The European Research Council

ERC applications: good practices

The European Research Council within Horizon Europe

Dr Line Fredslund Volkers
Call coordinator ERC Proof of Concept
Scientific Department
ERC Executive Agency

6th October 2021
ERC Starting and Consolidator Grant applications: good practices - Outline

- Novelties in the 2022 ERC Work Programme
- Applicants profile and Eligibility criteria
- How to write your ERC proposal
  - Select your evaluation panel
  - Part B1
  - Part B2
- The submission system
- DOs and DON’Ts
- Debunking common misunderstandings
ERC 2022 Work Programme: Novelties

1. ERC granting schemes

Starting Grant
- starters (2-7 years after PhD)
- up to M€ 1.5 for 5 years

Consolidator Grant
- consolidators (7-12 years after PhD)
- up to M€ 2 for 5 years

Advanced Grant
- significant track-record in the last 10 years
- up to M€ 2.5 for 5 years

Proof-of-Concept
- verify potential for marketable innovation
- up to €150,000 for ERC grant holders

Synergy Grant
- 2-4 Principal Investigators
- up to M€ 10 for 6 years
Additional funding can be requested to cover the costs below:

- Up to €1M for Starting / Consolidator / Advanced grants
- Up to €4M for Synergy grants

(a) "start-up" costs for Principal Investigators moving to the EU or an Associated Country from elsewhere as a consequence of receiving the ERC grant and/or
(b) the purchase of major equipment and/or
(c) access to large facilities and/or
(d) other major experimental and field work costs, excluding personnel costs.
# ERC 2022 Work Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ERC calls</th>
<th>Call Opening</th>
<th>Submission Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting Grants</td>
<td>23/09/2021</td>
<td>13/01/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERC-2022-StG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidator Grants</td>
<td>19/10/2021</td>
<td>17/03/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERC-2022-CoG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Grants</td>
<td>20/01/2022</td>
<td>28/04/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERC-2022-AdG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof of Concept</td>
<td>15/07/2021</td>
<td>14/10/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERC-2022-PoC</td>
<td>16/11/2021</td>
<td>15/02/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergy Grants</td>
<td>15/07/2021</td>
<td>10/11/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERC-2022-SyG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who can apply?

- **Excellent** Researchers
- **Any nationality, any age** or any current working place in the world
- The Host Institution **must be** in a EU member state or an associated country
- If granted, you need to spend at least 50% of your working time in the EU or associated countries

**SOLE SELECTION CRITERION: scientific excellence of the PI and the project**

No priorities, No quotas - the Host Institution is NOT an evaluation criterion
Preparing your proposal
Make sure you are eligible (StG/CoG)!

Extensions of eligibility window possible for StG and CoG for documented cases of:

• Maternity – 18 months per child *(before or after PhD)*
• Paternity – actual time taken off
• Long-term illness
• Military service
• Caring for seriously ill family members
• Medical specialty training (4 years maximum)

No limit to the total extension.

See the [ERC Work programme](#) for details. Supporting documents must be included in the submission.
Preparing your proposal: Host Institution

• You can change it during the project's life
• **Negotiate** with the HI (your position, equipment, administrative support, access to infrastructure, etc.)
• **Get a letter of support** from your HI where the project is to be carried out
• If necessary, other institutions can participate as secondary beneficiaries.

• Rumour 1: *The quality/fame of the HI is increasing my chances/scores.*
  ❌ **NOT true:** the HI is not an evaluation criterion!
ERC Starting and Consolidator Grants
The applicant’s profile

- Potential for research independence
- Able to develop ground-breaking idea ........ think out of the box
- Evidence of scientific maturity and creativity

**Promising track-record of early achievements**
- Significant publications contributing to the field (up to 5 publications for StG, up to 10 for CoG)
  - At least one (StG) /several (CoG) publications without participation of PhD supervisor
- Invited presentations to conferences
- Awards, prizes, academy membership
- Granted patents

50% of the PI’s time in EU / AC
50% StG - 40% CoG in the project
Preparing your proposal
Decide whether to apply

