

## ERC Session 2025 Summary

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*This summary is to be used as a support document to the presentations of the session. Its content is based on the understanding of the author and revision by the speaker.*

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## Disclaimer

*The presentation and accompanying notes are based on the provisions of the ERC Work Programme 2025, as published by the European Research Council. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information provided, applicants are strongly advised to consult the official ERC documentation and updates on the Funding & Tenders Portal. Rules, eligibility criteria, and deadlines may be subject to change. This material is intended for guidance purposes only and does not replace official ERC guidelines.*

## ERC in Horizon Europe

**Horizon Europe** is the European Union's key funding programme for research and innovation, structured around **three main pillars**. **Pillar 1, "Excellent Science,"** is dedicated to supporting fundamental, high-quality research that advances the frontiers of knowledge. Within this pillar, the **European Research Council (ERC) is the flagship funding body for investigator-driven, bottom-up research.**

ERC grants provide substantial, flexible funding to individual researchers or small teams pursuing **ambitious, high-risk/high-gain projects across all fields of science.**

By enabling researchers to explore novel ideas without thematic constraints, ERC plays a critical role in nurturing scientific creativity and pushing the boundaries of what is currently known.

## ERC in a Nutshell

**ERC** can be considered a tool for **career development** since it is an individual grant that can be used to launch (STG), consolidate (COG) and further advance (ADV) researchers' career and **independence, autonomy and team**. Actually, in Horizon Europe, all other grants are gained by the organization. The only one solely focused on the researcher is the ERC and the MSCA-PF.

**ERC is bottom-up.** It is up to the researcher to come up with a blue-sky research project of excellence. There are no topics and no scientific restrictions.

**Evaluation criteria – Excellence.** The researcher and its proposed research project are evaluated only in the base of excellence and are evaluated by peers.

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**Breakthrough/Frontier research** is what ERC is looking for. Ambitious scientific challenges.

**5-year project, with reasonable budget.**

ERC grants are attributed to the Principal Investigator (PI) who must apply with the support of a **host institution located** in an EU Member State or a Horizon Europe associated country. However, if the project is selected for funding, or at any point during its implementation, the **PI retains the right to transfer the grant to another eligible host institution, should they decide to move.**

Eligibility for the different ERC schemes depends on the number of years since the candidate defended their doctoral thesis. (Check the guiding documents and the presentation).

The presentation was focused only in ERC-STG, COG and ADV.

## Before starting

Dedicate time to become familiar with the ERC funding scheme. The [ERC webpage](#) contains a lot of valuable information. Prospective applicants should really dedicate time to prepare him/herself if they want to succeed.

To prepare for ERC you should:

- Contact the Research Manager of your Research Unit,
- read the [ERC Work Program](#), [ERC guide](#), the [ERC guide for evaluators](#)<sup>1</sup>,
- study [past projects](#) (Abstract style, panels were they were funded, etc.)
- [assess your eligibility](#) and check if you have any possible extensions (date of PhD defence on January 1<sup>st</sup> year of the call)
- Explore the ERC webpage and watch the ERC Academy [videos](#).

ERC funds frontier research therefore you need to **present a convincing vision of your research idea with a well elaborated scientific question and show how it will advance**

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<sup>1</sup> there might be changes every year, please ensure you are reading the right documents

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**de State of the Art.** It has to be ambitious and should always be grounded on **preliminary observations/results to support its feasibility.**

It is very rare to win an ERC Grant at your first attempt. Statistics indicate that many successful applicants achieve funding after 2 or even 3 trials. ERC is a learning process. If your proposal is not selected for funding, you receive a thorough **feedback report from** expert peer reviewers. **This feedback** allows you to adjust your proposal/profile and try again. Persistence and resilience are essential **as the ability to manage frustration.**

ERC recognises that researchers may face career interruptions. See **extensions of your window of eligibility** on the ppt. If you have been in one of these cases (e.g., maternity/paternity leave, long-term illness, etc) you must submit evidence on the specific situation if asking for an extension.

