TOPIC 6:

PROJECT NARRATIVE

What is on our mind? What to write? The project narrative refers to the description of all its parts, according to the format set by the donor. In this segment, we write texts as answers to the posed questions, and we try to tell an authentic story. The most important segments of the narrative are as follows:

- Relevance
- Methodology
- Partnership
- Impact (dissemination) and sustainability

The project narrative provides one with a complete picture of what we wish to do, with the exception of the cost of each work package, i.e. project activities, since this is the information that we provide in the budget form. The main skills that one needs in order to compose a competitive narrative part of the project are as follows: the knowledge of language and excellent written communication skills; using a writing style that is more technical and less literary, thus demonstrating the knowledge of the programme and the technical language of grants; storytelling skills, and brevity and consistency in narration.

All questions and sub-questions that appear in the narrative need to be clearly answered. It often happens that despite the precisely formulated questions, the answers turn out to be elusive or fail to provide the required information. Likewise, answers are often copied from one section to another, or they appear to be incomplete or unconvincing for evaluators of project applications.

Discussion - relevance. The narrative of a project proposal usually begins with questions (and sub-questions) relating to the relevance, i.e. the importance of our project. The importance of our project has to be determined and described in relation to identified authentic and justified needs in the area within which the intervention is carried out, target groups directly involved in the project, the intervention sector, and the priorities and goals of the call itself.

The project relevance answers the question of why we are doing something and it should draw the attention of the reader/evaluator to the importance of the topic discussed in a convincing way. In other words, the narrative part gives us the opportunity to build the case for our project, based on the relevant data. Regardless of the format of the narrative, the relevance segment should include an overview of the following 5 focal points that help to achieve project competitiveness:

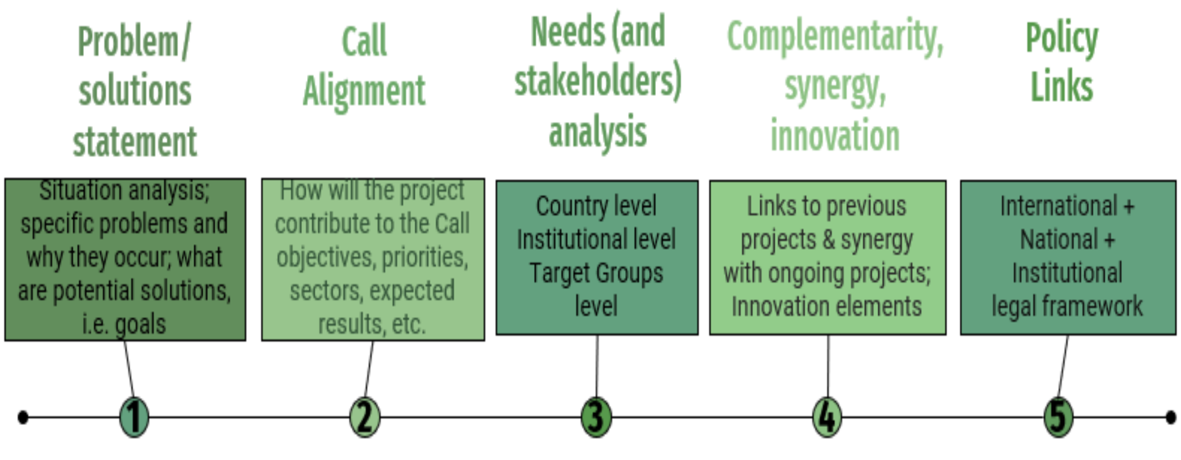

Figure 8: Project Relevance Description in 5 Key Points

When there is room, it is suggested to refer to the description of the project contribution to, i.e. the relevance for the so-called horizontal (*cross-cutting*) aspects of development which are important to almost all donors, and which relate to the elements of digital transition, green transition, social inclusion and gender equality. Projects in the field of agribusiness, agriculture and rural development can be particularly suitable for contributing to the topics (even if they are secondary in relation to the focus of the project) of environmental protection, the introduction of ICT in rural areas, as well as the position of vulnerable groups in rural areas, especially (elderly) women and young people.

Horizontal (cross-cutting) aspects to consider			
01	02	03	04
Digital dimension	Green dimension	Social (inclusive) dimension	Gender dimension
Blended learning/mobilities; change of physical space and working in a virtual environment; Virtual cooperation & experimentation; Use of new technologies; Improving digital skills (digital knowledge transfer), etc.	How does the project incorporate green practices in different project phases. (e.g. bring about change of individual consumption habits, lifestyles); The project´s alignment with partners´ institutional practices regarding green policies; Contribution to the EU/SDG green agenda	Showcasing democratic values, participation of the underrepresented groups (vulnerable, marginalized society members) – inclusion & diversity	How does the project contribute to gender equality and balance, strengthen the socio-economic status of women and touch upon the balanced distribution of roles in the family, and society; Reflect on the project contribution to the relevant policies

Figure 9: Common Horizontal Aspects of Project Relevance

Experience has shown that most project proposals concerning grants deal more adequately with the description of the LM and methodology than with the description of relevance, even though the questions relating to relevance are the first to be answered and directly concern the overall impact that the project is expected to achieve based on defined problems and needs.

