DisAI.eu

D3.2
Training report on opportunity seeking and scientific proposal writing

Project Title	Improving scientific excellence and creativity in combating disinformation with artificial intelligence and language technologies
Contract Nº.	101079164
Type of Action	HORIZON-CSA
Topic	Disinformation Combating
Project start date	1st Dec 2022
Duration	36 months

Funded by
the European Union

Deliverable title	Training report on opportunity seeking and scientific proposal writing
Deliverable number	D3.2
Deliverable version	1.0
Contractual date of delivery	31 May 2025
Actual date of delivery	30 May 2025
Nature of deliverable	R - Document, report
Dissemination level	Public
Work Package	WP3
Task(s)	T3.2
Partner responsible	CERTH
Author(s)	George Karantaidis (CERTH), Symeon Papadopoulos (CERTH), Nikos Sarris (CERTH)

Abstract	Within T3.2, CERTH organized a workshop for opportunity seeking and proposal writing, which took place in KInIT, Bratislava, as part of the initiative to strengthen knowledge transfer and enhance KInIT's innovation capabilities. The workshop offered a practical framework guiding participants through the entire lifecycle of a scientific proposal, from identifying relevant funding opportunities to drafting high-quality, competitive submissions. It emphasized proactive engagement in the funding landscape, strategic team formation, concept development, and the use of structured techniques in proposal writing.
Keywords	Funding opportunities, proposal preparation, proposal writing, proposal conceptualization

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	**3**
2 Workshop on Opportunity Seeking and Proposal Writing	**4**
3 Outcomes and Lessons Learned	**6**
4 Conclusions	**7**
Appendix A: Participant lists	**8**
Appendix B : List of successfully acquired projects	**9**

1 Introduction

This deliverable reports on the workshop entitled "Opportunity seeking and proposal writing" conducted within the DisAI project under Task 3.2. The primary objective of this workshop was to strengthen the knowledge transfer process and enhance KInIT's capabilities in research and innovation management. Organized by CERTH, the training aimed to provide researchers with a structured and practical approach to identifying research funding opportunities and crafting high-quality scientific proposals. Through detailed guidance on concept development, team formation, and proposal structuring, the workshop sought to equip participants with the tools necessary to effectively respond to competitive calls and elevate the overall quality and impact of their research submissions.

2 Workshop on Opportunity Seeking and Proposal Writing

The workshop in the DisAI project, hosted by KInIT and delivered by CERTH, was held on November 9th, 2023 in Bratislava, Slovakia.

The workshop was led by Senior Researcher Dr. Nikos Sarris provided a systematic guide on how to identify research funding opportunities and scientific proposals of high-quality. It outlined a process that guides researchers in spotting research calls and transforming innovative ideas into compelling, well-structured proposals. This process involved a series of well-defined steps aimed at maximizing the chances of success in competitive funding environments, particularly within frameworks such as the European Commission's calls for proposals.

The workshop emphasized that opportunity seeking is more than just waiting for a call. It requires constant vigilance, networking, and a deep understanding of one's own expertise. Researchers are encouraged to monitor upcoming calls by subscribing to relevant newsletters, regularly visiting dedicated funding portals, and participating in information sessions and networking events. This strategic approach to finding opportunities ensures that teams are well positioned to respond when a suitable call appears. Once an opportunity is identified, the proposal writing initiates with the conceptualization of an idea. At this stage, a partner, who ideally has deep expertise and familiarity with the field, proposes the idea that addresses an identified gap. The initiator then forms a core team by inviting two to three collaborators with complementary skills and a strong network of contacts. The team's initial task is to draft a short abstract of the idea, ensuring that it fully addresses the requirements of the call and is rooted in their area of expertise. Importantly, the workshop advises against choosing a call based solely on high statistical chances of funding; instead, the chosen topic should align with the team's core interests and capabilities.

The workshop introduced a framework for team development adapted from Tuckman's model and consists of four stages: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. In the Forming phase, the team meets to learn about the opportunities and challenges ahead, while in the Storming phase, team members voice their opinions and debate the concept's potential, allowing the group to identify both strengths and gaps. As the team moves into the Norming stage, resolved disagreements and established norms pave the way for a unified approach to structuring the proposal. Finally, during the Performing stage, the team shifts its focus toward achieving clearly defined goals and delivering a proposal that stands out in both clarity and impact.

