"GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT!"

Know the evaluation process and criteria to prepare a competitive research proposal

Paul JAMET

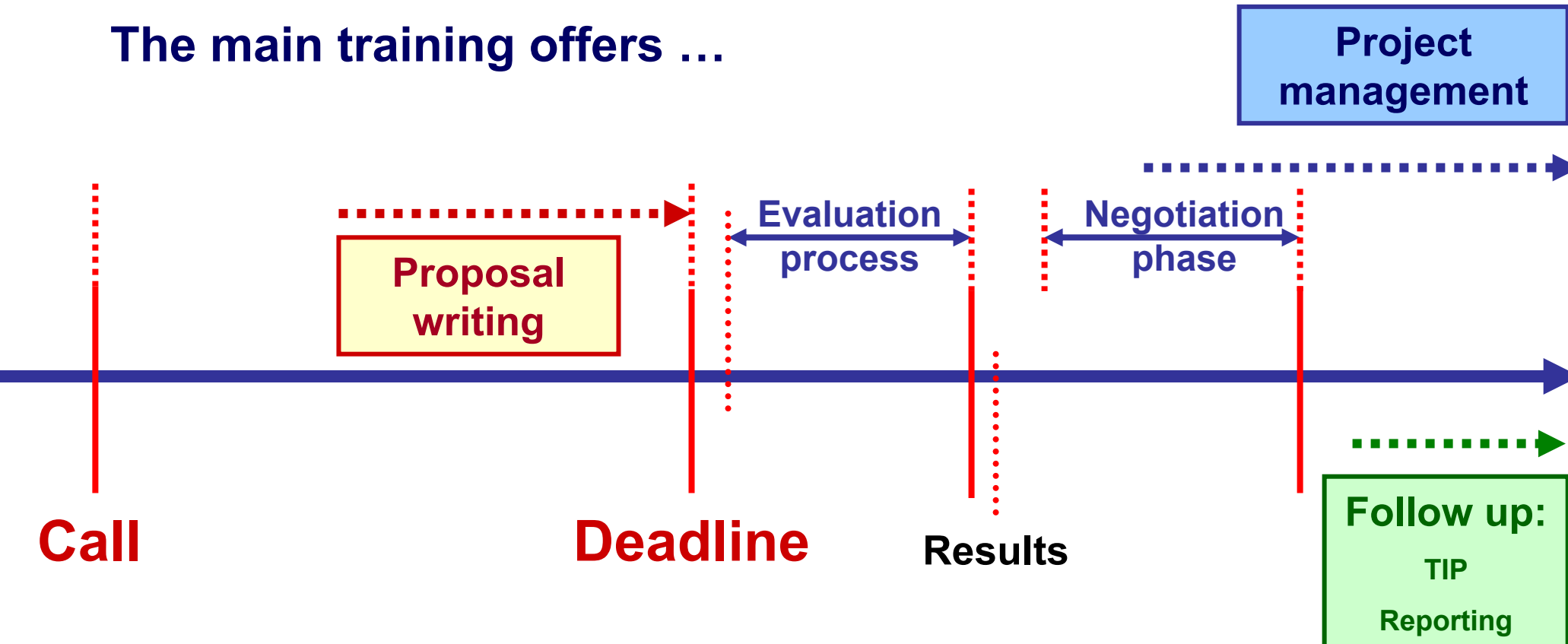**Ministry in charge of Higher Education and Research**

French NCP co-ordinator

paul.jamet@recherche.gouv.fr

PROCESS DIAGRAM

The main training offers …
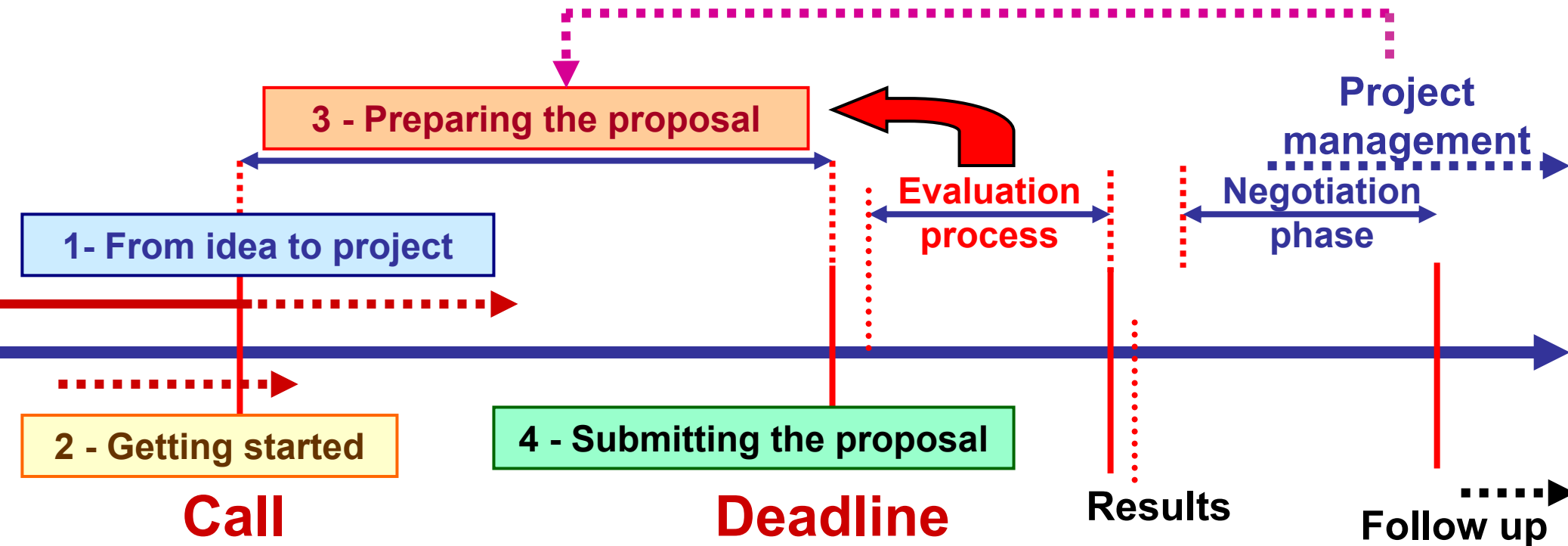
Project
management

