The European Research Council

How to write a successful grant proposal

ERC Grants: what to expect in 2026 calls

24/09/2025

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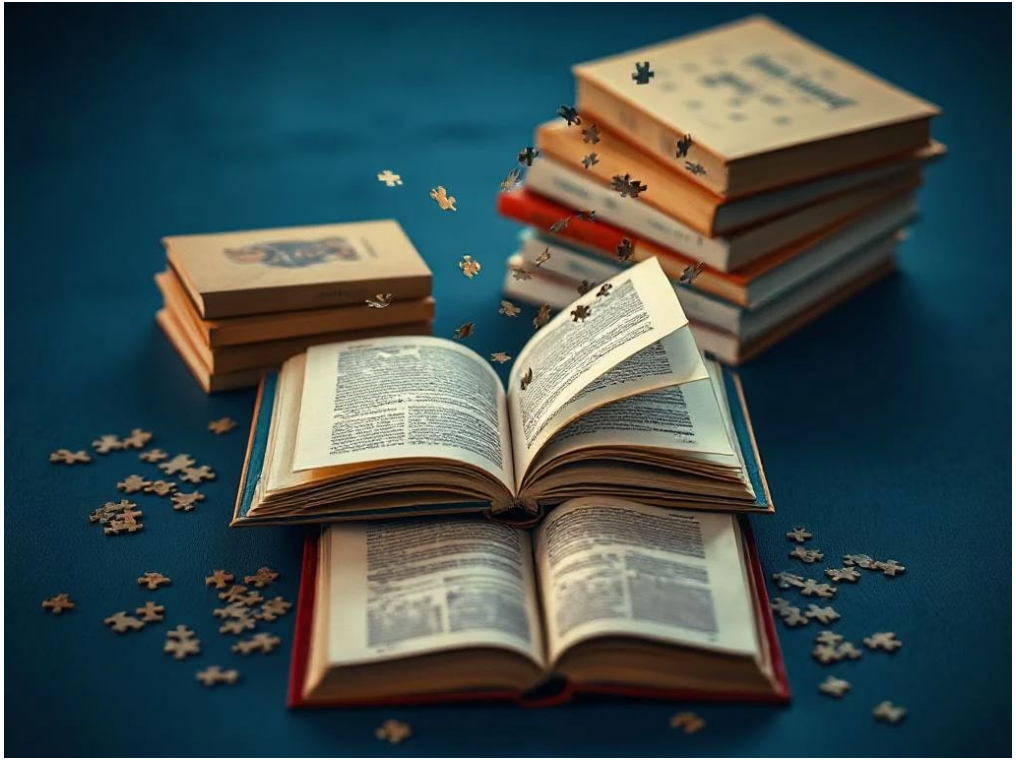
What writing a proposal may look like



Preparing your application

Don’t leave it for the last moment

- Do a proper literature study, know the state of the art
- Think big, beyond the next paper
- Establish collaborations in advance
- Write the proposal
- Check against ERC evaluation criteria
- Get feedback from outstanding scientists, colleagues
- Check, check, check

1. This is a marathon

Preparing your application

Don’t leave it for the last moment

TIME

1. This is a marathon

Preparing your application:

- Register early, get familiar with the European Commission's Funding and Tender portal and download the templates
- Read the call documents (Information for Applicants, ERC Work Programme, ERC website) that explain how to prepare your proposal
- Talk to your Institution's grant office, ERC National Contact Points
- Talk to ERC grantees (ERC Dashboard)
- Contact the ERCEA to ask all your questions well ahead of the submission deadline– e.g., ERC-2026-STG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu

2. Gather information

Preparing your application:

Life Sciences

- LS1 Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions
- LS2 Integrative Biology: From Genes and Genomes to Systems
- LS3 Cell Biology, Development, Stem Cells and Regeneration
- 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 Interactions
- SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity
- SH5 Texts and Concepts
- SH6 The Study of the Human Past
- SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, and Space
- SH8 Studies of Cultures and Arts

