

# Writing a winning EU-project proposal

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# There are two types of EU project:

Top down (typically IAs, RIAs)

Bottom up (MSCA COFUNDs, DNs, PFs, ERCs)





MSCA Post-doctoral fellowships



ERC Starting grants

every September

personal funding for 2 years

fixed host

host institution must be  
established in a Member State  
or an Associated Country

≤ 8 years since PhD

mobility rule



## MSCA Post-doctoral fellowships

# Read this first

Make sure you understand  
the evaluation criteria



## Horizon Europe Programme

### Guide for Applicants

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF)

Version 1.0 - 2021

22 June 2021

#### Disclaimer

This guide aims to support potential applicants to the PF 2021 call. It is provided for information purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation of any applicable legal sources. Neither the European Commission nor the European Research Executive Agency (or any person acting on their behalf) can be held responsible for the use made of this guidance document. Note that the guidance provided in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement shall prevail in case of discrepancies.





# Understanding the evaluation

# Understanding the evaluation



- ▶ Evaluations are made based on feelings, not by applying strict criteria.
- ▶ Based on these feelings a mark is awarded, with strengths/weaknesses added afterwards, to match the initial feeling.
- ▶ It is not enough to write a technically perfect proposal.

# Understanding the evaluation



- ▶ *The entrepreneurial aspect of transferable skills training is insufficiently elaborated and is unconvincing.*
- ▶ *The proposal lacks a convincing articulation of how some planned network-wide training courses are meaningfully aligned with the contemporaneous research needs of the doctoral candidates.*
- ▶ *It is unclear that the work packages are well organised and integrated; for example, integration inconsistencies are evident in work packages 1-3..*



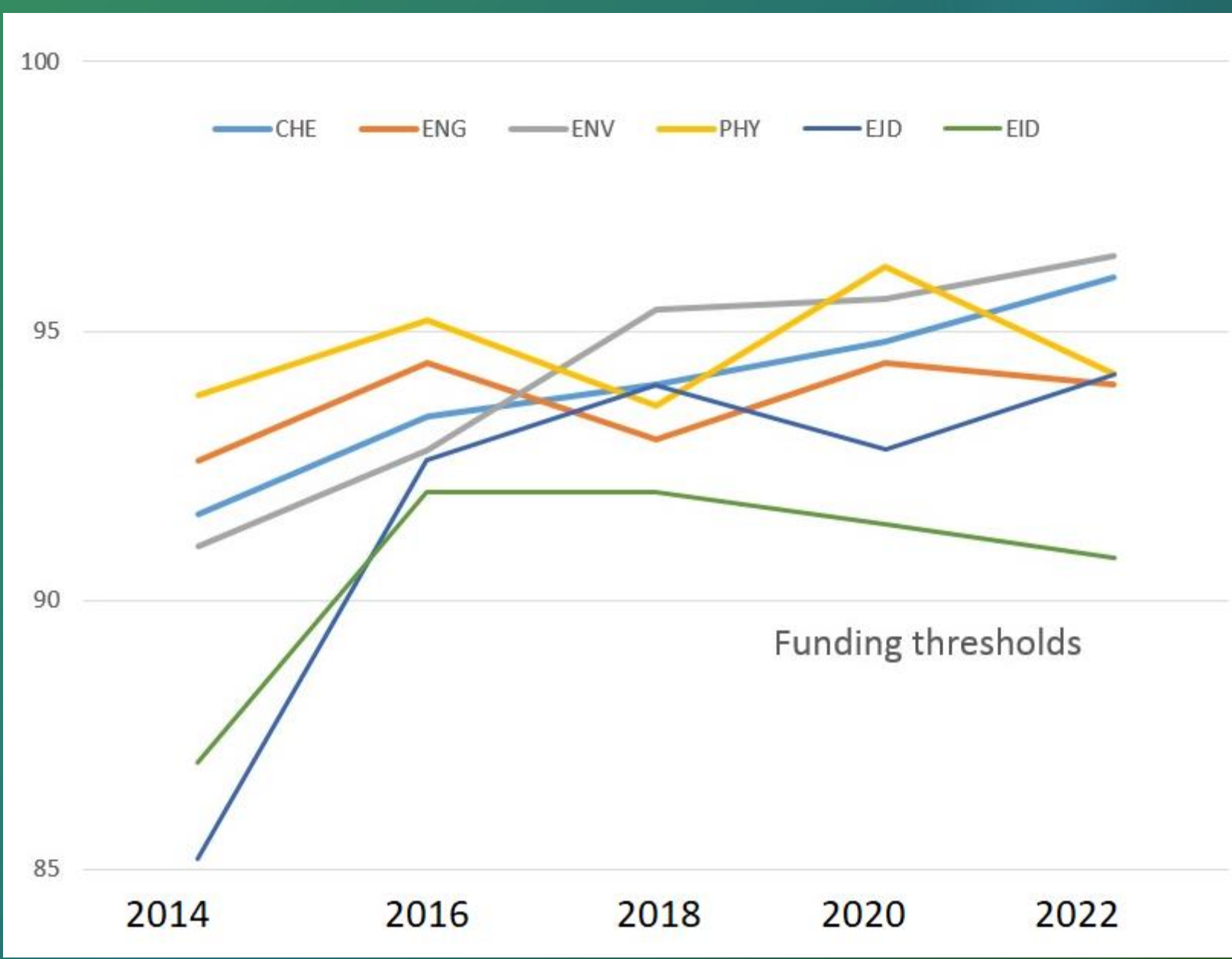
# Understanding the evaluation



## Who are the reviewers?

- ▶ Industry, academia and governmental.
- ▶ They are very unlikely to be experts for the proposal they are reviewing.
- ▶ They rarely have any experience of the kind of proposal they are reviewing.
- ▶ They are doing the best job they can.