SKILLS

- EXCELLENCE
- CREATIVITY
- AMBITION
- BOLDNESS
Get inspired by browsing through the ERC-funded projects on our website – [https://erc.europa.eu](https://erc.europa.eu)
Select your evaluation panel

ERC Revised Panel structure


Life Sciences (LS)
- LS1 Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions
- LS2 Integrative Biology: from Genes and Genomes to Systems
- LS3 Cellular, Developmental and Regenerative Biology
- LS4 Physiology in Health, Disease and Aging
- LS5 Neuroscience and Disorders of the Nervous System
- LS6 Immunity, Infection and Immunotherapy
- LS7 Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Diseases
- LS8 Environmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution
- LS9 Biotechnology and Biosystems Engineering

Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)
- SH1 Individuals, Markets and Organisations
- SH2 Institutions, Governance and Legal Systems
- SH3 The Social World and Its Diversity
- SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity
- SH5 Cultures and Cultural Production
- SH6 The Study of the Human Past
- SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, and Space

Physical Sciences & Engineering (PSE)
- PE1 Mathematics
- PE2 Fundamental Constituents of Matter
- PE3 Condensed Matter Physics
- PE4 Physical & Analytical Chemical Sciences
- PE5 Synthetic Chemistry and Materials
- PE6 Computer Science and Informatics
- PE7 Systems and Communication Engineering
- PE8 Products and Processes Engineering
- PE9 Universe Sciences
- PE10 Earth System Science
- PE11 Materials Engineering

LS: revision and adjustment of panel contours
PE: additional panel (PE11) + revision
SH: additional panel (SH7) + revision
SH6 panel - The Study of the Human Past
Archaeology and History

- SH6_1 Historiography, theory and methods in history, including the analysis of digital data
- SH6_2 Classical archaeology, history of archaeology, social archaeology
- SH6_3 General archaeology, archaeometry, landscape archaeology
- SH6_4 Prehistory, palaeoanthropology, palaeodemography, protohistory, bioarchaeology
- SH6_5 Palaeography and codicology
- SH6_6 Ancient history
- SH6_7 Medieval history
- SH6_8 Early modern history
- SH6_9 Modern and contemporary history
- SH6_10 Colonial and post-colonial history
- SH6_11 Global history, transnational history, comparative history, entangled histories
- SH6_12 Social and economic history
- SH6_13 Gender history, cultural history, history of collective identities and memories, history of religions
- SH6_14 History of ideas, intellectual history, history of economic thought
- SH6_15 History of science, medicine and technologies
Proposals are submitted to a targeted Panel (of PI's choice)

- Can flag one “Secondary Review Panel”

Applicant chooses his/her panel, and this panel is “responsible” for the evaluation of the proposal

Each panel covers a given breath of research topics, further detailed with its descriptors

Proposals can be moved to other panels in exceptional cases, e.g. if clear mistake on part of applicant, or due to the necessary expertise being available in a different panel

In case of cross-panel or cross-domain proposals, evaluation by members of other panels possible
• Indicate a secondary panel if:
  – The proposal’s innovative content concerns a discipline at the interface between panels or
  – The proposal also includes important advances in a field covered by another panel

Also explain why you think the second panel is relevant

• This will “flag” your proposal as potentially interdisciplinary

And needing a cross-panel reviews
Preparing your proposal
Choosing descriptors

1-4 descriptors

• The first descriptor should be in the submission panel
  • The other descriptors can be from any panel
    – Free keywords (optional)

• Descriptors and free keywords may influence:
  – Evaluation Panel
  – Panel members
  – Whether a cross-panel evaluation is necessary

• Rumour 2: The more cross-panel descriptors I indicate, the higher the funding chances, since I emphasize like this the interdisciplinarity of my proposal.

