

FAQ ERC Advanced Grants

General information

What are ERC Advanced Investigator Grants?

The objective of the ERC Advanced Grant funding scheme is to support excellent, innovative investigator-initiated frontier research by leading advanced investigators. The research projects are supposed to be carried out at a host institution in an EU Member State or countries associated to the Research Framework Programme (Albania, Croatia, Israel, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Switzerland) by research teams headed by a single "Principal Investigator" of any age and nationality.

If necessary, additional research team members from remote research institutions can be included. Depending on the field, a Principal Investigator may also carry out his research without a research team. In exceptional cases when it should be necessary for interdisciplinary research projects to be carried out successfully, the Principal Investigator may choose a member of his/her team, who is active in a second discipline, as primary "Co-Investigator".

Who can apply for an Advanced Grant?

As one of the two funding schemes of the ERC, the Advanced Grants are targeting established researchers with an outstanding scientific performance record. This must be proven by a research profile reflecting excellent research achievements over the past 10 years. Without an outstanding profile there is no prospect for a successful application. However, researchers with less than 10 years research experience are also eligible to file an application.

What is the expected profile of an ERC Advanced Grant applicant?

ERC Advanced Grant applicants may be at any stage of their research career, if they have a track-record of significant research achievements in the last 10 years which identifies them as exceptional leaders in terms of originality and significance of their research contributions to their respective fields. For the 2008 ERC Advanced Grants call the ERC specified the period from the 1st of January 1997 to the specific deadline for application of the selected ERC Panel as a reference time-frame for the track-record. Appropriate to their individual research fields, applicants will be expected to match at least one or more benchmarks which will be used to measure their scientific achievements. These benchmarks are:

- The applicant's top 10 publications as senior author (or in those fields where alphabetic order of authorship is the norm, joint author) in major international peer-reviewed scientific journals of their respective fields, or, concerning interdisciplinary applications, in international peer-reviewed multi-disciplinary

scientific journals. Applicants should also indicate the number of citations their publications have attracted (excluding auto-citations).

- Prospective Advanced Grant holders are also expected (especially in the Social Sciences and Humanities domain) to have published normally 3 major monographs, of which at least one should have been translated into another language.
- If applicable in their respective research domain, prospective Grant Holders should hold normally 5 patents. If relevant for their research, they should also have led about 3 research expeditions.
- To show their reputation in the international scientific community, applicants should also have been regularly invited to presentations at peer-reviewed, internationally established conferences and/or international advanced schools (up to 10 times) and should have been involved in the organisation of international conferences in their field as a member of the steering and/or organising committee (normally 3 times).
- Furthermore, it is expected that applicants, as an important part of their excellent scientific profile, have been awarded major national or international prizes (e.g. the EURYI-Award, the Heinz Maier-Leibnitz-Award, the Leibniz-Award, the Sofia Kovalevskaja Prize etc.) or are members of well regarded scientific academies.

A PhD or equivalent degree is not formally required, even though it will be only in exceptional cases that a Principal Investigator is meeting the above-mentioned benchmark without having a PhD-degree.

How many Advanced Grants will be awarded per year?

It is intended to fund at least 250-300 projects in the first call round of the Advanced Grants, published in November 2007. In the course of the 7th Framework Programme (2007-2013), the number of funded projects per year is expected to increase to up to 500 projects in 2013. With the parallel budget increase from about 517m€ to more than 1bn€ in 2013, the Advanced Grants will become the largest funding activity of the ERC.

What kind of research can be funded?

The ERC funding aims at supporting frontier research, i.e. research at the frontiers of knowledge as well as at the interface between established disciplines. Multi- or interdisciplinary research proposals are thus strongly encouraged. Applications can target all domains of research except research activities directed towards nuclear energy applications and research activities creating human embryos solely for the purpose of stem cell procurement. Funding of subsequent steps involving human embryonic stem cells will however be possible within the ethical framework defined in the 7th Framework Programme. All proposed research projects which raise sensitive ethical issues will generally be subject to an ethical review.

When can an investigator apply for an Advanced Grant?

Calls for Proposals for the ERC Advanced Grants will be published annually in autumn of the respective year in the Official Journal of the European Union (<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/oj>), on the website of the ERC (<http://erc.europa.eu>), and on the CORDIS website (<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc>).

