



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



How to write a winning competitive application

Richard Forsgård October 23, 2026

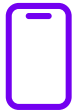
Richard Forsgård



Grant Writer, RDI Services



richard.forsgard@hamk.fi



+358 504773989



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



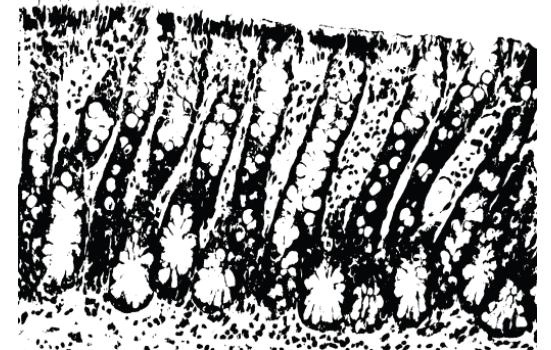
ÖREBRO UNIVERSITET



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

INTESTINAL PERMEABILITY AS A MARKER OF GASTROINTESTINAL HEALTH

Richard Forsgård



[Gut Microbes](#). 2023; 15(1): 2229938.

Published online 2023 Jul 4. doi: [10.1080/19490976.2023.2229938](https://doi.org/10.1080/19490976.2023.2229938)

PMCID: PMC10321188

PMID: [37401761](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37401761/)

Limosilactobacillus reuteri DSM 17938 supplementation and SARS-CoV-2 specific antibody response in healthy adults: a randomized, triple-blinded, placebo-controlled trial

Richard A. Forsgård, ^a Julia Rode, ^a Karin Lobenius-Palmér, ^a Annalena Kamm, ^a Snehal Patil, ^b Miriam G. J. Tacken, ^c Marleen A. H. Lentjes, ^{a, b} Jakob Axelsson, ^d Gianfranco Grompone, ^d Scott Montgomery, ^{a, b, e, f} and Robert J. Brummer ^a

What is Horizon Europe (HE)?

- European Union's flagship funding program for research and innovation, covering the period from 2021 to 2027.
- Budget is about 95 b€
- HE's objectives are to:
 - Strengthen Europe's research, competitiveness, and growth
 - Support EU's strategies and policies
 - Address global challenges



25 b€

PILLAR I

Excellent Science

**European Research
Council**

**Marie Skłodowska-
Curie Actions**

**Research
Infrastructures**

54 b€

PILLAR II

Global Challenges

Clusters:

1. Health
2. Culture, Creativity, and Inclusive Society
3. Civil Security for Society
4. Digital, Industry, and Space
5. Climate, Energy, and Mobility
6. Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment

EU Missions

NEB Facility

14 b€

PILLAR III

Innovative Europe

**European Innovation
Council**

**European Innovation
Ecosystems**

**European Institute of
Innovation and
Technology**



Co-funded by
the European Union

3 b€

Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area

Sneak peak into FP10 (2028→)



Co-funded by
the European Union

Pillar I

EXCELLENT SCIENCE

€44.079 BILLION

EUROPEAN RESEARCH
COUNCIL

MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-
CURIE ACTIONS

SCIENCE FOR EU POLICIES

Pillar II

COMPETITIVENESS AND SOCIETY

€75.876 BILLION

COMPETITIVENESS¹ :

1. Clean Transition and Industrial Decarbonisation
2. Health, Biotech, Agriculture and Bioeconomy
3. Digital leadership
4. Resilience and Security, Defence Industry and Space

SOCIETY:

1. Global societal challenges
2. EU Missions
3. New European Bauhaus Facility

Pillar III

INNOVATION

€38.785 BILLION

EUROPEAN INNOVATION
COUNCIL

INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS
AND
THE KNOWLEDGE
TRIANGLE

Pillar IV

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

€16.262 BILLION

ERA POLICIES

RESEARCH AND
TECHNOLOGY
INFRASTRUCTURES

WIDENING PARTICIPATION
AND SPREADING
EXCELLENCE

Cluster

Cluster 4. **Digital, industry, space**
Work Programme

Destination

Destination 1. **Climate neutral, Circular and Digitised Production**
KSOT, Expected impacts, EU policies

Call

Call: **HORIZON-CL4-2024-TWIN-TRANSITION-01-TWO-STAGE**
Deadlines, the reserved budget

Topic

Topic: **HORIZON-CL4-2024-TWIN-TRANSITION-01-01: Bio
intelligent manufacturing industries (Made in Europe
Partnership) (RIA)**
Expected outcomes, scope...



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

HE is open for all types of organisations!

EU Member States

- And their overseas areas and territories

Non-EU countries

- HE associated countries (Norway, Iceland, Ukraine, UK)
- Canada, New Zealand, Tunisia, Morocco, South Korea, Switzerland..
- Low- to middle-income countries (listing)

Other countries

- IF mentioned in the call text!
- IF their participation is necessary!

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-auratom_en.pdf

Africa Initiative IV under Horizon Europe

- **€605.45 million** to support EU–Africa cooperation in research and innovation for 2026–2027
- The initiative contributes to the implementation of the **AU–EU Innovation Agenda**, addressing agreed short-, medium- and long-term actions across priority areas.
 - **Public Health**
 - **Green Transition**
 - **Innovation and Technology**
 - **Capacities for Science**

What is Erasmus+?

