ERC Advanced Grant 2014:
Notes and Tips for Applicants
(version Oktober 1st, 2014)

Quick overview: AdG 2014 Call

- **Prolonged „waiting time"** for resubmission of ERC proposals (1 year for proposals evaluated as „category B", 2 years for „category C" proposals)
- **Model CV- Template** provided by ERC (for guidance only)
- **Mandatory „Funding ID" annex** to indicate running and submitted grants
- ERC **abstract** on Cover Page needs to be **identical** to abstract in online-forms (no separate „Proposal Summary" anymore)
- New **textbox to explain „cross-panel"/"cross-domain" nature** of proposal, if a second panel is selected (on Cover Page of B1)
- Simplified budget table
- Some changes in ERC „panel descriptors" (keywords)
- Online Proposal Submission via the **EU Research Participant Portal (PPSS**): Registration of applicants via **ECAS –** system/PIC code mandatory; some changes in the administrative on-line forms -> **early pre-registration important**
- **Ethical issues table** needs to be completed online; additional questions in ethics section, „**ethics self-assessment"** to be provided if any issue in the ethical issues table applies
- Request for exclusion of up to three reviewers possible without justification
- **Open Access** mandatory as in Horizon 2020, related costs can be charged to the project
- **Minimum 30% of the PIs total working time** needs to be committed to the ERC project, and the PI needs to spend minimum 50% of his/her total working time in Europe or a Horizon 2020-Associated Country (even if the salary of the PI is not charged to the project). The time commitment will be monitored by the ERC.

Important documents and links:

- **ERC Work Programme 2014 (legally binding)**
  http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/doc/call/h2020/common/1587810-erc_c(2013)_8632_en.pdf

- **Information for applicants to the Advanced Grant Call 2014** (former „Guide for Applicants"), including the detailled **„panel descriptors":**
  http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/doc/call/h2020/erc-2014-adg/1612600-information_for_applicantsadg_2014_final_en.pdf

- ERC **Standard Proposal template** (pdf) for Advanced Grant, including administrative forms and Letter of Commitment of the Host Institute:
  http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/call_ptef/pt/h2020-call-pt-erc-adg_en.pdf
  rtf.-versions available via online-submission system (PPSS)

- Participant Portal: Link to proposal submission for **AdG 2014**:
  http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/4050-erc-adg-2014.html#tab3

- Link to previous **ERC panel members („generalists"):**
  http://erc.europa.eu/evaluation-panels
  Please note that there are two panels (panel A and B) for the Advanced Grant which alternate between even und odd years (whith new panel members being appointed regularly). For the Advanced Grant Call 2014, it is thus advisable to look in particular at the list of panel members for the Advanced Grant Call 2012.
  The Panel Chairs of the ERC Advanced Grant Call 2014 are listed at
  http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/content/pages/pdf/Panel_Chairs_AdG_2014.pdf

- Link to previous **ERC external referees („specialists") members**:
  http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/experts_en.html (-> „Ideas")

- Link to CORDIS **database of ERC-funded projects** and Principal Investigators
  http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/projects_en.html
  In our experience this is currently the best database to search for abstracts and Principle Investigators of ERC grants.
  After selecting the "Theme" FP7-IDEAS/ERC you can search for keywords (e.g. „keyword1" AND „keyword2") and/or for specific panels (e.g. SH5, PE6)

- Guidlines for completing the „**ethics self assessment**":
  http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf

- **ERC Homepage**: erc.europa.eu

Remarks on the online submission of ERC proposals via PPSS:

Due to several **new features** in the online submission tool for ERC proposals (PPSS), we strongly recommend to **pre-register early** in order to get aquainted with the system. Please **follow the instructions as provided in the „Information for applicants"** (former „Guide for Applicants", in particular p30-36). As an example:

> For the Principal Investigator and the host institution contact person full details will be required later in the administrative forms (section 2). **Please be aware that you MUST enter the details of the PI and the main host institution contact person at step 4, since these fields are not-editable in the forms.** You may at any point return to 'step 4' of the submission to add or delete any contact person or to change the access rights. Remember to save your data before leaving step 4.

