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Practical hints and tips for a successful ERC application

ERC grants – Evaluation criteria



Excellence

is the sole evaluation criterion

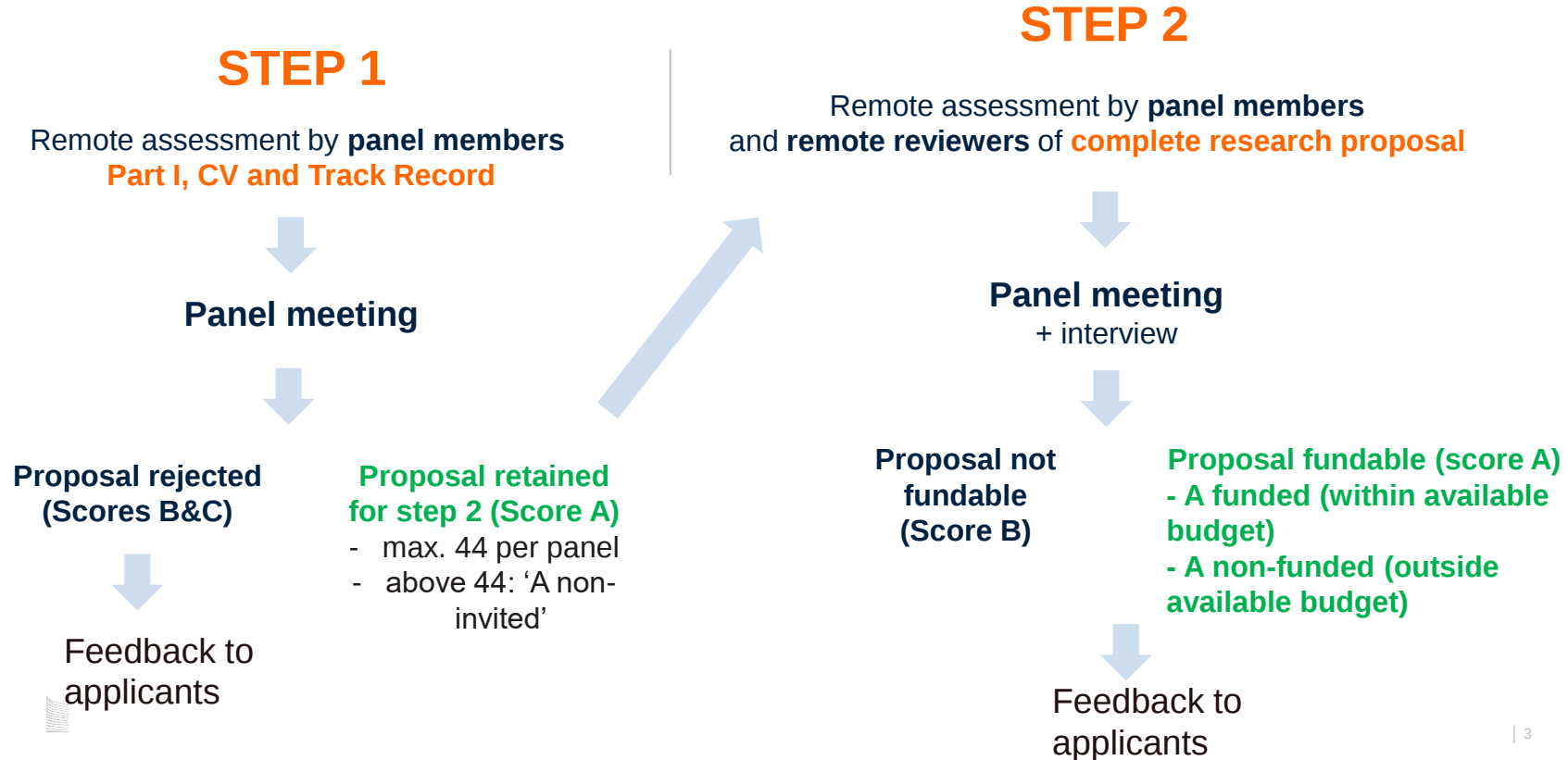
- Excellence of the **Research Project**
 - ✓ Ground-breaking nature
 - ✓ Ambition
 - ✓ Feasibility
- Excellence of the **Principal Investigator**
 - ✓ Intellectual capacity
 - ✓ Creativity
 - ✓ Scientific expertise and capacity to execute the project