- Erasmus+ is an EU funding program designed to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe
- Budget about 26 b€
- Erasmus+ objectives are to:
 - to promote learning mobility of individuals and groups, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the fields of education and training, youth, and sports



ERASMUS+ STRUCTURE 2021-2027

Key Action 1

Learning mobility for individuals

Student mobility

Staff mobility

Key Action 2

Cooperation among organizations and institutions

Partnerships for
Cooperation

Partnerships for
Innovation

Partnerships for
Excellence

Capacity Building
projects

Key Action 3

Support to policy development and cooperation

Support for Public
Policy Reform

Jean Monnet Actions

Support to teaching and research in the field of EU studies

Modules

Chairs

Centres of
Excellence

Networks

Who can participate in Erasmus+ calls?

- In general, any organisation active in the fields of education, training, youth, or sport

EU Member States

- And their overseas areas and territories

Non-EU countries

- North Macedonia, Serbia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Türkiye

Other countries

- IF mentioned in the call text!
- IF their participation is necessary!

Other EU funding programmes

- Digital Europe
- Creative Europe
- COST Actions
- LIFE
- Research Fund for Coal and Steel
- EU4Health
- Citizens, Equality, Right, and Values (CERV) programme
- Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument
- European Defense Fund
- Interreg
 - Interreg Europe
 - Interreg Central Baltic
 - Interreg Baltic Sea Region
- European Regional Development Fund
- European Social Fund +
- Just Transition Fund

Every EU funding programme drives a political priority!

EU funding programme	Major policy drivers
Horizon Europe	European Green Deal Digital Decade & technological sovereignty EU competitiveness and industrial strategy Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA) Evidence-based policymaking and global challenges (SDGs)
Erasmus+	European Education Area European Skills Agenda Social inclusion, mobility, and EU values
Digital Europe	Digital Decade policy programme Deployment of key digital capacities (AI, data, HPC, skills)
Creative Europe	Cultural diversity and linguistic pluralism Competitiveness and resilience of cultural and creative sectors
Interreg	Economic, social, and territorial cohesion Cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation Integrated, place-based regional development

How political priorities shape EU funding priorities

Von der Leyen asks
Draghi for a report on
European
competitiveness
Sep 2023

Sep 2024
The Draghi
Report

EU's Competitiveness
Compass
Jan 2025

Mar 2025
Union of Skills

€22.5 million for the
Choose Europe for
Science pilot initiative
under MSCA
May 2025

“The European University system is also failing to provide sufficiently attractive conditions for the most talented researchers both from Europe and around the world.”

“The EU must become a global magnet for talent, to both attract and retain it...Europe must strengthen its attractiveness for top researchers, specialists in strategic fields...”



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

Another example...

HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-TRANSFO-06: Making Europe a global magnet for talent - Attracting and retaining students, researchers and high-skilled workers from outside the EU

*The EU's ability to compete on a global scale depends not only on retaining homegrown talent but also on actively drawing and retaining talent from outside Europe. **The Union of Skills**, adopted in March 2025, aims to make the EU and the European Research Area (ERA) a **global magnet for talent**, to attract and retain brilliant extra-EU tertiary students, top-level researchers and high-skilled workers.*

*There is **still limited research on what specific factors** and their variability across Member States and Associated Countries (e.g. academic quality, career opportunities, cultural appeal, political context or funding availability) most influence the decision-making process for international students when choosing destinations.*

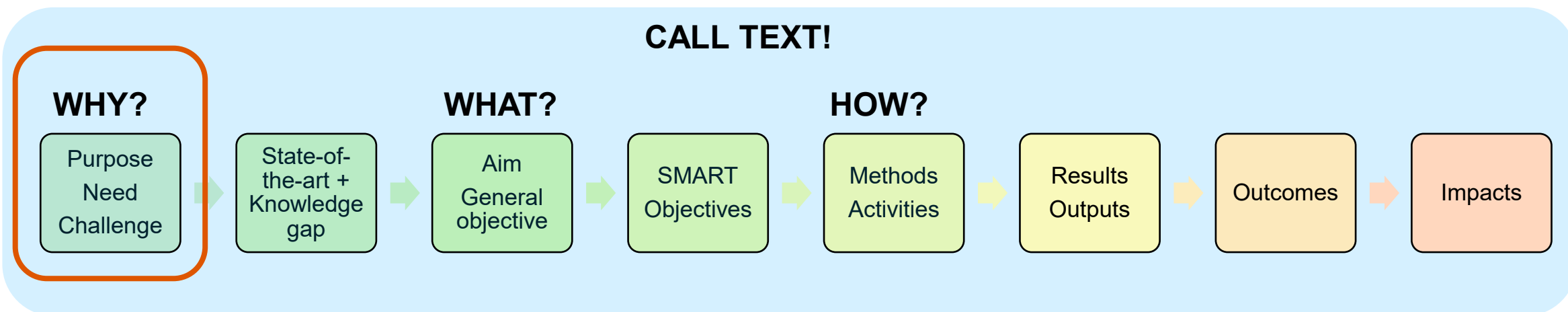
*Proposals should generate rigorous, **policy-relevant evidence** on the factors that may influence **students, researchers, and high-skilled workers** from non-EU countries **to move to and remain in the EU**.*

Political priorities become research priorities!



