How to align needs and opportunities

What will you learn in this module?

In this module you will learn about …

- How to recognise the needs and challenges of stakeholders in the regional ecosystem
- How to recognise the strengths and advantages of the region and undertake asset mapping
- To be aware of emerging technologies and trends in Europe and to be aware of channels to scout these new technologies and opportunities
- To understand how to evaluate the relevance and potential of emerging and innovative technologies at an early stage

In this module we are going to learn about one of the most significant parts of proposal design. Before we start writing a proposal, we have to be able to know what we are capable of achieving and how to achieve it. We must be able to identify the opportunities around us and be mindful of what we can achieve.

It is evident that the current Horizon Europe program focusses even more on the Impact of proposals as compared to previous calls. Previous calls have focussed heavily on funding for Research (targeting mostly HEIs and large research organizations) and comparatively less on the business site. This has now shifted to a higher TRL (Technology Readiness Level) and the current aim is to fund proposals that are feasible and realistic, have the highest impact and are more closely linked to market needs. In addition, there are efforts to bring Academia (i.e. mainly research phase) and business closer together (economic impact), aiming to transform research results to actual products that will have a positive impact on our health, culture, society, the environment and other topics.

Winning Horizon Europe projects are normally multidisciplinary with partners who are complementary to each other, thus making a strong consortium in which all partners are experts in their fields. Figure x shows the different scouting for ideas phases. One of the most important steps in writing a proposal or joining a consortium is organisational self-awareness.

The first step, therefore, is for organisations to learn about their strengths and their weaknesses. Through this self-knowledge they develop an understanding of what the missing pieces of the puzzle are that will make a winning project proposal that will benefit partner organisations and have great impact, as per Horizon Europe guidelines.

What can we achieve?

Before we even decide on which proposal we are going to start working on, we need to understand organisational strengths and weaknesses at an internal level. What are we good at? Which topics do we have knowledge on and which do we not?

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Figure x - Scouting for ideas phases (source: Novatex)

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The most popular tool to do identify our strength and weaknesses is the SWOT analysis which also allows us to identify the ''opportunities'' and the ''threats'' (see figure x).

In this module we want to focus on the ''**Strengths**'' and ''**Weaknesses**'' part of the SWOT analysis to get an idea of what we can do best either on a personal level or an organizational level. It is also important to include stakeholders (partners, target groups etc.) in the analysis once we have identified our own ''Strengths'' and ''Weaknesses'' in order to better understand what can actually be achieved with our wider network.

When knowing what you or your organisation is capable of, you can start scouting for project calls. There are thousands of calls announced by the European Commission and it would be a waste of time to work on a proposal which we do not have the proper experience and knowledge for. After we identify the areas in which we believe we have sufficient experience, we are going to limit our

focus solely to these areas in order to save resources and workhours. It is important to be conscious of resources as writing a proposal and building a consortium are time consuming activities, and a failed proposal will result in wasted work-hours and resources. It is important to be realistic with ourselves in order to get an accurate SWOT analysis.

The process of identifying our Strengths and Weaknesses is an internal affair

1. **Always start with the Strengths**. Brainstorm your strengths as a business and ensure a complete and detailed list. At this stage, place as many as possible because you'll be refining these later.

2. **Focus on Weaknesses**. Once we have completed the list of our Strengths, it's time to focus on the weaknesses of our organisation. This is the mirror image to the Strengths and if you have already been through the strengths process

Figure x - *Basic SWOT analysis (source: Novatex)*

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you should be able to quickly identify this second list. It is important to be honest with ourselves and to include our failures, lack of skills etc.

Helpful questions to identify Strengths

- What skills do I and my team excell at?
- What topics do I like and have knowledge on?
- Would my experience provide a competitive advantage in this call?
- Can my organisation deliver what is written in the proposal?

Helpful questions to identify Weaknesses

- Does my organisation have the resources for this proposal?
- Do I have the neccesary experience for this call?
- Is my consortium capable of contributing to such call?

☞ Tip for HEIs

HEIs should identify what expertise their academics can offer to SMEs in a university-business-collaboration as well as the availability of these staff.

☞ Tips specific for SMEs

SWOT analysis is a significant tool for all organisations no matter their size and nature. Every organization needs to identify their Strengths and Weakness at an internal level first.