They tend not to be generous and forgiving, and will not usually given you the benefit of the doubt



# Understanding the evaluation



## What have we learned?

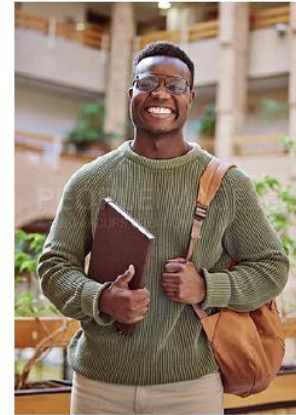
- The evaluation process is far from perfect
- The largest unknown is the referees
- Keep the Evaluation Criteria in mind
- Make your pitch at the right level, to the intelligent non-specialist

# What to write



- Make it interesting
- Make it clear
- Include simple figures
- Make it about you, your science, your aspirations

# The CV part



every October

funding for you and your  
research group for 5 years (€1.5 m)

ERC grants are portable

host institution must be  
established in a Member State  
or an Associated Country

> 2 and  $\leq$  7 years since PhD



**ERC Starting grants**



- Extended Synopsis: 5 pages
- Curriculum Vitae and Track Record: up to 4 pages
- Scientific Proposal: 14 pages

## **The panels will primarily evaluate:**

- the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of the research project.

## **At the same time, the panels will evaluate:**

- the intellectual capacity, creativity, and commitment of the Principal Investigator.



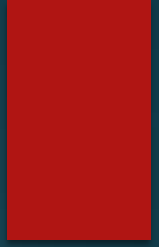
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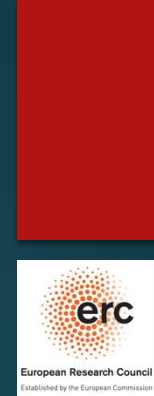
- the intellectual capacity, creativity, and commitment of the Principal Investigator.

No more high  
risk, high gain



# Understanding the evaluation

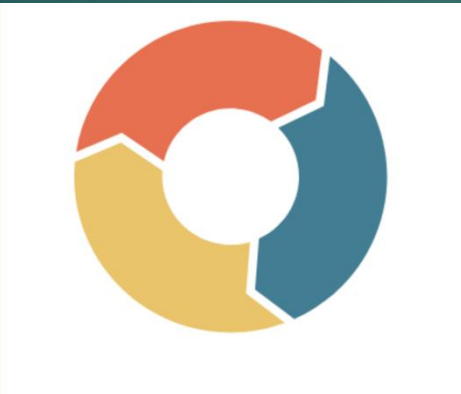
# Who evaluates?



## >16,320 panel members

More than 16,320 panel members since 2008

StG = 5,918  
CoG = 4,097  
AdG = 5,661  
SyG = 644



ERC Scientific Council



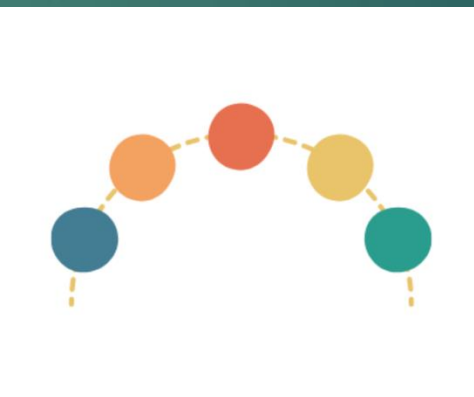
ERC evaluation panel members



Remote referees

## 123k evaluators

Overall the number of researchers who evaluated ERC grant proposals throughout the years and calls surpassed 123,000.



## 620k evaluation reports

Proposal reviewers have submitted more than 620,000 evaluation reports since 2008.

# Who are the remote referees?



Top scientists and scholars coming from all over the world to help ERC select the best project proposals.

**At step 1**, the Extended Synopsis and the Principal Investigator's CV and Track Record will be assessed.

**At step 2**, the entire research proposal will be assessed.

## 1. Research Project

Ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility

## 2. Principal Investigator

Intellectual capacity and creativity

# Understanding the evaluation



## What have we learned?

- The evaluation process for ERC is better, referees are better matched
- Keep the Evaluation Criteria in mind
- Make your pitch at the right level, i.e., specialists

# Some concluding thoughts



- Do you really want €1.5 m
- How will AI impact the writing of project proposals?
- Are there better ways of distributing the money?