From proposal to Grant Agreement

EARMA Post-Award Project Management thematic group

26th February 2025

Who we are. Project Managers (not lawyers!)

Flo O'Regan

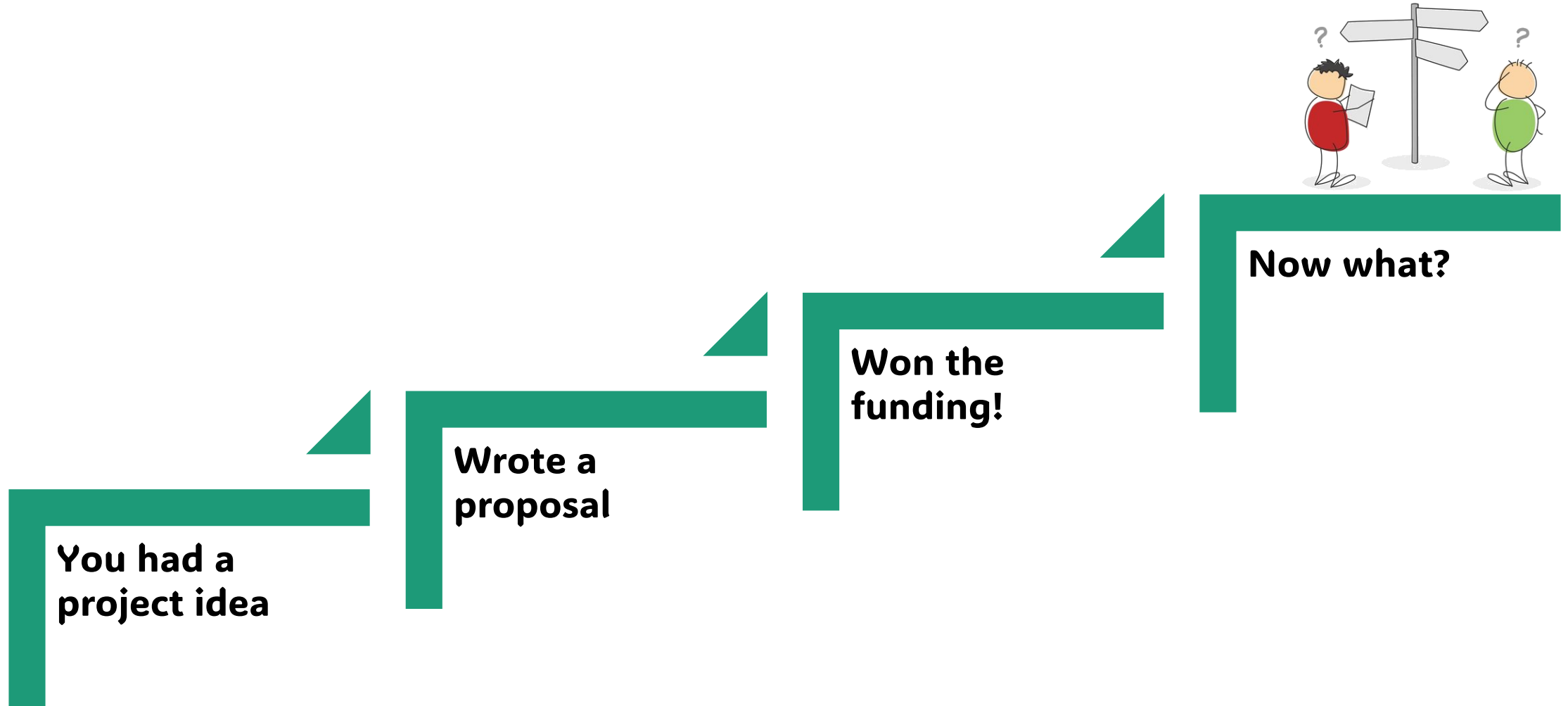Mobilisation Officer
Trinity Research
Trinity College Dublin

Alwynne McGeever

Horizon Europe Strategic
Project Coordination Officer,
AMBER Centre
Trinity College Dublin

Edward Casey

Research Development Officer
& Project Manager
AMBER Centre
Trinity College Dublin

You had a
project idea

Wrote a
proposal

Won the
funding!

