FP10 Readiness Brief #3

From Call Monitoring to Call-Fit Thinking

Why FP10 preparation should go beyond tracking work programmes and focus on strategic interpretation, institutional strengths, and proposal logic

FP10 Readiness Series | Victoria Folea

July 2026

Independent professional brief for information and discussion purposes.

LLM-assisted tools were used to support drafting, language refinement and source organisation. The author reviewed, selected and interpreted the information and remains responsible for the final content.

Why call monitoring is no longer enough

Monitoring is necessary, but not enough

Many universities already monitor Horizon Europe work programmes, calls, partnerships, missions and policy updates. This is necessary, but it is not sufficient. FP10 readiness will depend not only on knowing what opportunities are published, but on understanding whether an institution, research group or project idea can credibly fit the logic of a future opportunity.

Call monitoring answers a useful operational question: **what opportunities are appearing**?

Call-fit thinking asks a more strategic question: **where do we have a credible, competitive and evaluable contribution**?

This distinction matters because a published topic is not simply an invitation to write a proposal. It is a structured funding opportunity with a policy rationale, a specific scope, expected outcomes, an intervention logic, eligibility and participation conditions, and implicit expectations about the type of consortium and implementation capacity needed.

Monitoring can show themes, deadlines, instruments, budgets and eligibility conditions. It cannot, by itself, decide whether an idea is mature enough, whether the institution has sufficient credibility, whether the right partners are involved, whether the impact pathway is convincing, or whether evaluators will be able to see the fit clearly.

From topic match to real call fit

A common mistake in EU proposal preparation is to confuse topic match with real fit. A project may appear relevant because it uses the same language as the topic, for example digital transition, resilience, climate, skills, competitiveness, inclusion, innovation, security or strategic autonomy. But a proposal that repeats the right words may still fail to answer the topic fully.

Call-fit thinking treats relevance as a structured judgment, not as a keyword exercise. It asks whether the research idea, the European priority, the funding instrument, the consortium logic and the institutional capacity make sense together.

A simple way to express this is:

> **Call fit = relevance + credibility + consortium logic + readiness + evaluator clarity**

In other words, a good fit is not only a thematic match. It is the point where research strengths, European priorities, partner roles, implementation capacity and evaluation logic begin to make sense together.

AI-assisted proposals and the risk of superficial fit

AI-assisted drafting makes this distinction even more important. AI tools can help applicants draft faster, organise information, refine language and check internal consistency. Used well, they can support proposal development. Used poorly, they can make it easier to produce fluent, polished and keyword-rich text that is still weakly aligned with the actual logic of a topic.

As more applicants use AI tools, some proposals may look complete without being genuinely fit. They may reproduce the language of a work programme, but fail to respond to the full scope, expected outcomes, consortium implications, methodology or implementation requirements.

In this environment, call-fit thinking becomes a quality-control step. It checks whether a proposal is not only well written, but actually suitable for the topic, instrument, expected outcomes and evaluation logic.

The example below is a simplified, generic illustration based on common Horizon Europe proposal-assessment logic. It does not reproduce any specific evaluation document.

Superficial topic match	Call-fit reading
The proposal mentions the main policy theme.	Does it address the specific problem, target group and context described in the topic?
The proposal uses the right keywords.	Does it respond to **all** topic requirements, not only the most visible ones?
The proposal includes several activities.	Are the activities the right type for the topic, such as research, demonstration, validation, replication, capacity-building, policy support or deployment?
The proposal describes impact.	Are expected outcomes translated into credible pathways, target groups, uptake mechanisms and measurable contributions?
The consortium looks strong.	Does the consortium include **all** specific expertise, actors, users, regions, infrastructures or implementation capacity needed for this topic?
The work plan is polished.	Are work packages, timing, resources, risks and partner roles aligned with the methodology and expected outcomes?

Part I. What call-fit thinking means for researchers

For researchers and research groups, the central question is simple:

Is my idea genuinely ready for a European call, or does it only sound relevant?

Beyond keywords. Does the research idea answer the real problem?

A research idea can be scientifically valuable and still not be a good fit for a specific European funding opportunity. The issue is not only whether the idea is interesting, but whether it responds to the problem the topic is trying to solve, at the level of ambition, maturity, partnership and expected contribution required by the instrument (type of project).

Researchers therefore need to move from keyword coverage to logic coverage. Instead of asking only whether the proposal mentions the right concepts, they should ask whether the project logic answers the actual need behind the topic.