Moreover, when it comes to projects that are submitted in two steps, the relevance described at the first step constitutes an elimination criterion for submitting the entire project. Some of the most common mistakes that both novice and experienced applicants may make regarding relevance descriptions are presented in the picture below.

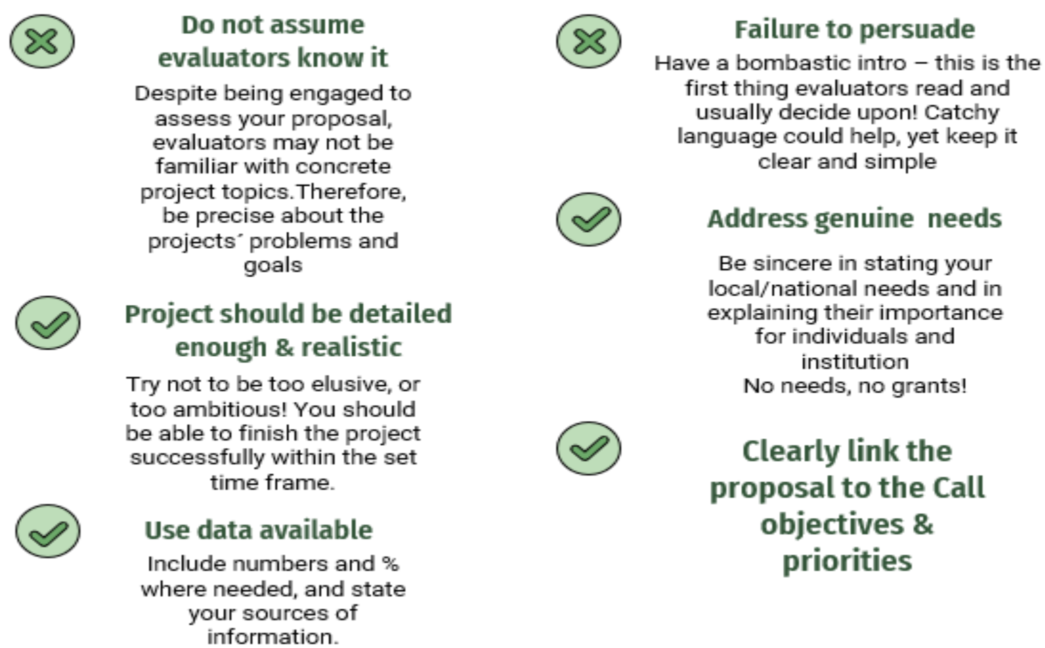

Figure 10: Relevance – common mistakes

Outcomes and examples - relevance. The questions and sub-questions that need to be answered in the narrative part about the relevance of the project are formulated differently in relation to different calls and approaches of donors. For instance, with the Horizon Europe projects, they are included in the *Excellence* part.

The main outcome of this segment is the correctly and competitively described project relevance which will unequivocally communicate to the project evaluators the following: the efficiency and effectiveness of the proposal, the range of influence, the uniqueness of the proposal, the usefulness for the community and individuals, the context in which the change should happen, and why it should happen.

Examples of frequently asked questions and sub-questions, and a suggested approach to providing answers:

1. ***The context and general objective –*** *Describe the general/international context in which the project takes place and how the idea came about; describe how the project contributes to the general objective of the call, the priorities and thematic focus of the call and the expected results (if defined) - i.e. the assigned/expected scope of work;*
2. ***Needs analysis and specific objectives****. Describe how the project contributes to the specific objectives of the call; clarify your specific goals (use the SMART principle) that you have defined based on identified problems; explain the problems and present the situation in the area the project deals with in the target country, region, local community; present the needs of the sector to which the project refers, local communities, identified target groups and beneficiaries, as well as partner institutions; describe the target groups of the project and other stakeholders, the method of their selection and participation in the project; use numbers and percentages (%) wherever possible;*
3. ***Complementarity, innovation, added value****. Complementarity refers to the description of how the project relies on previous knowledge and work in the area of intervention (or previous scientific achievements); comment on the complementarity with other projects of the same or other donors, especially those implemented so far by*

the project partners; describe the elements of innovation[1]; when describing the added value[2] of the project, a review of the project's contribution to topics of horizontal importance is expected - promotion of good practices in the field of intervention, promotion of gender equality, promotion of public-private-civil partnerships, and the like.

METHODOLOGY

4. *and the like.*

[1]The concept of innovation does not necessarily refer to new horizons from the scientific standpoint (except in the context of scientific projects such as Horizon Europe); it is possible to highlight any novelties that the project brings, such as - the inclusion of a specific target group, or a local community, testing a new method and the like.

[2] In some calls, a reference to the EU added value is requested, whereby it should be described how the project has the potential to influence other EU countries to use the results, especially border territories; therefore, it describes the transnational dimension of the project and the replication potential of project results.

