



Institute for Automotive Engineering (ika) RWTH Aachen University

Experiences from the successful proposal
of the Horizon Europe project “HiVEP”

Gordon Witham

12.10.2026 · NRW-FIT in Europa · Aachen

Experience Report HiVEP

Speaker and coordinator



My role

Coordinator of HiVEP (during proposal and GAP phase)



Background

- Contribution to several proposals in Cluster 5
- Active in 2Zero, EARPA and EURIAS



Today

From the call for proposals to the project start:
what worked, what went wrong and what I
would do different

**“Coordinating is a different job
than contributing.”**

Even with a lot of proposal experience.

RWTH Aachen University in **HiVEP**

Project coordinator



**Institute for Automotive Engineering
(ika)**

Head: Univ.-Prof. Dr.-Ing. Lutz Eckstein



**Chair of Mechatronics in Mobile
Propulsion (MMP)**

Head: Univ.-Prof. Dr.-Ing. Jakob Andert

The Project

HiVEP - High-Voltage fast-charging Efficient electric vehicle Powertrains



Call topic

HORIZON-CL5-2024-D5-01-02

Integration and testing of next generation post-800V electric powertrains (2ZERO Partnership)

Research and Innovation Action (RIA)

9

partners

5

countries

42

months

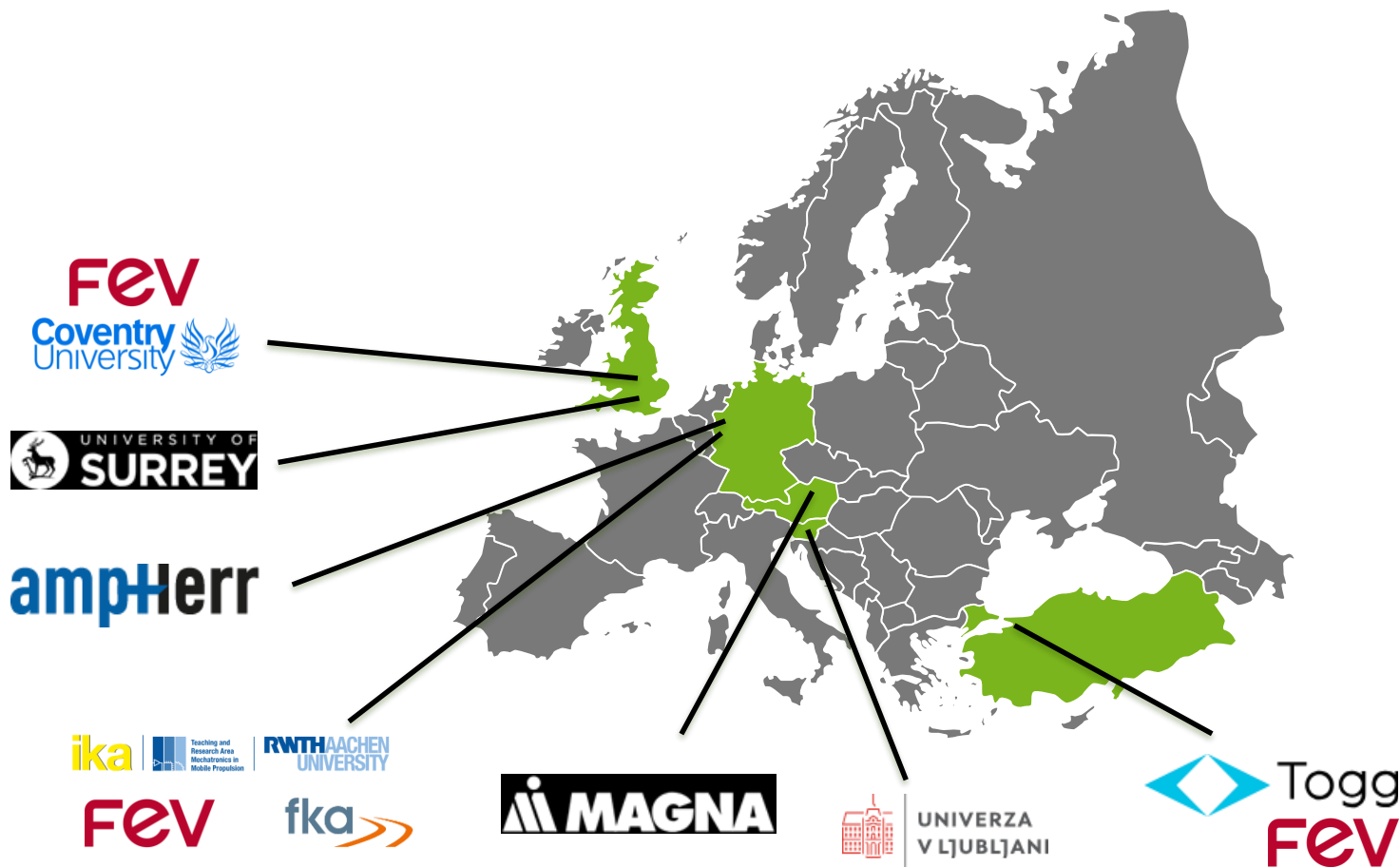
€4.98 M

EU contribution

Start: 1st February 2025