The deadlines end in spring of the calendar year following the year of the publication. There will be three deadlines staggered according to the funding domains of the ERC (Physical Sciences & Engineering, Social Sciences & Humanities, and Life Sciences).

How many times can an investigator apply for an ERC Advanced Grant?

For reapplications and multiple applications, the following rules apply:

- Only one ERC grant managed by a Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator can be active at any time.
- No Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator may be associated with more than one application to the ERC during the same year.
- No Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator may be associated with more than one eligible proposal for an ERC-Advanced Grant to either of the first two Advanced Grant calls (ERC-2008-AdG or ERC-2009-AdG).
- 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, expected in 2010) unless the eligible proposal to the first or second call has met the quality threshold.
- A Principal Investigator or Co-investigator who has submitted an eligible proposal for an ERC-Advanced Grant in either of the first two Advanced Grant calls may not apply for an ERC Starting Grant during the same period (2008-2009).

Application phase

Can the Principal Investigator be employed by the hosting institution at the time when the proposal is submitted?

The Principal Investigator can, but does not necessarily have to be employed by the institution at which he/she is planning to carry out the research project, at the time of the application.

Which institutions can host an ERC Advanced Grant-Holder?

The host institution for an ERC Advanced Grant can be any legal public or private entity, which has the infrastructure and capacity to carry out a frontier research project, such as universities, non-profit research organizations or research-performing companies.

The host institution must be situated in a Member State of the European Union or an Associated Country (Albania, Croatia, Israel, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Switzerland). An updated list of all eligible countries is provided by [CORDIS](#). In addition, International Organizations like CERN, EMBL, ILL, ESO may also act as host institution.

Is there any preferred size of the research team?

There is no preferred size for Advanced Grant research teams. In planning the personnel resources needed by the project, the applicants should however bear in mind that the maximum EC contributions should not exceed € 500,000 per year (in exceptional cases up to € 700,000 per year). The proposed size and composition of the research team should clearly reflect the nature and objectives of the project. However, it will always be possible to carry out ERC projects as a single Principal Investigator.

What should be considered concerning the composition of the team, in particular as regards mobility, status, etc.?

The composition of the research team must reflect the nature and objectives of the project. Commonly, a research team will involve the Principal Investigator and other researchers associated with the Principal Investigator's research institution. Team members can be of any nationality, age and occupational status. Furthermore, research teams may also involve team members from other research facilities or even team members located in non-European third countries.

In the exceptional case where interdisciplinary expertise is needed to achieve the research objectives, the Principal Investigator can name one or more of his team members who provide the expertise of a different research domain to serve as Co-Investigators. The contribution of these Co-Investigators must nevertheless be carried out in an EU Member State or Associated Country. However, all such arrangements (and possible funding of the

respective team members) are subject to appraisal by the ERC peer review evaluation panels. The Advanced Grant funding can not be used to support a research network or research consortium.

Can team members from other research institutions be incorporated into a research team?

Additional team members from remote research institutions can be integrated into the research team. If their respective host institution intends to receive funding to support their work, this must be specified in the grant agreement: The remote host institution must then be included as an additional legal entity in the proposal as well as in the grant agreement or in a subsequent amendment to it. The participation of any additional legal entity will only be possible if it is clearly necessary from the scientific perspective. The Advanced Grant funding cannot be used to support a research network or research consortium.

Can a team member already be employed by the hosting organisation at the time of the proposal?

Yes.

To which panel can interdisciplinary proposals be addressed?

The Principal Investigator can indicate a primary evaluation panel, i.e. the respective ERC evaluation panel which he/she thinks is most suited to assess the topic of the research project. Furthermore, the Principal Investigator has to indicate one or more keywords (selected from a drop-down list) to describe the area of the project in more detail. The assignment of the proposal to peer reviewers will be made by the Panel Chairs on the basis of these keywords. In the case of multidisciplinary proposals the Principal Investigator may indicate a secondary evaluation panel. The primary panel will then decide whether the proposal is interdisciplinary (cross-panel or even cross-domain) and if its evaluation requires expertise from other panels.

