**Administrative Review – Experience and recommendations**

The full process for projects in the 7th framework programme is a multi-year engagement, from exchange of research needs, call compilation and publication, evaluation and negotiation of proposals through to execution of the project.

On average there is an approximate two year period between the final input to the work programme and the signing of project contracts, with significant differences in procedures and timing between different programmes (e.g. JTIs) and Commission DGs. The longer the time and greater the uncertainty, the greater the difficulty for beneficiaries in planning manpower capacity, jeopardising research effectiveness.

The following diagram demonstrates the estimated average timing of each part in the process from work programme definition to project execution.
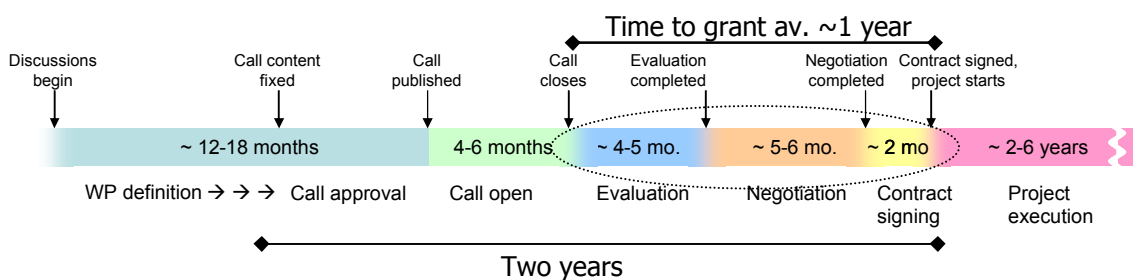
1.1 Pre-submission phase

~ 7-12 months **WP definition** is the time period between the start of informal discussion on the content of the work programme and the fixing of the content. This long period is necessary to ensure exchange and analysis of input to the content of the call.

- **Recommendation: no action.**

~ 5 months The **call approval** period between the content of the call being informally fixed and the call being published is a stable period of 4 to 5 months. This includes a three week Commission interservice consultation and a member state consultation of similar length, plus at least one month for finalisation of the text.

- **Recommendation: A reduction in the bureaucratic procedures to shorten this time period from around 5 to 3 months would be beneficial.**

4-6 months   The **call open period** must be long enough to allow project consortia to complete their proposals but not too long to slow down the process. The new IT tools made available by the Commission (EPSS / PIC / NEF) should be applied in those programmes where they are currently not available, including some JTIs.

Recommendations

- **Four months is sufficient time for a call to be open.**

- **Make same IT tools available for all research programmes.**

1.2   *Time to grant*

Creating most uncertainty for participants is the period between call closing and contract signing (time to grant). The diagram below demonstrates the average time taken in 2007-2008 for the main procedures during the period from call closing (project submission) to contract signing within the FP7 Cooperation programme, in total about one year (2nd FP7 monitoring report, p60 table B3). There are significant differences between Commission DGs, with average times ranging from 246 days to 519 days. Statistical data is not available on the times for the three individual elements of the process (evaluation, negotiation, contract), these have therefore been estimated according to experience of participants and exchanges with Commission officials.

For EUCAR members, the ICT (246 days) and Transport (505 days) programmes are of greatest relevance. The analysis below refers to the overall average (approximately 365 days), whereby the time saving potential is likely to be greater for those programmes with longer current delay. Examples are provided in the Annex.

The following analysis and recommendations are made for the three elements of this period:

1.2.1 Evaluation phase

Evaluations for highly rated projects can typically be completed within two months. There are often delays between closing of the call and start of evaluation due to evaluation resources not being in place.
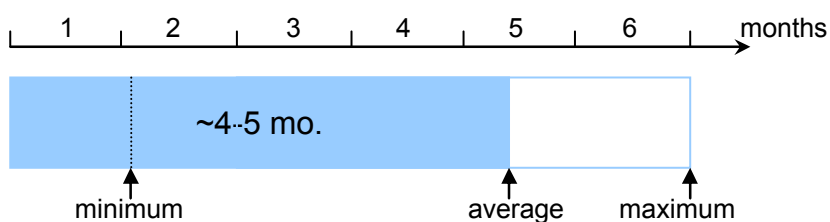
The processes in this period:

- Appointment of independent expert evaluators.

- Evaluation.

- Compilation of evaluation report.

- Programme Committee review and interservice consultation.

- Review by Commissioner's Cabinet.

- Waiting time for non-highly rated projects.

Difficulties arising:

- A three month average is achieved only by those projects which are classified as highly rated.

- In some cases there may be a delay after call closing before starting the evaluation – due to insufficient personnel resources in the Commission DG to cover the volume of project proposals. The appointment of the independent expert evaluator can also delay the start of the evaluation.

- Non highly rated projects have to wait for highly rated projects to complete negotiations, in addition to any delays in the evaluation process itself.

Recommendations:

- **Reduce delays in starting evaluations by planning and setting up evaluation resources in advance of project submissions.**

- **In particular collect standardised documentation in advance of proposal submission.**

- **Simplify process for appointing independent expert evaluator.**

- **Ensure adequate Commission personnel to eliminate procedural delays in evaluation process.**

1.2.2 Negotiation phase

Negotiation can take as little as a few weeks for some highly rated projects. However, a number of conditions can cause significant delays, either practical or related to negotiation content (requests for information). By eliminating some of these delays, it should be possible to reduce the average time to two or three months and significantly reduce the delays in more complicated negotiations.
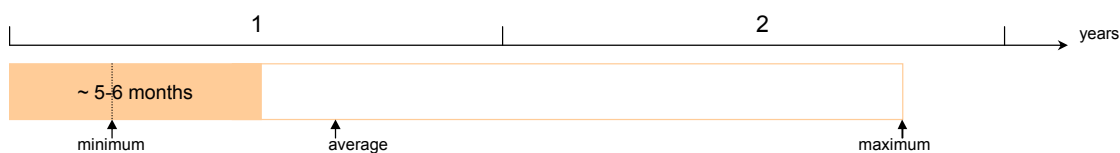
The processes in this period:

- Review comments in evaluation – clarification of work description, budget reduction,

- Annex 1, the budget and the consortium members are fixed

Problems that often arise are:

- Planning, validation and registering of participants takes place during negotiation period.