× NOT true: even though these are used to allocate proposals to Panel Members, once the proposals are allocated, Panel Members do not see the keywords and descriptors used.
Evaluation
Review procedure (StG, CoG and AdG)

Step 1
Panel members + cross-panel reviewers evaluate remotely the Extended Synopsis of the proposal and the CV (Part B1)

Panel Meeting in Brussels

Proposals rejected (score B and C)
Proposals retained (score A)

Feedback

Step 2
Panel Members evaluate remotely the full scientific proposal (Part B1 and Part B2)

Additionally, each proposal is evaluated by at least 2 specialists in the field

Panel Meeting in Brussels with Interviews for StG and CoG applicants (from 2021 also for AdG)

Proposals not recommended for funding (score B)
Proposals recommended for funding (score A)

Feedback
Preparing your proposal

- **Register early**, get familiar with the system and templates and start filling in the forms via the Funding and Tenders Portal.

- A submitted proposal can be revised until the call deadline by submitting a new version and overwriting the previous one.

- Follow the formatting rules and page limits.

- Download and proof-read the proposal before submitting.

- Make use of the help tools and call documents (Information for Applicants, Work Programme, Frequently asked questions, Videos!!!)

- Talk to the National Contact Points and your Institution's grant office.
Structure of the application

✓ Part A
  ✓ General information, budget + description of resources, ethics review

✓ Part B1
  ✓ 5 pages of project synopsis
  ✓ Include brief methodology and feasibility
  ✓ CV and track record

✓ Part B2
  ✓ 14 pages
  ✓ Include extensive methodology and work plan
  ✓ Cover: risks mitigation, open access costs, team

✓ Host institution letter
In Step 1, only the Extended Synopsis is read by panel members:

- **Concise and clear presentation** is crucial (evaluators are not all experts in the field)
  - Is my project new, innovative, bringing new solutions/theories? Including your previous work! Be honest, avoid buzzwords/overstatements!
  - Does it promise to go substantially beyond the state of the art? No incremental research, think big!
  - What is the state of play and why is your idea and scientific approach innovative? Know your competitors!
  - How can I support my case? Are my goals realistic? Are case studies justified? Explain your scientific approach in sufficient detail to convince the panel about the feasibility of your project, including sources!
  - What's the risk? Mitigating measures!
In Step 2, the whole proposal is read by Panel Members and specialists from around the world

- Provide sufficient details on your methodology and work plan – Do not repeat the synopsis!
- Make sure that the quantitative and qualitative differences to the state of the art are clear and referenced – Show you did your homework!
- Provide alternative strategies to mitigate risks
- Explain involvement of team members – Outline work plan / needed expertise!
- Justify requested resources, explain your budget properly – Do not inflate the budget, start from your needs!
Start WRITING

Part B1 or Part B2?

Spark curiosity and excitement !!!

BOTH 😊

Impress with plans and details
WRITING

Part B1 and Part B2?

Spark curiosity and excitement → INTERVIEW → WINNER

State of the art
Novelty
Originality
Importance/Impact
Scientific approach

In short terms: WPs, risks, preliminary results

DO NOT just copy paste B1
Detailed scientific approach
Preliminary results
Detailed workplan

References
Resources
Budget
Risk assessment/contingency plans
Time commitment

Show scientific independence in CV
Specificity of your career path/breaks /research environment and context
Preparing your proposal (7): PART B1: The research project

- Is my project new, innovative, bringing new solutions/theories?
- Does it promise to go substantially beyond the state of the art? – no incremental research. Think big!
- Know your competitors – what is the state of play and why is your idea and scientific approach outstanding?
- Only the extended Synopsis is read at Step 1: concise and clear presentation is crucial (evaluators are not all experts in the field)
- How can I prove/support my case? Are my goals realistic? Explain your scientific approach in sufficient detail to convince the panel about the feasibility of your project
- What's the risk? Mitigating measures?
- Societal impact is not an evaluation criterion (which does not mean ERC-funded projects would not have such impact)
Prefering your proposal (8): PART B1: The principal investigator

• Why am I the best/only person to carry it out? Know your competitors!

• Am I able to work independently, and to manage a 5-year project with a substantial budget?

• Am I competitive?

• Have I shown my scientific leadership in my CV?

