

My MSCA Applicant & Fellow Experience + 10 tips

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Outline

- Scientific background and CV at the time of application
- Project design and planning
- Proposal writing
- Experience as a MSCA PF Fellow

Scientific background at time of application (2020)

- Master in Medical Cell Biology 2014, UiB
- PhD in Biomedicine December 2019 (Cancer&Metabolism), UiB
- Employed as a research technician at the time of application
- Papers: 4 in total - 1st author from PhD (impact: medium/high)

Grant writing experience:

Applied twice for the RCN Mobility grant (2019, 2020)

1st time applicant for MSCA (2020)

RCN
May 2020 → December 2020

Summary of marks

Criterion	Mark
Excellence	3
Impact	4
Implementation	3
Overall assessment of the referee/panel	Not Funded

The proposal indicates that the applicant is at the early career stage having recently completed PhD training. It would appear that they have gained some basic but clearly relevant laboratory and scientific training. That being said, there are some key elements that appear to be lacking or require significant up-skilling. This lack of experience in key elements and accompanying CV would strongly suggest that the project manager has not yet demonstrated the ability to perform high-quality research. Having said this, the team that has been constructed

MSCA
September 2020 → March 2021

Criterion 1 - Excellence

Score: **4.90** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 50.00%)

Criterion 2 - Impact

Score: **4.80** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 30.00%)

Criterion 3 - Implementation

Score: **4.90** (Threshold: 0/5.00 , Weight: 20.00%)

Evaluation Summary Report

Evaluation Result

Total score: **97.40%** (Threshold: 70/100.00)

Funded

-Polished, but identical aims and work packages as RCN proposal. More focus on personal development

- 1) Don't give up
- 2) Your CV does not need to be perfect

Your CV does not need to be perfect

Tip #1: Identify which skills are lacking for you to achieve your career goals



Show how a MSCA Fellowship can help you fill these gaps

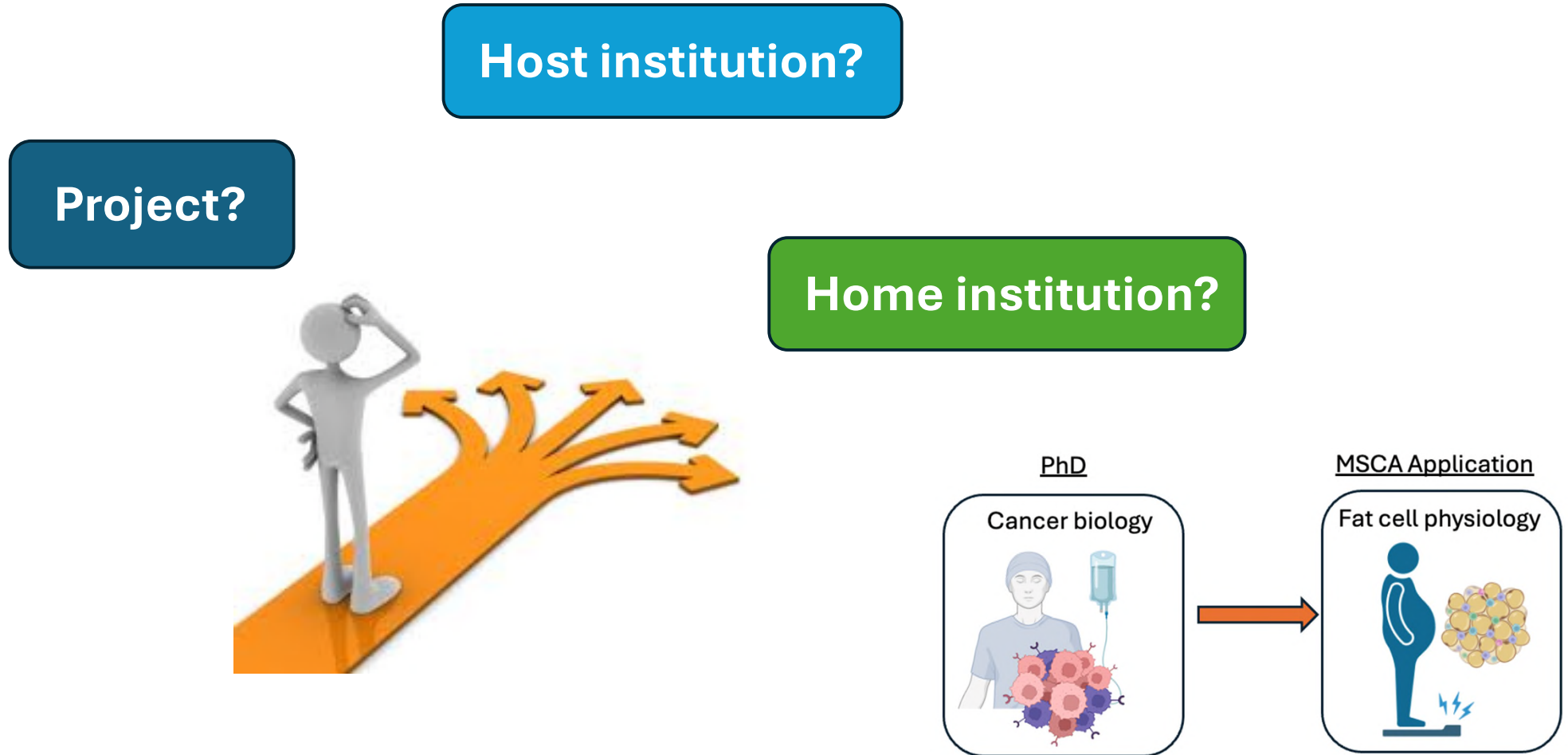
For example:



