



European Research Council

ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy 2018

Brochure



Entrusted with full authority over the scientific strategy and the decisions on the type of research to be funded, the ERC's Scientific Council shall at the same time "continuously monitor the ERC's operations and evaluation procedures and consider how best to achieve its objectives"¹ and be fully involved in the review and evaluation of ERC's activities to assess its achievements and to adjust and improve procedures and structures on the basis of experience².

This document outlines the approach that the ERC Scientific Council will take to monitor and evaluate the performance of the ERC operations and the impact of its funding activities³.

The overall aim of ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy is to generate a broad and integrated understanding of the ERC's performance and impact that will enable the Scientific Council to report on results and

achievements and to continuously improve its scientific strategy guaranteeing the effectiveness of the ERC scientific programme, the quality of its operations and peer-review process and its credibility in the scientific community.

The ERC monitoring and evaluation activities will complement and enhance the evaluation efforts of the European Commission and will help in providing all interested parties with an evidence-base judgement needed for the rigorous appraisal of the ERC's activities in the longer term.

The ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy will be revisited regularly and further developed to include the accumulated experience as well as best practices in monitoring and evaluation approaches of other funding agencies.

ERC mission and the objectives of the monitoring and evaluation activities

The prime core objective

ERC has been created with the mission to reinforce the excellence, dynamism and creativity of European research. At the core of the ERC mission is the creation of radically new knowledge, allowing Europe to take a leading role in creating the scientific and technological paradigm shifts. ERC is expected to fund the very best cutting-edge science by investing in the best researches and their greatest ideas and generate those knowledge leaps that would enable us to understand more about the world around us, to improve our conceptual thinking, to transform our society for the better of our life and well-being.

The ERC success shall be ultimately evaluated on its achievements related to pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge.

01 The prime objective of the ERC monitoring and evaluation activities is to observe, measure and analyse evidence of the contribution of the ERC funding activities to the advancement of the frontier of knowledge and the scientific and technological impact of the new ideas in short and long term.

This objective regards the ERC core mission and has the following three dimensions:

Knowledge

DI.1 Advancing knowledge: identify the new and often unexpected scientific and technological results generated by the ERC-funded projects and, among them, those revolutionary discoveries that are triggering scientific paradigm shifts or become the core principles behind radical technological developments; follow their consequences; estimate in what measure the breakthrough results are due to new ways of working in science or to taking high risks,

DI.2 Emerging areas: follow the creation and development of new scientific fields, the novelty and originality of associating and combining research areas, the development of new scientific instruments and methodologies as a result of the ERC funding activities and assess their importance,

DI.3 Performing globally: evaluate the contribution of ERC-funded discoveries to reinforcing the performance and status of European research globally.

The second objective

Talented researchers are the critical component for knowledge creation and the ERC funding activities have been designed to encourage the best researchers worldwide to participate in the ERC competitions, offer them the best support to fulfil their scientific ambitions and also prepare the young generation of researchers to confront their own exciting challenges.

02 The second objective of the ERC monitoring and evaluation activities is therefore to measure and assess the ERC contribution to improving the career prospects of the European researchers, to training the new generation of researchers and to attracting the world's best scientists to Europe.

This objective has the following three dimensions:

Researchers

D2.1 Promoting talent: evaluate how ERC helped its funded researchers to succeed in their professional careers, “empowered” them in controlling their research activities and, in the case of young researchers, accelerated their transition to / consolidated their academic independence,

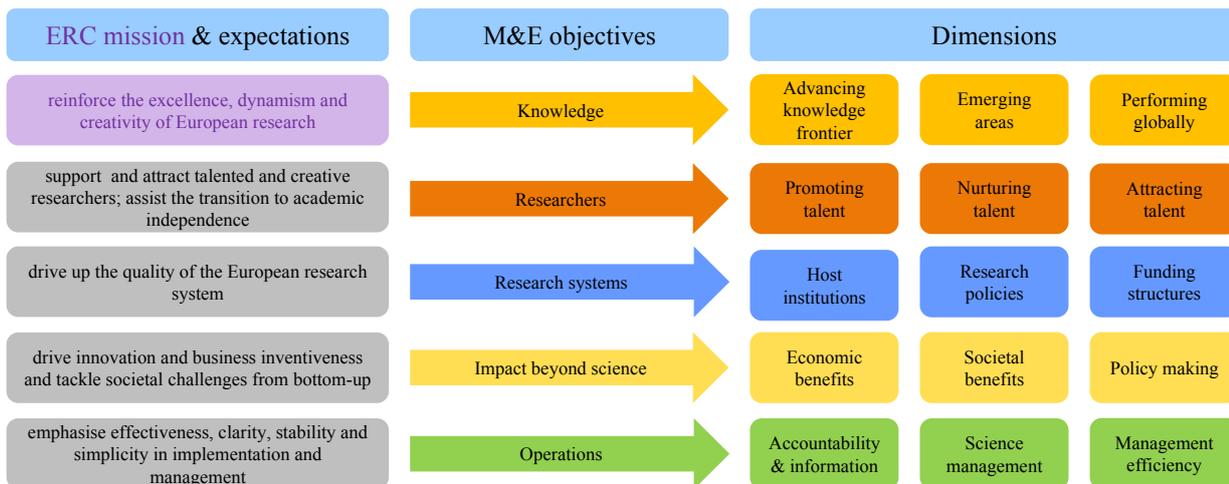
D2.2 Nurturing talent: measure the ERC contribution to training the next generation of researchers,

D2.3 Attracting talent: determine in what measure the ERC funding activities attracted to Europe talented researchers from abroad, including Europeans resident outside Europe.

