JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKOW

ERC grants: a panel member's perspective

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NICHE WORKS

You write for the reviewers

First and most of all – your grant needs to be based on good science!

- Get inside the reviewer's head. What reviewers *really* look for?

* good ideas – important questions

* clear hypotheses and experimental strategies to test them

* focused writing

* evidence of productivity

- Make sure your writing reflects this.

grant is not a review paper – it is a plan

ERC: 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
- ✓ Scientific expertise and capacity to execute the project

The Host Institution is not an evaluation criterion –
quality of PI's past, current or future institution is not evaluated

Current grant system: evaluation panels

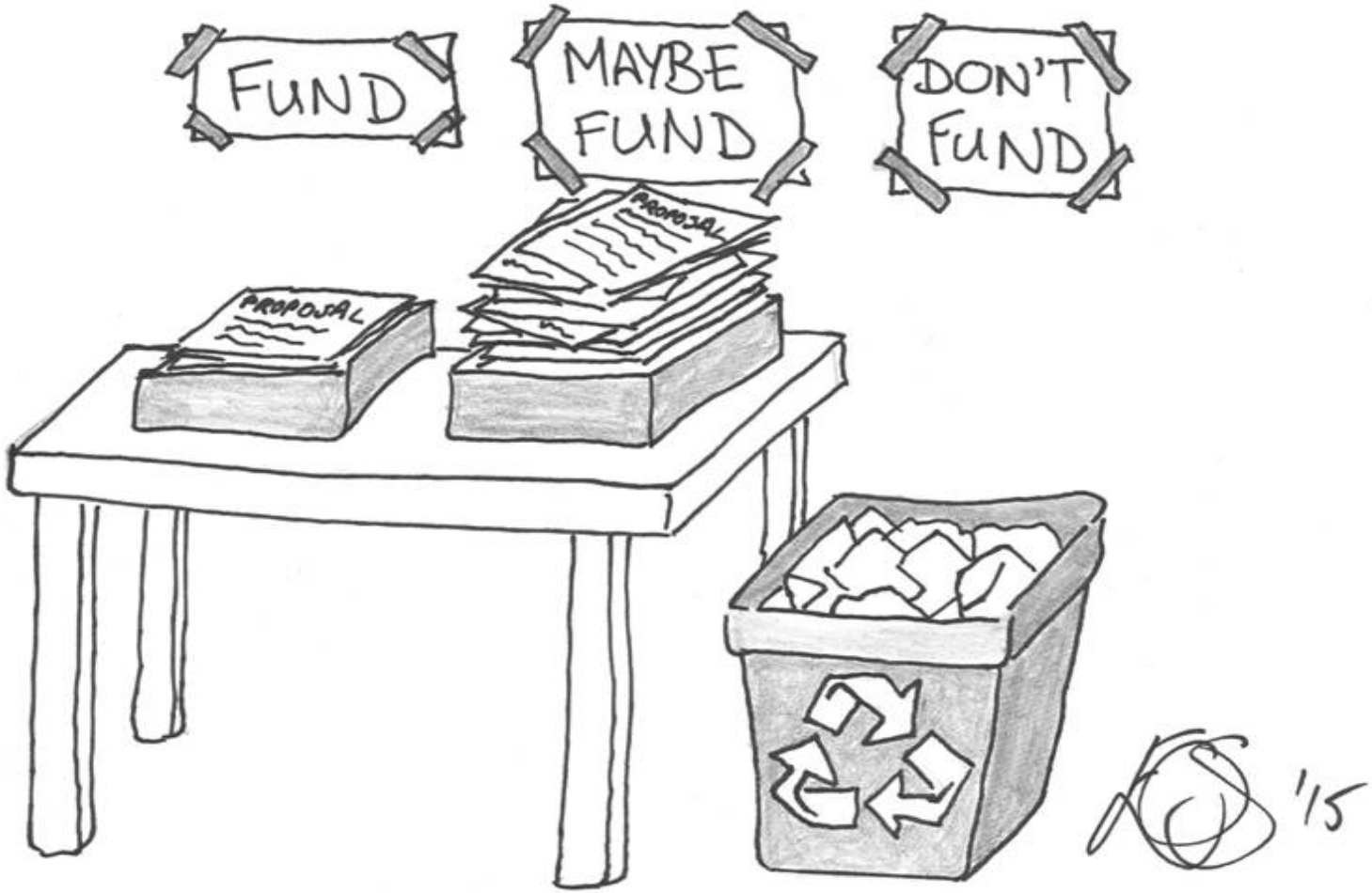
Most review panels select a subset of panelists to serve as primary, secondary, and tertiary reviewers for each application.

* All members of a grant review panel should have the opportunity to read the grant application and participate in the discussion and scoring.

Deidentified image from peer-review panel meetings

Liaw et al. Circ res 2017; Pier et al. PNAS 2018

Review panel categories (universal)



Try to get the reviewers excited about your science.

