White paper

ThermoFisher SCIENTIFIC

Achieving research excellence

Navigating the ERC grant landscape

thermo scientific

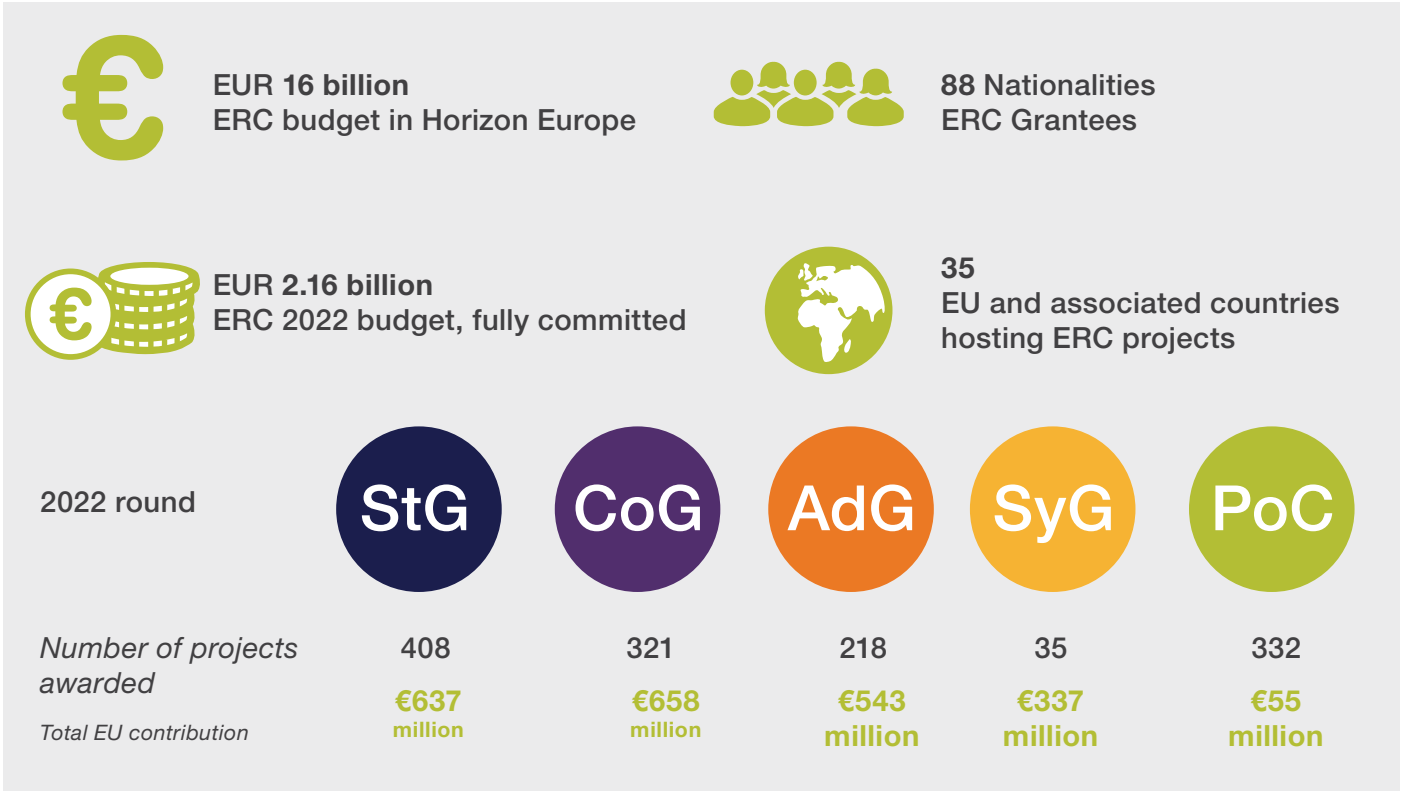


Figure 1: The ERC in numbers for Starting Grants (StG), Consolidator Grants (CoG), Advanced Grants (AdG), Synergy Grants (SyG), Proof of Concept Grants (PoC).

1. Why apply for ERC grants

European Research Council (ERC) grants are not just financial support — they are a catalyst for transformative research. These grants back frontier, high-risk, high-gain projects that can significantly advance scientific knowledge and push the boundaries of science. They empower researchers to embark on ambitious projects driven by scientific excellence across all fields. With substantial funding, ranging from €1.5 to 2.5 million for individual grants and up to €10 million for Synergy Grants, ERC grants enable researchers to build their teams and independent research programs, fostering a culture of innovation and discovery.

Over the past two decades, ERC funding has been a catalyst for numerous breakthroughs, particularly in life sciences. These breakthroughs, often resulting from high-risk, high-gain research projects, have significantly advanced our understanding of various scientific disciplines.

With a budget of €16 billion from 2021 to 2027, the ERC is a powerhouse of innovation. In 2022 alone, more than €2 billion was dedicated to funding cutting-edge projects. ERC projects are making waves across 35 EU and associated countries, generating over 2,400 patents and inspiring 400 start-ups. With more than 200,000 articles published and many prestigious awards, including 14 Nobel Prizes, the ERC's impact is undeniable. Spanning more than 850 research institutions and 88 nationalities, the ERC's impact includes diverse scientific disciplines and global communities (Fig 1).

- In 2012, a project led by Thijs Ettema and funded by an ERC Starting Grant reshaped our understanding of life's origins. By uncovering Asgard archaea, it settled the debate on the evolutionary tree of life, profoundly impacting microbiology and evolutionary biology and prompting textbook revisions.
- In 2013, ERC Synergy grantees Anna Akhmanova and Marileen Dogterom merged biophysics and biology research to advance our understanding of cell self-organization. Their work holds potential for revolutionary disease treatments like cancer. The grant facilitated collaboration with experts, allowing them to expand their impact. "The ERC Synergy Grant enabled us to combine our skills and think bigger," they said.
- Similarly, in 2017, Uğur Şahin, co-founder of BioNTech, secured an ERC grant to enhance the viability of mRNA vaccines for cancer treatment, employing data analysis to monitor tumor progression and predict mutations in patients. This innovative approach harnesses RNA-based vaccines, a cornerstone of immunotherapy, offering the potential for personalized cancer vaccines and broader disease control, exemplified during the COVID-19 crisis. He is now leading groundbreaking efforts with his interdisciplinary team to develop a new wave of mRNA cancer vaccines.

2. Eligibility requirements

ERC grants are available to researchers worldwide, regardless of age, gender, or nationality. Annually, the ERC announces opportunities through its Work Programme, showcasing available grants. You can apply for various grant types: Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, Synergy, and Proof of Concept Grants. The call for proposals appears on the Funding and Tenders Portal, your go-to hub for spotting opportunities, connecting with partners, and submitting proposals. Dive into the ERC's website for resources like the Work Programme description, guideline for applicants, and informative videos.

ERC host institutes

Regardless of your nationality or current place of residence, you are eligible to apply for ERC grants. The critical requirement is that the host institute for your ERC-funded research must be located in an EU member state or associated country.

