

# European Research Council: All you need to know before applying!

Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018, LEUVEN (BE)  
2018 MCAA General Assembly



**Dr Laurence COLIN**

**Scientific Officer**

*LS3 Cellular and Developmental Biology*

*B3 - Life Sciences Unit - ERCEA*

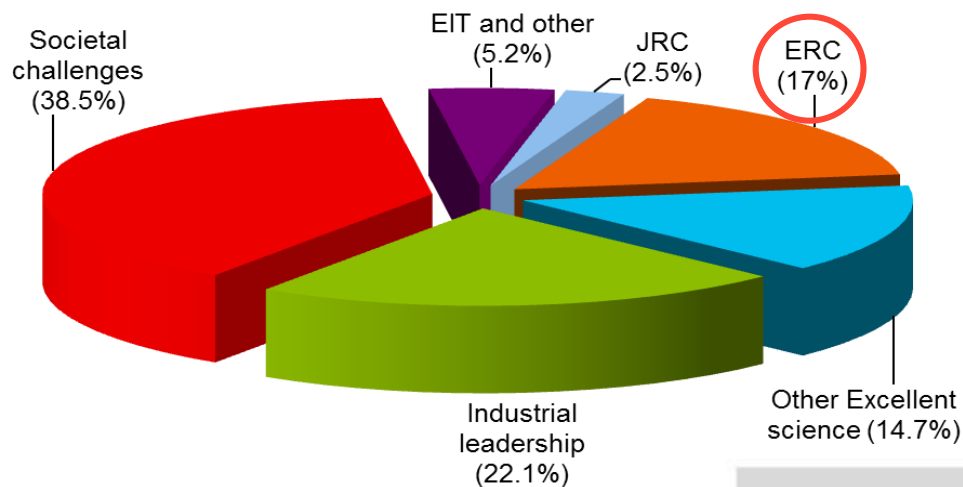
[Laurence.colin@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Laurence.colin@ec.europa.eu)



# The European Research Council

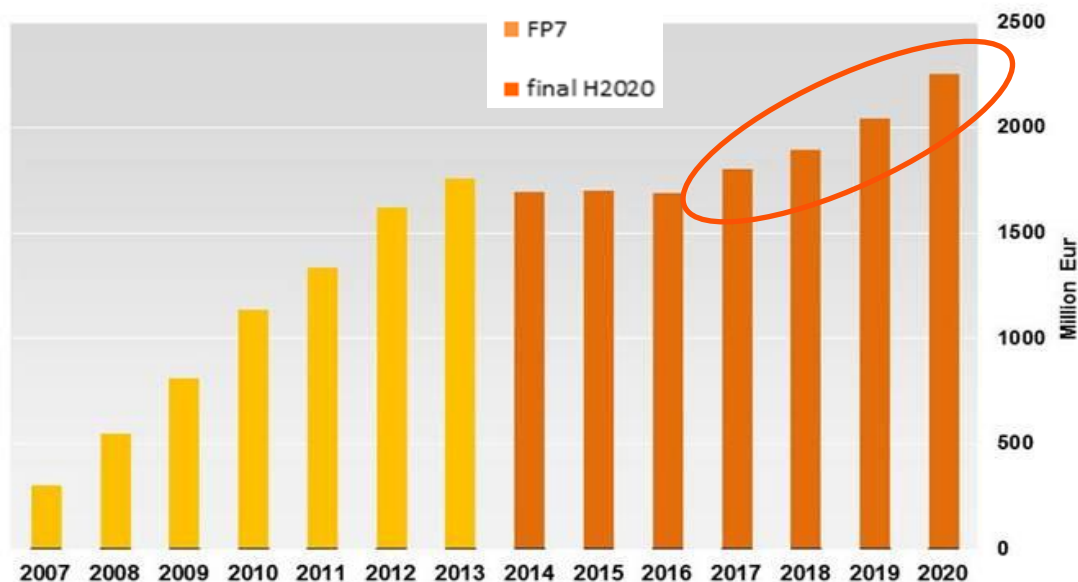
- What is the ERC?
- Evaluation process
- Other schemes

# It is part of H2020 funding



ERC Budget  
13 billion €

In **2018**, the budget will be **1.86 B** euros, the highest ever since the beginning of the ERC!





