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The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

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Horizon Europe: getting started, building partnerships and working strategically

DASSH workshop summary | key insights

November 2026

As Australia prepares to participate as an associated country in Horizon Europe, DASSH recently hosted a workshop exploring how researchers and institutions can identify opportunities, develop international partnerships and position themselves for success.

Drawing on practical experience from Aotearoa New Zealand, the workshop explored three central questions: How do we get started? How do we become strategic? And how do we build together?

The discussion highlighted the significant opportunities Horizon Europe presents for Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (HASS) researchers, both through the dedicated Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society cluster and through interdisciplinary collaboration across the broader program.

A central message was that Horizon Europe is about more than securing research funding. It offers opportunities to build enduring international networks, strengthen institutional research capability and contribute Australian expertise to major global challenges.

Key insights from the workshop

1. Think beyond Cluster 2

While Cluster 2 — Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society — is a natural starting point for HASS researchers, opportunities extend across all six clusters of Horizon Europe's Pillar II.

HASS perspectives, methodologies and community connections are increasingly important in research addressing health, climate, energy, mobility, digital technologies, security and societal transformation.

Researchers were encouraged to explore opportunities beyond their immediate disciplinary areas and consider how their expertise could contribute to interdisciplinary projects.

2. Build relationships before developing proposals

Successful Horizon Europe applications often involve large international consortia, with approximately 8–15 participating organisations or countries represented in the examples discussed.

Building these partnerships takes time. Established relationships, trust and shared understanding are particularly valuable when developing complex proposals involving multiple institutions and stakeholders.

Researchers were encouraged to begin with existing European colleagues and institutional partnerships, while also exploring new connections through National Contact Points (NCPs), networking events and partner-matching opportunities.

3. Understand what you bring to a consortium

An important distinction was made between pitching an existing research project and identifying what a researcher or team can contribute to a Horizon Europe call.

Rather than attempting to retrofit an existing project into a funding opportunity, researchers should consider their distinctive expertise, methodologies, research networks, stakeholder relationships and institutional strengths.

This includes identifying what Australian researchers can offer that may not be readily available to European partners, and communicating those strengths clearly.

4. Integrate HASS expertise from the beginning

HASS researchers have an important role in shaping how research problems are understood, how projects engage with communities and stakeholders, and how research outcomes are translated into policy and practice.

The workshop emphasised that HASS expertise should be incorporated at the initial problem-framing and project-design stages, rather than brought in later to address impact, engagement or communication requirements.

This is particularly relevant to interdisciplinary projects involving technological development, societal readiness, community engagement and public policy.

5. Invest in understanding the program and its requirements

Horizon Europe has its own terminology, application structures and expectations. Developing familiarity with the program is an important first step.

Researchers were encouraged to download the relevant cluster work programs and search them directly for topics and keywords aligned with their expertise.

Particular attention should be paid to the objectives, expected outcomes, scope and requirements of individual calls, including language indicating whether particular activities or partnerships are expected, mandatory or optional.

NCPs can provide valuable guidance in interpreting calls, identifying suitable partners and navigating program requirements.

6. Recognise the importance of institutional support

Horizon Europe participation can require substantial time and resources, particularly when developing international consortia and coordinating complex proposals.

The workshop highlighted the value of institutional research support, including assistance with proposal development, partnership management, budgeting, legal and financial requirements, and project administration.

Researchers should also consider the distinction between leading a consortium and contributing as a partner. Leadership can bring strategic benefits but also significant administrative responsibilities. Participating as a partner may provide greater opportunity to focus on the research itself.

7. Explore opportunities for Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand collaboration

The workshop identified considerable potential for greater trans-Tasman collaboration.

Aotearoa New Zealand's experience of participating in Horizon Europe offers valuable practical knowledge, established European relationships and opportunities for Australian researchers to connect with existing networks.

Australian and Aotearoa researchers may also bring complementary expertise, regional perspectives and established partnerships that strengthen their contributions to European consortia.

Practical next steps for researchers

Members interested in Horizon Europe were encouraged to take some initial steps over the coming months:

1. **Explore the work programs.**
   Download the relevant Pillar II work programs and identify calls that align with your expertise, methods and networks.
2. **Identify strengths.**
   Prepare a short statement outlining the distinctive expertise, methodologies, partnerships and perspectives you could contribute to a consortium.
3. **Map existing relationships.**
   Identify European and international collaborators who may be interested in relevant opportunities.
4. **Connect with support networks.**
   Engage with institutional research support teams and relevant Horizon Europe NCPs.
5. **Start conversations early.**
   Explore potential consortia, clarify roles and begin discussing research approaches, stakeholder engagement and budgets well before deadlines.

Emerging opportunities for further engagement

The workshop discussion also identified interest in further practical support, including:

- A dedicated session on reading and interpreting Horizon Europe calls.

- Opportunities for Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand researchers to meet and identify potential collaborations.
- Practical guidance on building and coordinating large, multi-institutional consortia.
- Examples of successful applications and approaches to proposal development.
- Discussion of how institutions can adapt their research support and collaboration practices to Horizon Europe requirements.

DASSH will consider opportunities to build on these discussions and support members to connect, share expertise and explore international collaboration.