- Triantafyllos Stylianopoulos moved from the United States to the University of Cyprus in 2013, where he established a state-of-the-art lab thanks to ERC support through a Starting Grant (2014), a Consolidator Grant, an Advanced Grant (2023), and three Proof of Concept Grants over the last decade. "The support I received from the ERC has been pivotal in driving my research forward," he said. "The timing was particularly fortuitous as I had recently relocated from the USA to Cyprus, only to encounter a collapsed economy with very limited funding for research. However, thanks to the ERC Starting Grant in 2014, I was able to establish my research team and purchase state-of-the-art equipment."

Widening countries

The ERC is implementing initiatives to enhance the engagement of nations with historically low participation rates. Certain countries, like Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia, also referred to as "Widening countries," have notably lower success rates than others. The ERC strives to boost involvement from these countries to unleash the potential for cutting-edge research throughout Europe.

Tip: If you are from one of the Widening countries and need help developing a project for an ERC grant, you can tap into the ERC Visiting Fellowship Programme to visit with and gain experience from ERC-funded teams.

- Physicist Matej Praprotnik from Slovenia visited a lab at EHT Zurich using an ERC visiting fellowship. "While there was a lot of experimental development in this field, there was not much theoretical," he said. "During my fellowship, I gained more experience in multiscale methods necessary for my project."

Types of ERC grants

There are five ERC grants that cater to principal investigators at various stages of their careers (Table 1). This white paper does not delve into the ERC Proof of Concept Grant, as the ERC views it as "complementary" funding to develop a proof of concept of an innovation resulting from projects funded by the other four grants.

Timing is key

Unlocking opportunities for principal investigators is all about timing. Specific eligibility criteria are tied to the date of your first successful PhD. Check Table 1 for a snapshot of grants and their corresponding eligibility criteria. It's worth noting that the eligibility periods can be extended for situations like parental leave, long-term illness, or national service.

***Tip:** Always check if an extension of eligibility criteria applies to your situation.*

	Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced Grant	Synergy Grant
Target group	Early-stage researchers aspiring to become independent research leaders	PIs consolidating their independent research team	Established research leaders continuing their work in expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge	2–4 PIs bringing together complementary skills, knowledge, and resources to address ambitious research problems
Eligibility period	2–7 years after PhD	7–12 years after PhD	No specific criteria	No specific criteria
Max. budget	€1.5 million	€2 million	€2.5 million	€10 million
Additional amount	€1 million	€1 million	€1 million	€4 million
Duration	5 years	5 years	5 years	6 years
Time commitment	50% project time and 50% in the EU or associated countries	40% project time and 50% in the EU or associated countries	30% project time and 50% in the EU or associated countries	30% project time and 50% in the EU or associated countries
	Single applicant			Consortium

Table 1: Overview of ERC grants.

Restrictions

Don't overlook crucial submission restrictions. Principal investigators are limited to leading one of the four grants at a time. If you secured a grant in 2023, hold off applying in 2024. Existing grantees must wait until their project ends within two years of the call to propose new projects. Panel Members from 2022 are barred from applying in 2024. Explore more restriction criteria, including resubmission rules, in Section 4.

Tip: Stay informed — check the Work Programme every year for the latest submission restrictions and guidelines.

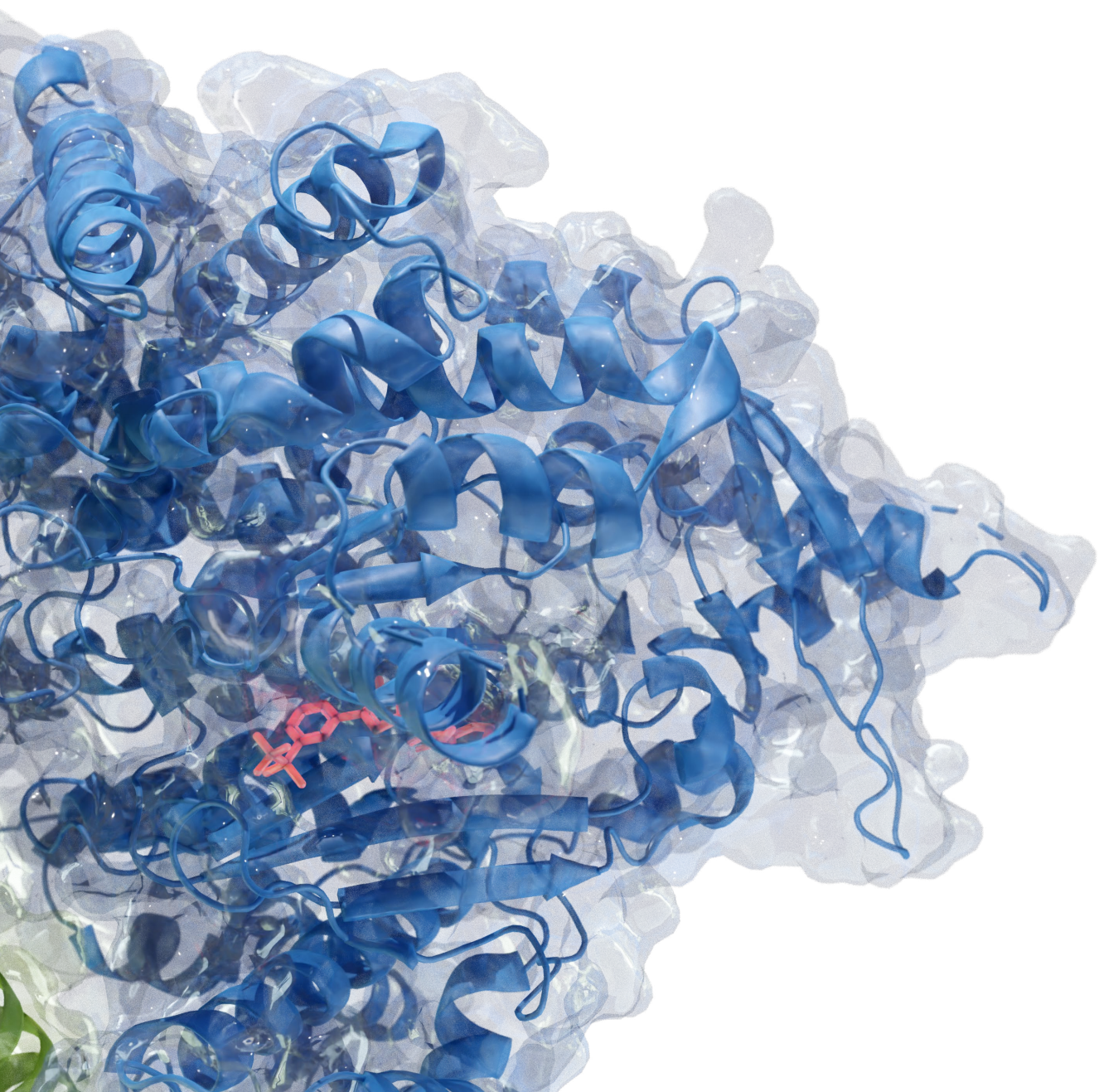
ERC datahub: A valuable resource

The ERC Datahub is your gateway to project insights. Dive into previous projects' data, grasp ERC standards, and uncover trends to refine your proposal. Compare and collaborate across disciplines for innovative, interdisciplinary proposals that bridge multiple fields.