## The European Commission

- › **provides financing** through the EU framework programmes
- › **guarantees autonomy** of the ERC
- › assures the **integrity and accountability** of the ERC
- › **adopts annual workprogrammes** as established by the Scientific Council



## The ERC Scientific Council

- › **22 prominent researchers** appointed by the Commission
- › **Establishes overall scientific strategy**
- › **Controls quality of operations and management**
- › **Ensures communication with the scientific community**



## The ERC Executive Agency

- › Implements **calls for proposals**
- › Organises **peer review evaluation**
- › Establishes and manages **grant agreements**
- › Administers **scientific and financial aspects**
- › Carries out **communication activities**



# ERC structure



## The European Commission

- › **provides financing** through the EU framework programmes
- › **guarantees autonomy** of the ERC
- › assures the **integrity and accountability** of the ERC
- › **adopts annual workprogrammes** as established by the Scientific Council



## The ERC Scientific Council

- › **22 prominent researchers** appointed by the Commission
- › Establishes **overall scientific strategy**
- › Controls **quality of operations and management**
- › Ensures **communication with the scientific community**

### Panel Members

- › Appointed by the Scientific Council
- › **Full independence** in the evaluation and ranking of the proposals
- › responsible for the appointment of remote referees (step 2)



## The ERC Executive Agency

- › Implements **calls for proposals**
- › Organises **peer review evaluation**
- › Establishes and manages **grant agreements**
- › Administers **scientific and financial aspects**
- › Carries out **communications activities**



## The European Commission

- › **provides financing** through the EU framework programmes
- › **guarantees autonomy** of the ERC
- › assures the **integrity and accountability** of the ERC
- › **adopts annual workprogrammes** as established by the Scientific Council



## The ERC Scientific Council

- › **22 prominent researchers** appointed by the Commission
- › Establishes **overall scientific strategy**
- › Controls **quality of operations and management**
- › Ensures **communication with the scientific community**

## ERC Scientific Officers

- › **Work closely with the panel members**
- › Manage **all practical aspects** of the evaluations
- › **Carry out scientific follow-up**



## The ERC Executive Agency

- › Implements **calls for proposals**
- › Organises **peer review evaluation**
- › Establishes and manages **grant agreements**
- › Administers **scientific and financial aspects**
- › Carries out **communications activities**

# The European Research Council

- What is the ERC?
- Evaluation process
- Other schemes

# 1

Principal Investigator

Host Institution

Research project

Selection criterion



European Research Council

Established by the European Commission

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCHERS  
FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

# LONG TERM GRANTS

TO HIGH-RISK/HIGH-GAIN PIONEERING PROJECTS  
IN ANY FIELD OF FRONTIER RESEARCH



Life Sciences



Physical Sciences and Engineering



Social Sciences and Humanities



# The main ERC funding schemes

## ERC STARTING GRANTS



completed your PhD  
**2 to 7** years before

**One important publication**  
Scientific journal in your field

## ERC CONSOLIDATOR GRANTS



completed your PhD  
**7 to 12** years before

**Several important publications**  
Scientific journals in your field

A CV and track record showing  
**Independence and Research  
maturity**

## ERC ADVANCED GRANTS



Up to 10 years  
**Scientific Track Record**

### Reasons for additional funds

- \_ start-up costs for moving to Europe
- \_ access to large facilities
- \_ major equipment

# Excellence is the sole evaluation criterion!

## PAN-EUROPEAN COMPETITIONS

NO THEMATIC PRIORITIES  
NO CONSORTIA  
NO CO-FINANCING



OPEN TO  
**EXCELLENT**  
& **INDEPENDENT**  
RESEARCHERS

REGARDLESS  
**NATIONALITY**  
**AGE & GENDER**

# Why should one apply for an ERC grant?

## ERC offers independence, recognition & visibility

- research topic of **own choice**, with a team of **own choice**
- true **financial autonomy** for 5 years
- negotiate with the host institution the **best conditions** of work
- attract **top team members** (EU and non-EU) **and collaborators**
- **portability of grants** within Europe
- **attract additional funding**

