

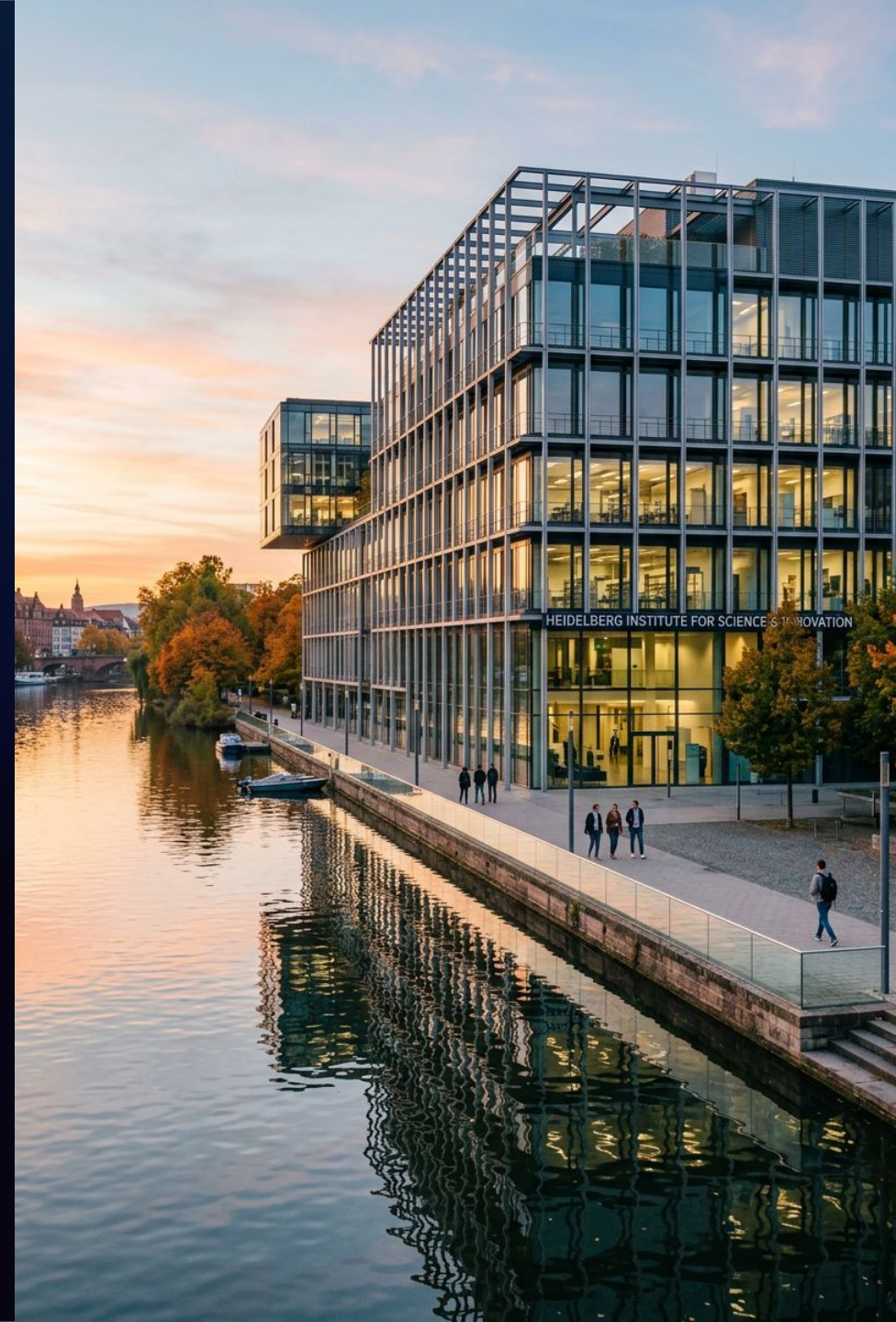
Horizon Europe 2026

Shorter Templates, Higher Stakes

What applicants should fix before writing Part B

NEXUSWELT

EU RESEARCH STRATEGY



Simplification is real — but not simple

The 2026–2027 Work Programme reduces administrative weight, but proposal teams still need **stronger decisions before writing starts**. The real shift is not just procedural — it demands a fundamentally different approach to how proposals are conceived and structured.

