

## The ACI position paper on the 9th European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Summary

From the launch of the first Framework Programme for Research and Development in 1984, through the constitution of the European Research Area at the turn of the 2000s to the creation of the European Research Council in 2007, the role and prerogatives of the European Union in the field of Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) have progressively been asserted. The 9<sup>th</sup> European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP9) must build on these foundations, while at the same time offering a **renewed and ambitious vision** of European policy for research and innovation.

The Association of Innovation Consultants (ACI) is a French professional association, which gathers 71 consulting firms with collectively more than 3,000 employees. These companies offer their expertise across the full range of innovation consulting services and work daily alongside all stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem, serving economic competitiveness and territorial attractiveness.

This document contains a summary of the reflective work carried out by the Association of Innovation Consultants (ACI). It intends to **contribute to collective reflection and the debate** initiated by all stakeholders involved in the preparation of FP9.

ACI proposals revolve around six major themes: affirming the Union's ambitions regarding Research, Development and Innovation; improving the participation of all stakeholders, especially SMEs; improving project evaluation within the framework programme; rethinking project management; promoting non-technological innovations and finally, carrying and accelerating efforts on gender equality.

## Affirming the Union's ambitions regarding Research, Development and Innovation

Continued investment in Research and Development (R&D) and Innovation is the key to the dynamism and success of the Member States. In the face of global competition, European cooperation is a clear factor for success, both in terms of the distribution of research effort & knowledge sharing, as well as maximising potential effects of scale. In a word, **the field of research and innovation can and must continue to assert its place at global level.**

It is therefore essential to design European funding programs that guarantee both **a high level of excellence and fundamental research capacity, as well as support for innovation-oriented projects that are close to the market and to their ecosystems.** This guarantees the development of both Europe's economic fabric and its scientific knowledge.

However, the mid-term evaluation of the H2020 program has shown that some parts of the program **do not have the financial capacity for their ambitions.**

### Proposed measures

- Significantly increase the overall budget of the Framework Programme for Research, Development and Innovation
- Establish a genuine European area of innovation, through various means:
  - Combine research and innovation
  - Favour instruments adapted to innovation: short-cycle innovation, start-ups
  - Listen to companies during the construction of the work programmes
- Further diversify the topics of call for proposals, to ensure that certain areas are not over-prioritized

## Improving the participation of all stakeholders, especially SMEs

H2020 has proven its capacity to improve the participation of all the research and innovation value chain stakeholders, as well as its attractiveness.

Nevertheless, these improvements must be pursued as the high competition and complexity of the program tend to concentrate funding across a short list of the same big players.

The ACI considers it is urgent to **reduce the perception of European programmes as prohibitively complex** and to **identify** but also to **encourage** new players likely to participate in the FPs, in order to optimise all potential stakeholders' participation in the European research and innovation programme.

**The stakes are not only financial** (ensuring a return on investment of at least 1 for the funds invested by France into the programme budget) but also have an important impact on **scientific development**, the **ecosystem** and **entrepreneurship**.

### Proposed measures

- **Improve communication on the FP** by offering training for intermediaries, promoting a single information channel for participants and developing a first-time applicant kit
- **Map the interactions between different European funding instruments and with national/regional schemes**
- Deploy at national/regional levels an incentive human resources strategy (bonuses, working time discharges, taking into account career development), to **enable better involvement** of laboratories and research centres in European funding programmes

## Improving project evaluation

**Project evaluations are often the subject of controversial discussions regarding their modalities, criteria and relevance.** In particular, the following points emerged from the day-to-day experience of consulting firms involved in this field:

- Scoring on a small number of points for each criterion does not make it possible to significantly differentiate projects. This generates frustrations for project leaders.
- The reduced number of evaluators per project, the time allotted to them, and the results provided to project leaders limit the pertinence and relevance of the evaluations, the results of which **do not always match the considerable financial and human efforts consecrated** to the preparation of the proposal.
- The non-technological criteria should evolve to better match non-technological innovations.
- Considering gender, which is a transversal priority and an obligatory aspect of the proposal, does not seem to have any real impact on projects

### Proposed measures

- Generate greater value from evaluators' work by providing the project leader with the detailed evaluations provided by evaluators, including constructive criticism, notably for the lowest scores.
- Improve transparency on the rating criteria and sub-criteria and the number of evaluators involved
- Publish advanced statistics on each call

## Rethinking project management

European collaborative projects are complex – **their management and implementation require specific skills and adapted tools**, yet these specificities are rarely (or not at all) considered in the current framework programme.

