The European Research Council

Writing an ERC grant
Dos and Don'ts

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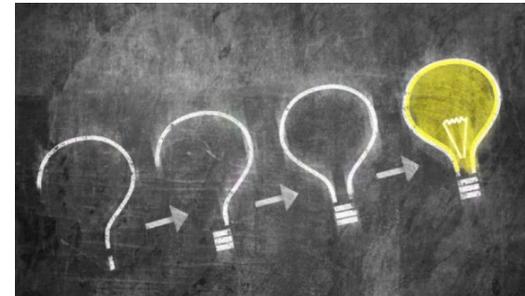
Preparing your proposal

Gather useful information

Evaluate your own potential

Build your research project

Preparing your proposal: consultation

networking

- discuss with colleagues, with peers inside & outside the field
- discuss with potential collaborators
- discuss with ERC grantees
- have people read your grant
- when unsuccessful application > feeling stuck and cannot improve further, contact scientists with specific background knowledge

familiarization
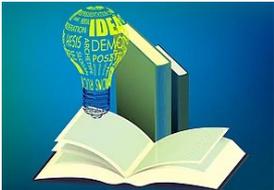
- check related / recent literature in the field extensively
- check funded ERC projects in similar field
- read ERC WP, ERC guidelines
- consult NCP, dedicated local offices…

    > know what reviewers expect & provide elements

Preparing your proposal: choosing the panel

- **guidance** not a complete scientific classification (not exhaustive)
- panel titles& descriptors **do not reflect priorities**
- **any topic/field welcome**, mentioned or not in panel structure
- secondary review panel possible > justify
- proposals can be moved to other panels (clear mistake, necessary expertise)
- if **cross-panel or cross-domain proposals**, evaluation by other panels possible
- consider CV, journals & field culture
- check former **panel members** (but do **NOT** contact any)
- choose **descriptors**: from chosen panel and any other
- **do not force** cross-panel descriptors nor interdisciplinarity
- add **free keywords**

⚠ RUMOR
NOT TRUE

Choose the panel "strategically" for higher chances of success

budget distributed to panels as a function of demand > equal success rate

➔ choose Panel that is right for proposal

Preparing your proposal (StG, CoG, AdG, SyG)

Part A: online administrative forms + budget

Parts B: scientific project + CV
B1: synopsis, CV, track record
B2: full project

Supporting documents (certificates, HI…)

be consistent with data given in different parts and pdfs (CV, dates, amount requested…)

Part A section 3: budget

3 - Budget

Beneficiary Short Name	PI	Senior Staff	Postdocs	Students	Other Personnel costs	A. Total personnel costs/€	B. Subcontracting Costs/€ (No indirect costs)	C.1 Travel and subsistence	C.2 Equipment - including major equipment	Consum-ables incl. fieldwork and animal costs	Publications (incl. Open Access fees) and dissemination	Other additional direct costs	C.3 Total other goods, works and services	Total Purchase costs/€	D. Internally invoiced goods and services/€ (No indirect costs)	E. Indirect Cost/€	Total Eligible Costs	Requested EU contribution /€
	0	0	0	0	0	0								0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	0	0	0	0	0									0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00

Section C. Resource

Expla...
This s...

State a...
Project...
Evaluati... ...unjustified budgets consequently reduced
Explain...

Request for additional funding if applicable : XXXXX (Cost in EUR)
> start-up costs, major equipment, access to large facilities, major experimental and field work costs
> excluding personnel costs
Justification needed

+ resources requested should be reasonable
+ do not artificially inflate budget
+ full justification, plus if additional funding
+ commitment, size and nature of the team
+ existing resources & equipment

Part B1

Research proposal [Part B1][1]
(Part B1 is evaluated both in Step 1 and Step 2
Part B2 is evaluated in Step 2 only)

Proposal Full Title

PROPOSAL ACRONYM

choose one easy to read

Cover Page:
- Name of the Principal Investigator (PI)
- Name of the PI's host institution for the project
- Proposal duration in months

Proposal summary (identical to the abstract from the online proposal submission forms, section 1)

It should provide th...
they will be achiev...

be as complete as possible
should include: topic, hypothesis, model, techniques, objectives, impact in the field…

Please use plain typed text, avoiding formulae and other special characters. The abstract must be written in English. There is a limit of 2000 characters (spaces and line breaks included).

