The European Research Council
Funding opportunities and application process

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21 September 2020
Outline

- What is the ERC?
- Brief overview of ERC Grants
- Evaluation process
- Some tips for potential applicants
- EU13 and ERC grants
What is ERC?

The ERC supports excellence in frontier research through a bottom-up, individual-based, pan-European competition

**Budget:** €13 billion (2014-2020) - 1.9 billion €/year
€7.5 billion (2007-2013) - 1.1 billion €/year

- Scientific governance: independent Scientific Council with 22 members including the ERC President; full authority over funding strategy
- Support by the ERC Executive Agency
- Excellence as the only criterion

- Support for the individual scientist – no consortia
- Global peer-review
- No predetermined subjects (bottom-up)
- Support of frontier research in all fields of science and humanities
ERC Scientific Council Members

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Interim ERC President

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Prof. Paola BOVOLENTA
(Neurobiology)

Prof. Margaret BUCKINGHAM
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Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER
(Theoretical and High-Energy Physics)
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Prof. Eveline CRONE
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Prof. Ben FERINGA
(Organic Chemistry)

Prof. Margaret BUCKINGHAM
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Prof. Ben FERINGA
(Organic Chemistry)

Prof. Prof. Mercedez GARCÍA-ARENAL
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(Psychology)

Prof. Andreas TAVERNARAKIS
(Molecular Systems Biology)

Prof. Milena VESTERGAARD HAU
(Physics)

Prof. Tomas JUNGWIRTH
(Condensed Matter Physics)

Prof. Michael KRAMER
(Astrophysics)

Prof. Michael KRAMER
(Astrophysics)

Prof. Barbara ROMANOWICZ
(Geophysics)

Prof. Jesper SVEJSTRUP
(Biology)

Prof. Nektarios TAVERNARAKIS
(Molecular Systems Biology)

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Prof. Eystein JANSEN
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ERC & Horizon 2020 Budget

ERC Budget € 13 billion

For 2020, the budget is more than 2 billion euros, the highest ever since the beginning of the ERC.
**ERC Grant Schemes**

**Starting Grants**
- starters (2-7 years after PhD)
  - up to €1.5 million + up to €1 million
  - up to 5 years

**Consolidator Grants**
- consolidators (7-12 years after PhD)
  - up to €2 million + up to €1 million
  - up to 5 years

**Advanced Grants**
- track-record of significant research achievements in the last 10 years
  - up to €2.5 million + up to €1 million
  - up to 5 years

**Proof-of-Concept**
Demonstrate that the idea funded by the original ERC grant has innovation potential and significant economic or societal benefits
- €150,000 for ERC grant holders, up to 18 months

**Synergy Grants**
(re-launched 2018)
- 2 – 4 Principal Investigators
  - up to €10.0 Mio + up to €4 million
  - for up to 6 years
- 1 PI can be based outside EU/AC
Additional funding can be requested to cover the costs below:

- Up to € 1.0M for Starting / Consolidator / Advanced grants
- Up to € 4.0M 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
What does ERC offer?
Creative freedom to individual grantee

ERC offers 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
- **Team members can be based fully outside EU/AC** if justified in the proposal and considered necessary by the panel.
- **Portability** of grants
- **Attract additional funding and gain recognition**: ERC is a quality label
Priority to Young Scientists

Two-thirds of ERC grants to early-stage Principal Investigators.

+ 45 000 PhD and post-doc researchers working in ERC teams.
Attracting Researchers to Europe

Nationality of ERC project teams (PIs not included)
Analysis of 1,901 Starting and Advanced Grants

EU: 71%
Assoc. Countries: 10%
non-EU/AC: 17%
unknown: 2%

In all ERC grants over 10,000 non-ERA team members most from
China, US, India, and Russia
21% of the ERC-funded Projects Deliver Scientific Breakthroughs
Career impact study
2017-2019

- **Objective:**
  
  Provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of ERC funding
  
  - on the careers of ERC PIs and their team members,
  
  - on the ERC funded teams as units linked to a research activity,
  
  - on ERC Host Institutions and their practices in promoting the careers of their researchers.