Suggested readings

Are you doing the SWOT analysis backwards? By Laurence Minsky and David Aron – link

A useful article by the Harvard Business Review which analyses a better way of conducting a SWOT analysis.

SWOT Analysis Understanding Your Business – link

SWOT Analysis is a tool that can help you to analyse what your company does best right now, and to devise a successful strategy for the future

How to Perform a SWOT Analysis for Your Small Business – link

This Guide includes information about SWOT analysis for small business. Albeit generic it covers most of SME organisations in EUROPE.

Tools

SWOT Analysis for Education, Schools, Colleges and Universities by Mike Morrison – link

This is a guide aimed at educational institutions on how to conduct a proper SWOT analysis.

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Identify external factors

The second section of this module is focusing on how to identify external factors that affect our environment. For this we are going to use the PESTEL Analysis. This is a strategic framework used to evaluate the external environment of an organisation by breaking down the opportunities and risks into Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors. The PESTEL analysis is very important while scouting for ideas because it allows us to identify opportunities and threats in our REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM. The difference between the PESTESL and the SWOT analysis is that the PESTEL analysis is mostly used to identify the effect of external factors in our ecosystem, and the SWOT analysis is use to identify internal factors that affect our organisation.

The PESTEL canvas in figure x includes some questions that organisations have to answer regarding Horizon Europe proposals. There are of course many questions we must ask ourselves in order to get a holistic image of our region and its needs, the opportunities and strengths that might exist within it and its threats. Each region is different and thus it is crucial to implement this analysis when we are looking for proposal ideas. One of the main outcomes of this PESTEL is that we are going to be able to recognize the challenges and needs of the stakeholders in the region.

> **Suggested readings**
>
> **PESTEL analysis, CIPD** – link
>
> *This resource describes the basic concept of PESTEL analysis and it also includes factsheets.*

Asset Mapping

Once we are done with the SWOT and PESTEL analysis we are going to move on to the next step which is to undertake an asset mapping exercise. This is a systematic process of cataloguing key services, benefits, and resources within the community, such as individuals' skill sets, organisational resources, physical space, institutions, associations, and elements of the local economy. This process can help us to:

- Identify community assets and strengths
- Ensure the intervention's relevance to community needs
- Obtain buy-in from the community

It is obvious that asset mapping has to do with our regional ecosystem and regional stakeholders as we need to identify our target groups and potential partners. In figure x you can find an example on what community assets look like.

Politics	Economy	Social	Technology	Environmental	Legal
•Are there any specific regulations? •What branch of the government is responsible for European funds?	•What is the budget of your National Agency? •What are the funding rates?	•What are the social norms in your region? •What are the marginilised groups in your region and how big are they? •Who are the stakeholders?	•What are the latest trends in your country? •Does new technology arrive fast to your region and does it get applied?	•What are the regional environmental laws and are they satisfactory? •Is there a need for change regarding environmental protection?	•What laws are applied in your region regarding fundings, oblications etc? •Is there a need for

Figure x - custom PESTEL questions for this module

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Examples of Community Assets that Might be Included in an Asset Map

Associations:
Animal care groups
Anti-crime groups
Block clubs
Business organizations
Charitable groups
Civic event groups
Special needs groups
Education groups
Elderly groups
Environmental groups

Physical Space:
Gardens
Parks
Playgrounds
Parking lots
Bike paths
Forest/forest preserves
Picnic areas
Campsites
Fishing spots
Duck ponds

Institutions:
Schools
Universities
Community colleges
Hospitals
Libraries
Social service agencies
Nonprofits
Museums
Fire departments
Media

Individuals:
Gifts, skills, capacities, knowledge and traits of:
Youth
Older adults
Artists
TANF recipients
People with disabilities
Students
Parents
Entrepreneurs

