

# How (not) to win an experimental MSCA

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Disclaimer: I am just expressing personal opinions, that may differ from the judgment of others

- 1) the candidate
- 2) the project
- 3) the place/secondments
- 4) impact

# The candidate (you!)

- Winning a Marie Curie is prestigious, will bring you good money, and some degree of independence
- However it is only a 2-3 years contract, and ideally it should be your last post-doc
- The idea is that after the MSCA, a candidate should apply for a permanent position or a long-term fellowship
- Even if no discrimination is made, and exceptions are there all the time, the ideal time to apply is after 2-3 years of post-doc
- Your past profile (conferences, publications, convenerships) should be good enough to assume you will be independent and mature at the end of the fellowship

# The project

- The main point here is to show that you will bring something special to the place you are applying, and receiving something special and unique
- The MSCA is not just one of the many post-docs you are applying to! You pick a place because there is a special synergy between your competence and what is done there
- If you want “just” to continue doing your analysis just in a different place, this is not for you...
- Multi-disciplinary projects are appreciated, even if that “just” means working on hardware and analysis
- Make sure you clearly specify what you want to do, when, how, with whom. Remember you are asking for a lot of money, and you should provide some deliverables, and convince people you will do that

# The place

- Two main successful approaches:
  - Go to a big, well-known place to work with a “star”
  - Go to an emerging place, and claim YOU will make it great
- Pitfalls:
  - How much time will the “star” spend with you? Who will follow you on a daily basis?
  - If going to a smaller place, will you get training? Will they have the proper infrastructures? It usually works better if there is a clear path to have a job there after the fellowship (maybe it is your home country and you are coming back after years)
  - In the recent years, people apply to MSCA to stay in the institute where they just started as a postdoc. This used to be forbidden/discouraged, and is not any more. However, you need to be very clear on what a MSCA could add scientifically with respect to your current position (just: “getting a higher salary”, or “it is more prestigious than my current position” will not fly. Perhaps you could get some equipment support? Supervise students? Have more travel possibilities?)
- Secondments
  - Tend to be favourably seen, because cross-fertilisation is good (see above)
  - However they have to be well motivated (bring back competence), clearly organised with the host, and unique
  - bad example: I will be going to CERN to work on my analysis. Of course every postdoc does that! Please specify why this is unique, with whom will you work, if this person will have time...
  - Good example: my analysis uses pixel detectors, I will become an expert on pixels operation, working with this expert, taking on-call shifts, data-quality validation etc.

# Impact

- Something unique has to come out of your research
- Possibly, a deliverable that will be used by a wider community (a calculation, a piece of code that others will use, a detector calibration, a tool to be made public, at least inside your collaboration)
- Saying “the results of my work will be published on a scientific journal” is OKish (and is what most people write), but definitely does not stand out
- Do not neglect outreach!! you may win/lose decisive points for it. Again, saying “I will participate to the institute’s open day” does not stand out. Please be more creative, and clearly past outreach activities make the plan much more credible

# Conclusions

- Try to put yourself in our shoes: we evaluate ~20 proposals, and only ~3 will win
- They have to be special, convince us that this is a unique opportunity that is missed if the project is not funded
- We have more experience than you (some reviewers even much more than us), so do not try to fool us
- Be honest, be enthusiastic, be creative
- You need to be the first one to believe that the MSCA is the best way to go forward for a piece of original research you really care for!