Strengths & deficiencies of 2024 Mission Soil LL proposals

Mission Soil NCP Training

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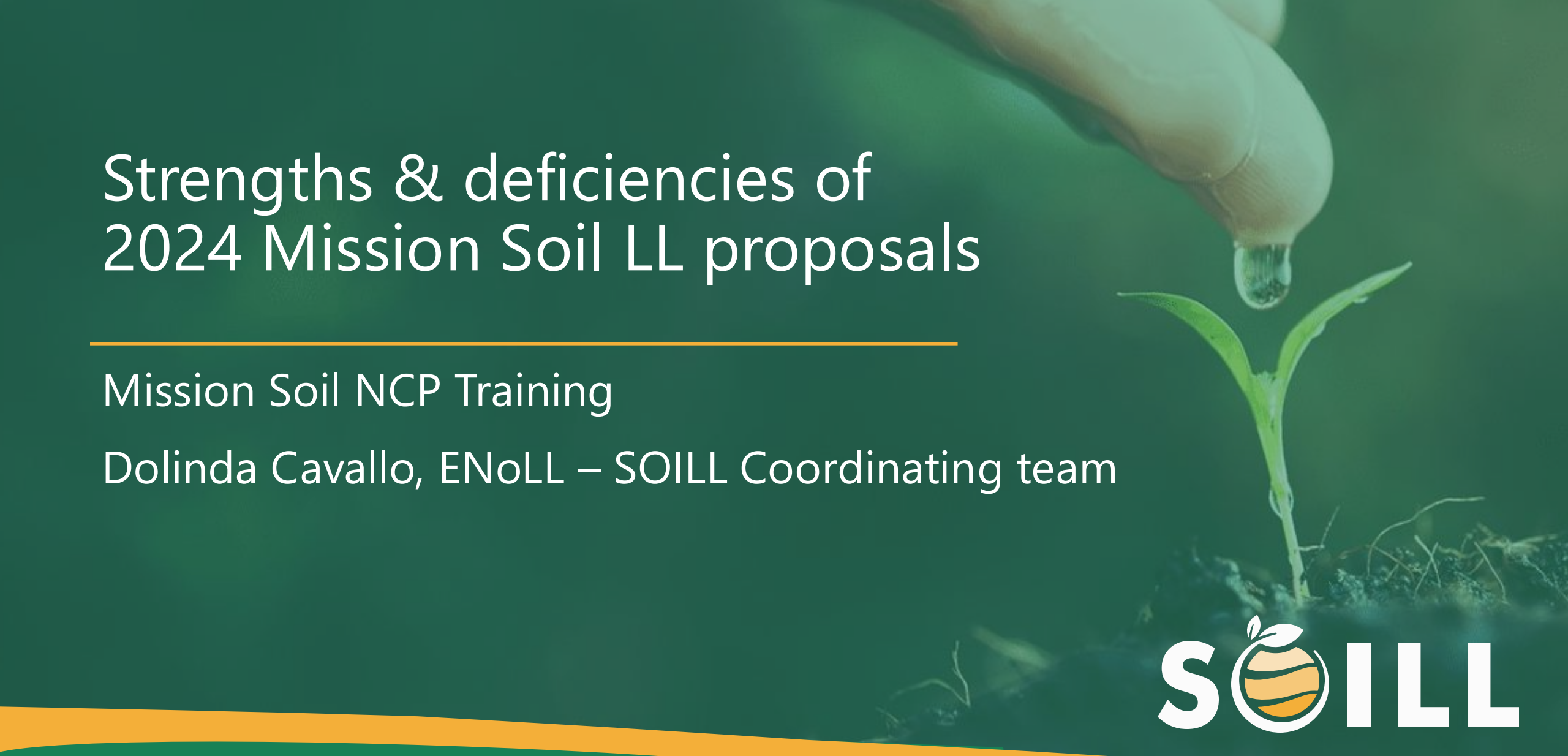

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2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis – Why?

Support Mission Soil LL topics applicants

As part of SOILL's mandate to support applicants to Mission Soil Living Lab topics, and in continuity with the capacity-building role of NATI00NS, access to ESRs enables more targeted and informed applicant support.

Identify common strengths & deficiencies

Identifying recurring patterns across evaluation reports to highlight valued elements and frequents limitations to guide the applicants avoid common pitfalls that lead to lower scores

Enable successful-by-design proposals

Extract recurring patterns across evaluation reports helps pinpoint what evaluators value and where applicants tend to fall short
Reduce frustration of unsuccessful applicants

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2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis – What?