Local Economy:
Business
Consumer expenditures
Merchants
Chamber of commerce
Business associations
Banks
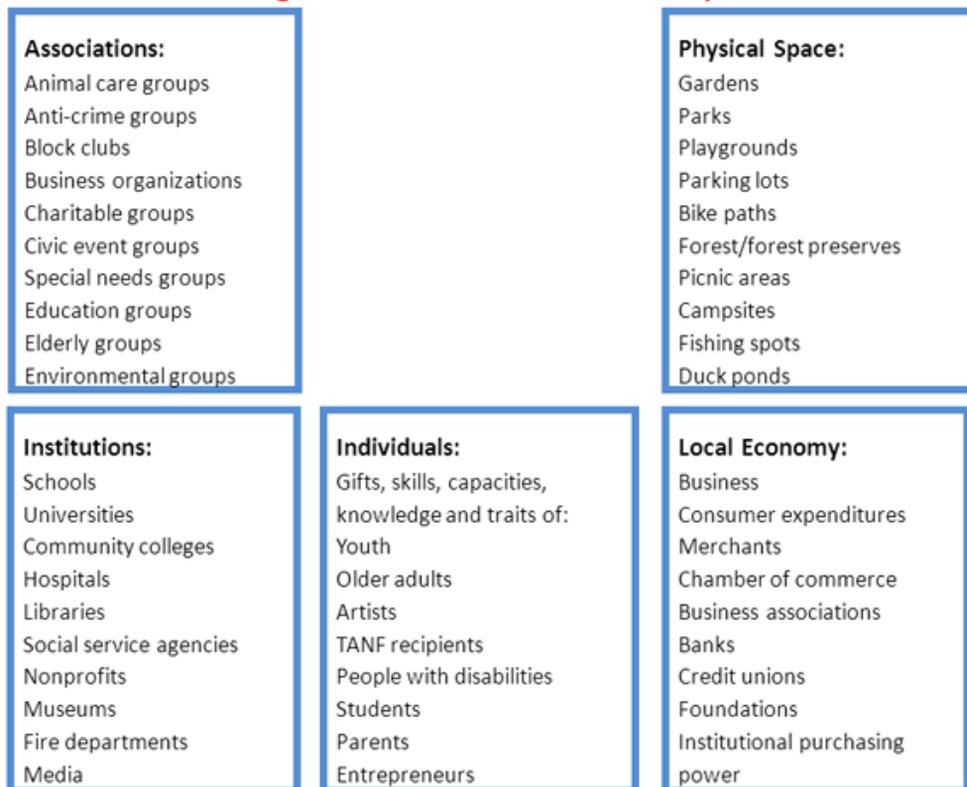Credit unions
Foundations
Institutional purchasing power

Figure x Example of Community Assets (source: Discovering Community Power: A Guide to Mobilizing Local Assets and Your Organization's Capacity, Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J.; Asset-Based Community Development Institute, School of Education and Social Policy; Northwestern University, 2005.)

Planning out your Scouting

Before starting to scout for ideas, it is important to plan out the various parts of this process. We have prepared a chart that provides an image of the various parts of ''scouting for ideas'', see figure x. We will outline the four main elements, from left to right.

Organisational strengths and weaknesses

Once you have used the SWOT analysis and you have identified your organisation's strengths and weaknesses and managed to identify which topics you are going to work on, it is suggested to build on your existing accomplishments. Seek calls that are related to topics that you have already worked on.

Alignment of ideas with project calls

Do not hesitate to contact your National Agency to ask questions and seek more information; National Agencies are the ones responsible for assisting you with your projects and calls. The European commission has launched a very useful tool called S3 Specialisation. The purpose of which is to provide advice to EU countries and regions for the design and implementation of their Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). It is also advised to enquire about the funding rate for a call that you are interested in, and what TRL level it operates at in order to make sure that you are actually financially able to work on a call

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Idea Generation methods

Another useful tool provided by the European Commission is the ability to search for past or on-going projects that have received funding from the European Commission and are suggested as good practices. Additionally, once you identify ''good practices'' that fit with your proposal, it is suggested to use other business templates to plan out the progress, milestones and deliverables of the proposal you are writing. Explore the grants and tender section on the website of the European Commission and browse through the calls to scout for calls that might interest you.

Stakeholders/Partner finding

There is a different module designed for this topic, but it is still worth mentioning. Forming a consortium is very important for Horizon Europe projects. Seek to find partners from various areas both in business and academia. Additionally, make contact with various organisations regarding the stakeholders of the proposal you are writing in order to get in touch with people who might want to join you.

