ERC Advanced Grant Call 2019:
Notes and Tips for Applicants
(Version Aug 6, 2019)

- **Waiting time** for **resubmission** of ERC proposals that failed **in step 1** of the evaluation: 1 year for proposals evaluated as category B, 2 years for category C proposals (most likely)
- Proposals that proceed to **step 2** but are not funded can be resubmitted "immediately" (to ERC calls of Work programme 2020)
- **Structural change:** The previous **section c) resources of part B2 has been transferred to the online submission form** (section 3, max 8.000 characters), **but counts towards the 15 pages limit for B2** (excluding the online budget table)
- **Literature references** do **not count towards page limits** (B1+B2)
- **10 years Track Record:** Presentation of **up to 10** publications from the last 10 years
- **Model CV-Template** provided by ERC (for guidance only, but panel members seem to appreciate it)
- **Mandatory Funding ID annex** to indicate ongoing, previous and submitted grants
- Dedicated **textbox to explain cross-panel/cross-domain nature** of proposal, if a second panel is selected (on cover page of B1)
- Request for **exclusion of up to three reviewers** possible without justification
- **Open Access** is mandatory for publications arising from the ERC project, related costs can be charged to the ERC
- ERC beneficiaries will automatically be covered by the H2020 provisions on **research data sharing** unless they specifically decide to opt-out; related costs can be charged to the project
- **Ethical issues table** needs to be completed online; **ethics self-assessment** annex to be provided if any issue in the ethical issues table applies
- **Minimum 30% of the PIs total working time** needs to be committed to the ERC project, and the PI needs to spend **minimum 50% of his/her total working time in Europe or a Horizon 2020-Associated Country,** even if the salary of the PI is not charged to the project
- **Written consent by all proposal particpants/collaborators needs to be documented,** e.g. by an email dated before the call deadline**,** but not submitted with the application (online form, section "Declarations")

Important documents and useful links

Please consult in particular the following two documents:
- **ERC Work Programme 2019 (legally binding)**
  https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/erc/h2020-wp19-erc_en.pdf
- **Information for applicants to the Advanced Grant Call 2019,** including the detailed **panel keywords:**
  https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/guides_for_applicants/h2020-guide19-erc-adg_en.pdf

- ERC Homepage: erc.europa.eu

- Participant Portal: Link to proposal submission for **AdG 2019**:
  http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/erc-2019-adg.html

- ERC **Standard Proposal template** for the Advanced Grant, including administrative forms and Letter of Commitment of the Host Institute: available via the online submission tool after registration, at step 5

- ERC Advanced Grant 2019 Applicant Mailbox for queries related to the call:
  ERC-2019-ADG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu

- Link to previous **ERC panel members (frequently generalists)**:
  https://erc.europa.eu/document-category/evaluation-panels
  We recommend to use the lists of previous panel members to understand the different backgrounds and perspectives from which panel members may view your proposal. ERC panel members alternate between even and odd years, while several of the panel members will usually be replaced by new ones. It is therefore advisable to check in particular the panel member lists for the Call 2017 in order to arrive at an idea about the possible composition of panel members for 2019.

  The Panel Chairs of the ERC Advanced Grant Call 2019 are listed at
  https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/Panel_Chairs_ERC_Advanced_Grant_2019.pdf

- Link to lists of previous **ERC remote referees (specialists)** and panel members:
  https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/reference-documents;programCode=H2020
  (select button "expert names – annual lists")

- Link to ERC **database of ERC-funded projects**:
  https://erc.europa.eu/projects-figures/erc-funded-projects

Here you can search for abstracts and principle investigators of ERC grants. Search results can be filtered e.g. by panel and keywords. Project abstracts and the CVs of principal investigators funded by the panel you consider applying for may prove helpful for deciding on the most suitable evaluation panel, and for comparing CVs/track records of PIs.

- ERC webpage on **open access**: https://erc.europa.eu/funding-and-grants/managing-project/open-access

- Guidelines on Implementation of Open Access to Scientific Publications and Research Data (ERC): https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/oa-pilot/h2020-hi-erc-oa-guide_en.pdf

Online submission of ERC proposals: Submit early, submit often

We strongly recommend to **submit a first version of your proposal around 1 week before the deadline**, in order to check for any browser problem or other technical issues that may block proposal submission, or lead to layout changes in the uploaded versions. Up to the call deadline, **you can continuously modify your proposal by submitting (not just uploading) a new version, which will overwrite the previous one**.