ERC grantees – career expectations fulfilled

of ERC Starting/Consolidator grantees*:  
62% had their group become more visible internationally  
61% gained academic independence  
59% improved their status in the scientific community  
27% were nominated for membership of scientific academies, learned societies or editorial boards

of ERC Advanced grantees*:  
52% had their group pushed to world-leader status  
52% could focus more on research activities  
25% were nominated for membership of scientific academies, learned societies or editorial boards

(*) share of respondents reporting that that the impact was achieved to a large extent
Team members after the ERC grant

Base: all team members whose involvement with the ERC project had ended (n=1,905)

Career after the project

95% of TMs currently employed (2% unemployed)

36% of PhD students experienced career progression
   35% still doing their PhD
   9% exited research/innovation or work

35% of post-docs experienced career progression
   42% moved on as post-docs
   5% exited research/innovation or work

Geographical mobility

32% experienced cross-border mobility when getting involved with the project
   (while 51% came from the same country)
26% moved between countries after the project
   (while 64% stayed in the same country)

Sectoral mobility

After involvement in the project:

   65% are at a university
   18% are in public or private ROs

   6% moved to the business sector (?: Bias in reaching TMs outside academia)

Inter-sectoral mobility was greatest amongst team members from LS and PE domains: 21% and 18%
(12% for SH domain).
Impact on host institution’s reputation was by far the most commonly reported impact of ERC projects (93% strong positive or positive).

This can lead to leverage of other grant funding for investment (61%).

### If and how hosting an ERC project impacted on the research environment at the host institution (% of research offices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Strong positive impact</th>
<th>Positive impact</th>
<th>Negative impact</th>
<th>No impact</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of host institution</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Opening up new research areas</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborations outside host institution</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence of human resources/critical mass of researchers</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research equipment/infrastructure</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research culture (collegiality, trust, openness)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical workspace/facilities</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborations within host institution</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research office survey (n=178)
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
Eligibility of the Principal Investigator

- Eligibility window can be extended in case of career breaks:
  - maternity (18 months per child before or after PhD)
  - parental leave,
  - caring for sick relatives,
  - long-term illness,
  - national service etc.

- See the work programme for details

- Documents must be included in the submission
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
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)

**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)
Evaluation - StG/CoG/AdG

Peers

- Panel members: typically 375 / call (SyG:~90)
  - High-level scientists
  - Recruited by the ERC Scientific Council from all over the world: ~14% from outside Europe
  - About 12-17 members, including one chair person

- Referees: typically 2000 / call
  - Evaluate only a small number of proposals
  - Similar to normal practice in peer-reviewed journals
How are ERC research proposals evaluated?

*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

Note: Quality of the PI's institution (where they come from / where they go to) is not evaluated.
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
Contrary to what you may think.....

- ERC funds "frontier research", including applied research.
- The budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand.
- The panel descriptors do not represent ERC scientific priorities.
- The success rate is virtually flat across the eligibility window (StG, CoG).
- Publication record is not decisive in selection decisions.
- The Host Institution is not an evaluation criterion.
Particular emphasis on.....

- Multi- or inter-disciplinary 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.
How to prepare and submit a successful ERC research proposal?

- Have a **bright, original, exciting 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)
- Consider the balance between addressing **generalists and specialists**, and the difference between part B1 and part B2 of the written proposal
- **Submit** your research proposal **before the deadline**
- **Mock Interviews** (StG/CoG)
- If rejected, **keep trying**! (reapplications have a much higher success rate – benefit of using feedback from evaluation reports)
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?
• **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)
What’s next – Horizon Europe

**Pillar 1**
Excellent Science
- European Research Council
- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
- Research Infrastructures

**Pillar 2**
Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness
- Health
- Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society
- Civil Security for Society
- Digital, Industry and Space
- Climate, Energy and Mobility
- Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment
- Joint Research Centre

**Pillar 3**
Innovative Europe
- European Innovation Council
- European innovation ecosystems
- European Institute of Innovation and Technology

Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area
- Widening participation and spreading excellence
- Reforming and Enhancing the European R&I system
Transition to Horizon Europe

• Stability of ERC mission, continuity of rules and procedures

• First calls can open only after the adoption of the 2021-2027 EU budget and of the Horizon Europe regulation

• Foreseen: postponement of opening of the first calls to January 2021, suspension of Synergy Call (will start again in 2022)