Now what?

Image: Adobe stock

Attachment to a message in the Communication Centre of the EU portal
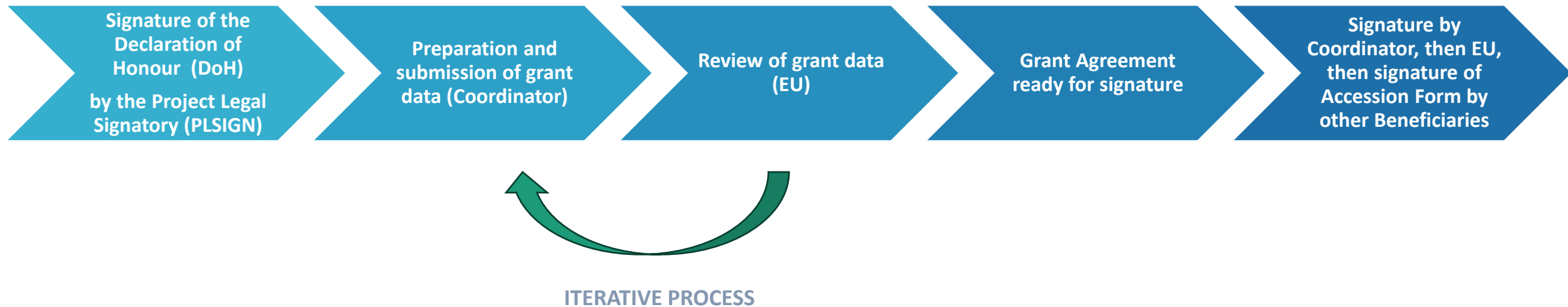
GAP instructions

Project officer
Grant Agreement
Executive Board
Milestones   PIC   Beneficiary
FSIGN   BEN   Action
LEAR   LSIGN   Coordinator
AMGA
PLSIGN   SyGMa   HEU
DoH   PO   DOA
Consortium Agreement
GA   Data sheet
Deliverables   General Assembly
Description of action   CA
EB   PFSIGN   SEDIA
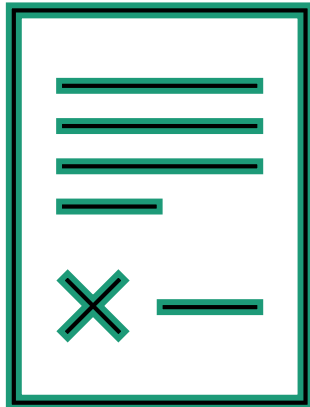Implementation

Glossary

Term	What it means
Grant Agreement Preparation (GAP)	The phase that begins after a proposal has been approved for funding. During this phase, the Grant Agreement is prepared and (hopefully!) finalised in collaboration with the granting authority
Coordinator	The organisation (not the PI!) who is coordinating the project. During GAP, the Coordinator communicates with the Project Officer on behalf of the whole consortium, and liaises with all consortium partners
Grant Agreement (GA)	Legal agreement between consortium and granting authority
Description of the action (DoA)	The description of the research project (based on the proposal)
Consortium Agreement (CA)	Legal agreement between consortium members about how to run the project

The basic steps of GAP

Signature of the Declaration of Honour (DoH) by the Project Legal Signatory (PLSIGN) → Preparation and submission of grant data (Coordinator) → Review of grant data (EU) → Grant Agreement ready for signature → Signature by Coordinator, then EU, then signature of Accession Form by other Beneficiaries

ITERATIVE PROCESS

Negotiation and signature of the Consortium Agreement

Grant Agreement: Overview

Core	Core: Preamble (the parties)
Core	Core: Terms and Conditions (including Data Sheet)
Annex	Annex 1 Description of the action (DoA) *
Annex	Annex 2 Budget
Annex	Annex 3 Accession forms
Annex	Annex 4 Model for the financial statements
Annex	Annex 5 Specific rules (if applicable)

Pro tip!