In case of problems with the online submission system, please contact your **host institution** (grant management/researchers´ service), **FFG** (ylva.huber@ffg.at) or directly the SEP Service Desk: DIGIT-EFP7-SEP-SUPPORT@ec.europa.eu or +32 (2) 29 92222.

Information on how to use the online submission system is also available via the submission service user manual: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/support/sep_usermanual.pdf

Please ensure that all the **required supporting documents are obtained and submitted** via the submission tool in time (Commitment letter of the Host Institution, ethical issues annex [ethical self-assessment and any additional documents related to ethics], other supporting documents as applicable)

Remark on "Declarations" in the online forms - **Written consent**:
The Principal Investigator declares to have the written consent of all participants on their involvement and on the content of this proposal, as well as of any researcher mentioned in the proposal as participating in the project (either as other PI, team member or collaborator). The ERCEA may request the applicants to provide the written consent of all participants at any time during the evaluation process.

The written consents should however not be submitted with the application. Consent can e.g. be documented by an **email** by the participant, which is **dated before the call deadline**.

Ethical issues: Online table and ethical self-assessment annex

The **ethical issues table** needs to be completed online in the Participant Portal (submission tool). The **page numbers** to be indicated in the ethics table refer to part B2. It is possible to indicate several page numbers divided by '/' (e.g. 12/14).

For each ethical issue that applies to your proposal, please 1) tick the appropriate box in the list and 2) provide information on your approach to these issues in the **ethics self-assessment** document. As there is **no template** for the ethics self-assessment, we suggest to use a plain word-document indicating the relevant topic(s) from the online-ethics section and to describe your strategy to deal diligently with these issues (e.g. which ethic approvals you will obtain, compliance with relevant national and European law/directives, anonymization of data, insurance, etc). Convert the document into **pdf** format and upload it as **ethical self assessment annex** via the online submission tool. Furthermore, you can upload additional annexes with ethics-related documents (e.g. examples of informed consent forms)

 A **guideline** on how to complete the ethical self-assessment is available at
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf.

Please note: The "ethical self-assessment guide" also refers to documents that may not be available at the stage of proposal submission but need to be provided at the stage of preparing the grant agreement, e.g. ethics approvals.

The **ethical issues section will not be evaluated** during proposal evaluation, as communicated to FFG by the ERCEA: "*Any document related to ethics (including the ethics issues table) will <u>not</u> be made available to the ERC reviewers during the evaluation. Hence, they will not be instructed to look at them. The evaluators are not supposed to take ethic issues into account during evaluations. The ethics clearance is done by the ethics review after evaluation is final*."
For proposals with immediate ethics issues, it is nonetheless "*advisable to include a short paragraph summarising how they will be dealt with and refer to ethics self-assessment/annexes.*"

Evaluating scientific excellence: Questions that AdG reviewers have to answer
(ERC Work Programme 2019, p36)

1. **Research Project**
   Ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility

Starting, Consolidator, Advanced and Synergy
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)?

