

15 tips for you who are considering making an ERC application

The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education has gathered a number of recommendations and useful links to researchers who are considering applying for a grant from the European Research Council, ERC.

The recommendations are as follows:

Before you start writing your ERC application:

- Search for previous ERC grantees within your field of research for comparison and in order to find out who you are up against. Make sure your CV is competitive for ERC (if it is not, look into how you can improve it)!
- Try to get hold on successful ERC Applications in your field of research, read and analyze them in order to get an idea of what it takes to write a successful ERC application in your field.
- Look up ERC panel members and evaluators; it can be helpful to know which ERC-panel to apply to. There are 25 panels in total (nine in life science, six in social sciences and humanities, 10 in physical sciences and engineering) – make sure to choose the right panel.
- Read the ERC Work Programme and the Information for Applicants guide in detail to the particular call to understand the grant scheme and what is expected of an ERC applicant and how to address the different parts of the ERC proposal.
- Begin in due time so you have time to get scientific feedback from peers. This could be six months or even longer before the deadline. Six weeks full time is what we often hear successful ERC grantees state they have used on their ERC application. Do not underestimate the application.
- Set time aside to write and revise your ERC application. Set time aside so you can get feedback from peers in Denmark and abroad, make sure you have time to use their feedback and comments. Use your research support staff at your institution.
- When you are applying for an ERC Starting or Consolidator Grant you have a five years window to apply in, do not wait to the last year to apply. The evaluators will take into account where you are in your carrier/your track record – so if you have an excellent idea, do not hesitate to apply even if your Ph.D. is just two or three years old.

When writing the ERC application:

- Find a truly excellent idea for your ERC project. This idea will be the foundation for your project aims/ hypothesis/project questions. It must be ambitious and timely! It must be high risk – high gain. It must be aimed at ERC and not just being a casual post doc project. Make sure it is clear why the ERC project you propose should be made now and make sure it is clear why it should be you doing it.
- Keep in mind that an ERC project is not a “Research and Innovation Action” (RIA) type of project or a project for your national research council. Do not make a consortium. Describe your team/or describe that you will set a team, but do not waste too much time on this. You are the only one being evaluated – only your CV matter. Be visible as a PI in the application text, it will be your project, you will be the leader of it, so do not be shy or too modest. Refer to earlier works and achievements. Write “I will...”, “I have...” etc.
- Demonstrate a deep knowledge of state-of-the-art in your field(s) and be able to substantiate how your ERC project will be able to go beyond state-of-the-art
- Have a strong focus on methodology and methods– describe it briefly but still clear and convincing in part B1 and go into details in part B2. Both methodology and methods must be state-of-the-art and beyond, but it could also be high risk – high gain or groundbreaking methodologies
- Make sure to describe high risk – high gain thoroughly. Do so both in part B1 and B2. Sometimes it makes sense to describe it in a separate section or a table.
- Make sure your project really is an ERC project, is it truly excellent? Can it last up to five years? Will it provide ground-breaking research?
- Make sure to describe scientific impact. How will your ERC project move science in new directions?
- Make sure your ERC application is well written with no grammar or spelling mistakes and make sure that it is well structured. Make sure that the parts the evaluators read first, title, the acronym, the summary, and B1 is a pleasure to read – and makes the evaluators eager to read the full proposal. Open part B1 by describing why there is scientific need for your project.

Useful links:

ERC Work Programme: <https://erc.europa.eu/document-category/work-programmes>

ERC Evaluation panels: <https://erc.europa.eu/document-category/evaluation-panels>

ERC projects: <https://erc.europa.eu/projects-figures/erc-funded-projects>

FAQ: <https://erc.europa.eu/funding/frequently-asked-questions/results>