# Preparing your proposal: Get information!

› **Register early**, get familiar with the European Commission's Participant Portal system, download the templates and start filling in the forms

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/home.html>

› Use the **help tools and call documents** (**Information for Applicants**, Work Programme, Frequently Asked Questions) to prepare your proposal

- Read the guidelines carefully!
- Find out about the formatting rules and page limits to respect!

› **Talk to your Institution's grant office and other ERC grantees**



- **Your** choice (in an EU Member State/Associated Country)
- You **can change** it during the project's life
- **Negotiate** with the HI (your position, equipment, administrative support, access to infrastructure, etc.)



**Rumour:** The quality/fame of the HI is increasing my chances/scores.

**✗ NOT true:** the HI is not an evaluation criterion!

# Preparing your proposal

## ...for StG/CoG, make sure you are eligible!

**Eligibility window measured from the  
1<sup>st</sup> of January of the year of the Call**

**Extensions of eligibility window possible** for StG and CoG for documented cases of:

- Maternity – 18 months per child **(before or after PhD)**
- Paternity – actual time taken off
- Military service
- Medical specialty training
- Caring for seriously ill family members

**No limit to the total extension**

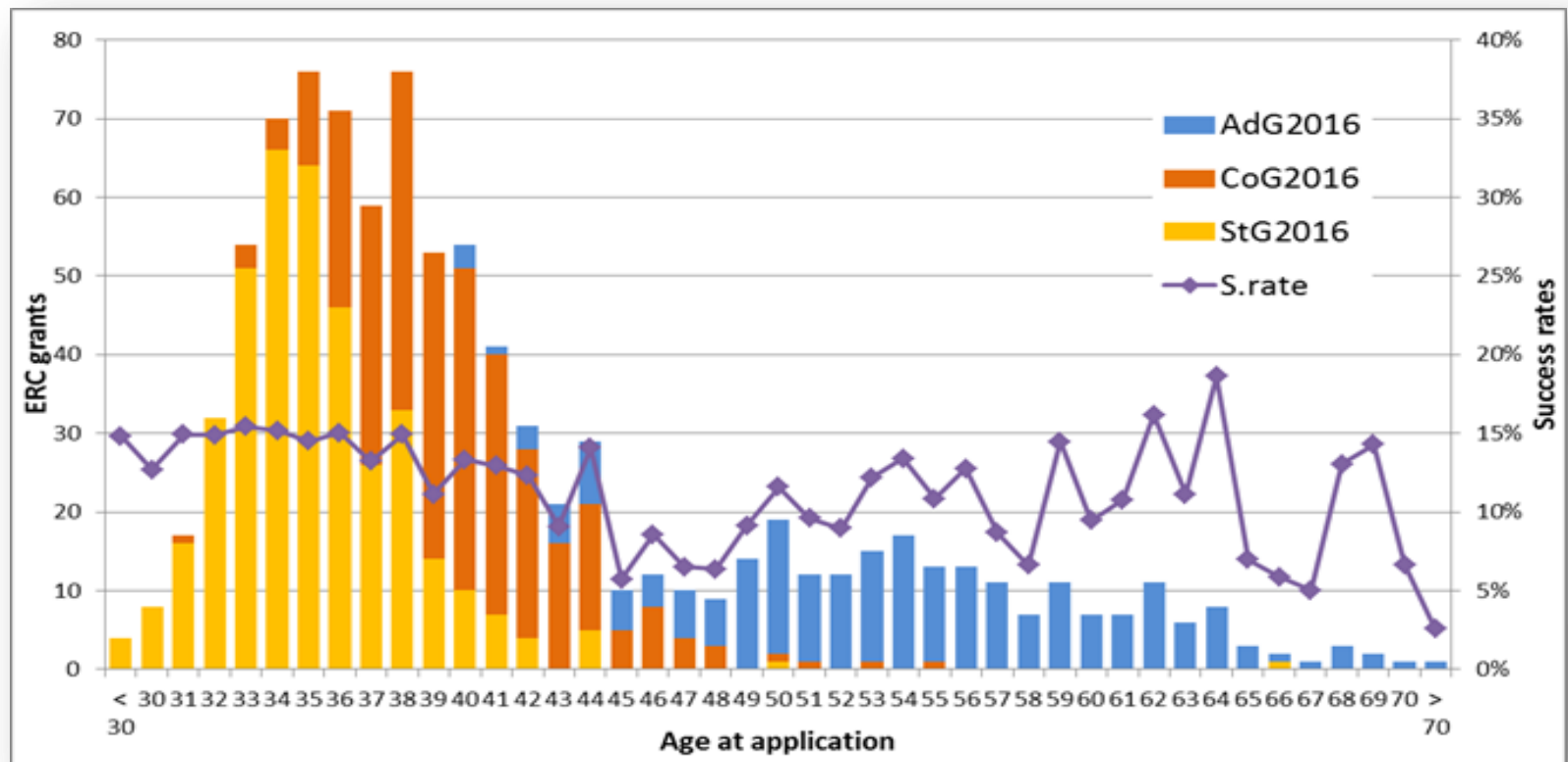
# Preparing your proposal

## .. Shall I apply now or wait another year?



**Rumour:** I should wait until the end of the eligibility window since then I will be more competitive

✗ **NOT true:** The success rate is virtually flat across the eligibility window (StG, CoG)



# Preparing your proposal

## ... Choose your Panel!

### Evaluation Panel Structure (WP2018)

#### Life Sciences

- **LS1** Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, Structural Biology and Molecular Biophysics
- **LS2** Genetics, 'Omics', Bioinformatics and Systems Biology
