# Starting Grant profile

## *Objectives*

ERC Starting Grants are designed to support excellent Principal Investigators at the career stage at which they are starting their own independent research team or programme. Applicant Principal Investigators must demonstrate the ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility of their scientific proposal.

## *Size of ERC Starting Grants*

Starting Grants may be awarded up to a maximum of **EUR 1 500 000** for a period of **5 years**[18].

However, up to an **additional EUR 500 000** can be requested in the proposal to cover (a) eligible "start-up" costs for Principal Investigators moving to the EU or an Associated Country from elsewhere as a consequence of receiving the ERC grant and/or (b) the purchase of major equipment and/or (c) access to large facilities[19].

[18] The maximum award is reduced pro rata temporis for projects of a shorter duration. This does not apply to ongoing projects.

[19] As any additional funding is to cover major one-off costs it is not subject to pro-rata temporis reduction for projects of shorter duration. All funding requested is assessed during evaluation.

## *Profile of the ERC Starting Grant Principal Investigator*

The Principal Investigator shall have been awarded their first PhD **at least 2 and up to 7 years prior to 1 January 2016.** The effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD can be reduced in certain properly documented circumstances (see *"Eligible Principal Investigator"* above).

A competitive Starting Grant Principal Investigator must have already shown the potential for research independence and evidence of maturity, for example by having produced **at least one important publication without the participation of their PhD supervisor.** Applicant Principal Investigators should also be able to demonstrate a promising track record of early achievements appropriate to their research field and career stage, including significant publications (as main author) in major international peer-reviewed multidisciplinary scientific journals, or in the leading international peer-reviewed journals of their respective field. They may also demonstrate a record of invited presentations in well-established international conferences, granted patents, awards, prizes etc.

**Early achievements track record**

*In the Track record (see "Proposal description" below) the applicant Principal Investigator should list (if applicable):*

*1.* ***Up to five publications*** *in* ***major international peer-reviewed multi-disciplinary scientific journals*** *and/or in the* ***leading international peer-reviewed journals, peer-reviewed conferences proceedings and/or monographs*** *of their respective research fields, highlighting those without the presence as co-author of their PhD supervisor, and the number of citations (excluding self-citations) they have attracted;*

*2.* ***Research monographs and any translations thereof****;*

*3.* ***Granted patent(s)****;*

*4.* ***Invited presentations to peer-reviewed, internationally established conferences and/or international advanced schools****;*

*5.* ***Prizes/ Awards/ Academy memberships****.*

## *Expected time commitment of the Starting Grant Principal Investigator*

The question of whether the Principal Investigator is strongly committed to the project and demonstrates the willingness to devote a significant amount of time to the project forms a key part of the evaluation.

Principal Investigators funded through the ERC Starting Grants shall spend a minimum of 50% of their total working time in an EU Member State or Associated Country and a minimum of 50% of their total working time on the ERC project.

Principal Investigators shall ensure a sufficient time commitment and presence throughout the course of the project to guarantee its proper execution. The time commitment will be monitored, and in cases where the actual commitment is below the minimum levels set out above, or the levels indicated in the proposal (see proposal description below), appropriate measures may be taken, up to and including reduction of the grant and suspension or termination of grants in accordance with the grant agreement.

# Evaluation procedure and criteria

## *Evaluation procedure*

A **single submission of the full proposal** will be followed by a **two-step evaluation**. The evaluation will be conducted by means of a structure of high level peer review panels as listed in Annex 1. The panels may be assisted by independent experts working remotely.

Applicant Principal Investigators can request during the electronic proposal submission that up to three specific persons should not act as an evaluator in the evaluation of their proposal[27].

**At step 1**, the extended synopsis and the Principal Investigator's track record and CV will be assessed (and **not** the full scientific proposal). **At step 2** the complete version of the retained proposals will be assessed (including the full scientific proposal).

The allocation of the proposals to the various panels will be based on the expressed preference of the applicant Principal Investigator (see *"Proposal description"* above). Proposals may be allocated to a different panel with the agreement of both Panel Chairs concerned.

The panel to which a proposal is allocated may request additional reviews by appropriate members of other panel(s) or additional remote experts.