Explain and justify the **cross-panel or cross domain nature of your proposal**, if a secondary panel is indicated in the online proposal submission forms. Th... ... ... 1000 characters, spaces and line breaks included.

don't force it

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Part B1: section a (5 pages)

Extended Synopsis of the scientific proposal

- **step 1** panel will have access only to part B1
- concise & clear > also for generalists
- ground-breaking nature (innovative, new aspects/solutions/theories)
- current state-of-play > know the field and the competitors
- support of the idea (literature, preliminary data)
- feasibility of the scientific approach
- risk & gain balance
- realistic goals, risk mitigation & contingency plan
- overall coherence of proposed project
- references to literature should be included (not counted in page limit)
- written as a stand-alone strong independent document

Part B1: section b (4 pages)

CV & Track Record > no prescriptive profile

- **personal details** (template for education, employment)

- **research achievements** (up to 10)

  + **demonstrating advancement in the field & capacity to successfully carry out proposed project**
    (publications, preprints, books (chapters), conference proceedings, data sets, software, patents, licenses, standards, start-up businesses…)

  + **emphasis on more recent achievements**

  + **short & factual narrative on significance of selected outputs**

- **peer recognition** with short explanation of significance
  (prizes, fellowships, academy membership, invited presentations, position…)

- **additional information**

  + **career breaks, diverse career paths, life events**

  + **other contributions to research community**

Part B2: full proposal (14 pages)

section a > State-of-the-art and Objectives
section b > Methodology

- step 2 panel + external reviewers access parts B1 + B2 + budget

- do not repeat the synopsis

- novel or unconventional aspects

- extensive methodology & work plan

- discuss alternative methodologies & defend your choice

- include intermediate goals, timeline, Gantt chart

- risk & gain balance

- clear strategies to mitigate risks (backup plans)

- explain involvement of team members & collaborators

- references to literature to be included (not counted in page limit)

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Part B2: appendix > Funding ID

Appendix: All current grants and on-going / submitted grant applications of the PI (Funding ID)

Mandatory information (does not count towards page limits)

Current research grants (Please indicate "No funding" when applicable):

Project Title	Funding source	Amount (Euros)	Period	Role of the PI	Relation to current ERC proposal[2]

On-going / submitted grant applications (Please indicate "None" when applicable):

Project Title	Funding source	Amount (Euros)	Period	Role of the PI	Relation to current ERC proposal[2]

describe clearly any scientific overlap between your ERC application and the current research grant or on-going grant application

Differences between Part B1 and Part B2

STEP 1

B1 assessed by Panel members (& cross-panel members)

success rate step 1 ~20%

synopsis & track record

STEP 2

B1+B2 assessed by Panel members and external reviewers

success rate step 2 ~40%

full detailed methodologies and potential outcomes

DORA

guidance on the track record for applicants

- Journal Impact Factor: not accepted as relevant bibliometric indicators that may be included as part of the publications track record

- Track record: achievements listed under PI profile are not exclusive; any other achievements can be included if relevant to research field and project

- PI should provide a short narrative describing scientific importance of research outputs and role played in each production

- publication metrics are discouraged (use by PI, use by reviewers)

⚠ RUMOR

NOT TRUE

Without articles in top journals, I have no chance

any relevant achievements are taken into account, not only journals and publications, but value & impact of all research outputs

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Proposal evaluation process: peer-reviewing

single submission > 1-step evaluation (PoC)

submission during or <12 months after the end of main project

proposal
- **part A (administrative form, budget)**
- **part B (scientific proposal)**
- **supporting documentation**

evaluation criteria
- **project**
  - + breakthrough innovation potential
  - + approach & methodology
- **principal investigator**
  - + strategic lead & project management

Remote evaluation of proposals

↓

Proposal ranking

↓

**Final results
Feedback to applicants**

Proposal structure for PoC

o **Part A**: administrative form, budget table, ethics)

o **Part B: scientific proposal (max. 10p)**

+ Section 1a: The idea – Breakthrough Innovation potential
- description of the idea (problem, solution, origin)
- demonstration of breakthrough innovation potential
- high-risk/high-gain idea (difficulties, contingency, breakthrough)

+ Section 1b: Approach and Methodology
- approach & methodology outline
- activities, experiments, tests
- involvement of industrial or organizational stakeholders
- DoA, timescale, resources, team and project plan

+ Section 1c: PI: strategic lead & project management

o **Supporting documentation** (HI support letter, relevant stakeholders support…)

The interview

- rehearse & practiced in front of a mock jury

- challenge yourself

- unique opportunity to convince the panel

- show enthusiasm and scientific curiosity

- be prepared for questions

- answer clearly, briefly & to the point

- stick to the time

> **> seize the high chance to be selected (success rate 30-40%)**

The content of the interview

- CV   > don't waste too much time
  > mention changes occured after submission (position, new publications)

- preliminary results
  > time to prepare after submission
  > share if not presented in the proposal
  > mention new publications related to proposal

- demonstrate you know what you propose
  > know the most recent literature
  > if similar work published in the meantime >
  > risks & mitigation plan
  > ability to explore novel routes
  > how to cover missing expertise & manage collaboration
  > where you & your research will stand in 5 years

  - how similar/different works are
  - changes to make novel original again?
  - where to go from there?