*The research project is now called "The Action"

Annotated Grant Agreement (AGA): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/aga_en.pdf

Accessing your grant data

Login > Grants Centre > Projects > Actions > Manage Project

SygMa (System for Grant Management)

Pro tip!

Project Officers often call this "The System"

From proposal to Annex 1: normal modifications to the proposal

Inputting information into the EU portal: part A

PROPOSAL → *COPY & PASTE TO EU PORTAL* → **Part A**

- ❑ **Work packages**
- ❑ **Staff Effort (person-months)**
- ❑ **Deliverables**
- ❑ **Milestones**
- ❑ **Critical risks**
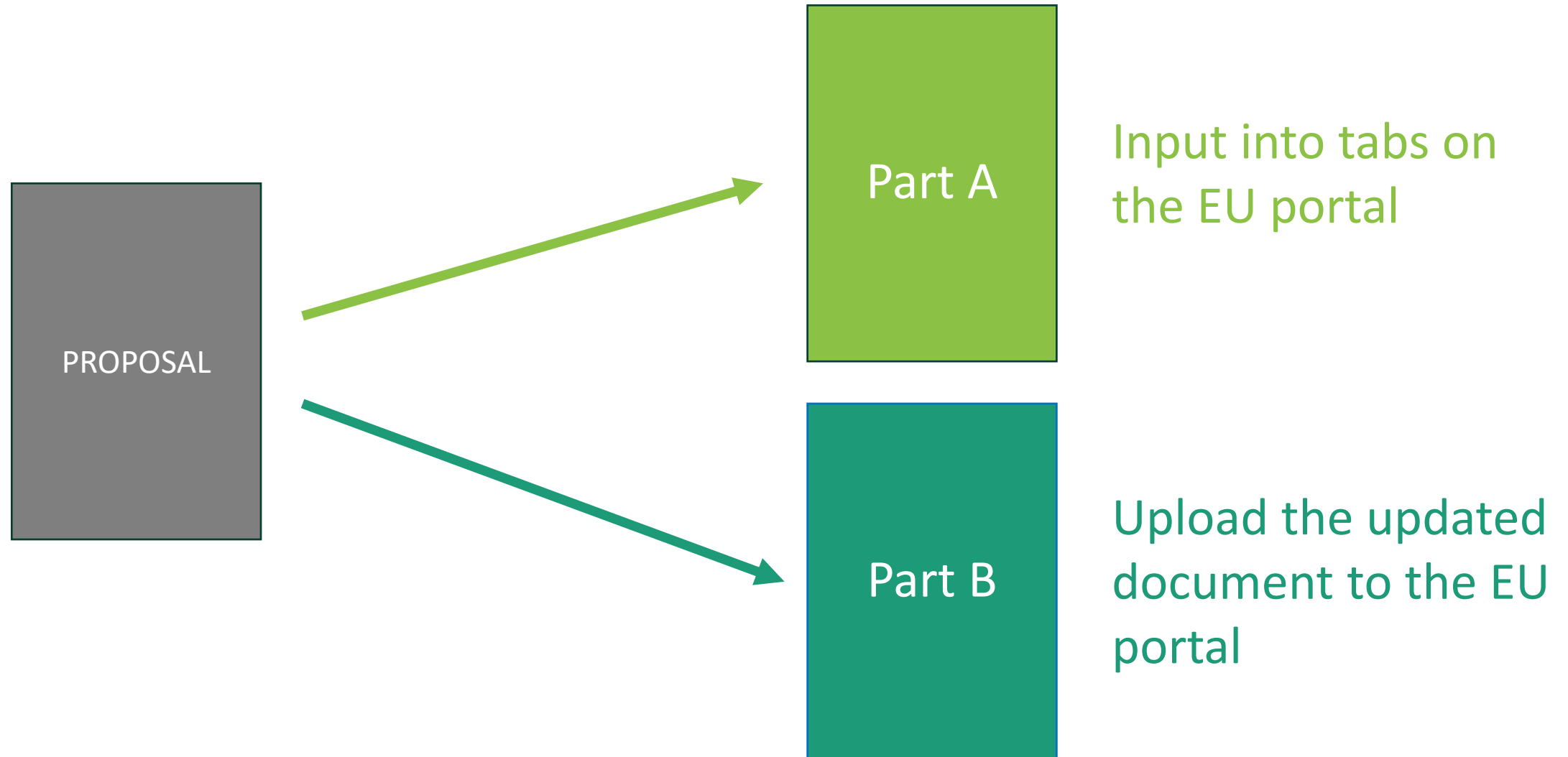
Project Summary | Beneficiaries | General Information | Reporting Periods | GA Information | GA Options | Financial Information | LF Overview | Associated Partners | Researchers | Work Packages | Deliverables | Milestones | Reviews | Critical Risks | Ethics Info | Security

