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National Contact Points for Innovation

HOW TO APPLY SUCCESSFULLY - EIC PATHFINDER

Tips for successful application in *FET open and FET proactive Research and Innovation Actions*

2020

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This guide has been drafted with the contribution of the Horizon 2020 Future and Emerging Technolgies - FET National Contact Points who interact regularly with EIC Pathfinder FET Open and FET Proactive applicants.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The guide 'How to apply successfully - EIC Pathfinder' is provided for information purposes only and solely reflects the view of the authors. The authors of this guide are Horizon 2020 FET National Contact Points (NCPs) who interact regularly with FET Open and FET Proactive applicants.

This guide has been written as part of the Access2EIC project, a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Commission to strengthen the network of Horizon 2020 National Contact Points (NCPs) for the

European Innovation Council (EIC) and Access to risk finance (ARF).

More specifically, the project is focused on identifying and sharing best practices in applying for EIC-dedicated instruments in Horizon 2020. The guide 'How to apply successfully - EIC Pathfinder' shall assist proposers which are preparing a project proposal for the Horizon 2020 EIC Pathfinder pilot call to understand the requirements of the proposal templates, and provide useful tips and advice.

At the end of 2019, a new pilot for the European Innovation Council (EIC) was launched, which included the FET Open and FET Proactive schemes into the "EIC Pathfinder Pilot".

The call for proposals, of which this guide referrers to are:

FETOPEN-01-2018-2019-2020: FET-Open Challenging Current Thinking

FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020: FET Proactive: emerging paradigms and communities

FETPROACT-EIC-08-2020: Environmental Intelligence

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ABOUT THE GUIDELINES

This guide is based on the needs of FET Open and FET Proactive applicants and beneficiaries who interact with NCPs. The guide will be useful for anyone who wants to submit to the EIC Pathfinder (both FET Open and FET Proactive Research and Innovation Actions), and will provide general tips regarding submission to the program.

The **First Section "The EIC Pathfinder funding mechanism"** provides information on the EIC Pathfinder – FET Open and FET Proactive, such as its main purpose, the submission process, the award criteria, scores and weighting, as well as a detailed description of the evaluation process. The information in this section has been described on the basis of the official documents provided by the European Commission.

The **Second Section "EIC Pathfinder Key recommendations"** includes tips and relevant information to be addressed in a FET Open and FET Proactive proposal.

It provides information on how to create a winning consortium – based on evidence from previous FET funded projects' practices – and tips on proposal writing, detailed for the related sections of the proposal template (Excellence, Impact, Implementation, Members of the consortium, Ethics and Security).

The recommendations appearing in the document include Access2EIC FET NCPs' recommendations, based on hundreds of EIC Pathfinder proposals revised each year, and feedback received from 23 EIC Pathfinder FET independent evaluators employed by the European Commission.

This guide includes recommendations from 15 FET Open and FET Proactive beneficiaries who have previously received support from the European Commission, and relevant key sources which analysed and measured the impacts of the "Future and Emerging Technologies" research funding scheme. This type of information is detailed in **Orange Boxes**.

The recommendations resulted from FET evaluators and beneficiaries will be cited as *A2EIC survey respondents*.

More information is available in the *Topic Conditions and Documents* section on the topic page on the Funding and Tender portal.

For a more general overview of how the EIC Pathfinder Pilot support the future and emerging technologies, see the Frequently Asked Questions or look at the recorded session of the Info-day Webinar "**European Innovation Council Pilot: EIC Pathfinder and Accelerator 2020 calls**", held on 22nd April, 2020.

If you need help, you can contact the **H2020 FET National Contact Points** in your country.

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1. THE EIC PATHFINDER FUNDING MECHANISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO EIC PATHFINDER – FET OPEN AND FET PROACTIVE

The Future and Emerging Technologies (FET) programme focuses on research beyond what is known, accepted or widely adopted and supports novel and visionary thinking to open promising paths towards radically new technological possibilities. In the work programme2018-2020, and specifically for 2019 and 2020 FET Open and FET Proactive is part of the EIC Pathfinder Pilot.