**Rumour 3: One needs publications in Nature/Science/High Impact Factor journals to succeed.**

✗ NOT true
WRITING

Part B1

Spark curiosity and excitement

State of the art
Novelty
Originality
Importance/Impact
Scientific approach

In short terms: WPs, risks, preliminary results

Show scientific independence in CV
Specificity of your career path/breaks/research environment and context

Part B2?

DO NOT just copy paste B1
Detailed scientific approach
Preliminary results
Detailed workplan

Resources
Budget
Risk assessment/contingency plans

Preliminary results

References

INTERVIEW

Impress with plans and details

WINNER

INTERVIEW

WINNER
Preparing your proposal (9): PART B2

In Step 2, both part B.1 and part B.2 are read by Panel Members and specialists from around the world

- Do not repeat the synopsis, provide sufficient details on your methodology and work plan
- Make sure that the quantitative and qualitative differences to the state of the art are clear and referenced - show you did your homework.
- Provide alternative strategies to mitigate risks
- Explain involvement of team members
- Justify requested resources – explain your budget properly
What are the panel members looking for?

In your proposal

Fund frontier research projects:
- Does the project go substantially **beyond the state of the art**?
- **Why** is the proposed project important?
- Is it **timely**? (Why wasn't it done in the past? Is it feasible now?)
- What's the **risk**? Is it justified by a substantial potential **gain**? Is there a **plan** for managing the risk?

Fund the future leaders in the field:
- **Why** is the PI the best person to carry it out?
- Is the PI internationally competitive as a researcher **at his/her career stage** and in his/her discipline? (up to 5 publications for StG, up to 10 for CoG, 10 publications in major scientific journals for AgG)
- Is there **evidence** that the PI is able to work independently, and to manage a 5-year project with a substantial budget?
Contrary to what rumours may say...

… ALL scientific fields are eligible for ERC funding; no predetermined priorities

… the budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand

… the Host Institution is not an evaluation criterion

… societal impact is not an evaluation criterion (which does not mean ERC-funded projects would not have such impact)

… proposals shorter than five years are equally welcome

… the content of the proposed research determines its budget

… all researchers are welcome to apply; applicant’s career stage matter, publication record is not decisive

… having already an ERC grant does not guarantee obtaining/not another one; each proposal is evaluated on its own merit, in comparison with the competing pool of applications
Evaluation process

Excellence is the sole evaluation criterion

Excellence of the Research Project
- Ground breaking nature
- Potential impact
- Scientific Approach

Excellence of the Principal Investigator
- Intellectual capacity
- Creativity
- Commitment
How to prepare a successful ERC proposal?

- Have a **bright, original idea**
- Design a **research project** to implement the idea
- Get a letter of support from a **Host Institution** where the project is to be carried out (EU/AC)
  - Make sure you are **eligible** (StG/CoG extensions!)
  - **Register early**, get familiar with the system and templates and start filling in the forms
- Consider the balance between addressing **generalists and specialists**, and the difference between part B1 and part B2 of the written proposal
- Seek for **feedback** / Organize **mock interviews** (StG/CoG)
- If rejected, **keep trying**! (reapplications have a much higher success rate – feedback from panels is valuable both for resubmitting and to advance your own research)
WHEN PREPARING YOUR PROPOSAL, ASK YOURSELF...

- Does my project bring new, innovative aspects?
- Does it promise to go substantially beyond the state of the art? – no incremental research. Think big!
- Know your competitors – what is the state of play and why is your idea and scientific approach outstanding?
- Only the extended Synopsis is read at Step 1: concise and clear presentation is crucial (evaluators are not all experts in the field)
- How can I prove/support my case? Are my goals realistic? Explain your scientific approach in sufficient detail to convince the panel about the feasibility of your project
- What's the risk? Mitigating measures?
- Societal impact is not an evaluation criterion (which does not mean ERC-funded projects would not have such impact)
Last but not least.....