Less space to explain

Reduced page limits mean every sentence must carry weight. There is no room for padding or repetition.

More pressure to connect

Each section must link logically to the next. Evaluators will notice gaps faster than ever before.

Higher need for architecture

Proposal structure must be planned before writing begins — not discovered during drafting.

Source: European Commission Work Programme 2026–2027 General Introduction



What is changing in 2026–2027?

The 2026–2027 Work Programme introduces a significant package of structural changes. These are not minor adjustments — they represent a deliberate redesign of how Horizon Europe operates for applicants.

33%

Shorter Work Programme

The overall Work Programme document has been substantially reduced in length.

35%

Fewer Topics

Significantly fewer call topics mean broader competition and fewer entry points for applicants.

50%

Lump Sum Budget

Half of the total call budget is now implemented through lump-sum funding mechanisms.

41

Two-Stage Topics

A substantial number of topics now require a two-stage submission process.

Shorter & less prescriptive topic descriptions

Reduced proposal page limits

Simplified Impact & Implementation sections

New online budget table for lump-sum topics

Sources: European Commission Work Programme 2026–2027 General Introduction; UKRO — 2026–2027 novelties summary

The Hidden Risk

Many proposal teams will misread the simplification signals. The changes look like they reduce pressure — but in practice, they raise the bar for strategic thinking.

What teams may think

- Shorter template = **easier proposal**
- Less guidance = **more freedom**
- Lump sum = **simpler budget**
- Two-stage call = **lower risk**

What actually happens

- Shorter templates **expose weak logic faster**
- Less guidance **requires stronger positioning**
- Lump sums **require earlier budget planning**
- Stage 1 **must already be strategic**

Source: UKRO – 2026-2027 novelties summary

Less Prescriptive Topics + Fewer Topics

Open topic descriptions give applicants more flexibility – but also more responsibility. Without detailed guidance from the Commission, teams must do the interpretive work themselves. At the same time, with **35% fewer topics**, competition is broader and entry points are fewer.

Are we answering expected outcomes?

Or are we only repeating call keywords without demonstrating genuine alignment with what the Commission wants to achieve?

Why this project?

The proposal must articulate a clear rationale – why this consortium, this method, and this timing are the right combination for this specific topic.

 Before writing, ask: **Are we answering the expected outcomes – or only repeating call keywords? Why this project, this consortium, this method and this timing?**

Source: European Commission Work Programme 2026–2027 General Introduction

Shorter Templates

Reduced page limits mean **every paragraph must work harder**. There is simply less space to compensate for weak thinking with additional explanation. Evaluators will reach the end of a section faster – and if the logic is not clear, there is no room to recover.

No space left for:

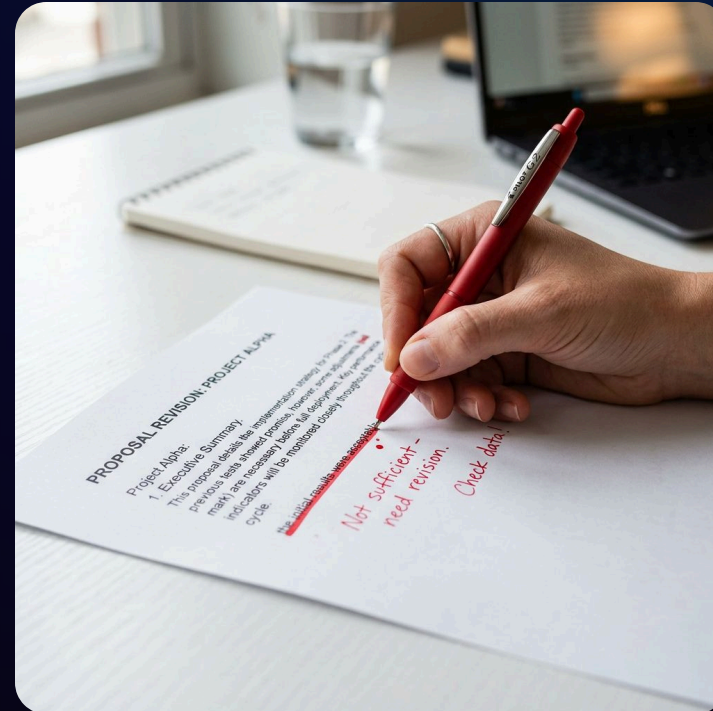
Generic background

Repeated explanations

Unclear partner roles

Weak impact wording

Unfocused methodology



⚠ Before writing, ask: **Can an evaluator understand the project logic in the first 2–3 pages?**

Source: UKRO – 2026–2027 novelties summary

Lump-Sum Funding + Online Budget Table

With **50% of the call budget** implemented through lump sums, budget planning becomes a strategic activity – not an administrative afterthought. For selected 2026 lump-sum topics, the Excel budget table is being replaced by an **online budget table in Part A**. This is a structural change that affects how the entire proposal is assembled.

The budget must now demonstrate coherence across every dimension of the proposal:



Work Packages & Deliverables

Each work package must be costed accurately, with deliverables and milestones that justify the resource allocation.



Partner Roles & Person-Months

Every partner's contribution must be visible in the budget. Person-months must reflect actual planned effort.



Impact Activities

Dissemination, exploitation, and communication activities must be budgeted – not assumed to be free.



Before writing, ask: **Does the budget prove that the work plan is realistic?**

Sources: European Commission Work Programme 2026–2027 General Introduction; UKRO – online budget table update

Two-Stage Calls

The 2026–2027 Work Programme includes **41 two-stage topics**. Many teams treat Stage 1 as a rough sketch — a chance to test the waters before committing to a full proposal. This is a strategic mistake.

Stage 1 is evaluated competitively. It must already demonstrate the full strength of the concept, even within its shorter format.

01

Clear Need

The problem being addressed must be articulated precisely and compellingly — without relying on lengthy background sections.

02

Strong Concept

The core idea must be distinctive. Evaluators must be able to see why this approach is the right one.

03

Strategic Fit

The proposal must connect clearly to the expected outcomes of the topic — not just its keywords.

04

Credible Consortium Logic

The consortium must make sense on its own merits — not because of famous names or institutional prestige.

05

Expected Impact

Even at Stage 1, the impact pathway must be visible and specific enough to be credible.

⚠ Before writing, ask: **Would the concept look strong without long explanations or famous partner names?**

Source: European Commission Work Programme 2026–2027 General Introduction

Impact is Simplified, Not Less Important

A simplified Impact section does not mean lower expectations from evaluators. The Commission has reduced the structural complexity of the section — but the **quality of thinking required has not changed**. A strong impact pathway must still answer every critical question about how results will reach the world.

1

Who needs the results?

Identify specific target groups — not generic stakeholders.

2

How will they be reached?

Describe concrete channels and engagement strategies.

3

How will results be used?

Explain the pathway from output to actual application or adoption.

4

What changes after the project?

Articulate the specific difference the project will make in its field or sector.

5

What remains after funding ends?

Demonstrate sustainability — what structures, tools, or communities will persist.

6

Which partners support uptake?

Show that the right partners are in place to drive real-world adoption.

❏ Before writing, ask: **Is our impact specific — or does it still sound generic?**

Sources: UKRO — 2026–2027 novelties summary; REA — Dos and don'ts when applying for funding



Dissemination and Exploitation

Dissemination and exploitation plans are frequently written in the final week of proposal preparation – treated as a box-ticking exercise rather than a strategic component. This approach is visible to evaluators and weakens the overall score.