3. Choose your panel

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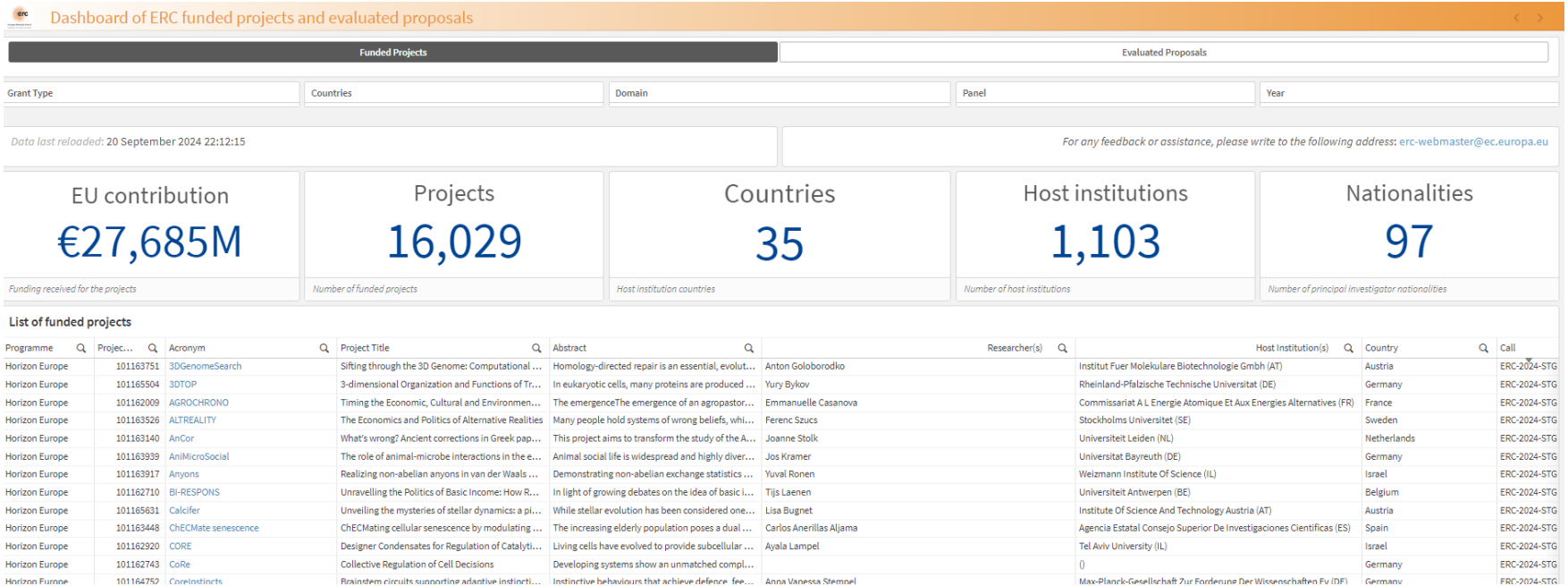
Choose your panel: the ERC website is your friend



Dashboard of ERC funded projects and evaluated proposals

Funded Projects | Evaluated Proposals

Grant Type | Countries | Domain | Panel | Year

Data last reloaded: 20 September 2024 22:12:15

For any feedback or assistance, please write to the following address: erc-webmaster@ec.europa.eu

EU contribution	Projects	Countries	Host institutions	Nationalities
€27,685M	16,029	35	1,103	97
Funding received for the projects	*Number of funded projects*	*Host institution countries*	*Number of host institutions*	*Number of principal investigator nationalities*

List of funded projects

Programme	Projec…	Acronym	Project Title	Abstract	Researcher(s)	Host Institution(s)	Country	Call
Horizon Europe	101163751	3DGenomeSearch	Sifting through the 3D Genome: Computational …	Homology-directed repair is an essential, evolut…	Anton Goloborodko	Institut Fuer Molekulare Biotechnologie Gmbh (AT)	Austria	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101165504	3DTOP	3-dimensional Organization and Functions of Tr…	In eukaryotic cells, many proteins are produced …	Yury Bykov	Rheinland-Pfalzische Technische Universitat (DE)	Germany	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101162009	AGROCHRONO	Timing the Economic, Cultural and Environmen…	The emergenceThe emergence of an agropastor…	Emmanuelle Casanova	Commissariat A L Energie Atomique Et Aux Energies Alternatives (FR)	France	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101163526	ALTREALITY	The Economics and Politics of Alternative Realities	Many people hold systems of wrong beliefs, whi…	Ferenc Szucs	Stockholms Universitet (SE)	Sweden	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101163140	AnCor	What's wrong? Ancient corrections in Greek pap…	This project aims to transform the study of the A…	Joanne Stolk	Universiteit Leiden (NL)	Netherlands	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101163939	AniMicroSocial	The role of animal-microbe interactions in the e…	Animal social life is widespread and highly diver…	Jos Kramer	Universitat Bayreuth (DE)	Germany	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101163917	Anyons	Realizing non-abelian anyons in van der Waals …	Demonstrating non-abelian exchange statistics …	Yuval Ronen	Weizmann Institute Of Science (IL)	Israel	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101162710	BI-RESPONS	Unravelling the Politics of Basic Income: How R…	In light of growing debates on the idea of basic i…	Tijs Laenen	Universiteit Antwerpen (BE)	Belgium	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101165631	Calcifer	Unveiling the mysteries of stellar dynamics: a pi…	While stellar evolution has been considered one…	Lisa Bugnet	Institute Of Science And Technology Austria (AT)	Austria	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101163448	ChECMate senescence	ChECMating cellular senescence by modulating …	The increasing elderly population poses a dual …	Carlos Anerillas Aljama	Agencia Estatal Consejo Superior De Investigaciones Cientificas (ES)	Spain	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101162920	CORE	Designer Condensates for Regulation of Catalyti…	Living cells have evolved to provide subcellular …	Ayala Lampel	Tel Aviv University (IL)	Israel	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101162743	CoRe	Collective Regulation of Cell Decisions	Developing systems show an unmatched compl…	()		Germany	ERC-2024-STG
Horizon Europe	101164752	CoreInstincts	Brainstem circuits supporting adaptive instincti…	Instinctive behaviours that achieve defence, fee…	Anna Vanessa Stempel	Max-Planck-Gesellschaft Zur Foerderung Der Wissenschaften Ev (DE)	Germany	ERC-2024-STG

