Integrating Activities for Starting Communities

A 'Starting Community' has never been supported for the integration of its infrastructures under FP7 or Horizon 2020 calls, in particular within an integrating activity.

An Integrating Activity will mobilise a comprehensive consortium of several key research infrastructures[[Exceptionally, the consortium may include only one research infrastructure providing access, if this facility is of a truly unique nature.]] in a given field as well as other stakeholders (e.g. public authorities, technological partners, research institutions) from different Member States, Associated Countries and other third countries[[Legal entities established in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, Mexico and USA, which provide, under the grant, access to their research infrastructures to researchers from Members States and Associated countries, are eligible for funding from the Union.]] when appropriate, in particular when they offer complementary or more advanced services than those available in Europe.

Funding will be provided to support, in particular, the trans-national and virtual access provided to European researchers (and to researchers from Third Countries under certain conditions), the cooperation between research infrastructures, scientific communities, industries and other stakeholders, the improvement of the services the infrastructures provide, the harmonisation, optimisation and improvement of access procedures and interfaces.

To this extent, an Integrating Activity shall combine, in a closely co-ordinated manner:

(i) Networking activities, to foster a culture of co-operation between research infrastructures, scientific communities, industries and other stakeholders as
appropriate, and to help develop a more efficient and attractive European Research Area;

(ii) Trans-national access or virtual access activities, to support scientific communities in their access to the identified key research infrastructures;

(iii) Joint research activities, to improve, in quality and/or quantity, the integrated services provided at European level by the infrastructures.

All three categories of activities are mandatory as synergistic effects are expected from these different components.

Access should be provided only to key research infrastructures of European interest, i.e. those infrastructures able to attract significant numbers of users from countries other than the country where they are located. Other national and regional infrastructures in Europe can be involved in the project, in particular in the networking activities for the exchange of best practises, without necessarily be beneficiaries of the action.

The research infrastructures of a 'Starting Community' usually show a limited degree of coordination and networking at present. The strongest impact of an integrating activity is expected typically to arise from a focus on networking, standardisation and establishing a common access procedure for trans-national and/or virtual access provision.

In line with the strategy for EU international cooperation in research and innovation (COM(2012)497), Integrating Activities should, whenever appropriate, give due attention to any related initiatives internationally (i.e. outside the EU) and foster the use and deployment of global standards.

Integrating Activities should also organise the efficient curation, preservation and provision of access to the data collected or produced under the project, defining a data management plan, even when they opt out of the Pilot on Open Research Data. Data management, interoperability (definition of metadata and ontologies) as well as advanced data and computing services should be addressed where relevant. To this extent, proposals should build upon the state of the art in ICT and e-infrastructures for data, computing and networking, working in cooperation with e-infrastructure service providers.

Integrating Activities in particular should contribute to fostering the potential for innovation, including social innovation, of research infrastructures by reinforcing the partnership with industry, through e.g. transfer of knowledge and other dissemination activities, knowledge sharing through co-creation, activities to promote the use of
Researchers will have wider, simplified, and more efficient access to the best research infrastructures they require to conduct their research, irrespective of location. They benefit from an increased focus on user needs.

Operators of related infrastructures develop synergies and complementary capabilities, leading to improved and harmonised services. There is less duplication of services, leading to an improved use of resources across Europe. Economies of scale and saving of resources are also realised due to common development and the optimisation of operations.

Innovation is fostered through a reinforced partnership of research organisations with industry.

Integrating Activities are expected to duly take into account all relevant ESFRI and other world-class research infrastructures to exploit synergies, to reflect on sustainability and to ensure that rationally designed, comprehensive and coherent overall concepts for European Infrastructures are being pursued.

As the scope of an Integrating Activity is to ensure coordination and integration between all the key European infrastructures in a given field and to avoid duplication of effort, at most one proposal per area is expected to be submitted.

Further conditions and requirements that applicants should fulfil when drafting a proposal are given in part C of the section “Specific features for Research Infrastructures”. Compliance with these provisions will be taken into account during evaluation.

Integrating activities for starting communities range across all areas of science and technology. Proposals should not restrict their services to too narrow research fields and should address the wider scientific communities, even multidisciplinary ones, which can be served by the involved sets of research infrastructures.

The Commission considers that proposals requesting a contribution from the EU of up to EUR 5 million would allow this topic to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts.

European researchers need effective and convenient access to the best research infrastructures in order to conduct research for the advancement of knowledge and technology. The aim of this action is to bring together, integrate on European scale, and open up key national and regional research infrastructures to all European researchers, from both academia and industry, ensuring their optimal use and joint development.

- Researchers will have wider, simplified, and more efficient access to the best research infrastructures they require to conduct their research, irrespective of location. They benefit from an increased focus on user needs.
- Operators of related infrastructures develop synergies and complementary capabilities, leading to improved and harmonised services. There is less duplication of services, leading to an improved use of resources across Europe. Economies of scale and saving of resources are also realised due to common development and the optimisation of operations.
- Innovation is fostered through a reinforced partnership of research organisations with industry.
• A new generation of researchers is educated that is ready to optimally exploit all the essential tools for their research.

• Closer interactions between a larger number of researchers active in and around a number of infrastructures facilitate cross-disciplinary fertilisations and a wider sharing of information, knowledge and technologies across fields and between academia and industry.

• The integration of major scientific equipment or sets of instruments and of knowledge-based resources (collections, archives, structured scientific information, data infrastructures, etc.) leads to a better management of the continuous flow of data collected or produced by these facilities and resources.

• When applicable, the integrated and harmonised access to resources at European level can facilitate the use beyond research and contribute to evidence-based policy making.

• When applicable, the socio-economic impact of past investments in research infrastructures from the European Structural and Investment Funds is enhanced.

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