

A Guide to Addressing Diversity in your Research Proposal

Background

Writing robust, detailed gender and/or diversity plans in grant applications has become increasingly important, with some funders requiring explicit descriptions of how you address dimensions of gender and diversity in your project.

For example, Horizon Europe grant proposal templates now contain a specific one-page section titled “Gender dimension.” It used to be sufficient for applicants to mention gender balance in team composition and sample populations, as well as sex balance in animal models and cell lines. It was also enough for applicants to say that they will follow their institution’s gender equality or diversity plan. ***However, gender and/or diversity dimensions of research proposals extend beyond team composition. They require thinking carefully about the nature of your research, your methods, and the organisation and implementation of the project, including governance, dissemination, and outreach.***

The purpose of this document

This document contains some prompts/questions to enable you to think comprehensively about the gender/diversity dimensions of your project. Please note a couple of things:

- The prompts are meant to spark further thinking, especially during project planning and proposal writing phases.
- The list is not intended to be a checklist.
- We chose to make it suitable for a range of fields rather than comprehensive to any single field.
- It is suitable for individual and collaborative projects.
- It is not intended to be a guide to all of the best practices for diversity and inclusion in scholarly research, science, or academic culture. Hopefully it would prompt you to look for useful resources.

This document is specifically focused on ensuring that proposals are competitive because they describe considerations about sex, gender, and other elements of diversity comprehensively and in the appropriate places.

What does diversity mean?

Many of our prompts here focus on gender because it is the minimum element of diversity consideration that many funding agencies currently ask for. For an explanation of sex vs. gender, please see [this resource](#).

However, “diversity” obviously encompasses many other attributes, including race, ethnicity, age, religion, language, language proficiency, having care responsibilities, country of origin, (dis)ability, sexuality, socio-economic position, and political preference/ideology. All these aspects may be taken into consideration when assessing the gender and diversity dimension of research proposals, depending on e.g., the research topic, scope, population and used methods. Also, EU proposals often require participation from diverse EU member states as well, and participation from underrepresented countries is particularly encouraged.

Which proposal sections have ‘diversity dimensions’?

There are specific sections on gender diversity, sometimes titled “gender dimension plan,” in Horizon Europe templates. Any dimensions of diversity relevant to the proposal should be addressed here.

In addition, other sections of research proposals related to/interwoven with gender and diversity are, for example:

- organisation and implementation of the project
- Specific sections on activities related to open science. *Many diversity issues intersect with open science considerations.*
- Sections/work packages on project management, including recruitment and hiring processes, and composition of external advisory boards. These should mention how advisory board members are recruited and compensated. They should also mention how early stage researchers are encouraged and promoted in the project, if relevant.
- Methodology sections, especially regarding subject recruitment, data collection, data analysis.
- Sections on outreach dissemination

- Sections on community involvement
- Sections on scientific, economic, and societal impact and knowledge utilisation

Considering and addressing a proposal’s ‘diversity dimension’ clearly goes beyond team composition. The remainder of this document gives pointers as to how address this dimension in the different sections.

What diversity topics should you address (if they are relevant)?

1. Team composition	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Is the research team representative of the sample or study population?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, you should say so in the proposal. If no, you might consider explaining why.	
Are there opportunities for teams to incorporate categories of diversity that are also present outside the research team?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, you should explain how.	
Is there a balance in terms of gender, age, disciplinary background (when applicable), ethnicity, language skills, socioeconomic position, disability, and other attributes (see above)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If there is a balance, and/or you have made conscious efforts to seek a balance, then you should say so in your proposal.	
Are you making efforts to recruit underrepresented groups to the team?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, you should say so in your proposal.	A list of resources is being built.
Are you planning to			If yes, you should say so in the	

make sustainable efforts to increase access of underrepresented groups to this area of research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	proposal. (Note: this might be appropriate for funding from NWO or other funders for science communication. It may also be appropriate for sections of the proposal that ask about activities related to open science.)	
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Also: For a management section/work package, it might be appropriate to discuss the diversity of the team and how you will ensure that it flourishes.

2. Management	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Do you have an advisory board with members from the study population?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe how they are chosen and compensated.	
Is there an external advisory board?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, how far does it represent relevant diverse voices?	
Are early stage researchers given opportunities to have roles of responsibility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe how this will happen.	
Do you have a conflict resolution procedure to deal specifically with issues related to gender and diversity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, you should state this in the proposal. If not, you should state your confidence that the conflict resolution for scientific matters also functions for other conflicts.	