Evaluation
process

Negotiation
phase

Proposal
writing

Call

Deadline

Results

Follow up:

TIP

Reporting

OBJECTIVES

PROCESS DIAGRAM

Project management

3 - Preparing the proposal

Evaluation process

Negotiation phase

1- From idea to project

2 - Getting started

4 - Submitting the proposal

Call

Deadline

Results

Follow up

1- From idea to project

IDEAS

Many ideas, problems, research questions, opportunities,

Pre-proposal or outline proposal

Filter

Relevant, valuable, calculated risks, milestones, deliverables,
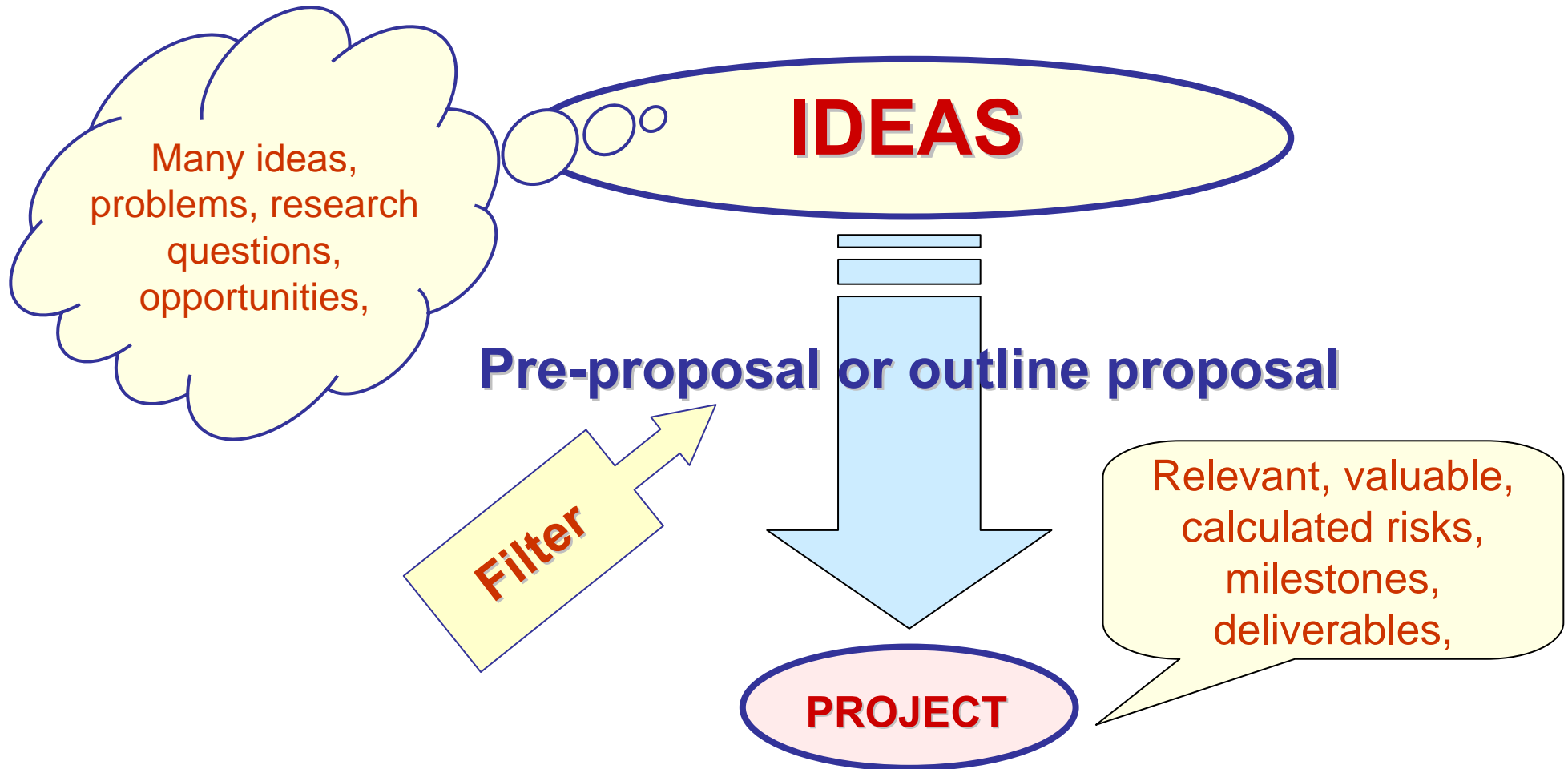
PROJECT