The EIC Pathfinder pilot targets high-risk cutting-edge projects exploring new research areas and aims at developing radically new and innovative technologies. FET Open uses interdisciplinary collaboration to tap into Europe's excellent science base for exploring novel ideas for radically new technologies, which may become the game-changers of the future. FET Proactive aims to identify the future and emerging technological paradigms with the highest potential to positively impact Europe's economy and society.

The FET Proactive scheme features "targeted calls" based on topics or challenges identified in the Work Programme, along with open bottom-up calls for proposals in FET Open. The FET Proactive topics include: Artificial Intelligence for extended social interaction; Breakthrough zero-emissions energy storage and conversion technologies for carbon neutrality; Digital twins for the life-sciences; Measuring the unmeasurable – Sub-nanoscale science for Nanometrology; and under Environmental Intelligence, new techniques for modelling and predicting social/environmental evolution across different temporal and spatial scales; and radically novel approaches to resilient, reliable and environmentally responsible in-situ monitoring.

1.2 EIC PATHFINDER OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 FET Open objectives

FET Open aims to establish European leadership in the early exploration of future technologies, by combining high scientific ambition with concrete technological implications.

It looks for opportunities of long-term benefit for citizens, the economy and society, that inspire the entrepreneurial minds that the EIC attracts.

FET Open supports early stage science to technology research exploring new foundations for radically new future technologies by challenging current technological and scientific paradigms.

Projects are expected to be interdisciplinary, cutting across different sectors and technologies, and to meet FET Gatekeepers (as described under *Section 1.4 Award criteria, scores and weighting*).

1.2.2 FET Proactive objectives

FET Proactive aims to establish a broad and solid basis for future and emerging technological paradigms with the highest potential for European economy and society, by capitalizing on relevant knowledge, key technological building blocks and interdisciplinary communities around the emerging technological trend.

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It will foster scientific and technological contributions to the foundation and consolidation of a radically new future technology.

FET proactive initiatives involve a set of complementary and collaborative projects, building new multidisciplinary research communities and enhancing Europe's innovation potential.

1.3 Call conditions for FET/EIC Pathfinder

Applicants are consortia of at least three legal entities from at least three different EU Member State or a Horizon 2020 Associated country. The legal entities must be independent of each other.

Both FET Open and Proactive calls use a single stage submission process.

 In the case of FET Open call, a specific proposal template is available where the title and sections 1, 2 and 3, together, should not be longer than 15 pages [see Key sources section]. The list of participants will be identified only in Form A- Administrative Forms.

In the case of FET Proactive call, a different proposal template is available where the title, list of participants and sections 1, 2 and 3, together, should not be longer than 30 pages.

1.4 Award criteria, scores and weighting

As seen above EIC Pathfinder proposals are sought for cutting-edge high-impact interdisciplinary research with the following essential characteristics.
FET Open projects must meet the **FET Gatekeepers**:

▸ Radical vision –enabled by a new technology concept that challenges current paradigms.

▸ Breakthrough technological target – the project must target a novel and ambitious science to technology breakthrough as a first proof of concept for its vision;

▸ Ambitious interdisciplinary research for achieving the technological breakthrough and that opens up new areas of investigation.

A FET Open proposal that, according to the evaluator's assessments, does not convincingly satisfy all FET gatekeepers as described under this topic will be declared out of scope.

FET Proactive might also identify complementarities between the FET Gatekeepers and the assessment of the Excellence criterion, as described below. Nevertheless, the FET Gatekeepers' satisfaction is not mentioned in FET Proactive evaluation process.

1.4.1 Award criteria

Independent evaluators examine submissions according to three main criteria, with reference to points in the FET Open self-evaluation form and FET Proactive Evaluation Criteria – Excellence, Impact and Implementation- available in the *Topic Conditions and Documents* section on the topic page in the Funding and Tender portal.

