

# How to write a strong ERC proposal

Quick Guide for StG, CoG, AdG (3rd Revised Edition)



#### What is ERC?

- ERC supports frontier research across scientific disciplines.
- ERC supports individual researchers, not consortia.
- Research topics are defined by the applicant.
- Scientific excellence (the quality of the proposal and the credibility of the applicant) is the sole criterion.

## Where to get the information?

- It is a good idea to start with the ERC National Information Day (NID), where you get more general insight into the ERC and how it works. NID takes place every autumn. In adition the video recording of the event is available also. It will give you an overview of the ERC scheme and evaluation method and ERC project investigators will share their experiences with you.
- Also read carefully the part of the <u>ERC Work</u>. <u>Programme</u> relevant to the given grant scheme, as well as the <u>Information for Applicants</u> and also <u>brochure from Technology Centre Prague</u> (only in Czech).
- You can find currently opened calls at the <u>Funding</u> and <u>Tender portal</u>.
- Inform the <u>ERC university consultant</u> at the Department of Science and Research – European Centre about your intention to submit a proposal.
- For further information, see our website ec.cuni.cz or official ERC website erc.europa.eu.

#### **Choosing the scheme**

- Starting (StG): 2-7 years from PhD. (the date of successful defence, not the awarding)
- Consolidator (CoG): 7-12 years from PhD.
- Advanced (AdG): no restriction
- Extensions of these time slots:
  - Maternity leave (18 months per child)
  - Paternity leave
  - Long-term illness or national service
  - Clinical training
  - Natural disaster or seeking asylum.
- Check the eligibility criteria in the current work programme.

#### The Host institution

The HI must be established in an EU country or associated country.

## Myth #1:

- the quality of the host institution determines the evaluation of the application
- the evaluation of the application depends only on the scientific quality of the project and of the Principal Investigator (PI)



#### Structure of the proposal

#### Part A – online (Funding & Tender Portal)

- General information about the project
- Participants (information about the Host Institution and Principal Investigator)
- Budget
- Ethics & security
- Other questions

# Part B1 – must be saved into the portal as a PDF

<ul><li>Abstract</li></ul>	(1 p.)
<ul><li>Extended synopsis</li></ul>	(5 p.)
CV and Track Record	(4 p.)

# Part B2 – must be saved into the portal as a PDF (14 p.)

- State-of-the-art and objectives in detail
- Methodology

# Annexes – must be saved into the portal as a PDF

- Host Institution Letter of Support
- Copy of PhD. diploma

#### **Choosing the evaluation panel**

- Life Sciences (9 panels)
- Physical Sciences and Engineering (11 panels)
- Social Sciences and Humanities (8 panels)

The field covered by the individual panels is characterised by descriptors. The right choice of the panel is of primary importance that can affect the evaluation. Please check carefully the descriptors associated with the individual panels (see Information for Applicants) as well as the previously supported ERC projects (see <a href="Project Database on ERC website">Project Database on ERC website</a>).

The descriptors and keywords that you specify in Part A are important. If chosen inappropriately, they can lead to reassignment of your proposal to another panel. They also affect the assignment of the evaluating panel members.

You can also look at the <u>list of evaluators</u> within the individual panels in the past years. However, never contact members of the active panel! That would create a conflict of interest and the panel would have to exclude your project from the evaluation.

## Myth #2:

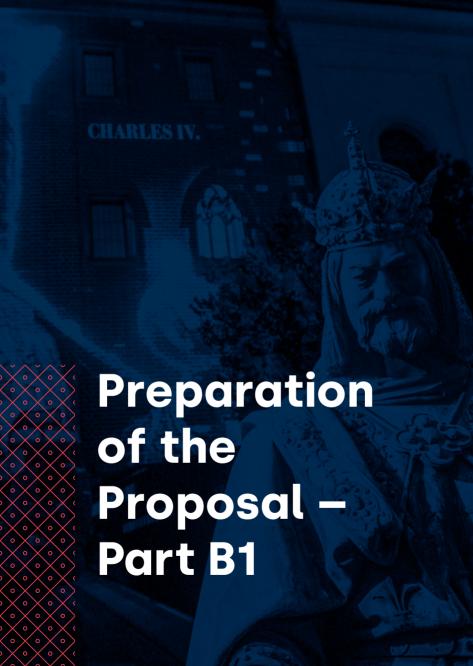
- The more descriptors (covering multiple panels)
  I state, the better because the project will seem multidisciplinary.
- You should submit your project to the panel where the experts will best understand and appreciate an original, innovative approach to the topic. Therefore, choose the second panel only when it is required by the nature of the project.



