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ERC SYNERGY GRANT: PREPARING A COMPETITIVE PROPOSAL

12.09.2019 Webinar

CONTENT

- Synergy Grant: Key features
- Tips for a competitive proposal
- Q+A

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SYNERGY GRANT IN SHORT

- Supports groups of 2 - 4 Principal Investigators (PIs) and their teams to bring together complementary skills, knowledge, and resources in new ways in order to jointly address ambitious research problems
- Open for all areas of research
- Funding criterion: scientific excellence
- Success rates: 9 % for Call 2018, approx. 14% expected for Call 2019

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2 - 4 Principal Investigators (PI) + Host Institution/s (HI)

including 1 Corresponding PI (admin. contact for ERC)

- Excellent scientists in all career stages (no formal eligibility criteria)
- Max. **EUR 10 million for up to 6 years** (up to EUR 14 million in defined exceptional cases)
- Next deadline SyG 2019: **5 November 2019**, **EUR** 350 million call budget (~ 39 projects)

Corresponding HI in EU-28 or Associated Countries; **1 HI can be located outside of EU/AC**

- Minimum 30% time commitment to project by each PI
- Minimum 50% of total working time spent in EU-28/AC by each PI except if 1 PI (not Corresponding PI) located at HI outside EU-28/AC

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KEY FEATURES (1)

Potentially transformative research

- Should enable substantial advances at the frontiers of knowledge, stemming, for example, from the cross-fertilization of scientific fields, from new productive lines of enquiry, or new methods and techniques, including unconventional approaches and investigations at the interface between established disciplines.

- Should have the potential of becoming a benchmark on a global scale

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KEY FEATURES (2)

Exceptional combination of expertise

- Synergy Grant Groups expected to demonstrate that they can successfully bring together the elements necessary to address the scope and complexity of the proposed research question, e.g:

  skills, knowledge, experience, expertise, disciplines, methods, approaches, teams, access to infrastructures,…

- Describe the contribution of each PI, their team and resources to achieving the objectives proposed

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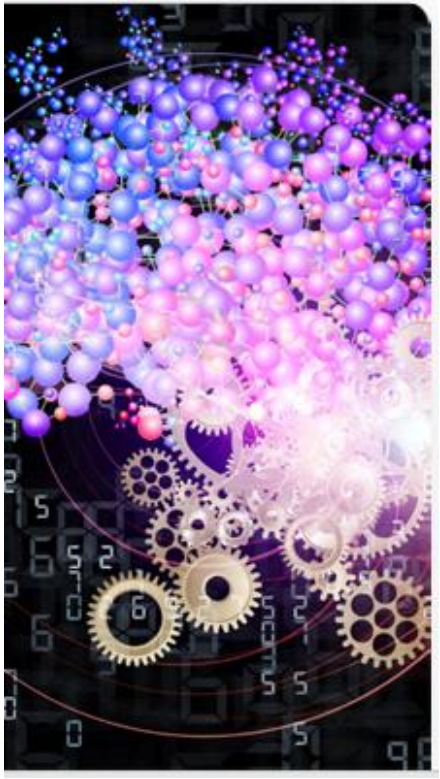
KEY FEATURES (3)



Working arrangements

- explain the **feasibility and appropriateness of the working arrangements**
- come up with ideas on how to spend time together in ways that best suit the aims and goals of your research in order to convince the panels/remote reviewers about the outstanding and exceptional work together

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PROJECT EXAMPLES

- **BrainPlay - The self-teaching brain**: This proposal describes an untravelled route to the learning algorithms of the brain that runs through the no-man's-land between synaptic physiology, systems neuroscience, cognitive neuroscience, theoretical neuroscience and machine learning.
- **The European Qur'an**. Islamic Scripture in European Culture and Religion 1150-1850 - will study the place of the Muslim holy book in European cultural and religious history (c.1150-1850), situating European perceptions of the Qur'an and of Islam in the fractured religious, political, and intellectual landscape of this long period.
- **Natural BionicS** - aims at creating a fully integrated, symbiotic replacement of human limbs with robotic parts that the user will feel and command as part of the body

