



European Research Council
**ADVANCED
GRANTS**
2010 Call for Proposals

HANDBOOK FOR APPLICANTS

A simple, easy to use guide providing key information to potential applicants on the preparation, submission and evaluation of project proposals to the ERC Advanced Grant Funding Scheme



**Agència
de Gestió d'Ajuts
Universitaris
i de Recerca**

SPEI Servei de Projectes
Europeus i Internacionals



Generalitat de Catalunya
**Departament d'Innovació,
Universitats i Empresa**

ERC ADVANCED GRANTS HANDBOOK FOR APPLICANTS

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What is the European Research Council (ERC)?

The ERC “Bringing great ideas to life”

The European Research Council (ERC) is the flagship component of the ‘Ideas Programme’ of the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), set up to fund investigator-driven frontier research.

Their main aim is to stimulate scientific excellence by supporting and encouraging the very best scientists, engineers and scholars in Europe to be adventurous and take risks in their research, encapsulated well by their slogan -“bringing **great ideas** to life”

The ERC ‘investigator-driven’ approach encourages researchers to go beyond established frontiers of knowledge, to challenge ‘the state of the art’ across boundaries of research disciplines - encouraging inter-disciplinary projects, including innovative or unconventional methodologies that may be considered ‘high risk/high gain’.

In this way the ERC funding ensures the very best researchers greater flexibility to identify new opportunities and explore innovative directions for promising new areas of research.

‘...for the first time a truly pan-European, scientifically independent instrument dedicated to supporting excellence in frontier research thus providing an avenue for freeing up the creativity and innovation of all European scientists and establishing a new standard of excellence for Europe.’

Towards a world class Frontier Research Organisation - independent experts’ review of ERC July 2009

As the FP7 Ideas Programme funding body the ERC has a total budget of €7.5billion for the 7 years (2007-2013) - almost 15% of the total FP7 budget. The ERC Advanced Grants calls which opened in October 2009 have an indicative budget of €590 million of the ERC total to fund the very best researchers across Europe in their ground-breaking projects on the leading edges of knowledge.

The ERC consists of a Scientific Council and an Executive Agency (ERC EA)*.

The Scientific Council defines the scientific funding strategy and management strategy of the ERC, including the annual work programme where calls for proposals, corresponding funding rules and selection criteria are defined.

The Executive Agency implements and applies these strategies and methodologies in the management and operations of the ERC funding activities.

The ERC operates with autonomy and integrity which is guaranteed by the European Commission

* The ERC Executive Agency was legally established by the EC on 14th Dec 2007 (see <http://tinyurl.com/y14quuc>)
For more information on the structure of the ERC including the ERC EA go here <http://tinyurl.com/ybans6d>

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What is an ERC Advanced Grant?

Funding excellence and innovation

The objective of the ERC Advanced Grant is to identify individual researchers who can establish Europe as the scientific leader.

Targeting the most talented established investigators Advanced Grants encourage and support excellent, innovative investigator-initiated research projects, across EU member states and associated countries.

Awarded on the sole criterion of Scientific Excellence — in the profile of the research leader and the research project, these grants should encourage the very best of European research and promote substantial advances in the frontiers of knowledge.

Demand is will certainly be very high and being a highly competitive call, only exceptional researchers with significant research achievements and ground-breaking research ideas in their field should apply.

ERC Advanced Grant Calls Schedule

ERC Action	Call open	Call Deadline	Evaluation
AdG3	Autumn 09	Spring 10	Spring 10 - Autumn 10
AdG4	Autumn 10	Spring 10	Spring 11 - Autumn 11

ERC AdG3 opened 29th October 2009!

Call Identifier	Domain	Call Deadline
ERC-2010-AdG_20100407	Social Sciences and Humanities (SH)	2010 - 04 - 07
ERC-2010-AdG_20100317	Life Sciences (LS)	2010 - 03 - 17
ERC-2010-AdG_20100224	Physical Sciences and Engineering (PE)	2010 - 02 - 24

Depending on the subject area of a research proposal there are three deadlines

It is up to the applicant to choose and decide on the most appropriate ERC peer review evaluation panel and the corresponding deadline. Applicants must submit their proposals before the deadline of the selected ERC Panel.

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Why apply for an ERC Advanced Grant?

Funding your frontier research

The ERC investigator-driven approach creates a unique environment where creativity and originality can prosper, where high risk is justified by the possibility of a major breakthrough with an impact beyond a specific research discipline.

This can bring real benefits to the Principal Investigator (PI) and his/her subsequent ability to concentrate on the research goals.

- “Bottom up” approach allows the researcher an unusual amount of autonomy and flexibility
- Minimal bureaucracy and administration
- Full accountability
- Independence* – freedom to manage

* see section 5: “It is a condition for all ERC funding that the host institution: will offer him/her appropriate conditions independently to direct the research and manage its funding for the duration of the project.”