TO3 (Improve selected transferable skills): Project leader experience: After recently finishing my PhD, my project leader skills are incomplete. Leading the proposed project will therefore be a great opportunity for me to build on my project leader experience. I will have the main responsibility for ensuring progress of the project,

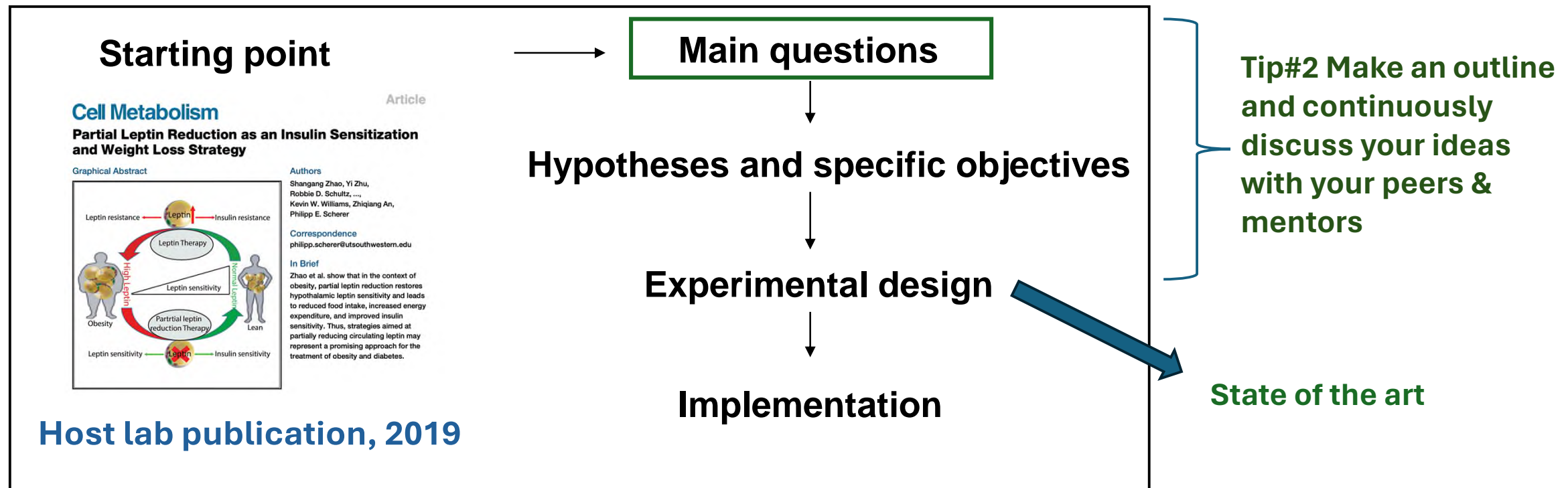
Make it clear what is your next step and how the grant can take you there

First time applicant: Where to start?



Alternative 1: Design project → Find suitable host/home institution

Alternative 2: Choose host/home institution → Design project



I aimed at designing a project that:

- Have high scientific quality (novelty, impact etc. – **ambitious** but realistic)
- Take advantage of expertise in both labs
- Have a balance between learning objectives and already acquired skills
- Career promoting

Tip#3: Like how you formulate the scientific objectives, clearly formulate and present training objectives

TO1: Training-through-research

- Perform the proposed project to become a more independent researcher.

TO2: Hands-on training activities for developing scientific skills

- In addition to the techniques described above (genetic mouse modeling and metabolic measures), I will gain new skills within single cell spatial signaling and bioinformatics (Hyperion and single cell RNAseq).

TO3: Improve selected transferable skills

- Improve my skills related to: project management, proposal preparation, and supervising.

TO4: Advance my dissemination and communication abilities

- Build on my communication and dissemination skills.

Where my PhD mentor did his PhD

Host institution

&

Home institution

Where I did my PhD

- **Guided by research interest**
- **Fulfilled criteria essential for success:**
 - Experts within the field
 - Excellent scientific environment (including infrastructure)
 - Well funded (fellowship running cost is limited)
- **Not critical for success, but positive for the application:**
 - long-standing collaboration between laboratories (exchange/sharing)
 - Already familiar with the lab/environment at the home institution
- **Should be a place that you (and your family) can imagine to live for 2 years**

Tip#4 When choosing host/home institutions - ask to talk to other post-docs in the lab

In summary

Raise excellent, ambitious, important questions

Use state of the art tools to answer them

Preliminary data is an advantage

Show that you and the team around have the skillset and infrastructure needed for performing the proposed project

State your career goals and show how an MSCA PF can help you achieve these



Express this information in a clear, structured manner

Proposal writing

Tip#5: Dedicate a significant amount of time – proposal writing takes time

- Scientific ideas needs to mature
- Formulate and communicate it in the best possible way
- Besides the 10 page proposal you need to invest time in:
 - Budget
 - Ethical considerations
 - Data management plan
 - Invitation letter
 - Your CV (+ your mentors?)

