



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

The ERC Evaluation Process

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CRANCE



The timeframes / timetables

Basic Process:

- Submission of application
- First round of evaluation by the panel.
 - Decisions will be based on the B1 document only. Panellists will not be sent the B2 document
 - Panellists will *not* be specialists in your field. They will be experienced researchers in the domain of the panel.
- A selection of applications will be sent to expert evaluators, and the PI will be invited to interview
- Second round of evaluation by the panel
 - Decisions will be based on B1 and B2.
 - The PI will be interviewed by the panel, who will also have report from expert evaluators (the expert evaluators will not be involved in interviewing applicants)
 - Decisions will be made on the basis of a combination of: (1) the panellists' judgement; (2) the expert evaluators' reports; (3) performance in the interview

Timeframe

| Timeframe for sending information to applicants (ERC-2024-StG) | Social Sciences & Humanities SH | Physical Sciences & Engineering PE | Life Sciences LS |
|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Invitations for interviews | beginning/mid March 2024 | | |
| 2. Results of Step 1 for non-retained applicants | beginning May 2024 | | |
| 3. Step 2 Interviews | end May 2024 | beginning June 2024 | mid June 2024 |
| 4. Results of Step 2 | end August 2024 | | |

| Timeframe for sending information to applicants (CoG2024) | LS Life Sciences | SH Social Sciences & Humanities | PE Physical Sciences & Engineering |
|---|---------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Invitations for interviews | June 2024 | | |
| 2. Results of Step 1 for non-retained applicants | June 2024 | | |
| 3. Step 2 Interviews | mid October 2024 | end September 2024 | end September / beginning October 2024 |
| 4. Results of Step 2 | December 2024 | | |

The criteria for assessment

Our mission

The ERC, set up by the European Union in 2007, is the premier European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. It funds creative researchers of any nationality and age, to run projects based across Europe.

The ERC's mission is to encourage the highest quality research in Europe through competitive funding and to **support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields**, based on scientific excellence.

.... But what does “excellence” mean?

Excellence: Significance and originality

Basic thoughts: Is the proposal *original* ? Is the proposal original and *significant* ?

- It is not the *topic* that is evaluated, it is how you propose to *research* it that is the key
- It is not enough for it to be on a topic nobody has looked at before (there may be good reasons why nobody has done so!)
- It is also not enough for you to be proposing to ‘fill in the gaps’ or just making an incremental advance on previous research. Avoid pedestrian research!
- It is not enough just for the research *topic* to be original. You have to show that:
 - The *questions* you propose to ask are *also* original
 - The *methods* you intend to use are original

Excellence: The meaning of significance

Basic thoughts: Will the findings be *significant* ?

- It cannot be enough to promise to discover new ‘facts’
- Findings have to be significant. In other words, they have to have the potential to make us *rethink* how we understand the topic. In other words, they have to be *transformative* and not simply an *addition*.
- Scalability: the project has to have the potential to generate findings that will inform research in cognate fields or disciplines
- Have you identified fields / disciplines to which this may contribute?
- Not fields! *Disciplines*!

Framing:

Basic thoughts: it is framed in the right way?

- Is the proposal driven by an appropriate set of research questions? (i.e. a main question followed by subordinate questions that follow on from, and elaborate, the initial research question)
- Is the question framed as an open question? (i.e. one that does not suggest that the PI already think they know the answer they want)
- Is the proposal framed in a way that indicates the PI will also be reflecting on their own working assumptions?
- Finally: formulate the question in terms of a broad general problem / issue that will then be answered through the selected topic (*top-down* not *bottom up*)

State of the Art:

Basic thoughts: does the proposal justify itself?

- Does the state of the art support the claim to originality?
- Is your state of the art sufficiently thorough?
- Clue: a convincing state of the art does not merely *list* the publications in the field. It engages critically with them. It makes a case as to why *this* research is necessary. (i.e. it highlights the limitations / lacunae in existing research, *but* these should be *non-trivial*)

From idea to project: project design (1)

Basic thoughts: does the proposal indicate how the *idea* will be translated into concrete steps and methods?

- Are the scope and focus well defined? Are they sufficiently ambitious?
- Does the project have well-defined parts (i.e. sub-themes)? Is there a meaningful relationship *between* the parts?
- Has the project been designed in such a way that the findings of the different parts can be brought to cast light on each other?
- Is the whole *more* than just the sum of the individual parts? What gives coherence to the project as a whole?

From idea to project: project design (2)

Basic thoughts: is the proposal well designed?

- Has a timetable been devised? Are there clearly defined *milestones* to enable the PI to assess progress?
- Is the proposed team of researchers justified, in terms of expertise, skills and experience? (It is ok to nominate individuals as named researchers – but then you have to give *evidence* of their suitability)
- Does the team have an appropriate gender balance?
- Is there a clear division of labour / responsibilities in the team? Is it clear what *you* as PI will be responsible for?
- Have you thought about career development possibilities for ECR in the team? (Careful over the meaning of 'PhD student'!)

Researcher profile

Basic thoughts: is your personal profile competitive?

- Your institution is not being assessed, only you and your proposal
- There is no ERC conspiracy against researchers from the Czech Republic or from east-central Europe
- However, the PI will need to be a credible candidate in the following ways:
 - The PI needs to have a record of *substantial* research outputs that will persuade the panel that they can complete the research
 - Your research publications can be in any language, but must be of international quality
 - Is there evidence of international *recognition*?
 - Is there evidence the PI will be able to lead a team?

Final Thoughts

- Evaluation is not a science! It rests on the experience and judgement of panellists
- Remember: this is a *competition*. It means that you may have a brilliant project, but there were others that were deemed to be more competitive
- Failure: it is disheartening, but do not let fear of failure put you off. Because it is so competitive, nobody will think less of you if you are not successful
- You can always resubmit. *But* read the feedback carefully. Do not dismiss it. Panellists are experienced researchers and even if you are not successful, it is illuminating to see how *others* see your ideas and you as a researcher
- When drafting your application, give yourself time (9 months) and do *not* ask your colleagues to give you feedback ! They will be too polite to offend. Instead: find senior scholars in your institution who (ideally) have ERC experience .