- ✓ Does the idea address the problem the topic is trying to solve?
- ✓ Is the European relevance clear and specific?
- ✓ Is the expected contribution credible for the type of action?

- ✓ Is the idea mature enough for the instrument and expected outcomes?
- ✓ Can the project logic be understood quickly by evaluators?

This does not mean forcing every research idea into policy language. It means identifying the one or two genuine connections that make the idea relevant in a European context and explaining them clearly.

Strategic interpretation. Reading the call behind the call.

Strategic interpretation means looking beyond the surface wording of a topic. It asks what type of problem the programme is trying to address, why the topic appears at this moment, what kind of contribution is likely to be valued, and what type of proposal would look credible to evaluators.

For researchers, this means **reading a topic not only as a list of instructions, but as a signal about expected contribution**. A topic may require frontier research, collaborative problem-solving, demonstration, deployment, policy evidence, capacity-building, innovation pathways, stakeholder engagement or knowledge uptake. Each of these requires a different proposal logic.

A call-fit reading can therefore help researchers ask better questions before they begin writing:

- ✓ What problem is the topic really trying to solve?
- ✓ What type of impact appears to be expected?
- ✓ Which actors should be involved for the proposal to be credible?
- ✓ Is the topic asking mainly for new knowledge, testing, demonstration, policy support, capacity-building or deployment?
- ✓ What kind of consortium role could our team credibly play?
- ✓ What would make the proposal easy to understand and evaluate?

This is where Brief #3 builds on the logic of Brief #2. Reading EU priority signals is useful, but the next step is to translate those signals into preparation decisions: which ideas to develop, which partners to approach, which instruments to monitor and which opportunities to leave aside for now.

Making the fit visible in proposal logic

Even when a proposal is a good fit, evaluators cannot be expected to infer that fit. It has to be made visible. A strong proposal does not only respond to a topic; it shows why the problem matters, why the consortium is credible, why the methodology is sound, why the work plan is coherent, why the impact pathway is plausible and why the project can be implemented. It should make clear not only **why** the project matters, but **how** the proposed work will deliver on that logic.

In evaluator terms, call fit is not something that should be assumed. It must be demonstrated.

For researchers, this means that fit must appear across the proposal, not only in the introduction. It should be visible in the objectives, concept, methodology, partner roles, work packages, deliverables, risk management, dissemination and exploitation measures, and pathway to impact.

A useful test is to ask whether a non-specialist evaluator, reading under time pressure, can quickly understand five things: the problem, the contribution, the consortium logic, the implementation route and the expected value of the results.

What researchers can do now

Researchers do not need to wait for final FP10 work programmes before preparing. They can begin with small, practical steps that make their expertise easier to identify, discuss and position.

- ✓ Prepare or update a short European research profile: expertise, methods, infrastructure, datasets, networks, previous projects and possible consortium contribution (see Brief #2).
- ✓ Develop one or two early concept notes linked to broad European challenges, without turning them into full proposals too early (see Brief #2).
- ✓ Identify the one or two EU priority signals most genuinely connected to the research area (see Brief #2).
- ✓ Discuss early fit with research support staff, colleagues or potential partners before a deadline creates pressure.
- ✓ Map possible consortium roles: scientific partner, methodology contributor, data provider, demonstrator, policy analyst, impact contributor, trainer or knowledge broker.
- ✓ Test whether the idea has European project logic, not only scientific value.
- ✓ Identify what is missing: partners, stakeholder access, impact pathway, demonstration capacity, policy relevance, infrastructure description or implementation detail.

This kind of preparation does not guarantee funding. It does something more realistic and more useful: it reduces surprise, improves positioning and helps researchers decide earlier whether an opportunity is worth pursuing.

Part II. What call-fit thinking means for universities and research support offices

For universities and research support offices, the central question is different:

Where can the institution credibly contribute, and how can it support the right ideas before calls become urgent?

From "where can we apply?" to "where can we credibly contribute?"

Universities often monitor calls in order to identify where researchers might apply. This is useful, but it can remain reactive. A more strategic approach starts earlier, by asking where the institution has research strengths, networks, infrastructure, policy relevance, implementation capacity or emerging expertise that could become visible in future European collaborations.

The question is not only whether a university can apply. It is whether it can contribute credibly. This requires mapping institutional strengths before opportunities become urgent.

- ✓ Research groups and areas of recognised expertise.
- ✓ Previous participation in EU-funded and international projects.
- ✓ Publications, datasets, methods, models, laboratories and infrastructures.
- ✓ International networks, COST Actions, partnerships and stakeholder links.
- ✓ Policy, industry, public-sector or civil-society connections.
- ✓ Early-career researchers with European potential.
- ✓ Administrative, legal, financial and proposal support capacity.
- ✓ Experience with coordination, work package leadership, dissemination, exploitation, reporting or evaluation.