Project layout

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

SUMMARY (half of page)

Section a: Extended Synopsis of the scientific proposal

(5 pages)

References Part B1

Individual Evaluation Report – step 1

Criterion 1 - RESEARCH PROJECT

Your score: ... of 5

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project

To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?

To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development across disciplines)?

To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain?

Comments:

Scientific Approach

To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain (based on the Extended Synopsis)?

Comments:

Individual Evaluation Report – step 2

Scientific approach

To what extent is the proposed research methodology appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?

….

To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology?

….

To what extent are the proposed timescales and resources necessary and properly justified?

….

Comments:

Don't make things too complicated

General rules in reserch project

- Do pursue **original science**;

- Gold standard: **hypothesis-driven science**

- Do provide a well **focused research plan**.

- Do not let your ideas wander from the main theme.

- Do not propose too much(?) →
  but the high gain justifies the high risk…

- Provide a critical approach to project:
  * discuss potential problem areas *(better you than reviewers…)*
  * discuss alternative approaches

- Provide preliminary results (both published and unpublished)

Specificity of project writing

Grant Writing
Sponsor goals: *Service attitude*
Future oriented: *Work that should be done*
Project-centered: *Objectives and activities*
Persuasive rhetoric: *"Selling" the reader*
Personal tone: *Conveys excitement*
Team-focused: *Feedback needed*
Strict length constraints: *Brevity rewarded*
Accessible language: *Easily understood*

- Academic style usually prefers impersonal tone, with writer's persona hidden from view.

- You as a grant writer are expected to **convince the reviewer that you can perform valuable study**

  * active voice

  * more energetic phrasing

  * direct references to the author in the first person

But: do not exaggerate…

Be confident without boasting

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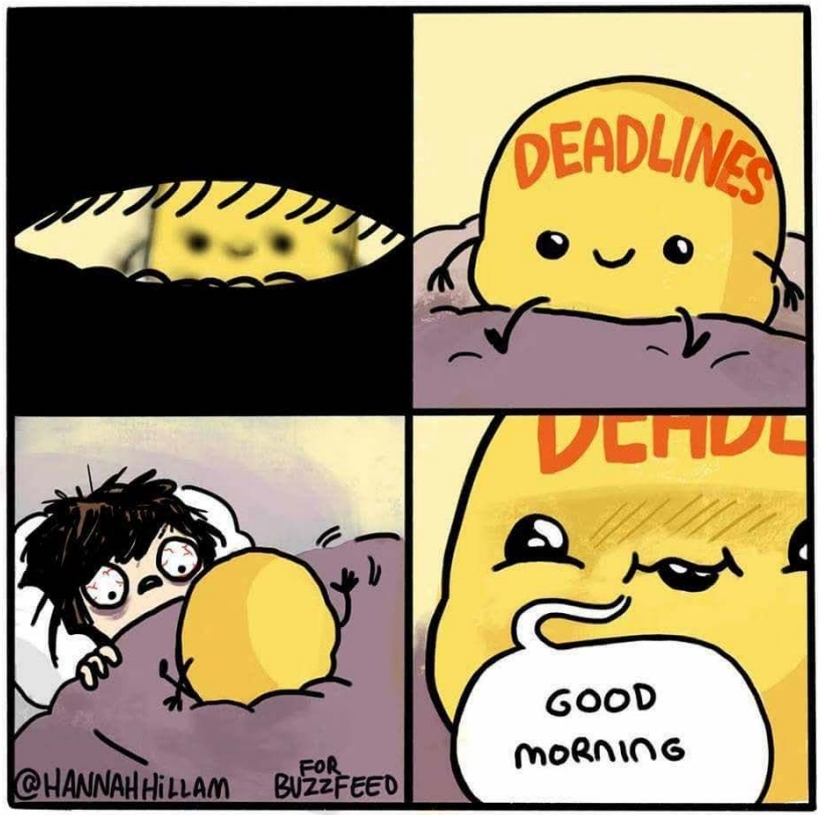
- Grant writers must use language that can be understood by a diverse group of readers.

- Fewer words with greater clarity.

Follow the KISS
(Keep It Simple and Succinct)

My personal experience

Writing always takes longer than you expect



Reviewer ⟶ Good Reviewer

- Rewiewers have usually 20-30 projects for evaluation or ranking with short deadlines.

- They are over-commited, over-worked, and tired. And they work late at night.