- **LS3** Cellular and Developmental Biology
- **LS4** Physiology, Pathophysiology and Endocrinology
- **LS5** Neuroscience and Neural Disorders
- **LS6** Immunity and Infection
- **LS7** Applied Medical Technologies, Diagnostics, Therapies, and Public Health
- **LS8** Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology
- **LS9** Applied Life Sciences, Biotechnology and Molecular and Biosystems engineering

#### Physical Sciences & Engineering

- **PE1** Mathematics
- **PE2** Fundamental Constituents of Matter
- **PE3** Condensed Matter Physics
- **PE4** Physical and Analytical Chemical Sciences
- **PE5** Synthetic Chemistry and Materials
- **PE6** Computer Science and Informatics
- **PE7** Systems and Communication Engineering
- **PE8** Products and Process Engineering
- **PE9** Universe Sciences
- **PE10** Earth System Science

#### Social Sciences and Humanities

- **SH1** Individuals, Markets and Organisations
- **SH2** Institutions, Values, Environment and Space
- **SH3** The Social World, Diversity, Population
- **SH4** The Human Mind and Its Complexity
- **SH5** Cultures and Cultural Production
- **SH6** The Study of the Human Past



# .. Choosing the right Panel is very important

- Proposals are assigned to the Panel of the PI's choice
- The PI can flag one "Secondary Review Panel": the PI **must explain the interdisciplinary nature of the proposal in Part B1**
- **Choose your descriptors/free keywords carefully!**
- **Transfer of proposals between panels may occur if:**
  - there is a clear mistake on part of the PI
  - the necessary expertise is available in a different panel

**Rumour:** Choose the panel "strategically" in order to increase chances of success

**✗ NOT true:** The budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand → success rate is equal amongst panels → choose the Panel that is right for your proposal! If you choose the "wrong" one because it has an X, Y, Z reputation, you will most probably hurt your proposal's chances of success!