In case of problems with the PPSS, please contact your host institution, FFG (ylva.huber@ffg.at) or directly the **PPSS Service Desk**: DIGIT-EFP7-SEPSUPPORT@ ec.europa.eu; Tel: **+32 (2) 29 92222**

It is very advisable to upload and **submit a first version** of your proposal at least around **10 days before the deadline,** in order to check for any „validation errors" or other issues (including PPSS maintenance windows) that may block proposal submission, layout changes in the uploaded versions, etc**. Up to the call deadline, you can continuously modify your proposal by submitting** (not just uploading) a new version, which will **overwrite** the previous one.

Please ensure that all the **required supporting documents are obtained** and submitted via PPSS in time (Commitment letter of the Host Institution, PhD certificate, ethical issues anneces (ethical self-assessement and any additional documents related to ethics), other supporting documents as required)

Ethical issues (based on information by the ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA)):

- "Any document related to ethics (including the ethics issues table) will not be made available to the ERC reviewers during the evaluation. Hence, they will not be instructed to look at them. The evaluators are not supposed to take ethic issues into account during evaluations. The ethics clearance is done by the ethics review after evaluation is final."

- For proposals with immediate ethics issues, it is nonetheless "advisable to include a short paragraph summarising how they will be dealt with and refer to ethics self assessement/annexes."

- The page numbers to be indicated in the ethics table (online) refer to part B2. It is possible to indicate several page numbers divided by '/' (e.g. 12/14).

„Scientific Excellence": Subcriteria for the evaluation
(ERC Work Programme 2014, p30)

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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 (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)?

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2. Principal Investigator

Intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment

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).
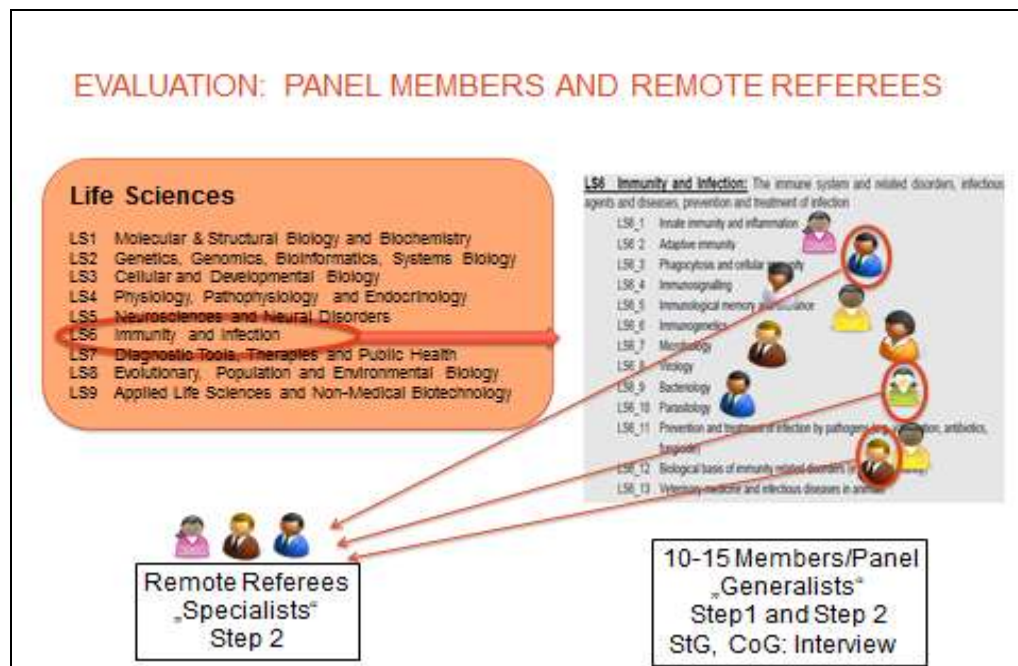
(FFG 2014)

Step 1: At least 3 Panel Members („generalists") read **part B1 only** in detail. The remaining panel members will often only see the abstract of the proposal, and may skim through the proposal during panel discussions.