However, experiences show that the influence of effective and professional project management has a positive impact on project performance and results

The measures proposed by the ACI aim to ensure, for future European projects, effective strategic management as well as a professional administrative and financial management.

### Proposed measures

- Promote the impact of a real expertise in management (whether this expertise is internal or external, public or private):
  - By clearly allowing the participation of other partners, not just the coordinator, in the Project Management Office (PMO)
  - By removing the exclusion of subcontracting in coordination tasks
  - By allowing the PMO to use the "in-kind contribution from third parties against payment"
  - By removing the reference to the prohibition of project management by a subcontractor in the standard grant agreement
- Promote the exploitation of results during the project
- Continuously improve IT tools for project monitoring by developing adequate tools for first-time beneficiaries (e.g. training videos, creation of tutorials, etc.)

## Promoting non-technological innovations

Compared to FP7, H2020 made significant progress in supporting non-technological innovation. However, compared to the available public funding for technological developments, this domain is still at a significantly low level, despite its potential to generate sustainable and economic growth.

**The Framework Program therefore neglects pools of excellence and growth** that could help it achieve its objectives and **position the European Union at the forefront of the services and new uses** that the transformation of our societies requires in the light of contemporary challenges.

### Proposed measures

- Dedicate specific calls to non-technological innovations, which may cover various topics (Social Enterprise, Social Sciences, Business Models...)
- Adapt evaluating criteria and skills of the panels of evaluators for a better consideration of non-technological innovations and promote integration of humanities and social sciences

## Accelerate efforts regarding the consideration of equality between women and men in the 9th Framework Programme

Gender in Research is a theme that emerged at the end of the 20th century with the acknowledgment that there is a **clear disparity in the participation and representation of women in the research community**, particularly in scientific research.

**The poor participation of women has revealed wide disparities in terms of opportunities and treatment** within the research community on various aspects: precariousness (11% of women have precarious temporary contracts compared to 7% of men), salary (the European average gross salary in research is 17.9% higher for men than for women), qualifications required and work-life balance, among others.

Equality between men and women in the research community today includes three key issues: the participation of women in research teams, female participation in the construction of research policies and programmes, and gender balance in research content to achieve better scientific excellence.

Gender is gaining in importance in successive FPs and promises to be further strengthened. However, although improvements have been made on the main objectives, this development must be accelerated. In order to do so, **gender has to be seen as a real and serious subject** for all research and innovation ecosystems. Otherwise, the risk is to settle for declarations of intent without acting on the status quo.

### Proposed measures

- Strengthen gender equality as a cross-cutting theme:
  - Systematize the existence of a Gender NCP to all countries participating in FP9
  - Give a bonus to projects proposing specific actions to improve the existing situation (this part would be funded at 100%)
  - Consider reducing funding for events, conferences and seminars where no women are represented (depending on the percentage of women in each sector)
- Dedicate actions from FP9 to the theme of gender equality:
  - Strengthen the number and amount of funding of calls dedicated to gender equality within the Societal Challenges pillar, by mobilising all the instruments of the programme (CSA, RIA, IA, SME Instrument, Prizes, etc.)
  - Make the possibility of funding actions for a better balance between personal and professional life (not necessarily only for women) and the training of researchers on gender in science more systematic and **visible**



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### **About ACI, the Association of Innovation Consultants**

The Association of Innovation Consultants results from the merger of ASCOFI, founded in 2007, and UNATRANTEC, founded in 1984. Represented throughout France, the network formed by the members of the Association of Innovation Consultants consists of seventy consulting companies, employing 3000 staff.

The members of the Association offer their expertise across the full range of innovation consulting services and work alongside all stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem (businesses of all sizes, research and higher education, public bodies), serving economic competitiveness and territorial attractiveness.

[www.asso-conseils-innovation.org](http://www.asso-conseils-innovation.org)