

Summary of the Sixth Project Academy Session 9.05.2025

Introduction and Session Setup

Janika Leoste opened the session by welcoming participants and outlining the goals of the training. She explained that the focus would be on how to enhance Horizon Europe grant proposals using AI tools, particularly for writing the so-called “blue table” section. Leoste set up the context for the meeting, emphasizing that while AI (like ChatGPT) can assist in drafting proposal text, the human writer’s guidance and originality remain crucial. This introduction framed the session as a mix of practical demonstration and expert insights, aimed at improving proposal writing skills in a professional, responsible manner.

Understanding the “Blue Table” in Horizon Europe Proposals

Leoste provided an explanation of what the “blue table” (https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-form/af/af_he-ria-ia_en.pdf, page 40) means in the context of Horizon Europe project proposals. In the standard proposal template, certain sections or tables are highlighted (often in blue) to prompt specific information from applicants. The “**blue table**” typically refers to the structured table in the **Impact section** where applicants summarize how their project’s outputs will lead to the expected outcomes and broader impacts. Janika Leoste stressed the significance of this table: evaluators pay close attention to it because it concisely shows the project’s intended impact and alignment with the call’s objectives. Getting the blue table right is essential, as it can strongly influence the proposal’s evaluation. She reminded participants that the content in this table should be clear, compelling, and tailored to the specific call topic and expected impacts.

Demonstration: Using Large Language Models to Draft Proposal Content

During the session, Leoste demonstrated how various large language models (LLMs) can be used to generate draft content for the blue table. She walked through examples using **ChatGPT o3**, **ChatGPT 4o**, and the ChatGPT “**Pro**”(paid) version to show how each might tackle the same prompt. In a live demonstration, she fed the models information about a hypothetical project and the relevant Horizon Europe call text. The AI models then produced sample text that could fill in parts of the blue table, such as descriptions of expected project outcomes, potential impacts, and how those align with Horizon Europe’s goals. This side-by-side comparison illustrated differences in the depth and style of the outputs. For

instance, ChatGPT 4o generated a shorter, more general text, while GPT Pro with Deep Research provided a more detailed and structured response. Participants could see how AI can quickly provide a first draft of complex proposal sections. Leoste highlighted that these tools are especially useful for overcoming writer's block or generating initial ideas for phrasing and content in the proposal's impact table.

Ensuring Originality and Recognizing AI's Limitations

While the AI demonstration was impressive, Janika Leoste put strong emphasis on the importance of originality in proposal writing and the limitations of AI-generated text. She cautioned that **relying solely on AI** to write proposal sections can be risky. There are several reasons for this warning:

- **Potential Lack of Originality:** Many users might prompt ChatGPT with similar Horizon Europe topics, and the model could produce **generic text** that ends up looking similar across different proposals. If dozens of proposals contain look-alike phrasing from ChatGPT, this lack of originality could be obvious to evaluators and reflect poorly on the applicants.
- **Context and Accuracy Issues:** AI models do not inherently know the specifics of *your* project or the latest nuances of the call. If the generated text isn't carefully guided, it may include statements that are **out of context or inaccurate** for your particular project. Leoste pointed out that AI sometimes gives plausible-sounding content that might not actually fit well with the project's unique approach or the call's precise requirements.
- **Reused or Trained Content:** Because language models are trained on large internet datasets, there's a chance that some phrases or sentences they generate have appeared elsewhere (for example, in public documents or prior proposals). If not curated, this could inadvertently introduce text that isn't entirely fresh or, in worst cases, could raise plagiarism concerns.

Leoste underscored that the **blue table must reflect the project's unique vision and specifics**, something AI on its own cannot guarantee. The takeaway was clear: AI-generated material should be treated as a **starting point** or inspiration. It is the researcher's responsibility to refine, customize, and infuse the content with genuine insight and original ideas. In summary, the session underlined that while AI can draft text, **human expertise and creativity are irreplaceable** in producing a compelling and context-rich proposal.