Since **2024** the evaluation is primarily focused on the **research project**

Evaluation: Process

For main grant schemes (Starting, Consolidator, Advanced grants): a single submission but a **two-step** evaluation



1. Get the information (early on)

- **Register early** on the **Funding and Tenders Portal**
- Consult the **call documents** (Work Programme, Information for Applicants) → **ERC website**
- Look at **funded projects in your field** (search tool on ERC website), testimonials, tutorials
- Watch the **ERC Classes videos** and **webinars** (YouTube)
- Talk to your **Institution's grant office**
- Contact the **National Contact Point**
- Talk to **ERC grantees**
- Contact ERCEA and **ask all your questions** well ahead of the submission deadline (dedicated mailboxes for each call) – e.g.,

ERC-2026-STG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu / ERC-2026-COG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu / ERC-2025-ADG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu / ERC-2026-SYG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu

2. Choose grant type & ensure eligibility

- Window is calculated as according to the 1st of January of the year of the call (i.e. 1 January 2026 for the 2026 calls).

StG-2026: 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2023 (inclusive)

CoG-2026: 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)



3. Choose the Host Institution

- **Your choice!**
- **Starting, Consolidator** grants should be in an EU Member State/Associated Country
- **Synergy** grants allow 1 PI outside the EU/Associated Country
- You can change it during the project's life (**portability**)
- You **don't have to be employed** at the Host Institution when you apply but you need them to give you a **support letter**.



- **Rumour:** the quality/fame of the Host Institution is increasing the chances/scores
- **NOT true:** the Host Institution is **not** an evaluation criterion

4. Choose a panel

- When you submit your proposal, you need to **choose a review panel**
- ERC panel structure provides **guidance**, not meant to be a complete scientific classification (***not exhaustive***);
- Panel titles, subtitles, descriptors **do not reflect priorities**;
- **Any topic/field** is equally welcome, whether mentioned in panel structure or not;
- You can flag one '**secondary review panel**'. Explain why proposal is 'cross-panel' in Part B1!

- **Rumour:** Choose the panel '**strategically**', to increase chances of success
- **NOT true:** The budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand, success rate is equal amongst panels → **choose the panel that is right for your proposal!**

4. Choose a panel

(StG, CoG, AdG)

Evaluation panel structure 2025

- 3 domains
- 28 panels
- Each panel: Panel Chair + Panel Members

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 and 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 Processes 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
- SH8** Studies of Cultures and Arts

4. Choose a panel

Explore the ERC projects portfolio:

<https://erc.europa.eu/projects-statistics/erc-dashboard>



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Established by the European Commission

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Homepage > Projects & statistics > ERC dashboard

ERC dashboard

ERC dashboard

Advanced analytics tool (ERIS)

Science stories

Mapping ERC frontier research

Need data on ERC grants?  New dashboard is [here](#)

The dynamic platform for ERC funded projects and evaluated proposals is a user-friendly interface with powerful filter options.

You can effortlessly filter by funding scheme, country, year, panel, and more. Plus, export results and graphs to further analyze and showcase your findings.



Share your experience

Please contact us at erc-webmaster@ec.europa.eu to share your feedback and suggestions regarding this new tool.