 The criteria, scoring and threshold will be the following:

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- Excellence –Threshold: 4/5, Weight: 60%

- Impact – Threshold: 3.5/5, Weight: 20%

- Quality and efficiency of the implementation – Threshold: 3/5, Weight: 20%

For the **FET Open** *excellence criterion*, the independent experts will check adherence to the "FET gatekeepers" as described in the call text:

- Clarity of the radical vision of a science-enabled technology and its differentiation from current paradigms.

- Novelty and ambition of the proposed science-to-technology breakthrough that addresses this vision.

- Range of and added value from interdisciplinarity for opening up new areas of research; non-incrementality of the research proposed.

- High-risk, plausibility and flexibility of the research approach.

For the **FET Proactive** *excellence criterion*, the independent experts will check the following:

- Clarity of long-term vision of a science-enabled technology.

- Concreteness and ambition of the proposed science-to-technology breakthrough that addresses this vision.

- Range and added value from interdisciplinarity, novelty and non-incrementality of the research proposed.

- High-risk of the research proposed and plausibility and flexibility of the approach.

1.4.2 EIC Pathfinder Evaluation Process

The EIC Pathfinder proposals will be evaluated by at least four independent experts, in order to consider the inter-disciplinary character of the proposal.

For FET Open the Evaluation Summary Report will include a collation of the comments from individual evaluators' assessments, or relevant extracts from them. The panel will also decide on any additional comments, possibly including advice not to resubmit the proposal.

For FET Open the consensus score for each evaluation criteria will be the median of the corresponding scores attributed by the individual evaluators.

The consortium will receive the evaluation summary reports on the outcome of the evaluation after maximum five months from the corresponding cut-off date, and can expect to sign the grant agreements after eight months from the corresponding cut-off date.

1.4.3 Priority order for proposals with the same score

If necessary, the panel will determine a priority order for proposals which have been awarded the same score within a ranked list. In FET Proactive[1] at least each of the two highest-ranked proposals for each sub-topic will be funded provided that they attain all thresholds. Then, respecting the ranking, the third ranked proposal (if any) from each sub-topic is awarded within available funding budget[2]. Finally, any remaining funding budget is allocated according to the ranking list.

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1. FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020, FETPROACT-EIC-08-2020
2. For FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020 this applies to sub-topics a, b and c. For sub-topic d at most two proposals will be funded.

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The following approach will be applied successively for every group of ex aequo proposals requiring prioritisation, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

a) Proposals that address topics, or sub-topics not otherwise covered by more highly ranked proposals, will be considered to have the highest priority.

b) The proposals identified under (a), if any, will themselves be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion excellence. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for the criterion impact.

c) If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on the following factors, in order: size of EU budget allocated to SMEs; gender balance among the personnel named in the proposal who will be primarily responsible for carrying out the research and/or innovation activities.

d) In the specific case of FET Proactive, if a distinction still cannot be made, the panel may decide to further prioritise by considering how to enhance the quality of the project portfolio through synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call or to Horizon 2020 in general.

These factors will be documented in the report of the panel.

2. EIC PATHFINDER KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 HOW TO CREATE A WINNING CONSORTIUM

Examples of multi-disciplinary consortia built in successful H2020 EIC Pathfinder Pilot call for proposals are presented in the project portfolios of the calls:

FET Open: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/fet-open
FET Proactive: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/fet-proactive

Nevertheless, key information regarding the constituency of EIC Pathfinder consortia are available below.

2.1.2 Statistics from FET funded projects

‣ FET Open research and innovation actions proposals consist of average 6 beneficiaries. 68% of successful proposals have included a SME in the consortium. The average grant per project is approximately € 3.3 M and the average duration is three and a half years.

‣ Many successful FET Proactive proposals consist of consortia of 7-10 beneficiaries, of which 1-2 are usually high-tech SMEs.

‣ The size of the consortia in the last round of successful proposals varied from 5 to 17 partners with most proposals having between 6 and 9 partners (there were 33 SME partners involved in the 22 successful proposals).

Visit the **FET Open Data hub** to learn about winning FET/EIC projects or check out the "*Funded project list*" usually on call topic pages on the Funding and Tenders portal.