Gender equality: Progress in action

The ERC has adopted a Gender Equality Plan and implemented measures to promote gender balance within its programs. One such measure involves extending the eligibility window for women who took parental leave, granting an extension of 18 months per child for eligibility criteria. Women who have received grants are also urged to share their stories to inspire more women to join ERC calls.

These efforts are starting to pay off. In the 2023 call, 43% of Starting Grants went to women principal investigators, up from 39% in 2022. Advanced Grant applications by women principal investigators hit a record-high participation rate of 23%. Women also clinched 39% of Consolidator Grants in 2022, a historic high.



3. Critical elements of the application

The application contains an administrative form (Part A) and a research proposal (Part B).

Key pointers and tips for Part A

In the General Information section, you'll find project duration, title, ERC and free keywords, and your abstract. But here's the crucial part: strategically choosing the right ERC panel and keywords could significantly influence your proposal's evaluation.

Panel Selection — Dive into the panel's composition, use relevant keywords, and align your proposal with their preferences to enhance communication. To boost your chances of securing ERC funding, take these proactive steps:

- Analyze past panel compositions in your areas of interest, considering member turnover every two years for up to eight years (four rounds). For instance, when applying for the LS2 panel of the 2024 StG call, scrutinize LS2 panel members from the 2022 and 2020 calls to identify potential evaluators. This historical perspective helps predict who might be on your target panel this year.
- Don't forget to tap into the wisdom of colleagues who have won ERC funding in your field — they offer priceless insights.
- If your project spans disciplines, explore cross-panel options, but tread carefully. Dual panel assessment brings benefits and challenges, so weigh your options carefully.
- Consider these questions while selecting the panel:
  - Which panel would be most receptive to the innovation and originality of your work?
  - Are the panel members likely to grasp your research's significance and broader implications?
  - Does your methodology exceed the standard within the selected panel's field?

Tip: *Investigate what kind of projects have been funded by the panels in the past and are available on the ERC Datahub to provide clues about the panel's thematic preferences and trends.*

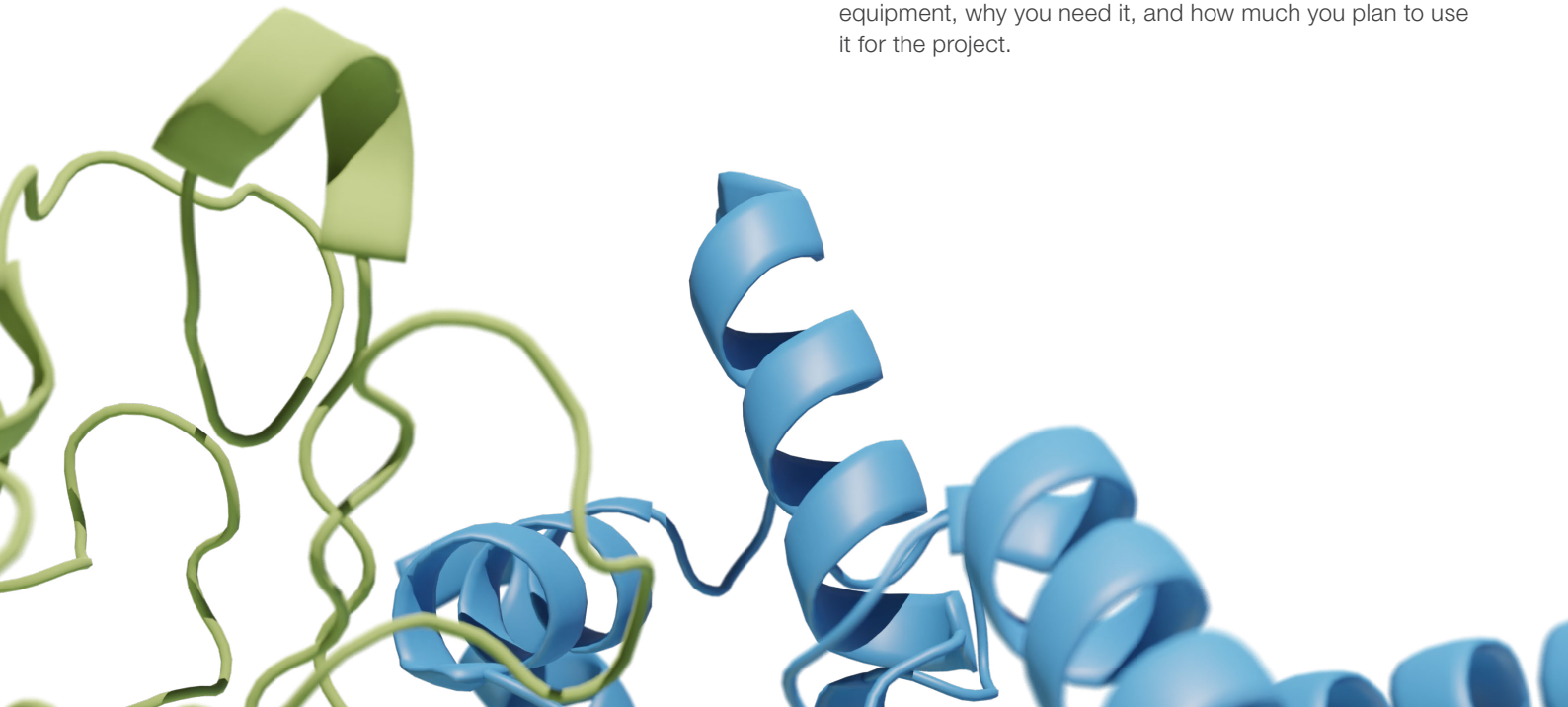
Abstract — Crafting a standout abstract (2,000 characters) for your ERC project is essential. Here's how to do it:

- Introduce the project's topic and highlight the main scientific gap it addresses to captivate readers and showcase its novelty.
- Include a hypothesis or novel theory that resolves the identified knowledge gap and offers unique insights.
- Briefly outline the research plan, including key steps and methodologies to achieve the project's objectives despite character limits.
- Emphasize the project's high-risk, high-gain nature to convey uncertainty while showcasing the potential significant outcomes upon success.

Tip: *Examine abstracts of previously funded projects within your research domain to draw inspiration and learn effective techniques for crafting a compelling abstract. Analyze the structure, clarity, and key elements of these abstracts to understand how to convey the novelty, significance, and feasibility of your proposed research concisely.*

Budget — The key is to provide a detailed, justified, and realistic budget that aligns with the proposed research activities in the project. A description and justification of resources must be provided with a maximum length of 8,000 characters. This information is made available to evaluating experts.