### Panel Selection

**Selecting the right evaluation panel is one of the most strategic steps in preparing your ERC application.** The panel you choose will assess the scientific merit of your proposal, and its selection can significantly influence your chances of success. Before deciding to apply in a specific year, it is advisable to thoroughly study the panel structure and anticipate which panel is best positioned to understand and appreciate the nature and potential of your research.

To select the best panel, you should carefully revise its **ERC-specific Keywords**, as these are the ones that should drive your panel selection. Also, please note that each keyword is associated with a specific panel member and is used internally to assign your proposal to the most appropriate reviewers within the panel. Use the free keywords to describe the specificities of your idea (this will refine the panel members selection and the remote evaluators for stage 2)

**Panel members** are only public on the year after the call, but its composition is more or less steady (2/3 of the panel are the same) and they serve every other year. You should revise the panel members to properly select the one you are applying to.

You should analyse **previous funded projects** by the panel to understand better what is being funded ([ERC Hub](#)).

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## Proposal template and Evaluation

Before the deadline you have to submit a full application:

**Part A** (Administrative);

**Part B1** (5 pages project synopsis and 4 pages Narrative CV)

**Part B2** (14 pages extended project).

**Annexes** (host support letter, PhD certificate clearly mentioning the PhD defense date, any extensions support documents, any ethics-related support documents).

There are no guidelines to fill in the templates (B1 and B2). It is up to the researcher to organize its ideas and present it in a logic and coherent way. Sometimes the blank page can be scary. Be optimistic! It also gives you room for **creativity** 😊

**B1** includes the narrative C.V. where you present your track record and a summary and synopsis of your research idea. The Panel members are experts but not in your specific research field. B1 should be written to generalists. Treat them as experts but understand that they will not be familiar with all the terms you will use, make sure you explain well your idea, provide context and details and be clear.

At stage 1, evaluators assess:

- The originality and ambition of the research idea.
- The potential of the PI to drive groundbreaking research.
- Whether the project fits the ERC's ambition for frontier research.

**Important:** Step 1 panels read only Part B1. **Part B2 is not considered** at this stage.

Only the top 44 applicants for each panel move to Step 2 Evaluation where both **B1 and B2 documents** are revised. The Applicant will be invited for an online interview with the panel where she/he will make a presentation (its duration is panel specific) followed by a discussion with the panel.

**B2** includes your research project description in detail. As such B2 should be clear to allow that specialists and generalist clearly understand, value your project and see how it advances the SoA. External remote experts will not participate in the online interview but can provide feedback and questions.

At stage 2, evaluators assess:

- Scientific robustness, clarity of methodology.
- Feasibility of the project.
- Justification of resources.
- Ethical considerations.
- Quality and capacity of the host institution (although the grant is awarded to the PI).

### Resubmission Restrictions

ERC applies **specific restrictions on reapplying after an unsuccessful submission**, depending on the evaluation outcome. (Check the presentation for details)

**Note:** Restrictions apply **to the PI**, not to the proposal itself. Changing the proposal does not lift the ban; it is linked to your profile and your evaluation score.

### Approach the ERC strategically

**Plan your application strategically:** check your eligibility in advance.

**(When?)** When is the best time to apply according to your eligibility window, panel members, preliminary research data, relevant achievements.

**(Who?) Prepare your C.V:** describe your track record, competences and achievements to demonstrate your degree of independence and expertise.

**(What?) Start thinking in your idea:** discuss it with your peers, collect feedback from other disciplines, from profiles that can mimic generalists, how it will advance the SoA.

**(to Whom?) Identify the best Panel:** check the keywords, panel members, previous projects funded.

**(How?) Proposal:** Decide how you will approach your writing. Based on our experience it is best to write the B2 first and then resume it to the B1. Decide your structure, write clearly, include storytelling elements.