*The ERC strongly encourages **multi- and inter-disciplinary research proposals**. Proposals of this type are evaluated by ERC's regular panels with the appropriate external expertise.*

Proposals will be retained for step 2 based on the outcome of the evaluation at step 1 (see below) and a budgetary cut-off level of three times the panel's indicative budget.

Principal Investigators whose proposals are retained for step 2 of the evaluation for the Starting and Consolidator Grants will be invited for an interview to present their project to the evaluation panel meeting in Brussels.

[27] The persons identified may be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal concerned, as long as it remains possible to have the proposal evaluated.

## *Evaluation criteria*

For all ERC frontier research grants, **excellence is the sole criterion of evaluation**. It will be applied in conjunction to the evaluation of both: the ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility of the research project; and the intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment of the Principal Investigator.

During the evaluation, the phase of the Principal Investigator's transition to independence, possible breaks in the research career of the applicant and/or unconventional research career paths should be taken into account. Benchmarks set in the relevant profiles above including the expected minimum working times to be spent in the EU or an Associated Country and on the ERC project, will also be taken into consideration.

In general, projects wholly or largely consisting in the collation and compilation of existing material in new databases, editions or collections are unlikely to constitute ground-breaking or "frontier" research in themselves, however useful such resources might be to subsequent original research. Such projects are therefore unlikely to be recommended for funding by the ERC's panels.

Plagiarism detection software may be used to analyse proposals submitted to the ERC.

The detailed evaluation elements applying to the excellence of the research project and the Principal Investigator are set out below.

## 1. Research Project

## Ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility

**Starting, Consolidator and Advanced**

***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 (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development across disciplines)?*

*To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain?*

***Scientific Approach***

*To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain (based on the Extended Synopsis)?*

*To what extent is the proposed research methodology appropriate to achieve the goals of the project (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?*

*To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?*

*To what extent are the proposed timescales and resources necessary and properly justified (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?*

## 2. Principal Investigator

## Intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment

***Starting and Consolidator***

***Intellectual capacity and creativity***

*To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to propose and conduct ground-breaking research?*

*To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative independent thinking?*

*To what extent have the achievements of the PI typically gone beyond the state of the art?*

***Commitment***

*To what extent does the PI demonstrate the level of commitment to the project necessary for its execution and the willingness to devote a significant amount of time to the project (min 50% for Starting and 40% for Consolidator of the total working time on it and min 50% in an EU Member State or Associated Country) (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?*

***Advanced***

***Intellectual capacity and creativity***

*To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to propose and conduct ground-breaking research?*

*To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative independent thinking?*

*To what extent have the achievements of the PI typically gone beyond the state of the art?*

*To what extent has the PI demonstrated sound leadership in the training and advancement of young scientists?*

***Commitment***

*To what extent does the PI demonstrate the level of commitment to the project necessary for its execution and the willingness to devote a significant amount of time to the project (min 30% of the total working time on it and min 50% in an EU Member State or Associated Country) (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?*

## *Outcome of evaluation*

At each evaluation step, each proposal will be evaluated and marked for each of the two main elements of the proposal: the ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility of the research project; and the intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment of the Principal Investigator.

At the end of each evaluation step, the proposals will be ranked by the panels on the basis of the marks they have received and the panels' overall appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses.

At the end of **step 1** of the evaluation applicants will be informed that their proposal:

**A.** is of sufficient quality to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**B.** is of high quality but not sufficient to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**C.** is not of sufficient quality to pass to step 2 of the evaluation.

At the end of **step 2** of the evaluation applicants will be informed that their proposal:

**A.** fully meets the ERC's excellence criterion and is recommended for funding **if sufficient funds are available**;

**B.** meets some but not all elements of the ERC's excellence criterion and will not be funded.

In addition, once the evaluation of their proposal has been completed, applicants will receive an evaluation report which will include the ranking range of their proposal out of the proposals evaluated by the panel.

Projects recommended for funding will be funded by the ERC if sufficient funds are available. Proposals will be funded in priority order based on their rank.

**Applicants may also be subject to restrictions on submitting proposals to future ERC calls based on the outcome of the evaluation. Applicants will need to check the restrictions in place for each call (for 2016 calls see restrictions on submission of proposals under "Eligibility criteria" above).**