



From the idea to the project: The story of one ERC Starting Grant

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Background

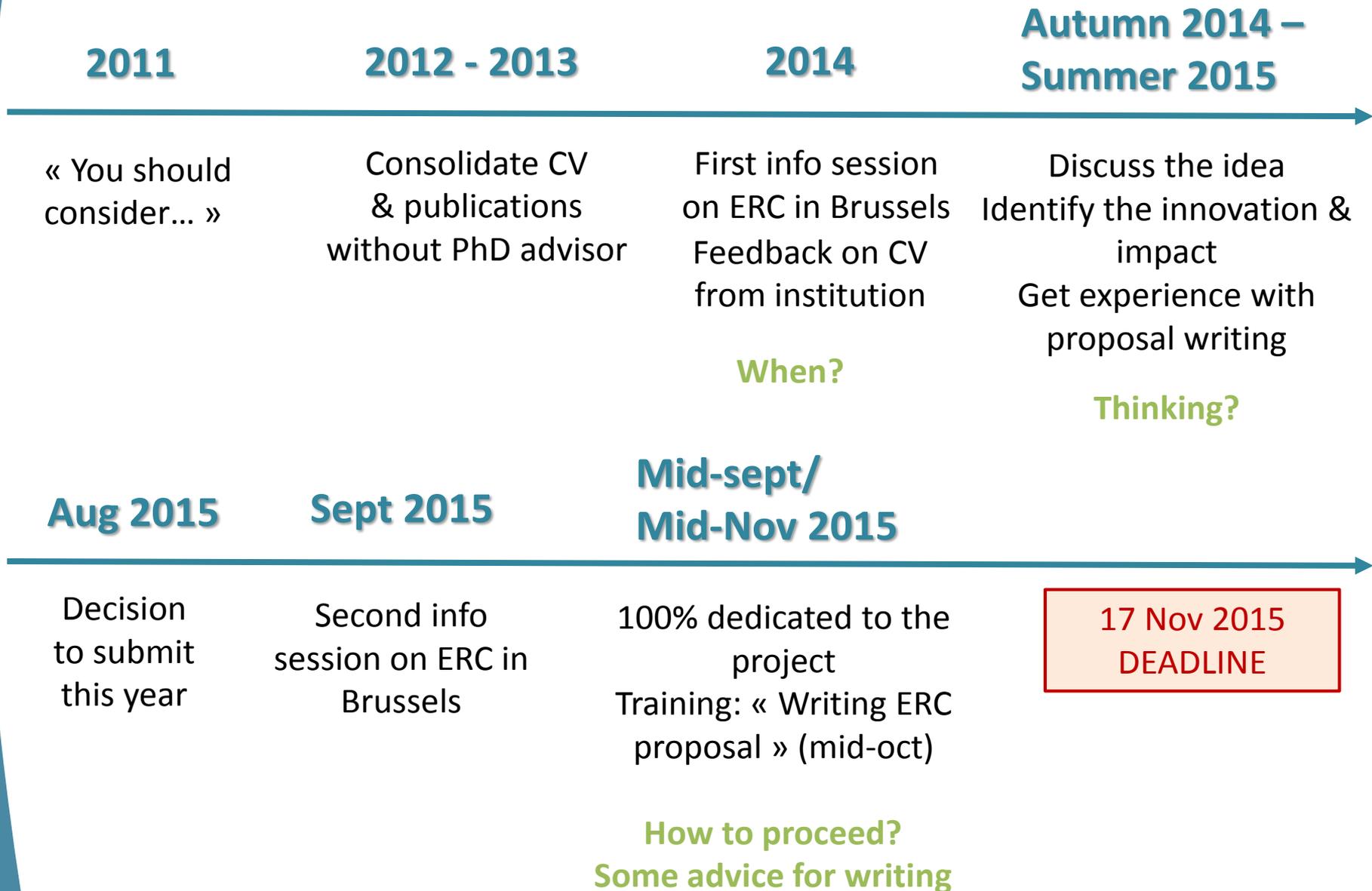
- MSc in Geology
- PhD in Agronomical sciences & Biological engineering
- FNRS research associate
- Applied for an ERC Starting Grant in November 2015
- Informed that the grant was funded in September 2016

**Mineral weathering in thawing permafrost:
causes and consequences (WeThaw)**





From the idea to the proposal...





When?

- Window after PhD 2-7 years
 - Extended if maternity
 - Consider your chance to resubmit a Starting Grant

- Check if your CV is enough at that stage
 - Consolidate (ask advice at your institution)

- Think about the maturity of the idea & its impact for the field:
 - Good timing?

- Make sure that you can be fully dedicated to the writing
 - Give you the best chance if you decide to do it

- My window was « submission in 2015 or 2016 »



Thinking period

- Go to conferences: listen and clarify what has already been done related to your idea
- Clarify the impact of your idea beyond your field
- About 1 year to discuss your idea with colleagues, to expose your view
- Make sure that your idea requires an ERC to do it
- Initiate collaborations to generate preliminary data
- Try to discuss with people who have had an ERC in your discipline



How to proceed to write?

1st month

- Collect all info for the CV (for part B1)
- Contact all collaborators (to secure samples,...)
- Collect all info for the budget (team, quote...)
- Discuss/check the budget with your institution
- Deep reading : conceptual figure
- Do and redo the structure of the WPs until convincing
- Think it as a team, with the profile of the team members

2nd month

- Training to write (ask your institution)
- Write based on a skeleton of the proposal
 - not only the headings from the ERC
 - also the idea of each paragraph
 - check the link with the budget
- Ask several feedback (ask in advance)
 - more specialist for part B2
 - less specialist for part B1
 - the research administration in your institution



Writing: selected advices

- If you have the opportunity, follow a training (ask your institution)
- Write part B2 first (15 pages), then part B1 (5 pages)
- The abstract is very important
- Provide the info expected:
 - What is groundbreaking?
 - Feasibility?
 - Why you?
- Try the submission procedure online few days before the deadline (you can upload a new version later)
- Polish the part B1!



When the proposal is submitted....

**Dec 2015/
Feb 2016**

March 2016

April 2016

**17 Nov 2015
DEADLINE**

Generate preliminary data
Create a delta for the interview

Notification for the interview:
STEP 1

Visit/discuss with collaborators of the project

How to proceed?

May 2016

June 2016

Summer 2016

Sept 2016

Interview preparation
Training: « ERC interview training »

**09 June 2016
INTERVIEW**

Try to think about something else

Notification that the grant was funded

Advice to prepare the interview



When you succeed for Step 1

- Congratulations for this first step
- Ask your institution which funding you can access to prepare the interview (training, etc.)
- Visit your collaborators and discuss your preliminary data with them
- Register for a « Interview training » session: my experience was that if you go early, you can adjust
- Maybe create a logo that you can use at the interview



To prepare the interview

- The format can vary from one panel to another (be careful)
- Integrate the comments received at the « Interview training » (useful for me)
- Ask your colleagues (including from further disciplines) to come to trial sessions + questions
- Prepare a **interview sample question list** (including questions on the weaknesses of the project) and prepare them
 - Be prepared for short answers
- Content of the presentation:
 - Discuss more the project itself
 - Show the delta since the proposal submission (e.g., preliminary data)
 - Every word counts in 5 minutes!



After the interview

- *Try* to think about something else until you receive the answer
- Enjoy the idea that you have had to initiate small projects (such as MSc thesis)
- Consolidate your preliminary data in case you have to resubmit (the deadline is often close to the notification)

I really learned a lot from the entire process!