Political context is the starting point of your project's narrative!

CALL TEXT!



Here, you place your project within the wider frame of scientific/societal development!

- Policy landscape / political priorities
- Emerging societal trends
- Local/regional/national/European/global strategies
- Target group needs



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY
NETWORK
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union

It all starts with the correct...

a) funder

b) funding call

so, familiarise yourself with them!

Who is the funder?

- What are their objectives as an organisation?
- Which type of projects have they funded previously?
- Who have they funded previously?
- Has someone from your organisation received funding from them?



Funding call text analysis

- Top-down vs bottom-up
- Individual vs organisation/consortium
- Academic vs industry vs policy
 - Scope of the activities
 - Results/Outputs
 - Outcomes/Impact
 - Stakeholders



An example of a consortium

	Type	Role	Expertise
Partner 1	Research Organisation	Coordinator	R&D and project management
Partner 2	Large industry B2B	WP Leader	R&D and commercial
Partner 3	Large industry B2C	Partners	Commercial
Partner 4	University	WP Leader	R&D
Partner 5	University	Partner	Social sciences
Partner 6	Research Organisation	WP Leader	R&D
Partner 7	SME	Partner	Supply chain actor
Partner 8	SME	Partners	Sustainability, LCA
Partner 9	Civil Society	WP Leader	Consumer engagement
Partner 10	Service Company	WP Leader	Communication

Reading the call text

Expected Outcome:

Successful proposals will enable the bio-based industries in the Union, including SMEs, to contribute to the enhancement of European industrial sustainability, competitiveness and resource independence and to the deployment of innovative and sustainable value-chains in the bio-based sectors as a prerequisite and driver of future solutions for a circular economy and the bioeconomy transitions. Projects results will contribute to deliver bio-based solutions with reduced environmental impacts on soil, water, and air quality, biodiversity and climate, in line with the EGD objectives, the EU circular economy and the EU zero pollution action plans, the bioeconomy strategy and the communication on sustainable carbon cycles.

Projects results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Circular design of bio-based processes and products: increasing resources and energy efficiency of bio-based technologies, decreasing their environmental impacts on soil, water, and air quality, biodiversity and climate, improving durability and suitability of bio-based products to be safely re-used and re-manufactured, allowing for high-quality recycling, increasing the safe recycled content in new products;
- Product information systems enabling the circularity, safety and environmental sustainability of the bio-based manufacturing sectors and of the use of products at consumers' level.

Scope:

The bio-based processes and products within the scope of this topic do not include food, feed, biofuels, bioenergy and cultural and recreation sectors. The establishment of safe, resilient, competitive and equitable production and consumption systems with reduced environmental impacts on soil, water, and air quality, biodiversity and climate, is part of the objectives of the EU circular economy.

To improve the capacity of the industrial bio-based sectors within the scope of the topic, especially the manufacturing sectors, to contributing to that objective, proposals should:

In order to achieve the expected outcomes, and in line with the EU strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation, international cooperation is encouraged. Projects are expected to contribute to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative by interacting with the NEB Community, NEB Lab and other relevant actions of the NEB initiative through sharing information, best practice, and, where relevant, results.

Where relevant, proposals should seek links with and capitalise on the results of past and ongoing EU funded projects, including under the Circular Bio-based Europe JU, the Processes 4 Planet partnership and other European partnerships of Horizon Europe.

This topic requires the effective contribution of SSH disciplines and the involvement of SSH experts, institutions as well as the inclusion of relevant SSH expertise, in order to produce meaningful and significant effects enhancing the societal impact of the related research activities.

Technological Readiness Level (TRL)?

Activities are expected to start from **TRL 5** in order to achieve **TRL 7** by the end of the project.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Basic principles observed	Technology Concept Formulated	Experimental Proof of Concept	Technolgoey Validated in lab	Technology validated in relevant environment	Technology demonstrated in relevant environment	System proto-type demo in operational environment	System complete and qualified	System proven in operational environment Commercial

Innovation Denmark's Societal Readiness Levels:

https://innovationsfonden.dk/sites/default/files/2019-03/societal_readiness_levels_-_srl.pdf

KTH's Innovation Readiness Level:

<https://kthinnovationreadinesslevel.com/>



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funding call text analysis

- What type of needs/challenges the project should address?
- What are the expected outcomes of the project? (i.e. happens during or shortly after the project?)
- Which objectives/Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) the project should meet?
- What are the expected impacts of the project? (i.e. what has changed 1-5 years after the project?)
- What type of methods/activities/approaches the project should apply?
- Are there any specific elements/aspects/caveats the project should consider?
- What type of stakeholders/target groups the project should involve or reach? What should be their level of commitment?
- What policies/initiatives/other projects the project should support or align with?
- What type of partners/expertise the project consortium should include?



