

IPERNOVATION • EU EXPERT EVALUATOR

The EIC Accelerator Self-Scoring Checklist

Score your project the way a certified EU evaluator would, before you spend three months writing the proposal.

WHY THIS EXISTS

Most EIC Accelerator applications are not rejected because of weak technology. They are rejected because of a weak impact narrative, an indefensible market case, or a team that does not convince the jury. This checklist is the same logic an evaluator applies to your proposal, turned into questions you can answer honestly today. Built from scoring more than 3,700 proposals for the European Commission.

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HOW TO USE THIS

Three dimensions, one honest score

The EIC evaluates every proposal on three axes: **Excellence**, **Impact** and **Implementation**. Work through each section below and tick only the boxes you can defend with evidence, not intention. At the end, count your ticks and read the interpretation. The goal is not a perfect score. It is to find your weak points while you can still fix them.

Be ruthless. An evaluator reads dozens of proposals in a sitting and rewards clarity and evidence, not ambition. If you hesitate on a box, leave it empty: that hesitation is exactly where the points are lost.

WHAT CHANGED FOR 2026

Six full-proposal cut-offs a year (7 Jan, 4 Mar, 6 May, 8 Jul, 2 Sep, 4 Nov), the full proposal cut from 50 to 20 pages, and five thematic challenges (advanced materials, fusion, biotechnology, critical raw materials, climate adaptation). A shorter proposal is less forgiving: every claim has to earn its place. Funding is unchanged: up to 2.5M grant plus optional equity, up to 17.5M per project.

Scoring guide for each item is shown in grey. Tick the box only when the grey condition is genuinely met.

01

Excellence

The quality and novelty of the innovation - is it genuinely new and credibly hard?

- The innovation solves an unsolved problem, not an incremental improvement on an existing solution.
Tick if a domain expert would call it new, not just better.
- The technology readiness level is realistically TRL 5 to 8 (validated in a relevant environment up to a qualified system).
Tick if you can point to the evidence behind the TRL claim, not just assert it.
- The excellence section is written in technical language a specialist would respect, not marketing language.
Tick if a sceptical engineer would be convinced, not just impressed.
- The technological risk is clearly stated and explained, not hidden.
Tick if you name the hard parts. Evaluators distrust proposals with no risk.
- The novelty is defensible against the closest existing alternatives, with specifics.
Tick if you can name the alternatives and explain precisely why yours is different.
- If you are applying to a 2026 challenge, the project genuinely belongs there (not forced to fit).
Tick only if the fit is natural. A forced fit reads as a weak strategic case.

02

Impact

Market potential and European impact - the dimension that rejects the most proposals.

FROM INSIDE THE EVALUATION

An excellent technology with a weak business case does not pass. When an evaluator reads a thin impact section, it does not produce neutrality, it produces doubt that bleeds into every section after it. Spend a disproportionate share of your 20 pages here.

- The market is built bottom-up (TAM, SAM, SOM) with sources, not a single huge number quoted from a report.
Tick if you show how you get from the big number to the share you can realistically capture.
- There is concrete evidence of demand: a paying pilot, a letter of intent, or early revenue.
Tick if someone has already validated the problem with their wallet, even at small scale.
- The competitive positioning is specific and honest (you do NOT claim 'no competitors').
Tick if you name real competitors and explain your edge. 'No competitors' worries evaluators.
- The go-to-market plan is credible and matched to the resources requested.
Tick if the plan could survive a due-diligence conversation with an investor.
- The European (or global) dimension of the impact is explicit, not just national.
Tick if the scale of impact matches the scale of the funding.
- The financial projections are tied to assumptions you can defend line by line.
Tick if you can explain every major number, not just present it.
- The non-dilutive logic is clear: why a grant now changes your trajectory.
Tick if you articulate what the money de-risks and what it unlocks next.

03

Implementation

The team and the plan - can you credibly execute when reality diverges from the plan?

- The team has relevant, complementary track record for THIS venture, not a generic impressive CV.
Tick if the team's experience maps directly to the execution risk.
- Missing key skills are named explicitly as planned hires funded by the grant.
Tick if you address gaps openly rather than hoping evaluators do not notice.
- Milestones are realistic, verifiable, and include go/no-go logic.
Tick if you show you know when to stop investing in a path that is not working.
- The work plan, budget and timeline are internally consistent.
Tick if the numbers, tasks and dates actually add up against each other.
- Key risks have named mitigation plans, including commercial and regulatory ones.
Tick if you cover more than just technical risk.
- The use of funds maps clearly to the milestones it is meant to achieve.
Tick if every euro requested is tied to an outcome.

04

Interview readiness

Step 3 decides everything - and is the phase teams under-prepare the most.

- You have run at least two mock interviews with people who ask hard, unscripted questions.
Tick if you have rehearsed under pressure, not just polished slides.
- You can defend every assumption behind the business plan out loud, without notes.
Tick if you can handle 'why do you believe that?' on any number.
- You have prepared honest answers about the risks you did NOT put in the proposal.
Tick if you can name what could go wrong without becoming defensive.
- You can name plausible strategic acquirers and your hiring plan on demand.
Tick if you treat the jury like investors doing due diligence, because they are.

YOUR SCORE

Count your ticks (23 boxes total)

Boxes ticked	What it means	What to do next
19 to 23	Strongly competitive. Your project has the potential to win	Pick a 2026 cut-off and start the full proposal now, working backwards
13 to 18	Promising, but with real gaps that an evaluator could fill	Close the empty boxes before you write. Most gaps are in Impact
7 to 12	Not ready. Applying now would likely burn an EIC ticket	Fix the fundamentals first, especially demand evidence and market
0 to 6	The EIC Accelerator may be the wrong instrument for you	Consider Pathfinder, EIC Transition, Eurostars or national programs

READY TO GO DEEPER?

Book a 30-minute call

If your score leaves you unsure, a short call is enough to know whether your project can compete and which 2026 cut-off to aim for. EIC support is available on a success-fee basis: a modest fixed fee, plus a fee paid only if you are awarded.

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This checklist is general guidance based on the author's experience evaluating EU proposals. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by the European Commission or the European Innovation Council. Always refer to the official EIC Work Programme and Guide for Applicants for binding rules.