Inputting information into the EU portal: part A

PROPOSAL

COPY & PASTE TO EU PORTAL

☐ **Work packages**
☐ **Staff Effort (person-months)**
☐ **Deliverables**
☐ **Milestones**
☐ **Critical risks**

Part A

Tips:

• **Staff Effort is input in the Work Packages tab: click on the WP you want and then look for the subtab called "Effort". Click "Manage partners" to input person-months for each partner.**
• **Work packages can be reordered by clicking, holding and dragging.**
• **Deliverables can be reordered by clicking, holding and dragging.**
• **The order/numbering of Deliverables within a WP can be changed: click on the WP and click, hold and drag the Deliverables.**

(at the moment, Milestones and Critical Risks can't be reordered once input. Delete and start again)

Creating and uploading the Part B

PROPOSAL

ADD

→ **Part B**

- ☐ **Footer**
- ☐ **Table of contents**
- ☐ **History of changes made in Part A and Part B (updated with each submission)**
- ☐ **Ethics self-assessment from Part A of the proposal (text only)**

Upload to the document section as a pdf

Part A

REMOVE

- ☐ **Cover page**
- ☐ **Table of participants**
- ☐ **Header**
- ☐ **Lum sum grants: costs tables (3.1h-i-j)**

REMOVE AFTER TRANSFERRING TO THE PORTAL

- ☐ **Work Packages, Staff Effort, Deliverables, Milestones, Critical Risks**

Start date, Data Sheet, Annex 2 (budget)

Input: Start date (preferably a **fixed start date**). This is in the "General information" tab.

Input: Start date justification (prior professional commitment of key staff **or** availability of equipment/facilities)

Check: budget. To make changes: "Beneficiaries" tab, click on the relevant beneficiary, and then click on the "Financial Information" subtab

Check: Timing of reviews
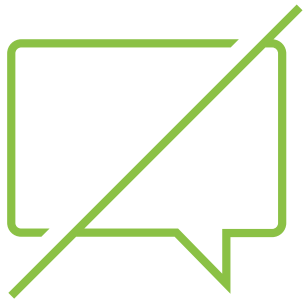
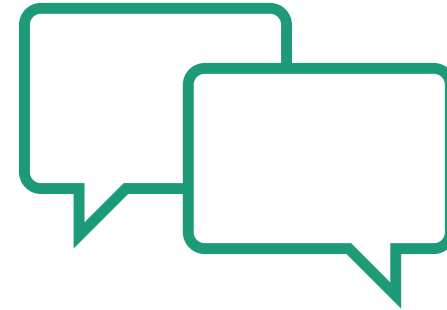**Check: Timing of reporting periods**

Check: Pre-financing %

Check: Is a Consortium Agreement mandatory

What about other changes?

No negotiation.
Proposal accepted "as is".

BUT some changes may be necessary.

Changes requested by the funder

COMMON

- Budget clarifications (more detail, correction of cost category, checks on "Other cost categories" such as subcontracting, removal of name of potential subcontractor, etc.)
- Small modifications to the Description of the Action to address any shortcomings identified by the reviewers
- Adding new deliverables such as Data Management Plan or DEC plan
- Adding new deliverables resulting from ethics review

LESS COMMON

- Deadline changes for milestones and deliverables for administrative scheduling of reporting and reviews
- Consolidating the number of deliverables and/or adding new deliverables (other than DMP/DEC plan and ethics)

CAUTION

- Out-of-the-ordinary requests: addition of KPIs not previously in the proposal, request for CVs, etc.

