Personal Experiences with ERC funding

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Who am I?

- PhD in 2003 from Antwerp University
- 2003-2004: NCEM, Berkeley National Lab, California, USA
- 2004-2007: FWO Postdoc
- 2007-2012: Assistent Professor
- 2012-2014: Associate Professor
- 2014-2018: Professor
- 2018-now: Full Professor
- 7 ERC projects in the group!
ERC lessons learned

• Timing is important, not only because of h-index etc. more about finding the right timing concerning the ability to do something innovative (equipment, new idea…)

• Panel is important: read the expertise of panel members in previous years

• Think and try before you write: you need a REALLY good idea and concept

• Do new experiments, dedicated to this grant

• Start writing in advance so that there is time to put is away for a week or so

• Prepare for the interview (see next slide)

• Consider this as an opportunity to shape your future

• Only apply for projects that seem like a lot of fun to do
ERC lessons learned – the interview

• Prepare well in advance

• Read the instructions, but DO highlight your strong points

• It is not a scientific presentation

• Make the slides attractive, don’t change them in the days before the interview. End with a really good slide

• Movies: check in advances

• Rehearse timing

• Prepare for obvious questions

• Don’t let other candidates make you nervous

• Show enthusiasm and enjoy…this is your audience
The impact of my ERCs

- Many doors opening
- Invitations for papers
- Visibility
- Quality label
- Research professorship
- Freedom
- Start of an independent career, my own research line
- Also some negative reactions…
Last bits of advice / thoughts during application

• The hard work is totally worth it

• Do not give up

• Make sure that the project is high risk/high gain, innovative, but with preliminary proof of concept, show impact

• Read the guidelines

• Write a well-structured proposal, including WP, risk analysis, a Gantt chart

• Show off, but don’t overdo it

• Try to get your proposal read by somebody that has experience with ERC

• Don’t listen too much to all of the advice, stay close to yourself
Last bits of advice / thoughts during the project

- Enjoy: it is YOUR project
- Get help from your financial department
- Ask advice from somebody who has been an ERC PI
- Take care of your open access publications
- Read the project again once in a while
- Only hire excellent students, this is too important
- Do a bit of PR
- Ask the officers for help, they are willing to provide assistance
- Start thinking about new applications before the end of the project