- More at: https://erc.europa.eu/projects-figures/erc-funded-projects

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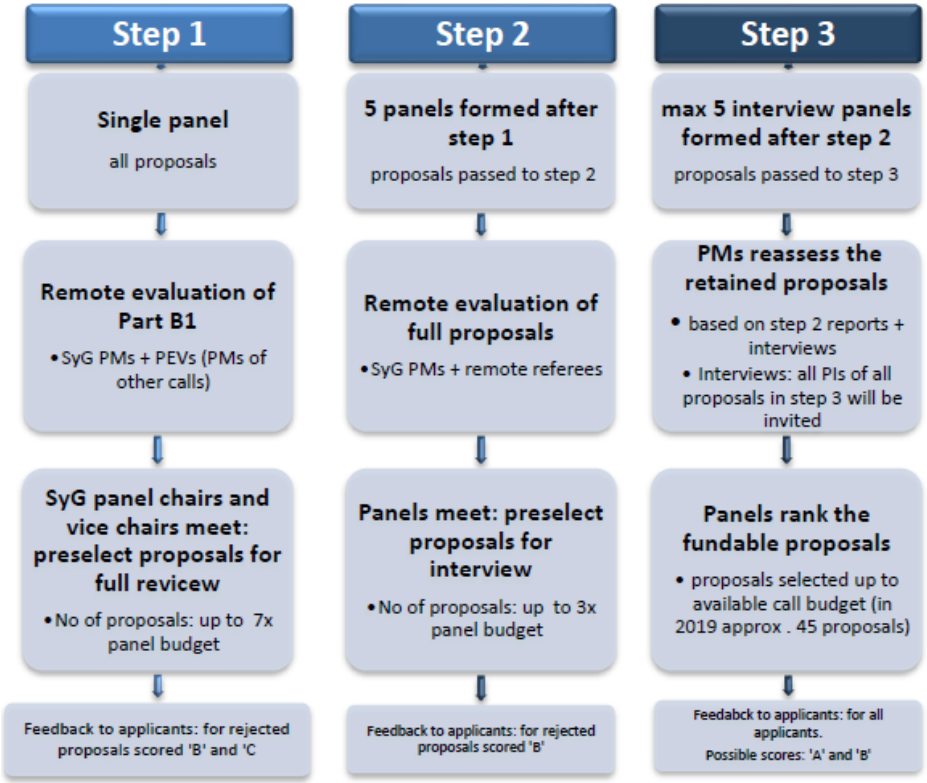
TAILOR-MADE EVALUATION PROCESS

Panel Members: Generalists
Step 1: 1 panel,
~ 80 panel members
min. 3 Panel Members read B1

Step 2
5 panels formed dynamically
(**2 PE-, 2 LS-, 1 SH-oriented**)
Panel Members & Remote Referees read B1 + B2

Step 3
5 panels, composition may be changed again for **interview with all PIs**



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THE QUESTIONS TO SYNERGY REVIEWERS

Research project (1)

- **Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project:**
  - To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
  - To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?
  - To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a higher-than-normal risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?

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THE QUESTIONS TO SYNERGY REVIEWERS (2)

Research project (2)

- **Scientific approach:**

○ To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain?

○ To what extent does the proposal go beyond what the individual Principal Investigators could achieve alone?

○ To what extent does the proposal require and demonstrate significant synergies, complementarities and scientific added-value to enable it to achieve its objectives?

○ To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project? (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?

○ To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?

○ To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources and PI commitment adequate and properly justified (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?

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QUESTIONS SYNERGY REVIEWERS HAVE TO ANSWER

Principal Investigators

- To what extent has/have the PI(s) demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?
- To what extent does/do the PI(s) has/have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

Synergy Grant Group

- To what extent does the Synergy Grant Group successfully demonstrate in the proposal that it brings together the elements – such as skills, knowledge, experience, expertise, disciplines, methods, approaches, teams – necessary to address the proposed research question?

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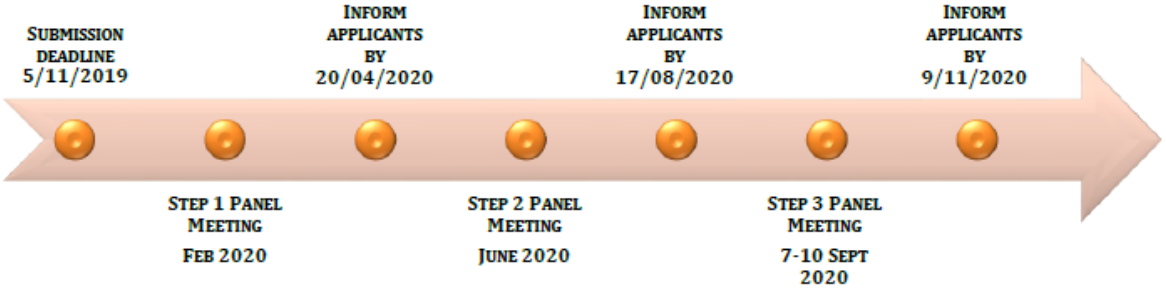