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101192720.

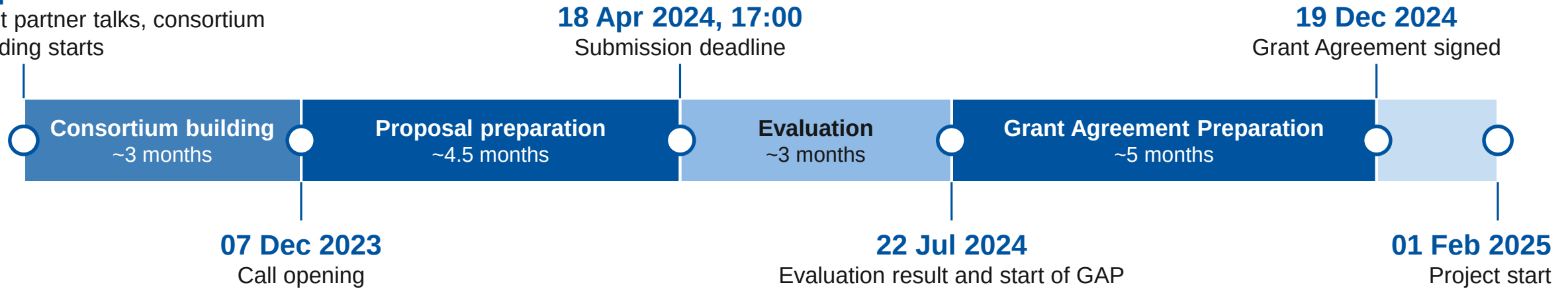


The Journey

From first partner talks to project start in about 16 months

Sep 2023

First partner talks, consortium building starts



About 8 months from deadline to signature. The work started 3 months before the call opened.

Phase 1: Analysing the Call

Does the call fit our competences?

Call scope (excerpt)

- “Holistic assessment” of higher-voltage impacts on vehicle and powertrain
- “Modular powertrain platforms”



ika competences

- Powertrain design for battery electric vehicles
- Thermal management for battery electric vehicles
- Expertise from the Horizon 2020 project ModulED



Decision: We want to coordinate

Topics and activities fit in most sections along the V-model, from requirements and system design to validation.

Phase 1: Analysing the Call

Read the call 100 times

Typical targets

- X % higher charging power
- Y % lower losses

→ *one dimension each*



Expected outcome in Call:

“Range increase over travel time”

More complex target definition, that required some work on the explanation within the proposal. A holistic system approach is necessary to achieve the expected outcome.

This needed to be made clear to the reviewer!

