The European Research Council
Funding opportunities
ERC has a unique mission

- To encourage the highest quality research in Europe through competitive funding

- To support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields, on the sole basis of scientific excellence
ERC Budget from EU 2021 – 2027: €16 Billion
Evaluation Panel Structure (2021-2022)

**Life Sciences**
- 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 Ageing
- 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

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

**Social Sciences and Humanities**
- 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
What does ERC offer?
Creative Freedom for the Individual Grantee

ERC offers selective and generous grants, independence, recognition & visibility

- Work on any research topic: **bottom-up**
- Gain **financial autonomy** for 5 years
- Negotiate the **best work conditions** with the host institution
- Attract **top team members and collaborators (EU and non-EU)**, **flexible team structure**
- **Portability of grants**
- **Attract additional funding and gain recognition:** ERC is a quality label
Particular emphasis on…..

Frontier of science, scholarship and engineering, i.e.
- Multi- or interdisciplinary proposals which cross boundaries between different fields of research, or
- Pioneering proposals addressing new and emerging fields of research, or
- Proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions.
ERC Funding Schemes

Starting Grant
- 2-7 years after PhD
- up to €1.5M (+1M)
- for 5 years
- Time commitment: 50%

Consolidator Grant
- 7-12 years after PhD
- up to €2M (+1M)
- for 5 years
- Time commitment: 40%

Advanced Grant
- 10 years of significant research achievements
- up to €2.5M (+1M)
- for 5 years
- Time commitment: 30%

Proof-of-Concept
- for ERC grant holders only
- Supporting innovative potential of ideas from ERC projects
  - up to €150,000
  - for 1 year

Synergy Grant
- 2-4 PIs at any career stage
- up to €10 M (+4M)
- for 6 years
- 1 PI could be based outside EU/AC
- Time commitment: 30%
ERC schemes are highly competitive

Average success rate 12%

Success rate ERC H2020 calls
ERC Evaluation procedure
How are ERC research proposals evaluated?

*Excellence* is the sole evaluation criterion

Evaluation of *excellence* at two levels:

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

- **Excellence of the Principal Investigator**
  - ✓ Intellectual capacity
  - ✓ Creativity
  - ✓ Commitment
Evaluation of Proposals:
Review procedure for StG, CoG and AdG

STEP 1
Remote assessment by Panel members of section 1 – PI and synopsis (part B1)
Panel meeting
Proposals retained for step 2: Score A
Score: B or C

STEP 2
Remote assessment by Panel members and reviewers of full proposal (B1+B2)
Panel meeting + interview (StG and CoG)
Ranked list of proposals: Score A
Score: B

Feedback to applicants
Evaluation of Proposals:
Review procedure for StG, CoG and AdG

STEP 1
Remote assessment by Panel members of section 1 – PI and synopsis (part B1)

Panel meeting

Score: B or C

Proposals retained for step 2:
Score A

STEP 2
Remote assessment by Panel members and reviewers of full proposal (B1+B2)

Panel meeting + interview (StG and CoG)

Ranked list of proposals:
Score A

Feedback to applicants
Evaluation of Proposals:
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**STEP 1**
Remote assessment by Panel members of *section 1 – PI and synopsis (part B1)*

- Panel meeting
- Proposals retained for step 2:
  - Score A

**STEP 2**
Remote assessment by Panel members and reviewers of full proposal (B1+B2)

- Panel meeting + interview (StG and CoG)
- Ranked list of proposals:
  - Score A

Feedback to applicants

Score: B or C
Panel members: typically 375 / call (SyG:~90)
- High-level scientists
- Recruited by ScC from all over the world: ~14% from outside Europe
- c.a. 12-17 members plus a chair person

Remote Referees: typically 2000 / call
- Evaluate only a small number of proposals
- Similar to normal practise in peer-reviewed journals

EU and Associated Countries (86%)
US (7%)
Other (7%)
Preparing and submitting a Proposal

Hints and tips
Preparing your proposal (1)

Generalities

- **Register early**, get familiar with the system and templates and start filling in the forms
- 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)
- Support from National Contact Points and your Institution's grant office
Preparing your proposal (2): Make sure you are eligible (StG/CoG)!