- Consult your institution's administration and finance departments when preparing the budget. They can provide salary tables and guidance on eligible costs.
- Specify the percentage of the principal investigator's dedicated time (see Table 1) to the ERC-funded activity when calculating personnel costs.
- Include 25% indirect costs on top of the direct costs, except for subcontracting and third-party resources.
- Thoroughly justify all costs in the Description of Resources section to facilitate the panel's resource assessment. The evaluation panels often reduce unjustified budgets.
- Include a short technical description of any requested equipment, why you need it, and how much you plan to use it for the project.



Equipment purchase — ERC grants cover equipment purchases owned by the host institution, reimbursing costs based on usage and depreciation and ensuring no profit for the beneficiary.

- You can request additional funding up to €1 million or €4 million beyond the set limits (€1.5 million to €10 million) for start-up costs and major equipment purchases, reaching a total funding request of €2.5 million for Starting Grants, €3 million for Consolidator Grants, €3.5 million for Advanced Grants and €14 million for Synergy Grants (see Table 1). The funding can be requested for start-up costs related to relocating to the EU or an associated country, major equipment purchases, or access to large facilities.
- In the 2022 round, 15% to 18% of awarded projects for Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants and 50% of awarded grants secured extra funding. Out of these projects, 39% were from life sciences, 58% from physical science and engineering, and 9% from social sciences panels (Fig. 2).
- If your host institute lacks the necessary equipment for your ERC project, apply for an extra budget to purchase major equipment like microscopes, mass spectrometers, and other instruments. Get quotes from multiple vendors to maximize your investment and utility (see section 6).

Tip: *Thermo Fisher Scientific provides support for procuring large equipment through ERC grants. Throughout the application process, we can help you ensure that the chosen equipment aligns with your needs and specifications. We also offer quotes to help with budgeting, provide details regarding room requirements, and conduct site surveys as necessary.*

Key pointers and tips for Part B

- Use provided templates in the submission system, labeling each page with the principal investigator's last name and proposal acronym.
- Include scanned copies of your PhD certificate, the host institution support letter, and relevant documents related to ethics issues (e.g. confirmation of ethical approval by the ethics committee of your institute) and/or security issues.

Refer to section 5 for additional details on how to compose parts B1 and B2.

Tip*: Beat the rush. Early registration and submission are key, as the portal may get shaky near the deadline. The good news is that you can submit multiple proposal versions until the cutoff. The latest one counts, so do not wait until the last minute to upload your proposal.*

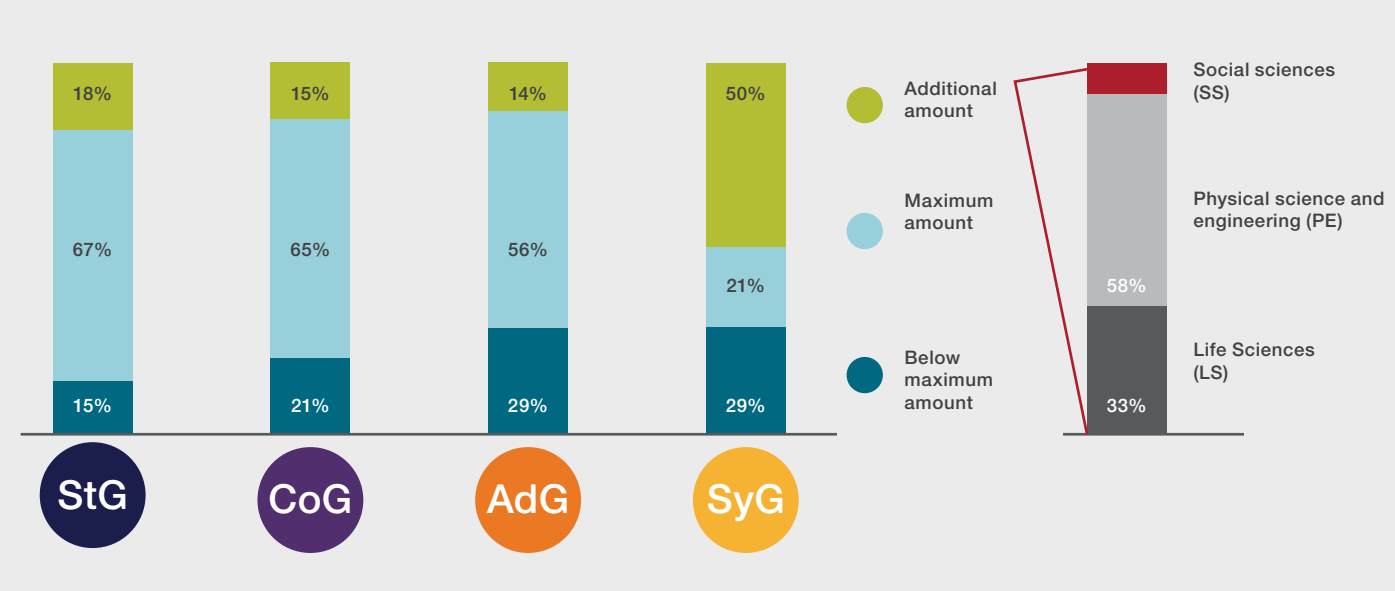


Figure 2: Funding distribution for awarded projects in 2022.

- Martin Kozák of Charles University in Prague secured an ERC Starting Grant for a five-year project, which has received €1.83 million to pioneer electron microscopy for precise electron motion capture in matter, aiming to advance materials research for faster electronics and information transfer, drawing inspiration from his international experiences. He attempted to further develop his findings from post-doctoral work in Germany upon returning to Prague, but only on a theoretical level, as he lacked the experimental equipment in the Czech Republic needed for this research. "Thanks to the ERC, I have now received funding to buy equipment that will allow us to carry out experiments, which we would have to perform abroad otherwise," he said.

- Similarly, John Diffley won an ERC grant to reconstitute the entire process of DNA replication *in vitro* (in a test tube) in 2010. "ERC funding really allowed us to turn the big oil tanker of a research programme around to focus on a different approach," he said. "It can be hard to change a lab, so this support was essential to retooling the lab for biochemical, not genetic, experiments."

4. Evaluation process

Evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria are focused on "scientific excellence," evaluating project innovation, feasibility, and principal investigator commitment. Key elements include:

1. Research project
   - Ground-breaking nature and potential impact: Tackling significant challenges with ambition
   - Scientific approach: Assessing feasibility, methodology, and resource adequacy
2. Principal investigator
   - Intellectual capacity and creativity: Demonstrating original thinking and research prowess
   - Scientific expertise and capacity: Proving capability to execute the project successfully

Evaluation process

Two-step process for ERC Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants

Step 1: Remote assessment of Part B1 document by panel members, often non-experts in your field.

