ERC funding schemes: Rules of application and evaluation, with special focus on the novelties in the 2025-2027 ERC Work Programmes, Part 1

Konkoly Observatory (HUN-REN CSFK)

Gergely Bőhm, ERC NCP
Katalin Borvölgyi, ERC NCP

29 October 2025

European Research Council
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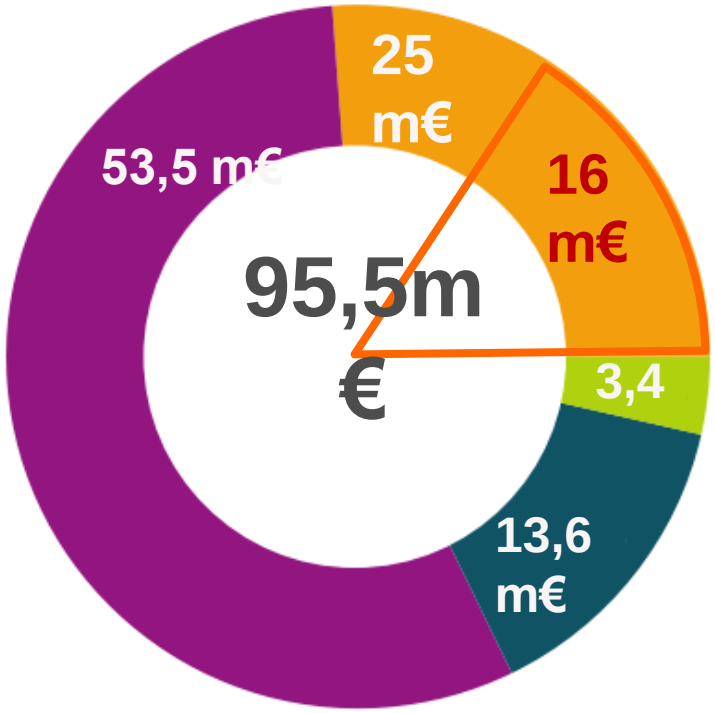
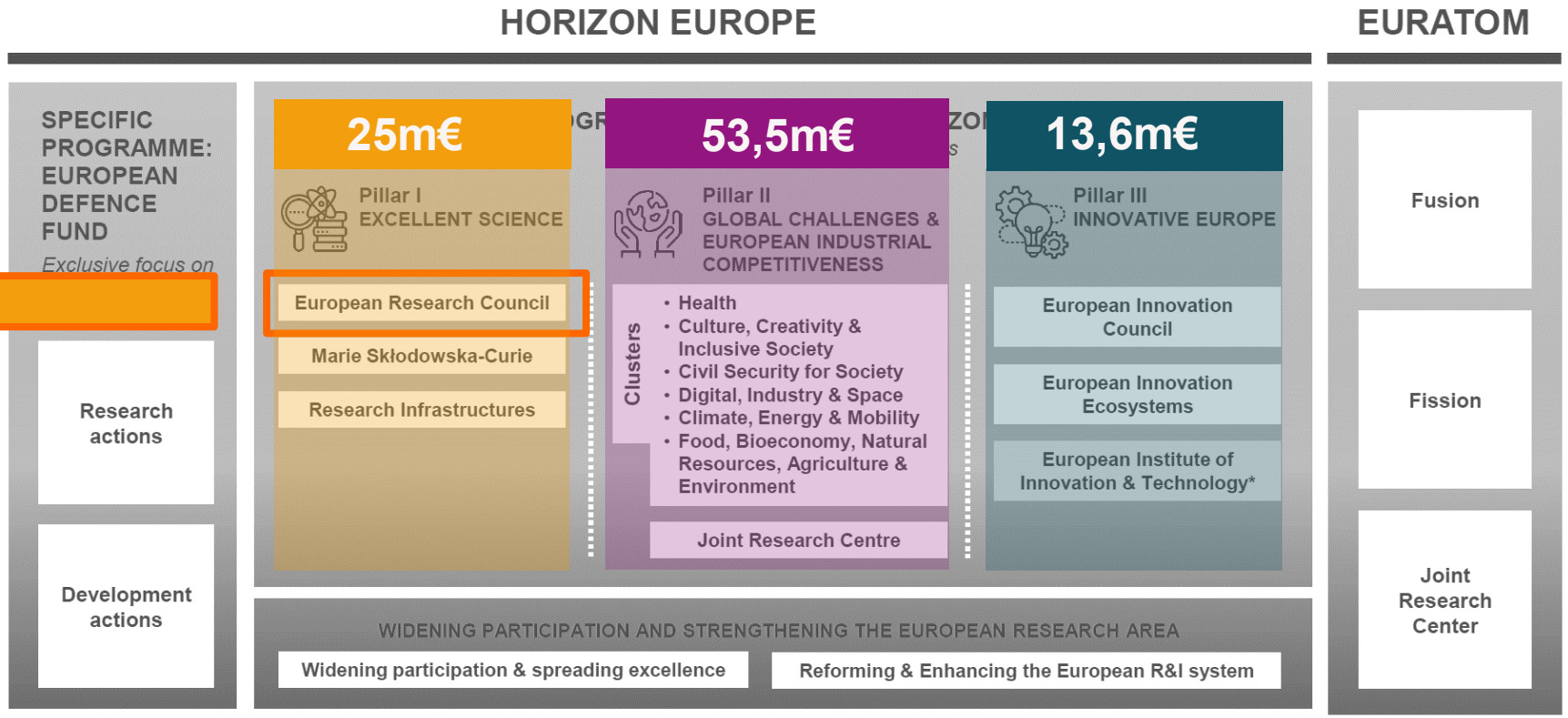
ERC is part of Horizon Europe

European Research Council

Pillar I – Excellent Science (25/95,5 million euros)

ERC budget 17% of Horizon Europe,
16 million € in HE compared to 13 million € in H2020





ERC principles

1 Principal Investigator (PI)

- from anywhere in the world, from 2 years after PhD in any career stage
- no limitations to the members of the research group

1 Research project

- frontier research in any field of science
- scientific breakthrough, ~~high risk – high gain~~

1 Evaluation criterion: SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE

- PI and the project

funding scientific breakthrough projects for 5 years in any career stage

NOT among the evaluation criteria

- host institution
- scientific field, direct social, economic impact, gender, age, nationality, etc.