This kind of mapping can help universities avoid two weak strategies: chasing every apparently relevant topic, or discovering too late that a promising idea lacks partners, maturity, impact logic or institutional support.

Institutional strengths and proposal readiness

Not every strong research group is proposal-ready. Some groups may have excellent science but limited international visibility. Others may have networks but no clear European contribution. Some may have infrastructure but weak impact articulation. Others may have promising ideas but no consortium logic or implementation route.

Research support offices can therefore use call-fit thinking to distinguish between several levels of readiness:

- ✓ High fit / high readiness: a credible idea, clear European relevance, suitable partners, mature contribution and realistic work plan.
- ✓ High potential / not yet ready: strong expertise or infrastructure, but missing partners, impact pathway, concept note or instrument understanding.
- ✓ Interesting but weak fit: a good research idea that does not fully respond to the topic, instrument or expected outcomes.
- ✓ Attractive but risky: a topic that looks relevant but requires actors, territories, demonstration capacity, policy links or implementation experience the institution does not yet have.
- ✓ Not a good fit for now: an opportunity that would require too much forced relevance, rushed writing or artificial consortium construction.

This is not a discouraging exercise. On the contrary, it helps research offices support researchers more intelligently. Some ideas should be developed now; some should be repositioned; some should be matched with partners; and some should simply be saved for a better opportunity.

The call-fit matrix as an institutional tool

A simple call-fit matrix can help universities move from general monitoring to structured preparation. The matrix does not replace expert judgement. Its value is to make the reasoning visible: why an opportunity is promising, what is missing, what should be done next and whether the institution should apply, partner, monitor or wait.

EU priority / call direction	Relevant institutional strength	Research group / expertise	Potential European contribution	Needed partners / missing capacities	Proposal readiness	Fit level	Next step
Emerging FP10 direction or topic family	Existing strength, infrastructure, network or experience	Relevant researcher, team or unit	Possible role in a consortium or proposal	What is missing for credible participation	High / medium / low / not yet clear	High / medium / low	Apply, partner, develop, monitor or wait
Example: resilience and local capacity	Policy, climate, governance or social innovation expertise	Research group with prior EU or national projects	Evidence, methods, stakeholder engagement, training or evaluation input	Local authority partners, demonstration sites, impact pathway	Medium	Medium	Develop concept note and partner profile

The matrix can be used lightly. It does not need to become a bureaucratic tool. Its purpose is to slow down premature enthusiasm and make the decision clearer: is this a strong opportunity, a future opportunity, a partnership opportunity, or a topic that should not absorb scarce proposal-writing energy?

What universities can do now

Universities and research support offices can begin preparing for FP10 before calls are published by turning monitoring into structured internal intelligence.

- ✓ Identify research strengths that are genuinely relevant to the emerging FP10 landscape.
- ✓ Map which groups have European-level credibility and which need positioning support.
- ✓ Identify researchers who could become visible in future consortia but are not yet proposal-ready.
- ✓ Distinguish between mature ideas, promising ideas and ideas that need more development before a call appears.
- ✓ Monitor which future opportunities require partners, infrastructures, territories, users or implementation capacity the university does not yet have.
- ✓ Prepare internal guidance on how to read topics, expected outcomes, scope, instrument type and proposal logic.
- ✓ Use short European profiles and early concept notes to make researchers easier to introduce to potential partners.
- ✓ Encourage early conversations with international networks before consortia are fixed.
- ✓ Be willing to say no, or not yet, when an attractive topic is not a credible fit.

The goal is not to centralise every decision or control every proposal idea. The goal is to help the institution invest attention where there is a real chance of credible contribution.

From reactive monitoring to strategic readiness

FP10 readiness is not about reacting faster when calls appear. It is about preparing better before they appear.

Call monitoring will remain necessary. Universities and researchers will still need to follow work programmes, partnerships, missions, stakeholder positions and programme developments. But monitoring should become the beginning of a more strategic process, not the end of preparation.

Moving from call monitoring to call-fit thinking means asking better questions earlier. Does the idea answer the real problem? Does the institution have a credible contribution? Does the consortium logic make sense? Is the proposal mature enough? Can evaluators see the fit?

Universities that develop this capacity will be better placed to identify credible opportunities, support the right researchers, build stronger consortia and develop proposals that are easier to understand, evaluate and fund.