

My Experience on ERC Grants

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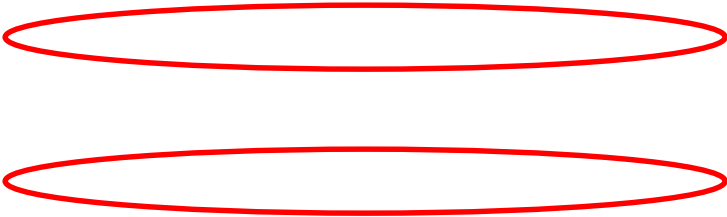
Why should we apply for ERC grants?

- Attractive amount of funding
 - Starting Grant: 1.5 M Euro (2-7 years after PhD)
 - Consolidator Grant: 2.0 M Euro (7-12 years after PhD)
 - Advanced Grant: 2.5 M Euro (>12 years after PhD)
- Individual grant!
- No limitation of research topics!
- Minimal reporting (2 times scientific & financial reporting)
- The success rate is not very low!
 - Approx. 10 percent



How can I start working on an ERC proposal?

- Read many successful abstracts on the ERC webpage that are related with your field!
 - **Increase your concentration**
 - You can understand what ERC scientifically expects
 - **Get the philosophy and style of ERC!**
 - You also understand the content of the proposals
 - This also **helps you whether your idea can work or not.**
- Read ERC tips by grantees!
 - Some of the grantees share their experiences on their website
 - Information provided by consultancy companies on ERC can be useful.
- TUBITAK provides proposal examples and explanatory documents.
 - Helped me!



What is the process to get an ERC grant?

- **Writing the proposal**
 - Part-B1 (short version of proposal and CV)
 - Part-B2 (long version of proposal and budget)



- **Interview**
- Presentation
 - QAs

Part B1

- Part B1 (Only this part is evaluated in the 1st round → if successful, invitation to interview)
 - Abstract
 - Proposal+references → 5 pages
 - CV → 2 pages
 - Early achievements track-record → 2 pages
(explain and emphasize your achievements.)

Abstract

- Find an exciting idea while you are writing and excite your reader as well!
 - Reviewers read many projects
- **The abstract of the project** is the first part that the panelists read
 - Polish, polish, polish!

Proposal

- Proposal+references → 5 pages
 - Proposal starts with a 1-page summary of the Project
 - Key problem/challenge
 - Key solution
- Abstract + Introduction proves **in 5 minutes**
 - the idea is **significant** and **novel**
 - the applicant can do it (**do-able by applicant**).

Success on ERC: 50% CV & 50% Proposal

- Sell your CV!
- Highlight your achievements!
 - Journal Covers
 - School names
 - Citations
 - Awards/Fellowships
 - ...

Part B2

- Part B2 (15 pages) = Proposal + Budget
 - Proposal
 - Detailed explanation of your idea
 - Risk & Feasibility check
 - **Preliminary results**
 - Budget
 - Dedication of your time

Explain clearly and simply!

- Do not make the reviewers tired!
 - Write clearly and organized!
- Clearly show significance & novelty of your project
 - Use bold, italic, underline to highlight the important parts!
 - This will allow the reviewers to catch quickly the important points of the proposal!

Philisophy of ERC

- **high risk/high gain pioneering** projects in any field of frontier research
 - **MOTTO:** Long-term carrearer project
- **High risk:** This is scientific risk, but not too risky!
 - If too risky, **feasibility is a problem!**
 - Your previous experience will decrease the scientific risks.
- **High gain:** High Impact on science, society, business
 - Clear positive impact
 - Lead to billions of euro saving, millions of patient,...
- **Pioneering:** Beyond the state of the art
 - Not incremental!
 - You need to review the literature and clearly show the **limitation** of the previous studies!

IDEA

- Significant (High gain)
- Novel (high risk/pioneering)
- Superior (pioneering)

My strategy for ERC

- Targeting a **significant** scientific question
 - If not, no scientific breakthrough!
 - If not, no high risk!
 - This project will allow us to understand...
- **Novel** material
 - If not, no new methodology!
- **Novel** devices with **superior** performance levels
 - If not, not beyond the state of the art performance levels!
 - If not, no high gain!