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



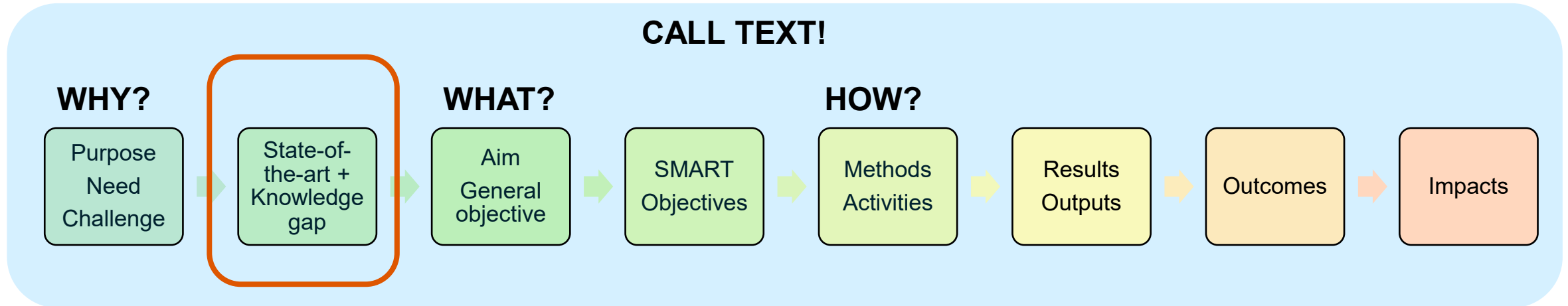
REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY
NETWORK
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union

Building the project's narrative

CALL TEXT!



Here, you place your project within your scientific field!

- What is the current state of evidence?
- What has been done previously in this research field?
- Previous projects in the field – how do you establish the link? (CORDIS database!)
- Where are the gaps in research? How do you go beyond the state-of-the-art? TRL?
- Why there are gaps in research?



Building the project's narrative

CALL TEXT!

WHY?

Purpose
Need
Challenge



State-of-
the-art +
Knowledge
gap



WHAT?

Aim
General
objective



SMART
Objectives



HOW?

Methods
Activities



Results
Outputs



Outcomes



Impacts

Here, you tell your solution to the identified knowledge gap!

- What is the aim of your project?
- What are the general objectives of the project?



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences

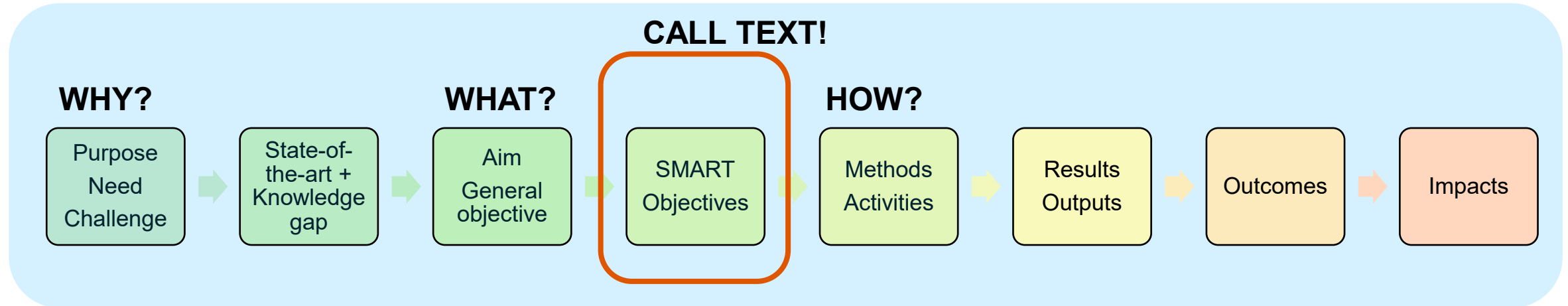


REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY
NETWORK
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union

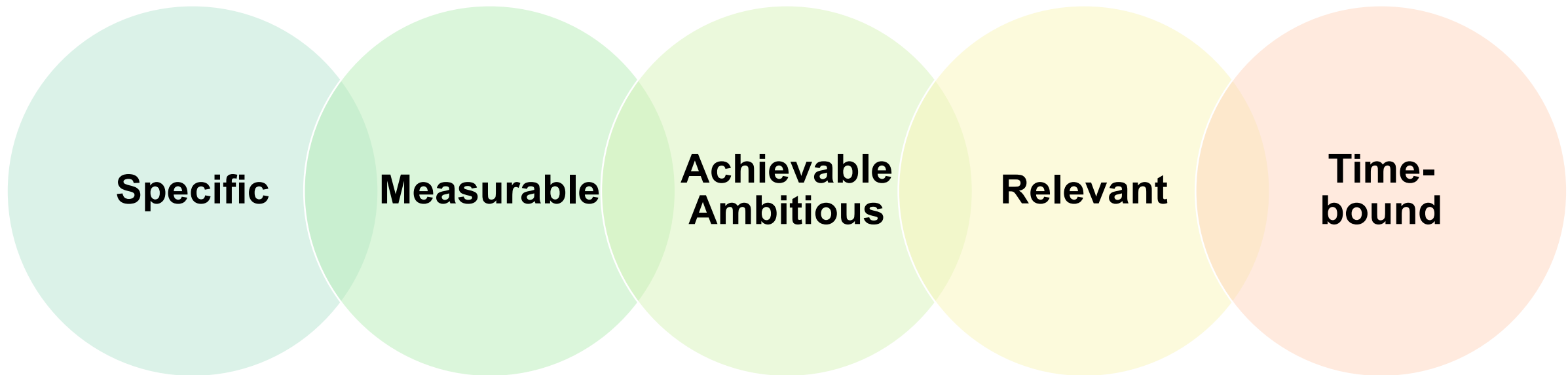
Building the project's narrative



Here, you state the specific project objectives that take you to your main aim!