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2.1.3 Building the consortia

‣ A winning consortium is one that has partners from multiple disciplines and researchers with interdisciplinary skills and technical competences, that will be able to drive breakthrough innovations through research-driven approaches.

‣ The consortia are usually led by universities and/or research organisations.

‣ The inclusion of high-tech SMEs and/or start-ups with groundbreaking ideas that could create new markets is welcomed. They may be involved in research and scientific investigation and/or to secure the exploitation of research result(s) of the project in the future.

‣ The consortia may benefit from including young researchers who have the potential to grow into key leaders of nascent, emerging research topics.

‣ Provide evidence of the partners' complementarity and the extent to which the consortium, as a whole, brings together the necessary expertise.

As a general rule, all actions under EIC Pathfinder are open for participation of third countries and international organizations, if the envisaged international cooperation ensures:

‣ European access to the best talent, knowledge and resources;

‣ major opportunities to tackle global societal challenges in the most effective way in a partnership approach;

‣ help establish new opportunities for European high-tech industries through participation in global value chains and access to new and emerging markets;

‣ have a leading voice in global debates and developments.

Regarding funding, we can distinguish between countries that are automatically eligible for funding and those that are not through the dedicated section available in the **H2020 Online Manual**.

> **Practices from FET funded projects**
>
> A2EIC survey respondents declared that the core partnership is usually well-known, but new collaborations have been identified in 2 out of every 3 consortia.
>
> Partners are usually included in a consortiumbased on their scientific expertise. Among these, 1 out of 3 EIC Pathfinder beneficiaries had previous experience in European Research Council (ERC) funded projects.

2.2 HOW TO WRITE A WINNING PROPOSAL

2.2.1 Excellence

‣ Provide information on what is the new insight/approach/strategy that may lead to a new technological paradigm;

‣ Provide concrete specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) objectives (avoiding general and multiple objectives). Alternatively, propose the main objectives and the sub objectives;

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‣ Describe your vision on a new research path to solve an existing problem.

‣ Give a comparison with the state-of-the-art/alternative existing approaches and describe new lines of investigation. This might be also relevant to existing patents and scientific publications, to be seen as a good starting point of your paradigm-changing vision;

‣ Provide information to justify why the proposal is disruptive and not incremental;

‣ Define clearly any preliminary data describing the solution/way forward. Include a clear description of how a solution will be created/delivered/implemented;

‣ Provide information about why this was not possible before, in terms of novel scientific approaches or technological advancements, and how it will become conceivable now;

‣ Convincingly explain the new trends of research and the methodology proposed for implementation;

‣ Define a multidisciplinary concept and not *solely* multidisciplinary consortia; Aim at novel types of multidisciplinary concepts, not traditional multidisciplinary collaborations;

‣ Provide a description of discipline-specific approaches to the problem and how a new interdisciplinary approach can move the field forward;

‣ Highlight the project's capacity to bring in new developments and create breakthroughs in several scientific disciplines;

‣ Invent a new kind of synergism across disciplines;

‣ Provide pioneering references and not only references of the consortium; Concerning the high-risk character of the proposal, try to envisage every possible scenario or strategy and develop newly designed methods by exploiting available techniques from different consortium members;

‣ Ensure the presence of contingency plans;

‣ Outline the project's general strategy towards gender issues within the content of the planned research and innovation activities;

‣ Funded projects in FET Open focus on the first "*proof of concept of the proposed technology*" and "*early lab demonstration*".

Funded FET Proactive projects focus on the "Scientific and technological contributions to the foundation and *consolidation* of a radically new future technology" [as defined in the call for proposals – FET Proactive Emerging paradigms and communities - under Expected Impacts' section]. By keeping its disruptive and novel character, the proposal might therefore exceed TRL 3 – Proof for concept, as defined in the General Annex G to the H2020 Work Programmes.

