

How to Write a Convincing ERC Advanced Grant Proposal

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Why this presentation?

ERC applicants are excellent in research. But they have sometimes difficulties to display their achievements and their research idea in a nice manner, because they are natural to them.



Disclaimer: This information is based on my personal experience, and not on any information of the Commission.

Presentation outline

1. Getting Started

2. How Evaluators Read the Proposals

3. Your Proposal

- B1: The Principal Investigator (PI)
- B2: The Scientific Proposal
- B2: The Host Institution (HI)

4. Cosmetics and Finish

1. Getting Started (1)

- Start early → the deadline is very strict!
- Read well all important ERC documents
 - [Work Programme](#)
 - [Guide for Applicants](#)
 - [Guide for Peer Reviewers](#)
- Read well the evaluation criteria
- Register on EPSS (<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm>)
- Use the mandatory templates (to download from EPSS)
- Prepare the supporting documents early (annexes: HI letter; annexes on ethical issues, if applicable)
- If you have questions, contact your Regional Office or your National Contact Point **early**



1. Getting Started (2)

Imagine you're applying for your dream job. The HR personnel gets hundreds of applications and needs to make a valuable selection of candidates within a very short time frame.

It is the same with ERC proposals!

Your proposal must make a difference!



2. How Evaluators Read the Proposals

- They first read title and abstract.
- The abstract already decides if they are interested in reading more.
- The second thing they read is the publication list.
- They often flip through the pages. This means: Your proposal needs to be well structured. Important parts of your proposal should be eye catching.
- They normally make a triage of 3 piles: A) best, B) intermediate, C) out.
- They have many proposals to read. They have little time. Make their work easier in presenting them a nice proposal.
- The following criteria are not used: nationality, gender, age, amount of requested grant.

3. Your proposal

PART A – online forms To complete in EPSS

- A1** Proposal and PI information
- A2** Host institution information
- A3** Budget

PART B1 - submitted as pdf

Section 1

- a) Scientific Leadership Profile 2 p.
- b) CV 2 p.
- c) 10 years track record 2 p.
- d) Extended synopsis 5 p.

Annexes – submitted as pdf

- Letter of HI
- Annex on Ethical issues (if appl.)

PART B2 – submitted as pdf

- Section 2** Scientific proposal 15 p.
- Ethical issues table 1-2 p.
- Section 3** Research Environment 2 p.

3. Your proposal

B1: The Principal Investigator (1)

- Scientific Leadership Profile:
 - This part is like the cover letter of a job application, whereas the CV and the track record are comparable with the CV of a job application. Both complement each other and mirror your career in two different ways.
 - The Scientific Leadership Profile includes 4 parts: Content and impact of your scientific contributions; international recognition and diffusion of these contributions; efforts to inspire younger researchers; ability to change research fields and to establish new interdisciplinary approaches.

3. Your proposal

B1: The Principal Investigator (2)

- Scientific Leadership Profile:
 - Write a clear and nice text with distinct paragraphs
 - Document your achievements – it is not enough to say „I have participated in many international projects“. Say which ones
 - Come to the point. Be precise. „I established / I identified / I demonstrated / I initiated / I was awarded ...“
 - Summarize your work. E.g., „more than 30 original articles in international peer reviewed journals as main author...“

3. Your proposal

B1: The Principal Investigator (3)

- CV: Which sub-headers are best to describe yourself and your achievements? E.g.,
 - Education
 - Professional Experience
 - Awards
 - International Collaboration
 - Teaching and Supervision Activities
 - Key Publications

Use indexes, summaries...



3. Your proposal

B1: The Principal Investigator (4)

Don't forget:

- Mention a distinct Funding ID. You can do this with a table, e.g.:

Institution	Identifier	Duration	Amount	Partners
SNSF	xxx.1234	12.04-12.08	500.000 Euro	--

3. Your proposal

B1: The Principal Investigator (5)

Don't forget:

- Mention your actual position!
- Mention your website
- Translate non-English terms, at least in brackets
- And especially: the competition is high. The evaluators should see your excellence at once! Sell yourself, without bluffing.
- In case of a co-investigator project, each PI has to fill in the scientific leadership profile, CV, and track record (2p. maximum per section and person).



3. Your proposal

B2: The Scientific Proposal (1)

- The ERC funds basic research projects that are **novel, creative, go significantly beyond the state of the art, make substantial advances in the frontiers of knowledge, use new methods and techniques, are interdisciplinary, and high-risk-high-gain projects.**
- This means:
 - Focus on these aspects
 - Display these aspects clearly and in a user-friendly manner
 - Show where and why your project is excellent
- The proposal must be short, concise, crystal clear. No “noise”.