…and a few more conditions

European Research Council

Host institution

- only in EU or associated countries
- university, research institute, company, private or public
- since 15 December 2022 public trust foundations in Hungary (and organisations operated by them) are not eligible as host institutions for new grant agreements (in proposals they are)

ERC grant is portable

- the PI can change HI even during the project

There is no consortium or co-financing

The PI

- must spend 50% of their (working) time at the HI, but can keep their job outside Europe

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What does an ERC grant offer?

- **recognition of scientific excellence,**
- new milestone in a researcher's career, **more attention, new opportunities,**
- **high risk research** in any field **without any thematic restriction**
- **start / develop your own research group as a PI**
  (invite researchers from abroad)
- 5-year research, financial **autonomy** even vis-à-vis the institution (portability)
- 1.5-3.5 million € **research funding** and flexibility in its use

ERC grants (2025 - 2026)

European Research Council

Starting Grant

early career researchers
2-7 years after PhD
1.5+1 **or 2** million €
5 years

Consolidator Grant

excellent researchers
7-12 years after PhD
2+ 1 **or 2** million €
5 years

Advanced Grant

established researchers
2.5+ 1 **or 2** million €
5 years

Proof-of-Concept Grant

for ERC grant holders
to market their research
150,000 €
for 1.5 years

Synergy Grant

2-4 PIs in joint research project
10 + 4 million €
for 6 years

Other opportunities

mentoring, visiting fellowships,
public engagement with
research etc.

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ERC grants (2027- what is available so far)

European Research Council

Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced Grant
early career researchers **0-10 years after PhD** 1.5+1 **or 2** million € 5 years	excellent researchers **5-15 years after PhD** 2+ 1 **or 2** million € 5 years	established researchers 2.5+ 1 **or 2** million € 5 years

Proof-of-Concept Grant	Synergy Grant	Other opportunities
for ERC grant holders to market their research 150,000 € for 1.5 years	2-4 PIs in joint research project 10 + 4 million € for 6 years	mentoring, visiting fellowships, public engagement with research etc.

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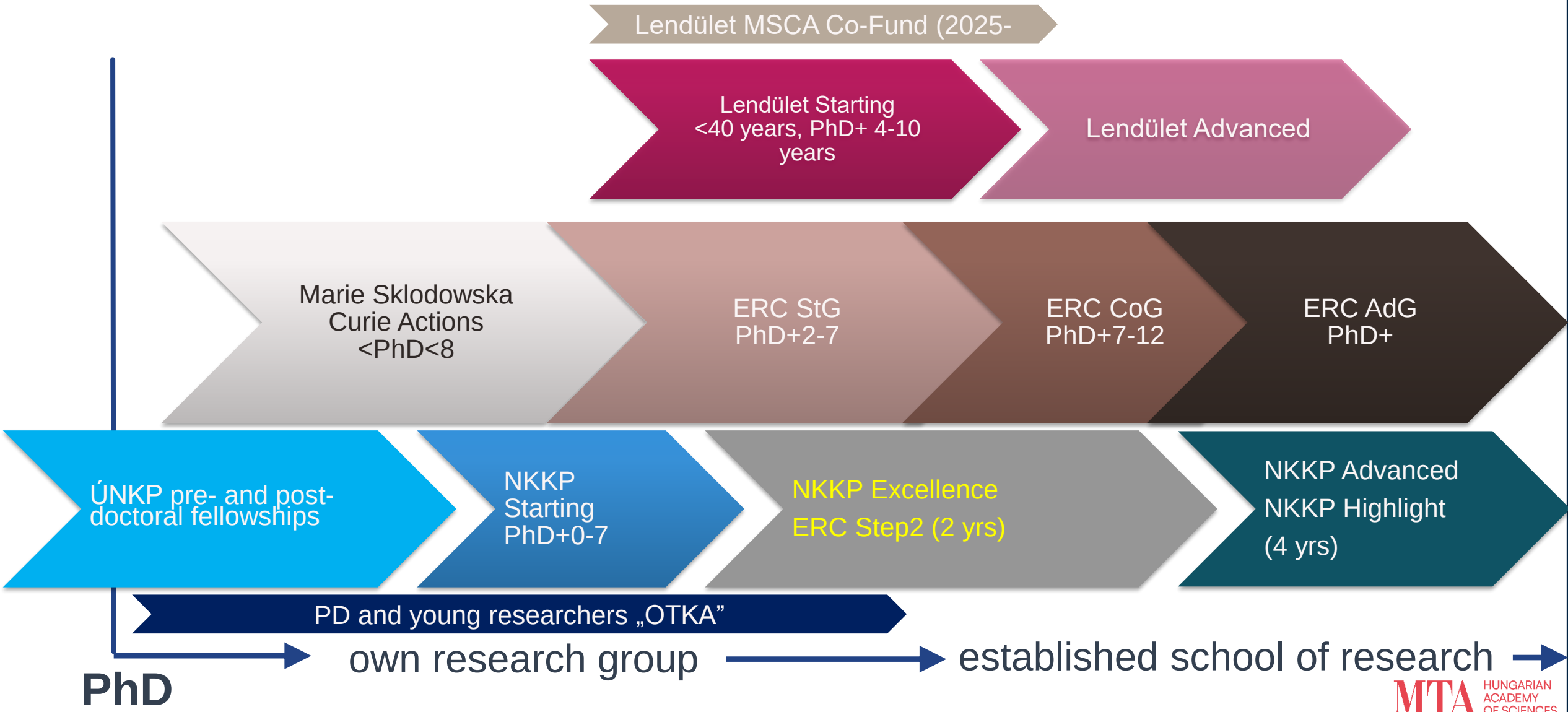
EU and Hungarian funding opportunities for PIs



Starting Grant (StG)

European Research Council

Support for excellent Principal Investigators at the career stage at which they are starting their own independent research team or programme.