The point is, that a potential PI must have a clear understanding of why they want to apply for the grant in the first place. When it comes to considering whether applying for

a grant is worth it or not, my answer is always "Do or do not. There is no try."

Jana Kalbáčová Vejpravová (ERC StG)



#### Part B1

Part B1 consists of an abstract, extended synopsis, CV and track record of the PL

**The abstract** is essential. It represents the whole proposal, and it is carefully read by each person involved in the evaluation. It should describe the grant proposal in a nutshell, not mainly the state of the art in the field.

The following questions must in principle be answered: WHAT is the main selling point? WHY is the addressed problem important? HOW will the problem be approached? Originality and novelty must be clear.

**The extended synopsis** is an invitation to read Part B2, which is not available to the panel in the first round of the evaluation. It must trigger curiosity and interest in reading the whole proposal. This creates support for retaining the proposal to Step 2.

- The following aspects must be addressed: novelty, importance and credibility the PI to achieve substantial results.
- The description of methodology in part B1 must substantiate the positive opinion of the evaluators on the feasibility of the project. The detailed

- description of the methodology is the core information in Part B2.
- Overselling and too much hype can severely damage even an otherwise great proposal.
- Use appropriate graphics for an easier understanding of the proposal core points.

# Myth #3:

- The extended synopsis should describe my research in general terms, while the part B2 should describe the project proposal in full detail and specific terms. Because B1 is evaluated by "general" reviewers, in comparison to the "experts' that will evaluate Part B2.
- Part B1 is evaluated by experts from your scientific field as well as by generalists with a broader research background. The etended synopsis should therefore appeal to both types of evaluators.

**The CV and track record** should describe the professional path towards submitted ERC proposal and it must provide information that makes the PI credible for carrying out the proposed research.

- For StG it is crucial to provide the proof of independence.
- For CoG it is crucial to demonstrate in addition the existence of the seed of the original scientific school led by the PI (leadership of the group, laboratory, etc.).

## Myth #4:

- Without a publication in Nature or Science, or without very high h-index, there is no point in applying for the ERC grant.
- Not all grantees have a publication in Nature or Science. In 2021 ERC joined the DORA (Declaration on Research Assessment) and impact factor or h-index is no more relevant bibliometric indicator for evaluators.



ERCs are the best grants ever: low administration, high visibility, scientific freedom; go for it!

Matyáš Fendrych (ERC StG, CoG)

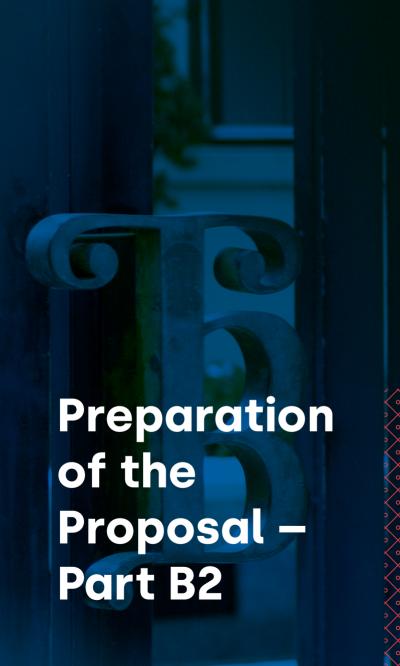
#### Questions to be answered

**WHAT** is the fundamental and timely problem to be investigated? Show that you are an expert in the given field. It should be appealing to experts as well as non-experts in the particular problem.

**WHY** is this problem important and the proposed work worth funding? Explain what is the state of the art in the field, while highlighting the gaps that you are addressing. Explain the specific and broader impact of your solution. Avoid vagueness and interpretative phraseology.

**HOW** can the problem be approached so that substantial progress towards the goals can be expected? Admit the challenges and describe the way of addressing them. In ERC, there are no requirements about reaching any quantitative goals such as number of publications etc.

**WHO** is the PI? Why is he/she in the best position to solve the problem? This question needs to be answered (without self-evaluation wording) primarily in the Extended Synopsis.



#### Part B2

- Give a thorough and detailed description of the research objectives, methodology and resources, that further develops the information given in B1.
- Elaborate specifically on the project implementation and on possible obstacles that have to be handled.
- The work plan must be clear (well-structured with sub-tasks associated with particular members of the team). The size of the proposed team should be adequate to the research plan.

## What are the evaluators looking for?

- Vision, ambitious goals with appropriately described challenges and uncertainties.
- Originality!
- Not all goals need to be achieved. However, it must be clear that at any case the work will lead to a very substantial progress.
- Methodology cannot be based on the application of standard approaches.