• Eligibility periods for StG and CoG not affected
# 2021 Call Calendar (expected dates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ERC calls</th>
<th>Expected Call Opening</th>
<th>Expected Submission Deadline(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting Grants ERC-2021-StG</td>
<td>12/01/2021</td>
<td>09/03/2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consolidator Grants ERC-2021-CoG</td>
<td>21/01/2021</td>
<td>20/04/2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Grants ERC-2021-AdG</td>
<td>20/05/2021</td>
<td>31/08/2021</td>
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<td>Proof of Concept ERC-2021-PoC (cut off dates)</td>
<td>14/01/2021</td>
<td>16/03/2021 17/06/2021 20/10/2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synergy Grants</td>
<td>No Synergy Grant call in 2021 (but foreseen again in 2022)</td>
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ERC AND EU13

General overview
EU13 = countries that joined the EU since 2004: BG, CZ, CY, EE, HR, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, RO, SK, SI
and associated countries

European Union Member States and Countries Associated to Horizon 2020

EU Member States (28)

Associated Countries (16)
Albania
Armenia
Bosnia & Herzegovina
Faroe Islands
Georgia
Iceland
Israel
the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Republic of Moldova
Montenegro
Norway
Serbia
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
Switzerland
ERC Funded Projects by Country of HI

9,988 main grants funded
Awarded budget: €18 billion
Success Rate by Country

Success rate (2007-2019)

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
<th>EU15</th>
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ERC Funded Projects by Domain

Host country (as of 25/03/2020)
Success Rates by Domain

ERC calls 2007-2019

Country of Host Institution
Grantees at Home and Abroad

- Non-nationals in host country
- Nationals in host country
- Nationals abroad

ERC 2007-2019 calls
Get inspired by browsing through the ERC-funded projects on our website – [https://erc.europa.eu](https://erc.europa.eu)
The EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL

- More information: https://erc.europa.eu/
- or watch: https://player.vimeo.com/video/154715819
- National Contact Points: https://erc.europa.eu/national-contact-points
- Sign up for news alerts: https://erc.europa.eu/keep-updated-erc
- Where to apply: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/

www.facebook.com/EuropeanResearchCouncil
twitter.com/ERC_Research
www.linkedin.com/company/european-research-council
Thank you!

Jana.Siftova@ec.europa.eu
SOME USEFUL TOOLS AND LINKS

- Read Information for Applicants and Work Programme
- View the step-by-step video Introduction to application process, including tips & tricks for the interview [https://vimeo.com/94179654](https://vimeo.com/94179654)
- Consult ERC website for latest funding opportunities, view ERC funded projects
Preparing your proposal (1): Decide whether to apply
Preparing your proposal (2)

- 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
- Make sure you are eligible
- 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)
- Talk to the National Contact Points and your Institution's grant office.
Preparing your proposal (3): 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
- Military service
- Medical specialty training
- Caring for seriously ill family members

No limit to the total 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 1: *The quality/fame of the HI is increasing my chances/scores.*
  ✗ NOT true: the HI is not an evaluation criterion!
Preparing your proposal (5): Choosing the panel

ERC FUNDED PROJECTS

The ERC operates according to a "curiosity-driven", or "bottom-up", approach, allowing researchers to identify new opportunities in any field of research. Accordingly the portfolio ERC funded projects spans a wide range of topics and research questions.

Since 2007, more than 9,000 projects have been selected to receive ERC funding throughout the EU Member States and the associated countries.

Use the search facility to quickly and easily find examples of ERC funded projects.

HOW CAN YOU SEARCH?

Projects can be filtered according to funding scheme, call year, panel and/or country of host institution.
StG/CoG/AdG: Submission to Panels
(SyG: all proposals are submitted to a single panel)

- 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

- 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
Preparing your proposal (6): Choosing descriptors

- 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.
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)
Preparing 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*
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
Typical reasons for not making it into Step 2

- Incremental in nature
- Hypothesis and objectives not sufficiently clear
- No realisation of risks & challenges, contingency
- For interdisciplinary proposals: expertise missing in one area

It does take a considerable effort to compose a good application!
After More than 10 Years, a Success Story

- Over **9,980** top researchers funded since the ERC's creation in 2007
- Over **75,000** researchers and other professionals employed in ERC research teams
- **€ 13 billion** ERC budget for 2014-2020 under Horizon 2020
- Over **150,000** articles from ERC projects published in prestigious scientific journals
- **> 800** research institutions hosting ERC grantees – universities, public or private research centres in the EU or associated countries
- **82** nationalities of grant holders