# Preparing your proposal

## ... Start filling the different sections!

### PART A – administrative online forms

**A1** Proposal and PI info

**A2** Host Institution info

**A3** Budget

### Annexes – submitted as .pdf

Statement of support of HI  
copy of PhD or equiv. (StG & CoG)

*If applicable:*

- document for extension of eligibility window (StG & CoG)
- explanatory information on ethical issues

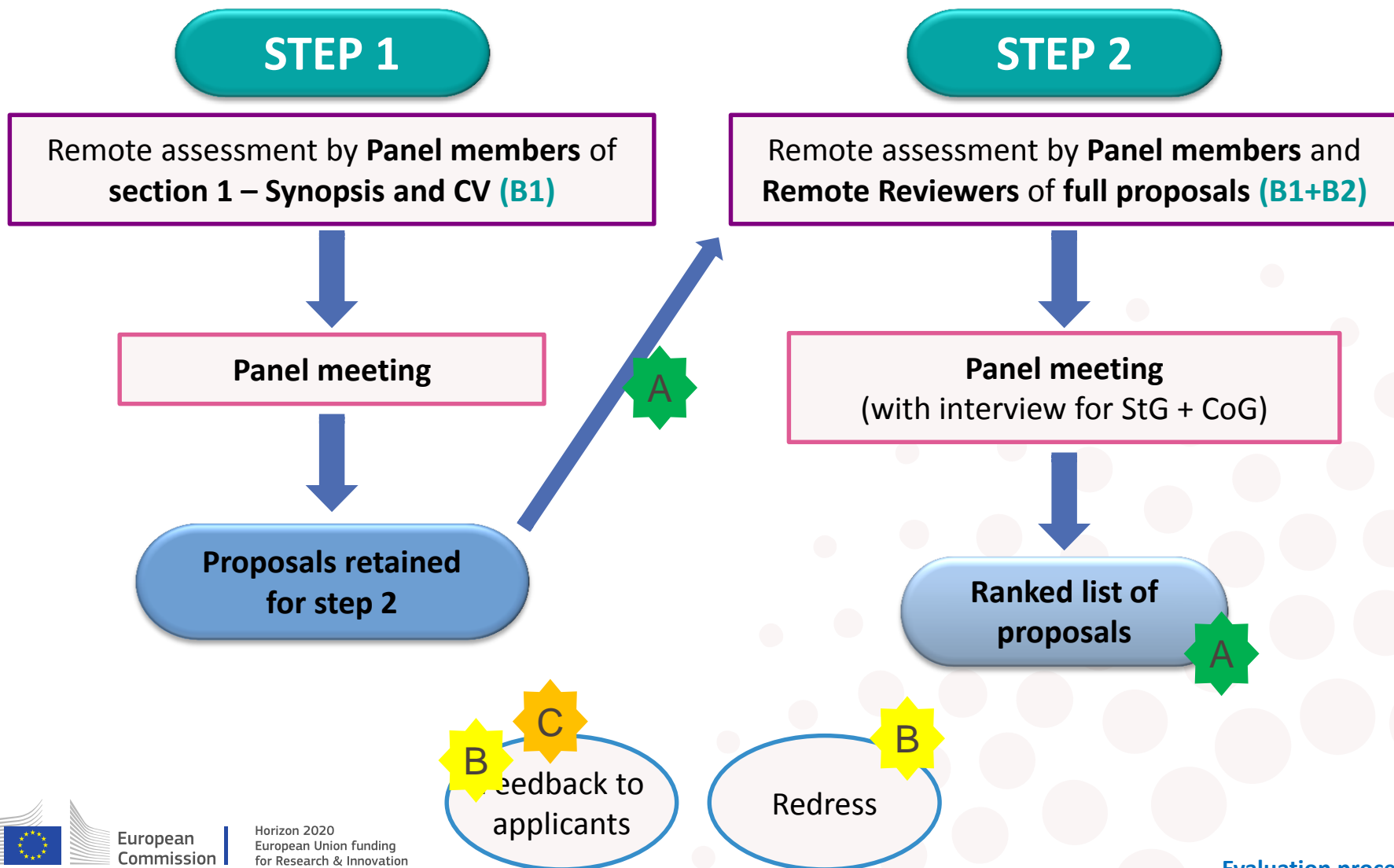
### PART B1 – submitted as .pdf

Abstract and Cross-domain explanation	1 p.
Extended Synopsis	5 p.
(Recommended Model) CV	2 p.
Funding ID	1 p.
Track Record	2 p.