• If rejected, **KEEP TRYING!!!!!**

• Reapplications have a much higher success rate
• Benefit of using feedback from evaluation reports
Typical reasons for rejection

Research Project
- **Scope**: Too narrow ↔ too broad/unfocussed
- Incremental research
- Collaborative project, **several PIs**
- **Work plan** not detailed enough/unclear
- Insufficient **risk** analysis
- Part B2 similar with part B1

Principle Investigator (PI)
- Insufficient **track-record**
- Insufficient (potential for) **independence**

Interview
- Vaguely addressed questions
- Not convincing is their own idea/project
- Lack of preliminary results
- Similar work published in the meantime – unaddressed issue

Before Redressing: see what you could you have done/explained/presented better before blaming the process!
- Diverting scientific opinion is **not** a motivation for redress
- An obvious mistake however might result in a re-evaluation
DO / DON’T

• **STAND OUT!** Be ambitious and original!

• **Write for the panel!**
  Only 1-2 panel members are experts in your particular proposal. Panel members act as generalists

• **BE FOCUSED**: no need to do all and “save the world”

• **BE SPECIFIC**: even in Part B1

• **DO** explain hypothesis

• **DO** show preliminary data

• **DO** present a (detailed) plan

• **DO** justify requested resources

• **DO** cover missing expertise

• **DON’T** overdo mentioning partners and collaborators

• **DO** justify requested resources
DO / DON’T

- **STAND OUT!** Be ambitious and original!
  - **DO** use graphics
  - **DO** cite all relevant studies in the field
  - **DO** get some hard core scientists to read you proposal before submitting
  - **DO** work on your CV
    - **DO** explain specificities of your research environment
    - **DO** show your independent creative thinking:
      main articles and your contribution, evidence of leadership, scientific initiatives at local/national/international level, awards
  - **DON’T** oversell
  - **DON’T** make false statement
    - **DON’T** omit shared co-authorship
    - **DO** nominate all authors
  - **RE-THINK**
    If you re-submit your application – consider feedback
THE INTERVIEW

Show **SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY** and be **PROUD** of that!

**YOU** have very good chances! (> 30%)
**YOUR** opportunity to convince the panel
**YOU** know very well every part of your proposal

Do not change the **objectives** and **focus** of the proposal
If not presented in the proposal, prepare **preliminary results**

What is published in the meantime?

Rehearse & challenge yourself

What are your biggest **achievements** so far?
What is it you will be **famous** for after the five years?
THE INTERVIEW

Show **SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY** and be **PROUD** of that!

**DO** Stress the main new concepts early on

**BE PREPARED** for questions (Lead Reviewer, Panel Chair, Panel Members)

- **Demonstrate you know what you propose:**
  - you know the risks
  - You have a plan to mitigate
  - You have the ability to explore novel routes
  - Need collaborators? How you manage them?
  - ID? How you cover missing expertise?

**What if** someone else published similar work in the meantime? **??? BE AWARE!!!**

**COME PREPARED TO:**
- **Justify** how similar/different the works are
- What would you change to make it novel and original again?
- Where do you go from here?

**Convince that is YOUR proposal:**
- Caught in the system?
  - Independent even in a big group
  - How the grant will give the independency
- If you have your group – consolidate?
- You have the knowledge in the field
- Do not change the original objectives
Where can you find more information?

Our website:  
[erc.europa.eu](http://erc.europa.eu)

Our social media channels:  
[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/erc.europa.eu),  
[LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/erc/europa-eu),  
[YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/c/EuropeanResearchCouncil),  
[Twitter](https://twitter.com/EuropeanResearch)

National Contact Point (NCP):  
[https://erc.europa.eu/funding/national-contact-points](https://erc.europa.eu/funding/national-contact-points)

Funding & Tender Opportunities:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home)

Where can you find more information?

Videos - ERC Classes

- What to consider before applying
- How to fill in the application
  (Part B1 and B2)
- The interview
- How the evaluation works

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbFbzkVWgCU&list=PLtv6FnsXqnXAYRk6HCErwMxwML0ZKoMcy

More opportunities to develop your scientific career through public funding linked to ERC projects, even if you do not receive an ERC Grant.

https://erc.europa.eu/funding/additional-opportunities
Thank you!

Line-Fredslund.Volkers@ec.europa.eu