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Preparing your application:

3. Choose your panel

- Proposals are initially assigned to the panel of the applicant's choice.
- Transfer of proposals between panels may occur if:
  - there is a clear mistake on part of the applicant.
  - the necessary expertise is available in a different panel.
- The PI is not informed when this happens (they'll be informed later on)

Rumour: Choose the panel "strategically" in order to increase chances of success

✘**NOT true**: Choose the panel that best fits the proposal. The budget is allocated based on demand → success rate is equal amongst panels for a call!

Preparing your application:

- You may choose a primary and a secondary panel
- In those cases, in principle, we will make use of (an) expert(s) from the secondary panel

Rumour: indicate a lot of diverse descriptors, so your proposal looks more multidisciplinary.

✘**NOT true**: reviewers will not see them in Part B1. This simply makes the assignment process more confusing

3. Choose your panel

At the practical level:

Funding and Tender Portal

PART A – admin forms online

Section 1 Proposal (including abstract) and PI info
Section 2 Host Institution info
Section 3 Budget
Section 4 Ethics
Section 5 Other questions

Annexes – submitted as .pdf

- Statement of support of HI (template available)
- copy of PhD or equiv. (StG & CoG)
- No reference letters

If applicable:

- document for extension of eligibility window (StG & CoG)
- explanatory info on ethical issues

Seen by the panel

PART B1 – submitted as .pdf

Abstract and Cross-Panel explanation	1 p.
Part I of the Scientific proposal	5 p.+ref
CV & Track Record (merged)	up to 4 p.

PART B2 – submitted as .pdf

Part II of the Scientific Proposal	7 p.+ref*
Funding ID	1 p.

*Change from 2026 calls

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Part A: online

1 - General information

Field(s) marked * are mandatory to fill.

Topic	Type of Action
Call	Type of Model Grant Agreement

Acronym

Proposal title: The title should be no longer than 200 characters (with spaces) and should be understandable to the non-specialist in your field.

Note that for technical reasons, the following characters are not accepted in the Proposal Title and will be removed: < > " &

Duration in months*: Estimated duration of the project in full months.

Primary ERC Review Panel*

Secondary ERC Review Panel: Not applicable (if applicable)

ERC Keyword 1*: As first keyword please choose one which is linked to the Primary Review Panel.

Please select, if applicable, the ERC keyword(s) that best characterise the subject of your proposal in order of priority.

ERC Keyword 2: Not applicable

ERC Keyword 3: Not applicable

ERC Keyword 4: Not applicable

Free keywords: In addition, please enter free text keywords that you consider best characterise the scope of your proposal. The choice of keywords should take into account any multi-disciplinary aspects of the proposal.

Part A: online

Application forms

Proposal ID

Acronym **Acronym is mandatory**

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	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00

- My colleague will give more details on how to prepare the project budget

Part I of the Scientific Proposal

- Overall idea of the proposed research project, including:
  - State of the knowledge
  - Scientific questions
  - Objectives
  - Overall approach and/or strategy

- Evaluated at step 1 (and step 2) by the panel
- References do not count against the page limit
- Respect the formatting constraints and do not split the document

Applicant's last name Part B1 ACRONYM

Part I of the Scientific Proposal (max. 5 pages, references do not count towards the page limit).

Please note the changes as from 2026 calls regarding Part I and Part II of the Scientific Proposal and read carefully the "ERC Work Programme 2026" and the "Information for Applicants to the Starting and Consolidator Grant 2026 Calls".

[***Part I of the Scientific Proposal*** *should present the envisaged research and it should:*

- *lay out the current state of knowledge,*
- *explain the scientific question and the objectives of the project, and*
- *present the overall approach or research strategy to reach the goals of the project.*

Part I should convince the evaluation Panel that it presents an original and creative idea addressing an important question in the respective research field(s). Furthermore, it should substantiate how the project will advance the frontier of knowledge, and what contribution it will make to the research field(s) i.e. what may be changed, opened, challenged or how the results of the work will alter the current understanding of the field.