- Can be sub-objectives under your general objectives

SMART Objectives



+ VERIFIABLE!

SMART Objectives

OBJECTIVE: We will increase HEI staff competences in writing grant applications.

S

OBJECTIVE: We will deliver **a training module on proposal writing to HEI researchers and teachers.**

M

OBJECTIVE: We will deliver a **10-h** training module on proposal writing to **20** HEI researchers and teachers.

A

OBJECTIVE: We will deliver a 10-h training module on proposal writing to 20 HEI researchers and teachers resulting in **10+ high-quality (>80% scoring) proposals to international funding programmes.**

T

OBJECTIVE: We will deliver a 10-h training module on proposal writing to 20 HEI researchers and teachers resulting in 10+ high-quality (>80% scoring) proposals to international funding programmes **the end of 2027.**

R

OBJECTIVE: This objective contributes to our organisational strategy to increase external funding.



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

Your objectives matter!

- *The **objectives** outlined within this proposal are clearly stated although **not convincingly focused**.*
- *However, **some objectives** are not sufficiently **measurable** or **verifiable** because key performance indicators and target values are **not adequately specified**.*
- *However, the **objectives** of the proposal are **not fully clear, measurable, and verifiable**.*
- *While some metrics are provided, overall, the objectives are **not sufficiently measurable and verifiable**.*
- *The consortium proposes **measurable and achievable objectives** that are **clearly linked to the work plan and KPIs** for following the progress.*
- *All of the specific and main objectives of the proposal are clear and well described with clear articulation between project goals, main objective and three key objectives. **All of the specific objectives are measurable and verifiable with well described key deliverables and KPIs**. They are also **realistically achievable within the duration of the project** because of proper dimension of the ambitions of the intervention. This is very good.*



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences

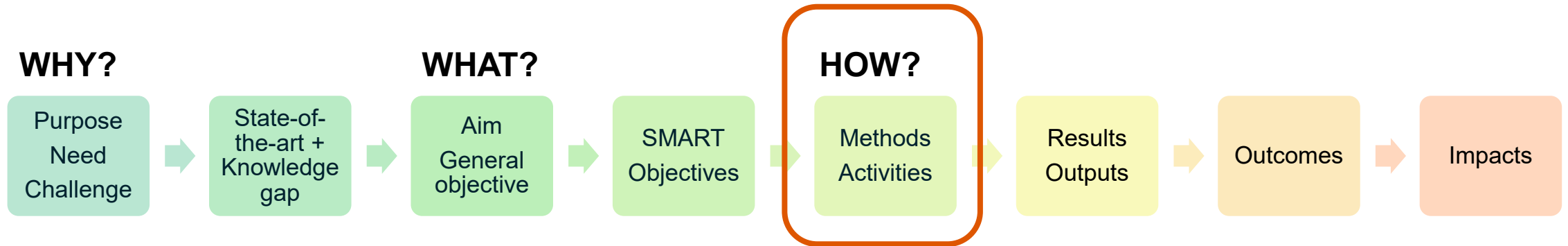


REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY
NETWORK
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union

Building the project's narrative

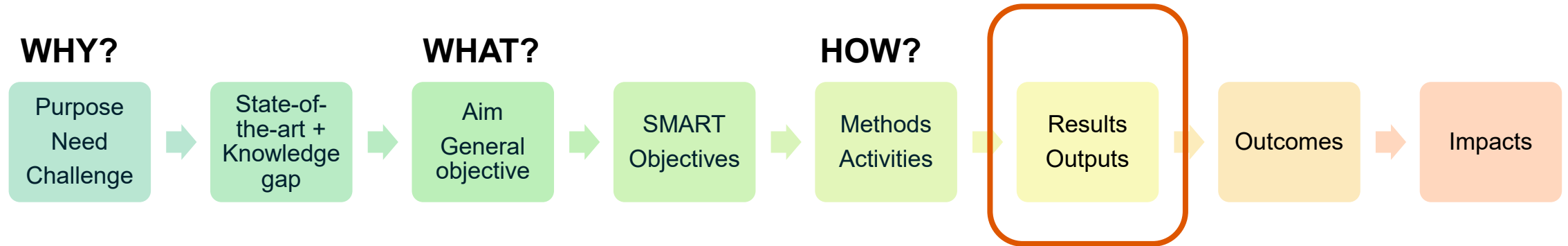


Here, you describe the methods you are applying to reach your project objectives!

- What is your approach and why? What are the challenges/assumptions in your chosen methodology?
- What type of data your methodology produces? Important for data management, open access...
- Do you have the necessary expertise, services, and/or infrastructure in place? If not, who has?
- Is your approach novel or innovative? If yes, why?