- **2-7 years** of experience since the completion of PhD (certified date of the PhD defence)
- a scientific track record showing evidence of the potential for research independence
  - **For example: at least one important publication as main author** or without the participation of their PhD supervisor
- max. 5 years; **1.5 million € (+ 1 million €)**
- **minimum** time commitment: 50% in a MS or AC, **50% on the ERC project**

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Consolidator Grant (CoG)

Support for excellent Principal Investigators at the career stage at which they may still be consolidating their own independent research team or programme.

7-12 years of experience since the completion of PhD (certified date of the PhD defence)

- a scientific track record showing evidence of research independence
  - **several important publications as main author** or without the participation of their PhD supervisor
  - ~~significant publications (as main author) in major international peer-reviewed multi-disciplinary scientific journals, or significant publications in the leading international journals of their field, or research monographs, conference invitations, patents, etc.~~
- max. 5 years; **2 million € (+ 1 million €)**
- **minimum** time commitment: 50% in a MS or AC, **40% on the ERC project**

Advanced Grant (AdG)

Support for established, leading principal investigators who seek long-term funding to pursue a ground-breaking, high-risk project

- **active researchers** who have a track-record of significant research achievements ~~**in the last 10 years**~~ BUT in the CV and track record: „with an emphasis on more recent achievements”
  - ~~10 publications as main author (or in those fields where alphabetical order of authorship is the norm, joint author) in major international peer-reviewed multidisciplinary scientific journals, and/or in the leading international peer-reviewed journals, and/or peer-reviewed conferences proceedings of their respective field;~~
  - ~~3 major research monographs or 5 patents / 10 invited presentations / 3 research exhibitions / international awards and prizes / mentoring young researchers / innovation leadership.~~
- max. 5 years; **2.5 million € (+ 1 million €)**
- **minimum** time commitment: 50% in a MS or AC, **30% on the ERC project**

Extension of eligibility (StG and CoG)

- **Maternity:** 18 months for each child born or a documented longer total maternity leave
- **Paternity or parental leave:** documented time of paternity or parental leave taken before the call deadline
- **Long-term illness or national service**: documented amount of leave taken by the PI before the call deadline for each incident which occurred after the date of the successful defence of their PhD degree
- **Disability:** extension corresponding to the reduced amount of working time (including leave taken) and/or the degree of disability of the Principal Investigator
- **Clinical training**: documented amount of clinical training received by the PI after the reference date of the first eligible degree and before the call deadline, max. 4 years
- **Major disasters**: documented time of a PI's inability to work before the call deadline due to a major disaster, which occurred after the date of the successful defence of their PhD
- **Seeking asylum**: documented time of the PI's inability to work before the call deadline due to seeking asylum
- **Gender-based violence or any other form of violence**: documented duration of the PI's inability to work due to being a victim of violence

Sole criterion: scientific excellence

PRIMARILY: the research project

- Ground-breaking nature, novelty
- Ambition,
- Feasibility (quality of methodology, credibility, scientific approach)

And secondly: the researcher's excellence / ability to implement the project

- Intellectual capacity, creativity
- Commitment
- with a focus on how much these serve the successful execution of the project

In administrative terms an ERC application is a simple process via the online submission system (EU Funding & Tenders Portal) https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home.

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Call calendar in the 2025 Work Programme

European Research Council

	Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced Grant	Synergy Grant
Call identifier	ERC-2025-StG	ERC-2025-CoG	ERC-2025-AdG	ERC-2025-SyG
Call opens	10 July 2024	26 September 2024	22 May 2025	11 July 2024
Call deadline	15 October 2024	14 January 2025	28 August 2025	6 November 2024
Budget million EUR (estimated number of grants)	751 (483)	719 (354)	683 (276)	500 (48)

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Call calendar in the 2026 Work Programme

European Research Council

	Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced Grant	Synergy Grant
Call identifier	ERC-2026-StG	ERC-2026-CoG	ERC-2026-AdG	ERC-2026-SyG
Call opens	9 July 2025	25 September 2025	28 May 2026	10 July 2025
Call deadline	14 October 2025	13 January 2026	27 August 2026	5 November 2025
Budget million EUR (estimated number of grants)	705 (450)	673 (328)	747 (294)	500 (49)

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Information on 2024 and 2025 call results

Starting Grant 2024: **494** grantees, (0)

Synergy Grant 2024: **57** granted projects, involving **201** PIs, **(1) Stephen Mojzsis, HUN-REN CSFK (PE)**

Consolidator Grant 2024: **328** grantees, **(1) Ambrus Kaposi, Eötvös Loránd University (PE)**

Advanced Grant 2024: **281** grantees, (0)

Proof of Concept Grant 2025 DL1 (ERC-2025-PoC-DL1): **29** grantees **(1) László Nagy, HUN-REN SZBK (LS)**

Starting Grant 2025: **478** grantees **(2) András Gilyén (HUN-REN Rényi, PE), Gábor Dobó (Kassák Alapítvány, SH)**

Synergy Grant 2025: **early November**

Consolidator Grant 2025: **end of December**.