At Step 1, only Part I and the Curriculum Vitae (CV) and Track Record (see below) is assessed by the evaluation Panel. *It forms the basis for the Panel's decision whether it chooses to evaluate the proposal in the next step. Therefore, all essential information must be covered in this section.*

References to literature should also be included. Please use a reference style that is commonly used in your discipline such as American Chemical Society (ACS) style, American Medical Association (AMA) style, Modern Language Association (MLA) style, etc. and that allows the evaluators to easily retrieve each reference.

Please respect the following formatting constraints: Times New Roman, Arial or similar, at least font size 11, margin sizes (2.0 cm side and 1.5 cm top and bottom), single line spacing.]

Part I of the Scientific Proposal

The panel should be able to answer the following question:

“Is this a great idea that would be worth pursuing?”

Applicant's last name Part B1 ACRONYM

Part I of the Scientific Proposal (max. 5 pages, references do not count towards the page limit).

Please note the changes as from 2026 calls regarding Part I and Part II of the Scientific Proposal and read carefully the “ERC Work Programme 2026” and the “Information for Applicants to the Starting and Consolidator Grant 2026 Calls”.

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CV and Track Record

Since 2025 calls

- No prescriptive Principal Investigator profiles
- Instead, 3 sections

1. PERSONAL DETAILS

   PI's education and key qualifications, current position(s) and relevant previous positions they have held.

2. RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENTS (<=10) AND PEER RECOGNITION
   - demonstrating advancement in the field, with emphasis on more recent achievements
   - prizes, fellowships, academy membership, etc.

   *The applicant can provide a **short, factual narrative** on the significance of the listed achievements and recognitions in relation to the research field and the proposed project. You should be able to explain your contribution.*

3. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

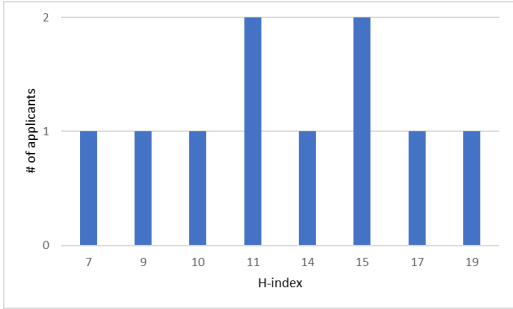
   Relevant additional information on their research career to provide context when assessing their research achievements and peer recognition.
   - career breaks, diverse career paths, life events
   - other noteworthy contributions to research community

CV and Track Record

- Use the recommended template with the 3 sections as much as possible.
- Explain what has been your own contribution to your publications/how they have impacted the field.
- Describe accurately any other activity that can indicate scientific maturity.
- If you know that you have gaps or other issues in your CV, explain them in the Additional Information section.

Rumour : *One needs publications in Nature/Science/High IF journals to succeed.*

✘**NOT true**: however, publishing with senior scientists (former supervisors) may raise doubts about maturity/scientific independence.



StG2024-PE3
H-index distribution

Part II of the Scientific Proposal

- Describe in detail the implementation:
  - Methodology
  - Work plan
  - Risk assessment
  - Mitigation measures
  - Budget justification (additional to the information provided in part A)

- Evaluated only in step 2 by the panel and the external reviewers

ERC Starting Grant 2026
Part B2[1]
(not evaluated in Step 1)

Part II of the Scientific Proposal (max. 7 pages, references do not count towards the page limits).

Text highlighted in grey should be deleted.

Please note the changes as from 2026 calls regarding Part I and Part II of the Scientific Proposal and read carefully the "ERC Work Programme 2026" and the "Information for Applicants to the Starting and Consolidator Grant 2026 Calls".

[Part II of the Scientific Proposal should be a detailed explanation of the project implementation, including research methodology, work plan, risk assessment, mitigating measures and any further necessary background not included in Part I. Please note that the justification for the requested budget and resources should be explained under the "Resources" Section in the online submission form (Part A, Section 3 - Budget). Part II of the Scientific Proposal cannot deviate from the Resources section but can include additional justification where necessary when describing the methodology, workplan etc.]

Please respect the following formatting constraints: Times New Roman, Arial or similar, at least font size 11, margins (2.0 cm side and 1.5 cm top and bottom), single line spacing.

Do NOT split Part II from the references and/or the appendix (Funding ID) and do NOT upload them as separate documents.

Part II of the Scientific Proposal

The panel should be able to answer the following questions:

"Can that idea be pursued realistically, and if so, in the manner and with the approach that the applicant proposes?"

ERC Starting Grant 2026
Part B2[1]
(not evaluated in Step 1)

Part II of the Scientific Proposal (max. 7 pages, references do not count towards the page limits).

Text highlighted in grey should be deleted.

Please note the changes as from 2026 calls regarding Part I and Part II of the Scientific Proposal and read carefully the "ERC Work Programme 2026" and the "Information for Applicants to the Starting and Consolidator Grant 2026 Calls".

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Explain properly your resources and budget

- Budget analysis carried out in Step 2 evaluation.
- 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).
- Costs can be cut when they have not been explained.
- Awards made on a “take-it-or-leave-it” basis: no negotiations.
- Ask for funding for Open Access – this is obligatory in Horizon Europe
- You can ask money for team members (placed in other HIs, other countries, etc.)

