

Συχνές ερωτήσεις και απαντήσεις για το πρόγραμμα "ΙΔΕΕΣ" (1η πρόσκληση υποβολής)

1. Pre-registration of proposals for Starting Grants should be at least 3 weeks before the deadline of 25. April 2007. Does this mean that applicants pre-registering later than this can not apply?

The 3-week-limit is not applicable to the first call for proposals for ERC Starting Grants. (GfA – Ver 2007-01-31, chapter 3.2.1, footnote 14)

2. How many team members can be included in the research team lead by the principal investigator?

There is no formal limitation to the number of team members. However, the number of team members should be necessary and reflect the scientific needs in view of its methodology and objectives.

3. Many young scientists might have experienced short periods of unemployment. Does this qualify for extension of the 9 year period after the first PhD prior to the deadline of the call?

No. Unemployment is not listed as eligible career break. (GfA – Ver 2007-01-31, chapter 2.2.1, Box 2)

Note:

The Scientific Council decided to focus the ERC launch strategy on two complementary grant schemes: the ERC Starting Grant aimed at supporting the most promising "starting researchers" located in Europe who have or about to establish or consolidate an independent research team, and the ERC Advanced Grant for the best established independent researchers located in Europe in all subsequent career stages.

Of course, the Scientific Council is well aware of the fact that certain career interruptions are natural, necessary or forced, for both women and men (maternity/paternity leaves, civil/military services, long-term illness). However, it is clear as well that there is no established rule on how to consider these interruptions in view of the career prospects of "starting researchers", i.e. researchers who have established or are about to establish and consolidate an independent research team and have a proven potential to perform world class research.

The Scientific Council decided that such promising "Starting Researchers" need at least 2 years experience after having been awarded their PhD but cannot be regarded as "starting researchers" when their seniority counts more than 9 years after having been awarded their PhD.

Extensions of this period may be allowed only in case of the following eligible career breaks: maternity/paternity leaves, long-term illness, civil/military services, leave taken for unavoidable statutory reasons. The Scientific Council agreed that the allowable extension is limited and a maximum (cumulative) career break of three years is allowed.

If a researcher with PhD does not fulfil the "2-9 years after PhD" conditions for the ERC Starting Grant, she/he could apply for an ERC Advanced Grant.

4. An applicant asked me about a project concerning 'military research'. I suppose it is not advisable to submit such a proposal, but on what basis? Or could it be funded, if it had high enough marks?

Applications may be made in any field of research - including the social sciences and humanities - with particular emphasis on the frontier of science, technology and scholarship.

Note:

ERC grants aim to support "frontier research", in other words the pursuit of questions at or beyond the frontiers of knowledge, without regard for established disciplinary boundaries. Applications may be made in any field of research - including the social sciences and humanities - with particular emphasis on the frontier of science, technology and scholarship. In particular, proposals of an interdisciplinary nature which cross the boundaries between different fields of research, proposals in new and emerging fields and "high-risk, high-gain" proposals are encouraged. In essence, ERC-supported research should aim to broaden scientific and technological knowledge. As such, projects should not be linked to commercial objectives. Some frontier research activities and methodologies may have ethical implications or may raise questions which will require a sound ethical assessment. This may result in proposals not being accepted or being accepted only under certain conditions. (GfA – Ver 2007-01-31, chapter 2.3)

5. ERC Starting Grant OUTLINE Proposal - Use of References: For the presentation of the ERC Starting Grant OUTLINE proposal max 4 pages on the research project are allowed, incl. 'State-of-the-Art': I could find no instructions - or even mention of - references, bibliography etc. As one is required to discuss the scientific field in question including state-of-the-art, how does one document source material?

It is up to the PI to decide if and what references need to be referred to in the research proposal. It is recommended that only references are cited which provide important key information to the peer reviewers to assess the scientific value of the proposal in view of the evaluation criterion "Quality of the proposed research project". Standard syntax should be used for the citation of references (such as "name of first author, abbreviation of journal, edition number (year) page number").

6. Is there at this time any indication of the date for the above-mentioned call? In WP it states later in 2007.

It is foreseen that the 2nd call for ERC Advanced Grant proposals will be launched this summer (July/August) with deadlines in November 2007. For each of the three areas/domains (Social Sciences, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences) there will be one dedicated deadline.

7. Who should sign the Expression of Support of the Hosting Institution? The form in annex 3 of the GfA says 'legal representative'. Some applicants told me that the legal representative of the Department is the Head of Department, while, of course, the legal representative of the University is the Dean or Rector. Would either one be qualified to sign? The Head of Department would probably be the person more directly involved in ensuring the conditions of autonomy, but the Dean is highest in hierarchy.