Step 2: Full research proposal (Part B1 + B2) assessment by panel members and technical experts. Additional reviews may be sought, and principal investigators whose proposals are retained for Step 2 will be invited for an interview to present their proposal at the meeting of the evaluation panel. Each applicant undergoes a 30-minute interview, either in person or remotely. The interview includes a presentation of the research project by the principal investigator followed by a question-and-answer session. Panel members may review the budget and resources, recommending adjustments if necessary.

Three-step process for Synergy Grants

Step 1: Remote assessment of Part B1 document

Step 2: Evaluation of full proposals (Part B1 + B2) meeting criteria and budget threshold

Step 3: Interviews for retained projects

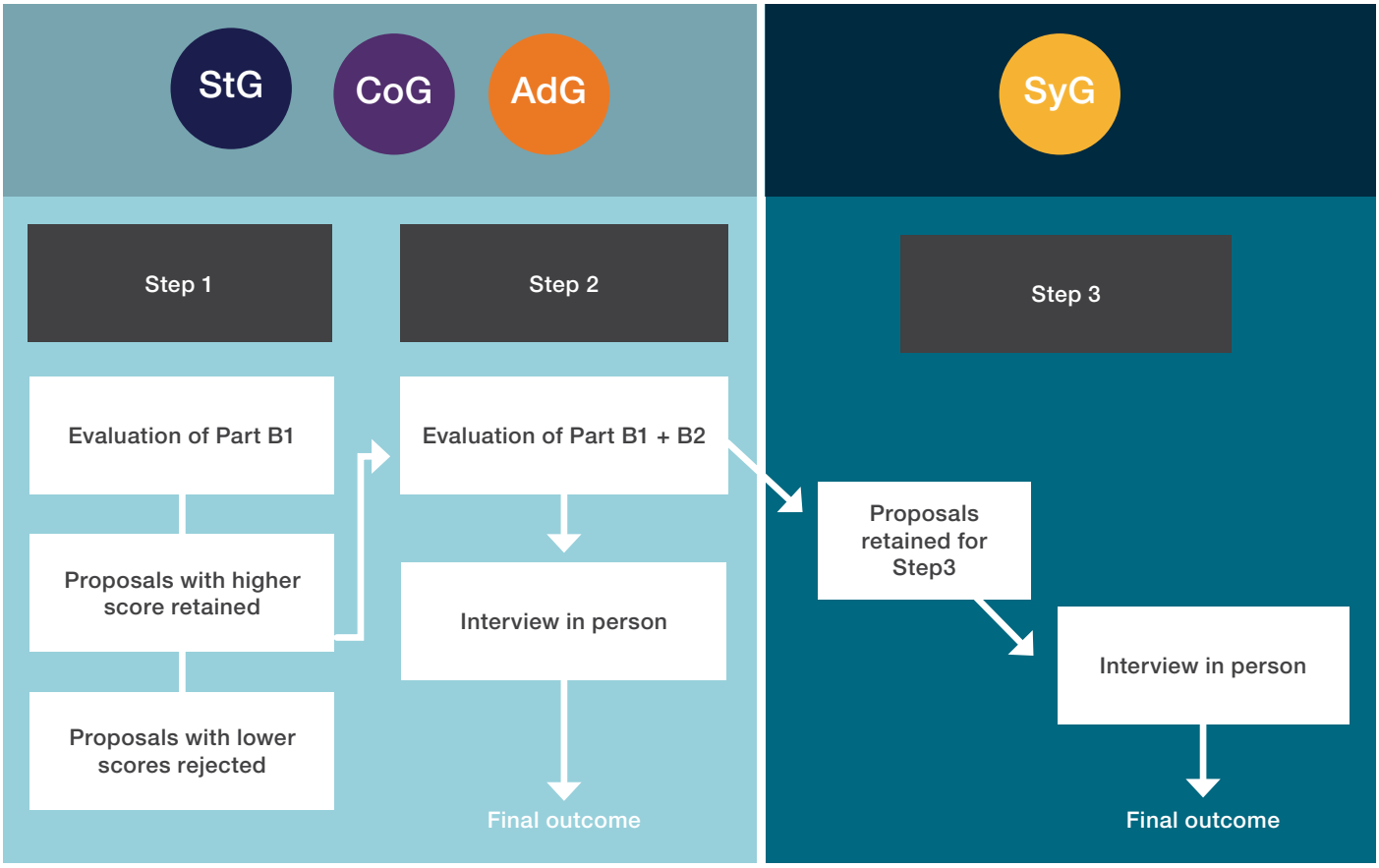


Figure 3: ERC evaluation process.

Tip: *The scores determine eligibility for resubmission in subsequent rounds. These include receiving a "B" or "C" in Step 1. Therefore, it is not recommended to submit a subpar application. It is important to review these resubmission restrictions outlined in the Work Programme.*

Common reasons for rejection at Step 1

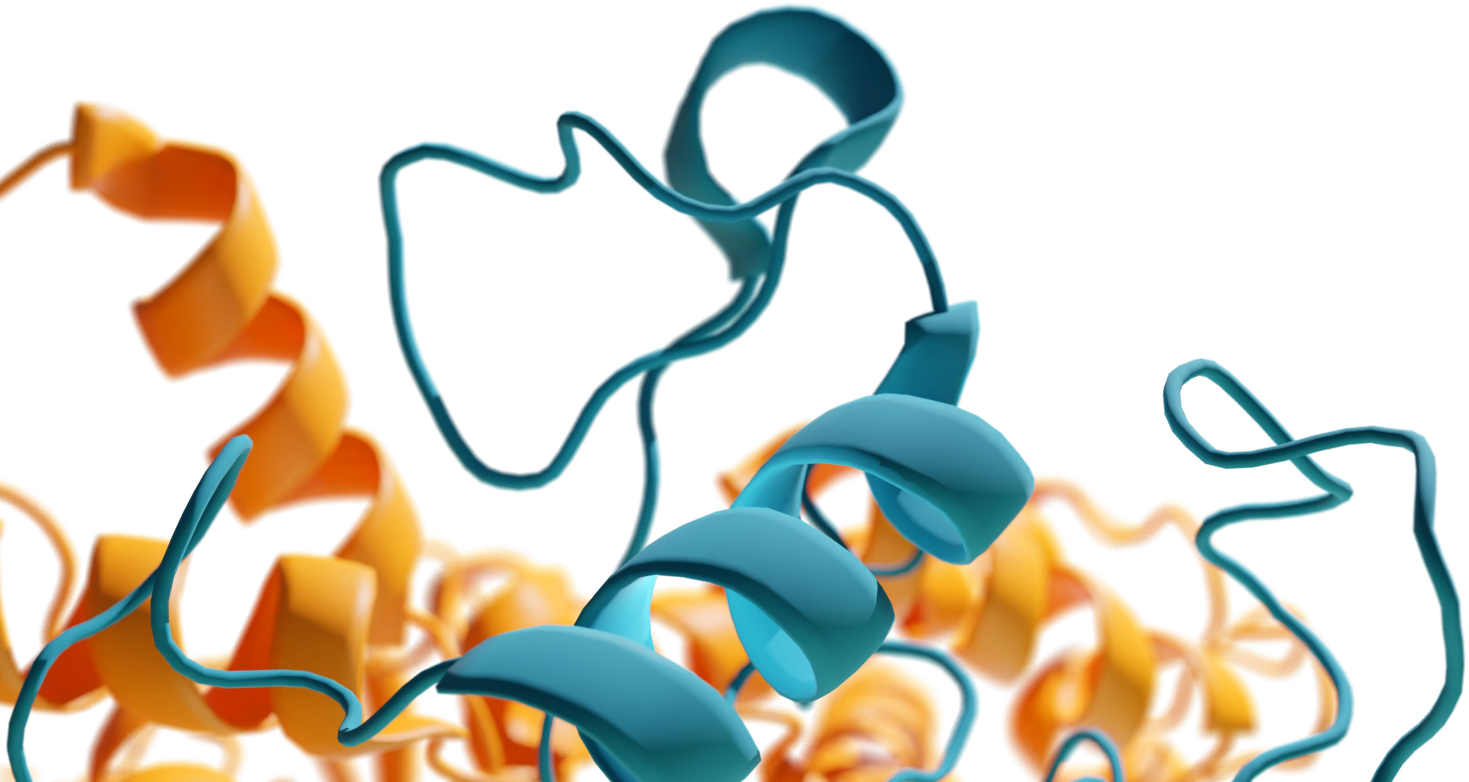
- Eligibility criteria not met (see section 2.3)
- Research sounds incremental and not groundbreaking
- The scope of the project is not clearly focused, either too narrow or too broad
- The principal investigator's track record and scientific independence are not sufficient
- The description of the challenges that are addressed is not clear, and how this research could help to address these challenges is not explicitly described
- Objectives are not clearly defined or not ambitious enough

