Understanding Calls & Setting Project Objectives

A 90-Minute Practical Workshop



ICER - Pro

Co-funded by the European Union

ENCARE - Enhancing Capacities of UAS staff for more successful EU funded Research
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Today’s workshop agenda

Agenda

0–10	Pre-work debrief
10–30	Methodology toolkit
30–45	Exercise: Fit check & problem
45–65	Drafting objectives
65–80	Peer review
80–90	Debrief + takeaways

You’ll walk away able to:



Decode what a call actually wants



Draft aligned project objectives



Assess fit between idea and call

Pre-Work Debrief

0-10 min

Quick round – share with the group:

1. Which call did you read?
2. What is this call trying to achieve (1 sentence)?
3. What was the most confusing part?
4. Do you have a project idea that could fit?

Anatomy of a Call for Proposals

10-30 min

Policy Context

Which EU strategy does this serve?

Eligibility

Who can apply? Check this first.

Priorities & Topics

What specific themes are funded?

Award Criteria

Your proposal blueprint — how you'll be scored

Expected Outcomes

What results does the EC want?

Budget & Duration

Funding, timeline, co-financing

The Key Insight



Every call contains hidden instructions for how your proposal will be evaluated.

Award criteria = your scoring blueprint.
Expected outcomes = your deliverables list.
Policy context = the language you should mirror.

Read every call at least 3 times: once for understanding, once for extraction, once for strategy.

Your Methodology Toolkit (workbook pages 4-5)

Problem Tree

What's the problem?

A visual tool. You put the core problem in the middle, map its causes below (roots) and its effects above (branches).

Then flip it: causes become your activities, the problem becomes your objective, effects become your expected results.

Use this first — it's the analytical step before everything else.

Theory of Change

Why will this work?

A narrative logic chain:
Needs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impact

It tells the story of how and why your project leads to change. It makes your assumptions explicit.

Use this to check if your logic holds — can you explain why each step leads to the next?

Logical Framework

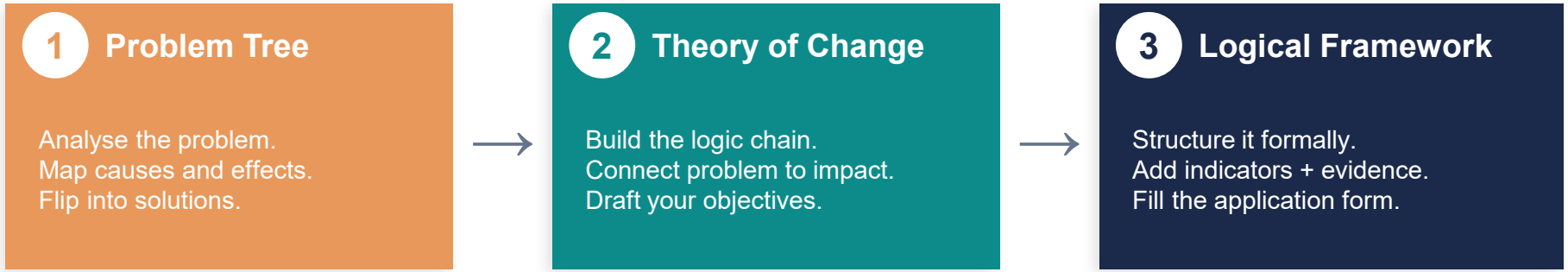
How will you prove it?

A structured matrix with 4 columns: objectives, indicators, means of verification, and assumptions.

It forces you to define how you'll measure success and what must hold true.

Many EU application forms require LogFrame thinking. This is the operational structure that sits behind your narrative.

How They Fit Together



The Logical Framework Matrix

Level	Objective	Indicators	Verification	Assumptions
Overall obj.	Broader change you contribute to	How you'd measure it	Where's the evidence	What must hold true
Specific obj.	What your project achieves	Concrete, measurable targets	Surveys, reports, data	External factors
Results	Outputs and outcomes	Deliverables produced	Project records	Partners deliver
Activities	What you'll do	Milestones, timelines	Work plans, budgets	Resources available

Two Pathways to Draft Objectives

Top-Down: Start from the call

1. Highlight call priorities & expected outcomes
2. Identify what the EC wants to see changed
3. Reverse-engineer objectives from those outcomes
4. Check: can your consortium realistically deliver?
5. Refine wording to mirror the call's language

Best when: responding to a specific call with clear priorities

Bottom-Up: Start from the need

1. Define the problem (Problem Tree helps here)
2. Map your theory of change (needs → impact)
3. Draft objectives from the change you want
4. Check alignment with the call's priorities
5. Adapt wording to fit the call's framework

Best when: you have a strong idea and need to find the right call

EXERCISE: Fit Check & Problem Analysis (workbook page 6) 30-45 min

Part A: Does your idea fit?

Compare call vs. your project:

- Priority / Topic
- Target Group
- Expected Outcomes
- Geographic Scope
- EU Added Value

Mark each: ✓ fits / ~ partial / ✗ gap

Part B: Problem analysis

Sketch a quick Problem Tree:

- Core problem (middle)
- Causes (below)
- Effects (above)

Then translate into your ToC:
Causes → Activities
Problem → Objectives
Effects → Outcomes + Impact

Add outputs: what will activities produce?

General vs Specific Objectives

45-65 min

General Objective

The broader change you contribute to.
1 sentence. Aligns with EU policy goals.

Example: “To enhance quality and inclusion of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa through...”

Specific Objectives

What YOUR project will achieve.
2–4 objectives. Measurable, concrete.

Example: “To develop and pilot a digital training programme for 120 maternal health workers...”

SMART+ Check

- **S** Specific — what, for whom
- **M** Measurable — indicators exist
- **A** Achievable — realistic scope
- **R** Relevant — matches the call
- **T** Time-bound — within project
- **+** Evaluable — can be scored

Common Mistakes to Avoid

BAD: “We will organise 5 training workshops”

This is an activity, not an objective

BETTER: “To strengthen digital skills of 150 teachers through a structured training programme”

BAD: “To improve the quality of education”

Too vague — which aspect? For whom?

BETTER: “To improve STEM learning outcomes for secondary students in rural areas through...”

BAD: “To create an innovative platform”

An output, not an objective — what change does it cause?

BETTER: “To increase access to maternal health info for 500 community workers via a mobile platform”

EXERCISE: Draft Your Objectives (workbook page 9)

Choose your pathway, then draft:

↓ Top-down?
Start from the call's expected outcomes and reverse-engineer.

↑ Bottom-up?
Start from your problem tree and ToC, then check call alignment.

Step 1: Draft 1 general objective (1 sentence)

Step 2: Draft 2–3 specific objectives

Step 3: Self-check with SMART+

Then peer review (65–80 min) — swap with a partner:

- Is it an objective (not an activity or output)?
- Does it align with the call requirements?
- Does the theory of change hold together?
- Could an evaluator score this?

Key Takeaways

Read the call like an evaluator — every criterion is a clue

Use the toolkit: Problem Tree → Theory of Change → LogFrame

Choose your pathway — top-down or bottom-up shapes how you draft

Objectives describe change, not work — activities ≠ objectives

If the logic breaks, the proposal breaks — test your chain

Thank You!

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Please check the following tools for further information:

CARPE Website
(general project information & training material)

LinkedIn
(news & up-dates)

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