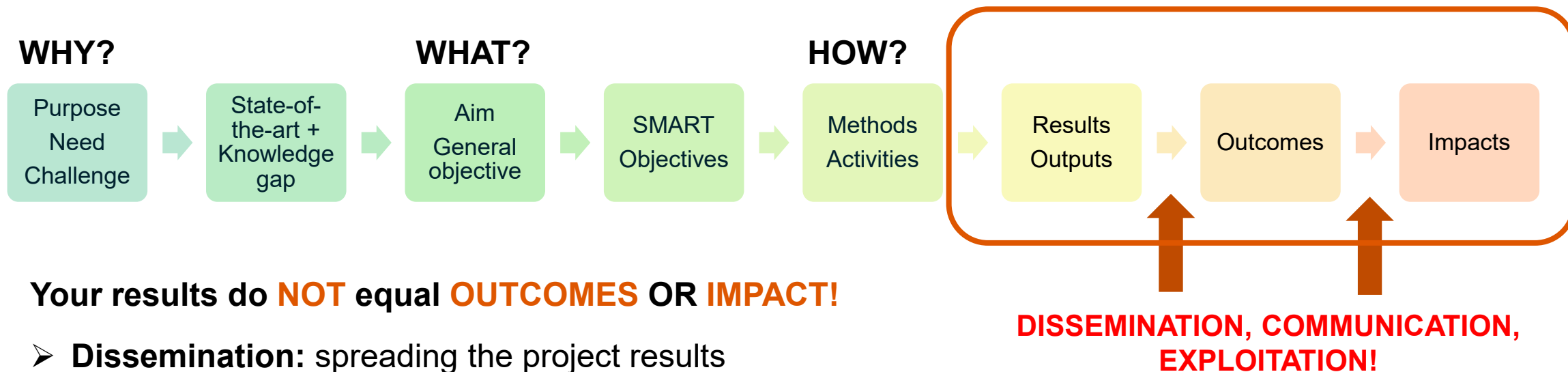
Building the project's narrative



Here, you tell what type of results and/or outputs your project produces!

- What type of results and outputs does your methodology produce?
- Identify your Key Exploitable Results (KERs)
- E.g., data sets, products, services, publications, protocols
- How do they link to your objectives?

Building the project's narrative



Your results do **NOT** equal **OUTCOMES OR IMPACT!**

- **Dissemination:** spreading the project results
- **Communication:** overall project communication activities
- **Exploitation:** KERs! Who uses the project results and how? Intellectual property rights? Sustainability?
INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FOR EU PROJECTS!



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences

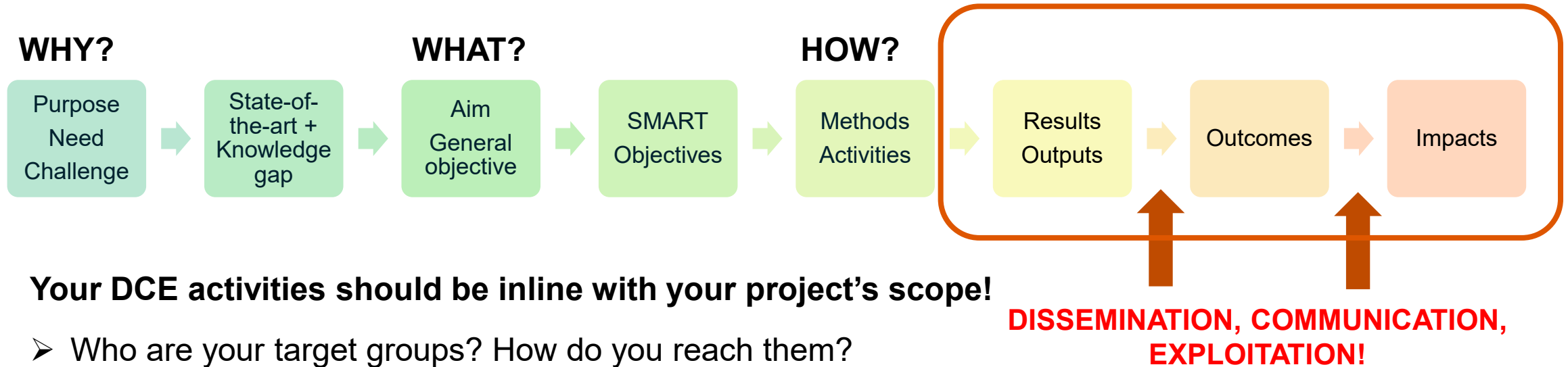


REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY
NETWORK
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union

Building the project's narrative



Your DCE activities should be inline with your project's scope!

- Who are your target groups? How do you reach them?
- The general public is **NOT** a good target group!
- Not everything for everyone, be as specific as possible!