This is not an exhaustive list: **other changes may be necessary to meet legal and financial requirements**

Communications around these requests

- Are these necessary / mandatory?
- Can the consortium accommodate these requests?

If not:

- Decline politely
- Justify why (e.g.: Would have a negative impact on workplan dependencies / Reference reviewer comments on the question, if these were specific and favourable / etc.)
- If appropriate, suggest a workable alternative

When things weren't foreseen at proposal stage - consortium-requested changes: what's possible in practice

- Correction of minor omissions / errors / inconsistencies in proposal.

- Budget reallocations within the existing budget envelope (if there are any changes to Personnel costs, person-months may need to be adjusted accordingly).

- Check dissemination level of deliverables, as well as timing of deadlines.

- Changes in consortium composition: a partner has to leave the consortium. Common solutions: reallocate the tasks, person-months, and associated budget within the consortium / replace the partner. This may depend on the relative importance of the partner within the consortium.

- Change of status (e.g. a Beneficiary asks to become an Associated Partner instead).

Minor changes: make directly in the DoA, then record and justify briefly in the History of Changes table.

More substantial changes (e.g. composition of the consortium): discuss with the Project Officer as soon as possible**. Identify and suggest a solution (or possible solutions). **The proposed change must not affect the consortium's capacity to deliver the project or call into question the original decision to fund the project** – explain why it is a suitable solution.

In all cases: justify the request for the change (even if this is just "to correct a clerical error in the proposal"). If the change will enhance the consortium's capacity to deliver (i.e. if it's "better for the project"), explain why this is the case.

In all cases: record the change and its justification in the History of Changes table at the start of the Part B.

NB: Correction of typos/ minor formatting changes are not considered a "change" and don't need to be recorded.

Communication with your project officer: some tips

- Have a positive outlook: the EU has selected your project because it wants to fund it.

- Approach GAP as a collaborative process, with both the EU Project Officer and partners.

- Communicate openly and frequently with your Project Officer and partners. Have meetings. Ask questions. Meet deadlines (or ask about an extension).

- Be respectful of your Project Officer's time. They have a high workload too.

- **If you bring a problem to your Project Officer, also bring a solution.**
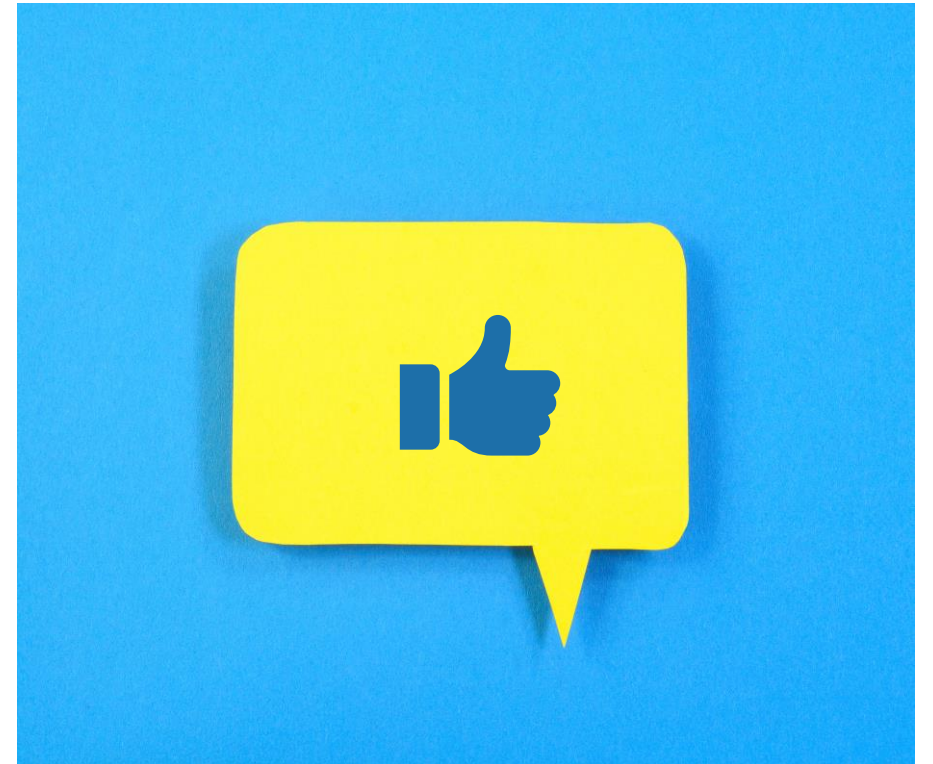
Grant Agreement vs Consortium Agreement