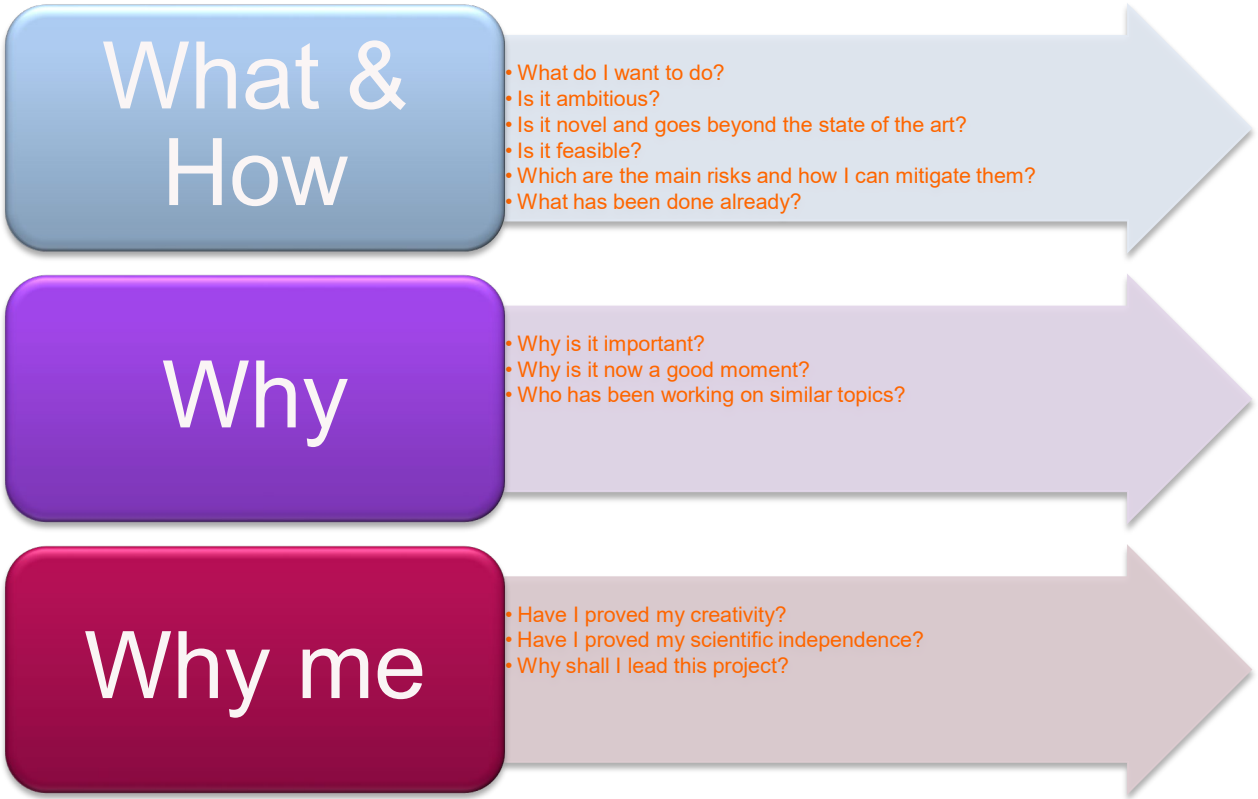
Rumour 1: *If I do not ask for a large sum, I have no chances- only complex and expensive projects get funded.*

✘**NOT true**: There are many areas where it may make little or no sense to ask for the maximal amount of funds. No grant was ever rejected for asking too few funds.

Rumour 2: *Ask for funding beyond the max, the panel will anyhow cut it down.*

✘**NOT true**: only unjustified requests can be cut, so do not artificially inflate your budget