Common reasons for rejection in Step 2

- The project is not high risk, high gain
- Evaluators are not convinced of the feasibility of the project
- Risk management is insufficient
- Resources are not justified
- The work plan is not detailed
- The novelty and impact of the project are moderate
- No information was provided on the recruitment of personnel for the project
- The timeline is too ambitious to achieve all objectives
- Limited insights into scientific approaches and methods
- The project does not promise to produce lot of valuable insights

How to improve

Reason for rejection	Mitigation
For the research proposal	
The scope is too narrow	Use Part B1 to provide the big picture and explain the critical gaps in the field for scientific advancement. Explain how the project will have a significant impact (e.g., developing new concept techniques) for the scientific field and how other areas of research will also benefit in the long term (check section 5.1).
The scope is too broad	Rethink the aims of the project and define clear research questions. Include a testable hypothesis with defined follow-up objectives that align with delivering concrete results.
Incremental sounding research	Rethink the big picture and avoid making the proposal sound like a mere follow-up on previous research. Use terms like "first-time," "novel," and "innovative."
The work is not detailed enough	Check section 5, point 4.
Insufficient risk management	Check section 5, point 4.
For the principal investigator's track record	
Insufficient track record	If an essential publication is not yet in press or published, consider applying when key publication manuscripts as first author or corresponding author are submitted or close to being published.
Insufficient (potential for) independence	Highlight leadership skills such as mentoring students or post-docs, showcase any projects you've led, and try to differentiate yourself from your PhD and post-doc supervisor.



5. How to build a story for a proposal

Framework for Part B1

The objective of B1 is to show original thinking, relevance, impact, and excellence.

1. Global challenge or problem

Start with a concise overview of the global challenge your research addresses, leading to the specific focal problem you aim to tackle. Emphasize the urgency, relevance, and ambition of your research endeavor.

Example: Provide facts and figures to illustrate the importance and urgency of the project, for example, on the social and economic burden as well as the mortality, morbidity, and incidence rate of the disease your project is addressing.

2. Scientific challenge and solution

Clearly articulate the scientific challenge your project addresses, explaining why it's significant and warrants attention. Justify why ERC support is crucial for advancing your research. Highlight the vision behind your research, its fit with the ERC's objectives, and the ambitious goals you aim to achieve.

Example: No treatment is available for a given disease due to lack of known molecular targets, low treatment response due to tissue heterogeneity, high off-targets of current treatment raising safety concerns, lack of methods to investigate molecular interactions, or lack of techniques to investigate structural aspects at the nanoscale.

3. Your research plan, hypothesis, and critical objectives

Present your hypothesis and outline the objectives of your research. Provide a detailed and well-crafted research plan, including methodologies, techniques, and timelines. Demonstrate the timeliness of your research, explaining how it addresses current gaps and contributes to the advancement of knowledge. Highlight the excellence of your approach, emphasizing originality, innovative methodologies, and your unique skills and expertise.

Example: Based on your hypothesis, develop two to three key aims leading to main objectives. Objectives can be executed in work packages. Explain how the expected outcomes after the execution of these objectives will fill in the current gaps mentioned in section 2. Explicitly mention new techniques and approaches that will be developed in this project and mention the originality of the approaches using terms like "first time," "novel," "transformative potential," and "innovative." A PERT chart showing how various work packages are linked with key project deliverables can help evaluators understand the research plan.

4. Impact of your work

Describe the potential impact of your research on the scientific field and beyond. Explain how your findings will help to address the global challenge you identified in the introduction.

Framework for Part B2

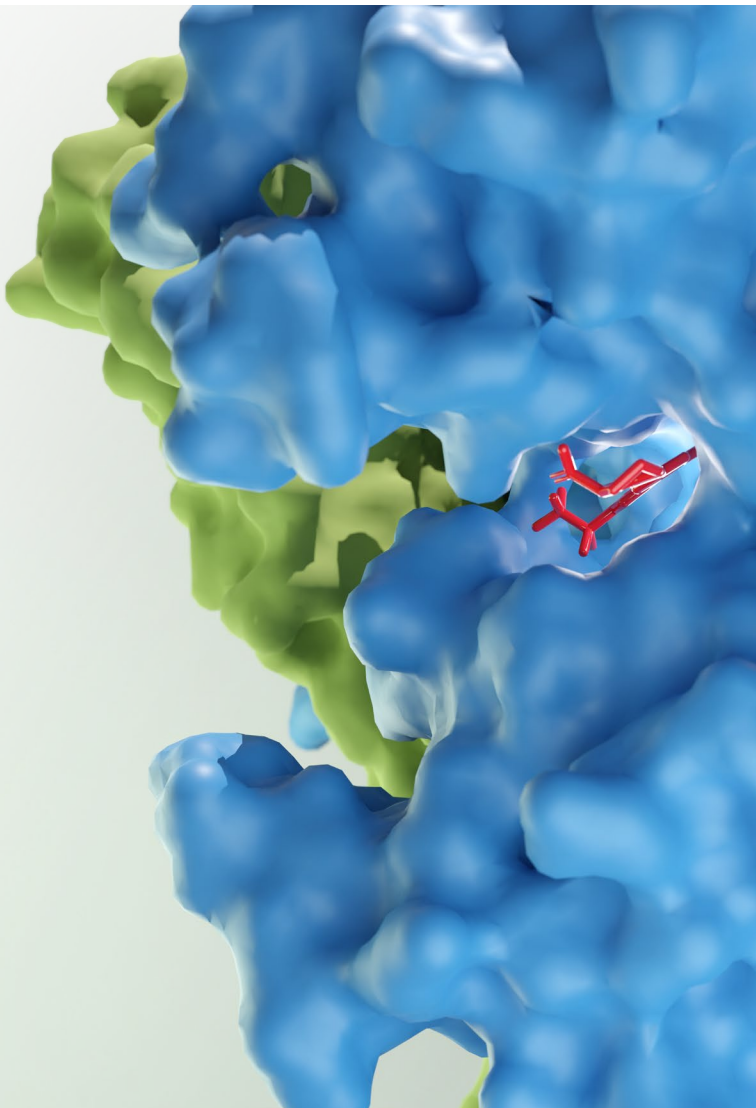
The objective of B2 is to show original thinking, feasibility, and excellence.