- The negotiation extends over a holiday period (e.g. August).

- The negotiation officer is changed, necessitating time for orientation.

- Insufficient resources are available in the Commission to allow parallel negotiations.

- In many cases, requests for information are seen to be unnecessary, which increases negotiation time and decreases the motivation of participants to respond.

Recommendations:

- **Allow formal notification to highly rated participants immediately after evaluation to enable planning, validation and registration to take place before negotiation period.**

- **Ensure adequate Commission personnel to eliminate procedural delays in evaluation process.**

- **Ensure planning reduces likelihood of project officer change during negotiation.**

- **Ensure common procedures and reduce dependence on project officer.**

- **Adoption of user-friendly support systems budget, deliverable list and work package descriptions in order to avoid filling in the same information in many places in Annex I.**

1.2.3   Contract completion phase

This period contains mainly administrative procedures but still lasts on average 2 months. This can occur simply due to the burden of work on project officers and management in the Commission due to many projects being administered simultaneously.
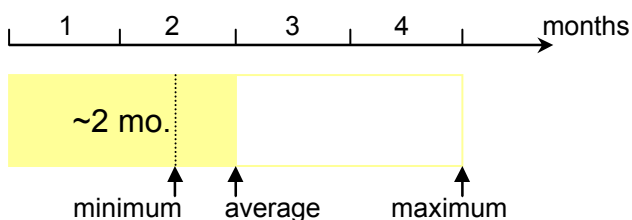
The processes in this period:

- Annex 1, the budget and the consortium members are entered into the contract and the contract signed.

- GPF forms are produced using information on EPSS whilst parallel the consortium agreement is signed.

- Must go through different levels in Commission. Project officer, unit head, director (to sign).

Problems that often arise are:

- Delays occur in transcription of data to GFP forms.

- IPR issues can cause legal delays.

- If a partner drops out and a new partner is integrated, the EPSS process and a new eligibility test are required.

- Internal Commission bureaucratic procedures.

Recommendations:

- **Ensure sufficient resources in the Commission legal department.**

- **Expedite handling of signatures (consortium members responsibility). Explore possibility of electronic signatures.**

- **Implement the "simplified account sheet" in NEF and better interaction with financial data already available through the URF portal**

- **Consider allowing projects to commence before contract signing for subsequent payment of funds (risk to consortium members)**

1.2.4   Summary for time to grant
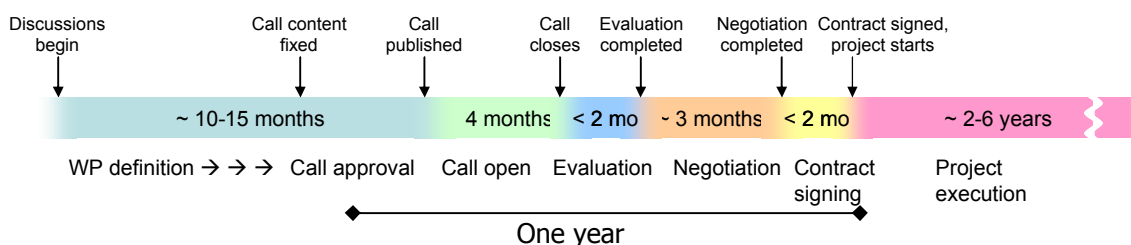
In sum these measures would reduce the period between final input on the work programme to signing of project contracts to a little over one year. The average delay between call closing and project start would be reduced to about 6 months. The implementation of these measures would not be a simple matter, but could be achieved within the structure of FP7 if the necessary resources are made available.

The following table summarises the potential result

Phase	Current average	Target average	Current maximum	Target maximum
Call approval	5 months	3 months		
Call open	4-6 months	4 months		
Evaluation	4-5 months	2 months	6 months	4 months
Negotiation	5-6 months	2-3 months	12 months	5 months
Contract	2 months	<2 months	24 months	2 months

References:

- Handbook on evaluation and selection of proposals, ICT call 6, European Commission, January 2010.

- 2nd FP7 Monitoring Report, European Commission, October 2009.

Annex: Example for EUCAR members of difficulties in project procedures

Example 1

CASPER project: time between positive decision to finance the project and signing of the grant agreement was 15 months. (need more detail)

Example 2

Experience of one EUCAR member:

1. Several projects where **starting date** has been put forward due to
    a. Delayed completion of contract signing
    b. Rewriting of description of work at very late stage makes an unnecessary extension of the process
    c. Elongated negotiation and contract signing increase the risk of organisational changes to happen during the process which may cause even further delays.
2. Coordinator sometimes has to take too large a responsibility in clarifying the rules and processes for the consortia.

Example 3

Some EUCAR members report administrative delay due to re-assignment of their respective dossier. Introducing new officers with sometimes limited experience in the automotive R&D sector can delay administrative procedures considerably.

Moreover, in one particular instance, a member of EUCAR was forced to resubmit documents three times due to loss. Given the extensive size of a typical FP7 proposal, these occurrences naturally added significantly to the applicants' administrative workload.