Figure 11: Methods and methodology

Discussion - methodology. When the description of the project´s relevance is completed, it is time to move to the segment of methodology description in the narrative part[3]. Methodology answers to the question of *how* we work. Also, in this segment of the project narrative, we actually describe and *defend* the selection of activities and work packages exactly as they have been defined in the LM, defining the relations between them, as well as the time frame for the implementation of activities/work packages. The use of different methods indicates the existence of project phases - preparation (inception), implementation, dissemination and impact (the follow-up phase).

The goal of methodology is to determine/identify work methods appropriate for achieving the project's goals. Methodology represents an analysis of all methods and procedures planned for the project (including those relating to project management, risk management strategies, quality assurance - monitoring and evaluation, dissemination).

[3] Questions relating to methodology can be encountered throughout the narrative, depending on the donor's form.

We should keep in mind the differences between methods and methodology - while work methods are defined as conducting research, testing, and the like, methodology is an overview of specific techniques used in research, testing, and piloting.

Outcomes and examples - methodology. The most frequently asked questions relative to the description of project methodology are as follows:

1. *Describe the concepts and methodology.*
2. *What are the project risks and assumptions?*
3. *Describe how the project is managed and the quality of the project is ensured - what is the M&E strategy, what are the project management mechanisms, what are the mechanisms of coordination and communication between partners and with third parties?*
4. *What is the timeline for the implementation of each activity/work package?*

Some useful examples of working methods-concepts-practices in the agricultural sector are as follows:

- Entrecomp (Entrepreneurial competence) Framework in Agriculture,
- Local Action Groups (LAGs) as an example of private-public civil partnerships,
- Training of Trainers,
- Evidence-based policy making,

- Social experimentation and innovation in rural areas,
- IoT in agriculture,
- Financial support for third parties.

RISKS

Some typically considered examples of risks - which can be grouped according to the work packages they relate to and should optimally count five to eight (in medium-sized projects) - are presented in the table below.

Risk description	Work packages	Risk management measures/strategies
Operational risks: Withdrawal of a consortium member, withdrawal of a project manager or a key expert; low probability, high impact severity; Budget inadequacy; low probability, medium impact severity; Insufficient engagement of national partners in communication with stakeholders - medium probability; high impact severity.	WP1 WP2 WP3 WP4 WP5	The project Steering Committee is formed with the aim of strategic decision-making, including the replacement of partners in the event of the withdrawal. Problems with budget gaps will be identified in the initial phase of implementation, and all changes will be agreed upon with the donor; all partners are ready to use more resources for a certain period of time, if necessary; partners are a part of the national rural network for the development of agriculture and villages, so they are in a good position to engage additional human capacities of stakeholders for project quality implementation and results, including their engagement in M&E activities.
Technical risks: Difficulties that the rural community encounters with the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT), and the lack of basic infrastructure - including the Internet; lack of funds; medium probability, high impact severity.	WP4	Innovative technological solutions will take into account the existing local restrictions in relation to each local self-government unit; A systemic analysis of the implementation space and existing obstacles will be conducted and used in accordance with the work plan. Capacity building activities will be carried out through physical

		demonstrations as well as through virtually available materials.

Table 6: Risk Matrix – an example

Description of project management and quality assurance

Describing the aspects of project management (PM), and quality assurance (QA) is an integral part of project methodology and must be explained separately in order to convey an impression of the existing capacities for quality management and achieving the expected results, i.e. achieving goals.

In accordance with the level of project complexity, this segment should describe the following:

- management structures that are of strategic importance (the formation of a management body such as the Steering Committee chaired by a representative of the leading institution on the project, i.e. the coordinator is most often proposed); these are formed to last throughout the entire duration of the project;
- bodies of an operational nature, e.g. joint procurement commission;
- expert bodies that support joint work on project activities in accordance with the partners' expertise and expected results - work teams according to work packages, and the like;
- a special body dealing with M&E is often recommended in the form of an independent quality committee involving stakeholders outside the project consortium, and the like;

- the guiding principles of the PM, as well as listing the project managements documents, such as Quality Control Manual, Communication Strategy, Code of Ethics, Work Plan and others;
- Coordination and communication mechanisms of a virtual and non-virtual nature, and the like.

Timeline and other bits and bobs

Concerning the project timeline, a Gantt chart is usually filled out with activities planned for each month of project implementation.

It is important that the start-up phase is not too long - three to six months is the usual start-up period for projects lasting between 24 and 48 months. The final two to three months is the time when the consortium works intensively to close the project and initiate the final reporting. For each planned activity, a realistic duration and interdependence with other related activities should be determined.

If there is an equipment procurement activity on the project, it is important that it is done as early in the project as possible, and that the equipment is put into use during the project lifetime.

If there is an activity on the project, i.e. more often a work package that involves re-granting, i.e. the possibility of awarding mini-grants to small-scale and less experienced organisations, the time frame for such an activity must be defined in relation to the complexity of the grant scheme and the expected level of work of each partner in implementing the grant scheme, with a specially defined preparatory phase, mini-grant implementation phase, grant scheme closing phase, and support programme evaluation.