Effective dissemination and exploitation should support:

- **Stakeholder engagement** – building relationships with those who will use the results
- **Policy visibility** – ensuring results reach decision-makers at the right level
- **Market or societal uptake** – translating outputs into real-world change
- **Trust building** – establishing credibility with communities and end users
- **Long-term project value** – creating assets that outlast the funding period

 Before writing, ask: **Does dissemination support real uptake, or only project visibility?**

Source: REA – Dos and don'ts when applying for funding

Compliance Still Matters

Simplification does not remove eligibility and compliance risks. A proposal that fails on a compliance check may never reach evaluation – regardless of its scientific quality. These requirements must be addressed **early in the preparation process**, not in the final days before submission.



Gender Equality Plan

Required for most public bodies and research organisations. Must be in place before submission.



Ethics

Ethics self-assessment must be completed accurately. Underreporting is as problematic as overreporting.



Data Management

A data management plan must be prepared and aligned with FAIR data principles.



Responsible AI Use

If generative AI is used in the research or proposal process, it must be disclosed and handled responsibly.



Partner Eligibility

All consortium partners must meet eligibility criteria. Financial capacity must be verified in advance.



Page Limits & Completeness

Exceeding page limits or submitting incomplete sections can result in immediate rejection.

⊗ Before writing, ask: **Could one missing requirement create problems before evaluation even begins?**

Sources: REA – Dos and don'ts when applying for funding; European Commission – Gender equality in research and innovation; European Commission – Guidelines on responsible use of generative AI in research

The Proposal Architecture Test

Before writing Part B, the consortium must be able to trace a clear, unbroken line of logic through every component of the proposal. If one part is weak or disconnected, the whole proposal can look unfinished — even if the individual sections are well written.



This architecture test is not a writing exercise — it is a strategic exercise. The connections between these elements must be established **before the first word of Part B is written**. A proposal where these links are clear will score higher, read faster, and convince evaluators more effectively.

❏ If one part of this chain is weak, the whole proposal can look unfinished — regardless of how well the individual sections are written.

Source: EU Funding & Tenders Portal

Save This Checklist

Before writing Part B, every proposal team should be able to answer **yes** to each of the following questions. If any answer is uncertain, that is where preparation work is still needed.

1	One-paragraph summary Can we explain the project clearly and compellingly in a single paragraph?
2	Measurable objectives Are all objectives specific, measurable, and directly linked to the topic's expected outcomes?
3	Real partner roles Does each partner have a genuine, distinct contribution — not just a presence on the consortium list?
4	Logical work packages Do work packages follow a coherent journey from problem to solution to impact?
5	Budget matches workload Does the budget reflect the actual effort required — and does it align with the work plan?
6	Meaningful deliverables Are deliverables substantive outputs — not just internal reports or meeting minutes?
7	Specific impact Is the impact pathway concrete and targeted — not a list of generic benefits?
8	Dissemination linked to uptake Does the dissemination plan actively support adoption — not just awareness?
9	Compliance checked early Have all eligibility and compliance requirements been verified before writing begins?
10	Readable under pressure Can an evaluator reading quickly still follow the logic and understand the value of the project?

Source: REA — *Dos and don'ts when applying for funding*

The Main Takeaway

Horizon Europe 2026 simplification is not a shortcut. It is a **stress test for strategy**.

Shorter templates will not hide weak proposals. They will expose weak logic faster. The strongest proposals in 2026 will not be the ones that write more – they will be the ones **where everything connects better**.

Read the Full Article

Horizon Europe 2026 Simplification: Why Shorter Templates Require Stronger Strategy – available via the link below.

Useful Sources

[European Commission – Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026–2027 General Introduction](#)

[UKRO – Summary of EC webinar on Horizon Europe 2026–2027 novelties](#)

[UKRO – New online budget table for selected 2026 lump-sum topics](#)

[European Research Executive Agency – Dos and don'ts when applying for funding](#)

[EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#)

[European Commission – Gender equality in research and innovation](#)

[European Commission – Guidelines on responsible use of generative AI in research](#)