Elements of an ERC application

European Research Council

Online submission here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home

Part A - Administrative forms

1. General information
2. Administrative data of participating organisations
3. Budget and description of resources
4. Ethics and security (Ethics Issues Table)
5. Call-specific questions (e.g. time commitment)

Annexes

- Host Institution support letter
- PhD certificate + proof of successful PhD defence date (for StG and CoG)
- etc (e.g. documents justifying career breaks)
- **New: eligibility extension request**

Part B1 (pdf)
(Step 1 & Step 2)

Proposal summary (abstract) + Cross-panel or cross-domain nature: explanation (in SyG: only keywords, not panels!)

a – PART I of Scientific Proposal – 5 pages NEW (formerly known as Extended synopsis)

b – Curriculum Vitae + Track Record – up to 4 pages for each Principal Investigator

Part B2 (pdf)
(Step 2)

PART II of the Scientific proposal – 7 pages NEW
(in SyG: 10 pages)

a – A detailed explanation of the project implementation (formerly: State-of-the-art and objectives + methodology)

b – References and Funding ID (does not count towards page limits)

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Summary of specific features of ERC evaluation

20,000 reviewers (panel members + remote reviewers)

Only experts invited by the Scientific Council
(unlike in other calls)

28 panels covering all the three scientific domains

Applicant should select the panel(s) to which the application should be assigned (single panel or primary + secondary panels)

Panel members may call on external experts, an application is reviewed by at least 5-8 scientists, in case of interdisciplinary topics this may reach as many as 10-15!

Typical set-up: assessment in two phases (Step 1, Step 2)

In Step 2, interview by the panel (StG, CoG, AdG – since 2020 -, in SyG there is a 3rd phase: interview phase)

Selection of the panel(s) by the applicant

Does not apply to Synergy Grant

Single panel: highly recommended

What about interdisciplinary / multidisciplinary research topics?

Primary panel + secondary panel (justify!): not recommended

For the secondary panel, the panel chair of the primary panel will invite one expert from that panel to give an individual report, but apart from that, the expert will not be involved any longer in the evaluation process (will not attend the applicant's interview).

To account for any interdisciplinary aspect: **choose keywords from panels other than yours, as these will guide the panel chair in inviting external experts**.

The evaluation process

European Research Council

STEP 1

Remote assessment by panel members
based on „B1" (Part I and PI)

Panel meeting

REJECTED „B" or „C"

NOT INVITED „A"

Invited „A" PASS to STEP 2

STEP 2

Remote assessment by panel members and remote reviewers
based on the full proposal (B1+B2+ budget and resources)

Panel meeting + interview
outcome: a ranked list of proposals

REJECTED „B" or UNFUNDED „A"

RESERVE LIST „A"

FUNDED „A"

Evaluation report

Redress (administrative)

Changes in the 2024 calls

- (Reform of the) Research assessment: **focus on the project**
- Broad assessment of the applicant (introduction of the „narrative CV”)
- Change to the evaluation procedure
- **Lump sum funding of Advanced Grants**
- Changes to the evaluation panels

Changes: research assessment with focus on the project

- Evaluation based on the sole criterion of scientific excellence in StG, CoG AdG and SyG – NO CHANGE

BUT:

- Panels will **primarily evaluate** the research project in terms of its **ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility** and
- Will evaluate the **applicant's intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment** also with a **focus on how much these serve the successful execution** of the project

Note: This guiding principle has existed already but will from now on be given more emphasis.

Changes: broad assessment of the applicant

- Detailed prescriptive profiles of applicants will NO LONGER BE APPLIED

INSTEAD:

- CV and Track Record are **merged into 1 document of up to 4 pages**
- **More freedom for applicants in drawing up this 4-page document („narrative CV”):**
  - A list of up to **10 research outputs** (more emphasis on more recent ones; explanation and comment may be added);
  - A list of examples of **peer recognition** (e.g. prizes; explanation and comment may be added);
  - **Career breaks, unusual career paths**, any particularly noteworthy **contributions to the research community** can be included (not to be evaluated by the panel but important to provide context for assessing the PI’s research achievements and peer recognition in relation to their career stage).

ERC Starting Grant Mentoring Event on 31st May 2023 by Young Academy of Europe on the narrative CV: link to the full video recording here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZjesMzOQeQ&t=4s

Changes: evaluation procedure

For **Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants**:

- **a maximum of 44 proposals per panel will be assessed at Step 2**

For **Synergy Grants**:

At Step 1: Proposals will be retained for step 2 based on the outcome of the Step 1 evaluation and **a budgetary cut-off level of up to seven times the panel's indicative budget**;

At Step 2: Proposals will be retained for step 3 based on the outcome of the Step 2 evaluation and **a budgetary cut-off level of up to four times the panel's indicative budget**.

Changes: evaluation procedure

- For Starting, Consolidator, Advanced and Synergy Grants, **new scoring** at Step 1:
  - **„A invited" – is of excellent quality and ranked sufficiently high to pass to step 2 of the evaluation**
  - **„A not invited" – is of excellent quality but not ranked sufficiently high to pass to step 2 of the evaluation, though not subject to any submission restriction!**
  - „B" – is of high quality but not sufficient to pass to step 2 of the evaluation (subject to submission restriction!)
  - „C" – is not of sufficient quality to pass to step 2 of the evaluation (subject to submission restriction!)

