The European Research Council

Funding opportunities
After 11 Years, a Success Story

- Over 8,000 top researchers funded since the ERC’s creation in 2007
- Over 60,000 researchers and other professionals employed in ERC research teams
- €13 billion ERC budget for 2014-2020 under Horizon 2020
- Over 110,000 articles from ERC projects published in prestigious scientific journals
- 748 research institutions hosting ERC grantees – universities, public or private research centres in the EU or associated countries
- 74 nationalities of grant holders
Proposal: What to pay attention to?

• **Interdisciplinarity**: Research proposals of a multi- and interdisciplinary nature are strongly encouraged. However PI must prove herself to be knowledgeable and must have research output in all disciplines. Thus an expert companion attached does not suffice.

• **Style and clarity** are important: Project is evaluated by generalists and experts with widely varying backgrounds.

• **Innovation and ground-breaking research**, proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches have more chance. High risk and/or high gain aspects are pluses.

• **Continuation of existing work to improve the state-of-the-art** is not a winner.
CV: What to pay attention to?

• A balance between the relevance of the research project and the track record of the applicant is desired. Thus both the CV and the proposal are important and act as filters for project selection.

• Beyond publications, citations (> 1000+), patents:
  - International visibility
  - PhD graduates and post-docs;
  - Outreach
  - Previous/concomitant funding
  - Published review papers
Excellence of PI

Many important publications without my PhD supervisor and a promising track record

Program/Scientific committee member
General chair and founder of a workshop

Member of scientific evaluation panels
Referee for several international journals

Several invited presentations, awards

International collaborations

Supervision of students
Teaching Activities
Erasmus Delegate
Member of the ICT
International Doctoral School
What counts?

Excellence of PI:
- Intellectual capacity
- Creativity
- Commitment

Excellence of RP (research project)
- Ground breaking nature
- Potential impact
- Scientific approach

✓ Budget is not an elimination criterion. If not properly justified, it will be cut down

✓ Your impression at the interview is a key factor
Gender

• **Gender balance**: Presently 60% of applicants/winners are male, 40% woman. This is a big improvement from a low start in 2007 of 90% to 10% ratio.

• **Experience and impressions of panels**: Women may not necessarily identify with the 'Tarzan' language of 'groundbreaking', 'leader', 'outstanding' etc. that is used in ERC calls. Women sometimes think less highly of their research than their male colleagues and write their applications and present themselves differently, tending to show off less or to use less exuberant language. Women are put off by the writing styles that overstate achievements.

• **Proactively**: More woman panel members
Caveats

- **Time dedicated**: Be unambiguous about the time claimed to be spent on the project, and the time actually spent in the participating country: “If granted, you need to spend at least 50% of your working time in the EU or associated countries”

- **Double dipping**: Applicants re-using parts of another grant. Applicants must be entirely transparent about what funds are used for what part of the whole.

- **English style**: Poor command of the English language was a problem for proposals.
Ground-breaking and high risk

• **Ground-breaking:**
  • The originality of the vision, the scope and breadth of the addressed scientific question are most important. For example, a fresh look into a current problem or a fresh problem.

**High risk**

• Your suggested methods may not provide a guaranteed solution to the whole of the scientific question you consider. That is your risk.

• But it is expected to be significantly beyond the state-of-art and better by an order of magnitude; or, it can be a unifying theory for disparate evidences
Refereeing I

• Panel Members act as 'generalists', hence they look at the big picture offered by the proposal and CV. Furthermore a group of selected panel members act as expert reviewer for each project.

• 12-16 panel members plus chairman deliberate for three days. This is after that panel members have spent at least two months on the assigned, typically 30 projects to them.

• 100 projects per panel, 30 chosen projects per panel member.

• No obvious bias against Turkey or in fact against any other country or institution
Refereeing I

• Peer review process also makes use of remote referees, which are scientists and scholars who have specialized expertise for that project.
• 375 panel members and 2000 referees per call
Other

• Second application:
Success rate of returning grantees (~30%) is higher than for other applicants. Though by no means it is self-evident that a new application of a former ERC Grantee will be successful.

• Role of host institution
Local host institutions have to take actions:
  ✓ Identify potential ERC candidates
  ✓ For these applicants have their proposals reviewed by senior colleagues
Final tips

✓ Understand the process
✓ Select the right timing
✓ Start many, many months before the deadline
✓ Reserve several weeks for writing
✓ Get plenty of feedback
✓ Rely on local expertise
How I Prepared for Interview

✓ Rehearsed many times (10’ talk +15’ questions for PE6)

✓ Mock interviews organized by my former Faculty

✓ Suggestion from an ERC Adv. Grant Panel Member:

   Convince me that you are UNIQUE because:

   a. what you are doing is unique

   b. what you are doing can only be done by you

   c. if you achieve what you promise this will be a unique asset for Europe.
ERC Starting and Consolidator Grants

“Am I competitive enough?”

- Potential for research independence
- Evidence of scientific maturity
  - For example, at least one (StG) /several (CoG) publications without participation of PhD supervisor

Condition StG: PhD at least 2 and up to 7 years before 1 January 2019
Condition CoG: PhD over 7 and up to 12 years before 1 January 2019

*Promising track-record of early achievements*

- Significant publications
- Invited presentations in conferences
- Funding, patents, awards, prizes
ERC Advanced Grants
“Am I competitive enough?”

- Exceptional leader in terms of originality and significance of your research
- Excellent track record and achievements during the last 10 years

**Substantial track-record of significant research achievements**
- Publications in peer-reviewed journals, monographs, invited presentations, funding, patents, awards, prizes
- Organisation of international conferences
- Major contributions to the early careers of excellent researchers
- Bibliometric data