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 (based on the Extended Synopsis)?
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)?
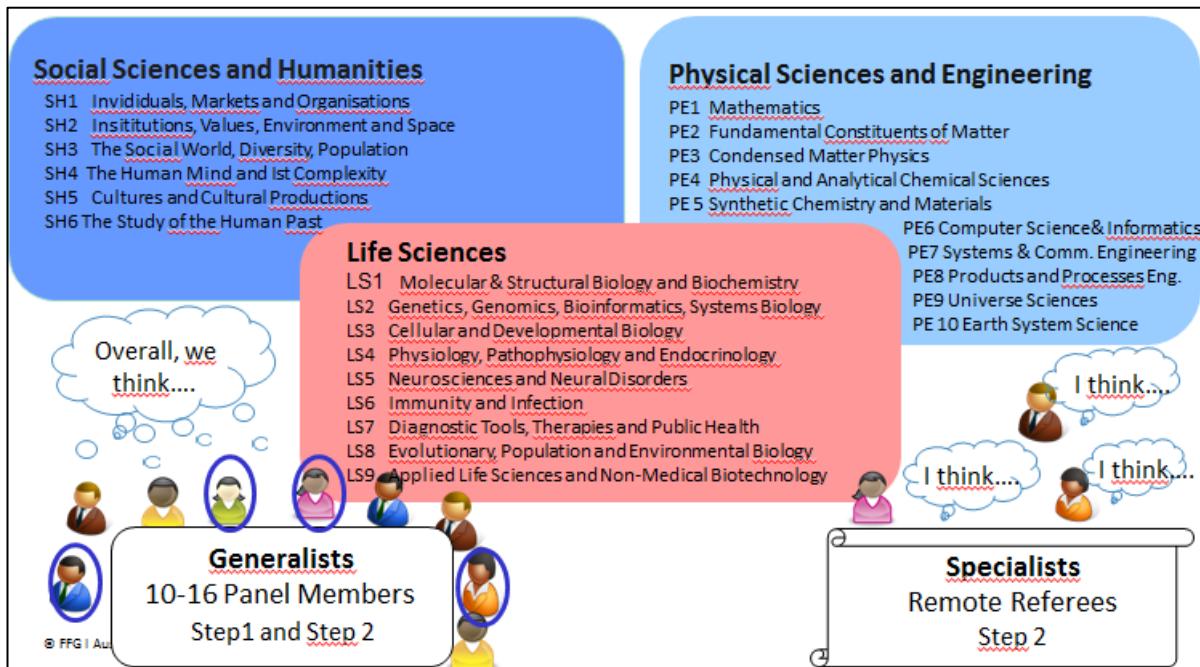
2. Principal Investigator
   ## Intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment

Intellectual capacity and creativity
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?

*To what extent has the PI demonstrated sound leadership in the training and advancement of young scientists (**for Advanced Grant applicants**)?*

Evaluation step 1: Usually **four Panel Members** (out of appr. 12-16), the majority of whom may often be **generalists** rather than specialists in the area(s) of your project, **read part B1 only**.

Evaluation step 2: The **full proposal (B1 and B2) becomes accessible** to the **panel** members and **specialist remote referees** (who are selected by the panel members). The final decision on the recommendation of a project for funding lies with the panel members.

Tips for a competitive ERC Advanced Grant proposal

Structure

- Provide a **clear structure**. Your proposal should read as a compelling, authentic **narrative**.

- Present the big picture to put your research into a broader **context** (appealing also to panel members who are not specialists in your field) and to **motivate your research goals**

- The introduction/motivation should, however, not dominate the proposal: The **major part** of the grant application (also in the extended synopsis/B1) should explain concretely your **novel approach** and **planned work** (as a rule of thumb: minimum 50 % of the extended synopsis in B1)

- Present the concrete **aims/objectives** of your project rather early and in a highly visible manner (e.g. bullet points, bold fonts, text box). Panel Members like to see them at the first glance.

– The **perfect match between aims/objectives**, the **methodology** and the **workplan** of the project should be easy to perceive, e.g. by referring to aim(s) 1,2 when describing research line/workpackage x or method y). This will support the impression of a well-integrated, coherent proposal.

Part B1

is a crucial element of the proposal that needs to capture the novelty, ambition and the feasibility of the project. The success rate for step1 of the evaluation process, where only Part B1 is assessed, was lately below 30 % for the Advanced Grant.

– The extended synopsis in B1 should contain **all important information** to evaluate both the breakthrough character and the feasibility of the project. This includes:

  -key **preliminary data**/results/"proof of principle" already obtained
  -**risk management** (what are significant risks and your plan B, why does the project have a favourable risk-gain-balance)
  -how will you **validate** the results of your project? (e.g. how will you determine causality, as opposed to "only" correlation)? → to show the **explanatory power** of your approach

– Based on ERC evaluation comments, we strongly recommend to also include a paragraph/sentence on the **team composition** in B1 (message: the necessary expertise will be assembled in your team), as well as a **brief time plan** (1-2 sentences, or putting timing information in brackets, e.g. "aim 1… [Year 1-3]" / "key intermediate goal x [Year 3]").

– One or a few high quality **figure(s)** can also be very helpful for B1

– **References** to literature should be included. They do not count towards the 5 pages-limit. The references in B1 may also support Panel Members in selecting the remote referees to evaluate the proposal in step 2 of the evaluation.

Part B2

should present the required details for the evaluation by specialist reviewers in step 2. This concerns in particular the methodology, preliminary data, and risks and contingency plans.