5. Start writing

PART A – admin forms online

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Section 1 | Proposal and PI info |
| Section 2 | Host Institution info |
| Section 3 | Budget |
| Section 4 | Ethics |
| Section 5 | Call-specific questions |

Annexes – submitted as .pdf

- Statement of support of HI
- Copy of PhD or equivalent (StG & CoG)

If applicable:

- Document for extension of eligibility window (StG & CoG)
- Explanatory info on ethical issues

Seen by
the panel

Step 1, only Panel Members

PART B1 – submitted as single .pdf

- Abstract and cross-panel explanation 1 page
- Extended Synopsis 5 pages + ref.
- CV & Track Record up to 4 pages

Step 2, both PM and specialists

PART B1

PART B2 – submitted as single .pdf

- Full Scientific Proposal (7 pages + ref.)
- Funding ID

Typical reasons for not making it

- Hypothesis and objectives not sufficiently clear
- Incremental in nature, missing the ground-breaking potential
- No realisation of risks & challenges, contingency
- Overly ambitious (promising too much) or 'overselling' yourself
- For interdisciplinary proposals: expertise missing in one area



New CV and Track Record

- **Personal details:** education and key qualifications, current position and relevant previous positions
- **Research achievements** (≤ 10) and **peer recognition** (short factual narrative)
 - demonstrating advancement in the field, emphasis on more recent achievements
 - prizes, fellowships, etc.
- **Additional information** (to provide context)
 - career breaks, diverse career paths, life events
 - other noteworthy contributions to research community

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- **Rumour:** one needs publications in Nature/Science/High IF journals to succeed
 - ✗ **NOT true:** publication record is not decisive in selection decisions

General tips

- Make the project easy to read and attractive to the eye – divide into sections, font large enough, correct typos!!
- Check coherence of figures – pay attention to figure legends
- Make sure you give full references – these are excluded from the page limit, so there is no excuse not to properly reference
- Only list collaborators who have agreed to collaborate with you
- Honest presentation (own work, work of others, order of authorship on papers)
- Avoid ‘bonus’ objectives (usually overly ambitious, vaguely articulated and poorly integrated; often translational)
- “Test” your proposal with peers/mentors/friends – you need to re-write it many times!
- **Writing a proposal is hard – devote plenty of time!** do not work right up to the deadline; a submitted proposal can be revised until the call deadline by submitting a new version and overwriting the previous one

Interview

- **StG, CoG and AdG** interviews take place **remotely at Step 2**
- **SyG** interviews take place in person **in Brussels, during the Step 3 meeting**
 - ✓ Have clear and representative slides and **focus on your research project**
 - ✓ Don't over explain your CV
 - ✓ Know the details of your proposal and methods, and your research area
 - ✓ Do you have **new data** since you submitted the proposal? **Present it**
 - ✓ **Anticipate questions** - Prepare also for cases where you do not have an answer
 - ✓ Keep the time
 - ✓ **Practice practice practice!**

Some concluding remarks

- Don't exclude yourself from participating in ERC calls - if you have an idea that you think will make a significant change in your field of research: go for it!
- Take risks, explain your project's high scientific impact if you reach your aims, and provide evidence that you can do it
- If you fail, try again! Gain experience from evaluation. Panel feedback is useful and resubmissions have a higher success rate



Criteria 1 – Research Project B2

Status: Above

Total score: 10.00 Threshold: 0 Evaluation progress: 100.00%

Criterion 1 - RESEARCH PROJECT, Current score: 5.0 / 5.0 ; Threshold 0

Criterion 2 - PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, Current score: 5.0 / 5.0 ; Threshold 0

Criterion 1 - RESEARCH PROJECT

Current score: 5.0 / 5.0 ; Threshold 0

Your score:

5 - Exceptional

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 between or across disciplines)?

To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a high risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?

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:

Criteria 2 – Principal investigator

Criterion 2 - PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Current score: 5.0 / 5.0 ; Threshold 0

Intellectual capacity and creativity

The questions below can have one of the following five responses: Exceptional/Excellent/Very Good/Good/Non-competitive

Your score:

5 - Exceptional

To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?

Exceptional

To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative independent thinking?

Exceptional

To what extent does the PI have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

Exceptional





Thank you

Any Questions???