1. Scientific challenge (answering the "why" question)

Clearly articulate the scientific challenge your research addresses, emphasizing its significance in the field. Justify why tackling this challenge is crucial for advancing scientific knowledge and addressing pressing issues. Highlight the importance of pushing the boundaries of knowledge and achieving breakthroughs in your field.

2. Scientific approach (answering the "how" question)

Describe your scientific approach for addressing the identified challenge and achieving desired outcomes. Explain the methodologies, techniques, and strategies you will employ to tackle the problem. Highlight the innovative nature of your approach and its potential to yield groundbreaking results. Showcase how your approach differs from existing methods and how it brings a fresh perspective to the problem. Highlight the unique skills, expertise, or resources your team possesses that enable you to execute the proposed approach effectively.



3. Demonstrating feasibility (answering the "why you" question)

Provide evidence demonstrating why you are well positioned to execute the proposed research successfully. Showcase your track record, expertise, and resources that support the feasibility of your approach. Demonstrate timeliness by explaining how your knowledge and resources enable you to carry out the research efficiently and within the specified timeline. Demonstrate your excellence by showcasing your proficiency in the relevant methodologies and techniques, ensuring high-quality research outcomes. Try to explain why this work has not been done before and why you would be the best person to tackle this problem. Differentiate yourself from your peers working in the same research area. Show feasibility by providing a realistic assessment of the feasibility of your approach, considering factors such as available resources, logistical constraints, and potential challenges. Use preliminary data to show not only the premise of your hypothesis but also the feasibility of certain technically ambitious aspects of the proposed research. Explain contingency plans for high-risk steps to help convince evaluators that the project will not run into a dead end if the high-risk step fails.

Tip: *Principal investigators often tend to write using the first-person plural perspective (e.g. "we hypothesize…"). Because ERC grants are personal, it's more convincing to use first-person singular at relevant places: "I propose/hypothesize/envision…," "My post-doctoral research showed…," "My team will develop..."*

Figure 4: Self-reflection questions to build the story.

4. Research plan (answering the "what" and "how" questions)

Present a detailed research program outlining the specific objectives, activities, and milestones of your proposed research. Describe how each component of the program contributes to addressing the scientific challenge and achieving the desired outcomes.

- **Risk assessment:** This section is critical in helping evaluators appreciate the high-risk, high-gain nature of the project. Evaluate the potential risks, their likelihood, and potential impact on the project. Discuss how you plan to mitigate risks while maximizing the benefits of your research. Explicitly mention the high technical risk that could fail and back up your strategy with good contingency plans.
- **High-risk, high-gain aspect:** Include a separate paragraph explaining ambitious and high-risk steps related to specific work packages or tasks within the work packages. Explain how outcomes of these specific tasks have gained value for tackling the scientific challenge described in section 1 of Part B2.
- **Visuals:** Diagrams can be very helpful in illustrating the key concept of the project as well as the research plan. For example, a PERT chart can be used to show how work packages are connected, and a Gantt chart can be used to show a timeline of the work plan (Fig. 5 and 6). Here, it can also be useful to show when the deliverables are expected and how key personnel are involved.

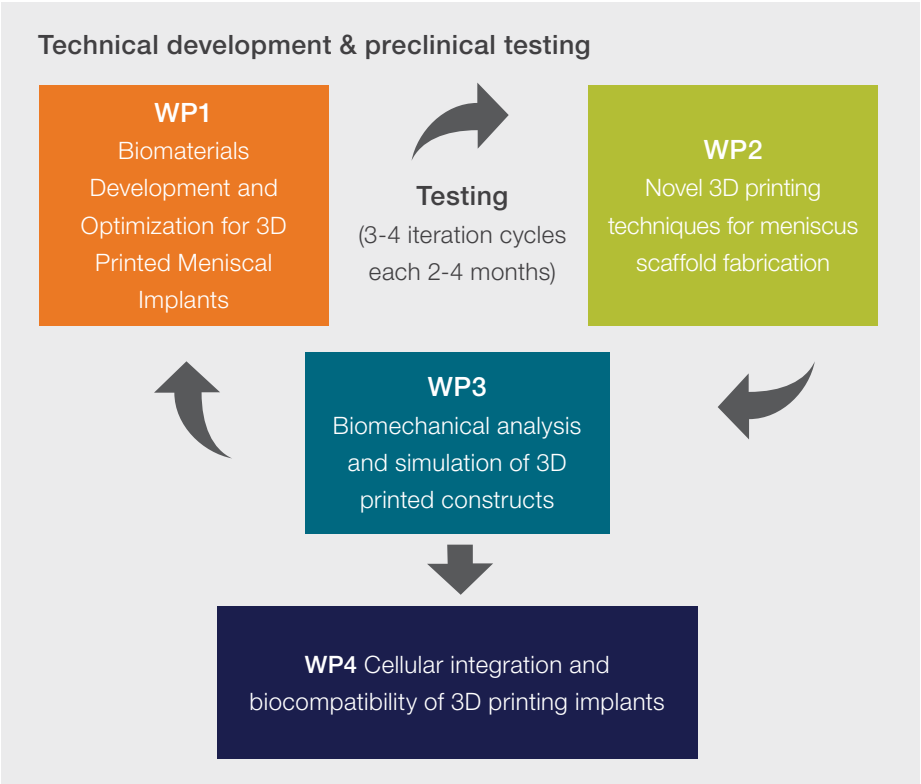


Figure 5: Example of PERT chart.

Workpackages		Duration (month)	Year																	
			2024				2025				2026				2027				2028	
WP1	New assay workflow	18																		
WP2	Bladder cancer kinome development	24																		
WP3	Methodology development and synthesis	24																		
WP4	Kinase-screening using proteomic analysis	21																		
WP5	Ex-vivo validation	15																		

Figure 6: Example of GANTT chart.

6. Key points to keep in mind while preparing the application

Timeline for preparing your application

Three months is the minimum amount of time required to craft a high-quality proposal adhering to the suggested timeline (Fig. 7).