The "Expression of Support of the Hosting Institution" (GfA, Annex 3) has to be signed by a person in the hosting institution, that has the authorization to commit the institution (legally, financially) with respect to its support to the PI and her/his project. Depending on the respective institution's organisational structure, the exact function or level of the relevant person may be different from one institution to another.

8. Several institutions called me to say that more than one applicant was preparing a (separate) proposal as PI within the same Department, on different topics. Could they give their support to more than one application?

It is up to the hosting institution to decide whether they support an ERC grant application or not. A hosting institution might decide to support more than one ERC Grant application at the same time.

9. The PI must fulfil the eligibility criteria by the first deadline of 25 April, right? The PhD was obtained 9 years ago in May 2007, so for the September deadline (if he passes the first selection) the period would be exceeded – but that does not represent an ineligibility problem, am I correct?

The deadline for stage 1 outline proposal (April 25, 2007) is the relevant reference date to verify if a PI meets the specific requirement of having at least 2 but not more than 9 years research experience after having received the PhD.

10. What is the meaning of "paternity leave (accumulation of actual time off)"?

"Actual time off": This means that you have to provide official proofs of the breaks you have taken to take care of your children. It needs to indicate the type of break (full time or the level of part time) and allow calculating the absolute time (full-working-day-equivalents) the PI has taken to take care of his children.

"Accumulation": This means that you might have taken several paternity leaves - in this case you have to accumulate the effective time you have taken-off and provide the relevant official proofs (from your employers, e.g. their agreement on the new working arrangement if part-time or their agreement for your paternity leave until a specific date). Official proofs need to indicate the change in your working conditions for a distinct time period.

11. Concerning the maximum time per child you could receive as extension: is it the same as for maternity leave, i.e. one year?

Yes.

12. About the project proposals' Research Project component', which is said to include the state-of-the-art and the objectives, methodology, resources and the ethical issues of the project. We are dealing with a very often-asked question asking whether the 4 pages limitation should contain the list of references, or is it possible to attach the list to the proposal as an annex for example.

It is up to the PI to decide if, what and how many key references need to be referred to in the research proposal while respecting the page limits. It is not allowed to add a list of references as annex to the research proposal. It is recommended that only references are cited which provide important key information to the peer reviewers to assess the scientific value of the proposal in view of the evaluation criterion "Quality of the proposed research

project", i.e. how and why the project is important for the field, and what impact it may have, such as how it may open up new horizons or opportunities for science, technology or scholarship. Standard syntax should be used for the citation of references (such as "name of first author, abbreviation of journal, edition number (year) page number").

13. Are the 20% overheads included in the max. €400.000 per year indication for the ERC Starting Grant?

Yes.

14. What is the reference date for the calculation of the PIs eligibility period; is it the date of the defence or is it the date when the official PhD certificate was issued by the University/Institution?

This is the date of PhD award referred to on the original PhD certificate.

- 15 I got a question from a person from FYROM, now living in Norway. He had been sitting four years in the parliament in FYROM. Does this qualify for extension of the eligibility period?

No. This is not an eligible career break.

16. The names of the panel members will be made public. Will the names of the specialist referees be published as well?

Yes, this will be published on a regular basis. However, it will neither be published in advance nor will it be disclosed which proposals have been reviewed by a referee.

17. Will the referee reports (ESR's) become available to the PI applying?

Yes. (see GfA, Section 4.3)

18. Does every PI who has submitted a proposal for the 2nd stage have to go for an interview?

No. PIs with the highest ranked proposals will be invited for an interview by the relevant ERC panel.

19. When a PI is invited for an interview by a relevant ERC panel, will the PI's travel and subsistence costs be reimbursed?

Yes.

20. If a PI is not invited to submit a full proposal (2nd stage), does this mean that the PI is ineligible for the 2nd stage?

Proposals that have not passed the 1st stage, are excluded from the 2nd stage since they have not been retained and failed.

21. Once a contract for an ERC Grant has been signed, does it have to enter into force within a certain period of time?

Yes. (this will be specified in the ERC grant agreement)

22. Do expert referees receive a reimbursement for their services?

No. Only panel members are reimbursed.

23. A top scientist working at the MD Anderson Cancer Center (Texas) would like to apply for an ERC Starting Grant. He received his PhD on February 2, 1998, which will represent a little more than 9 years at the 25 April deadline. Apparently, his father was very ill for a while and this researcher would like to know if the time he spent to take care of his father could be considered as an eligible career break.

No, this is not an eligible career break. The PI may consider to apply for an ERC Advanced Grant.

24. Pre-registration is clearly a requirement: at least three weeks prior to the deadline. This suggests that any delay would result in rejecting the application as being ineligible. Am I right?