Changes: lump sum funding in Advanced Grants

European Research Council

- From 2024, in Advanced Grants, **a single lump sum contribution for the entirety of the project** as approved by the relevant ERC panel will be awarded
- Payment of this sum will be based on the work carried out and reported, irrespective of the actual costs incurred for the project or the successful outcome of the project activities - – that is, payment based on work completion, not linked to successful outcome
- **Detailed budget table** in the application, **based on realistic cost estimates** (cost estimates: an approximation of the project's actual costs, subject to same eligibility rules as with actual cost ERC grants!) – more reflection needed when preparing the budget
- **Additional funding** (e.g. to purchase major equipment) is still **possible** and will be made part of the lump sum.
- **Portability** of the grant remains **possible**.
- **At the start of the project**, the ERC grant beneficiaries will receive **80% of the total grant**, and the rest will be paid upon completion of the project.
- One **single formal work package** covering the entire project.

Changes: lump sum funding in Advanced Grants

- **What does it mean in terms of proposal submission?**
  - More structured information on budget:
    - ✓ **Budget table: person-months** per staff category
    - ✓ **Budget narrative**: structured in 6 boxes
    - ✓ **Equipment depreciation table**: Excel table as mandatory attachment to be uploaded
  - **Additional Declaration 10** – new and specific to Lump Sum proposal (declaring that cost estimates have been established in line with:
    - ✓ Institution's usual accounting practices and
    - ✓ Basic eligibility conditions of EU actual cost grants.

Changes: lump sum funding in Advanced Grants

- **What does it mean in terms of evaluation?**
  - **Scientific excellence remains** the single evaluation criterion
  - **Budget assessed during evaluation** – assessment of cost estimates based on sound financial management (costs should be eligible, reasonable, non-excessive)
    - ✓ Panel will not only **assess** resources (i.e. number of staff), but also **associated personnel cost**
      - Benchmark against which it is assessed: **historical ERC personnel cost data** (available for applicants and panel members on ERC website, NOT THE SAME AS HORIZON EUROPE DASHBOARD – actual personnel costs paid since 2018 in ERC grants, displayed by country and staff category)

Changes: lump sum funding in Advanced Grants

European Research Council

- **What does it mean in terms of implementation, payment and ex-post control?**
  - **Budget table** included in the proposal is **removed from the Grant Agreement**
    - ✓ Full flexibility regarding transfer between cost categories
  - **Amendments to Grant Agreement:** in the **same** way **as with actual cost grants**
  - **Reporting and payment:**
    - ✓ **80% pre-financing** to ensure cash-flow
    - ✓ **1 scientific mid-term report** to assess progress and deviations
    - ✓ **1 single payment (20%) at the end** of the project
  - **Ex-post control: no financial audits, only technical reviews** on proper implementation and compliance with non-financial obligations (such as ethics, procurement, PI's time commitment)
  - **Keeping records:** technical documents, prototypes, documentaton required by good research practice (e.g. lab books, etc.)

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Additional information on lump sum funding in Advanced Grants

- https://www.youtube.com/live/oKhCdAavkMI (video)
- https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-06/Webinar-for-applicants-AdG-lump-sums.pdf (slides)
- https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-08/Webinar-AdG%202024-Applicants_August%202024.pdf

Evaluation panels for 2026

Evaluation panels in 3 scientific domains:

- **Life sciences (LS): 9 panels**
- **Physical sciences and engineering (PE): 11 panels**
- **Social sciences and humanities (SH): 8 panels**
- Panel structure for 2026:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2026/wp_horizon-erc-2026_en.pdf **(ERC Work Programme 2026 pp. 57-59)**

Changes for 2025, 2026, 2027

For 2025

- Additional funding increased from 1 to 2 million euros (for PIs moving to Europe in AdG) through **amendment of WP 2025;**

For 2026

- New categories for eligibility window extension: parental leave, gender-based violence or any other form of violence
- New restriction on resubmission
- New structure for Part I and Part II
- Additional funding availability extended
- „Supergrant” – expected to be introduced **through amendment of WP2026**

For 2027

- New eligibility windows for StG and CoG

2026 Changes: submission and resubmission

- **Applicants with SyG 2025 score „B” at Step 1 cannot apply to the 2026 Synergy Grant call**

- ERC grantees applying for a new ERC grant are required to finish their running project within 2 years from the submission deadline of the call to which they are applying. **However, under certain circumstances they may remain eligible for the new grant even if their running grant needs to be extended beyond the 2-year period after the call deadline.**

2026 new proposal structure

- **Scientific Proposal Part I** (max. 5 pages)
- **Scientific Proposal Part II** (max. 7 pages / Synergy Grant: max. 10 pages)
- **CV and Track Record** (max. 4 pagesl)
- **Resources and Time Commitment** (max. 2 pages - does not apply for SyG)
- **Funding ID** does not count towards page limits

2026 new proposal structure

Scientific Proposal Part I

- lay out the current state of knowledge
- explain the scientific question and the objectives of the project, and
- present the overall approach or research strategy to reach the goals of the project

Scientific Proposal Part II

- a detailed explanation of the project implementation, including research methodology, work plan, risk assessment, mitigating measures and any further necessary background not included in Part I

2026 Changes in evaluation

European Research Council

Step 1:

Only Part I of the Scientific Proposal + CV and Track Record are assessed

- focus on the project idea
- **feasibility of the scientific approach is no longer assessed**
- synergy aspects are only assessed in Step 2 for SyG

Step 2:

- Scientific Proposal Part I + Part II + CV and Track Record + Resources and Time Commitment (from Part A) + Annex on Grants/Grant Applications (Funding ID) are assessed
- focus on methodology, feasibility, operation (running of the research team)

2026 Changes in evaluation

Discussion of low-ranking applications

Current rule: Every proposal to be discussed formally at the panel meeting at Step 1

New rule: Any proposal that receives *at least one mark above 3.5* (on a scale of 1-5) for the research project must be discussed in the panel. A proposal that received a *mark of 3.5 or lower from all reviewers* does not need to be discussed in the panel unless the panel explicitly decides otherwise. This new rules is expected to reduce the number of proposals requiring discussion by approx. 30 percent