In essence, ERC-supported research should aim to broaden scientific and technological knowledge. As such, projects should not be linked to commercial objectives

The Advanced Grant scheme is set to be the flagship funding programme of the ERC throughout FP7, dispensing nearly two thirds of the total ERC budget.

ERC Advanced Grant overview

Number of grants to be awarded: 275 in 2008 call from 2,167 proposals = 13%

Amount of funding: Maximum of €2.5 million / up to €3.5 million¹

Duration: Up to five years

Application: Online (EPSS) one-stage submission

Evaluation criteria: Scientific excellence

'Live' submission deadlines:

- 24th February 2010
Physical Sciences and Engineering
- 17th March 2010
Life Sciences
- 7th April 2010
Social sciences and Humanities

¹ Unless the application involves specific features requiring a higher level of support: a “co-investigator project”; a project which requires the purchase of major research equipment, or when the PI is currently engaged in a third country but intends to move to a host institution in a member state or associated country in order to build up a new research team and activity.

An ERC grant can cover up to 100% of the total eligible direct costs of the research plus a contribution towards indirect costs, which cannot exceed 20% of the total eligible direct costs (excluding the direct eligible costs for subcontracting)

Direct eligible costs* are:

- Personnel Costs
- Equipment Costs and Consumables
- Travel and Subsistence Costs
- Publication Costs

* Consult the official ERC Applicants guide for precise rules of costs and eligibility.

The **PI** should determine the amount of funding necessary to fulfil their objectives and the duration of the project. The budget should be based on reasoned estimate of the project costs in round numbers only and explained clearly in the project proposal.

On this basis, the ERC panel will recommend the level of funding and duration taking into account the needs of the project and the team. Over budgeting on the basis of reduction on proposal acceptance is not recommended as guidelines exist to eliminate proposals that are not reasonably budgeted.

* For specific budget issues contact your university/centre office or SPEI

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What research do Advanced Grants fund?

Funding creativity and risk-taking in basic research

The ERC Advanced grants fund established research leaders, creating the opportunity for “frontier research projects – bold science in the pursuit of questions at or beyond the frontiers of knowledge, without regard for established disciplinary boundaries.”

Advanced Grants are intended to encourage creativity and risk-taking in basic research - new productive lines of enquiry and new methods, including exploring unconventional approaches in all fields of research, such research clearly has a high-risk/high-gain profile.

The ERC strongly encourage projects that can demonstrate the necessary combination of knowledge and skills from more than one discipline to achieve impact beyond specific research disciplines and change inter-disciplinary approaches.

The most recent statistics we have are for the 2008 call and below are the number of successful proposals in each of the 4 research domains:

ERC AdG 2008 call: Successful proposals by domain

Domain	Number of Proposals	Percentage
• Life Sciences	84	30.5%
• Social Sciences and Humanities	48	17.5%
• Physical Sciences and Engineering	114	41.5%
• Interdisciplinary domain	29	10.5%

The competition is extremely intense, so creativity and originality in proposals will be imperative. Evaluation panels will look for evidence that the proposed research will be new and/or different, an idea that goes beyond the state of the art in your field and is clearly not just an incremental step of your current research. So, aim high, only the most ambitious, far-reaching projects ideas from research leaders in their scientific domain will have a chance of succeeding.

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Who can apply for an ERC Advanced Grant?

Calling leading researchers and institutions

The ERC Advanced Grants support projects carried out by individual teams¹, headed by a single Principal Investigator (PI) and may include team members of any nationality or trans-national in character, all team members operate under the leadership of the PI.

A grant application should be submitted by the PI in conjunction with and on behalf of the “host institution”, which will be the (Applicant Legal Entity) and therefore legally entitled to receive the funds on behalf of the PI.

The Principal Investigator (PI):

The ERC Advanced Grants are open to leading established researchers in EU member states and associated countries in a position to establish an independent* research team and undertake ‘frontier research’, eg:

- Leading scientists in Europe
- European researchers working abroad looking to repatriate
- Non-EU nationals looking to establish themselves in Europe

The Principal Investigator’s CV and scientific leadership profile is one of the most important evaluation criteria when applying for an Advanced Grant. An application should only be considered if the PI reaches these minimum requirements listed below, the chance of succeeding in absence of such a record of achievements is very small.

Do you qualify on all these criteria?

- Active independent researchers established in their own right
- Leaders in their field of research
- Exceptionally experienced through their record of research achievements, collaborations and project leadership in the last 10 years.
- Supported by EU /associated countries based Host Organisation



*In the event of heavy over-subscription to the call, the evaluation panels may identify less competitive applications which do not reach minimum quality thresholds and reject them, allowing the panel to concentrate on thorough evaluation of retained proposals.”