Your Scientific Proposal



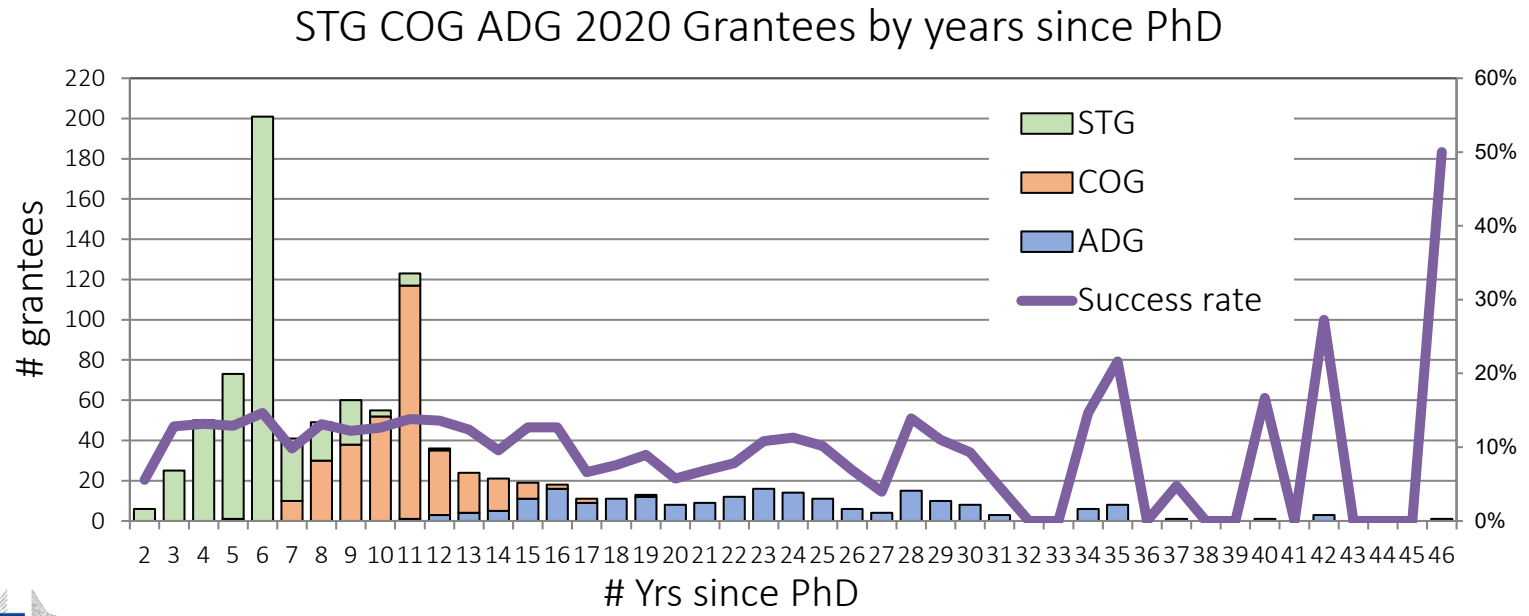
Shall I apply?

StG: 2 to 7 years after the PhD defence
CoG: 7 to 12 years after the PhD defence

Changes expected as from 2027 calls

Rumour: I should wait until the end of the eligibility window in order to accumulate enough seniority: only then I will be competitive.

✘**NOT true**: The success rate is virtually flat across the eligibility window (StG, CoG).



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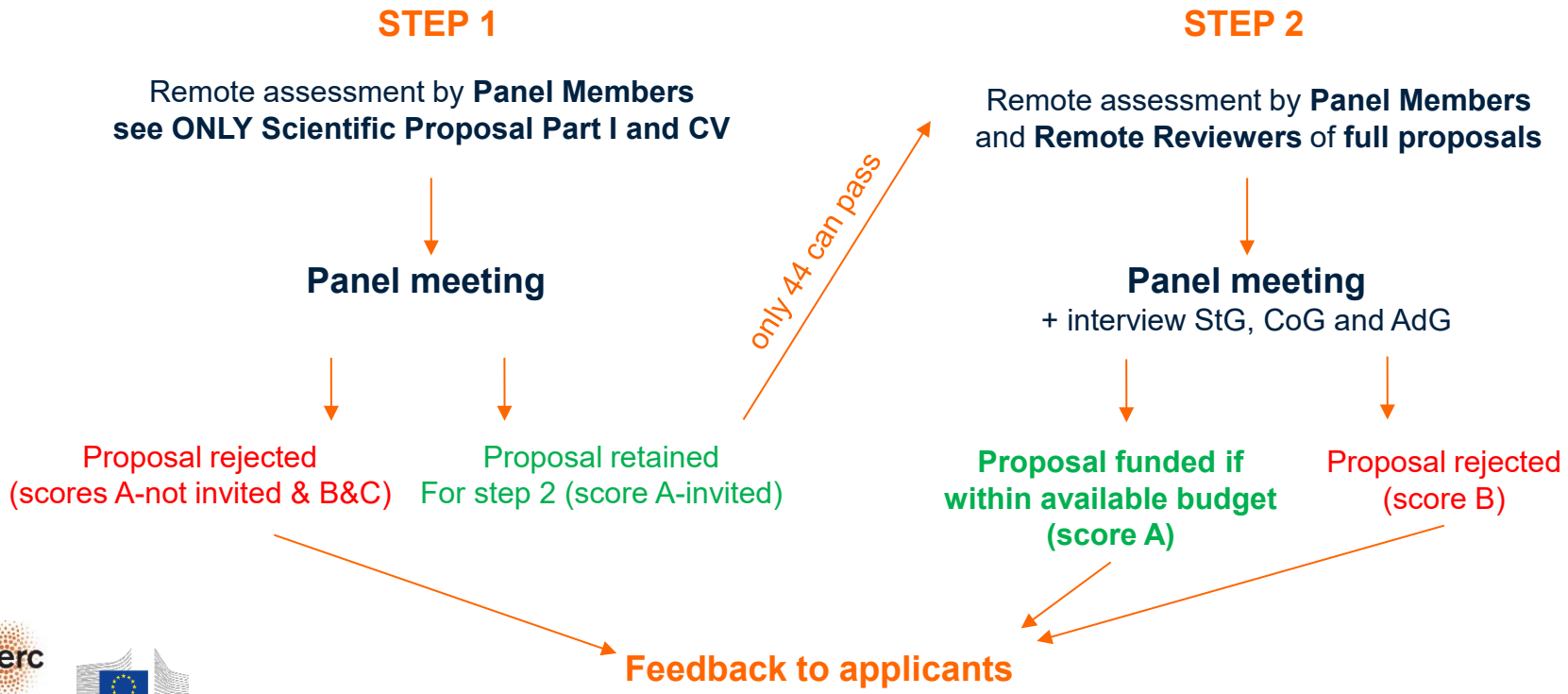
Eligibility extensions