Structuring Effective Prompts with Call Text and Project Concepts

A practical portion of the training focused on **how to structure prompts** for the AI in order to get useful and relevant output. Janika Leoste provided guidance on combining the official call text with the team's project concept when querying tools like ChatGPT. Rather than asking a very broad question, she recommended a structured approach to prompt design:

1. **Provide the Call Context:** Begin the prompt by pasting in key excerpts from the Horizon Europe call or topic description. This gives the AI a clear context about the objectives, expected outcomes, and any specific jargon or focus areas of the call.
2. **Outline the Project Idea:** Next, clearly describe the core idea of your project – the problem it addresses, the approach or innovation proposed, and the goals. This description should be concise but specific, so the AI understands what your project is about.
3. **Specify the Task for the AI:** Finally, instruct the AI on what you want it to produce. For example, you might write, *“Using the above call text and project description, draft the content for the impact ‘blue table’, detailing expected outcomes of the project and how they contribute to the call’s objectives.”* Being explicit about the desired output (e.g. focusing on impacts, outcomes, and significance) helps the model deliver more targeted content.

Leoste demonstrated that using this structured prompt method yielded much more relevant and tailored text from the language model. The AI, given both the call framework and the project specifics, was able to draft paragraphs that spoke directly to the goals of the call and the innovation of the project, rather than generic filler. This part of the session taught attendees how to be “prompt engineers” in a simple way: by always anchoring AI requests in the official call language and their own project's unique features. Participants were advised to always review and edit the AI's output, but with well-structured prompts, the first draft would require fewer major changes.

Warnings About Reused AI Content and Adding Personal Input

Building on the theme of AI limitations, the session included warnings about the risk of AI-generated content being **overused or lacking personal touch** if not combined with the team's own input. Janika Leoste warned that if two different teams give a similar prompt to ChatGPT (for example, using identical call text without project-specific details), they might receive very similar outputs. This is a serious concern: proposals could inadvertently end up

with overlapping sentences or claims, especially in a standardized section like the blue table. Such overlaps could be noticed by evaluators or plagiarism-check tools.

To avoid this, Leoste strongly encouraged **infusing personal insight and context** into any AI-assisted text. She reiterated that the content for a Horizon Europe proposal must be specific to the consortium's experience, the project's innovation, and the context of the problem being solved. AI by itself has no knowledge of these specifics unless the user provides them. For example, only the research team can contribute details like unique strengths of the consortium, specific stakeholders they will engage, or why their approach is novel in light of current state-of-the-art. If these details are missing, AI text tends to be bland and could fit almost any project, thus weakening the proposal. The guidance was clear: **always blend AI output with your own knowledge, data, and narrative**. The human writer should add context, correct any erroneous assumptions the AI made, and ensure the tone and content align with the project's story. By doing so, the final text will be both AI-enhanced and richly customized, meeting the evaluators' expectations for a thoughtful, context-aware proposal.

Reviewer's Perspective on Impact and the Blue Table

Later in the session, insight was provided from the perspective of a proposal evaluator. **Voldemar Tomusk** shared his experience and advice, offering a reviewer's point of view on proposal evaluation, especially regarding the Impact section and the blue table. Tomusk, who has served as a reviewer or expert in evaluating research proposals, emphasized how critical the Impact section is in Horizon Europe evaluations. He noted that evaluators often **skim dozens of proposals**, so a well-structured blue table immediately stands out. According to Tomusk, an effective blue table is one that **clearly links the project's activities to tangible outcomes and broader impacts**.

From his perspective, many proposals falter by being too vague or overly optimistic in the impact descriptions. He advised that proposers should be realistic and specific: for each expected outcome listed in the blue table, there should be a convincing explanation of how the project will achieve it and why it matters. Tomusk also pointed out that the blue table is not just a bureaucratic formality; it is a **snapshot of the proposal's credibility**. If the table is filled with buzzwords or generic statements (for instance, claiming the project will "revolutionize an industry" without evidence), reviewers will be skeptical. On the other hand, if the table is concise and factual – mentioning concrete innovations, target metrics or beneficiaries, and alignment with the call's impact goals – it instills confidence.