– Avoid unnecessary repetition between part B1 and B2: As part B1 should capture the essence of the entire proposal, B1 and B2 need to be mutually consistent. However, panel members are increasingly likely to disapprove of longer sections with identical wording in B1 and B2. In part B2, you can also refer to figures/text presented in part B1.

– Present your **key intermediate goals** and expected **results** and how you will **validate/ interpret** results

– Highlight any **novel/unconventional methodology**

- Deal **appropriately with significant risks** (contingency plans, alternative strategies; promising preliminary data) – to further bolster the message of a favourable risk-gain-balance

- At least in most cases, reviewers will likely expect a reasonable **time plan** for an ERC project. It has meanwhile become standard in part B2 of ERC proposals to present e.g. a Gantt chart or overview table on **key intermediate goals/milestones** (see also example below). The time plan should however not be too detailed to be credible for a ground-breaking research agenda.

Fictitious example table for key intermediate goals

	Aim 1	Aim 2	Aim 3
Years 1-2	Analysis of... Publication 1...	Purify...	Visualize... Conference...
Years 3-4	Maps...	Integration of...	...
Year 5	Model...	Correlation of findings...	...Publications,...

- High quality **figure(s)** can play an important role to demonstrate feasibility and/or provide a crisp overview on the project.

- **References** to literature should be included (they do not count towards the 15 page-limit)

Further suggestions with relevance both for B1 and B2

Novelty and unique features

- Address explicitly the **ground-breaking nature** of the project (what is the core novelty?) and its potential scientific **impact** - both the "immediate" impact on your field/other fields as well as your more **long-term-vision** (5-10 years or beyond)

- It should be evident for reviewers that your approach is **original, timely, genuinely novel**, and not an "extension" of (your) previous research. Explain the **unique features** and the advantage of your approach compared to **competing approaches.**

Hypothesis-driven project/clearly defined research questions

- While there can be differences between research fields/disciplines, ERC reviewers frequently comment positively on the fact that a project is hypothesis-driven. In any case, however,

the overarching research questions should be clearly presented. Proposals that apparently lack such question(s) and are perceived as largely technology- or methodology-driven will likely be at a disadvantage.

Scope of the project: Justified approach

– As for any research proposal, also the scope of an ERC project can be questioned by reviewers – either as being too broad/unfocused or too narrowly focused/incremental. It is therefore important to explain why the approach you have chosen is the best strategy to achieve a breakthrough.

Clarity

– Your proposal needs to be **well understandable** also for **reviewers that are not specialists** in your own research field/topic.

– Important: **Precise wording**/descriptions, **clear** (working) **definitions**, concrete **examples**, high quality **figures**

– Ensure a **reader-friendly layout**, with sufficient spaces, highlighting key messages, e.g. by short summary of a section in a text box, bullet points; selective use of bold fonts

Collaborations

– Strive for a good balance when describing collaborations for the project: explain their importance for the project, but without giving the impression of the PI being "too dependent" on them. Messages: Due to the excellent network of the PI, s/he will have access to all required complementary expertise and infrastructure. The collaborations are well-defined/targeted. This should avoid a potential impression of a project based on a consortium, as the ERC explicitly does not fund consortia (ERC Work Programme 2018, p9). If you think your project would actually require several PIs, the ERC Synergy Grant call (for a group of 2-4 PIs) could be an option.

Demonstrating a competitive "advanced" profile

– **CV, Track Record, State of the art:**
  Your scientific leadership profile should be evident throughout the proposal, i.e. not only in the CV and Track Record section, but also in B1 and B2, e.g. when presenting the state of the art or preliminary data ($\rightarrow$ "As we could show in [ref.x]…")

Which panel?

– Consider which panel is likely in the best position to understand the ground-breaking nature of your project, and to appreciate your previous achievements.

– While the ERC welcomes **interdisciplinary** projects, they constitute a challenge for the evaluation process, as these proposals need to be rated as excellent in every discipline they cover. If you

consider your proposal to be interdisciplinary (cross-panel/cross-domain), you can indicate a secondary panel in the online-submission system. In this case, please describe the cross-panel/cross-domain nature in the dedicated text box on the B1 cover page.

However, we recommend to give some extra thought to this question, as so far the success rates of explicitly cross-panel proposals apparently has been lower. One reason for this might be that panel members from the secondary panel are, according to our information, not physically present during panel meetings, but only submit their written comments to the panel.

