



HORIZON 2020



★ SEAL OF ★
EXCELLENCE

What it is
Who can benefit
How to use it





★ SEAL OF ★ EXCELLENCE

WHAT IS A SEAL OF EXCELLENCE?

The 'Seal of Excellence' is a quality label, awarded to project proposals submitted for funding under Horizon 2020, which succeeded in passing all of the stringent selection and award criteria but could not be funded under the available Call budget. **The 'Seal' identifies, therefore, promising project proposals which merit funding from alternative sources (public or private), i.e. national, regional, European or international.**

WHY A SEAL OF EXCELLENCE?

In a period of scarce resources, the impact of our investments in Research and Innovation needs to be maximised: creating synergies between Horizon 2020 and other funding sources (such as, but not exclusively, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)) is a way to achieve it. This was also a clear mandate from President Juncker to Commissioners Moedas and Crețu.

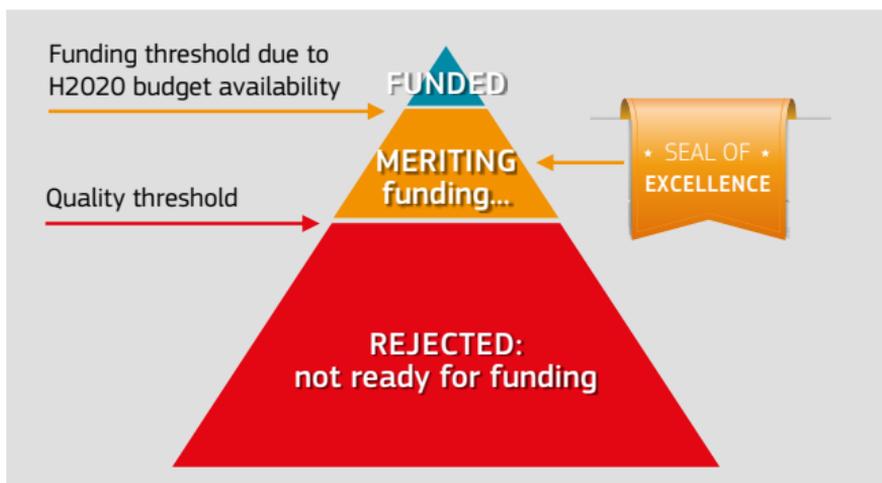
«We fully support the Seal of Excellence as an important first step in a longer term process of building synergies between Horizon 2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds. It will help innovative companies to access and enhance the knowledge economy in their regions, contributing therefore to the implementation of smart specialisation strategies»

*Corina Crețu, European Commissioner for Regional Policy;
Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation*

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE SEAL OF EXCELLENCE?

Every year, thousands of organisations in Europe apply to the Horizon 2020 Programme investing precious resources and time. The European Commission runs one of the most complete evaluation systems in the world, using international independent experts.

The evaluation screens against three defined criteria (excellence, impact and quality & efficiency of implementation) and identifies those proposals not mature enough to receive funding (below quality threshold) and those that are considered as meriting funding (above threshold). Only some of the above threshold proposals receive funding depending on the available Horizon 2020 budget.



The 'Seal of Excellence' certificate will be awarded to the applicants of above threshold not funded proposals: a holder of the certificate can then approach alternative funding sources (regional, national, private or public) and present the certificate as a label of a high-quality project proposal.

The action concerns, for this initial 'pilot' phase, only proposals applying for the SME instrument and in particular all those SME instrument proposals evaluated above the quality threshold (13 or more out of 15 in Phase 1, or 12 or more out of 15 in Phase 2) but not receiving Horizon 2020 funding. Later on it could be extended to cover more areas of Horizon 2020.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REGIONS/MEMBER STATES AND THEIR STAKEHOLDERS

The *'Seal of Excellence'* offers a unique opportunity for regions and Member States (and any other interested actor) to fully exploit the high-quality Horizon 2020 evaluation process: to easily identify and possibly support high-impact proposals coming from promising innovative companies, with an ambition to grow and compete internationally.

The Horizon 2020 'SME instrument' has been selected for the introduction of the 'Seal of Excellence' because of the relevance to regional and national funders, as the project proposals are mostly led by a single SME and address small scale R&I actions close to the market with a clear territorial impact.

Regions/Member States interested in funding these types of proposals could use ESIF resources (in line with ESIF priorities and in compliance with national and relevant EU rules) or their own national/regional resources to grant funding without additional qualitative evaluation.

«What appealed to us about this approach is that it is an economical way for us to synergize with Horizon 2020, as the indirect costs (submission and evaluation of proposals) for the national funding are almost zero. We also find it very important to encourage our SMEs to apply for EU funding and as the success rate for the SME instrument turned out to be quite daunting, we want them to feel sure of funding if they propose as good a project as possible. We know how much time and effort SMEs put into their applications.»

(Karin Aase, VINNOVA Sweden – using own national funds)

This possibility is not confined to ESIF, other funding sources (public or private) are also welcome.

THE SME INSTRUMENT AND THE SEAL OF EXCELLENCE

The Horizon 2020 SME Instrument Calls for Proposals are open to small and medium-sized businesses in all EU Member States (and Horizon 2020 Associated Countries) and offer support for:

- Feasibility assessment activities (Phase I): EUR 50,000 lump-sum grant per project (covering 70% of total cost of the project);
- Innovation development & demonstration activities (Phase II): grant ranging between about EUR 500,000 and 2.5 million (covering 70% of total cost of the project as a general rule).

Thanks to the 'Seal', high quality proposals from innovative Small and Medium Enterprises will have additional chances to be funded. The precious time and effort SMEs invested in the proposal and idea development will thus not be wasted.

"We submitted to Phase 1 of the SME Instrument our project proposal aiming at recovering exhausted extinguishing powder through an eco-innovative process able to extract noble components to use in agriculture and other sectors. Although we passed a very competitive selection - we didn't get funded. We were a bit disappointed but thanks to EUR 25,000 funding support from Lombardy region we were able to quickly go ahead with our idea and we are now submitting Phase 2".

(William Grandi, Director of Prophos Chemicals-Italy)

A number of SME applicants for the SME instrument are already benefitting from the 'Seal of Excellence'-type of approach implemented by some Member States and regions using their own national or regional funding. They recognise the validity of the Horizon 2020 evaluation outcome as a basis for providing alternative funding to those SMEs in their territory.

HOW WILL THE SEAL OF EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE BE IMPLEMENTED?

It is up to each Member State or region to establish supporting funding schemes that are specifically dedicated to these types of proposals and enable the provision of alternative funding, in compliance with national and EU rules. A growing number of Member States and regions are already studying the best options for implementation.

In order to allow for exchanges of know-how, the European Commission has established a 'Community of Practice' exploring the best ways to implement funding schemes in support of high-quality projects with the 'Seal of Excellence' through ESIF or other sources. The 'Community of Practice' is reserved for National or Regional authorities that have a funding power for research and innovation actions. It is also open to other Funding Agencies for Innovating SMEs (including private banks and investors).

If your organisation is interested in being part of the Europe-wide 'Community of Practice', please send an Expression of Interest by e-mail to: RTD-seal-of-excellence@ec.europa.eu

Find more information

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/regions/>

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/research-innovation/

Other useful links

Guide on synergies between different EU R&I related programmes:

https://ec.europa.eu/research/regions/documents/publications/h2020_synergies_201406.pdf

Horizon 2020 SME instrument / Online Manual / FAQ:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/sme_participation.html

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