

# MSCA success story - tips from an awardee

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UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



# EpiTarget: Epigenome-targeted therapy for cholangiocarcinoma

European Commission - Research - Participants  
Proposal Submission Forms

Research Executive Agency

Horizon 2020

Call: H2020-MSCA-IF-2015

Topic: MSCA-IF-2015-EF


Type of Action: MSCA-IF-EF-ST

Proposal Number: 709161

Proposal Acronym: EpiTarget

- What went well
- What didn't go so well & should change in hindsight

Ref. Area(2016)242174\_22/01/2016

Proposal Evaluation Form		
	<b>EUROPEAN COMMISSION</b> Horizon 2020 - Research and Innovation Framework Programme	<b>Evaluation Summary Report</b>
<b>Call:</b>	H2020-MSCA-IF-2015	
<b>Funding scheme:</b>	Standard EF	
<b>Proposal number:</b>	709161	
<b>Proposal acronym:</b>	EpiTarget	
<b>Duration (months):</b>	24	
<b>Proposal title:</b>	Epigenome-targeted therapy for cholangiocarcinoma.	
<b>Activity:</b>	LIF	

## MSCA IF scoring criteria

Three criteria for evaluation:

- ✓ **Excellence** (50% weight)
- ✓ **Impact** (30% weight)
- ✓ **Implementation** (20% weight)



**SCORING:** Scores must be in the range 0-5,

Interpretation of the score:

- 0 - The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1 - Poor: The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- 2 - Fair: The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
- 3 - Good: The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
- 4 - Very Good: The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
- 5 - Excellent: The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

# EXCELLENCE

## Criterion 1 - Excellence

Score: **4.50** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 50.00%)

**Quality, innovative aspects and credibility of the research (including inter/multidisciplinary aspects)**

**Clarity and quality of transfer of knowledge/training for the development of researcher in light of the research objectives**

**Quality of the supervision and the hosting arrangements**

**Capacity of the researcher to reach or re-enforce a position of professional maturity in research**

### Strengths

- The candidate would address a timely question of high importance.
- The objectives and action plan are well thought out and the candidate would produce a substantial quantity of data.
- The project is ambitious and original, and has interdisciplinary elements involving in vitro, in vivo approaches, using patient samples.
- The applicant will be using cutting-edge technologies and has generated preliminary data that support overall feasibility.
- The fellow will gain new knowledge in the "OMICS" expertise of the hosting institution.
- The hosting institution will benefit from the experience of the candidate in the methylomics analysis, clinical statistics, and biomarker areas.
- The host institute provides an outstanding environment for the proposal.
- Although the capacities in mentoring and leadership abilities of the supervisor are not yet well established because of the early career stage, they have a very specific and high quality expertise in the field. The clarity in describing the most important scientific and career plans of the fellow shows the capacity and determination to reach the objectives regarding scientific & professional maturity.

### Weaknesses

- The rationale behind certain aspects of the project are not fully addressed. Mutations affect several chromatin modifiers but the ER focus the research only on histone/DNA modifiers as drug targets. Also it is unclear why only one epi-target will be selected for in vivo validation.

# Sell your project: Why this cancer? This topic? This time?

*“The candidate would address a timely question of high importance.”*

*My Proposal* → *Your Proposal*

## Cancer

Cholangiocarcinoma is a rare cancer types that we know little about

What differentiates your cancer from other cancers?

## Question

Cholangiocarcinoma had no treatment options beyond palliative chemotherapy

What unmet need is your topic addressing?

## Time

Very recent sequencing studies identified high mutation rates in epigenetic regulators

What is the current state-of-play in your cancer that makes your proposal needed now?

# Cancer requires inter-disciplinary innovative thinking

## - Deliver this in your MSCA IF proposal!

*"The project is ambitious and original, and has interdisciplinary elements involving in vitro, in vivo approaches, using patient samples."  
"The applicant will be using cutting-edge technologies and has generated preliminary data that support overall feasibility."*

### What are my models?

- Strengths
- Limitations
- Relevance to human disease?

### What are my techniques?

- Strengths
- Limitations
- Novelty?