1- From idea to project
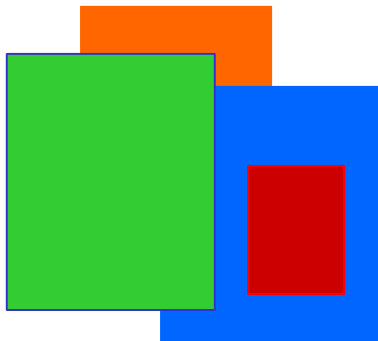
Evolution

Your initial idea

The Final Project

1 - In your initial idea taking the largest part (blue) was not reasonable, and you have decided to concentrate on a smaller part of the project (red)

2 - Finally, the project is different and your contribution has changed

2 - Getting started (1)

Advance preparation

Know:

- **The funding body** (Europe): read Green papers, White papers, Action plans, all relevant policy papers on European strategies;

- **The Framework programme** and the specific programmes **:** be aware of the priorities, of the participation rules, …

- **Your subject:** relevant documents, i.e. text of the call, work programme, instruments,

- **Yourself:** what do you want to do? what are your strengths and your weaknesses. Play to your strengths!

- **The evaluation process :**

Know how your proposal will be evaluated before you write it

You must convince expert-evaluators

REMEMBER …

Your main objective is to prepare and to write a proposal to get it through the evaluation process successfully

Work step by step to a winning proposal through collaboration and teamwork

2 - Getting started (2)

Know the Seventh Framework Programme from which you seek support: avoid to waste your time writing a proposal that has no chance of success.

- **Read carefully all the documents**: text of the call, work programme, participation rules, evaluation manual and **pay attention to specific goals and specific requirements!**

- **Contact NCPs,**

- **Contact a Scientific Officer,**

- **Discuss your proposal with colleagues.**

2 - Getting started (3)

Read these two documents:

❑ Guidelines on Proposal Evaluation and Selection Procedures
❑ **Guidance Notes for Evaluators** : specific for the call

Know:

❑ **The procedure**

➔ **Guidelines on Proposal Evaluation and Selection Procedures**

Both available soon on CORDIS

❑ **The criteria**
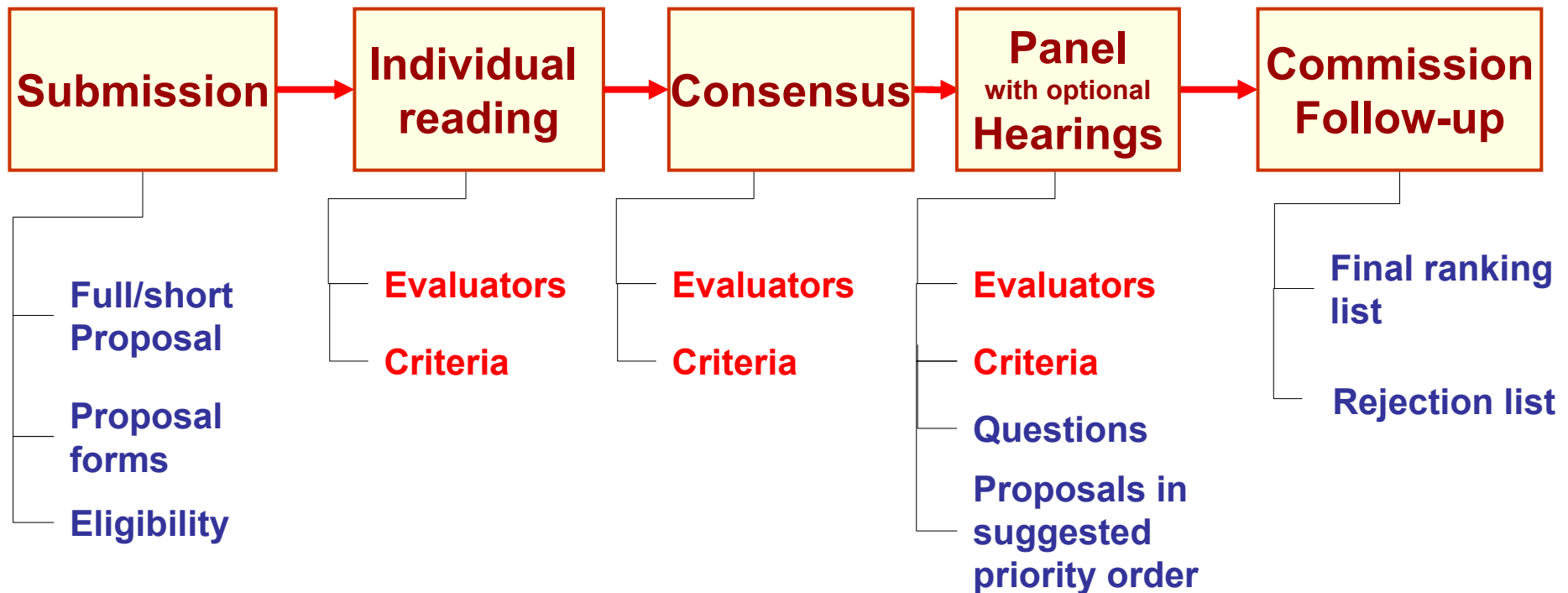**& forms filled by the evaluators**