Step 2: The **full proposal (B1 and B2)** becomes accessible to „generalist" panel members and minimum 3 „specialist" external referees, all of whom review the full proposal.

Considerations for preparing a competitive ERC Advanced Grant proposal:

Usually within few minutes, evaluators will have formed an opinion about core aspects of the proposal:

- What is the problem/research challenge?
- Is it an important problem?
- Why was the problem not solved until now?
- What is the new idea/approach?
- What are the concrete research objectives of the project?
- Is this ground-breaking research, or rather incremental?
- Is the risk-gain-balance favourable?
- Is the PI in a position to succeed with the project?

Structure – B1 & B2

- Provide a **clear structure** throughout your proposal. Ideally, your project will be read as a compelling "story".

- **Introduction/state of the art** are important sections to provide the „big picture", describe the research challenge and to motivate your resarch goals. They should, however, not dominate the proposal:

   → The **major part** of the proposal should explain your **novel approach**

- Present the concrete **aims/objectives** of your project early and in a highly visible manner (e.g. bullet points, bold fonts, text box). Panel Members like to see them „at the first glance".

> - Aim 1: Understand…
> - Aim 2: Identify…
> - Aim 3: ….

- The "**perfect match" between aims/objectives** and the **methodology and the workplan** of the project should be visible (e.g. by referring to „aim(s) 1,2") when describing „method x" or „workpackage y"). This will support the impression of a well integrated, coherent proposal.

Content – B1

- **Part B1** provides the essence of your proposal: it should contain **all important information** to evaluate the "breakthrough character" as well as the "feasibility" of the project. Apart from the "big picture" and the objectives, this includes key **preliminary data**/results/"proof of concept", **risk management,** and key intermediate goals. We recommend to also include a paragraph on the **team composition** in B1 (message: the necessary expertise and manpower will be assembled in your team), and ideally also a **brief timeplan** (1-2 sentences).
   Part B1 is a crucial element of the proposal. The success rate for step1 of the evaluation process, where only Part B1 is assessed, was lately below 30 % for the Advanced Grant.

Content – B2

- **Part B2**
- B2 should be „stand-alone" and present all the key information covered in B1. In addition, B2 should provide the required details for the evaluation by „specialist" reviewers in step 2. This concerns **in particular** the **methodology, preliminary data, risks and contingency plans, resources/time planning**, but also the **team composition** and information on infrastructure/conditions at the **host institution**.

Part B2 also contains the **budget table** (see proposal template).

− Please consider that the „specialist" external referees in step 2 of the evaluation read the proposal for the first time and might thus question „everything" (including the groundbreaking nature).

− Present your **key intermediate goals** and expected results

− Explain how you will **interpret** and **validate** your **results**

− Highlight any novel/unconventional methodology

− Deal **appropriately with significant risks** ($\rightarrow$convincing risk management/"plan B"). The essence of this information is also important for B1 to demonstrate feasibility.

− Helpful: **Time plan/Gantt chart**, overview table on key intermediate goals (see also example below)

− Present the composition and „expertise requirements" for your **team** (PhDs, Post Docs, and their expected background) , as well as „working arrangements" (e.g. supervision of PhD students by Post Docs/Post Docs and PI; overall supervision and guidance by PI)

− Emphasize your **commitment** to the project as PI, including the percentage of total working time (in addition to the „time committment" line in the budget table). If you think there could be reasonable doubts on whether you will be able to fulfill the time commitment due to other duties, explain your strategy proactively.

− As opposed to the ERC Starting or Consolidator Grant, **no interview** will take place in step 2 of the evaluation process. Because there is no opportunity for PIs to explain any unclarities or add missing information during a discussion with panel members, please take particular care also in the preparation of B2.

• **References** are included in the 5 pages-limit of B1 and in the 15 pages-limit of B2. It is advisable to keep them to the „necessary minimum" (approx. half page in B1; e.g. by removing the titles of the publications). The references in B1 may also support Panel Members in selecting the external referees to evaluate the proposal in step 2 of the evaluation.