### Is this technically feasible?

- Prior skills of fellow
- Skills of mentor/institute/collaborators
  - Preliminary data!

# Progress involves the acquisition of new knowledge

## - Contribute to knowledge sharing in your MSCA IF proposal!

*"The objectives and action plan are well thought out and the candidate would produce a substantial quantity of data."*

### Objectives

- 2-3 Objectives (O)
- Split into Tasks (T)
- Each task has an outcome

### Action Plan

- Os are inter-related
- Os are not inter-dependent
- Clear risks & mitigation strategies

### Data production

- Big data generation
- New constructs or models
- Ethical sharing of data

# Make evaluators believe in your dream team: Fellow, Mentor, Host Institution

*"The fellow will gain new knowledge in the "OMICS" expertise of the hosting institution.*

*The hosting institution will benefit from the experience of the candidate in the methylomics analysis, clinical statistics, and biomarker areas.*

*The host institute provides an outstanding environment for the proposal.*

*Although the capacities in mentoring and leadership abilities of the supervisor are not yet well established because of the early career stage, they have a very specific and high quality expertise in the field. The clarity in describing the most important scientific and career plans of the fellow shows the capacity and determination to reach the objectives regarding scientific & professional maturity.."*

**SYNERGY**

**SYNERGY**

*What new skills are brought by the fellow?*

Fellow

Mentor/  
Institute

*What skills are provided by the mentor/institute?*

**SYNERGY**

**SYNERGY**

*What skills are available in collaborator network?*



## Beware the risks of alternative views: Rationalization, Uncertainty, Limitations

### Weaknesses

*“The rationale behind certain aspects of the project are not fully addressed. Mutations affect several chromatin modifiers but the ER focus the research only on histone/DNA modifiers as drug targets”*

- **Is my title too general?**
- **Have I rationalized methods, approaches, decision points?**

*“Also it is unclear why only one epi-target will be selected for in vivo validation.”*

- **Have I emphasized the feasibility of specific experiments within my timeline?** (balance between feasibility and ambition)

# IMPACT

**Impact (definition): Have a strong effect on someone or something (re. your proposal)**

## Criterion 2 - Impact

Score: **5.00** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 30.00%)

**Enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources, skills, and working conditions to realise the potential of individuals and to provide new career perspectives**

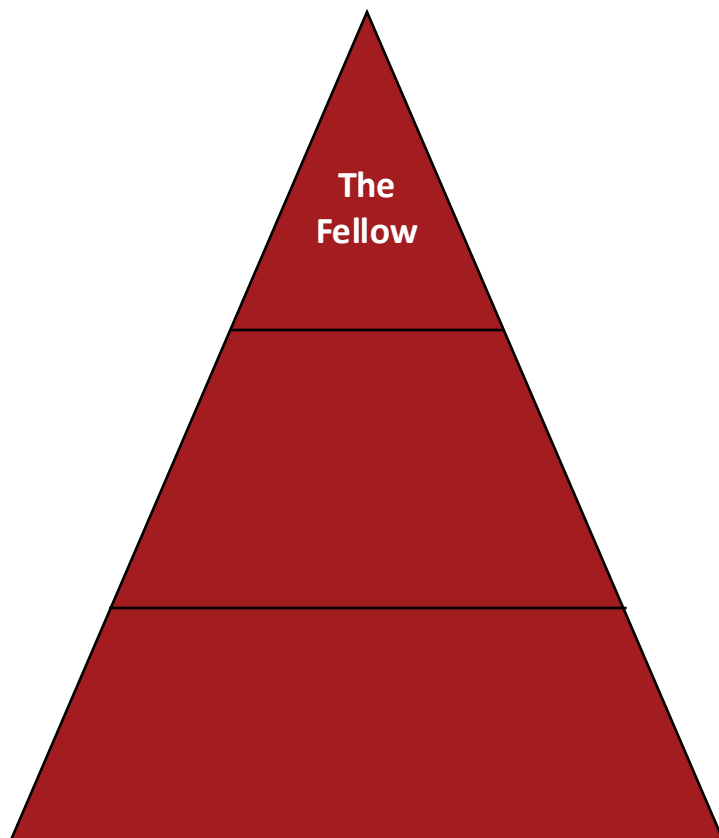
**Effectiveness of the proposed measures for communication and results dissemination**