➔ **Handbook on evaluation and selection of proposals**

Evaluation of proposals:
basic facts and figures

- Funding decisions are based on peer review of research proposals
    - ➔ There is no *juste retour!*

- High quality evaluators are at the core of the evaluation system

- Involves 4500 to 5000 independent experts every year

- About 16,000 proposals (and rising) are evaluated annually

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Submission	→	Individual reading	→	Consensus	→	Panel with optional Hearings	→	Commission Follow-up

Submission
- Full/short Proposal
- Proposal forms
- Eligibility

Individual reading
- Evaluators
- Criteria

Consensus
- Evaluators
- Criteria

Panel with optional Hearings
- Evaluators
- Criteria
- Questions
- Proposals in suggested priority order

Commission Follow-up
- Final ranking list
- Rejection list

Eligibility checks

- Date and time of receipt of proposal on or before deadline for receipt
  - Firm deadlines
- Minimum number of eligible, independent partners
  - As set out in work programme and the call
- Completeness of proposal
- "Out of scope"
- Others (*e.g.* budget limits) *New for FP7*

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Criteria adapted to each funding scheme
  - specified in the work programme

- <u>Divided into three main criteria:</u>

  - *S&T Quality* (relevant to the topic of the call)
    - Concept, objective, work-plan
  - *Implementation*
    - Individual participants and consortium as a whole
    - Allocation of resources
  - *Impact*
    - Contribution to expected impacts listed in work programme
    - Plans for dissemination/exploitation

New for FP7

The criteria: *scoring*

- Criteria generally marked out of 5

- individual threshold = 3

- overall threshold = 10

- Can vary from call-to-call

New for FP7

The experts (1)

- The Commission draws on a wide pool of evaluators
  - c. 50,000 in FP6

- Calls for "candidates" published 14 December
  - Call for applications from individuals; and from institutions
  - Applications via CORDIS

- Mass-emailing of FP6 experts
  - A simple procedure to ensure registration for FP7

- Commission invites individuals, call-by-call
  - Not self-selection!

- Expertise, and experience are paramount
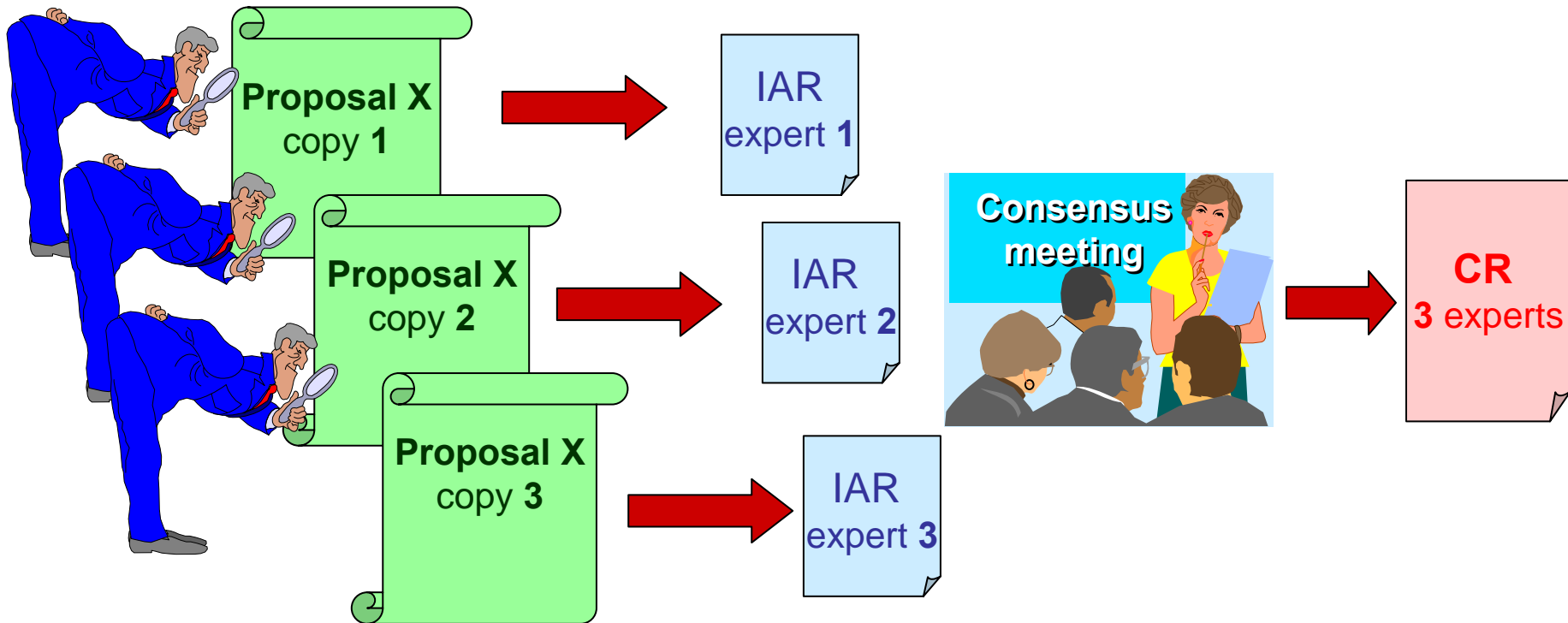 - Geography, gender and "rotation" also considered