The third objective

Beyond the advancement of knowledge ERC is expected to have a significant structural impact by generating a powerful stimulus for driving up the quality of the European research system over and above the researchers and projects which the ERC funds directly.

03 The third objective of the ERC monitoring and evaluation activities is thus to measure and understand the ERC's contribution, in addition to ongoing efforts at Union, national and regional level, to reform, strengthen and unlock the full potential and attractiveness of the European research system.



The third objective has the following three dimensions:

Research Systems

D3.1 Host institutions: understand the extent to which ERC contributed to improving the quality of the research environments at Europe's universities and other research organisations and the working conditions offered to top researchers,

D3.2 Research policies: estimate in what measure ERC acted as an inspirational target for frontier research in Europe, opening new ways of working in the scientific world and stimulating national research systems to reform their policies, priorities and funding models,

D3.3 Funding structures: determine the influence of the ERC, its funding activities and operational practices to shaping the administrative organisation of research and the funding mechanisms for frontier research.

The fourth objective

Radical innovation and technological progress emerge from a solid base of excellent science. Although not falling under the ERC core mission, it is nevertheless expected that knowledge created on the ERC-funded projects will sooner or later impact outside science and generate benefits to the society that can take various forms.

04 The fourth objective of the ERC monitoring and evaluation activities is to trace over long periods of time the contribution of the knowledge created to driving

commercial and social innovation and business inventiveness, generating economic growth, tackling societal challenges and influencing policy making.

This objective is a satellite to the ERC core mission, all together dependent on it, and has the following three dimensions:

Impact beyond science

D4.1 Generating economic benefits,

D4.2 Generating societal benefits,

D4.3 Improving policy making.

The fifth objective

05 Ultimately the ERC monitoring and evaluation activities should support the ERC Scientific Council to continuously monitor the ERC's operations such as to swiftly respond to emerging needs, to timely take corrective measures whenever necessary and to consider how best to achieve its objectives.

This fifth objective has the following three dimensions:

Operations

D5.1 Accountability and information: conduct a process of continuous collection, validation and analysis of data, helping the Scientific Council identify timely trends and patterns in the ERC funding activities (for example on the profile and quality of the applicants, on the mobility of researchers, on number of applications and success rates, on the composition of the panels),

D5.2 Science management: provide the Scientific Council with reliable information on the quality of operations at all stages of interaction with the applicants and, in particular, the performance of the Peer Review mechanism that it has designed and continue to design, helping to ensure that the mechanism identifies ground-breaking scientific excellence, breakthrough ideas and talent regardless of a researcher's gender, nationality, institution or age, and does not disadvantage high-risk research topics, those dealing with ideas not yet fully tested and where the outcomes are uncertain, or inter-disciplinary proposals,

D5.3 Management efficiency: provide information to the Scientific Council and other stakeholders on the ERC organisational excellence and management efficiency in all aspects of its operations, and provide evidence in any attempt to simplify and improve ERC procedures with regard to having the ERC grants selected and operated according to simple, transparent procedures that maintain the focus on excellence, encourage initiative and combine flexibility with accountability.

Key principles of ERC monitoring and evaluation

- **Independence and Objectivity:** the results, conclusions and recommendations are delivered based on robust, quantitative and qualitative evidence, independently from any pressure and influence, in the spirit of objective judgement, with all assumptions clearly indicated.
- **High-quality and Relevance:** all efforts are made to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation activities and their outcomes met the highest professional standards, follow the state-of-the-art methods used in evaluation and are relevant for the ERC work and rationale.
- **Causality and Attribution:** a monitoring / evaluation exercise shall not treat the intervention as a black box that transforms inputs into achievements or failures but shall attempt to understand the inter-play between rationale, implementation and the external factors involved and to determine whether and to what extent the observed effects can be attributed to the intervention.
- **Focus and Proportionality:** the activities undertaken and the methods employed are designed to address the purpose of the monitoring / evaluation or the decision-making process and are tailored to the characteristics of the intervention/operation and the data available.
- **Priority and Resources:** the monitoring and evaluation activities are planned and prioritised in such a way that various components are not unnecessary replicated, that they do not compete for critical resources when this can be avoided and are informed by previous exercises when the case.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** the monitoring and evaluation activities shall document the methods used, make public the data available (to the extent possible) such that anyone can replicate the ERC findings or conduct their own investigations, and inform all stakeholders and the general public about what the ERC has done and achieved.

1) Regulation (EU) No 1291/2013 establishing Horizon 2020.

2) Council Decision 743/2013 establishing the specific programme implementing Horizon 2020.

3) This document has been elaborated taking into account the rationale behind the establishment of the ERC, the funding strategy developed by the Scientific Council, the input of the Scientific Council Working Group on Key Performance Indicators, the expert reports on monitoring and evaluation activities commissioned by ERC in 2014-2015 as well as the practice and experience of other funding agencies. The ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy will be updated periodically.