3. Scope	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Is your research about events, procedures, histories, or other aspects that involve a certain group or community of humans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If yes, do you involve the perspectives of that group in the design, execution of research methods, the analysis of results, and the reporting of findings?</p> <p>Note: There are two ways to do this: you can imagine these perspectives, or you can ask the target group (which is the stronger strategy). Describe in the proposal how you do this.</p>	

4a. Methods—study population	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Have you created a list of all of the criteria for inclusion and exclusion from the study group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If so, list the criteria in your proposal.	
Can you justify these criteria, so that they do not privilege one group over another on any dimension?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, consider justifying them in your text, especially if they seem contradictory.	
Are there consequences of this selection for the subject group and for those not belonging to your subject group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, consider discussing these consequences in your text.	
Can the results still be applied to larger groups (if applicable)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, justify this generalization.	
Are there groups that are			If yes, consider explaining the	

often excluded from comparable research setups?			reasons as well as the consequences.	
Do you need new data(sets) in order to include diversity dimensions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe how you will acquire this data and incorporate it into your study.	

4b. Methods—your presence as a researcher	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Would you consider yourself a member of your subject group (if applicable)? Are others in your research team?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, mention this in the proposal, and describe its implications for the research process.	
Does your gender/nationality/ethnic /language skills/physical ability/age/socio economic background etc. play a role in how you set up data collection, do the data collection, and impact your ability to recruit subjects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe in the proposal how you accommodate this impact and mitigate any risks it presents. If not, and if one could reasonably conclude that there should be an impact, you might consider describing how you will manage these.	
If you do interviews, will your interviewees have a comparable level of proficiency in the interview language as you do?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, mention how you will accommodate these differences. If not, mention that it does not.	

4c. Methods–assumptions	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Do your data collection, data analysis, and their outputs assume homogeneity of anatomy, physiology, disease processes, cognition and social behavior along dimensions of diversity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, definitely reflect on this assumption. In the proposal, consider justifying this assumption and how you have made allowances.	

4d. Methods–Other	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Do the administrative units/jurisdictions in which your research takes place have rules about reporting sex/gender that contradict procedures of your research? (Eg., some EU member states are working toward not requiring the reporting of sex/gender data.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, mention how you accommodate these rules.	

5. Results/analysis	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Does your analysis team involve any members of the community you are studying?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe how. If word counts allow, consider briefly describing why this inclusion was not possible.	
Have you ensured that you can avoid gender/diversity-related bias in statistical analyses, modeling, and other analyses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe that you have done this, and also describe how.	

6. Reporting and Dissemination	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Do you have plans to report findings to the community you are studying?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe how. If no, justify this.	
Do you have plans to report your findings to a wide range of audiences — ie., not just academics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, describe those plans.	
Have you thought about the assumptions you make about the homogeneity of your outreach audiences? For example, reaching out to heart patients with results from a cardiovascular study is important, but do not assume that all heart patients have the same language skills or the same gender of the subjects in your study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, consider describing this process when you assemble your dissemination plan.	

<p>Do you consider digital accessibility of your proposal and research output? Find a checklist here https://www.essentialaccessibility.com/blog/website-accessibility-checklist</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If yes, include this in the proposal.</p>	
<p>Will research results be presented at conferences that maintain a diverse speaker balance? https://inclusivepanels.be/nl/inclusive-panel</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If yes, say so in the proposal.</p>	

7. Impact	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
<p>Have you considered the potential scientific, societal, and economic impact of addressing dimensions of diversity in your methodology and dissemination plans?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If yes, include these impacts in your proposal. Also say that you have considered these potential impacts.</p>	
<p>Does your research contribute to increasing equity in society?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If yes, you should certainly mention this in the proposal.</p>	
<p>Does bringing diversity dimensions to your research meet previously unmet needs or open new markets?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If yes, you should mention this.</p>	

8. Inclusive language	Yes/No		Information to be provided in the proposal	Other resources
Do you use gender inclusive language in your proposal?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, state this.	
Do you review the proposal (either by hand or using automated tools) for inclusive language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, state this.	
Do you use singular they instead of he/she?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Do you use other inclusive terms (e.g. "person-hours" for "man-hours")	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Has the proposal been reviewed for inclusive language, especially if it deals with a group that has been historically excluded? Think racial/ethnic categories, religious groups, and queer communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, incorporate any changes, and also indicate that you have done this review.	
Will other documents from the project be reviewed for inclusive language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, incorporate any changes, and also indicate that you have done (or intend to do) this review.	
Will all materials from the proposed study (questionnaires, interview protocols, tasks, websites) be reviewed for	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, state this in the proposal.	

understandability/usability ?				
Does the proposal have an inclusive reference list?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, state this in the proposal.	

What if I don't have answers to any of these questions?

Learn more:

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/events/what%E2%80%99s-gender-equality-horizon-europe>

About this document

This document created by Constance Sommerey and Michael Erard in the fall of 2021 and prompted by a presentation that Constance made to the UM funding advisor group. Additional comments were provided by Bart Penders, Aurélie Carlier (on behalf of FEM), Sueli Brodin, Latifa Abidi, and Hans Bosma. UM funding advisors (Eva Rijkers, Merle Achten, Vivian Brakers, Pan Xu, Willem Wolters, Marcel Giezen, Raymunde Neven, Anouk Holsgens, Marco Berndes and Anne Gisling) also provided valuable feedback.