Anonymised ESRs of all 2024 LL proposals (65)

Co-creating solutions for soil health in Living Labs (HORIZON-MISS-2024-SOIL-01-01)
&
Living Labs in urban areas for healthy soils (HORIZON-MISS-2024-SOIL-01-02)

Provided/not provided info

PROVIDED:
- Topic code (e.g. HORIZON-MISS-2024-SOIL-01-01)
- Anonymised proposal code (e.g. Proposal01, Proposal02)
- ESR comments per evaluation criterion
- Proposal status (above or below threshold)

NOT PROVIDED:
- Proposal or evaluation criterion score
- Proposals retained for funding

- Confidential info anonymised (e.g. acronym/partner/output replaced with "XXX")
- Experts briefing material not shared

Received guidance:

- **Excellent** – Fully and successfully addressed
- ***Very Good*** *– Addressed very well, goes beyond basic requirements*
- ***Good*** *– Sufficiently addressed, meets basic requirements*
- **Minor Shortcoming** – Small issue, marginal and easily fixed; might not impact score
- **Shortcoming** – Important issue that lowers the score but proposal still fundable
- **Significant Weakness** – Aspect not sufficiently addressed; likely lowers score below threshold

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2024 Mission Soil LLs ESR analysis – How?

Challenges in analysis:

- **Assessment terminology** (e.g. "this is a shortcoming", "this is good") appear at the end of sentences or paragraphs — full context had to be interpreted
- Terminology was sometimes not referred for positive aspects or synonyms used – **appreciation level had to be interpreted from context**
- Feedback in a single paragraph or group of sentences required **separation into positive and negative aspects** ("…. This is good. However, …")

SOILL approach

- Focus on identifying **common trends** to guide applicants — not on assessing individual proposals or the evaluation process
- ESR comments were analysed **per evaluation criterion**, using the **proposal application template** to define sub-sections (e.g. 1.1 → objectives, moving beyond state-of-the-art)
- Statistics on use of scoreboard terms (level of appreciation) have been manually calculated (Ctrl+F)

SOILL steps

- Manual identification and tagging of all comments by evaluation sub-criterion
- Combined manual and AI-supported processing to group comments in thematic clusters
- Synthesis of recurring positive and negative aspects, with emphasis on Living Lab-/LL topics-specific elements where applicable
- Excel-base calculation of statistics on use and severity of comments

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2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis: Excellence

- Selection of soil health challenges, land uses, and pedoclimatic contexts is well justified and tailored to the local needs
- Clear and well-justified rationale for the selection of LLs, linking each to specific soil challenges, territorial contexts, or policy priorities
- Role of the transdisciplinary and participatory approaches is clearly explained, including how local actors will be engaged to co-create, implement, test, and adapt soil health solutions
- Relevant details included on how each LL would function
- Clear plan for coordination of work within and across the proposed LLs including a harmonised methodological framework across the LLs, to enable comparability, collective learning, and synthesis of results
- Transferability of soil health solutions and coherence with project objectives considered at LL level, outlining methodological features that enabled replication in other territories or scaling beyond the proposed LLs/sites
- Well-defined soil health or other monitoring indicators embedded in the methodology
- Commitment to contribute data to EUSO and/or to support EU-wide soil knowledge platforms

2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis: Excellence

- Lack of initial analysis of relevant soil health challenges in the regions (significant weakness)
- Unclear or not convincing explanation of how individual LLs contribute to the overarching proposed objectives or are integrated in the proposed work logic (shortcoming / significant weakness)
- Criteria for LL selection were vague or absent, or diversity and complementarity of LLs was not demonstrated (shortcoming)
- Failure to explain how the proposed LLs would be set up and operated in practice (significant weakness)
- Methodological approaches across LLs were inconsistent, fragmentary, or not aligned with a common vision (shortcoming/significant weakness)
- Insufficient information on relation to other initiatives, previous work (shortcoming) or no collaboration plan with SOILL, Mission Soil projects and other networks
- Lack of details on how different types of knowledge would be integrated or on how different actors would collaborate in the proposed multi-actor approach (shortcoming/significant weakness)
- Gender aspects not convincingly taken into account or treated only superficially (shortcoming)
- Lack of attention to research data and/or FAIR principles (shortcoming/significant weakness)

2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis: Impact

- Described well-structured and credible impact pathways, including how outputs would contribute significantly to topic expected outcomes and Mission Soil longer-term impacts
- Integrated mechanisms to influence governance and inform policymaking, including policy briefs, stakeholder dialogue platforms, and links to EU and international regulatory frameworks
- Convincingly descriptions of how project results and outputs will be sustained beyond the funding period. Strengths included a strong focus on anchoring results in regional structures and practices, clear provisions for maintaining digital outputs, and a well-articulated long-term vision
- Scale and significance contributions (magnitude) clearly defined across timeframes (short-, medium-, and long-term) as well as its geographical scope, and actors who would benefit from those contributions (e.g. land managers, regional authorities) and how
- Comprehensive and structured identification of potential barriers, covering a wide range of external challenges
- Credible exploitation strategy addressing how project results would be sustained and taken up, including business models, stakeholder uptake, and long-term use of key tools and knowledge