The experts (2)

- Experts agree to terms and conditions of an "appointment letter"

- Typically, an individual will review 6-8 proposals "remotely"….

- …then spend a couple of days in Brussels

- Some will participate in "hearings" with the consortia

- Travel and subsistence reimbursed
  - Plus €450 honorarium per day

- Experts sign confidentiality and conflict of interest declaration

- Names published after the evaluations

For each proposal:

May be "remote" evaluation

Proposal X copy **1** → IAR expert **1**

Proposal X copy **2** → IAR expert **2**

Proposal X copy **3** → IAR expert **3**

Consensus meeting

CR 3 experts

Note: There may be more than 3 evaluators
IAR = Individual Assessment Report
CR = Consensus Report

Consensus

- Built on the basis of the individual assessments of all the evaluators

- Usually involves a discussion

- Moderated by a commission staff-member

- One expert acts as rapporteur

- Agreement on consensus marks and comments for each of the criteria

Panel review

- <u>Panel Meeting</u>
  - Compare consensus reports
  - Examines proposals with same consensus score (if needed)
  - Final marks and comments for each proposal
  - Suggestions on order of priority, clustering, amendments, etc.
- <u>Hearings with proposers may be convened</u>
  - Questions to the invited proposal coordinators
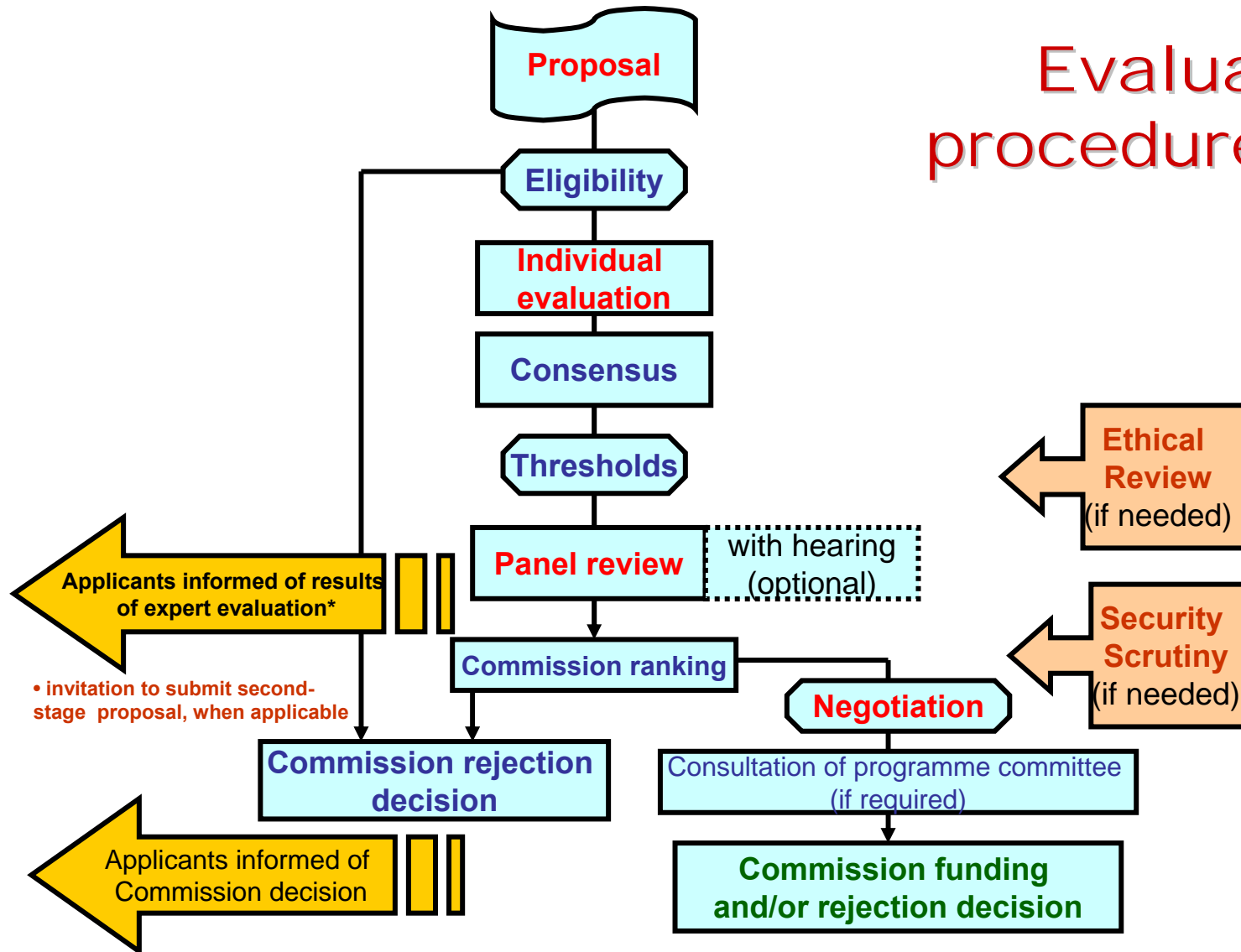 - Small number of proposal representatives