### Strengths

- The new competences and skills that the fellow will obtain together with new collaborations, environment and mentoring will certainly provide new career perspectives. The training objectives are clear and convincing.
- The supervisor collaborations with industries are relevant for the project and career perspectives of the fellow.
- The proposed analyses have very good potential to improve our understanding of epigenetic-based therapies, which might be of great importance in cancer management, thus having an impact on the healthcare and business sectors.
- The dissemination plan is very well presented. The applicant includes a general and scientific audience, but also addresses the possibility of IPR protection.

## Impact on the fellow (i.e. you): Fellow, Mentor, Host Institution

*“The new competences and skills that the fellow will obtain together with new collaborations, environment and mentoring will certainly provide new career perspectives. The training objectives are clear and convincing.  
The supervisor collaborations with industries are relevant for the project and career perspectives of the fellow.”*



Spell it out simply for evaluators!

Impact on researcher profile:

- Development of new knowledge basis (examples)
- Accrual of new technical expertise (examples)
- Establishment of leadership skills (examples)
- Enhancement of translational profile (examples)
- Impact on employability (examples)

Connections with other sectors:

- Industry (direct or indirect association)
- Public Sector (hospital, government agencies)

## Impact on other sectors: Healthcare? Business?

*“The proposed analyses have very good potential to improve our understanding of epigenetic-based therapies, which might be of great importance in cancer management, thus having an impact on the healthcare and business sectors.”*



Healthcare &  
Business  
Sectors

In OECl academy, we are all working on cancer

How might our work affect the healthcare sector?

- Better treatment options for patients
- Alternative treatment options for patients
- Biomarkers for patient stratification
- New knowledge affecting healthcare policies

How might our work affect the business sector?

- New jobs for manufacturing drugs or developing healthcare policies?
- New tools to perform or optimize tasks?

# Impact on Wider Society: Scientific & Lay Audiences

*“The dissemination plan is very well presented. The applicant includes a general and scientific audience, but also addresses the possibility of IPR protection.”*

The bigger picture of your research!

Professional dissemination:

- Conferences? (examples)
- Publications in journals? (examples)
- Open access?

Lay dissemination:

- National Science Day participation
- Workshops for students
- Workshops for teachers
- Media engagement

Intellectual property rights (IPR)



Wider  
Society

# IMPLEMENTATION

## Criterion 3 - Implementation

Score: 5.00 (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 20.00%)

**Overall coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources**

**Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including quality management and risk management**

**Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)**

**Competences, experience and complementarity of the participating organisations and institutional commitment**

### Strengths

- The work packages, deliverables and the timelines are clearly described.
- The host institution demonstrates excellent experience in the management of external proposals, fellows and intellectual property. The management structure and progress monitoring strategy is satisfactory. Overall, the risks are well defined and the contingency plans are in place.
- The host institution has the infrastructure necessary for completion of the project and subsequent commercialization of results.
- The necessary resources are already in place (e.g. epi-drug bank, patient samples and data).
- There is a clear synergy between the host institution, host organization and the fellow.