As an alternative to selecting two panels, you can choose only one panel, but add keywords from other relevant panels (as well as free keywords).

– Exceptionally, the ERC may also allocate a proposal to a different panel than the one indicated by the PI.

Proposal Abstract

The abstract is an important part of the proposal, also during panel discussions. The majority of panel members may only read the abstract and possibly leaf through the proposals when they are discussed in the panel meetings. The abstract should therefore present the essence of your project: scientific challenge, novel approach, objectives, potential impact, unique features of the project.

Timely feedback-loops with colleagues

– Questions and critical comments of colleagues (both within and beyond your research field, ideally with a background similar to that of potential panel members) on the proposal will be highly valuable. In addition, polishing of the proposal by an English native speaker, where applicable, is highly recommended.

Specific remarks on B1-CV, Track Record and online Section 3 - Resources

B1, Section b: Curriculum vitae (max. 2 pages)

– In addition to the suggestions provided by the **CV template**, please present also key activities as reviewer for **journals** (top examples)

– Ensure an impeccable and reader-friendly **layout** also of the CV and Track Record section

• *Appendix to CV: All ongoing and submitted grants and funding of the PI (Funding ID)* Mandatory information not counting towards page limits

– According to information by the ERCEA, the information in this table is used to support the selection of reviewers for the proposal (avoiding potential conflicts of interest with reviewers that might be involved in running/submitted projects with the applicant).

However, if several ongoing grants are listed which will temporally overlap with the ERC project, it is advisable to also demonstrate that **the PI will be able to fulfil his/her time commitment to the ERC project**, e.g. by indicating the % of time commitment of the PI for the other grants in the table.

− For submitted grant proposals which strongly overlap with the content of the ERC project, we recommend to add an explanatory sentence, e.g.: *In case both the X grant application and the ERC grant application are successful, I shall accept the ERC Grant and decline the X grant*

− While the information given in the B1 template and in the "Information for Applicants" is currently somewhat contradictive in terms of whether ongoing or also previous grants should be listed, the ERCEA has confirmed in writing that also **previous (completed) grants** can be listed in the **Funding ID** table:

" (…) the table provided in the Part B1 template allows to indicate the period of funding. Previous (and completed) grants may therefore be reported in the provided table specifying the years during which funding was obtained. "No funding" refers to any situation where no financial support is/was received.

In the online submission form, applicants are asked to specify the details of their most recent ERC application, whether it was successful or not."

−   You can also present the total amount of funding obtained by the PI so far (CV or Track record)

B1, Section c: 10 years achievements track-record (max. 2 pages, see structure in the ERC Work Programme 2019)

− Present **up to ten representative publications,** from the last **ten years**, as **main author** in the track record. Research monographs can be listed separately (see ERC Work Programme 2019)

− For the track record as well as for the CV, we recommend to provide **summary/overview information** for the reviewers (e.g. total number of publications, contributions to conferences, citations, h-index etc as applicable), as well as specific **highlight information**. E.g. for the list of publications in the track record, it has proven very useful to describe the key content and impact of selected publications and your contribution in 1-2 sentences in a textbox ("Here, we could show for the first time…")

− **Please note:** While the 10 publications-limit is no formal criterion, we would expect that reviewers appreciate a focus on 10 top papers in the track record. We received the following comment by the ERC Executive Agency on this topic: *The 'up to 10 publications' is not an eligibility issue but how strictly each panel will look at this in the evaluation is their own decision and cannot be predicted."*

− We also recommend to mention any further important papers of particular relevance for your ERC project (i.e. in addition to the top 10) in the proposal as well, e.g. by a brief additional running text section in the CV or Track record (research profile, research interests or similar), and in particular by quoting them in B1 and B2.

- The mentorship profile by Advanced Grant applicants is also frequently commented upon by reviewers (section "Major contributions to the early careers of excellent researchers", see ERC Work Programme).

New : Section 3) Resources (online submission form)

- As a change to previous **calls, the budget table and description of resources are now part of the online submission form (Section 3 - Budget). They should therefore not be included in Part B2.** However, we have received confirmation by the ERCEA that some information regarding resources, i.e. "*regarding the role of team members and collaborators", may be added in the usual (B2) sections a and b.",* as has been the case also previously.