2.2.2 Impact

▸ Address the expected impacts listed in the work programme for the FET topic you select;

▸ Describe any relevant market and envisaged users you may interact with, in order to support the emergence of an innovation ecosystem around a future technology;

▸ If possible, describe potential application sectors that might be affected by the deployment of your technology as well as by the creation of a new market; or disciplines that might be affected by the new areas of investigation introduced with the proposed research approach;

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▶ Members of a consortium are required to conclude a consortium agreement, prior to the signature of the grant agreement. Describe relevant agreements among the consortium members on measures dedicated to support motivation and benefits from project results (either in IP, or knowledge or new developments). If applicable, describe any agreements on joint ownership. Exploitation is usually subject to agreement between partners, while access rights are typically expected to be granted under fair and reasonable conditions;

▶ Whenever relevant, give information about potential patents;

▶ If relevant, describe your willingness to launch a spin-off/ start up company;

▶ Outline the project's general strategy towards open access and open source when describing the IP strategy;

▶ A key point, at the end of FET Open and FET Proactive projects is knowledge transfer and technologies that can form a basis of future innovative products, services and processes. It is therefore advisable to include a plan dedicated to knowledge transfer: most of the projects, in particular those funded under FET Proactive, have already identified partners who could be recipients of the scientific results and/or capable of implementing the transfer of knowledge into an innovative product, service or process;

▶ The dissemination of the results of FET projects is typically through peer-reviewed publications, seminars and workshops. To ensure the proper dissemination of results, FET consortia are welcomed to identify selected beneficiaries capable to guide and support the dissemination strategy and its implementation. The implementation will be supported by the consortium as a whole;

▶ Make your research data findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable (FAIR) in order to ensure that your project is in line with the European open access policy to publications and research data under Horizon 2020. Check the relevant guide for more information;

▶ With specific reference to FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020 and to FETPROACT-EIC-08-2020, in line with the discussion on **Responsible Research and Innovation** (RRI), several activities might be advisable to support the establishment of iterative and inclusive participatory multi-actor dialogue and to maximize the impact of the project. For more information on wider stakeholder/**public engagement**, informal education and policy debate, you might find relevant **resources** via dedicated CSA;

▶ Provide innovative measures to communicate about your project. You might find relevant resources via dedicated **FETFX CSA** or **FET Briefing CSA**.

The Key Impactsidentified in FET Traces's Analysis Report

▶ FET has a great impact on novel knowledge creation beyond mainstream through a high number of publications in high impact journals like Science or Nature.

▶ FET projects have relevant impacts on the researchers involved; the clear majority of FET researchers said that FET projects had promoted their careers and made them venture into unknown areas and disciplines, learning from these interdisciplinarity.

▶ FET projects have relevant impacts on the economy. 83% have contacts with industry; 40% had at least one partner in the industry; industry participated in one third of research papers; one quarter of FET projects produced at least one patent; 12% produced at least one spin-off company.

▶ FET researchers see themselves mostly as being part of a technology development community rather than a community solving societal challenges; still, a relatively high hare (17 percent) of researchers reported societal impacts of their FET projects.

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2.2.3 Implementation

▶ Interdisciplinarity in the consortium is a must! Look for novel collaborations across multiple disciplines that break with existing patterns and have a high potential for bringing in new insights.

▶ Consortium members should be complementary to each other;

▶ If relevant, synergies among beneficiaries should be evident in the Work Packages description and identified tasks, supporting valuable collaborations and the interdisciplinarity of the research approach in the implementation of specific *core activities;*

▶ Show clear roles and responsibilities of everyone in the consortium;

▶ Have an interconnection between tasks and deliverables. You can include, for instance, a project management table and an organizational table, detailing the team members and their roles in each;

▶ Pay attention to the milestones: these will serve to support the identification on major progress points and, if relevant, could reflect key technological breakthrough achievements identified in the proposal;

▶ Check consistency of your work plan - share of resources, appropriate distribution of work load between partners, weight of person-months between major work steps;

▶ The tasks distributed should be in correlation with the person months and should be realistic. I.e. a partner should not be given a task which it is somewhat unlikely to be accomplished;

▶ All partners should contribute to the project- keep in mind when allocating tasks that all participants should have a valid role and adequate resources to fulfil this role.