Evaluation: wrong ideas

- The Host Institution is not an evaluation criterion

- ERC funds frontier research, whether basic or applied

- Societal impact is not an evaluation criterion

- Translational character is not an evaluation criterion

- All scientific fields are eligible > no predetermined priorities

- Success rate is flat across panels > budget distributed on demand

- Having already an ERC grant does not guarantee obtaining/not another one

- Each proposal evaluated on its own merit, compared to competing pool in panel

- Each proposal evaluated as any others, not compared to previous application(s)

Writing a strong proposal

- prepare thoroughly

- check all documentations and consult

- clear format & content

- show your research is ground-breaking, ambitious & feasible

- evaluate honestly your potential & show you are the best placed

- demonstrate how unique and worth-funding your application is

- increase your chance with a well-prepared interview

Thank You!

More information: erc.europa.eu

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Call Calendar 2024

	Starting Grant	*Consolidator Grant*	*Advanced Grant*	*Synergy Grant*	*Proof of Concept Grant*
Call opens	11/07/2023	12/09/2023	29/05/2024	12/07/2023	16/11/2023
Call deadline	24/10/2023	12/12/2023	29/08/2024	08/11/2023	14/03/2024 17/09/2024
Budget (m EUR)	601	584	578	400	30

Novelties – Work Programme 2024

- **Proposal assessment**
    - **focus on research project**
    - **PI profile**

- **Proposal evaluation**
    - **new panel, changes in descriptors**
    - **new score in step 1**
    - **proposals passed to step 2**

- **Proposal budget**
    - **lump sum for AdG 2024**

ERC Work Programme 2024

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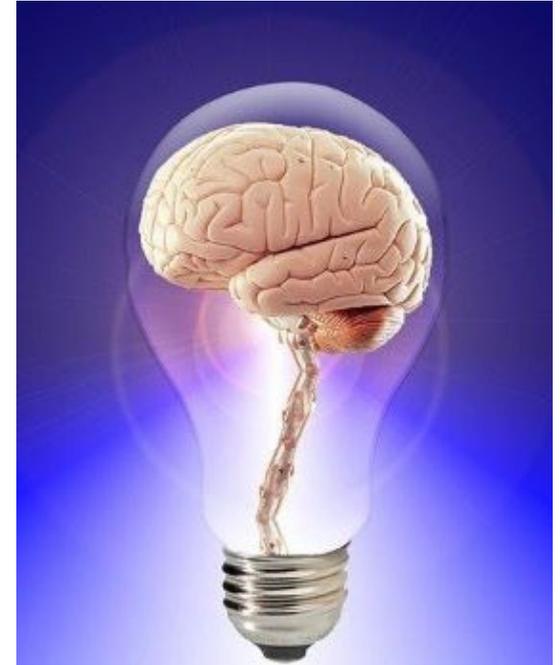
Novelties 2024 – Project assessment

Assessment primarily focused on the project

- the proposed research project

    + ground-breaking nature, ambition, potential impact

    + feasibility of the scientific approach

- the PI

    + intellectual capacity, creativity

    + commitment

Novelties 2024 – PI assessment

New **CV & Track Record** template (4p): **> no prescriptive profile**

- **personal details** (education, employment)

- **research achievements** (up to 10)

  + **demonstrating advancement in the field**
    (e.g., publications, preprints, books (chapters), proceedings, data sets, software, patents, start-up…)

  + **emphasis on more recent achievements**

  + **short & factual narrative on significance of selected outputs**

- **peer recognition** with short explanation of significance
    (e.g., prizes, fellowships, academy membership, invited presentations to conferences…)

- **additional information**

  + **career breaks, diverse career paths, life events**

  + **other contributions to research community**

Novelties 2024 – Proposal evaluation

- **new panel** (**SH8** *Studies of Cultures & Arts)*
- *changes in descriptors (LS3, LS5, SH5…)*