Also worth reading



Work Programme
destination and
expected impacts



2ZERO partnership
roadmap



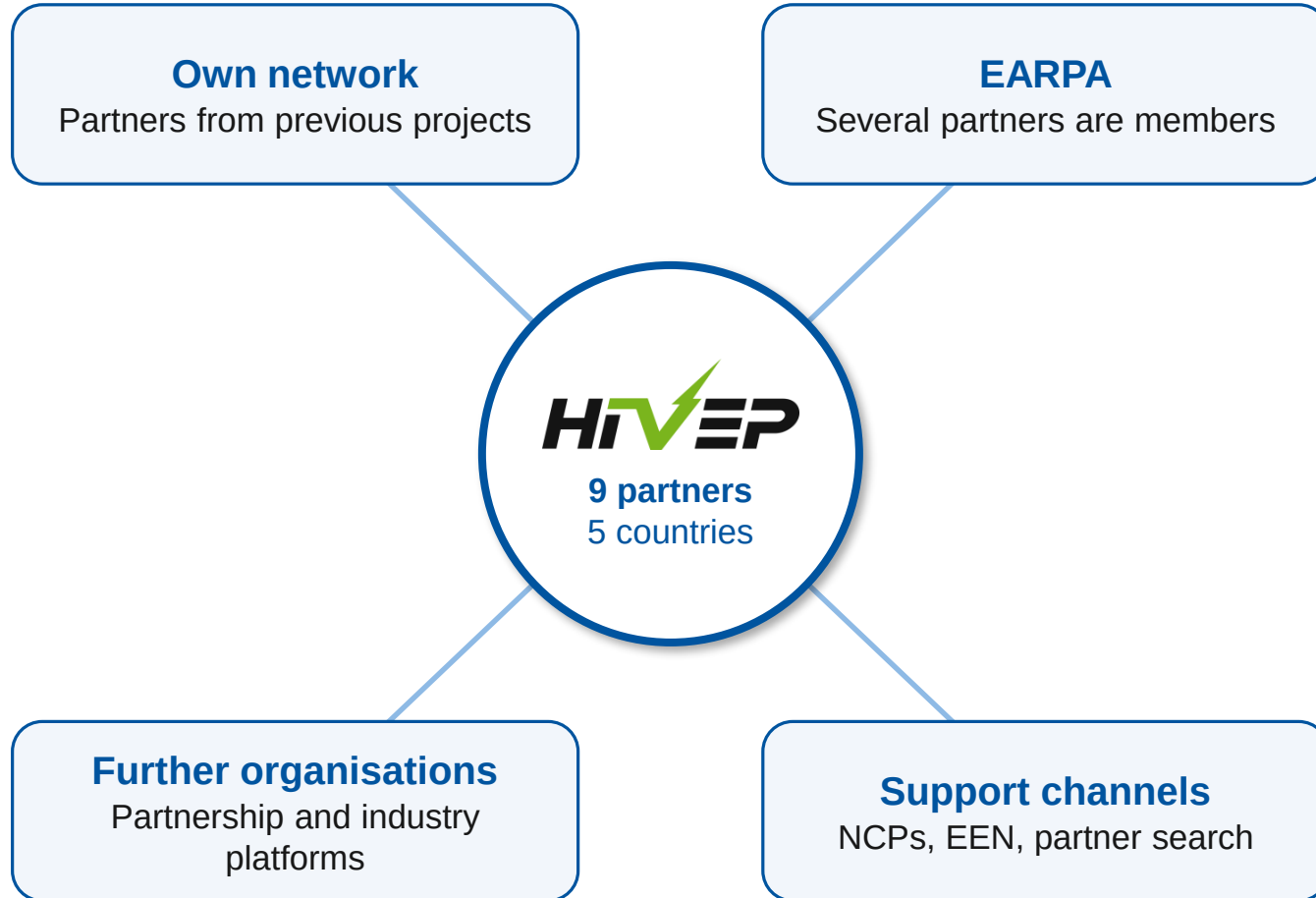
Predecessor calls
and funded projects
(CORDIS)



Call writers are often
the same people

Phase 2: Building the Consortium

Where partners come from

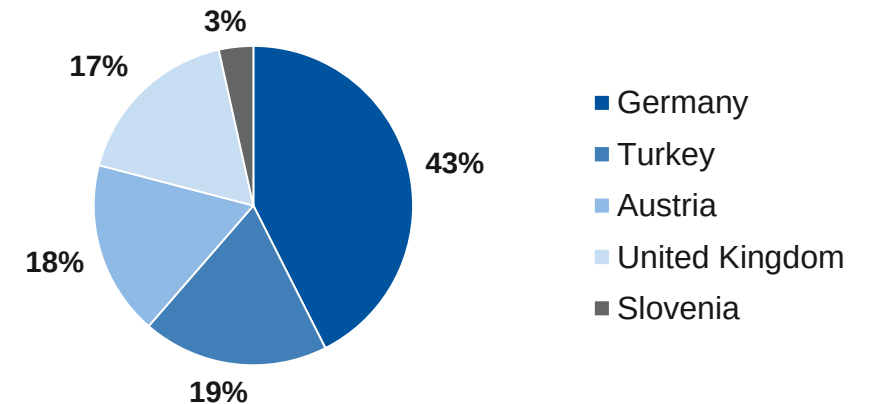


~3 months

before the call opened, we started building the consortium (Sep 2023)

Once a call is open, strong partners are often already committed.