Tip#6: Make sure you answer every question

- State even the obvious

Tip#7: Be confident (without overselling)

“Since I did XXX I should have the competence to perform the proposed project”

“I am confident that I have the skills required to performed the proposed project”

Tip#8 Make your proposal as easy to read and follow as possible

Summarize and highlight important information by using figures/illustrations/tables/bullet points etc

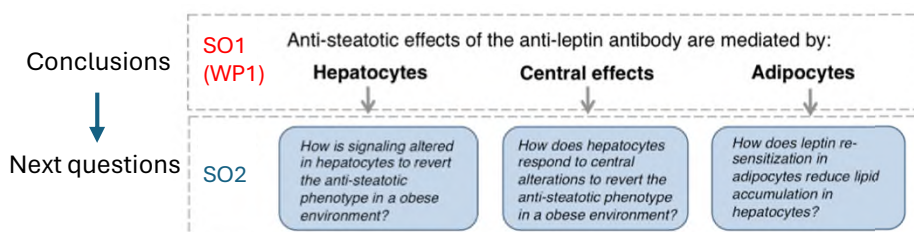
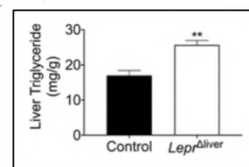
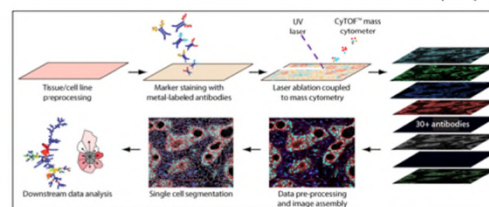


Figure 5: Scientific questions SO2 in connection to SO1.



- Summarizing figures
- Preliminary data
- Methodology
- Timelines
- Highlight important information
- ++

Color-coding?

Specific Objective 1 (WP1, WP2, WP3)

Specific Objective 2 (WP4, WP5)

Specific Objective 3 (WP6, WP7)

Training Objective (TO1-TO4)

Summarize and highlight information

Example - CV

Early achievements track record

I am an ambitious young investigator that at an early stage (PhD completed December 2019) has published 4 papers. There is not an overlapping theme between the papers. Of the 4 papers, one is a first-author publication and two of them do not include the PhD-supervisor as a co-author.

Publications:

1) **Pedersen L***, Panahandeh P*, Muntequa,S, Knappskog S, Lønning Teigen K, Halberg N. (2020). Golgi-localized PAQR4 mediates Anti-a Cancer. *Cancer Research*. 2020 Apr 14 pii: canres.3177.2019.

3) Sivertsen Åsrud K, **Pedersen L**, Aesoy R, Muwonge H, Aasebø E, Jenkins S, Berge RK, Henderson NC, Selheim F, Døskeland SO, Bakke M. (2019). Mice depleted for Exchange Proteins Directly Activated by cAMP (Epac) exhibit irregular liver regeneration in response to partial hepatectomy. *Scientific Reports*. 2019 Sep 24;9(1):13789.

Contribution: Established the procedure of partial hepatectomy in the laboratory of Prof. Bakke, performed all in vivo experiments as well as a significant part of the in vitro assays, analyzed data, and contributed to writing the manuscript.

of Citations,
Contribution of the paper to the scientific field
Metrics
(..if it looks good)



Clearly demonstrate in your CV that you have the necessary skillset

Summary



Highlight



MSCA Fellow experience – scientific aspects

- Great scientific environment (seminars, courses etc)
- Local lab environment different from my PhD (large group consisting mainly of postdocs)
→ Forces independence
- Your time-perspective is very different from the others (2 years vs. 6 years)
→ Need to stay more focused
- Networking (attend conferences and workshops)

MSCA Fellow experience – practical aspects

Startup phase (≤ 6 months) challenging (as expected)

- Basic things not straight forward (e.g., to set up a bank account and buy a car)

Practical aspects to consider when moving abroad as an MSCA

- Insurance (can be very expensive - check the rules for *guest researchers*)
- Visa? (time consuming)
- NAV - social benefits – (time consuming –up to 6 months)
- Tax
- School, childcare, job opportunities for your spouse?

Tip#9 Contact the international office at your host and home institution for guidance early

- Ask for a contact person for practical questions at the outgoing University

Tip10#: Enjoy the experience

Enjoy the science, communicate the science, build your network, learn the new culture, let the new surroundings and colleagues inspire you for your next step

Thank you and good luck!