If you think you have a Green light, then proceed



¹ The constitution of the individual research team is flexible. Commonly, it involves other researchers - such as senior researchers, post docs, graduate and PhD students - from the PI’s research group or same institution as “team members”.

Assessment of the Principal Investigator's (PI) scientific leadership profile and record of research achievements will be a major component of the evaluation.(see below)

Principal Investigator's of ERC Advanced Grant proposals are expected to demonstrate at least **one or more of the following benchmarks** (depending on field):

- **10 publications** as senior author in major international peer-reviewed multi-disciplinary scientific journals and/or in the leading international peer-reviewed journals of their respective field
- **3 major research monographs**, at least one is translated into another language

Other alternative benchmarks may be considered (individually or in combination) as indicative of an exceptional record /recognition in the last 10 years:

- **5 granted patents**; if applicable
- **10 invited presentations** in well-established internationally organized conferences and advanced schools;
- **3 research expeditions** led by the applicant;
- **3 well-established international conferences** or congresses where the applicant was involved in their organisation as a member of the steering and/or organising committee;
- **International recognition** through scientific prizes/awards or membership in well-recognised academies.

With the focus on the Principal Investigator, the concept of individual team is fundamentally different from that of a traditional "network" or "research consortium"; proposals based on a network or consortium will **not** be accepted for ERC Funding.

Co-investigator project

When a "co-investigator project" is proposed, a Principal Investigator may identify members of his/her individual team, who are active in specific complimentary disciplines important to the scientific outcome as "co-investigators."

The contribution of Principal Investigators and co-investigators must be carried out in the EU or associated countries. The evaluation panel may carefully assess the scientific added value of any co-investigator by:

- inviting one or more members of a complementary panel to contribute to the evaluation of the proposal.
- assessing the scientific added value of any co-investigator to the project;
- permitting the participation of any additional legal entity only if it is clearly necessary from the scientific perspective.

The host institution

Any type of legal entity established in Europe or associated countries that has the infrastructure and capacity to carry out a frontier research project can host the PI and his/her team as long as his/her activity is not constrained by the research strategy of the enterprise.

- Universities, Research organisations, Research-performing companies

The PI does not necessarily need to be employed by the host institution at the time when the proposal is submitted. If not already employed by the host institution, the PI must be engaged by them if the application is successful, at least for the duration of the grant.

In order to be eligible for a grant, it is a condition for all ERC funding that the host institution must commit to the conditions¹ allowing independence for the PI in a signed statement², this implies that he/she has the authority to:

- Apply for funding independently
- To manage the research and the funding for the project and make appropriate resources allocation decisions
- To publish independently as senior author and invite as co-authors only those who have contributed substantially to the reported work
- To supervise team members, including research students or others
- Have access to reasonable space and facilities for conducting the research
- The right to project “portability”³

Proposals that do not include this signed statement will not be considered for evaluation.

NB! Rules as regards multiple applications and re-applications

- Only one ERC grant managed by a PI (and/or a co-investigator in an Advanced Grant) can be active at any time.
- No PI (and/or a co-investigator in an Advanced Grant) may be associated with more than one application to the ERC during the same year.
- No Principal Investigator who has submitted an eligible proposal to an Advanced Grant call (ERC-2010-AdG) may apply to the following Advanced Grant call (ERC-2011-AdG), unless his/her proposal was evaluated above the quality threshold during the 2nd step but not funded due to insufficient available budget.
- A Principal Investigator or a Co-Investigator associated with an eligible proposal for an ERC-Advanced Grant to either of the first two Advanced Grant calls (ERC-2008-AdG or ERC-2009-AdG) may not apply for the third ERC-Advanced Grant call (ERC-2010-AdG) unless the eligible proposal to the first or second call has met the quality threshold on both evaluation criteria - Principal Investigator, Research Project - at the end of step 1 of the evaluation.

1 These conditions, including provisions related to the “portability” of the project, will be the subject of an agreement between the principal investigator and the host institution. (supplementary to the ERC Grant Agreement) and they are described in the ERC Model Grant Agreement (C (2007)1625, 16/04/2007).

2 The host institution must provide a binding statement that the conditions of independence are set out in the supplementary agreement to the ERC Grant agreement.

3 “portability”: It is expected that the PI establishes and concludes the funded research project in association with the original host institution (applicant legal entity). However, the ERC grant scheme allows PIs having received a frontier research grant to transfer their projects from one host to another in the course of the project.

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How do I prepare an application?

Simple funding mechanism

The application procedure consists of a single submission stage.