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences

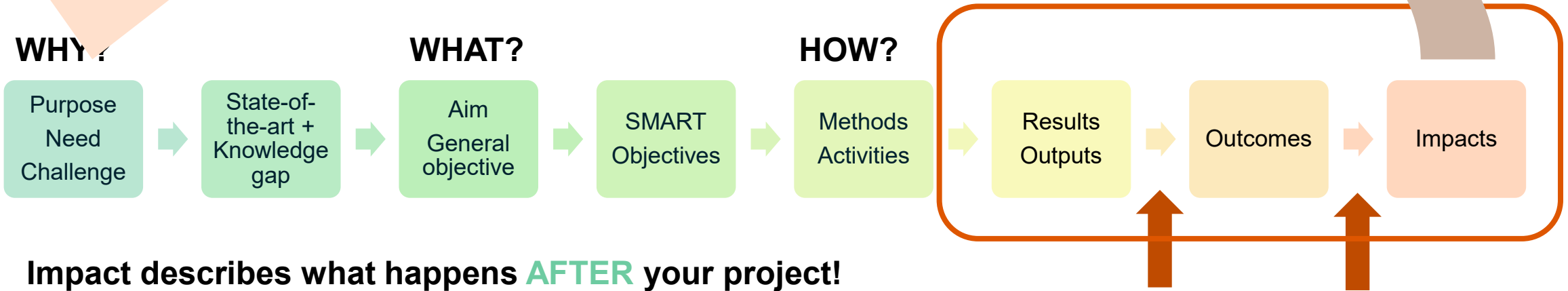


REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY
NETWORK
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union

Building the project's narrative



Impact describes what happens AFTER your project!

- What changes? Where and when?
- Impacts can be scientific, economic, societal...
- How do you measure the impacts? Indicators, KPIs vs Key Value Indicators (KVIIs)
- Possible barriers for impacts?

Result vs

Training module for teachers
on green transition

Agricultural method

Digital study programme

Medical procedure

Technology

Outcome vs

Embedding of green transition
topics into curricula

Increased agricultural
output

Increased access to
education

Changes in disease
treatment

Changes in industrial
standards

Impact

Graduates contributing to
green societies

Increased income for
farmers

Increased employment

Increased quality of life

Increased service life



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences

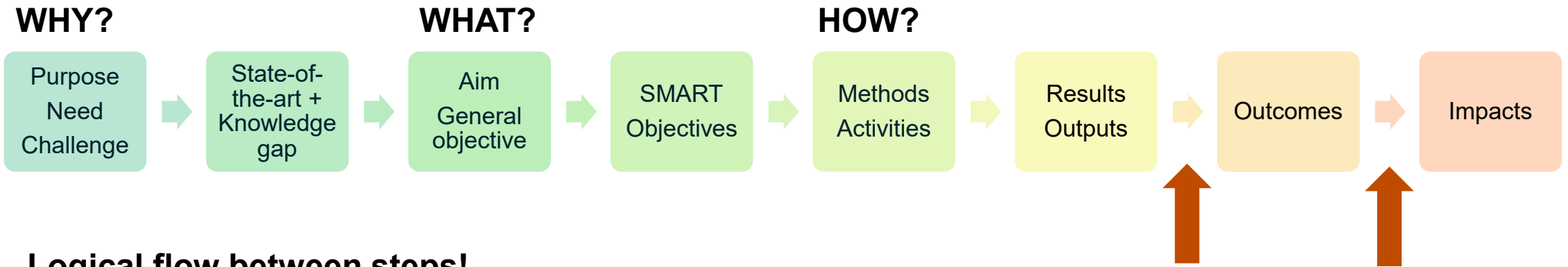


REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY
NETWORK
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union

A **red thread** through these steps builds the macro-level narrative of your project!



Logical flow between steps!

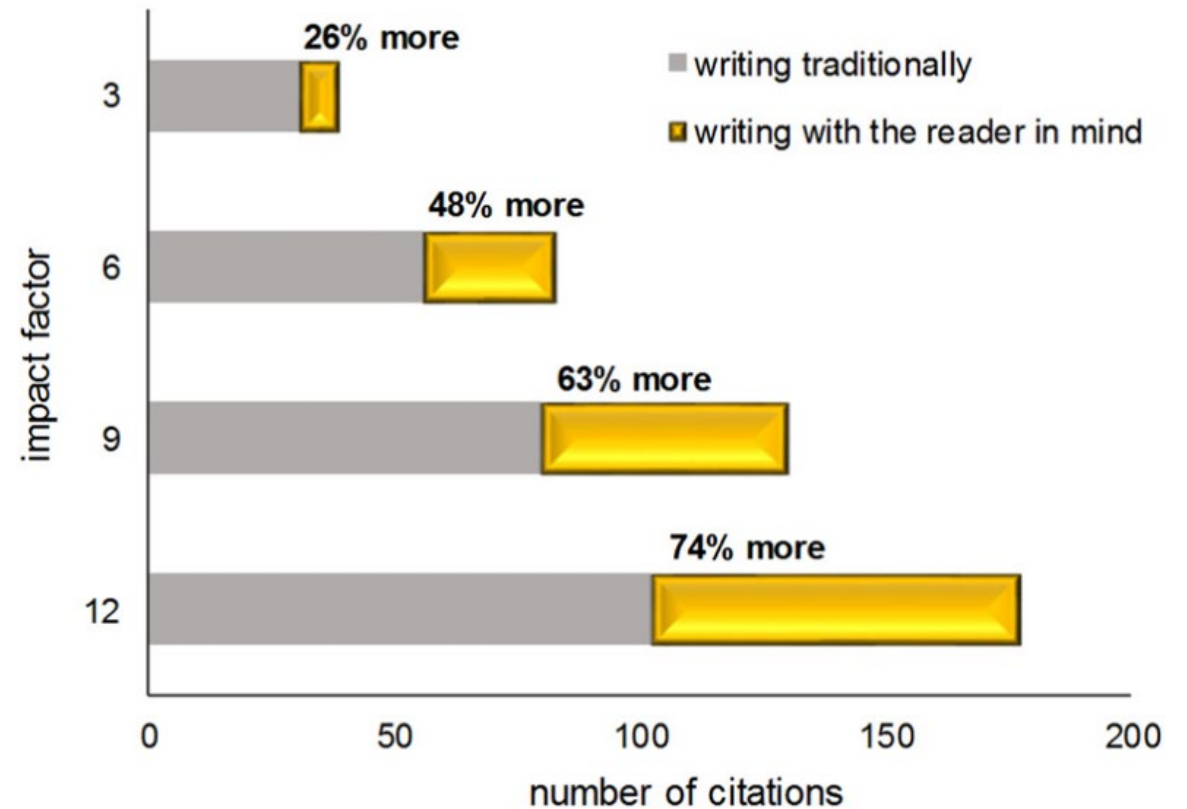
- Replace “and then” with “therefore” – South Park’s creators’ approach to storytelling
- Nothing happens by itself!