# Questions that the evaluators must answer

# The 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?

#### **Scientific Approach**

- To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the ground-breaking nature and ambition of the proposed research?
- To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?
- To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources, and PI commitment adequate and properly justified?

#### Intellectual capacity and creativity

- To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?
- To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative and original thinking?
- To what extent does the PI have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

# Frequent comments of the evaluators

- The project framework is either too narrow or, on the contrary, it is a loose connection of several subprojects without a clear leading idea.
- It is just a continuation of ongoing research.
- It is a collaborative project where the leading role of the PI is not sufficiently explained.
- The work plan is not clear or it is insufficiently described.
- There is an inadequate description of challenges that can arise during the work of the project.
- The PI has an insufficient track record, which doesn't substantiate the credibility for carrying out the project successfully.
- The PI didn't show enough independence on the PhD. supervisor and/or the previous work within the groups led by others.

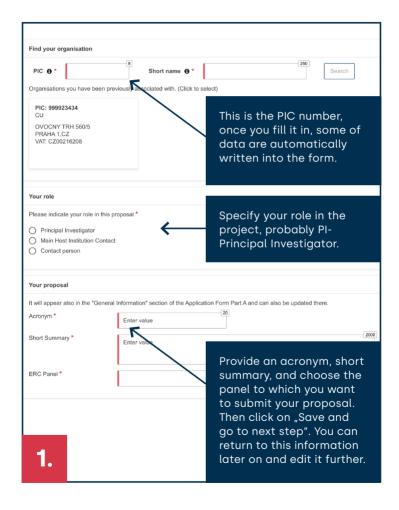


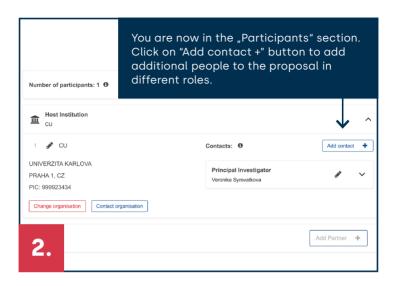
Writing a successful proposal is simple:) You just clearly and concisely describe the "What, Why, and How" so that everyone becomes enthusiastic about your project already after reading the abstract. Good luck!

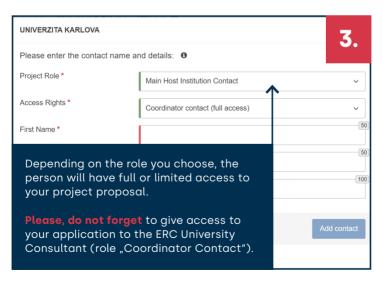
Libor Barto (ERC CoG, SyG)



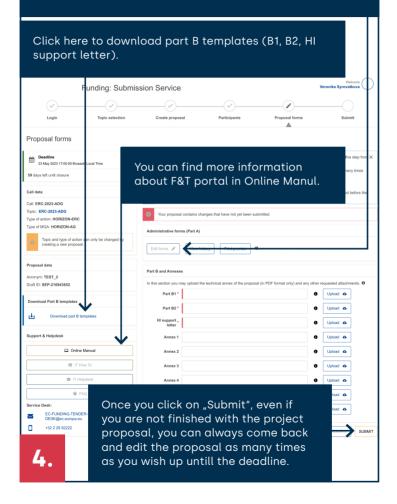
# Go to <u>Funding & Tender portal</u>. Search for ERC open call.







You are now in the section "Proposal forms". By clicking on "Edit forms" you can edit Part A, which we will introduce you below.









Application forms

#### **HORIZON**

Call: ERC-2023-ADG

(Call for Proposals for ERC Advanced Grant)

Topic: ERC-2023-ADG

Type of Action: HORIZON-ERC

(HORIZON ERC Grants)

Proposal number: SEP-210943652

Proposal acronym: TEST 2

Type of Model Grant Agreement: HORIZON Action Grant Budget-**Based** 

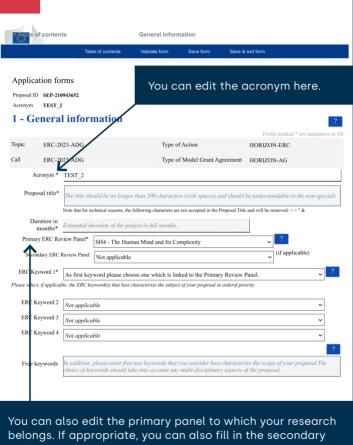
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You are now in Part A, you can get here by clicking on "Edit forms" (previous step).