Commission Follow-up

- Evaluation summary reports sent to applicants
  - *initial information letter*
  - "Redress" procedure   *New for FP7*
- Draw up final ranked lists
- Information to the Programme Committee
- Commission decisions on rejected proposals
- Formal consultation of Programme Committee (when required)
- Contract negotiation
- Proposals selected for funding
- Survey of evaluators & Independent Observers' reports

Evaluation procedure in FP7

- Proposal
- Eligibility
- Individual evaluation
- Consensus
- Thresholds
- Panel review — with hearing (optional)
- Commission ranking
- Negotiation
- Ethical Review (if needed)
- Security Scrutiny (if needed)
- Commission rejection decision
- Consultation of programme committee (if required)
- Commission funding and/or rejection decision

Applicants informed of results of expert evaluation*

• invitation to submit second-stage proposal, when applicable

Applicants informed of Commission decision

3 - Preparing the proposal

Six key points:

❑ **Formulate (an) appropriate research objective(s);**

❑ **State your (research) objective(s) clearly in your proposal;**

❑ **Develop a realistic research plan;**

❑ **Frame your project around the work of others;**

❑ **Format, brevity, grammar and spelling are important;**

❑ **More common reasons for failure of proposals.**

Formulate (an) appropriate research objective(s)

S M A R T Objectives

S Specific

M Measurable

A Achievable

R Result-oriented

T Time-related

Good objectives are:

✓ "**S M A R T**"

✓ Developed co-operatively by partners,

✓ Under the control of the co-ordinator, the "core team", WP leader,

✓ Expressed clearly in writing,

✓ Not too complicated …

State your (research) objective(s) clearly in your proposal

proposal

Strategic objectives

Overall and specific objectives

Achievements

- European policies
- Framework programme

- Call & work programme
- Proposal itself

- What will be achieved …

⊠ **The research objective(s) of this proposal is (are) ….**

Develop a realistic research plan

A realistic research plan is a plan to accomplish your (research) objectives;

it will determine the success of the project:

- **Clear vision** of the project structure, work packages, tasks, …

- **Innovativeness** and **creativity** brought in by participants;

- **Work carried out** by each participants (no overlapping);

- **Management** approach (how the project is organised, how responsibilities are assigned, etc.);

- Template for scheduling, budgeting, **risk management**, etc.

⊠ **Don't hide potential difficulties, suggest alternative approaches**

to achieve objectives

Producing a Gantt Chart

A Gantt Chart helps organize **a plan** to implement a (research) project. It documents **what** is to be accomplished, **who** will be involved and **when** workpackages and tasks will take place and how they will interrelate. It shows at a quick glance **the course of the project**. Additionally it provides guidance for managing the project. A simple example looks like:
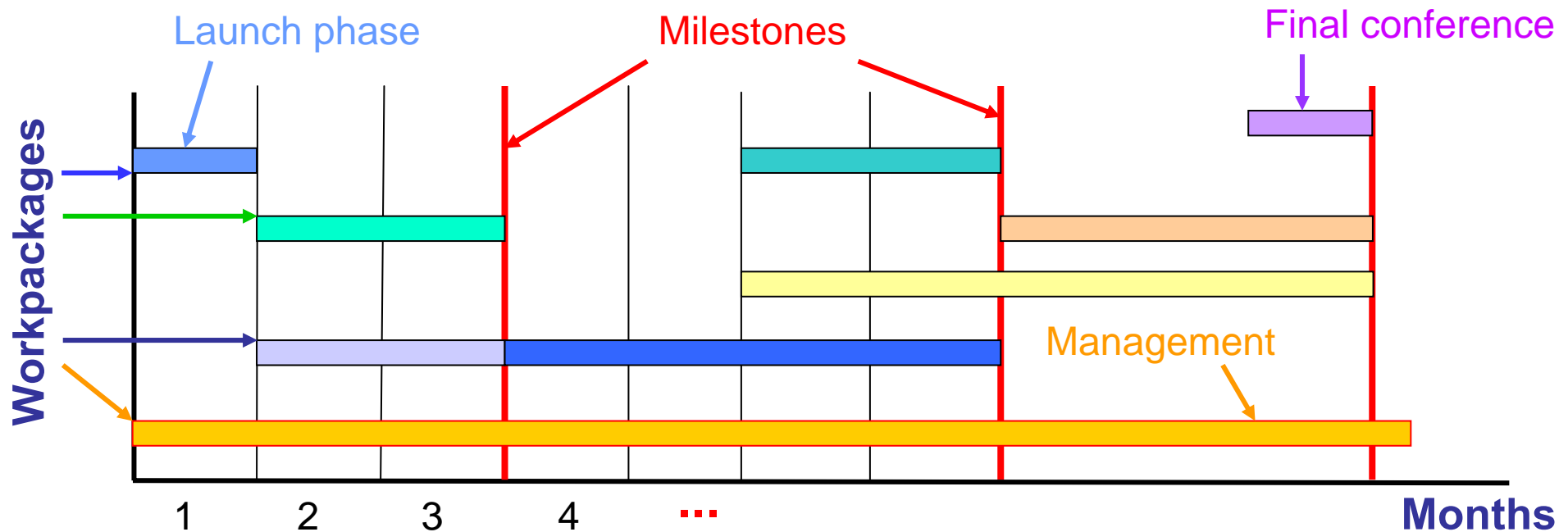
Frame your project around the work of others