2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis: Impact

- Addressing only partially the topic expected outcomes (shortcoming) or failing to demonstrate credible alignment or contribution to them despite listing them (significant weakness)
- Impact pathways not supported by tangible strategies or lacking measurable indicators of the expected scale and significance of the contributions (shortcoming) or overall impact logic not developed or not credible (significant weakness)
- Contributions lacked quantitative underpinning—such as missing or weak baselines, unrealistic assumptions, or absence of benchmarks—leading to poorly estimated or unconvincing contributions (shortcoming/significant weakness)
- Failure to explain (significant weakness) or only generically explained (shortcoming) how results would contribute to the formulation, revision, or implementation of governance frameworks or policy instruments
- Insufficient explanation of how results would be institutionalised or scaled up or applied elsewhere (shortcoming)
- No or unconvincing strategy for impact and long-term contributions (shortcoming)
- Barriers and relevant mitigation actions lacked adaptive mechanisms (shortcoming) or relied on broad statements (minor shortcoming, shortcoming)
- Proposed dissemination, exploitation and/or communication measures not sufficiently linked to the LLs or regional activities (shortcoming)

2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis: Implementation

- Clearly structured work plan, with well-defined work packages, tasks, deliverables, and milestones, with logical sequencing
- Good connection of planned tasks/activities with project objectives and the general methodological approach
- Integration of governance and co-creation in the work-plan/tasks with well articulated dependencies between technical, social, and evaluation tasks strengthening overall implementation logic
- Activities coordinated across Living Labs including shared timelines, network management structures, or synchronised outputs
- Clear connections between milestones and major implementation stages
- Clear engagement plans or activities with SOILL, other relevant Mission Soil projects or EU-funded initiatives
- Well-developed, realistic, and convincing mitigation strategies tailored to each identified risk, including contingency plans, clear actions, and responsible partners
- Broad and complementary range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise brough together

NB: worth noting that no positive comments on the resources distribution to the LLs, even in high scoring proposals

2024 Mission Soil LLs ESRs analysis: Implementation

- Task descriptions were vague or incomplete with essential methodological details missing (significant weakness/shortcoming)
- Isolated or redundant tasks/activities with no explanation of interdependencies or justification of overlaps (shortcoming/significant weakness)
- Timing of key activities was poorly justified or misaligned with technical or seasonal requirements - e.g., scheduling testing before analysis; limiting engagement activities to compressed periods; delayed field implementation; or, premature evaluations (shortcoming, significant weakness)
- Failure to explain how Living Labs would be coordinated across regions for example lack of shared frameworks or misaligned local schedules (shortcoming/significant weakness)
- Timing of deliverables or milestones overly concentrated at the end of the project or inconsistent with the logic of the work plan and its implementation (shortcoming/significant weakness)
- Staff effort appeared mismatched with task complexity (shortcoming)
- FSTP mentioned but not operationalised through any concrete task (shortcoming)
- Too few risks identified or missed key risks – e.g., risks related to stakeholder engagement (shortcoming)
- Partner roles were not clearly justified in the project or LLs or their staff effort seemed insufficient relative to responsibilities (shortcoming)
- Resource distribution across LL actors was unclear (shortcoming)

SOILL 2025 Annotated Application Forms

EC Template

SOILL guidance & insights

Read more

SOILL guidance & insights

This section should demonstrate how your project will deliver credible and measurable contributions to both the Expected Outcomes described in the topic and the Expected Impacts defined in the Mission Soil Work Programme.

For Mission Soil LL proposals, the pathway to impact must operate on two interconnected levels:

- At project level, showing how integrated results advance the goals of the Mission;
- At LL level, showing how each LL acts as a territorial driver of innovation and change.

Read more

- **ENoLL Booklet – Living Lab origins, developments, and future perspectives**
  Overview of the LL model with examples and recommendations relevant to soil, water, and land-use challenges.
  Citation: European Network of Living Labs, Schuurman, D., DeLosRíos-White, M. I., & Desole, M. (2025). Living Lab origins, developments, and future perspectives. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14764597
- **NATI00NS webinars**
  Resources developed by NATI00NS to support Mission Soil LL applicants (2023 and 2024 funding opportunities:
  - **The Living Lab essentials - how to set up a Living Lab (2023)**
    Introductory webinar covering the core characteristics of LLs, setup steps, stakeholder engagement strategies, and alignment with Mission Soil objectives across land use types.
    https://nati00ns.eu/events/living-lab-essential-how-set-living-lab
  - **Governance and Business Models for setting up a Living Lab (2023)**
    Webinar on the role of governance structures and business models in establishing

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