Start early!

- First impulse by TTO to write an ERC project (October-2014)
- Start to think about ideas
 - Limited time (I freshly prepared 3 courses in Fall Semester.)
- Generated 1 idea that may fit well to ERC
 - Lucky, I attended a Horizon2020 conference in Brussels in Mid-January 2015
 - I got feedback from one of the experienced H2020 representative
- 20th of January the classes finished.
 - Time to generate a new idea
- IDEA:
 - I searched for an **important** and **unsolved** scientific question (I found the question in one of the Nature papers.)
 - I can bring a solution with my expertise
 - Excited
- I traveled for a conference for one week (10th of February)
 - in the conference I considered more on the idea
- After 10th-February → Deadline: 26th of March
 - I actively worked on the ERC proposal

While applying, I was not very optimistic!

- The previous ERC grantees in Turkey that I know had approx. 4-5 years faculty experience and well-established research groups



This is me!

No experience

No research group

No preliminary data

No infrastructure

- No experimental preliminary data!
 - One theoretical simulation

Work closely with TTO!

- TTO directed me to a consulting company
 - Consulting company significantly enhanced the quality of the presentation of my proposal!

Interview

- After 3 months of submission the results are announced & Invitation for the interview (Mid-June)
 - No feedback is provided about the proposal
- After the announcement
 - Send my proposals and get feedback from one my personal contact to understand my chance
 - ERC Advanced Grant Panelist
 - Leading world-class expert in my field
 - Very positive feedback!
- Mid-July I received the details on the interview
 - 7 min. presentation
 - 4-slides
 - 20 min. for Q&A
- The interview date: 1st of October 2014, Brussels, Belgium

Interview preparation

- 1st version of presentation
 - Mid-July → End-August
 - Feedback by Yellow Research in Amsterdam
 - Very very negative!!!
 - Boring
 - Longer than 7 minutes
 - Not convey the message well-enough
- 2nd version of presentation
 - Presented my presentation to Reha Hoca, Tanju Hoca, TTO
 - Very useful feedback!
- 3rd version of presentation
 - Presented my presentation to Reha Hoca, Tanju Hoca, Ekrem Cunedioğlu (Economy), Murat Tortopoglu (Girisim Fabrikasi), My Postdoc, TTO
 - Very useful feedback!
- Final version of presentation
 - Consulting company, personal contact (ERC Advanced Grant Panelist in my field)

Interview

- Simple
- Interesting
- Appropriate duration (< 7 minutes)

Interview preparation

- I also prepared a list of questions that the panel can ask
 - Be aware about your weaknesses and prepare answers to those questions!
 - Plan B
 - Risk/Feasibility of the project
- I received 80-90% of the questions that I expected.

Interview day

- Go 2-3 days before the interview to Brussels
 - Dress smartly!
 - Be confident!
- You upload your presentation to the system & wait in the room with other applicants
 - Isolate yourself from others
 - Repeat your presentation during waiting

Interview time

- None of the interviews are perfect!
- I had 2 difficulties during interview
 - Presentation version mismatch
 - Continued like everything was perfect!
 - One publication appeared related with my proposal
 - I emphasized that the paper is just a small part of my proposal and the scientific question still remains there
- I received both technically in-depth & non-technical questions
 - High risk, high gain, pioneering check

- A great opportunity to establish a world-class laboratory!
- Please apply!
 - Some researchers take the fund in their third application – do not give up!
 - Choose the appropriate panel
 - Very important
- In Turkey, many high-quality researchers present and I believe that the ERC grant numbers will significantly increase soon!

How to get ERC grant

1) Vision

- 2019 – defined nanoparticles for blindness (problem on animal experiments for blindness – very difficult , unique expertise required)
- 2020 – generalized the nanoparticles for neurostimulation, then they asked for WHY? What is your vision?

2) Risk: Unexplored scientific territories

3) Feasibility: Good preliminary data & simulations for each critical step

- 2019 – Failed
- 2020 – Failed

4) Your solution needs to bring high gains (social, economical, medical, environment)

- Each WP needs to be ground-breaking

Your end goal needs to be better in comparison with other Technologies.

- In your area, you need to be unique.

Good luck!