- Extensions of eligibility window possible for StG and CoG for documented cases of:
  - Maternity – 18 months per child (before or after PhD)
  - Paternity /Parental leave – actual time taken off
  - Long-term illness (for the applicant or a close family member (child, spouse, parent or sibling))
  - Military service
  - Clinical training
  - Natural disaster
  - Seeking asylum
  - Victims of gender-based violence or any other form of violence *(new for 2026 calls)*

- No limit to the total years of extension

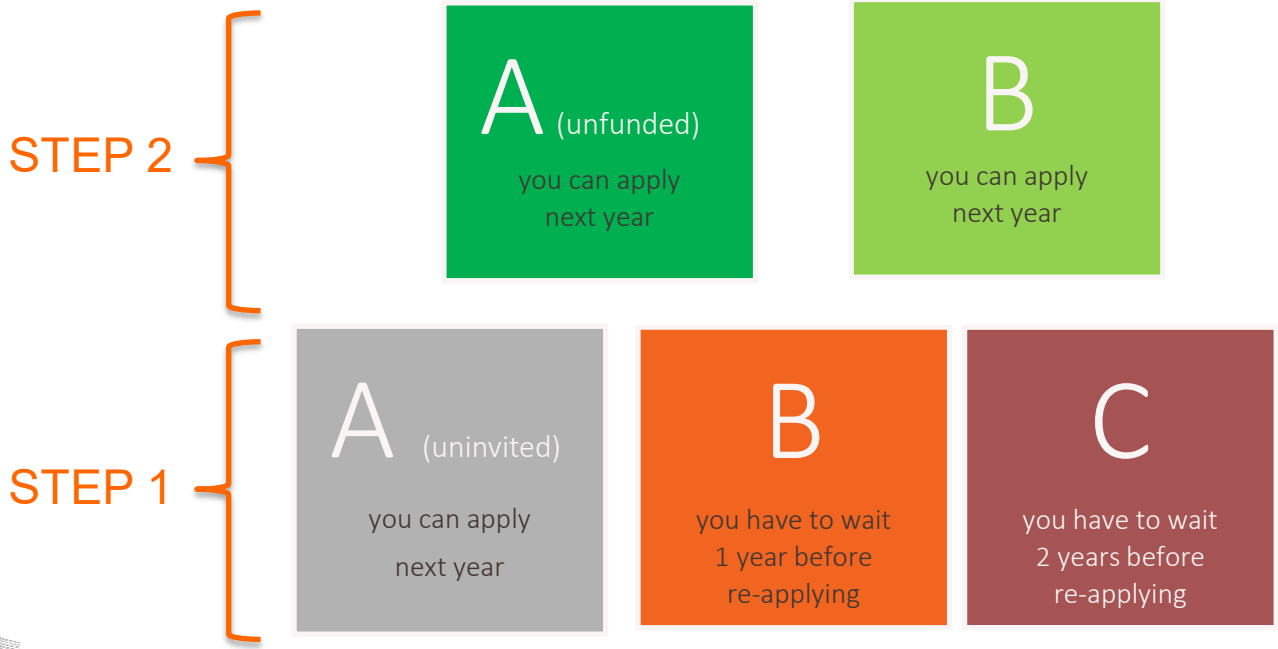
Evaluation: process

For individuals calls: a single submission but a two-step evaluation



I did not get the grant, can I apply next year?

In order to make the evaluation process more effective, in 2014 the Scientific Council introduced re-submission restrictions.



Typical reasons for rejection

Research Project

- Scope: Too narrow or too broad/unfocussed
- Not clear groundbreaking aspects/Incremental research
- Work plan not detailed enough/unclear
- Insufficient risk management
- Part II did not give sufficient information on the methodology- concerns on feasibility

Principle Investigator

- Insufficient track-record
- Not clear they can carry out the project (not independent, lack of relevant expertise, creativity not proved, etc.)