	Grant Agreement	Consortium Agreement
Roles and responsibilities	Role of partners in tasks and deliverables -person months and "lead"	Role of partners in managing the project- position on governing boards; chairperson; coordinator; etc
Budget	When the coordinator receives funds from the granting authority	When the partners receive funds from the coordinator
IP and ownership	What you own and what the European commission owns	How you share ownership of results and IP among the partners
Legality	Legally obliges consortium to have CA in place	Is legally subject to the GA- cannot over-ride something in the GA
Who is agreeing?	Between the consortium and the granting authority	Between the partners, within the consortium
When is it signed?	Second	First
Communication	Coordinator communicates with granting authority on behalf of consortium	How the Coordinator is allowed to communicate to the granting authority on the consortium's behalf- majority rules, quorum, voting rights etc Many different models exist – but the **DESCA model** ("Development of a Simplified Consortium Agreement") is the most common

Looking at DESCA – what is covered?

- Core agreements. These covers:
  - Definitions and purpose
  - Entry into force, duration and termination
  - Responsibilities, liabilities
  - Results, access rights
  - Non-disclosure and confidentiality

- Modules to be tailored to needs. These cover:
  - Small and Medium **OR** Large governance structures
  - Basic **OR** specific software clauses for IPR

- Other options:
  - Actual cost model versus Lump Sum cost model

✓ Covers large and small projects, with and without Associated Partners, with modifications for actual costs and lump sum
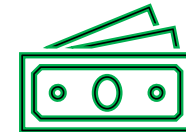
✓ Payment structures can be set out in Section 7 – make sure these match actual requirements, being mindful of financial pressures on SMEs, NGOs, etc.

Key take-aways: experience and observations

👍 Core elements do include options – so be sure to review them carefully, too!

👍 Make sure that optional elements are consistently applied and avoid internal contradictions

👍 The CA is an agreement between the participating *organisations* and *not* the individuals – it is essential to get the input of the legal and technology transfer offices, **especially if there are IPR and exploitation considerations.** Identify "background" IP.

👍 Make sure that the management structure in the Consortium Agreement matches the outline in Section 3 "Implementation" (Annex 1, Part B)

👍 Don't over-complicate the management structures: not every meeting needs to be formal, and formal meetings don't need to happen on a rigid structure (e.g. "twice a year" versus "once every six months")