2026 Changes in evaluation

Changes to the ERC evaluation procedures: background and rationale

by Maria Leptin, ERC President:

https://erc.europa.eu/system/files/2025-09/Changes_to_ERC_evaluation_procedures_background_rationale.pdf

Background information and explanation on:

- Format of the Scientific Proposal
- Workload for panel members
- Adjustments to eligibility windows

2026 Changes in additional funding

- No subcategories, any eligible cost can be accepted
- Increase from 1 to 2 million euros for PIs moving to Europe
- Freedom in restructuring the additional funding if necessary to achieve the project objectives

„Supergrant”: what we know at the moment

- Announced at the “Choose Europe” conference (Paris) by Ursula von der Leyen
- Grant period: up to 7 years
- Highly ambitious projects
- Excellence only
- No restriction on the scientific field, career stage, age, or nationality
- Lump sum
- **May be announced by the end of the year through an amendment of WP2026**

2027 Changes in eligibility window

- **Starting Grant: 0-10 years after PhD**
- **Consolidator Grant: 5-15 years after PhD**

- Only **1 StG and 1** CoG for any PI (a Starting Grant holder may not apply to the Starting Grant again but should apply to the Consolidator Grant; a Consolidator Grant holder may not apply to the Consolidator Grant again but should apply to the Advanced Grant – a CoG grantee is considered by the ERC to be ready for an Advanced Grant!; no restriction on the number of AdG one can obtain)

- Eligibility extensions do not change

Forms of support to ERC applicants offered by the Hungarian ERC NCP team

Assistance with preparation of application package or with preparation for the interview (including preparation of Powerpoint presentation following panel instructions and mock interview training before mock panel)

Participation in the **ERC's Mentoring Initiative** launched in 2021:

- The ERC Scientific Council approved the new Mentoring Initiative (MI) proposed by the Working Group on Widening European Participation in 2021.
- The aim of this initiative is **supporting ERC applicants from countries which are not performing so well in ERC calls**, inspired by the experience of some research agencies and host institutions which put in place programmes to support ERC applicants, but struggle to identify international experts to provide coaching and advise.
- The annually updated database of mentors prepared by ERCEA contains data on ERC grantees and former panel members who have volunteered to act as mentors.

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Evaluation by panel members: What do they look for?

European Research Council

CRITERION 1 - RESEARCH PROJECT

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project

To what extent does the proposed research address important scientific questions? (Step1 2026-)

To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?

~~To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a high risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?~~

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 timescales and resources adequate and properly justified?

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Evaluation by panel members: What do they look for?

European Research Council

CRITERION 2 - PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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?

~~The questions below can have one of the following five responses: Exceptional/Excellent/Very Good/Good/Non-competitive~~

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Evaluation reports

- confidential, do not represent the entire evaluation process,
  (for example discussion at panel meetings, reference to interviews)

Contain

- basic administrative information on the project and the PI
- abstract
- **evaluation criteria (as in the Work Programme)**
- panel score (A, B, C)
- ranking range (1-100%, for example 1-36%),
- panel comment (summary, often rather generic, but always in 2 parts: 1. Ground-breaking nature 2. Scientific approach)
- **individual reviewers (~3 to 8) comments in 3 paragraphs:**
  - Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project
  - Scientific Approach
  - Principal Investigator

The research project - General observations

- reviewers **strictly follow the evaluation criteria**
  (if they go beyond they usually make very short positive comments to the research environment, and social-economic-medical impact of the study)
- due to the overall high quality of ERC proposals, **the comments are usually much nicer than the scores would suggest**.
  „B" proposals would often get a review that still reads „excellent"
- some reviewers do look for gaps, flaws, weaknesses in the proposal, but these do not necessarily mean that the project is dismissed
- even in the comments for „funded" proposals **there can be doubts or weaker points identified, yet the panel supports them**
- however if the **lack of novelty or groundbreaking nature** is identified, **the project fails**
- there are differences throughout panels and domains

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact „C” - negative comments

- „It is a **very focused** project.”
- „I consider it **rather incremental** than groundbreaking.”
- „the research would be solid and incremental rather than transformative”
- However, upon reviewing the state of the art at a high level**, there are already real solutions on the market** that appear to solve some of the identified issues
- „the proposal is correlative, **lacks ambition and does not go beyond the state-of-the-art**”
- „However **the feasibility is not clearly demonstrated**: there is no hint on how…”
- „there are **no sufficient data and information that would make the hypothesis and the new proposal convincing or appealing**.”

importance
novelty
ambition
high gain

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact „B”

- „the PI has chosen to tackle a new research theme”
- „this **ambitious** proposal aims at…”
- „The proposed work is **highly ambitious** and **could potentially** resolve long-standing controversy in the field,”
- „**Some degree of ground-breaking approach**”
- ”The proposal uses many state-of-the-art techniques in order to be able to address a **fundamental and significant problem**”
- „if fully successful this proposal would generate knowledge that **will have significant impact on a number of key scientific fields”**
- **has the potential of contributing to understanding beyond its immediate research** focus and expanding into areas important to applications
- „The proposal is **not very risky**.”

importance
novelty
ambition

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact „A”

- „The study **has broader implications** shedding light to…”
- „The proposed research addresses an **important and timely** challenging question, **that is of high relevance to fundamental …. Research.”**
- „The proposed project **is well grounded in supporting evidence.**”
- ”The proposed **methodology is state-of-the-art and is well suited** to the proposed studies.”
- „Strengths include the **mixed methods and the detailed plans for the dissemination of results**.”
- „the techniques planned **mitigate the risk** and are well chosen to investigate the hypotheses”

importance
novelty
ambition
high-risk
high-gain
balance

Scientific approach „C”

- „The proposal **contains a lot of unclear phrasing** and it is **not clear how the PI plans to answer the 5 hypotheses**”
- „the project is **so matriculate that there is practically no room left for failure**”
- „The planned program is extension of the research in the PI’s team. Unfortunately, the **proposal does not offer alternative, contingency strategies** to circumvent potential difficulties and offers no exploitation of the gathered basic research knowledge”

appropriate/novel methodology

Feasibility of the the project is mostly evaluated based on B2, in B1 the focus is on the appropriate/novel methodology, so in case of „C” rated (Step 1) proposals, comments are often shorter.