No, but (pre-)registration will normally only be available until three weeks before the call deadline, except for the 1st call (deadline 25 April 2007) where pre-registration will be available until the deadline. (Pre-)Registration with EPSS is required and compulsory to

get a user name and password in order to use EPSS for proposal preparation and submission. (GfA – Ver 2007-01-31, chapter 3.2.1, footnote 14)

25. Extension of the 2-9 years period: "... (1 year per child born after the PhD award)..." This normally means no more than 3 children what gives extension 12 years which is clear and shouldn't raise doubts. However, we have been faced with the question: what about twins (or more!), i.e. children which were born at the same time.
The rule "(max) 1 year per child" applies as well, ie (max) 2 years for twins.
26. In the description of a research team [part b)iii. Resources - of the proposal template, Annex 2], is there any confirmation/commitment from team members necessary? In 1st or 2nd stage?
No.
27. Are the team members obliged to come to the PI host institution? Or they can cooperate remotely (whatever the country)?
No, not necessarily. The PI may include team members from other institutions if scientifically justified and necessary.
28. Period 2-9 years after the PhD, for starting grants. In some countries there is a "habilitation" scientific degree which means achievement of formal research independence. Are holders of this degree (already independent but still within the 2-9 years' period) eligible?
Yes, they are eligible if they fall in 2-9 years period. Please note that formal research independence does not always mean that such researchers are factually independent in the sense of having established and/or consolidated an independent research team.
29. Are minor deviances to the PI requirements for an ERC Starting Grant permitted (days)?
No. The PI may consider applying for an ERC Advanced Grant.
30. In case of multiple doctorate degrees: which one counts for the call?
The first PhD or equivalent degree (such as MD with research-relevant qualifications).
31. Is a Medical Doctor equally treated to the PhD with regard to the eligibility of the Starting Independent Researcher Grants?
MD training is highly variable in Europe, and in itself does not always train physician scientists. Our current thinking is that an MD followed by clinical specialty certification may be the more proper formal eligibility equivalent. Of course we have a dedicated panel for substantive evaluation of proposals in the medical and health sciences in general, and several others are appropriate for particular specialties (e.g. neurosciences, or infection and immunity).
32. Starting Independent Grant: Is it possible to apply for the grant as a professor?
Yes, as long as the 2-9 years requirement for the PI is fulfilled.
33. How many partners do I need for the consortium?
ERC Grants support projects which are carried out by individual teams, headed by a single "Principal Investigator" and, if necessary, include additional team members. There is no formal limitation to the number of team members. However, the number of team members should be necessary and reflect the scientific needs in view of its methodology and objectives. Note: With the focus on the Principal Investigator, the concept of individual team is fundamentally different from that of a traditional "network" or "research consortium"; proposals of the latter type will not be acceptable for the ERC.
34. Is it possible to change the members of the team from the first to the second stage or afterwards?
Yes, as long as the research project as such (aim, methodology) is not changed.
35. Can you hand in a proposal as a PI and a team member at the same time? Would you be funded in such a case for both participations?
PI or team members may not be associated with more than one application to the ERC during the same calendar year. (GfA, section 3.2.6)

36. Do I have to conduct the research project at a very renowned university/ institution?
37. What role does the PI's hosting institution play for the project?
The PI's hosting institution hosts and engages the PI for the duration of the grant and is committed to the PI's independence and to provide administrative support in managing the ERC research grant. The hosting institution is the "applicant legal entity" entitled to receive and administer the ERC grant
38. Who is the responsible administrative official of the hosting institution mentioned in the Guide for Applicants? (p. 33)
This is a person in the hosting institution, that has the authorization to commit the institution (legally, financially) with respect to its support to the PI and her/his project. Depending on the respective institution's organisational structure, the exact function or level of the relevant person may be different from one institution to another.
39. Will personnel costs be funded by the grant?
Yes, personal costs can be reimbursed by the grant.
40. Can/ should the PI include references other than the five that are asked for?
The PI should mention his/her 5 key references, i.e. the relevant PI's scientific papers underlining her/his scientific potential, in view of the evaluation criterion " Principal Investigator: Potential to perform world-class research" .
To explain/support the research proposal, other references may be included. However, it is recommended that only references are cited which provide important key information to the peer reviewers to assess the scientific value of the research proposal in view of the evaluation criterion "Quality of the proposed research project", i.e. how and why the project is important for the field, and what impact it may have, such as how it may open up new horizons or opportunities for science, technology or scholarship. Standard syntax should be used for the citation of references (such as "name of first author, abbreviation of journal, edition number (year) page number").
41. Is it possible to add an annex for the relevant references?
No.
42. I would like to ask you for your help with a question related to the 1st Call. A potential applicant is planning to stay at the institution where he is already regularly employed. Therefore he is already fully paid by the institution. Are costs for his salary eligible in case of ERC Starting Grant?
The answer to the question is "yes". Actual personnel costs related to the project can be reimbursed. Another question is how permanent staff's contribution should be presented to the auditors. Host organisations need to provide this evidence, e.g. by providing something like "time sheets" or similar tools.
43. Administrative support
Usually administrative support to the researchers will not be eligible as direct costs because it will not be possible to isolate and specify the costs of the central administration related to a specific project. In terms of the quality of the support it would be beneficial to host organisations and researchers if host organisations and PIs could agree in advance on a list of minimum requirements for adequate administrative support. Details will naturally have to take into consideration the variety of management practice in different host organisations.
44. Scientific autonomy of the PI
How PIs and host organisation agree on the implementation of the ERC funded projects and how these projects will fit into the overall scientific strategy of the host organisation will be left to the discretion of the two parties themselves. But it is clear that for instance the PI will have to respect the local, national and international ethical requirements. The host will be the formal grant recipient and has to sign the grant agreement, which includes