He also reinforced some earlier points from Leoste's presentation: a reviewer can tell when text is copy-pasted or AI-generated if it lacks the personal, project-specific touch. Tomusk echoed that originality and authenticity go a long way. In summary, his message to the

attendees was that **to impress a reviewer, the impact section (including the blue table) must be honest, specific, and demonstrably aligned with Horizon Europe's expected impacts**, showing a deep understanding of the call requirements.

Upcoming Information Day on May 15 – Ask Questions

During the discussion, the speakers highlighted the value of engaging with official information events. An **upcoming Horizon Europe information day on May 15, 2025** was mentioned as an opportunity not to be missed. Janika Leoste encouraged participants to attend such info days or webinars related to their call topic. She explained that these events often involve European Commission project officers or National Contact Points providing detailed explanations of the call scope and expectations. Importantly, attendees can ask **clarifying questions** during these sessions.

Leoste noted that if any aspect of the call text or the proposal requirements is unclear, an info day is the perfect forum to seek answers directly from the source. For example, if the wording of an expected outcome is vague or if one is unsure how broad or specific the project's focus should be, asking at the info day can yield valuable guidance. Sometimes the answers given are later published in an FAQ, meaning all competitors get the clarification – but being the one to ask can ensure your particular confusion is resolved. The guidance here was to **be proactive in gathering information**: the more you understand the funder's intent, the better you can tailor your proposal. The speakers emphasized that showing up at these events and asking thoughtful questions can ultimately strengthen the proposal, as it demonstrates due diligence and may provide insights that others overlook. In the context of the May 15 session, participants were reminded to prepare any questions they have about the call in advance, to make the most of the opportunity.

The European AI Continent Plan and Its Relevance

Another topic introduced in the session was the **European AI Continent Plan**. Janika Leoste brought up this newly announced EU initiative to inform participants of the broader strategic landscape, especially for those working on projects involving artificial intelligence. She briefly explained that the European AI Continent Plan is a high-level strategy by the European Union aiming to position Europe as a leading "AI continent." The plan frames AI development in Europe around principles like accountability, transparency, human-centric design, and digital sovereignty. In practice, it is Europe's effort to balance the rapid AI advancements globally with ethical considerations and public good in mind.

Leoste highlighted that being aware of such policy initiatives can be useful when writing proposals. For instance, if a project involves AI research or deployment, referring to the European AI Continent Plan in the proposal could show that the team is aligned with

Europe's strategic direction in AI. Citing relevant European strategies or plans (like this one) in a proposal can strengthen the section on **"Policy and Societal Context"** or justify the importance of the work. It demonstrates that the proposers understand and contribute to Europe's long-term goals. However, Leoste also advised to cite such plans **appropriately and meaningfully** – it should make sense in context (i.e. mention how the project supports or responds to the plan's priorities), rather than just name-dropping for the sake of it. This discussion on the AI Continent Plan served as a reminder that good proposals exist within a broader ecosystem of European priorities, and awareness of those priorities can be a competitive edge.

Conclusion: Balancing AI Assistance with Human Creativity

In closing the session, Janika Leoste and her co-presenters encouraged the participants to make the most of AI tools **in combination with human creativity and judgment**. The key message was one of balance: while large language models like ChatGPT can significantly speed up the writing process and help generate ideas or polish language, the **human element** – expertise, creativity, and critical thinking – is what makes a proposal truly stand out. They urged attendees to take what they learned from the demonstration and integrate it into their workflow: for example, use AI to draft sections or overcome writer's block, but always review the output with a critical eye and tailor it to fit the story you want to tell about your project.

Leoste ended on an encouraging note, reminding everyone that tools like ChatGPT are just that – tools to assist writers, not to replace them. The most successful grant proposals will likely be those that leverage the **efficiency of AI** for initial drafts or brainstorming, and then apply **human insight** to refine and enrich the content. Participants were thanked for their attention and engagement, and were encouraged to experiment with what they learned. The overall tone of the conclusion was optimistic: by combining cutting-edge AI assistance with their own originality and knowledge, grant writers can produce higher quality proposals and perhaps even enjoy the writing process more. The session wrapped up with a final reminder: use AI boldly but wisely, and always keep the proposal personal and unique to **your** vision.