The full ERC Advanced Grant application involves the following 3 components:

The administrative forms

The research Proposal

The supporting documentation

An ERC grant application should be submitted by a single Principal Investigator who has scientific responsibility for the project, in conjunction with and on behalf of her/his host institution (the “applicant legal entity”) and in most cases an individual research team, which will work under his/her responsibility.

Proposal submissions need to be uploaded electronically via the Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS) - in PDF format. Proposals cannot be submitted without prior registration (pre-registration), which is required to obtain an EPSS login name and password. Pre-registration is strongly recommended, as early as possible in advance of the call deadline. (see ERC Guide for Applicants, July 2009 for full details)

Please note that the working language of the ERC Panels is English.

The sections to be included in the research proposal and the page limits are:

NB! Currently the submission forms for Parts A and B for the AdG call are under review and, as of end November 2009, we do not know what they will look like as the current Guide for Applicants is unavailable.

We recommend you make a regular check of the ERC website (<http://erc.europa.eu/>) and of CORDIS (<http://tinyurl.com/ycv6hxp>) to download the new text as soon as it is available - or check with SPEI for further details.

However, the Evaluation Criteria on pages 58 and 58 of the Guide give a very clear indication of the kind of work they are looking to support. 'ground-breaking...creative thinking...significantly beyond the state of the art...open(ing) new and important scientific, technological or scholarly horizons...' are the essential characteristics that successful proposals will all have.

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Evaluation of proposals

Excellence is everything

Excellence is the sole criterion of evaluation. It will be applied to the evaluation of both the Principal Investigator and the scientific excellence of the research project.

A single submission of the full proposal will be followed by a **two-step** evaluation. Submission for funding is a simple process and documents clear and concise.

Evaluation criteria

Section 1:	Principal Investigator and Project synopsis	step 1	step 2
	PI Quality of research output/track record Intellectual capacity and creativity		
Section 2:	Scientific Proposal		
	Ground-breaking nature of the research Potential impact Methodology High-gain/High-risk balance		
Section 3:	Research Environment		
	Contribution of the research environment to the project Participation of other legal entities (only if co-investigator included)		

ERC Evaluation Panels

Grant applications are assessed by peer review evaluation panels (ERC panels), which may be supported by additional remote reviewers (in Step 2). The 25 dedicated ERC Advanced Grant panels are subdivided for operational reasons into three main research domains.

	Life Sciences	9 Panels
	Social Sciences and Humanities	6 Panels
	Physical Sciences and Engineering	10 Panels

* Interdisciplinary panels will be convened by the Scientific Council.

It is the responsibility of the PI to choose and indicate the most suitable ERC panel (primary evaluation panel) for the proposed research and indicate one or more panel descriptors (see annex1 ERC AdG guide). In the case of interdisciplinary proposals, the PI may indicate a secondary ERC panel, the primary panel will then consider if the proposal is interdisciplinary (cross field or even cross domain) and further evaluation expertise is required.

NB. Be safe in choosing Panel - But ensure your research idea is innovative and ground breaking
Funding is expected to be very competitive, so be ambitious in your proposal.

Evaluation Process

These ERC panels assess and score the proposals on the basis of individual evaluation in both criteria (PI and project synopsis). Each proposal will receive a mark in step1, based on following scale and are ranked as:

4	Outstanding
3	Excellent
2	Very Good
1	Non-fundable

A quality threshold of ≥ 2 will be applied at evaluation step 1 and successful proposals will be ranked in order of priority for funding. Depending on the call budget available a budgetary cut-off applies to the ranking list. Therefore, the proposals failing to reach the threshold or ranked below the budgetary cut-off will be rejected.

Proposals ranked by the panels will then proceed to step 2 in which the PI, the Scientific proposal and the excellence of the host organisation to support the PI will be assessed on a pass/fail basis and commented on. The evaluation panels will review the level of the requested grant and, as appropriate, suggest adjustments. Then a final ranking list with proposals to be funded, a reserve list and rejected proposals will be drawn up based on the budget of the call.

ERC Peer review evaluation panel members

The Panel Members have been selected by the ERC Executive Agency (ERC EA) in co-operation with the Scientific Council (SC) on the basis of their excellent scientific reputation.

The Panel consists of up to 12 Members moderated by ERC EA

The Panel Chair and Members are selected by the ERC EA and the Scientific Council taking account of the fields of expertise of the peer reviewers, and avoiding conflicts of interest.*

ERC EA manages and ensures the quality of the evaluation process for the proposals assigned to his/her panel.

*Before the deadline of a call, the names of the Panel Chairs are published.

“To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advances in science.”

Albert Einstein

Background information:

ERC Work Programme 2010:
<http://tinyurl.com/ycv6hxp>

ERC Guide for Applicants July 2009
<http://erc.europa.eu/>

For guidance and more information you can contact:

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