Scientific approach „B”

- „the scientific approach is **feasible as the aim is simple”**
- „The **methodology is well described but encompasses a very broad range of challenges,** all of very high-risk level.”
- „The proposed methodologies are novel; however, they also raise questions that, while not affecting the validity of the proposal, must be addressed **to make the proposal objectives clearer and with a broader applicability”**
- „The **budget plan is not fully transparent and reproduceable**”
- „The methodology and work plan are described carefully. … Unexpectedly, such detailed **description does not include indication on the human and instrumental resources needed to implement the various tasks**.

In general: comments are far more detailed for „A” and „B” ranked proposals and go into technical details (external reviewers vs. panel members acting as generalist B1 vs. B2)

appropriate / novel methodology

in Step2 feasibilty

Scientific approach „A”

- ”The proposed **methodology is state-of-the-art and is well suited** to the proposed studies.”
- „Considering the strong multidisciplinary expertise of the PI, this project seems **feasible** from a technical point of view and **is likely to lead to new insights.”**
- „Strengths include the **mixed methods and the detailed plans for the dissemination of results**.”
- „the techniques planned **mitigate the risk** and are well chosen to investigate the hypotheses”
- „She is proposing to **develop novel methodologies** … She also seems to be well aware of possible pitfalls/problems and **proposes reasonable alternative strategies**.”
- „The proposed approach is **carefully described** with 3 **independent tasks** which chiefly rely on the strong expertise of the PI. …. For each task, a series of **state-of-the-art yet challenging experiments** are proposed”

feasibility
appropriate / novel methodology

Research project - common mistakes

Often

- **lack of novelty** (incremental, does not go beyond the state-the-art,
- missing supporting evidence
- unclear phrasing
- not high-gain…
- not convincing enough methodology, **no plan „B”**
  unsufficient risk assessment,

importance
novelty
ambition

feasibility
appropriate/novel
methodology

Not very often

- **lack of importance** (too focused, too narrow, only practical implications)
- overambitious / not feasible: only risky elements
- wrongly assessed need for resources (human, time, very seldom financial)

Research project - highly valued elements

- **novelty, ground-breaking nature (idea)**
- **appropriate and novel methodology**
- **high gain…**

Less obvious

- **fundamental contribution to the scientifc field**
- **implications go beyond the field** of the project
- **appreciable impact** (as of importance, relevance)
- **clear and strong motivation**
- evidence on the **timeliness** (competitors)
- **clarity, overall quality**, detailed descriptions of the methodology and working arrangements
- **risks are well identified and well managed**, objectives are at least partly feasible for sure
- plans for **dissemination**

importance
novelty
ambition

feasibility
appropriate/n
ovel
methodology

Prinicipal investigator

Reviewers rate the PI's ability based on:

- To what extent has the PI demonstrated the **ability to conduct ground-breaking research**? (often assessed by making references to the proposal)
- To what extent does the PI provide evidence of **creative original ~~independent~~ thinking**?
- To what extent does the PI have the required **scientific expertise and capacity** to successfully execute the project?

There are no rating anymore only comments…

Principle investigator – general observations

- Compared to the research project there is a lot less information on the assessment of the PI.
- **Clearly negative comments only for „C” projects.**
- Quite often descriptive summaries of the PIs CV, **highlighting relevant elements regarding the project** (feasibilty)
- Nevertheless, it is the PI’s CV and track record that give credibility to the project and it seem to be considered when assessing the feasibility of the project. (sometimes also the available human resources going beyond the PI…)

Prinicipal investigator – negative comments

- „I am **not convinced that the proponent understands the key** physics **issues here**,"
- „His career shows **no record of ground-breaking multidisciplinary research**."
- The principal investigator CV does not provide any evidence of the ability to conduct ground-breaking research, nor of creative thinking. He has co-authored papers on diverse topics, none is well cited. There are no other signs of scientific quality (prizes, awards, keynotes, ...)
- The PI has a few publications describing the use of … research methods to solve problems in practice. However, **their record does not include publications at top venues of** … research that seem necessary for the proposed research.
- „The only aspect that might raise some concerns is **his lack of management experience."**
- „ …**he has no track record in the domain of the proposal**. This is clearly a new research direction for him that significantly differs from his previous work."
- „There are **no clear, objective indicators in their track record suggesting he is a leading expert** in the specific field of the project…"

conduct ground-breaking research

creative, original thinking

expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project

Prinicipal investigator – positive comments

- „The PI **received several prestigious fellowships**. His scientific **visibility is good** as demonstrated by the appreciable number of invited and contributed talks at international conferences and several review articles and book chapters that he co-authors."
- „He has published several publications (**many as first or corresponding author**) in good journals … ~~with citations which are a bit on the lower side~~."
- „the PI is a **"natural" candidate** to explore …" (expertise, motivation)
- „He is **clearly determined** to fully settle on this research direction."
- **Scientific independence is demonstrated** by the ideas proposed in the research proposal.
- „The PI **also made substantial contributions as a graduate student."**
- „The collaborations that he has set up and the **time spent in overseas internships or post-doctoral fellowships** have been extremely productive."
- Additionally, **the inclusion of collaborators to augment the capabilities in the PI's laboratory** clearly demonstrate a holistic view of the problem that **will be instrumental for a successful execution**
- „… level of **commitment of the PI to the project is appropriate** to achieve the proposed goals."
- „The **PI has secured funding for a different project and has applied for a large national grant also** on a different subject."

conduct ground-breaking research

creative, original thinking

expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project

Principle investigators – highly valued elements

- **strong publication record** to establish: **independence, ground-breaking results**
- **at least one publication that is linked to the topic of the proposal**
- list all (important) **grants, fellowships, awards**
- **high commitment (time)** for the project
- **motivation** to conduct the proposed research
- any **leadership** role (even at StG)
- demonstration of the **ability to attract funding**
- list of **collaborators**
- **mobility**
- **visibility** (conferences, website, etc.)