EU contribution by country



High share for one country (Germany).
Not recommended!

Phase 2: Building the Consortium

Letters of Intent before writing starts



EXCLUSIVITY

Each partner commits to this consortium only for this topic

Keeps partners from joining competing proposals



OWN FUNDS

Commitment to provide the necessary own funds

Not relevant for HiVEP, since RIAs are funded at 100%, including industry partners

Lesson learned



Get all key partners on board and Lols signed as early as possible. That leaves time for fine-tuning at the end.

Phase 3: Proposal Support

Involving a consultancy: optional, but helpful

Typical tasks

-  Distributing tasks
-  Writing summaries
-  Chasing deadlines
-  Keeping version control



External view

Some distance helps when topics get emotional, e.g. the budget

Payment models

	Absolute	% of funding
Base fee paid regardless of outcome	Fixed amount	Share of requested funding
Success fee paid only if funded	Bonus amount	Share of granted funding

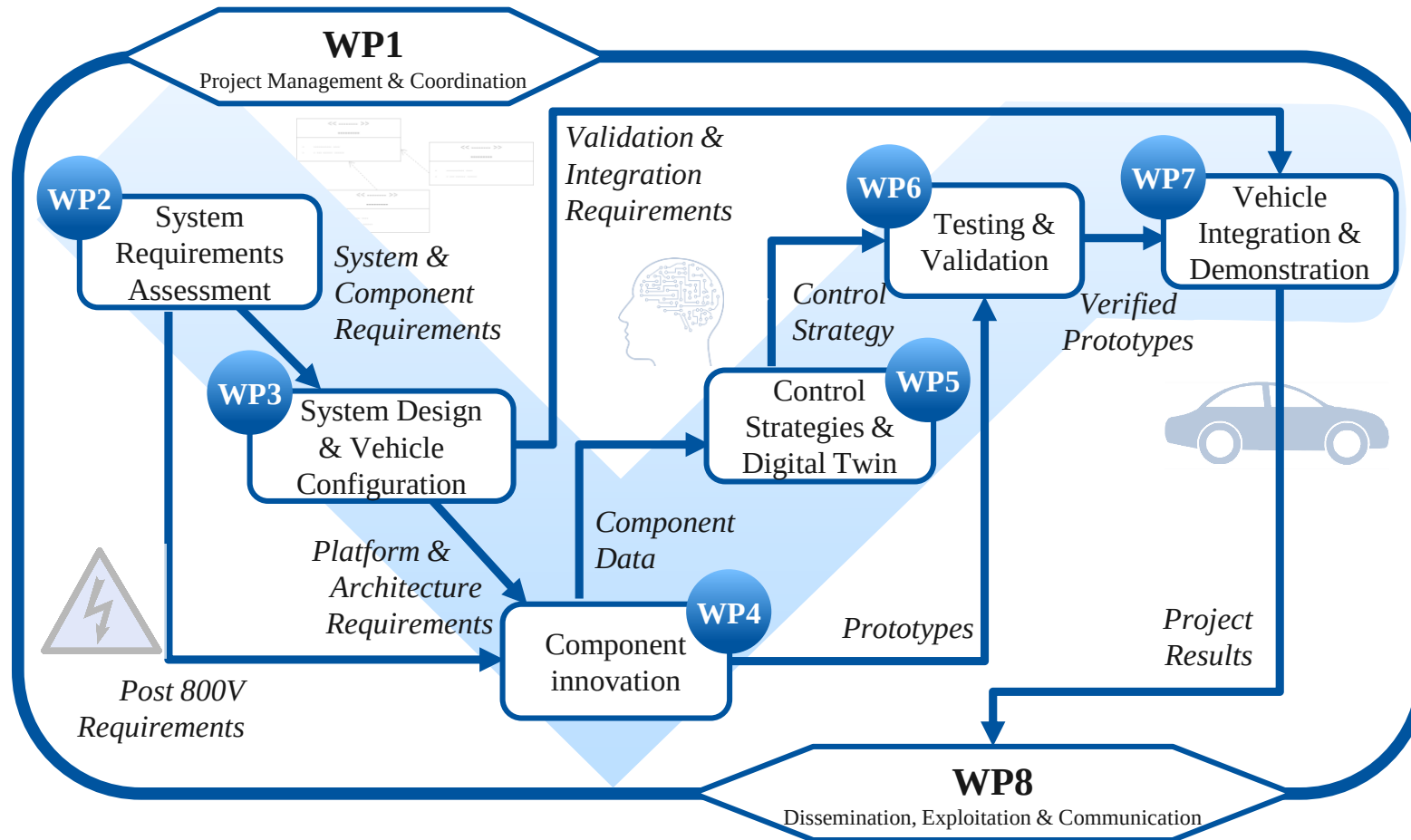
- Combinations are common, e.g. a low fixed fee plus a success fee
- Costs are usually shared among the partners by their share of the funding