Indicative date for signature of grant agreements 19/03/2021

https://erc.europa.eu/funding/synergy-grants
https://www.ffg.at/europa/ausschreibungen/horizon2020_erc-syn

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PROPOSAL STRUCTURE (1)

Extended synopsis (5 pages)

research challenge; aims, groundbreaking nature vs.state of the art; originality, feasibility, impact, methodology, expertise of PIs & team, brief time plan; working arrangements

→ **story one of a piece,** not assembly of parallel projects

→ convince **generalist and specialist panel members**

+ CV and track record (2 pages each) per PI

Abstract (2000 characters)

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PROPOSAL STRUCTURE (2)

Scientific proposal (15 pages, excluding online resources section + budget table)

a) State of the art and objectives: objectives clearly specified in context of state of the art; importance and impact of proposed research; challenging/unconventional aspects

b) Methodology: detailled; key intermediate goals; novel/ unconventional aspects, key risks and contingency plans, work and time plan; intermediate stages,working arrangements

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SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM PREVIOUS CALLS

- majority of PIs at ERC Advanced Grant level (Call 2018: 95 %)
- 2018: 70 % of funded proposals included at least one ERC Grantee
- sufficient focus also important for Synergy Projects
- various degrees of interdisciplinarity
- budget should be appropriate to individual contributions by PIs
- frequently a history of previous collaborations between PIs in funded projects
- time commitment of PIs frequently above 30% in funded projects

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SHARING EXPERIENCES: ERC SYNERGY PANEL MEMBER

Veronika Sexl
University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna
ERC Synergy Grant Panel Member

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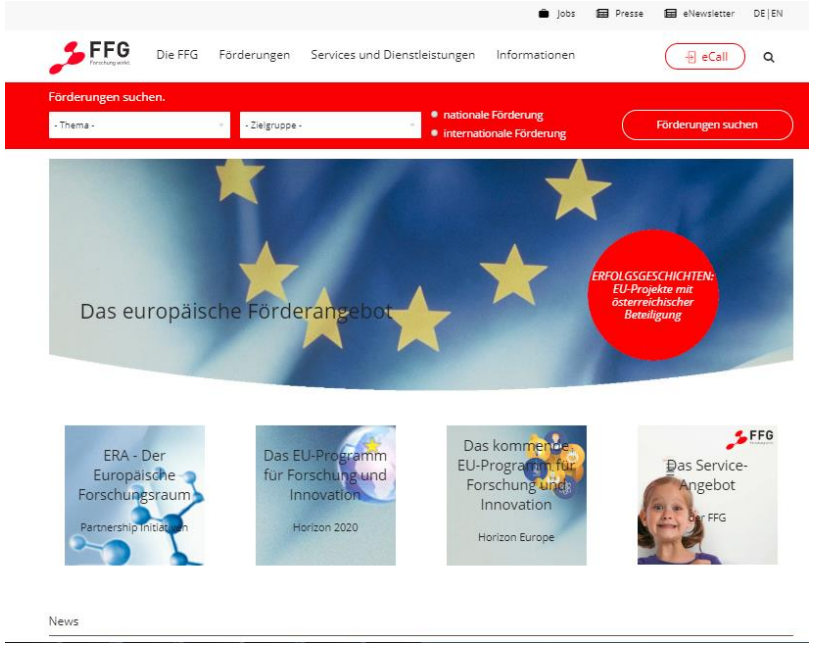

- ERC **Grant Proposal writing trainings**
- Webinars
- **Proposal Reading Days**
- Individual **consultancy**
- **Proposal check**
- Information packs
- Interview Trainings
- Homepage: https://www.ffg.at/erc
- Contact: ylva.huber@ffg.at

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RESUBMISSION RULES

Call to which the Principal Investigator applied under previous ERC Work Programmes and proposal evaluation outcome		2020 ERC calls to which a Principal Investigator is *not* eligible
2018 and 2019 Starting, Consolidator, Advanced Grant or Synergy	Rejected on the grounds of a breach of research integrity	Starting, Consolidator, Advanced and Synergy
2018 Starting, Consolidator, or Advanced Grant	C at Step 1	Starting, Consolidator and Advanced
2018 Synergy Grant	A, or B at Step 3	No restriction
	B at Step 1 or 2	No restriction
	C at Step 1	Advanced and Synergy Grant
2019 Starting, Consolidator, or Advanced Grant	A, or B at Step 2	No restriction
	B, or C at Step 1	Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grant
2019 Synergy Grant	A, or B at Step 3	No restriction
	B at Step 2	No restriction
	B at Step 1	Synergy
	C at Step 1	Advanced and Synergy Grant

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