Which application deadline is the right one in case of a interdisciplinary proposal where the applicants has chosen two evaluation panels from different research domains with differing deadlines?

Even in the case of an interdisciplinary proposal, the Principal Investigator has to indicate a 'primary evaluation panel', i.e. the respective ERC evaluation panel which he/she thinks is most suited to assess the topic of the research project. Furthermore, the research domain of the research project has to be specified by indicating one or more keywords (selected from a drop-down list).

In the case of a multidisciplinary proposal the Principal Investigator may indicate a secondary evaluation panel. The proposal will always be assigned to the primary evaluation panel in the first place, which will then decide whether the proposal is interdisciplinary (cross-panel or even cross-domain) and if its evaluation requires expertise from other panels. Because of this, the right application deadline is always (even in the case of an interdisciplinary proposal) the deadline of the corresponding research domain of the primary evaluation panel.

Application

How can an investigator apply for an ERC Advanced Grant?

ERC Advanced Grant applications can be submitted only in response to a "Call for Proposals" which will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union (<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/oj>), on the website of the ERC (<http://erc.europa.eu>) and on the CORDIS website (<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc>).

Proposals must be submitted to the corresponding domain-specific deadline via the "Electronic Proposal Submission System" (EPSS). A pre-registration is needed in order to get access to EPSS.

The deadlines end in spring of the calendar year following the year of the publication. There will be three deadlines staggered according to the funding domains of the ERC (Physical Sciences & Engineering, Social Sciences & Humanities, and Life Sciences).

A complete Advanced Grant application includes the following documents which have to be submitted: The four administrative forms ("A-forms"), the research proposal and supporting documentation. The research proposal is subdivided in three required main sections: In Section 1 the profile of the applicant has to be described in the sub-sections Curriculum Vitae (max. 2 pages), Scientific Leadership Profile (max. 2 pages) and a 10-year-track-record (also max. 2 pages); moreover, an aggregation of the Extended Project Synopsis of five pages has to be added in the first section. In Section 2 the research project (max. 15 pages) and in Section 3 the research environment (max. 2 pages) has to be presented. The scientific application has to be uploaded as a pdf-document in the EPSS.

The administrative forms have to include pieces of information about the applicant, his/her research project (A1), the host institution (A2) and about the financial information on the requested ERC grant (A3) which all have to be filled in online. In the additional fourth form (A1T) information has to be enlisted on the Scientific Leadership Profile of the Principal Investigator and her/his Track Record. The supporting documentation completes the application: a binding statement concerning the commitment of support of the host institution, a duly completed "Ethical-Issues-Table"-document and – if necessary – an additional written explanation of the Principal Investigator of the foreseen treatment of ethical issues. These documents have to be scanned and uploaded as three separate pdf-documents in EPSS.

The proposal, the supporting documentation and the completed administrative forms must then be submitted electronically until the end of the domain-specific deadlines.

Who applies for an Advanced Grant: the prospective Principal Investigator or the host institution?

A proposal has to be submitted by the Principal Investigator, who has scientific responsibility for the project, on behalf of the host institution which acts as the applicant legal entity. The Grant will be awarded to the institution that will be engaging and hosting the Principal Investigator. The host institution has to allow the Principal Investigator to manage the funding and to decide on appropriate resource allocations independently

What is the function of the administrative form A1T?

The online-form A1T contains the summary of the Scientific leadership profile and the 10-Year-Track-record. Together with the Extended Project Synopsis, it will be used in order to identify less competitive applications prior to the evaluation in case of heavy oversubscription of the call. With the agreement of the individual reviewers to whom the proposals have been allocated, these proposals will not be further evaluated.

Which language is required for the application?

Formally, applications can be submitted in any one of the 23 official languages of the EU. Since the working language of the peer review evaluation panels is English, it is highly recommended to submit the proposal in English. However, the administrative forms must be filled out in English.

How strict are the page limits defined for each section and is there a suggested font size?

The research proposal contains 3 sections:

1. The profile of the applicant: Curriculum Vitae (max. 2 pages), Scientific Leadership Profile (max. 2 pages) and a 10-year-track-record (max. 2 pages), the Extended Project Synopsis (max. 5 pages)*
2. The research project (max. 15 pages) and in
3. The research environment (max. 2 pages)

The page limits as well as the suggested format requirements with regards to font (Times New Roman), font size (at least 11 pt), line spacing (single) and margins (at least 1.5 cm) must be respected. Only proposal material within these limits will be evaluated.