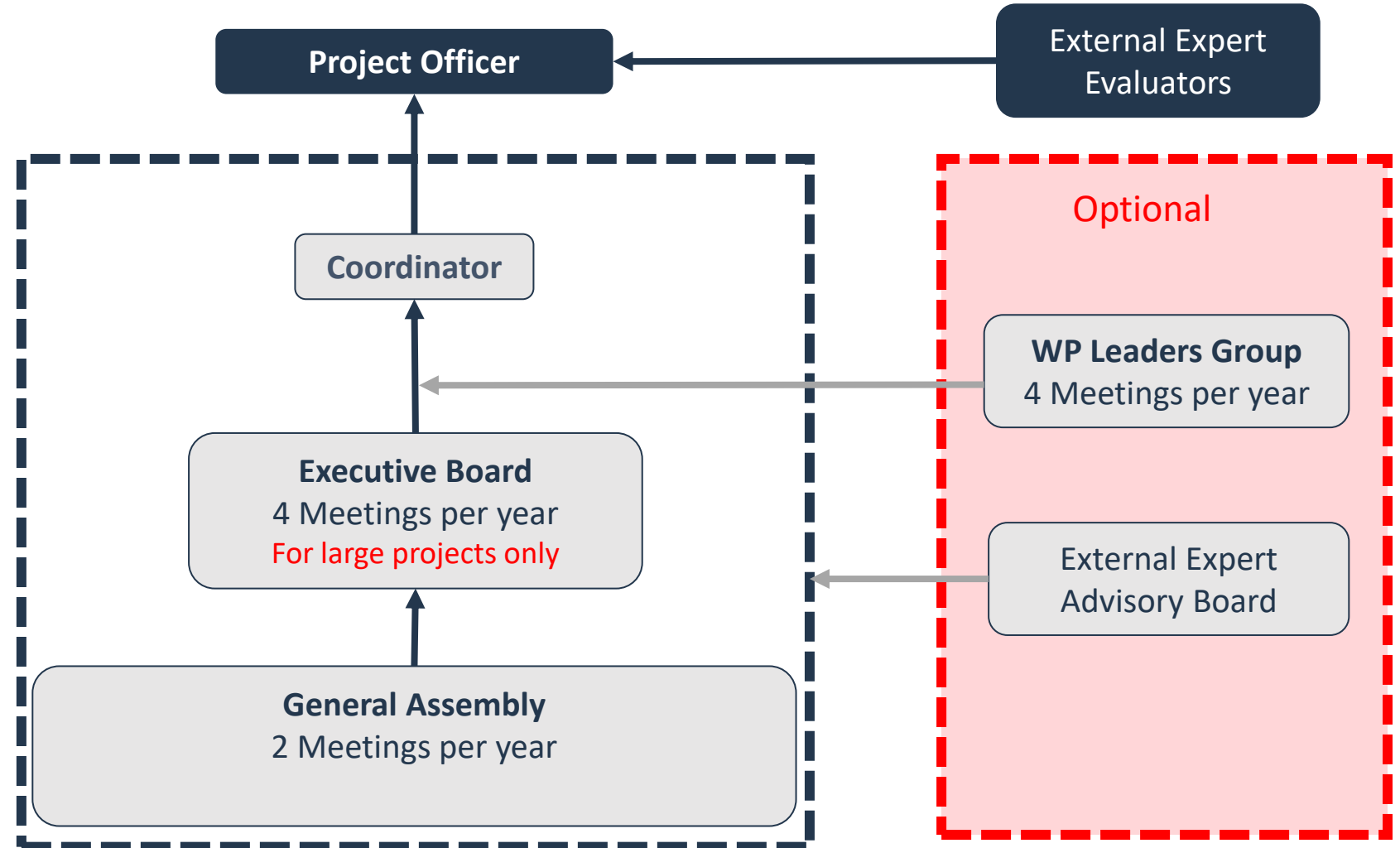👍 Make sure that the quorum and voting rules match the needs of the consortium

Governance of a project

Tips for consortium communications during GAP

Have a GAP meeting and agree deadlines and workflows

Use clear version control when sharing agreements with changes

Partners: communicate any requests for change early

Coordinator: Identify the right person in the partner institution (not just the PI!)

All communications with the PO go via the coordinating institution

Remember these are agreements between institutions, not individuals

Key acronyms

Acronyms	What it stands for
SyGMa	System for Grant Management
SEDIA	Single Electronic Data Interchange Area
GA	Grant Agreement (sometimes also used for "General Assembly")
CA	Consortium Agreement
PO	Project Officer
DoA	Description of the Action
DoH	Declaration of Honour
PIC	Participant Identification Code
LEAR	Legal Entity Appointed Representative (different from the "Legal Representative")
PLSIGN	Project Legal Signatory (project-level role)
PFSIGN	Project Financial Signatory (project-level role)
LSIGN	Legal signatory (organisation-level role)
FSIGN	Financial signatory (organisation-level role)
EEAB	External Expert Advisory Board

Thanks!

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