

The ERC is different

(but in a good way)



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Experience with the ERC

- 2009 – ERC Start (accepted)
- 2015 – ERC Consolidator (accepted)
- Ad hoc external reviewer for ERC Advanced

ERC – Track Record

Do not write as a chronological track record

Use this section to tell a story about your career

Sales pitch

Should read as if you spent 10 years getting the right experience because you wanted to do this ERC project from day 1

ERC Start - CV

- My CV heading in
11 primary papers, 9 reviews
 - First authors in Nature Immunology, Immunity, Journal of Experimental Medicine, PNAS (IF 15-25). Co-last in Immunity (IF=20)
 - Focus of my CV was impact, giving citations and listing commentaries, etc

ERC Consolidator - CV

- My CV heading in
90 primary papers, 67 as independent
 - Focus of my CV was on the number, with selected papers picked as highest-impact last author papers
 - Aim to show success as an independent PI
 - Secondary focus on awards – distinguish from other candidates

ERC – Project

Projects should be **big**

- Don't think of experiments – think of a long-term career ambition
- Think of it as a major program rather than a grant
- 3-4x the money of a major FWO = 3-4x the scope of a major FWO
 - Do not continue on prior research
 - Project should be unique, and take advantage of your unique skills

ERC – Project

The ERC is nothing like the FWO

- Highly ambitious projects are essential
- Lack of preliminary data will not kill your grant
- Moving to a new field will not kill your grant

“This is a ground breaking project that interconnects genetic studies, cohort studies and biological studies... It is an extremely ambitious proposal with important and broad objectives and diverse perspectives.”

“Some of the research directions could be difficult to accomplish during the project time, in particular some of the objectives of RT3. Perhaps, the PI should have planned them more realistically.”

“The proposal goes beyond the current state of the art, but its major problem is the over-ambition.”

“The proposed research involves an innovative and ambitious study design, but the risk is justified by the potential impact in the field.”

ERC – Project

The ERC is nothing like Horizon2020

- The judgment is in the grant vision
- Details are needed only to illustrate the concept and to indicate feasibility
- Detailed milestones and deliverables not needed

“With large-scale compatible immunological information on diverse monogenic disorders, common autoimmune disorders, healthy first-degree relatives of patients and healthy unrelated individuals, population-level questions can be asked. What proportion of T cell immunodeficiency and severe immune dysregulation cases are explained by known genetic associations? What proportion is explained by novel genetic associations? What proportion of cases with a specific gene mutation fit the “classical” clinical presentation described for that gene mutation? How far or close is the immunological phenotype of patients from the normal variation present in the human population? What proportion of normal variation in the immune system is accounted for by genetic polymorphisms in disease-associated loci?”

ERC – Project

Main grant

- Write this first
- Introduce a grand vision on the first page – very clear!
- Detailed breakdown of this vision into experimental stages

Extended Synopsis

- Not just a short version of the grant - **movie trailer**
- Needs to be exciting science!
- Your main grant is not read at all at this stage – the Synopsis needs to stand alone
- Detail is not important – leave it for the grant
- Focus on novelty of approach and exciting results

Writing tips

Write about your career projection the same way you write a paper – the intent and order of the original experiments doesn't matter, it is the story you create from them

Use the entire page limit. Empty half pages look like you ran out of ideas

Do not have solid pages of text with almost no gap – it makes reading as a reviewer difficult. Use diagrams and schematics to help illustrate difficult concepts and to break up the text

Even a text box helps break that wall of text. It can be a good way to illustrate alternatives / back-up without breaking the flow

The short name does not need to be an acronym. No convoluted titles needed to force a good short title – my first was “IMMUNO” because I was doing immunology

Interview tips

- Present the project to the non-experts
 - Most have not read your proposal, you want them to be excited about the potential your project has. Do not try to cover the whole grant, if needed, even focus on a single highlight
- Answer the questions of the experts
 - Listen respectfully without interrupting
 - Do not bluntly disagree, you are convincing not debating
 - Keep answers short, allow follow-up
- Generic questions
 - What proportion of your time is non-ERC, how will you manage?
 - Who are your competitors and how will you compete?



Good luck!