# Organization is key!

## Work packages, Timelines, Deliverables

*“The work packages, deliverables and the timelines are clearly described.”*

*Fellowship Gantt chart:*

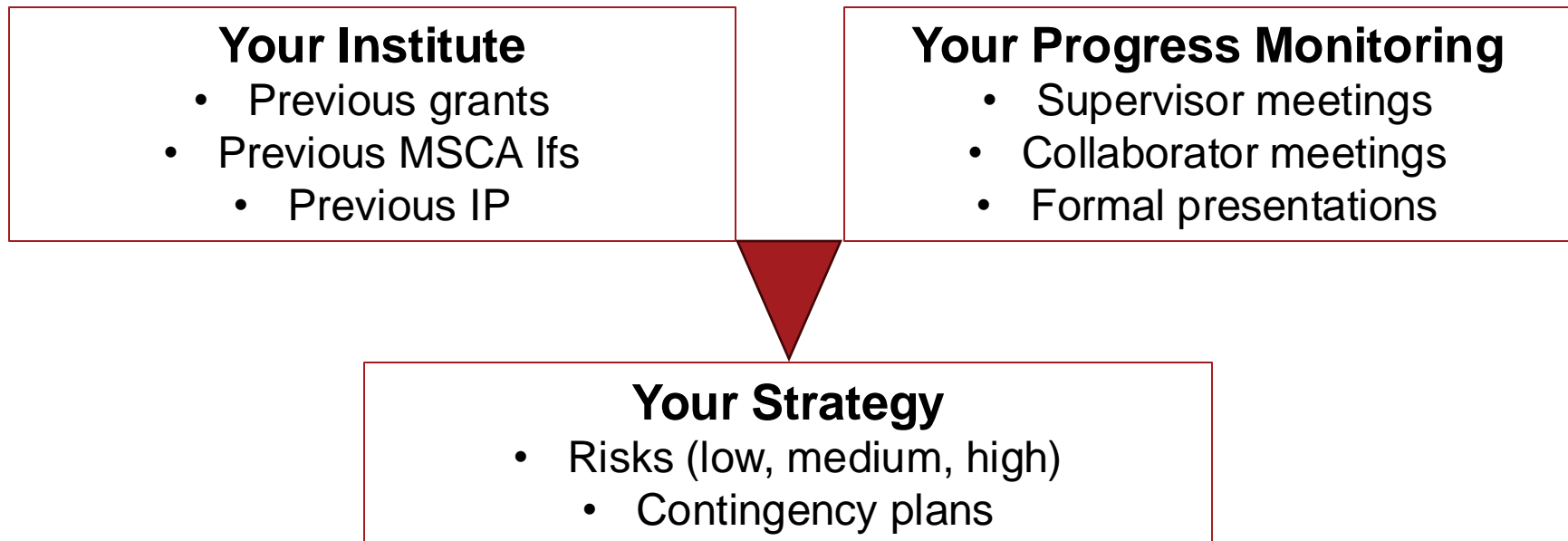
Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
<b>WP1</b>																								
Milestones						1.1	1.2																	
Deliverables						1.1	1.2																	
<b>WP2</b>																								
Milestones								2.1					2.2											
Deliverables								2.1					2.2											
<b>WP3</b>																								
Milestones															3.1							3.2		
Deliverables															3.1							3.2		
<b>WP4</b>																								
Milestones								4.1			4.2		4.3											
Deliverables			4.1			4.2			4.3															
<b>WP5</b>																								
Milestones						5.1						5.2				5.3			5.2					
Deliverables										5.1					5.3				5.2			5.3		5.4
<b>Progress Review</b>			PR			PR			PR			PR			PR			PR			PR			PR

- WP1-3 (objectives 1-3): specific milestones & deliverables clearly described in text.
- WP4 (training): specific milestones & deliverables clearly described in text.
- WP5 (dissemination, exploitation, public engagement): specific milestones & deliverables clearly described in text.

# Management is key!

## Institutional Experience, Risks, Contingencies

“The host institution demonstrates excellent experience in the management of external proposals, fellows and intellectual property. The management structure and progress monitoring strategy is satisfactory. Overall, the risks are well defined and the contingency plans are in place.”





# Readiness is key!

## Infrastructure, Resources

*“The host institution has the infrastructure necessary for completion of the project and subsequent commercialization of results. The necessary resources are already in place (e.g. epi-drug bank, patient samples and data).”*