❑ **Frame the project appropriately** (exact boundaries of the project);

❑ Make clear your contribution and your partners' contribution;

❑ Frame your project in terms of broader impact to the field and …

❑ <u>Describe the benefits for:</u>

- ▪ Europe,

- ▪ Regions,

- ▪ Industries (a more competitive Europe),

- ▪ Citizens.

⊠ **If successful, the benefits of this proposal will be …**

Format, brevity, grammar and spelling are important

A proposal is not rated based on its weight

- **Write, edit and proof read like a pro:**

   Make your proposal a pleasant reading experience, providing relevant concepts and making them clear

- **Take pity on the experts-evaluators: they are human!**

   Your are writing to the experts-evaluators, not to yourself

- **Educate the experts-evaluators: use figures appropriately to make and clarify points, but not as filler,**

- **Don't be verbose, don't cover every conceivable detail, don't use the smallest acceptable fonts, etc.**

From the NIAID-NIH web site:

http://www.niaid.nih.gov/ncn/grants/write/write_e3.htm

Many writing labs are available on the web

o **Write a topic sentence for each main topic:** then write a topic sentence for each sub topic in the outline;

o **Make one point in each paragraph:** this is key to creating text that's easy to read;

o **Divide the document into sections and subsections.** This organizes your text and, together with paragraph headers, creates white space;

o **Include bullets and lists:** they draw attention to key facts and create a visual break;

o **Use short sentences with a basic structure:** subject, verb, object;

o **Include transitions:** at the beginning of a new paragraph or concept;

o **Keep related ideas and information together:** *e.g.* put clauses and phrases as close as possible;

o **Use strong, active verbs:** write "We will develop a cell line," not "A cell line will be developed";

o **Use verb forms instead of abstract nouns:** say 'creating the assay leads to...'   rather than 'the creation of the assay leads to...

If writing is not your forte, get help

More common reasons for failure of proposals

- Missed deadline,
- Incomplete proposal (parts are missing),
- Does not fit objectives in call & work programme (**relevance**),
- Scientific content is not convincing: research is not innovative, not up-to-date with developments (**scientific excellence**),
- Alternative hypotheses are not considered,
- Too ambitious, problem more complex than proposers appear to realise,
- Proposal hastily put together and lacking coherence (**project management**),
- Likelihood of achieving success and value for money are not convincing.

4 - Submitting the proposal

❑ <u>**Proof read your proposal before it is sent:**</u>

Too many proposals are submitted with stupid mistakes, omissions and errors of all sorts

Don't spend months writing a proposal just to kill it with stupid mistakes that are easily prevented