**(Where?) Host Institution:** choose your host institution; discuss career opportunities, ask for support to official documents (administrative step)

### ERC Funding Mechanisms

- **ERC Starting Grant – ERC-StG (full conditions in the ppt)**

Despite what you may think, to have chances of success at ERC StG you don't need a top C.V.. You need to show that you have **achieved some degree of independence** (conditions in the ppt), you **have competences** to develop the research idea you are proposing and an **excellent scientific project**. Evaluation panels do not compare CVs purely based on the number of years after PhD defense. Rather, they assess candidates within the context of their academic profile, focusing on the quality and impact of achievements relative to the time since PhD completion.

There is a minimum commitment from the PI to the ERC grant and to work in an EU member state or associated country (see ppt).

The PI should present a team of its own or to be hired, to help him develop the project.

- **ERC Consolidator – ERC CoG (full conditions in the ppt)**

ERC COG is attributed to PIs that are consolidating their independence. You need to show your independence through your achievements on your C.V., narrative C.V helps you cover some gaps and explain how deviation from a research career in the academy will be an added value for the development of your research idea.

You should have a team by now (even if small), that you can allocate to the project and increase with the grant. There is a minimum commitment from the PI to the ERC grant and to work in an EU member state or associated country (see ppt). **ERC Advance – ERC Adv (full conditions in the ppt)**

The ERC Advanced Grant provides substantial funding for **established** researchers to pursue groundbreaking projects. The PIs must be active researchers with 10+ years of significant achievements, demonstrating exceptional leadership in their field. Applicants should be approaching—not past—their career peak, emphasizing future potential. The Narrative CV is focuses in the PI last 10 years success, and PIs must show that they have contributed to other careers significantly, that have a clear leadership roles, etc. There is a minimum commitment from the PI to the ERC grant and to work in an EU member state or associated country (see ppt).

- **ERC PoC – ERC Proof-of-Concept** – funding mechanism only available to whom have already secured an ERC Grant.
- **ERC SyN – ERC Synergy**

This funding mechanism is used when one PI alone cannot solve the scientific challenge and thus, pair with additional PI, from the same or different organization, and work synergistically. There is no limitation to the number of years to have finished the PhD in order to apply. However, it is usually an instrument that senior researchers apply to when they are no longer eligible for the other ERC funding schemes. The success rate of ERC SyN is very low.

## Next Steps

ERC support through ERC Portugal, by FCT, and Pre-Award Network at IST research ecosystem:

ERC-Portugal – FCT

### [ERC-Portugal Program](#)

- **ERC-PT Pre-Assessment**: proposal review by international evaluators (former ERC panel members)

#### **Pre-Assessment Models:**

**Step 1: Review of Part B1** (Extended Synopsis and Narrative CV) **by one evaluator**, followed by a report.

**Step 2: Review of Parts B1 and B2 by 3 evaluators**, with three separate reports provided to preserve diverse perspectives.

#### **Eligibility:**

- Researchers must submit a single proposal per cycle, along with a commitment to apply to an ERC Call and support from their host institution.
- Documentation must be submitted in English and adhere to ERC formatting guidelines.

**DEADLINE:** two months in advance to the respective ERC deadline

Reports are sent approximately one month before the respective ERC application deadline, ensuring timely feedback for proposal improvement.

- **ERC-PT A-Projects**: €250 000 (StG, CoG and AdG) award for proposals that score A in the 2<sup>nd</sup> evaluation step



DEADLINE: 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025

- **ERC-PT Careers**: financial support to permanently hire ERC grantees

DEADLINE: 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025

### Institution's Pre-Award support to the IST research ecosystem

- Research Managers support at Research Unit
- ERC Club (every two weeks, Monday's mornings, ideation sessions)
- ERC sessions and Workshops



\*probable month to deliver your application to FCT-Pre-assessment scheme

**ERC Club Ideation sessions every two weeks**

**Researcher Manager at the Research Unit**

- Guidance materials for the ERC interview
- Mock interview

All the materials are available at IST-ID website.

***If you want to know more contact us at [pre-award@ist-id.pt](mailto:pre-award@ist-id.pt)***