### Your Infrastructure

- Core facilities
- Equipment access

### Your Peers

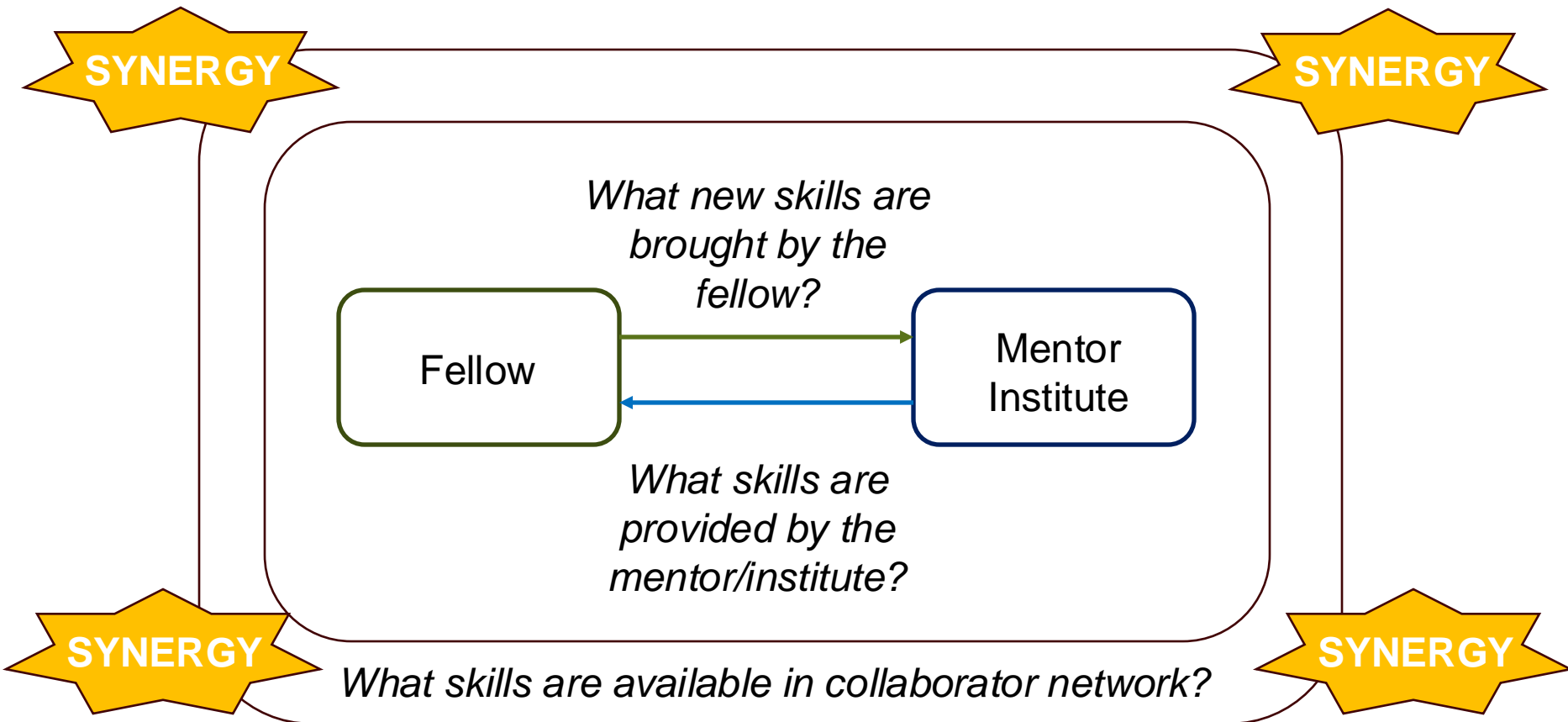
- Supervision
- Training

### Your Resources

- Drugs, reagents
  - Cells, mice
- Patient biomaterial

# Back to your dream team: Fellow, Mentor, Host Institution

*"There is a clear synergy between the host institution, host organization and the fellow."*



## Some general tips

### Preparation is a marathon, not a sprint

- Start preparation early (ideally >3 months)
- Ask others outside your group to read & provide feedback

### Use EU language to your advantage

- Make it easy for evaluators

### Think synergy

- Fellow-Host-Institute

### Don't forget key considerations

- Ethics, gender dimension, data-sharing, open access
- Keep up-to-date with EU commission's guidelines



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- Dr. Prson Gautam

## Contact information

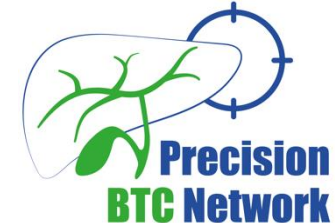
- [colm.rourke@bric.ku.dk](mailto:colm.rourke@bric.ku.dk)



Kræftens Bekæmpelse



Horizon 2020  
Programme



**Best wishes to all MSCA IF  
applicants in September 2025!**