* In case of interdisciplinary proposals with one or more Co-Investigators, an additional CV, a Leadership Profile and an individual track-record of each Co-PI has to be added to the first section, increasing the page limit by 6 pages for each Co-PI.

What is the Participant Identification Code (PIC)?

The Participant Identification Code (PIC) is related to institutions. Applicants at host institution possessing a Participant Identification Code (PIC) can use this number to identify their institution in the Electronic Proposal Submission System. On entering the PIC, parts of the A forms will be filled in automatically. Please note that in the cases where a PIC is not available it will always be possible to submit a proposal by entering the organisation details manually.

The process for assigning a PIC is triggered by a self-registration of an organisation. Principal Investigators can check whether their institutions have already registered themselves for a PIC by using the following website: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/urf-pic_en.html.

Is my proposal complete?

A complete proposal includes the following components:

- Part A: Administrative Forms (to be edited online via EPSS)
- Part B: Research Proposal (upload as PDF via EPSS)
- Supporting documentation: binding statement of support by the host institution (upload as PDF via EPSS)

N.B.: Proposals without the binding statement of support by the host institution will not be considered for evaluation.

Part A) The administrative forms ask for the following information:

- Administrative Data concerning the Principal Investigator as well as the scientific project (A1)
- Short summary of the Scientific Leadership Profile and the 10-Year-Track-record (A1T)
- Data concerning the host institution (A2) and the estimated research budget (A3)

Part B) The research proposal contains 3 sections:

1. The profile of the applicant including a Scientific CV with a so called Funding-ID (max. 2 pages), information on the Scientific Leadership Profile (max. 2 pages), the 10-Year-Track-record (max. 2 pages) - as well as a summary of the research project (Extended Project Synopsis, max. 5 pages)
2. The description of the Research Project including an Ethical-Issues-Table and - if applicable - explanations on how the project will deal with ethical issues (max. 15 pages)
3. The description of the Research Environment (max. 2 pages)

Is it necessary for the team members to be identified at the proposal stage?

Names of the regular team members can, but do not necessarily have to be identified at the proposal stage. However, the composition of the team and the allocation of tasks is important information which can be implemented. The panels will evaluate the achievements of the Principal Investigator and the proposed project, whereas individual attributes of regular team members will not be taken into consideration at this stage. Once funding is agreed, vacant positions can be advertised internationally. Unlike regular team members, Co-Investigators have to be identified at the proposal stage, because their scientific achievements will be evaluated as well.

What should the host institution provide for the project?

The host institution has to guarantee the Principal Investigator's independence, and provide the appropriate conditions and administrative support to the Principal Investigator for directing the research project and managing the funding. Furthermore, it must allow for the portability of the grant in (the rather exceptional) case that the Principal Investigator intends to change the host institution during the lifetime of the grant.

At the time of application, the host institution must provide a binding statement that the above described conditions will be guaranteed and that they will be formalised in a Supplementary Agreement to the Grant Agreement, which has to be concluded between the Principal Investigator and the host institution before the conclusion of the Grant Agreement.

Do applicants need to submit a confirmation of the hosting organisation by the time of the proposal submission?

Yes. All proposals for an Advanced Grant have to include a binding statement of the host institution guaranteeing that the conditions of independence of the Principal Investigator are already provided or will be fulfilled if the application is successful.

How are ERC Advanced Grant proposals evaluated?

Following the submission of the proposal, it will be assigned to the domain-specific panel. The Panel Chairs will then assign the proposal to the peer reviewers for the individual reviews (panel members as well as external reviewers). The assignment will be made on basis of the indication of the Principal Investigator and the keywords he/she has given in the proposal.

In the first evaluation stage, only Section 1 (including the Extended Project Synopsis) of the proposal will be assessed and marked by the reviewers and then ranked according to their marks. Proposals with a mark above a predetermined quality threshold (minimum 2 of a maximum mark of 4) and also above the budgetary cut-off level of the respective panel will pass on to the second stage of evaluation.