The more time we spend planning and scouting, the more likely we are to find a call that actually suits us. There are many negatives that can arise from writing and submitting a proposal that does not suit us.

Latest trends

Once you have a general idea on how to scout for ideas and on how to look for calls that suit you, we would like to discuss the latest trends. The Horizon Europe program focuses mainly on science, innovation, and industrial reform. Once you start looking at the calls available, you will discover that many of the calls have to do with new and emerging technologies that can be used to better our lives.
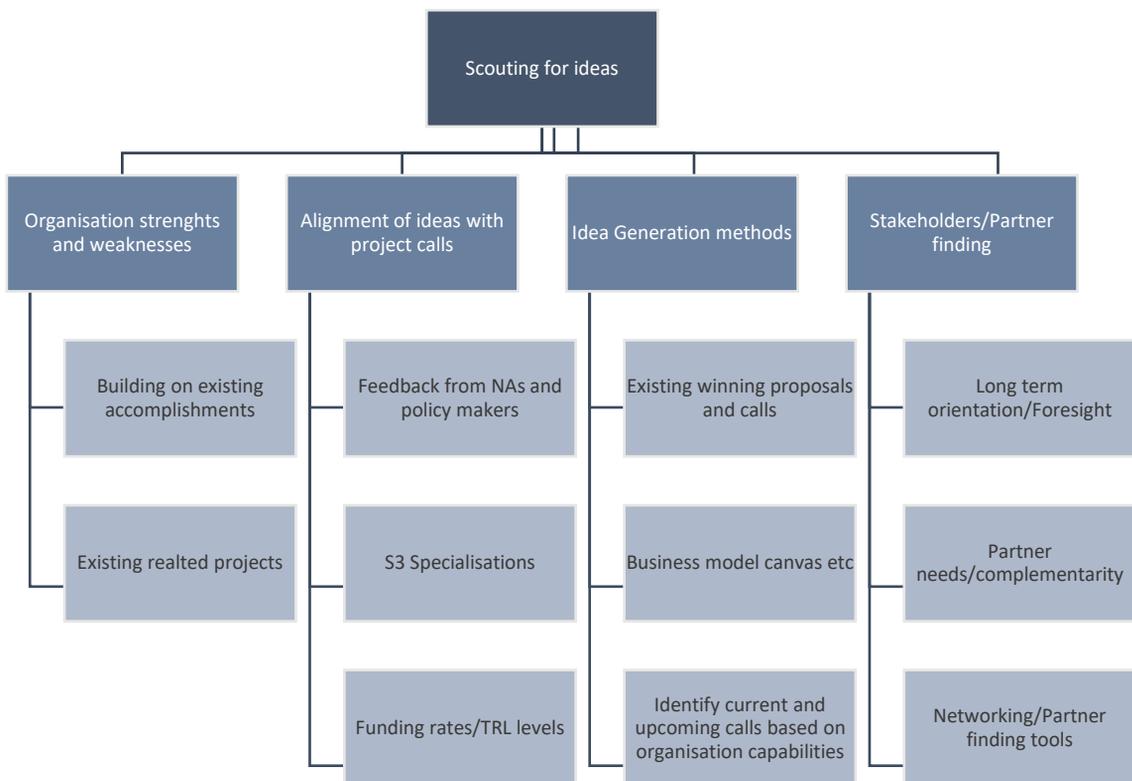

Figure x - Custom chart for planning out your scouting (source: Novatex)

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There are various ways to scout for new and emerging technologies, such as:

- Join tech forums
- Academic Literature surveys
- Social media
- Search engines
- Attend technological events

The world around us is constantly changing and we have to keep up with the latest trends and their applications. It might sound like a difficult task, but the easiest way to do your own research. Everything you need to know is to be found on the internet. The important aspect of doing your own research is to be able to evaluate the relevance and potential of these new technologies. It is necessary to evaluate these technologies based on specific criteria. Whilst we are the ones choosing this criteria, they have to align with the Horizon Europe Pillars and the external environmental factors found through the PESTEL analysis. We should take into consideration the time spectrum of a particular emerging technology, its impact and how significant it looks like it's going to be.

Are you an educator?

You can click here to go to the syllabus on page xx. This syllabus includes suggestions on the delivery of the module.

References

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