3. Your proposal

B2: The Scientific Proposal (2)

- Abstract and title are very important.
 - Choose a short and clear title.
 - Choose a short and handy acronym (<http://acronymcreator.net/>)
 - Write a crystal clear abstract.
- The ERC funds projects that cannot be funded otherwise. Describe why you need the ERC grant. And why it is now the best moment.
- Your project must make a difference.



3. Your proposal

B2: The Scientific Proposal (3)

- Risky projects are welcome. It must be clear, however, that you are aware of the risks and know how to tackle them. You may present a „plan B“.
- The feasibility must clearly be shown. Find a balance between originality and realism.



3. Your proposal

B2: The Scientific Proposal (4)

Resources:

- Budget what you need. A small budget is not an advantage per se. It has to be reasonable.
- The salary rules of your HI are applied.
- The salary of the PI can be included, if not covered otherwise.
- Note that new equipment is only financed by depreciation costs. Contact your Regional Office for further advice.
- The ERC does not want to reimburse travel costs for invited researchers outside the chore team if these were not clearly mentioned in the budget.
- Include costs for international / overseas conferences in your budget.

3. Your proposal

B2: The Scientific Proposal (5)

Resources:

- Do not forget to include the costs for the Certificate of Financial Statement in your budget
- Figures in this part must be consistent with those in the A3 form
- Budget is in Euro, with full numbers (not kEuro)
- Include 20% overhead (without subcontracting)
- Ask your Euresearch Regional Office to check your budget

3. Your proposal

B2: The Scientific Proposal (6)

Ethical Issues:

- You must fill in the ethical issues table in part B2, even if there are no issues.
- If the answer to any of the questions of the Ethical Issues Table is “Yes”, you must provide a brief explanation of the ethical issue and how it will be dealt with. Use the template provided in EPSS. Upload it as an annex, together with supporting documents (if any)
- The table and annexes do not count towards the maximal number of pages.

3. Your proposal

B2: The Scientific Proposal (7)

Don't forget:

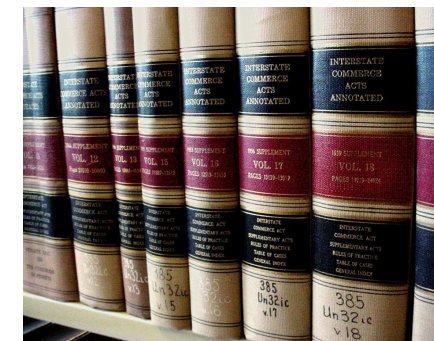
- The proposal has to be understandable for experts as well as for generalists (counts also for abbreviations and non-english terms)
- Graphs and tables are highly recommended
- Include a list of references
 - Has to be within the maximal number of pages
 - Decide which references are important
- Include timetable, milestones etc. (maybe in form of a table or graph)

3. Your proposal

B2: The Host Institution

The aim of this section is the description of your Host Institution: Why is it the best environment for you and your research?

- Describe your lab, your institute, your university, in terms of
 - research tradition
 - infrastructure, facilities
 - collaborations
 - intellectual support
- If additional participant: Show added value



4. Cosmetics and Finish (1)

The evaluators have to evaluate a lot of proposals and have very few time. They should get the information of your proposal very quickly.

This means:

The display of your proposal should be very nice and clear. The essence should be found at once.

4. Cosmetics and Finish (2)

One evaluator pointed it like this:

„An applicant who does not take his time to write a clear and nice proposal delegates the work to the evaluator, because the evaluator then has to struggle through the proposal to find the essence. The more the applicant can save the time of the evaluator, the better is his chance. An evaluator never has enough time“.



Another evaluator's opinion:

„In the top 15% everybody deserves the grant. If a person is in the top 15%, a nice proposal can make the difference“.

4. Cosmetics and Finish (3)

What does this mean for your proposal?

In terms of formalities:

- Subdivision of your text: subheaders, paragraphs...
- Bulleting, numbering...
- Ask yourself: which sub-headers are best to describe yourself and your achievements?
- Hierarchy of titles should be clear
- Include graphs, tables

Such aspects make your text „light“ and easier to read!

4. Cosmetics and Finish (4)

What does this mean for your proposal?

In terms of content:

- Clear structure, logical flow, red thread
- Your idea, goal, method should be visible at once



4. Cosmetics and Finish (5)

The finish of your proposal:

- Proof-read your proposal with the evaluation criteria before you. Imagine you're an evaluator, evaluating point per point your proposal (stage 1 and 2).
- Does your proposal answer the following questions: What, why, how, why now, why you?
- Check the format (eligibility!)
- Do not go beyond the allowed maximum number of pages.
- No repetition, no double information
- Figures have to be understandable in black-and-white
- Have your English checked by a native English speaker. Some evaluators care about the English.

Questions?

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**Thank you for
your attention!**