The architecture of competitive scientific proposals is characterized by a methodological integration of empirical rigor and structured narrative design. The workshop lays out a step-by-step process where the initial concept is refined into a coherent story. This includes defining a small set of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) objectives, drafting representative use cases, and developing interconnected work packages that detail every aspect of the project. Special attention is given to the “pyramid responsibility structure” for proposal drafting, wherein an experienced coordinator oversees the assembly of all information—ranging from the technical sections (Excellence, Impact, and Implementation) to the administrative annexes required by many calls. By integrating quality assurance measures such as clear templates, naming conventions, and even the employment of a graphic designer, the process aims to minimize last-minute editing and ensure that the final document is both professional and persuasive. A significant portion of the workshop was devoted to practical guidance. Participants were advised to “spot the opportunity” by being visible within their professional communities and using digital platforms like the EC proposal submission portal. Once an opportunity is identified, they must “study the opportunity” carefully, analyze the call text to ensure their proposed solution directly addresses the expected outcomes. The next step is to “write your story” by creating a narrative that is both scientifically robust and accessible to evaluators, many of whom may not have in-depth knowledge of the specific research area. The advice to treat the proposal as a story rather than a rigid scientific paper is aimed at engaging evaluators from the very first page, capturing their attention through clear, concise, and compelling language.

The participants list of the workshop is available in the Appendix A.

3 Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Following the workshop, the presenter engaged with participants, addressing key challenges from opportunity seeking to proposal writing procedures. One of the most important takeaways is the value of a clear process framework of the proposal writing journey. By following a structured pathway that begins from initial idea generation through team building, conceptual refinement, and final drafting. It is crucial that collaboration among partners can significantly enhance the quality of their proposals. The workshop also highlights the importance of balancing innovation with feasibility. While a proposal should introduce fresh ideas and novel methodologies, it must also be grounded in realistic plans, detailed work packages, and clear risk mitigation strategies.

Team dynamics constitute another critical lesson that emerged during the workshop. The use of Tuckman's stages of group development enables teams to navigate through internal challenges, which promote an environment where disagreements are resolved constructively. This not only builds a stronger consortium but also ensures that the final proposal benefits from a diversity of perspectives and a unified vision. In addition, rigorous quality control, throughout all stages of the proposal preparation, emerges as a key factor that separates good proposals from great ones. There are the adaptability, collaboration, and clarity in addressing societal challenges through impactful scientific projects that should taken into consideration and can be summarized as four pillars:

- Strategic Alignment: Proposals must resonate with both call objectives and team strengths while avoiding generic approaches or overpromising outcomes that cannot be delivered.
- Collaboration: Building diverse consortia boosts innovation but requires careful selection to ensure commitment from all partners.
- Impact Articulation: Linking research outcomes explicitly to societal benefits strengthens proposals significantly.
- Iterative Refinement: Conducting regular quality checks ensures coherence across sections while avoiding last-minute errors.

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, opportunity seeking and scientific proposal writing are indispensable skills for researchers navigating competitive funding landscapes such as Horizon Europe or other international frameworks. By adopting a proactive approach to identifying funding calls, carefully forming and nurturing a collaborative team, and following a structured, narrative-driven approach to proposal drafting, researchers can significantly increase their chances of success. The process is both an art and a science: an art in its storytelling and presentation, and a science in its structured methodology and rigorous quality control, addressing significant societal issues. Ultimately, the workshop's insights provide a roadmap that not only enhances the quality of proposals but also empowers teams to pursue innovative research projects that have the potential to make a significant impact.

KInIT team has been involved in preparation of multiple proposals since this activity. We list projects successfully acquired in KInIT after the workshop in Appendix B.

Appendix A: Participant lists

Name	Affiliation
Simon Ostermann	DFKI
Symeon Papadopoulos	CERTH
Nikos Sarris	CERTH
George Karantaidis	CERTH
Ivan Srba	KInIT
Juraj Podrouzek	KInIT
Katarina Házyová	KInIT
Mária Bieliková	KInIT
Márian Šimko	KInIT
Matuš Mesarćik	KInIT
Matúš Pikuliak	KInIT
Michal Kompan	KInIT
Michal Gregor	KInIT
Miroslava Micová	KInIT
Pavlina Števiková	KInIT
Štefan Oreško	KInIT
Samantha Prange	DFKI (online)
Mihai Maftei	DFKI (online)
Rosen Dimov	DFKI (online)
Kinga Schumacher	DFKI (online)

Appendix B : List of successfully acquired projects

List of successfully acquired projects in KInIT positively affected by the training.

Acronym	Scheme	Date
V4Grid	Interreg Central Europe	31.1.2024
DisAI-AMPLIFIED	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	9.5.2024
DisTraceAI	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	14.5.2024
CEDMO 2.0	Digital Europe	9.1.2024
HERMES	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	5.8.2024
AI-Auditology	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	14.6.2024
EMA	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	17.12.2024
slovaks.ai	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	13.11.2024
ALFIE	Horizon Europe	13.6.2024
DanubeEnergy	Interreg	2.7.2024
V4Grid MIRRI	Interreg Central Europe	15.8.2024
FraudNet security	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	19.9.2024
lorAI	Horizon Europe	4.10.2024
RobIndAI	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	11.10.2024
GEPERO	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	15.10.2024
SensAI	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	15.1.2025
EUDHIT	Horizon Europe	10.1.2025
DIG4HEALTH	Recovery and Resilience Plan Slovakia	13.1.2025