### PART B2 – submitted as .pdf

Scientific Proposal (incl. budget table)	15 p.
---	-------

# The ERC Evaluation procedure



# .. Questions to ask yourself when writing PART B1

## Research Project

Is my project new, **innovative**, bringing in new solutions/theories?

Does it promise to go **substantially beyond the state of the art**?

Why is my project **important**? **Think Big!**

How can I **prove/support** my case? Have I proven the project's **feasibility**?

Is it **timely**? (Why wasn't it done in the past?)

What's the **risk**? Have I proposed **alternatives**?

Have I given a realistic picture of my **collaborations**? Show that it is you who will be leading the project.

## Principal Investigator

Why am I the **best/only person** to carry it out? Know your competitors

Am I able to work **independently**, and to manage a 5-year project with a substantial budget?

Am I **internationally competitive**?

Have I shown my **scientific leadership** in my CV?

**NO THEMATIC PRIORITIES**

**NO CONSORTIA**

**NO CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**NO SOCIETAL/ECONOMIC IMPACT**

**ONLY CRITERION: EXCELLENCE OF BOTH THE PI AND THE RESEARCH PROJECT**



## .. When writing your CV

- Remember that the CV/Track Record are as **important as your project!**
- **Explain** what has been **your own contribution to your key publications** (incl. papers published without your PhD and postdoc supervisor).
- If you know that **you have gaps** or other issues in your CV (e.g. co-authored publications), **explain them**.
- Describe accurately **any other activity which can indicate scientific maturity**.
- Do not forget to put your **h-index, total number of publications and citations** (with and without self-citations)!
- **Fully fill in your Funding ID**



**Rumour:** One needs publications in Nature/Science/High Impact Factor journals to succeed.

**✗ NOT true:** However, publishing with senior scientists (former supervisors) may raise doubts about maturity/scientific independence.

# .. Differences between PART B1 and PART B2

## STEP 1

### B1

Assessment by **Panel members**

## STEP 2

### B1 + B2

Assessment by **Panel members** and  
**Remote Reviewers**

## .. Differences between PART B1 and PART B2

- ✓ Do not repeat the synopsis, go into details on your methodology and work plan!
- ✓ Make sure that there is an obvious **link between B1 and B2**
- ✓ Explain hypothesis or provide **preliminary data (if it exists)**
- ✓ **Provide alternative strategies** to mitigate risks
- ✓ **Make use of the evaluation criteria** (Ground breaking nature, Potential impact, Scientific Approach) - use them as title/subtitle

### STEP 2

**B1 + B2**  
Assessment by **Panel members** and  
**Remote Reviewers**



**Rumour:** I need preliminary results.

✗ **NOT true:** however explain how the literature supports your "hypothesis", give some confidence that your project is feasible.

# I have been invited for an interview .. now what?

- Have **clear and representative slides** and focus on SCIENCE!
- **Anticipate questions.**
- Know the **details** of your proposal and methods, as well as your research area – who are your main competitors/collaborators?
- Bring **additional slides** on new supporting data, if you have, and for possible explanations.
- **Don't over-explain your CV!**

**PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!!!**



**Rumour:** Choose your Acronym in alphabetical order, interviews are planned alphabetically.

✗ **NOT true:** the important thing is to choose an easy-to-remember acronym since this helps identifying the project during discussions!