• **Proposal Abstract**
The abstract is a very important part of the proposal, particularly during panel discussions (the majority of panel members may only read the abstract). It should therefore present the essence of your project in a nutshell (scientific challenge, objectives, innovative approach, potential impact; highlighting unique features of the project and PI)

Clarity

- It is important that your proposal is also **well understandable for reviewers that are not specialists** in your own research field/topic. This is particularly relevant for step 1 of the evaluation process, where **only part B1 is read by ERC panel members only**. ERC panel members usually act as "generalists" in the evaluation process; they are supported by "specialist" external referees in step 2 of the evaluation. The decision on whether a project is proposed for funding lies with the panel members.

- Helpful: **Precise wording**/descriptions, **clear definitions**, concrete **examples**; high quality **figures**

- Ensure a „reader-friendly" layout, with sufficient spaces, highlighting key messages (e.g. short summary of a section in a text box, bullet points; selective use of bold fonts)

Novelty/Originality/Competition

- Address explicitly the **groundbreaking nature** of the project and its potential impact ("immediate" impact and mid/long-term-vision).

- It should become evident for reviewers that your approach is **original, really novel** and not rather "an extension" of your previous research. Explain the **unique features** of your project, the advantages of your approach compared to **competing approaches,** and also why your project is **timely.**

Hypothesis-driven project/clearly defined research questions?

- While there can be differences between research fields/disciplines, ERC reviewers frequently comment positively on the fact that a project is "hypothesis-driven". In any case, however, the overarching research questions should be highly visible in the proposal. Proposals that apparently lack such question(s) and are perceived as largely „technology-driven" or „methodology-driven" will likely be at a disadvantage.

Scope/focus of the project?

- As with any research proposal, the scope of an ERC project can be questioned by reviewers – either as being „too broad/unfocused" or „too narrowly focused". It is therefore important to clearly explain and **justify the approach you have chosen** - why are you convinced that this is the best approach, and that it isfeasible within 5 years? („educate the evaluator").

Which panel?

- Consider thoroughly the **panel** for which you intend to submit. We suggest to check the list of previous panel members, and abstracts of proposals submitted to that panel (see weblinks above). In **which area is the "groundbreaking nature"/core novelty of your project located**, and which "generalist" panel would likely be in the

best position to assess the latter?

If you consider your proposal as interdisciplinary (cross-panel/cross-domain), you can indicate a secondary panel in the PPSS. In this case, please describe the cross-panel/cross-domain nature in the dedicated text box on the B1 cover page. However, we recommend giving some extra thought to this question, as the review of interdisciplinary proposals has also proven to be challenging for the ERC.

Demonstrating a competive „Advanced" profile (see also below)

- **CV, Track Record, State of the art:**
  Your "scientific leadership profile" should be evident throughout the proposal, i.e. not only in the CV and Track Record section, but also in B1 and B2, e.g. when presenting the „state of the art" and preliminary data ($\rightarrow$ „As we could show in [ref.x]…")

- **Collaborations:**
  Keep a good balance in describing collaborations for the project: explain their importance for the project, without giving the impression of being "too dependent" on them. Message: the PI is excellently connected and will have access to all required complementary expertise and infrastructure $\rightarrow$ targeted collaborations.

Benefit from feedback by colleagues

- Receiving comments and questions of colleagues (both within and beyond your research field) on your proposal will be highly valuable. Ideally, colleagues evaluate your application using the evaluation subcriteria as presented in the ERC Work Programme (see also above, p4)

Additional remarks on B1-CV, Track Record and B2- resources

B1, Section b: Curriculum vitae (max. 2 pages)

- ***NEW: CV Template, <u>for Guidance only</u>:***

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/call_ptef/pt/h2020-call-pt-erc-stg_en.pdf

- In addition to the suggestions provided by the CV template, please present also any activities as reviewer for **journals**

- ***NEW: Appendix: All ongoing and submitted grants and funding of the PI (Funding ID) -*** Mandatory information not counting towards page limits

- According to information by the ERCEA, the information in this table is used to support the selection of reviewers for the proposal (avoiding potential conflicts of interest with reviewers that might be involved in running/submitted projects with the applicant).

  However, if several ongoing grants are listed which will temporally overlap with the ERC project, it seems advisable to also demonstrate that **the PI will definitely be able to fullfil his/her time commitment to the ERC project**, e.g. by indicating the % of time commitment of the PI for the other grants in the table.