How to prepare for the application?
How to avoid common mistakes?

European Research Council

Submission is simple, but a successful **application requires thorough preparations, and preferably a long-term strategy**, not only from the researcher but also from the host institution!

- **be aware of all requirements**
  (read carefully the **ERC Work Programme** + Information for Applicants, AGA)
  and **make sure to address all evaluation criteria**
- **start working on the CV and your track record well in advance** already with an eye on the ERC requirements, and above all independence
- **increase your visibility** (not only publications, but conferences, website, talks, etc.)
- **choose the right timing** (CV and the project idea), **re-submissions** are more successful!
- choose the **right panel** (27: LS-9, SH-7, PE-11, (2023)), success rate is supposed to be the same, but the right experts are of key importance
- **host institution** is not an evaluation criterion, but the help they provide can be decisive

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How to prepare for the application?
How to avoid common mistakes?

European Research Council

- **leave time to discuss and polish the project idea**
- read project summaries, abstracts; learn about already funded projects
- **write and re-write** several times, make sure the proposal is **structured, easy to read, clear and interesting**
- **state all achievements**, mention collaborators
- demonstrate your **ability to lead the project**
- **use all the help available**: ERC website, host institution, colleagues, grantees, NCPs
- **do not leave everything for the last moment**

Remember: Winning an ERC grant is a great success, but an unsuccessful ERC application is already an important step towards a successful one!

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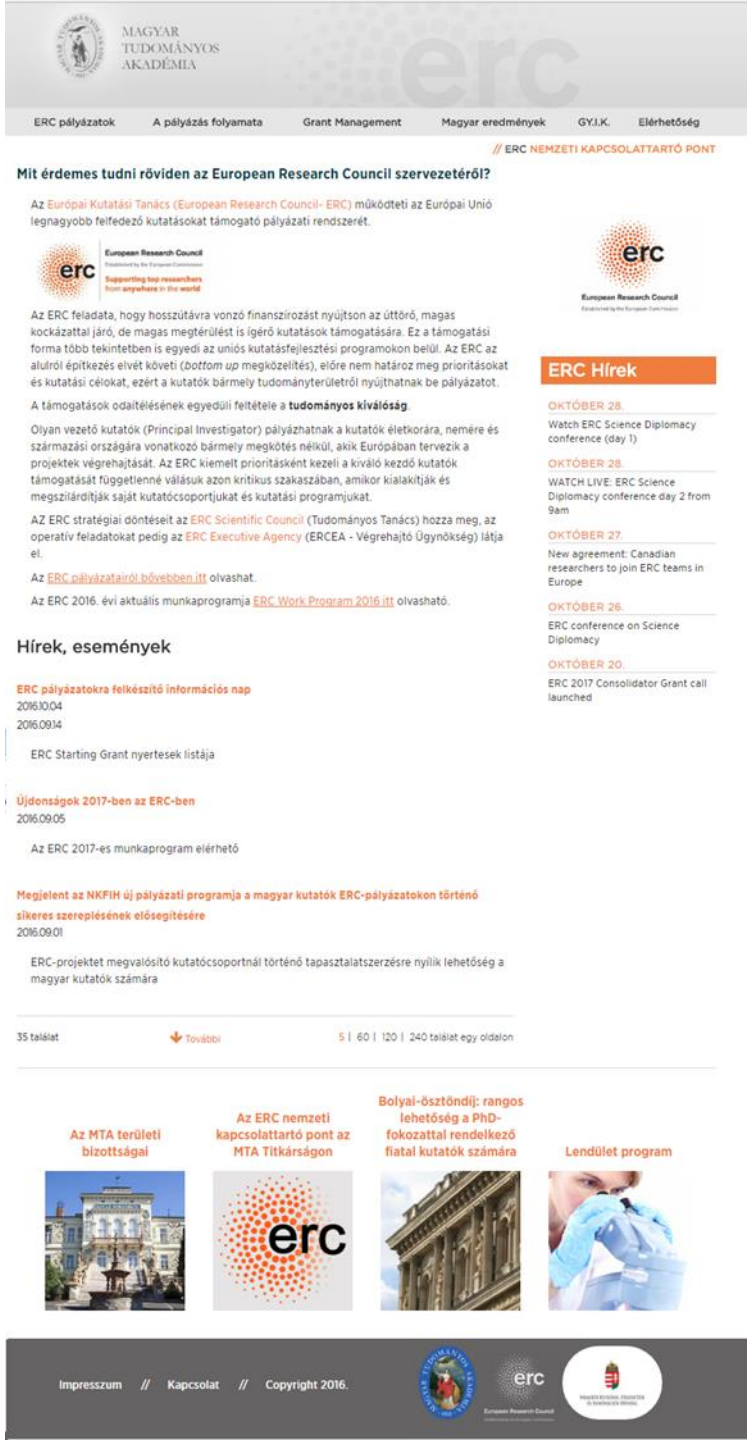

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