# Typical reasons for rejection

## PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

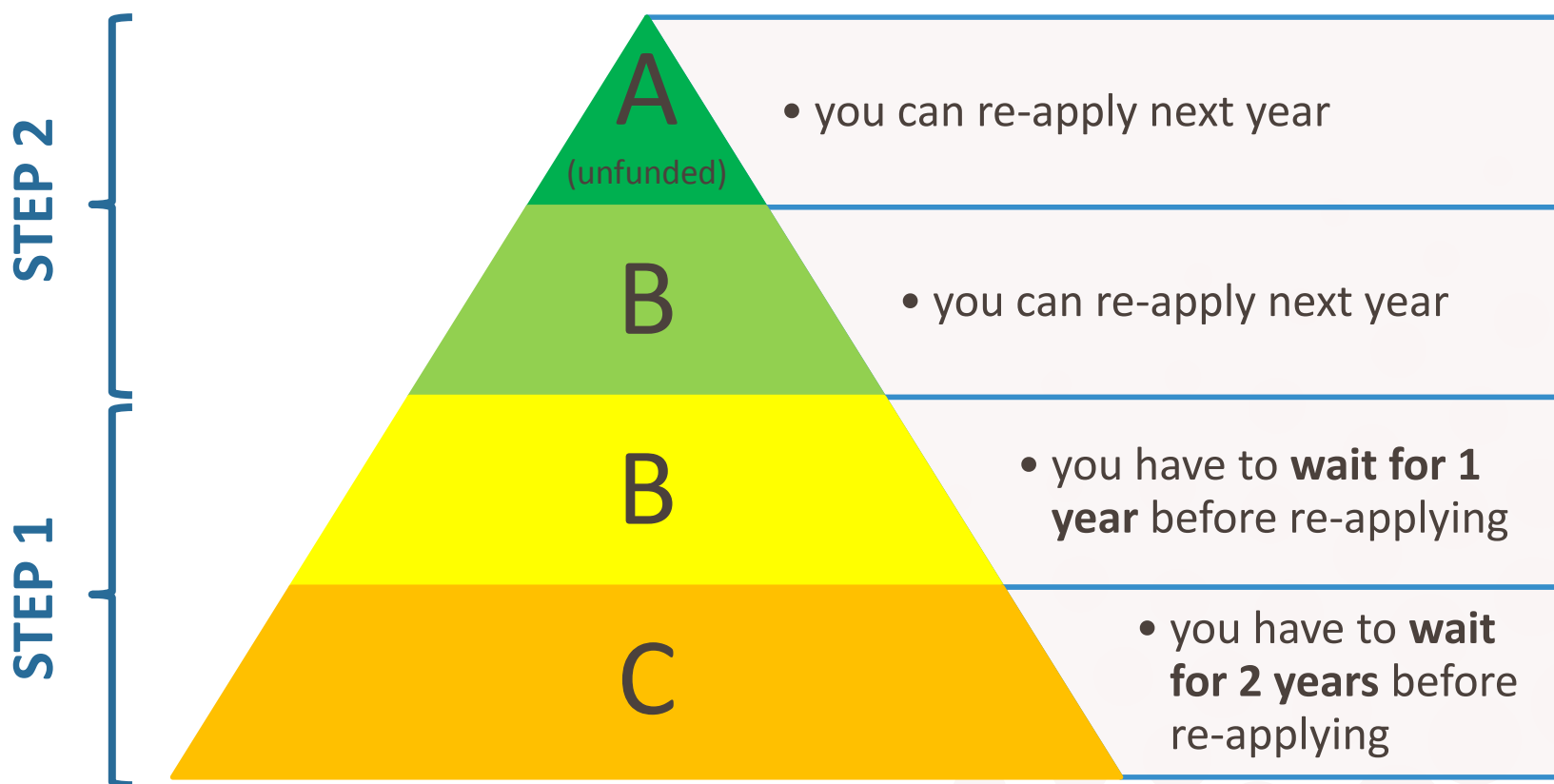
- Insufficient track-record
- Insufficient (potential for) independence
- Insufficient experience in leading projects

## RESEARCH PROJECT

- Scope: Too narrow  $\leftrightarrow$  too broad/unfocussed
- Incremental research
- Work plan not detailed enough/unclear
- Insufficient risk management

# I did not get the grant, can I apply next year?

In order to make the evaluation process more effective, the Scientific Council has introduced **re-submission restrictions**.