Prepare concept (9–12 weeks out)

- Craft an elevator pitch delineating your project's core concept. Create a mind map to visually organize research objectives, methodologies, and potential impacts for your ERC grant proposal, and collaborate with colleagues during the brainstorming process.
- Create a bulleted draft for Part B1, focusing on key objectives, methodology, and potential impact.

Write Parts B1 & B2 (6–9 weeks out)

- In Part B1, provide a concise synopsis of your project, highlighting its significance and innovation.
- In Part B2, provide a detailed explanation of methodologies, work plan, and expected outcomes.

Budget and arrange a letter from your host institution (6–8 weeks out)

- Develop a detailed budget for your project, including all necessary expenses.
- Arrange for a letter of support from your host institution.
- Prepare supporting documents if you are applying for an extension of eligibility or ethics approval related to the project.
- Check if your university offers ERC workshops or support sessions to assist with the application process.

Create an account and familiarize yourself with submission portal (7 weeks out)

- Set up an account on the ERC submission portal and explore its features.
- Familiarize yourself with the application requirements and guidelines.

Review and polish in iterations (1–6 weeks out)

- Review your application draft thoroughly and seek feedback from mentors, colleagues, or ERC advisors at your host institute.
- Polish the application through multiple iterations, focusing on clarity, coherence, and alignment with ERC evaluation criteria.
- Finalize and submit your application before the deadline, ensuring all required documents and information are included.

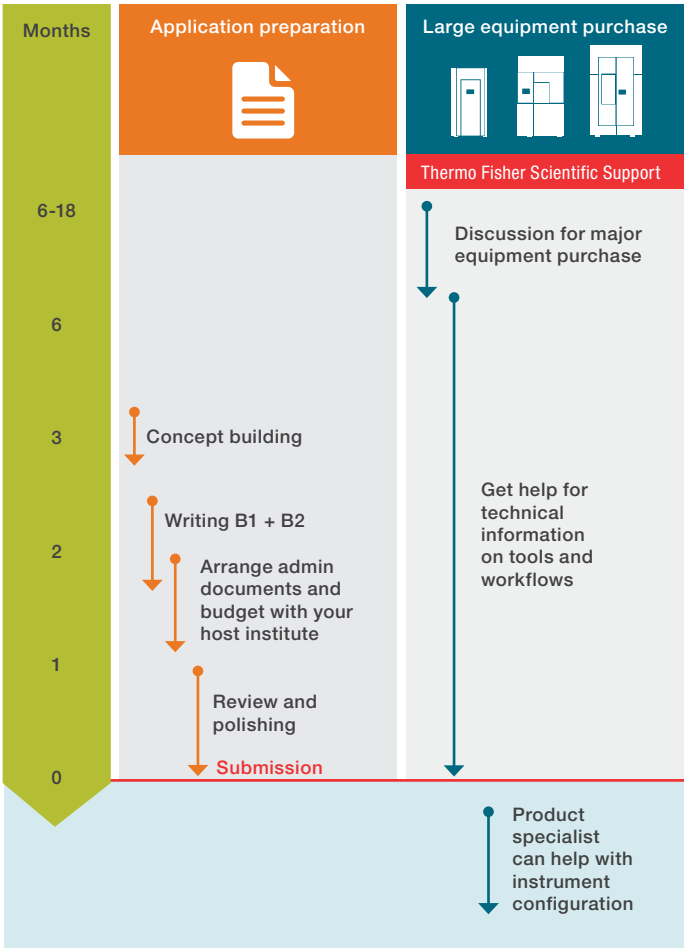


Figure 7: Timeline for application preparation and large equipment purchases.

How Thermo Fisher Scientific can help

Pre-grant support (4–18 months before application deadline)

- **Discussion and presentation:** We offer discussions and presentations on workflows and instruments, ensuring that you are equipped to address scientific questions effectively.
- **Budgetary quotes:** We provide budgetary quotes for grant proposals and can help you secure additional funding through comprehensive budget plans.
- **Site surveys and manuals:** We provide early site surveys and pre-installation manuals with room requirement details, which will help the funding agencies feel confident that the equipment can be housed adequately and that the necessary checks have been carried out.
- **Community engagement:** Local workshops foster community interest, encourage collaborations, and justify investment in equipment both for host institutes and funding agencies.

During grant writing (up to 6 months before application deadline)

- Sales development specialist support: Thermo Fisher Scientific sales development specialists offer various forms of assistance, including letters of support, sustainability data, and tool productivity insights to enhance the competitiveness of your grant application.

Post-grant support (after grant award or denial)

- Instrument configuration: Product specialists help configure instruments to suit specific research applications and ensure optimal performance.
- Ongoing collaboration: We'll stay in touch with you to support future grant applications, providing continuity in research endeavors.

Tip: *Approach colleagues who have successfully secured ERC grants and inquire if they are willing to share their proposals for your reference. Analyze these proposals to gain insights into successful strategies and formatting.*

7. Success stories and tips from ERC grantees

About the grant recipients

Florian Schur, PhD, Institute of Science and Technology Austria

Dr. Schur is an assistant professor at the Institute of Science and Technology Austria. His group studies the structural biology of cell migration and viral infection. He received an ERC Starting Grant in 2022 to investigate the actin cytoskeleton.

"The entire process, given how long it takes, even if it would have been unsuccessful, really helped me to formulate my ideas extremely well and I could have used these ideas and improvements for other projects."

Meytal Landau, PhD, Israel Institute of Technology

Dr. Landau is an associate professor at the Technion–Israel Institute of Technology. Her research focuses on amyloid proteins, which are associated with several neurodegenerative and infectious diseases. She received an ERC Consolidator Grant in 2023 to investigate how amyloid structure could support the development of novel antimicrobials.

"You have to not disregard the non-scientific part of your proposal."

Tips from Florian and Meytal

Start early and plan thoroughly

The most important aspect of a successful ERC grant proposal is, perhaps unsurprisingly, planning. Dr. Schur took nearly a year to refine his grant application and emphasized the impact thorough preparation and planning had on his proposal.

Showcase preliminary data

"Whether you show preliminary data within your application or an already available publication, that will very much depend on also what kind of panel you have, how they value it. But that's definitely an advantage," said Schur.

Consider your technology and equipment needs

"Collaborations are positive… but what needs to be absolutely clear is that your project can be successful even without [them]," Landau said. "I think probably one of the worst things is to make it appear as if you're dependent on somebody more senior, for example, to achieve what you're proposing."

Be prepared for detailed questions, even on non-scientific aspects

"For the ERC interview, you really have to be prepared for detailed questions where people ask you about budget." Schur said. "They asked me about details about how am I going to spend money for publishing costs? How many papers will I publish? How do I recruit people? And so on and so forth."

Be resilient and adapt in the face of rejection

Dr. Landau described her journey through multiple applications and rejections before finally securing an ERC research grant in 2023. Her persistence highlights the importance of resilience in the grant application process.

Need help with other funding opportunities?

Learn more at **thermofisher.com/fundingsupport**