In the second stage, the complete version (Sections 1, 2 and 3) of the retained proposals will be assessed, evaluated and ranked by the panel. After conclusion of the panel evaluations, the Panel Chairs of each research domain will set up a consolidated ranked list for the domain's proposals which are above the quality threshold. After conclusion of the panel evaluations, the Panel Chairs will set up a consolidated ranked list for the domain's proposals which are above the quality threshold. The ERC will then offer to open negotiations for a Grant Agreement to those proposals which are the highest ranking ones in the consolidated list.

In case of heavy oversubscription, panels might decide that – prior to the first evaluation stage – proposals will be subject to a pre-ranking procedure excluding all less competitive proposals unable to reach a minimum quality threshold.

Will the names of the peer-reviewers be published?

In accordance with the guiding principle of transparency, the ERC will publish an alphabetical list of the panel members in due time on its website. In addition, a list of the Panel Chairs will be available on the website of the ERC.

Financial and contractual aspects

How can the funding be used?

ERC grants cover up to 100% of the total eligible costs which can be attributed directly to the project, such as personnel costs (salaries of the team leader and team members according to their involvement in the project), consumables, travel and subsistence costs, publication costs and equipment costs. In addition, ERC grants include a 20%-flat-rate (excluding costs for subcontracting) covering indirect costs, i.e. cost related to the administrative support of the host institution or costs incurred through the allocation of work space and equipment, etc.

Can the grant cover the Principal Investigator's salary?

Yes. All costs which are directly related to the execution of the project can be claimed, i.e. the personal costs / salary of the Principal Investigator can also be claimed, but only to the extent of the actual working hours she/he was committed to the execution of the project. Those costs will be reimbursed to 100%. The level of the Principal Investigator's salary together with the overall personal cost calculation of the project must however be in line with the host institution's own accounting principles.

Can the grant be used to finance a teaching substitute for the Principal Investigator?

Only costs which are directly related to the execution of the project can be claimed, i.e. personal costs can only be claimed if the person is directly contributing to the execution of the project. As a teaching substitute does not directly contribute to the execution of the project, the respective personal costs cannot be reimbursed by the ERC grant. It is up to the host institution however to decide whether the reimbursement of the Principal Investigator's salary costs will be used to finance an appropriate teaching substitute.

Who is negotiating the Grant Agreement with the European Commission / ERC?

If a proposal is successful, the Principal Investigator's host institution (in its function as applicant legal entity) will receive the offer to begin the negotiations for a Grant Agreement by the ERC. The rules and conditions applicable to the Advanced Grant funding are non-negotiable; the host institution has to accept or reject the grant and the applicable rules and conditions as a package. If the host institution accepts this package, the ERC prepares the Grant Agreement on the basis of the proposal, taking into account the recommendations of the Evaluation Panel. The Grant Agreement is then concluded following the signature of the host institution and the ERC respectively. The ERC will sign the Agreement only after having received the signed Supplementary Agreement between the Principal Investigator and the host institution.

What are the obligations of the Principal Investigator regarding the implementation of the project?

The Principal Investigator must take all appropriate steps towards the effective execution of the project and is also responsible for the scientific reporting: A mid-term and a final scientific report are required to be sent to the ERC to give information on progress and achievements of the project. Furthermore, the Principal Investigator has to contribute to the financial management reporting which has to be conducted by the host institution.

Can members of the research team be dispatched to other facilities for research purposes?

Yes, team members can be dispatched to other research facilities for research purposes. Furthermore, the research team may also involve team members associated with institutions other than the host institution of the Principal Investigator during the entire course of the project. Especially in the latter case, the respective proposal should justify such arrangements by explaining the scientific added value. The purpose of the ERC funding is NOT to support traditional networks.

Is it possible to transfer the grant to a new host institution?

In exceptional cases it is possible to transfer the Advanced Grant in the course of the research project to a new host institution. The Principal Investigator nevertheless has to justify the transfer by bringing forward the reasons for moving to another institution. Such a move may be justified for example if the provisions for the Principal Investigator's leadership of the research project have not been respected by the original host institution. The latter is then expected to transfer the remaining funds to the new host institution.

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