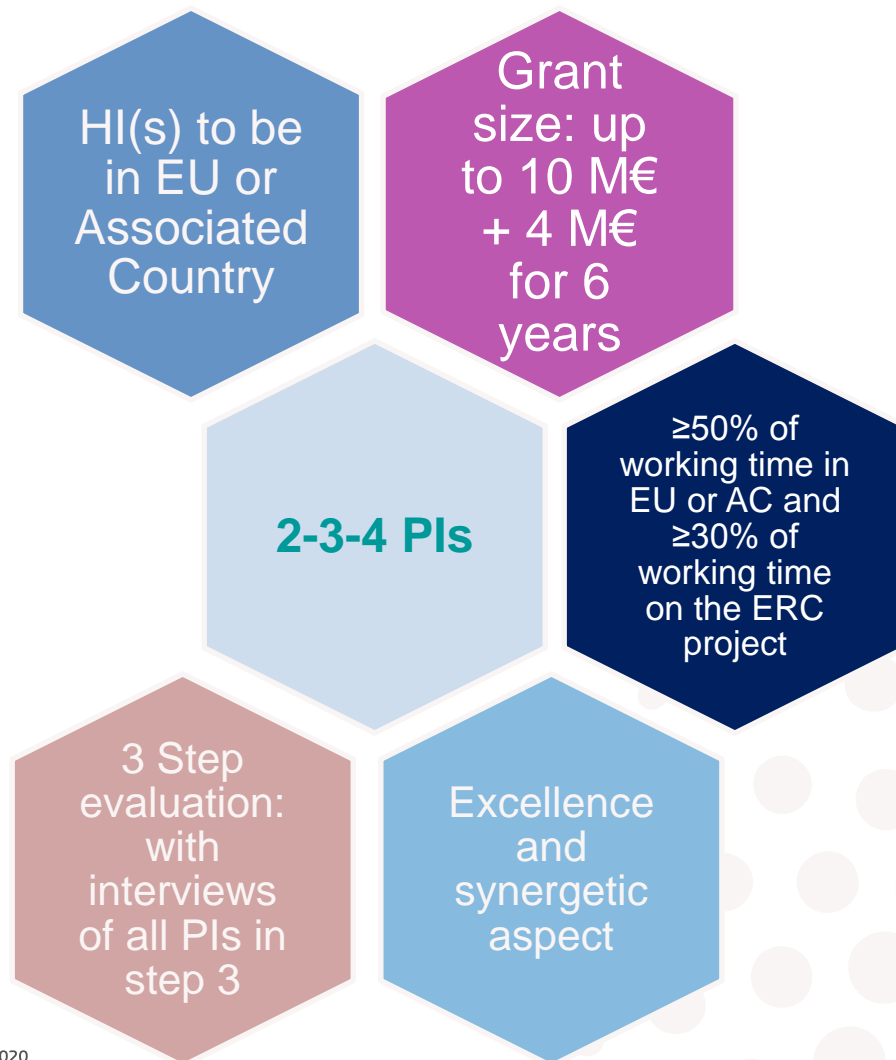




# The European Research Council

- What is the ERC?
- Evaluation process
- Other schemes

# Synergy Grant Scheme



# The European Research Council

- More information.. [erc.europa.eu](https://erc.europa.eu)
- National Contact Points .. [erc.europa.eu/national-contact-points](https://erc.europa.eu/national-contact-points)
- Sign up for news alerts .. [erc.europa.eu/keep-updated-erc](https://erc.europa.eu/keep-updated-erc)
- Follow us on



[www.facebook.com/EuropeanResearchCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanResearchCouncil)



[twitter.com/ERC\\_Research](https://twitter.com/ERC_Research)



[www.linkedin.com/company/european-research-council](https://www.linkedin.com/company/european-research-council)