- For submitted grant proposals which strongly overlap with the content of the ERC project,we recommend to add an explanatory sentence, e.g.: *In case both the X grant application and the ERC grant application are successful, I shall accept the ERC Grant and decline the X grant*

- Either in the CV or the Track Record , we recommend to also include a „Funding ID"-section to list **concluded grants** (full list, or selection). You can also indicate the total amount of funding obtained by the PI so far.

On-going Grants

Project Title	Funding source	Amount (Euros)	Period	Role of the PI	*Relation to current ERC proposal*

Applications

Project Title	Funding source	Amount (Euros)	Period	Role of the PI	*Relation to current ERC proposal*

B1, Section c: 10 years achievements track-record (max. 2 pages)

- AdG 2014: highlight **10 representative publications** in the track record

- For CV and track record, we recommend to provide „**summary/overview information**" for the reviewers (e.g. total number of publications, contributions to conferences, citations, h-index etc as applicable), as well as specific „**highlight information**". E.g. for the list of publications in the track record, it has proven very

useful to describe the key content and impact of selected publications and your contribution in 1-2 sentences in a textbox („Here, we could show for the first time…")

B2, Section c : Resources

Apart from explaining the project costs in the adequate detail (**usually ~ 1 explanatory « running text » page for the main cost items**, plus the budget table), this section is also suitable to present **detailed information on the team composition and expertise**, including the expertise requirements for Post Docs and PhD students that will be hired for the project. The strong **committment of the PI** to the project should be visible, including the time-commitment (which is also indicated in a box below the budget table (template)).

We also recommend to present relevant information on the **host institution/research environment** here, to strengthen the message of "the right project and team in the right place".

The time plan/overview on timing of „key intermediate goals" will usually either be presented in c) resources or at the end of b) methodology.

Example table for "**key intermediate goals**"

	Aim 1	Aim 2	Aim 3
Years 1 – 2	Analysis of .... Publication 1	Purify....	Visualize... Conference....
Year 3 – 4	Maps...	Integration of...	Binding

Budget table :

➔ Please contact the grant management office at your ERC host institution for support with the budget calculation

- **Other direct costs („with overhead flat rate"):** This category includes contracts to purchase goods, works or services,e.g. contract for a computer; contract for an audit certificate on the financial statements; contract for the publication of brochures; contract for the creation of a project website, contract for organization of the rooms and catering for a meeting, contract for hiring IPR consultants/agents. These costs do not arise from directly implementing the „action tasks" of the ERC project, but they are

necessary to implement these tasks. As a change to previous regulations, overheads apply to these costs in Horizon 2020, as opposed to the case for subcontracts (http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/amga/h2020-amga_en.pdf, p96/97)

- **Audit costs** should thus be included in the „**Other direct costs**" category. In Horizon 2020, only **one audit** (certificate of the financial statement) is required at the end of the project, if the funding (direct costs) amounts to more than 325.000 EUR (i.e. one audit per ERC-project will suffice)

- **Subcontracting costs („without overheads")**: Costs for subcontracts arise from the implementation of specific tasks which are part of the action (ERC project) by a third party. No overheads can be charged for these costs.

- **Equipment:** Please note that only **depreciation rates** (according to national rules) can be charged to the ERC for equipment

- Do not forget the possibility to include costs for publications, including **open access fees**

- **Other direct costs with no overheads :** This category includes costs of resources made available by third parties which are not used on the premises of the beneficiary (= host institution)

Timeframe Advanced Grant 2014 Evaluation (ERC–2014–AdG)

Indicative time frames for sending information to applicants (AdG2014)	PE – Physical Sciences & Engineering	LS – Life Sciences	SH – Social Sciences & Humanities
1. Results of eligibility check (applies only to proposals declared ineligible)	**December 2014**		
2. Results of Step 1	**March 2015**	**March 2015**	**March 2015**
3. Results of Step 2*	**End April 2015**	**End April 2015**	**End April 2015**

*In order to check that you have not received a notification letter, you can always check directly your applicant web account