

Panel Eval ERC Starting Grants LS6

Francisco Sánchez-Madrid
Servicio de Inmunología.
Instituto Investigación Sanitaria Princesa
Hospital Universitario de la Princesa
Universidad Autónoma Madrid

ERC (European Research Council): Funding schemes

Panelist
2007-2010

ERC Starting Grants

For top researchers with 2 to 7 years
experience after PhD

Grants up to €1.5 million for 5 years

ERC Consolidator Grants

For top researchers with 7 to 12 years
experience after PhD

Grants up to €2 million for 5 years

Applicant
2010-2011

ERC Advanced Grants

For established researchers who have a
recent research track-record which
identifies them as leaders in their
respective field of research

Grants up to €2.5 million for 5 years

ERC Proof of Concept

For ERC grant holders only

Bridging gap between research -
earliest stage of marketable innovation

Grants up to €150,000

Funded
2011

ERC only funds excellence...and good ideas

→ Projects being highly ambitious, pioneering and unconventional

→ For exceptional research leaders only

→ Attractive long-term funding

→ In the hands of distinguished peers

What to prepare

- A powerful biosketch: No fluff!
- A good idea
- A structure for implementation of the idea...
- ...technology transfer, etc

Key features to highlight: The biosketch (I)

- (Starters/Consolidators) **PI Research-Periods** in, at least, two different groups. Exposure to international science + **Productivity in different labs.**
- **Publications:**
A major achievement/breakthrough, reflected, at least in one/several papers in top journals (Nature/Science/Cell and their “children”); others in top “classical”, specialized research areas (JEM, JCB, PNAS, Neuron, JI, etc).
- **Quality vs quantity.**
Highlight your best papers, instead of including all of them (if you have a long list of papers)

Key features to highlight: The biosketch (II)

-Identify and clearly highlight the **main achievements**.

-For **starters and consolidators**, key achievements and, whenever possible, the applicant's specific contributions.

-For **advanced**, achievements in more than one research line, ability to change lines and fields and not only publication track, but legacy (alumni in top research positions).

Key features to highlight: The biosketch (III)

Publication highlights

-For starters:

it is valuable if significantly high. Do not include citations or IF if they are not high. Explain role in high-profile collaborations.

-For consolidators:

-it is very important to demonstrate clear signs of PI independency: Funding grants as PI and papers as senior author in top or very important journals.

- For advanced:

It's very important to position your research in the field. Citations are key (IF, h-index, etc). Best way of doing this is high-profile review articles.

Key features to highlight: The idea

Project

-Very original, ambitious and groundbreaking, **not an obvious continuation**, but based and built on previous expertise/experience/background of the PI.

-Preliminary data supporting the aims are very positively evaluated, even essential (see later).

-Good connections among all different specific aims

-Feasible and Realistic in terms of considering the weaknesses and strengths, as well as alternative approaches in case of failure.

Funding budget

-Not evaluated; Ask what you need (usually the maximum funding allowed)

Other features to highlight: Institution, dissemination and transfer

Institution

-Be ready to show that your Host Institution has the support to develop the project in its entirety or through established collaborations. Critical for starters.

Dissemination

That you will publish (of course you will!, and as high as possible, in journals or better, magazines like Nature; Science, etc).

Transfer

Identify patentable materials, ideas and procedures. Essential for filing proof-of-concept applications, but always a good idea.

Most applications
(>80%) do not meet
these requirements
and are not retained
(declined) for the
second stage

INTERVIEW

Key features during the interview (second stage) (I):

Exposition:

Explain concisely, and be on time. **Stay on time!!**
(panellists frown on filibusters).

Be very clear explaining the main concepts and points of your proposal. Again, no fluff!

Be yourself, behave naturally; do not overplay yourself.

INTERVIEW

Key features during the interview (second stage) (II):

It's very likely you will be asked along these lines:

- **For starters, how novel is this Project?** Is it very, or somewhat, or not independent from your post-doc or previous research?
- **For starters and consolidators**, concerns may emerge regarding independent thinking and hypothesis formulation. **Provide signs and proof of leadership.**
- Is your proposal hypothesis-driven?
- How will this proposal lead to important contributions in the field?
- Possible role of the proposal and its funding in your position in the field.
- Proposals are commonly deemed too ambitious and/or with too many aims: Where the focus will be in case the Panel considers funding it?

INTERVIEW

Key features during the interview (second stage) (III):

About your Institution

- Current PI position in the supporting host Institution; what type of support it is provided by the Institution?. Do they provide any Starting funds; personnel, research technician, post-doctoral funding, etc?
- What about facilities in the host institution? Are they appropriate to perform the proposal?
- What about Department support? Scientific tracks?

Specific questions and concerns about the scientific proposal raised by the Lead Reviewer or other members of the Panel or raised in remote reviewers' reports.

INTERVIEW

Concluding Remark

You should attract the attention of the reviewers in the Panel to your project and convince them both your proposal and you are outstanding.

ERC FUNDING: WHAT IT MEANS

Starter: It means you bear great potential. Funding is sometimes hard to handle. Risky, but attractive. Requires huge Institutional commitment.

Consolidator: The right track. Use the funding to take risks related to your expertise and consolidate (!) your current lines. A good time to link to H2020 consortium funding schemes.

Advanced: You're there, you're a leader in the field. You also need to apply as Leader or Coordinator of H2020 consortium schemes.

Experience in Advanced-ERC Grants

As Applicant and Reviewer

To get an ERC grant: A tale of perseverance and stubbornness

-- 2009: i) Group brainstorm.

ii) A good idea emerges: *“Transfer of genetic information between immune cells. Perhaps the immune synapse acts as a conduit”*.

ii) Writing of a draft, but it never matured enough for filing the application at that time.

-- 2010: Preliminary data gathering. The idea begins to yield results. Elaboration of the proposal and presentation (B1+B2). Retained for the second step. Not retained for final funding. We received the feedback from the panel (eight independent individual reviews from leaders in the field).

Summary of feedback: The Project is very interesting and novel, groundbreaking. But it is deemed too risky without more preliminary evidence.

--2011: Data keeps piling. The group publishes two landmark papers. Presentation of an improved proposal, with additional evidence and solid publications to back it up.

--Fall 2011: FUNDED!!!

SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME
“Ideas” Specific programme
European Research Council

Project acronym: **GENTRIS**

Project Title: *Mechanisms of MTOC guidance and Genetic Transfer at the Immune Synapse: novel modes of Immuno-modulation*

Grant ERC-2011-AdG 294340-GENTRIS

Duration: 60 months (2012-2017)

Principal Investigator: Francisco Sánchez Madrid

The GENTRIS proposal addresses two major specific objectives:

1.-To assess the role of MTOC polarization as a signalling and structural platform for the control of secretion during IS formation.

2- To define the mechanisms and functional consequences of intercellular transfer of miRNA via the IS.

GENTRIS will generate fundamental knowledge about the role and molecular mechanisms driving MTOC translocation to the IS as a guidance mechanism for the transfer of genetic information during immune cell-cell interactions.

GENTRIS proposal

Biosketch:

- Only high profile articles included in the application
- Solid and sustained scientific contribution in several subfields
- Very good reputation with the scientific community
- High number of citations = high h-index

One example of Advanced ERC : Francisco Sánchez-Madrid

- Two senior post-docs, one per major aim (**Maria Mittelbrunn and Noa B. Martin-Cofreces**)
- 4 Graduate Students, two per aim
- 1 supporting lab technician

