

Some thoughts and lessons from ERC applications

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The Process

- The project
- Part B1 of the proposal
- Part B2 of the proposal
- The interview

The project

- What do you want to do on a 5-year time scale, given the ability to assemble a group?
 - Essentially the same question as in tenure-track applications
- Identify a (or a couple) final goals that are clearly a milestone for scientific progress in your field
 - Ideally, it should be something that is of high scientific impact, but that *only you* can do
 - ERC states that they fund “high risk, high gain” projects, but how much “risk” is acceptable depends a lot on the panel...
- Then, break down the research plan into intermediate milestones and “work packages” or tasks

Part B1

- 5-page summary of the project
- Goal: convince the panel that your proposal is worthy of serious consideration
- It has to be stand-alone: the panel does not look at part B2 at this stage
- It should catch the attention of weary readers that have gone through hundreds of proposals...
 - Spend time in particular honing the abstract / executive summary
 - Think carefully about good figures: they should be specific to your proposal (not generic figures), contain physical information, but not be too complicated...
- Still, it is a good idea to refer to the broad structure of the proposal (e.g. major goals and intermediate milestones)

Part B2

- The *meat* of the proposal: ~20 pages
 - Should be accessible to *panel members from broad backgrounds*, but also sufficiently detailed to allow *external expert reviewers* to judge the quality and feasibility
- Good idea to think top down: major goals/questions - intermediate milestones - work packages
 - Justify the team and equipment
 - Synergy with host institution
 - Spend time thinking about risks, and come up with mitigation strategies
- Some overlap with Part B1 is unavoidable; just don't repeat whole pages...

The interview

- EU office organizes separate, extremely helpful *interview training* for anyone getting to that stage - hence will not spend time on it here
- Prepare for the standard questions that have been compiled (also ideal to make backup slides for)
- Keep in mind that the panel will most likely already have a preliminary ranking; in most cases, the interview is *not a deciding factor* for success

Questions?