Make the reviewers' job easier:

- Make it easy for them to **understand** thing

- Make them easy for them to **find** things

- Make it easy for them **to be your advocate**

- **Prepare a well-organized, clearly written prose**

Specific Aims

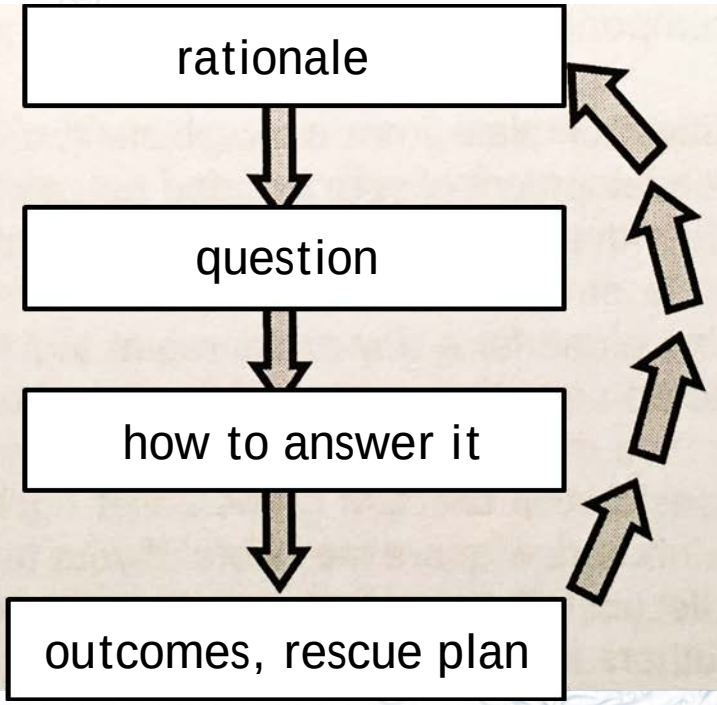
Hypothesis/important question

The overall goal:

Our ultimate goal is to understand how ….

The secific aims:

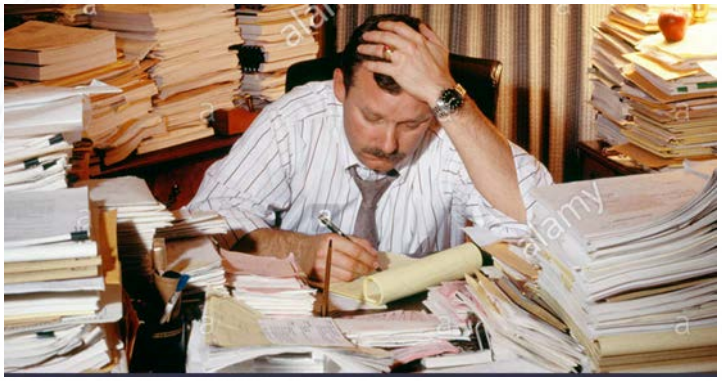
Our aims:
* To define the physiological role of…
* To understand the mechanisms of …
* To check whether …



Altogether, our novel model merges different key observations on HSC function into one cohesive mechanistic explanation.

Help your reviewer…

"*The growing body of evidence suggests that…*"
Please, please don't use it in your grants…



We conducted an investigation of it.
We investigated it.

conducted >> empty verb

Our drug *induces mobilization of* cells from the bone marrow. *induce >> vague verb*
Our drug mobilizes cells from the bone marrow. *mobilizes >> strong verb*

There was considerable erosion of the land from the floods. *erosion >> noun*
The floods considerably eroded the land. *erode >> strong verb*

Use strong verb, avoid vague and empty verbs. This will make your text concise and dynamic.

Periodic reports

Please specify the outcome in terms of:
1.1 Research and technological achievements along the main objectives/activities (in line with the Description of the action).
(Free text box)
1.2 Novel and/or unconventional methodologies
(Free text box)
1.3 Inter and cross disciplinary developments
(Free text box)
1.4 Knowledge and technology transfer
(Free text box)

Periodic reports

MAJOR PROBLEMS/DIFFICULTIES

(The information provided in this section will only be available to ERC staff, to members of the ERC panels, and to the Scientific Council).

2.1 Scientific problems
(Free text box)
2.2 Technical problems
(Free text box)
2.3 Support provided by the Host Institution (Start-up facilities, working space, access to labs, equipment, resources, etc)
(Free text box)
2.4 Others

2.5 *Please indicate any corrective actions you envisage.*
(Free text box)

Periodic reports

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Please give 1-3 sentence answers to the following:

How did the original objectives/ expectations of the research project correspond to the actual outcomes? Please explain.	*(Free text box)*
Please provide a summary of main results of your research project.	*(Free text box)*
To what extent did the research project advance the field beyond the state of the art? Would you consider it a breakthrough? Please explain why.	*(Free text box)*
Are there any other impacts of the project, including to society?	*(Free text box)*
Please indicate how the research project contributed to the careers of your team members and yourself?	*(Free text box)*
Please describe the future prospects of the research group supported by the project.	*(Free text box)*
Please indicate how well you and the research project have been supported by your Host Institution?	*(Free text box)*
Please indicate the difference receiving this ERC project has made in your case	*(Free text box)*

You can do that!

Be confident…

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