Whenever you leave the form, make sure to save it.





review panel.

Application forms

Proposal ID SEP-210943652
Acronym TEST\_2

2 - Participants

List of participating organisations

# Participating Organisation Legal Name Country Role Action

1 UNIVERZITA KARLOVA Czechia Coordinator Show Participant's Details

It is up to you whether you want to write a contact for the rectorate or the research support dpt. of your faculty here. You can assign more people to the role of contact persons in a project.

This will be the pers evaluation results, c	s of the Host Institution and contact person on the EU services will contact concerning this proposal (e.g. fo onvocation to start grant preparation). The data in blue is read-on dited in the store "Participants" of the submission wizard.		
Title		Gender	Female Non Binary
First name*		Last name*	
E-Mail*			
Position in org.	Please indicate the position of the person.		
Department	Name of the department/institute carrying out the work.		organisation name
	Same as proposing organisation's address	-	
Street	Please enter street name and number.		
Town	Please enter the name of the town.	Post code Area code.	
Country	Please select a country	~	
Website	Please enter website		
Phone	+xxx xxxxxxxxx Phone 2 +xxx xxxxxxxxx		
			Ω

The budget is in an electronic form that will fill in the required indirect costs of the project based on the direct cost input amounts. It is important to fill in the required EU contribution, which is not automatically filled by the system. Further information on the budget can be found below.

Beneficiary Short Name	71	Senior Staff	Postdocs	Students	Other Personnel costs	A.Total personnel costs@	R Subcontracti ng Cons € (No indirect costs)	C.I Travel and subsistence	C.2 Equipment- including major equipment	Consum- ables incl. fleldwork and animal costs	Publications (incl. Open Access fees) and dissemination	additional direct costs	C.3 Total other goods, works and services	Total Purchase costs@	D. Internally inveiced goods and services? (No indirect costs)	E. Indirect Costf	Total Eligible Costs	Requested EU contribution¥
Co	0	0	۰	0	0	0.00							0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0.00							0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
man 800 characters allowed)  To still to make admitted in the experim culturing the proposal or large. I proposate your description of resources will be remembed one is exceeded the maximum allowed characters. Figure made uses that your description is  or of planting considered measuremy to plaid the endopsions for the electrical of the electrical planting strong is and an electrical and accordinates to the anima.  Figure may exceed by your 'Other promotion and's suggery and the cust according to the continuous to the anima.  For the endopside of the strong below be invited and the electrical planting to the continuous to the animal continuous countries and the electrical planting to the proposate and one country and the cust to the continuous the electrical planting to the proposate and countries and the electrical planting to the proposate and countries and the electrical planting to the electrica																		

Once you answer "YES" to any of these questions, it is necessary to duly justify this in the project proposal. Indicate which page contains the justification, or attach appropriate authorisations or permission to the project proposal.



#### Ethics Self-Assessment

#### Ethical dimension of the objectives, methodology and likely impact

Explain in detail the identified issues in relation to:

- objectives of the activities (e.g. study of vulnerable populations, etc.)
  - methodology (e.g. clinical trials, involvement of children, protection of personal data, etc.)
- the potential impact of the activities (e.g. environmental damage, stigmatisation of particular social groups, political or financial adverse consequences, misuse, etc.)

Remaining characters

5000



Also, you must complete the Ethics Self-Assessment, in which you explain ethics in relation to the objectives of the research activities, the methodology and the potential impacts of these activities, as well as compliance with ethical principles and the corresponding legislation.



#### Compliance with ethical principles and relevant legislations

Describe how the issue(s) identified in the ethics issues table above will be addressed in order to adhere to the chical principles and what will be done to ensure that the activities are complaint with the EV/antional legal and ethical requirements of the country or countries where the tasks are to be carried out. It is reminded that for activities performed in a non-EU countries, they should also be allowed in at least one EU Member State.

Remaining characters

5000

You are at the end of Part A. If you are not sure whether you have completed everything correctly, click on "Show Error". Do not forget to save the modified data again.

< Other questions Validation result Exit form >

Table of contents Validate form Save form Save & exit form

#### Application forms

#### Validation result

Show Error

The red 'Show Error' button indicates an error due to a missing or incorrect value related to the call eligibility criteria. The submission of the proposal will be blocked unless that specific field is corrected!

ming

The yellow 'Show Warning' button indicates a warning due to a missing or incorrect value related to the call eligibility criteria. The submission of the proposal will not be blocked (proposal will be submitted with the missing or incorrect value).

Section	Description	
General Information	This section has not been validated yet	Show Error
CU	This section has not been validated yet	Show Error
Budget	The requested EU contribution should not be zero.	Show Error
Other questions	Working time commitment	Show Error
Other questions	Working time commitment	Show Error

12.