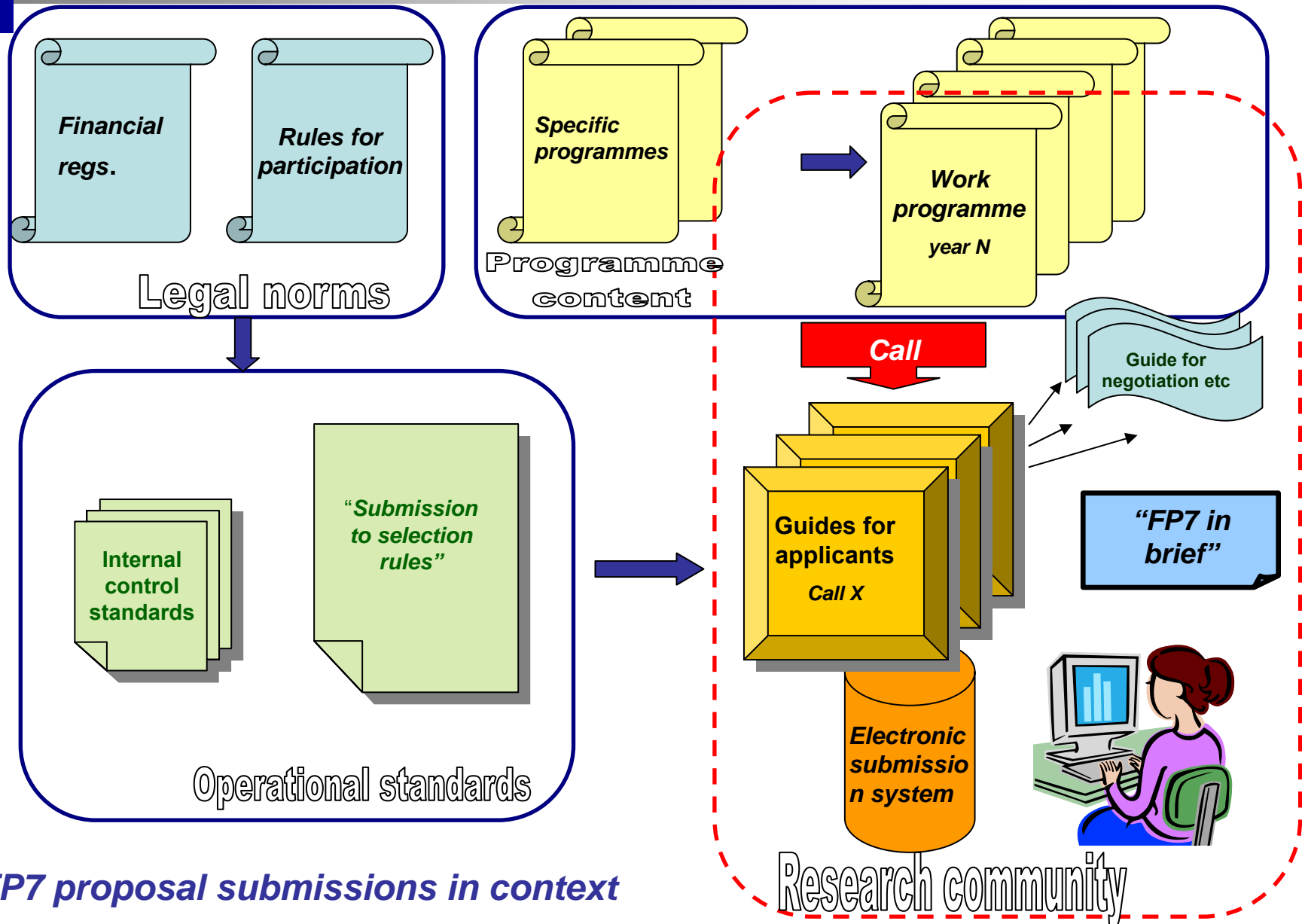❑ <u>**Submit your proposal in time:**</u>

A co-ordinator is responsible to submit the proposal in due time

Plan your work to submit one or two days before the deadline

The Commission strongly encourages the use of the on-line

Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS)

FP7 proposal submissions in context

Submission

- Proposal template given in Guide for applicants
  - Closely aligned to the evaluation criteria
  - Page limits set

  New for FP7

- Must be through the Electronic proposal submission system
  - Operational by 19 March 2007

- Proposals are normally submitted and evaluated in a single stage

- Deadlines are strictly enforced

Submission

- Two-stage submission
  - May be used for large, 'bottom up' calls
  - First stage: short proposal (about 10-20 pages), dealing with main scientific concepts and ideas
  - use of limited set of criteria
  - successful proposers invited to submit complete proposals

Conclusions (1)

It is not easy to write a good proposal:

it takes **time** and **efforts**; it can take several months …

Keep in mind what evaluators are looking for in proposals:

- **relevance**
- **scientific and technical excellence**
- **quality of project management**
- technical credibility of the proposal
- added value of carrying out the research at a European level
- strategy for exploitation and dissemination of results
- costs and budget breakdown
- competence and effectiveness of the consortium

Conclusions (2)

What makes a good proposal?

- **clear objectives** / fits programme
- **scientific excellence** / innovation
- **European dimension** / collaboration
- **high quality project management**
- balanced distribution of workload
- clear timescale and workplans
- understandable, non-technical, scientific jargon-free language
- industrial relevance
- a well defined marketable project result / product (what are benefits to EU?)

⊠ **A good proposal is convincing from the outset.** The essential facts must be readily extractable. A well written summary can often help hard-pressed evaluators to grasp the main points. Presentation is extremely important.

Conclusions (3)

For the Commission, quality of management is essential

The proposal must clearly state:

- What each member of the consortium will do;
- How they will work together effectively;
- How the various work packages relate to each other;
- That each activity has been properly resourced;
- Expected **deliverables** and **milestones** : they must be clearly identified and charts must be drawn up.

⊠ **Keep the core team small and well balanced**

Conclusions (4)

Right on target

- ❑ **Convince expert-evaluators that you:**

  - ▪ **Understand the problem**

  - ▪ **Can solve the problem**

  - ▪ **Can do the job**

  - ▪ **Provide value**

Conclusions (5)

This presentation was nothing more than common sense!

Why not get a thorough understanding of the process and

volunteer to be an expert-evaluator yourself !

EMM (Expert Management Module)

It's easy: https://cordis.europa.eu/emmfp7

GOOD LUCK & thanks for your attention.

Спасибо