- **new A-score at Step 1** (StG, CoG, AdG, SyG):
  - **'A invited'** – *high quality proposals to pass to Step 2*
  - **'A not invited'** – *high quality proposals exceeding the threshold for Step 2, but not subject to resubmission restrictions*

- no budget multiplier in StG, CoG, AdG: **up to 44 proposals per panel in Step 2**

- new **resubmission restriction**: applicants selected for funding and preparing a grant agreement in a 2023 ERC call, may not apply to StG, CoG, AdG in 2024 ERC calls

Evaluation criteria (StG, CoG, AdG, SyG)

Scientific excellence is the sole criterion of evaluation in all ERC grant

Research Project - Ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact

- proposed research > address important challenges?
- objectives > ambitious & beyond the state of the art (e.g., novel concepts & approaches or development between or across disciplines)?

Scientific approach

- scientific approach > feasible for ground-breaking nature & ambition of the research *(B1)*?
- research methodology & working arrangements > appropriate to achieve the goals *(B2)*?
- timescales, resources & commitment > adequate & properly justified *(B2)?*
- does the proposal go beyond what the individual PIs could achieve alone? *(SyG, B1)*
- do PIs succeed in proposing a combination of scientific approaches that are crucial to address scope & complexity of the research questions? *(SyG, B1)*

Evaluation criteria (StG, CoG, AdG, SyG)

Principal Investigator(s)

Intellectual capacity and creativity

- has the PI demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?
- does the PI provide evidence of creative & original thinking?
- does the PI have required scientific expertise & capacity to successfully execute the project?

Synergy Grant Group

- does the Synergy Grant Group successfully demonstrate in the proposal that it brings together the know-how – such as skills, experience, expertise, disciplines, teams – necessary to address the proposed research question? (*SyG, B1*)

Evaluation criteria (PoC)

one-step evaluation > ranking

Breakthrough innovation potential

- idea > potential to drive innovation & business inventiveness and/or tackle societal challenges?
- expected outcomes > innovative or distinctive compared to existing solutions?
- is the proposed idea high risk-high gain?
  - if successful, outcome > breakthrough innovation?
  - is there a risk that some aspects are difficult to overcome?

Approach & methodology

- activities & planning > appropriate to explore pathway from ground-breaking research to innovation?
- timescales & resources > adequate & justified for implementation & feasibility?

Principal Investigator - strategic lead & project management

- PI > demonstrate clear vision to manage & take strategic decisions to implement the project

What do panel members look for in a proposal?

Fund frontier research projects:

o Does the project go substantially **beyond the state of the art**?

o **Why** is the proposed project important?

o Is it **timely**?

o What are the **risks**? Are they justified by a potential **gain**? Is there **a plan** for managing the risks?

Fund the (future) leaders in the field:

o **Why** is the PI the best person to carry it out?

o Is the **PI competitive** at his/her career stage and in his/her discipline?

o Is there **evidence** the PI is able to work independently & manage a 5-y project?

Typical reasons for rejection

Scientific project

- scope: too narrow <> too broad/unfocussed
- incremental research, lack of novelty
- work plan not detailed enough and/or unclear feasibility
- aims not well articulated (lack coherence, no overarching view)
- methodology not adapted to answer the questions
- insufficient risk management (contingency plan)
- high risk not enough backed up (preliminary results or literature)
- high risk / low gain
- insufficient expertise or collaboration
- project too collaborative
- part B2 too similar with part B1 (lack of details)
- not synergetic enough (SyG)
- project not sufficiently defended during interview

Typical reasons for rejection

Principal investigator

- insufficient track-record / early achievements
- insufficiently explained track-record
- exaggerated overselling
- insufficient (potential for) independence (StG & CoG)
- PI not yet ready to manage the project if funded
- lacking some expertise / lacking adequate collaboration
- unrealistic in terms of diversity of techniques needed by PI
- rely too much on collaboration
- insufficient experience in leading projects/mentoring (AdG)
- complementarity of PIs not strong / not evidenced (SyG)
- not enough convincing during interview

Evaluation Panel Structure (2024)

Life Sciences

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

Physical Sciences & Engineering

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

Social Sciences and Humanities

- SH1 Individuals, Markets & Organisations
- SH2 Institutions, Governance & Legal Systems
- SH3 The Social World & Its Interactions
- SH4 The Human Mind & Its Complexity
- SH5 Texts & Concepts
- SH6 The Study of the Human Past
- SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, & Space
- SH8 Studies of Cultures & Arts

Additional funding up to 1M €

Additional funding can be requested to cover the following costs:

(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.