This is a Host Institution Letter of support (HIL), which you downloaded as one of the B Part documents. The HIL should be signed by the rector, please contact the team of the European Center or Research Support Office at your faculty.

After signing the document, we will send it back to you and it has to be uploaded to the system with other annexes.

#### Commitment of the Host Institution for ERC Calls 20231,2,3

The seplease fill in here the name of the legal entity that is associated to the proposal and
may host the principal investigator and the project (action) in case the application is
successful>>, which is the applicant legal entity,

confirms its intention to sign a supplementary agreement with <<p>lease fill in here the name of the principal investigator>>>

in which the obligations listed below will be addressed should the proposal be retained.

Performance obligations of the applicant legal entity (Host Institution) that will become the coordinator of the HE ERC Grant Agreement (hereafter referred to as the Agreement), should the proposal be retained and the preparation of the Agreement be successfully concluded:

The applicant legal entity (Host Institution) commits itself to ensure that the action tasks described in Annex 1 of the Agreement are performed under the guidance of the principal investigator who is expected to devote:

- in the case of a Starting Grant at least 50% of her/his working time to the ERC-funded project (action) and spend at least 50% of her/his working time in an EU Member State or Associated Country;
- in the case of a Consolidator Grant at least 40% of her/his working time to the ERCfunded project (action) and spend at least 50% of her/his working time in an EU Member State or Associated Country;
- in the case of an Advanced Grant at least 30% of her/his working time to the ERCfunded project (action) and spend at least 50% of her/his working time in an EU Member State or Associated Country.

**13**.



## **Budget breakdown**

- A. Direct personnel costs
- **B.** Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
- D. Internally invoiced goods and services
- E. Indirect costs

# Myth #5:

- The ERC budget affects the result of the evaluation.
- The budget is not an evaluation criterion. A possible reduction of the budget is discussed only after suggesting the proposal for funding.

## A. Direct personnel costs

- For the correct budgeting, you need to know your gross monthly salary, including personal supplement without remuneration from other projects.
- For an idea of the basic salary (without personal supplement) you can apply for, it is possible to

- look into the <u>CU salary regulation</u>, which sets the maximum salary threshold for each category.
- You should bear in mind that you are setting a 5–7 years outlook – reflect inflation, career progression and exchange rate movements and plan adequate financial reserves.
- In connection with the lump sum AdG, you will have to provide more detail on certain aspects. For example, personnel costs will have to be specified in person-months per staff category.

## **B.** Subcontracting costs

Do not specify the subcontractor's name in the budget, because a proper selection process (selection based on the best value for money quality) has to be done first. Describe only what the work will be and why the subcontractor must carry it out and not the host institution.

#### C. Purchase costs

- Purchase costs are divided into:
  - Travel and subsistence
  - Equipment (including major equipment)

- Consumables (including field work and animal costs)
- Publications and dissemination (including Open Access fees)
- Other additional direct costs (including CFS fee)
- Estimate the travel costs realistically and do not forget to include per diems in the calculation.
- In connection with the lump sum AdG, you will have to provide more detail on certain aspects. For example, equipment costs will have to include information on the depreciation rules that have been applied.
- In case the total amount of your grant exceeds € 430,000, your project must be first-level audited (CFS). The audit fee can be included in other direct costs (up to € 10,000). CFS is not applicable in lump sum AdG.

# D. Internally invoiced goods and services

 Typically, chemicals and other self-made consumables or costs for a kennel for experimental animals.

#### E. Indirect costs

- Indirect costs are fixed as a flat rate: 25% of direct costs (sum of the categories A and C).
- For more information see <u>Budgeting</u> recommendations from Technology Centre Prague (only in Czech). You can contact the <u>European</u> <u>Centre team</u> at any time, we will help you with the appropriate budgeting.



It's crucial to remember that ERC proposals aim at two distinct audiences. Your first audience is a virtual someone with limited knowledge about your topic who will read the

condensed version of your proposal. Your second audience comprises unknown individuals who, between them, may know your topic better than you; these people will read the detailed version. The interview is the most challenging aspect of the competition, as both audiences come together, you have no time to think about which question is coming from which audience, and every single word matters.

Anežka Kuzmičová (ERC StG)





#### **European Research Council**

Established by the European Commission

#### **Contact:**

European centre, Ovocný trh 560/5 116 36 Praha 1

More information: ec.cuni.cz

Want to get news about the latest research calls?

Send an email to ec@cuni.cz

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**European Centre, October 2023**