Content and technical vision stay with the coordinator and the partners.

Note: Proposal preparation costs are generally not eligible project costs.

Phase 4: Work Plan

Work packages along the V-model



- The structure was clear early because the project follows the V-model
- Left: requirements and system design (WP2, WP3)
- Bottom: component innovation (WP4)
- Right: controls, testing, vehicle integration (WP5 to WP7)
- Frame: management (WP1), dissemination and exploitation (WP8)
- Tasks and partner shares stayed iterative

Matches the call's focus on integration and testing and is easy for reviewers to follow

Phase 4: Budget

Iterative until the day before submission



Repeat. No closed budget rounds.

What we experienced

- Budget structured and cut iteratively
- Worked on until the day before submission
- Cuts in money and content, with the work plan adjusted each time
- Friction is normal, and hardly anyone ends up fully happy
- **Planned with ~€5 M instead of the €6 M maximum:** $3 \times €6 \text{ M}$ would not have fit into the €15 M topic budget

MOTTO

“A won project with less budget than desired is better than no project at all.”

Phase 5: Writing

Core team writes, all partners contribute

Core writing team

- RWTH Aachen University
- FEV
- Consultancy

Practical writing rules



Always use the latest template

Templates change between calls



Reuse what works

Structure and ideas from similar earlier projects such as ModuLED



Strict page limits

Use figures only where they add real value, e.g. one V-model diagram

All partners

Input on their tasks, expertise and resources

Consistency check



Phase 6: Submission

Our submission log

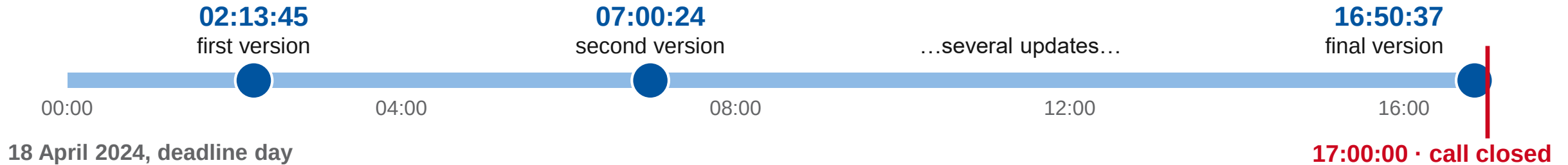
Final submission

9 minutes

before the call closed

The final days and hours were turbulent.

Why the first upload at 2 am? More on that at the end.



Our situation

- Budget and content worked on until the very end
- No buffer for portal problems

Recommendation

Upload a preliminary version a few days before the deadline. It can be overwritten until the call closes, and the portal is often overloaded on deadline day.

Phase 7: Evaluation

Three possible outcomes



Accepted for GAP



Selected for funding. Next step: Grant Agreement Preparation (GAP)

Reserve list



Threshold reached. Funding is still possible if

- a selected project fails in GAP
- additional budget becomes available (rare, mostly for smaller budgets)

Rejected



Threshold not reached, or too many proposals ranked higher

HiVEP Results

22 July 2024

informed about proceeding to GAP phase

~3 months

after submission

14 / 15

points reached



Phase 7: Evaluation

Where we lost points

Excellence –0.5 P

ESR comment

“The battery cell chemistry is not clearly elaborated”

Background

Not decided at submission and only fixed during GAP. With long lead times and fast development cycles, the exact chemistry could not be foreseen.