a presentation of the main scientific subject. Despite the PI's control over the "scientific micromanagement" the PI will not be able to change the main subject of the project without agreement by both host and the ERC implementation structure.

Some other FAQs

The PI and the team

Question

- Could you clarify the 2 to 9 years requirement (does it include or exclude the end points between 2 and 9)?

Answer: *As the call deadline is the 25 April 2007 candidates having received the PhD or equivalent between (including) 25 April 1998 and (including) 25 April 2005 are eligible. In the case of eligible extensions the cumulation of these extensions cannot surpass an earlier date than the 25 April 1995.*

Questions

- I have enough experience but was awarded my PhD at a later stage so I do not fall within the 2 to 9 years requirement. Can I apply?
- I only have a Masters Degree and no PhD but I have enough experience and publications. Can I apply?

Answer: *Only the proposals of applicants, which fulfil the eligibility criteria, will proceed to the evaluation stage.*

Question

- How many legal entities located in third countries can participate?

Answer: *There is no limit in legal terms but the involvement of entities has to be justified in terms of necessary scientific contribution.*

Question

- Can third country nationals apply for ERC funding?

Answer: *The ERC actions are open to researchers of any nationality who would like to set up their research activity in any EU MS as well as any Associated or Candidate country. (Reference: WP)*

Question

- Does the PI have to be an employee of the host institution?

Answer: *The PI has to have the support of the host institution for the duration of the grant and needs to have a contractual relationship with the host institution.*

Questions

- Is it possible for a researcher working on a fixed term contract at a University to apply for ERC funding in their own right?
- Do they need to be a permanent member of staff?

Answer: *PIs do not necessarily need to be members of the permanent staff of the institution.*

Question

- Will the ERC pay a salary to the PI?

Answer: *No, the salary is paid by the host institution, which receives the money from the ERC. Arrangements are made between the PI and the host for all the payments involved.*

Question

- Should I include references in my proposal?

Answer: *It is up to the applicants to decide whether and how many references to include, and to find a balance, while respecting the page limit.*

Question

- How much time are applicants for ERC funding expected to spend on the project?

Answer: *It is expected that there is a significant commitment to the ERC project and so a significant amount of time is spent on it.*

Questions

- What is needed to document the paternity/maternity leaves?
- Are birth certificates enough?

Answer: *For paternity leave documentary evidence should be presented, proving the actual time off. For maternity leave the birth certificate of the child should be enough.*

Question

- How do you define long term illness?

Answer: *Candidates are kindly asked to submit certificates if they have suffered a long term illnesses and it will be up to the evaluators to decide whether they could be accepted.*

Question

- Can the duration of the research be less than 5 years?

Answer: *Yes, it can be up to 5 years as stated in the WP.*

Questions

- What happens with the equipments and apparatus at the end of the Project?
- Will they remain in the property of the host institution?

Answer: *Generally speaking, the entity that buys the equipment remains its owner.*

Question

- Can the Principal Investigator involve in his/her research team employee from the host institution?

Answer: *Yes, there are no particular restrictions on that.*

Question

- Is there any confirmation/commitment from team members necessary?

Answer: *No, confirmation/commitment is needed from the host institution.*

Question

- Will the evaluation consist of two stages?

Answer: *Yes.*

The Host Institution

Questions

- What do you mean by a host institution which should engage the PI?
- What kind of Institution should it be?

Answer: *It must be situated in one of the EU MS, or one of the countries that are Associated to the FP, including the countries that are candidates to become EU members. It may also be an International European Interest Organisation (such as CERN, EMBL, etc...) or the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. (Reference: WP)*

Question

- Are the funds given to the PI or to the host institution?

Answer: *The money is given to the host institution (the legal entity).*

Questions

- What does the accompanying statement or letter of support by the host institution consist of exactly?
- At what level of the institution should it be endorsed?

Answer: *The accompanying statement has to be provided by a person in the host institution (the legal entity), who has the authorisation to commit the institution with respect to its support to the envisaged project under the Principal Investigator's scientific guidance. The exact level in the institution's hierarchy depends on the internal organisational structure of the institution.*