Initial Solar System Composition and Early Planetary Differentiation

ISoSyC

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Should I consider applying for Starting Grant in ERC?

Paradoxes to solve:

- Pioneering idea AND still feasible
- Work on your own AND work with a network of collaborators to help you
- High gain AND low risk (impossible)
- No incremental research AND no certainty when it comes to results

IS IT POSSIBLE?

YES, IT IS

Re-think the presentation of your scientific ideas in order to solve the paradoxes

An ERC proposal is very different from any other proposal: Science is important, presenting your project is also important.
Tactics

- Sell yourself: not really a familiar concept in European culture
- There is a weakness in your project? Describe it as being high risk and high gain
- Do not disperse yourself too much in the proposal
- Highlight important scientific points in the proposal and in your CV: catch the attention of the evaluators
- Explain all your decisions: It is OK to ask funds for 15 PhD or only one post-doc, but explain why it is your decision in the best interest of the project
- Need space? Put your schedule in an excel table
My experience:

**Year 1:** 3 positive to very positive reviews, one fairly positive, finishing by:
« Yet the project is not much structured and detailed: the work of the two post-docs and one PhD is not distributed, the precise analytical operations to test the 4 hypotheses is not given. The implications of these hypotheses for the Earth should also be developed and the link with Mars evolution (last line) be made. »
→ improved structure, stayed focus on one final goal: why finishing the project with the planet Mars while I did not really talk about it previously?

**Year 2:** 1 very positive, 3 fairly positive reviews, with unfair sentences:
« It is unclear from the proposal where the impact is likely to go beyond those interested in planetary formation and early history of Earth differentiation. » (nice…)
« Despite the proposed research has ambitious objectives, which might improve the current knowledge, I think that it contains a relevant amount of incremental research promoted by the availability of more accurate laboratory facilities. » → nothing to tell people saying there are not interested in the topic. BUT had to think how to make incremental research OK…

**Year 3:** Yeah! Going to the interview! → the main project remained globally the same over the attempts, the writing was improved!!
Interview

- Quite terrible: I had the feeling of going back at school! ;o)
- Waiting in the same room as other applicants: others can be terrified and terrifying
- Then going in a second room: second level of stress!
- Most important: sell yourself. Tell the evaluators why you are the best candidate for this project, why you want hire so many people etc etc…
- Many many thanks to Yellow Research (and to ULB for participating to it!)
- I only had a few very general questions about science, other questions were similar to those asked the training!
- Bring water, there are no drink available on the spot