Lesson

If a choice is still open, describe the selection approach, the options and when the decision will be made.

Implementation –0.5 P

ESR comment

“Some other goods, works & services costs, and some internally invoiced costs, are high and not sufficiently justified”

Background

An organisational point. Some items slipped through in the last-minute budget work and justification in the proposal.

Lesson

Justify every larger cost item explicitly in the resource tables.



Read and keep the Evaluation Summary Report. Won or lost, it is the best guide for the next proposal.

Phase 8: Grant Agreement Preparation

Working with the Project Officer



22 July 2024

Acceptance letter via the portal



Only hours later

First contact by the Project Officer



July to December 2024

Preparing the Grant Agreement with the PO



19 December 2024

Grant Agreement signed



01 February 2025

Project start



Follow the PO's instructions and deadlines strictly

Missing them can lead to a late rejection, which only helps projects on the reserve list



Changes are possible, but only with the PO's consent

e.g. replacing a partner or shifting tasks and budget between partners



About 5 months of GAP in HiVEP

From acceptance on 22nd July to final signature on 19th December 2024

Phase 8: Grant Agreement Preparation

What changed and what takes time

What changed in **HIVEP**



One partner replaced

The new partner took over the full content and budget of the previous one



Battery cell chemistry finalised

The open point from the ESR was closed

Typical admin hurdles



Unfamiliar forms

Hard to fill in if you have never seen them



Signature processes

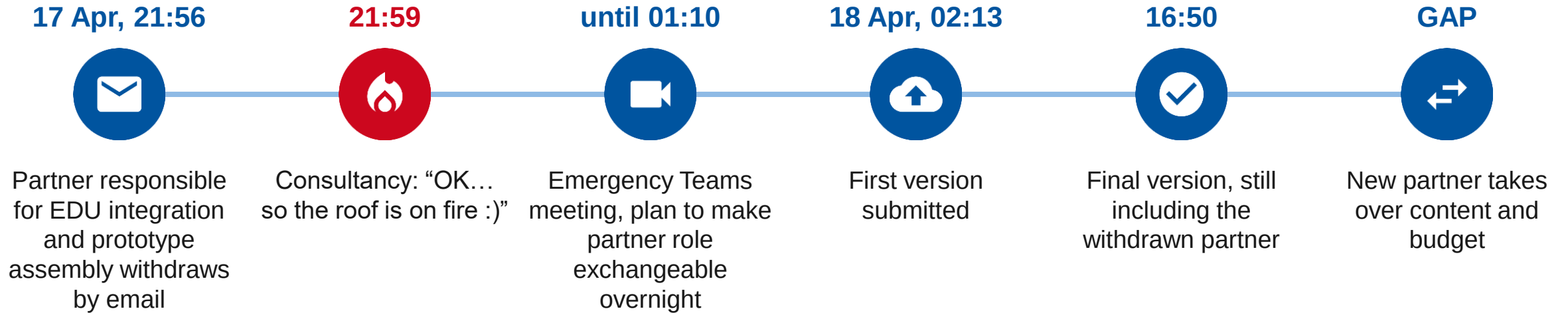
Large companies need time for internal signatures



Plan buffers. The PO's deadlines are fixed, internal signature processes are not.

The Chaos

The night before submission



“There is no sense in crying over spilt milk.”

Get up and get on. In the end, it all worked out.

Key Takeaways

Six lessons from HiVEP

1 Network early

Our consortium started forming three months before the call opened.

2 Every word counts

Read the call 100 times. Every word is there for a reason and opens or closes a door for proposals.

3 Talk budget early

A funded project with less budget beats no project.

4 Sign Lols early

Get the key partners on board early to leave time for fine-tuning.

5 Submit early

Not like us, 9 minutes before the deadline.

6 Stay calm

Something will go wrong. Tick it off and move on.

Summary

329 mails in final 2 weeks, countless hours in Teams meetings, more cups of coffee than hours of sleep. Worth it? Yes!

THANK YOU

Driving the future, together.

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