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No Funding despite excellent Evaluation?

Findings from a consultation of German applicants on evaluation criteria in Horizon Europe

September 2026 | German National Contact Point Bioeconomy & Environment

Excellent scores do not guarantee funding!

70%

of high quality proposals (above threshold)
cannot be funded*

in **39%**

of the topics
tie-breaking criteria (ex-aequo criteria) were applied**

What did Participants tell us?***

Frustration and disappointment are widespread, including doubts about whether future applications are still worthwhile.

High time and resource requirements are wasted, with proposal preparation taking several months. This threatens competitiveness of researchers.

More strategic and selective application behaviour becomes necessary, including more careful selection of calls, fewer applications and greater consideration of perceived funding opportunities.

Transparency of the evaluation process is felt to be lacking, particularly regarding the transparency and comprehensibility of tie-breaking criteria.

The consultation shows a strong interest in making Horizon Europe evaluation and selection more transparent, comprehensible and closely linked to proposal quality.

*CORDA data Horizon Europe, cut-off 6 January 2025
**European Commission data 2021-2025
***The findings of the consultation reflect the experiences and views of the participants and **may not be representative of all Horizon Europe applicants**.

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almost
4x

as many topics used ex-aequo criteria
*in 2023–2025 vs. 2021–2023***

Current ex-aequo criteria applied to prioritize tied proposals:

1. The proposal addresses aspects that are not covered by higher-ranked proposals
2. Higher score in the relevant criterion (For RIAs and CSAs: Excellence → Impact; for IAs: Impact → Excellence)
3. Gender balance in the consortium
4. Geographical diversity, i.e. the number of EU Member States or Associated Countries represented in the proposal
5. The panel may decide to apply further priorities where the quality of the proposals remains otherwise equal, e.g. SME participation

What changes did participants suggest?

Increase transparency

making the application of tie-breaking criteria more transparent both before submission and after evaluation

Change distribution of funding

fewer topics with larger budgets, allowing more highly rated proposals to be funded. Reserve budget for tied proposals

Reduce application burden

greater use of two-stage application procedures; changes to the application form and format

Explore alternative selection procedures

oral defence before an evaluation panel, distributed peer review and follow-up funding for highly rated proposals

Participants support tie-breaking criteria in general but suggest improvement:

Participants wish for more transparency and prefer to be ranked by proposal quality and call objectives rather than gender and geography. Partial lotteries among proposals that meet the threshold are met with skepticism.

About the consultation***:**

- **41 responses, 30 July - 6 Sept. 2026, open and closed questions**
- substantial experience: **Two thirds** had contributed to **more than five** Horizon Europe proposals

**European Commission data 2021-2025
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