- The budget table and description of resources will be made available to panel members and remote referees. The **description of resources, without the budget table, counts towards the page limit of 15 pages for part B2** (Scientific Proposal). **4000 characters, font size 11, single line spacing in the online section 3, correspond to one text page in B2.** Maximum 8.000 characters (corresponding to two pages) can be used for the online section. As an example: If 6.000 characters (1,5 pages) are used for the online resources section, 13,5 pages remain available for part B2 to comply with the page limits.

- Apart from explaining the project costs in the adequate detail, section 3 is also suitable to present **detailed information on the team composition and expertise**, including the expertise requirements for Post Docs and PhD students that will be hired for the project.
- We also recommend to present relevant information on the **host institution/research environment** here, to strengthen the message of "the right project and team in the right place".

- Present the composition and expertise requirements for your **team** (PhDs, Post Docs), as well as **working arrangements** (e.g. supervision of PhD students supported by Post-Docs; overall supervision and guidance by PI). Please consider: What is the ideal combination of PhD students and PostDocs for your project, how should PhD students "overlap" timewise to ensure optimal continuity of the project, etc? Reviewers may e.g. question whether certain tasks could be "too demanding for a PhD student" and should rather be allocated to a Post Doc; or conversely whether the selected tasks constitute a convincing PhD project.

Budget table – Remarks on specific cost categories

➔ Please contact the grant management office at your ERC host institution for support with the budget calculation

- **Other direct costs** (with overhead flat rate): This category includes contracts to purchase goods, works or services, e.g. contract for a computer; contract for an audit certificate on the financial statements; contract for the publication of brochures; contract for the creation of a project website, contract for organization of the rooms and catering for a meeting, contract for hiring IPR consultants/agents. These costs do not arise from directly implementing the action tasks of the ERC

project, but they are necessary to implement these tasks. As a change to previous regulations, overheads apply to these costs in Horizon 2020, as opposed to the case for subcontracts (http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/amga/h2020-amga_en.pdf, 126-130)

- **Audit costs** should thus be included in the "**other direct costs**" category. In Horizon 2020, only **one audit** (certificate of the financial statement) is required at the end of the project, if the funding (direct costs) amounts to more than 325.000 EUR (i.e. one audit per ERC-project will suffice)

- **Subcontracting costs** (without overheads): Costs for subcontracts arise from the implementation of specific tasks which are part of the action (ERC project) by a third party. No overheads can be charged for these costs.

- **Equipment:** Please note that only **depreciation rates** (according to national rules) can be charged to the ERC for equipment. If the depreciation period of the equipment in question exceeds the duration of the ERC project, the remaining costs have to be carried by other means. Please contact your host institution in case of questions in this context.

- Costs for **consumables** also include fieldwork and animal costs

- The category for **internally invoiced goods and services** refers e.g. to access to internal services that are charged as unit costs

- Do not forget the possibility to include costs for publications, including **open access fees** (Article 29.2 of the ERC Model Grant Agreement). In Horizon 2020, each beneficiary must ensure open access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications relating to its results. Also costs related to **open access to research data** (Article 29.3. of the ERC Model Grant Agreement) can be charged.

- **Other direct costs with no overheads :** This category includes costs of resources made available by third parties which are not used on the premises of the beneficiary (= host institution), e.g. access to large research facilities owned by a third party and not used on the premises of the beneficiaries.

- **PI salary:** As a PI, you may request funding for your salary corresponding to the percentage of total working time dedicated to the ERC project (or a smaller fraction of that amount), even if you already receive a salary by your host institution. Funding of (part of) the PI's salary can e.g. support the host institution in hiring a teaching replacement in case there is an agreement to reduce teaching obligations of a PI during the ERC project. Please consider, however, whether funding of the PI salary could result in a less-than-optimal number/experience level of team members due to budget constraints, as this needs of course to be avoided.

AdG 2019 Evaluation Timeframe

Timeframe for sending information to applicants (AdG2019)	PE Physical Sciences & Engineering	LS Life Sciences	SH Social Sciences & Humanities
1. Results of eligibility check (applies only to proposals declared ineligible)	End of October 2019		
2. Results of Step 1	31/01/2020	31/01/2020	31/01/2020
3. Results of Step 2	17/04/2020	17/04/2020	17/04/2020

Updates at: https://erc.europa.eu/timeframe-advanced-grant-2019-evaluation-erc-2019-adg