▶ Costs must be reasonable.

▶ If meaningful, devote certain project budget to an SME (high potential actor).

With specific reference to FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020, this topic allows for the provision of financial support to third parties (FSTP), in line with the conditions set out in **General Annex K**. Consortia might use hackatons, competitions or any other mean either to enhance impacts through punctual small scale experimentation and use of project results by third parties, or to award a prize following a contest organised by the beneficiaries.
The provision of financial support to third parties might include a fixed and exhaustive list of the different types of activities for which a third party:

➔ may receive financial support (Why);

➔ the definition of the persons or categories of persons which may receive financial support (Who);

➔ the criteria for awarding financial support, and for calculating the exact amount of the financial support (How)*; *[Please note that this may not exceed € 60 K]

➔ The FSTP process description, which should be conceivable and time-bound (When).

2.2.4 Members of the consortium and third parties

▶ Convince the evaluator that the consortium has the operational capacity and capability to execute the project at hand;

▶ Describe the resources that are available to the consortium – the facilities, manpower;

▶ Mention awards and grants previously awarded to the beneficiaries;

▶ Mention critical people in your organization;

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- ▶ Pay attention to gender balance of named personnel in the proposal (sections 4), as it may be a deciding factor for ex aequo proposals, and also address this in recruitment within the projects lifetime.

- ▶ Subcontractors have to be justified and properly explained.

2.2.5 Ethics and security

If ethics and or security are relevant answer elaborately on the matter. *For help use the **Ethics self-assessment**.

If ethics and or security are not relevant – briefly explain why that is the case.

> ### *Tips from FET funded projects*
>
> ▶ Start early and take your time: one out of three A2EIC survey respondent declared that it took around 6-7 months to make a valuable draft of the proposal. One third of the respondents submitted their proposal at least twice;
>
> ▶ Be sure to have sufficient expertise for all parts of the project;
>
> ▶ The „FET character" needs to be visible early in the proposal;
>
> ▶ Follow the template structure;
>
> ▶ The proposal must be very effective in communicating various concepts in a short and direct way (less is more: it's the idea that counts, do not attempt to cover everything);
>
> ▶ You write for experts not for the EC: be factual, no superficial phrases;
>
> ▶ Use tables and graphics to better explain the main idea and the implementation plan;
>
> ▶ Make a strong and detailed plan, consider possible pitfalls and have a solid consortium with a sound management structure;
>
> ▶ Do not neglect any detail, from gender issues to data management, to technology transfer;
>
> ▶ Make it easy for reviewers to follow the idea and discuss contingency plans clearly.

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KEY SOURCES

Enhanced European Innovation Council (EIC) pilot – Work Programme: **link**

General Annexes to the H2020 Work Programmes: **link**

FET Open Proposal Template [FETOPEN-01-2018-2019-2020]: **link***

FET Open Self Evaluation Form [FETOPEN-01-2018-2019-2020]: **link**

FET Proactive Proposal Template [FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020]: **link***

FET Proactive Proposal Template [FETPROACT-EIC-08-2020]: **link***

FET Proactive Evaluation Criteria: *Available under Topic Conditions and Documents*
* It is recommended to register for the call you are targeting to get the up-to-date .rtf version of the proposal template specifically designed for your call.

From great science to thrilling technology – Booklet: **link**

FET Open in 2014-2017 - Booklet: **link**

EIC Pathfinder Data Hub: **link**

FET Traces Impact Analysis: **link**

FETFX communication and outreach: **link**

PREFET available services: **link**

FET BRIEFING available services: **link**

Info-day Webinar "European Innovation Council Pilot: EIC Pathfinder and Accelerator 2020 calls", held on 2020, 22nd April: link

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Contact your National Contact Point NCP for additional advice and support schemes;

Use this guide, as well as useful links of EC, REA and Access2EIC website;

Use your evaluation summary report (ESR) - FET applicants receive in their ESR valuable comments with regard to the major strengths and weaknesses of their proposal.

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