Eligibility windows for PIs:

- StG Eligibility: PhD at least 2 and up to 7 years before 1 January 2022
- CoG Eligibility: PhD over 7 and up to 12 years before 1 January 2022 (for 2022 calls, which opened in July 2019)

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

- Maternity – 18 months per child (before or after PhD)
- Paternity – actual time taken off
- Military service
- Medical specialty training
- Caring for seriously ill family members

- No limit to the total time extension
Preparing your proposal (4): Host Institution

- You **can change** it during the project's life
- **Negotiate** with the HI (your position, equipment, administrative support, access to infrastructure, etc.)

**Rumour:** *The quality/reputation of the HI is increasing my chances/scores.*

* **NOT true:** the HI is not an evaluation criterion!
Preparing your proposal (5): Choosing the panel

- composition of the ERC evaluation panels are by nature multi-disciplinary
- initial allocation of the proposal to a panel is based on the preference expressed by the PI
- when additional expertise required
  - additional reviews by appropriate members of other panel(s) or additional remote experts
  - reallocated to a different panel with the agreement of both panel chairs
Preparing your proposal (6)
Check past panel members for the call

**IMPORTANT**: You are not allowed to contact panel members about the evaluation!

Any breach to this could lead to your exclusion from the call.
Preparing your proposal (7): Choosing descriptors

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

**Rumour:** The more cross-panel descriptors I indicate, the higher the funding chances, since this emphasises the interdisciplinary character 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.
ERC Proposal Structure
StG, CoG and AdG 2021 Calls

Administrative forms (Part A)

1 – General information (here to add the ERC evaluation panel)
2 – Administrative data of participating organisations and PI (career stage)
3 – Detailed Budget
4 – Ethics
5 – Call specific questions
You may indicate up to four ERC keywords

Annexes
PhD certificate, HI support letter, and any documentation needed on eligibility and ethics issues

Part B1 (submitted as pdf)

Evaluated in Step 1 & Step 2

a – Extended synopsis 5 pages
b – Curriculum vitae 2 pages
Appendix – Funding ID
c - Track-record 2 pages

References do not count towards the page limit

Part B2 (submitted as pdf)

Not evaluated in Step 1 (only in Step 2)

Scientific proposal 14 pages

a – State-of-the-art and objectives
b – Methodology

Funding & Tenders Portal
Is my project new, **innovative**, bringing new solutions/theories?

Does it attempt 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 considered at Step 1: a **concise and clear presentation** is crucial (all evaluators are not 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 is the **risk**? Is it justified by a substantial potential **gain**? Is there a **plan** for mitigating the risk?

Societal impact is **not** an evaluation criterion (despite ERC-funded projects could have it)
Preparing your proposal (8):
Part B1: the principal investigator

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

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

• Am I competitive at my career age and in my discipline?

• Have I shown my scientific leadership in my CV?

Rumour: One needs publications in Nature/Science/High Impact Factor journals to succeed.
*NOT true
2018 Calls "Academic age" of grantees

All calls 2018 Grantees by years since PhD

Years since PhD on 1 Jan 2018

# grantees

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

STG Grantees
COG Grantees
ADG Grantees
Success rate
In Step 2, both parts B1 and B2 are considered by Panel Members and other experts from around the world.

Therefore in Part B2:

- 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
Preparing your proposal (10): Budget considerations

- Budget analysis carried out in Step 2
- Panels have responsibility to ensure that resources requested are reasonable and well justified
- Budget cuts need to be justified on a proposal by proposal basis (no across-the-board cuts)
- Panels to recommend a final maximum budget based on the resources allocated/removed
- Panels do not “micro-manage” project finances
- Awards made on a “take-it-or-leave-it” basis: no negotiations
Typical reasons for rejection / not making it to Step 2

Research Project
- Incremental research
- Scope: too narrow; too broad / unfocused
- Hypothesis and objectives not sufficiently clear
- Work plan not detailed enough / unclear
- Insufficient risk management
- For interdisciplinary proposals: expertise missing in one area

Principal Investigator
- Insufficient track-record
- Insufficient (potential for) independence (StG and CoC)
- Insufficient experience in leading projects (especially in AdG)
- Complementarity of PIs not evident enough (SyG)

Interview
- Not addressing the questions / poor presentation

It takes a considerable effort and time to compose a good application!
I did not get the grant, can I apply next year?

In order to make the evaluation process more effective, the Scientific Council has introduced re-submission restrictions.

- **You can apply next year**
- **You can apply next year**
- **You have to wait 1 year before re-applying**
- **You have to wait 2 years before re-applying**
## Ongoing and future ERC calls

### Ongoing calls

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### Future calls

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Thank you!

endika.bengoetxea@ec.europa.eu