**DISSEMINATION, COMMUNICATION,
EXPLOITATION!**

How to support your narrative with effective writing?

Yes, your writing style matters!

- Narrative Style Influences Citation Frequency in Climate Change Science (*Hillier et al., 2016*)
- Accessible writing style improves the readability and understanding of scientific abstracts (*Ryba et al., 2021*)
- “Writing more with the reader mind produces more citations, regardless of career stage or where you aim to publish.” (*Freeling et al., 2019*)
- A narrative writing style correlated with higher scores in grant applications (van den Basselaar & Mom, 2022)



Freeling et al. (2019)

“Humans are storytelling animals”

- You are the narrator, and the reviewer is the reader whose job is to assess the credibility of your story (in relation to the funding call text!)
- **What kills your narrative?**
 - **Leaps in logic** – your red thread is in pieces!
 - **Vagueness** – you are not specific enough!
 - **Incomprehension** – your reader does not understand you!
- In most cases, the problem is **NOT** the credibility of your story, but the inability to assess whether your story is indeed credible or not!



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

How to NOT kill your narrative?

- **Use active voice!**

- *“Project meetings will be organised...”* → *“The project management team meets...”*

- *“The samples will be analysed...”* → *“Researcher X/Organisation Y will analyse the samples...”*

- **Use accessible language!**

- The reviewers are not necessary experts in your subject field!

- Avoid overtly technical terms, buzzwords, and abbreviations!

- **What do the reviewers need to know to understand your project?**



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

How to NOT kill your narrative?

- **Use settings, conjunctions, and signposts to guide the reader!**

- *Furthermore, moreover, for example* → Links sentences/concepts together
- *Firstly...lastly* → Marks the beginning and the end of a concept
- *However, in contrast* → Expresses contradiction with the previous concept
- *Currently, previously, in Europe* → Anchors the concept in time and/or in space

- **Use end focus!**

- Place the most important term and/or idea in the end of the sentence!
- Builds flow by providing you a natural link between sentences!
- “**Method X** is the gold standard for analysing samples Y. Organisation Z routinely uses **method X**...”
- “The gold standard for analysing samples Y is **method X**. **Method X** sees routine use at Organisation Z...”



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

How to NOT kill your narrative?

- **Avoid ambiguous quantifiers!**

- *“Many young people are interested in...”*
- *“According to a recent national survey, 76% of 18-25-year-olds Finnish university students are interested in...”*
- *“Some old people experience feeling left out of...”*
- *“45% of individuals over 70 years of age report feeling left out of...”*

- **Avoid value statements!**

- Words, such as *excellent, best, unique, etc.*, can be jarring unless properly justified.

- **Avoid blanket statements and justify your claims!**

- *“This project applies an innovative methodology...”* → Need to justify why it is innovative!
- *“The project activities will be inclusive...”* → Tell how!



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Co-funded by
the European Union

How to NOT kill your narrative?

- **Be explicit!**

- *“The aim of the project is....”, “The expected results are...”*
- *“The project supports the objectives of the Policy paper X by...”*
- The reviewers’ job is to look for weaknesses; if you let them interpret on your behalf, they are probably inclined not to interpret favourably!

- **Avoid jargon!**

- *“Co-creation sessions with stakeholders from varied backgrounds”*
- *“Three 2-hour workshops with four representatives from academia, four representatives from industry, and two policymakers”*

Other tips

- Respect the application requirements!
- Write the required parts in the correct sections
- **Treat every part as important and integral for a successful project!**
 - Data management, open access, interdisciplinarity, gender dimension...
- A funding application is **NOT** a scientific article or an essay – use headers, line breaks, other formatting/visuals to your advantage!
- Highlight important parts / concepts!
- Use tables and figures, but only **when they add value!**
- If available, look through the reviewer instructions: what are they paying attention to?



HAMK

Häme University
of Applied Sciences



Take home messages

- Know the policy background/wider context!
- Know your funder and the call text!
- Be as specific as you can!
- Be consistent with your narrative!
- Write for a reader!



Co-funded by
the European Union