If rejected, **KEEP TRYING**

Reapplications have a higher success rate

Use the feedback from evaluation reports

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Thank You!

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Step 2: choose your grant type & make sure you are eligible!

- Window is calculated as according to the 1st of January of the year of the Call.

  StG 2025: **1 January 2018** to **31 December 2023 (inclusive)**

  CoG 2025: **1 January 2014** to **31 December 2018 (inclusive)**

The reference date shall be the certified date of the successful defence of the first PhD degree.

- If you previously applied to an ERC call, check resubmission restrictions
- Minimum 50% of PI working time in an EU Member State or Associated Country
- Time commitment on the project: Min. 50% (StG), 40% (CoG), 30% (AdG/SyG)

Questions to guide the writing of the Scientific Proposal

- Is my project new, innovative, bringing in new solutions/theories?
- Does it promise to go substantially beyond the state of the art?
- Why is my project important? Answering a complete question (not only ‘what’ but also ‘why’) - Think Big! Make sure that your idea needs an ERC to do it
- How can I prove/support my case? Do I have a hypothesis? Do I have supporting evidence? Have I proven the project's feasibility? Are my goals realistic?
- Is it timely? (Why wasn't it done in the past?)
- What's the risk? Is it justified by a substantial potential gain? Do I have a plan for managing the risk? Have I proposed alternatives?
- Why am I the best/only person to carry it out? Know your competitors – what is the state of play, and why is your idea and scientific approach outstanding compared to them?
- Have I given a realistic picture of my collaborations? Show that you can drive the collaborations but that it is *you* who will be leading the project.

I have been invited for an interview – now what?

- Have clear and representative slides and focus on SCIENCE! Don’t try to make a business presentation – you are talking to scientists.
- Keep the time
- Give to the point answers- be mindful not to talk too much in an unfocussed way
- Know the details of your proposal and methods, as well as your research area – who are your main competitors/collaborators?
- If you have new work on the topic – present it!

Feedback to Applicants

Ranking range at Step 1

A Invited	Do not receive an Evaluation Report
A not invited	Receive ranking range starting from the cut-off point between A invited and B
B	Receive 10% ranking slices starting from the cut-off point between A not invited and B: e.g. 45 - 54%
C	Receive the top and the bottom percentage positions of the C category: e.g. 68 - 100%

Feedback to Applicants – Step 2 Ranking Range

A	Proposals within the panel budget at the panel meeting receive the percentage of proposals within that group: e.g. top 45%
A	Proposals outside the panel budget (i.e. not sure if budget available) receive their individual ranking position with a 2% ranking range: e.g. 52 - 54%
B	Proposals receive the top and bottom percentages of that group: e.g. 58% - 100%

Part B1- Research Project – Novelties 2025 calls

- Streamlined evaluation questions
- No explicit reference to ‘high-risk/high-gain’
  - Instead: ‘ground-breaking, ambitious, and feasible’.
  - The ERC will always encourage risky research.
- No explicit reference to ‘novel methodologies’
  - ‘Novel methodologies’ is an element that may be positive but is not strictly necessary for an excellent proposal.

Ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility

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 between or across disciplines)?***

*To what extent is the outlined scientific approach **feasible** bearing in mind the groundbreaking nature and ambition of the proposed research (Step 1)?*

Lump Sum Funding (Advanced Grant)

Pilot lump sum model for the Advanced Grant 2024 call:

- A lump sum contribution for the entirety of the project defined upfront and by project (capped at funding scheme ceiling):
  - budget based on estimated costs
  - assessed during the evaluation (justification/plausibility)
  - broken down by beneficiary
- One scientific mid-term report, one single payment at the end of the project
- Payment based on completion of activities and not on successful outcome
- Additional funding and portability available; deviations/amendments - possible

Beware of Open Access: Publications

Deposition	Immediate deposition in OA repository
Version of the publication to be shared in OA	Final accepted manuscript (AAM) or published version (VoR)
Open Access **repository**	‘**Trusted** repository for scientific publications’
Embargo period	**No embargo period**: immediate open access upon publication

Licence of the deposited version of the publication	Creative Commons (**CC BY**) or equivalent; for long-text formats CC BY-NC/ND/NC-ND acceptable (**book chapters are treated like articles!**)
Publication **metadata** (deposited version)	**More detailed metadata**, for example on licence, research data, outputs/ tools, PIDs, etc.
Publication **fees** (APC, BPC, other fees)	‘**Only publication fees in full open access venues** for peer-reviewed scientific publications are eligible for reimbursement’

Beware of Open Access: Data

Deposition and **sharing** of data	PIs **must deposit** 'digital research data generated in the project' as soon as possible (to be outlined in the DMP)
Data Management Plan (DMP) (due at month 6)	**All** ERC projects
Data **repository**	'**Trusted** repository'
Licence	Creative Commons (**CC BY or CC0**) or equivalent