: Risk, Barrier and Sustainability Logic

Credible impact does not pretend that uptake is automatic. Your proposal must acknowledge real-world barriers and explain how the project will address them.

Regulatory & Legal Barriers

Regulation, procurement rules, IP and licensing, data protection, standardisation requirements

Adoption Barriers

User acceptance, market readiness, technical delays, low stakeholder trust

Post-Project Sustainability

Lack of post-project ownership, unclear maintenance responsibilities, fading stakeholder engagement

✗ Weak Example

"The project will achieve strong market and policy impact."

✓ Stronger Example

"Uptake may depend on procurement rules, user acceptance and interoperability with existing systems. The project will address this through early stakeholder validation, pilot feedback and policy dialogue."

Post-Project Sustainability Checklist

- Who maintains key outputs after the project ends?
- Where will results remain visible and accessible?
- Which partners continue exploitation activities?
- How will stakeholders stay engaged beyond the final conference?
- Can EU tools support post-project visibility?

⊗ Impact should not end with the final conference.

Check 14: EU Result Tools and Post-Project Visibility

The Commission highlights several tools and services to help projects move from results to impact. A strong impact plan thinks **beyond the proposal and beyond the project lifetime**.



Horizon Results Platform

For promoting exploitable results to investors, partners, policymakers and other actors who can take them forward.



CORDIS

For project factsheets, deliverables and multilingual result visibility across the EU research community.



Horizon Dashboard

For programme data, statistics and project analysis to contextualise your results within the broader programme.



Horizon Results Booster

Free support services to help projects improve dissemination and exploitation – mention this in your plan.



European IP Helpdesk

Useful for IP, ownership and exploitation questions – especially relevant for results with commercial potential.

Common Mistakes Before Submission

Fix these before final upload. Most weak impact sections are **not empty** – they are **too generic**.

Content & Framing Issues

- Topic text is copied, not interpreted
- Policy relevance is too generic
- Expected results are vague
- Target groups are too broad
- Widening partners are symbolic
- Partner input is missing or late

Impact Planning Issues

- Communication is only a channel list
- Dissemination not linked to concrete results
- Exploitation is written too late
- Budget does not match promised activities
- KPIs measure activity, not uptake
- Risks and barriers are ignored
- Post-project sustainability is unclear

⊗ **Takeaway:** Most weak impact sections are not empty. They are too generic. Specificity is what separates fundable proposals from rejected ones.

Where Nexuswelt Can Support

Nexuswelt supports proposal teams and EU-funded projects where the technical concept is strong, but the route from results to stakeholders, uptake and impact still needs clarity.



Communication Strategy

Audience-first messaging, channel selection and milestone-linked communication planning



Dissemination Planning

Result-specific dissemination routes, format selection and target group mapping



Exploitation Logic

Exploitation pathways, IP considerations and post-project use planning



Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder mapping, engagement strategies and widening partner positioning



Impact Pathway Review

End-to-end review of the route from policy fit to results, users and measurable impact



Pre-Submission CDE Checks

CDE work package design, partner input collection and final impact section review

Save This Before Your Next Deadline

Before submission, run through all 14 checks. A strong Horizon Europe proposal needs a credible route from **policy fit** to **consortium logic**, results, users, uptake and impact.

01

Policy & Results

Are expected outcomes clearly addressed? Is EU policy relevance specific? Are results concrete?

02

Consortium & Partners

Does consortium geography add value? Are widening partners meaningful? Is every partner contributing to impact?

03

Communication & Dissemination

Is communication strategic? Is dissemination linked to results? Is exploitation realistic?

04

Budget & KPIs

Do PMs and budget match the plan? Do KPIs show uptake potential rather than just activity?

05

Risks & Sustainability

Are risks and barriers addressed? Is post-project sustainability visible and credible?

A strong Horizon Europe proposal needs a credible route from policy fit to consortium logic, results, users, uptake and impact. — **Nexuswelt**

✓ Need support? Nexuswelt works with proposal teams to strengthen impact sections, CDE work packages and exploitation logic before submission.