

ERC SYNERGY GRANT: KEY FEATURES & SUCCESS FACTORS

FFG ACADEMY WEBINAR, 26.09.2017



- Synergy Grant: aims and distinctive features
- What makes a competitive Synergy proposal?
- Q+ A

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
- Pilot calls were extremely competitive: 1,5 - 3% success rate; for 2018/2019: 6% success rate?



ERC SYNERGY GRANT: BACK IN THE ERC FAMILY



SYNERGY GRANTS

max. 10 mio € for 6 years (up to 14 mio € in defined exceptional cases)
next deadline: **14.11.17** (250 mio EUR budget)

WP 2019: deadline presumably in autumn 2018 (400 mio EUR budget)

STARTING GRANTS

2-7 years post PhD
max. **1,5 (-2,0)**
Mio € for 5 years

next deadline:
17.10.17

CONSOLIDATOR GRANTS

7-12 years post PhD
max. **2,0 (- 2,75) Mio**
€ for 5 years

next deadline:
15.2.2018

ADVANCED GRANTS

outstanding track
record in the last 10
years

max. **2,5 (- 3,5)**
Mio € for 5 years
next deadline:
30.8.2018

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES (1)



- **Potentially transformative research:**

The aim is to promote substantial advances at the frontiers of knowledge, to cross-fertilize scientific fields, and to encourage new productive lines of enquiry and new methods and techniques, including unconventional approaches and investigations at the interface between established disciplines.

This should enable transformative research not only at the forefront of European science but also to become a benchmark on a global scale

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES (2)



- **Unique combination of expertise:**

Each proposal must demonstrate that its objectives **can only be achieved through the specific combination of knowledge and skills** brought together by the participating PIs.

→ each proposal must make clear its synergetic effect

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES (4)



- **Group composition:**
 - Group of innovative and active PIs
 - PIs to be considered as equal, but a corresponding PI to be designated as administrative contact
 - each PI: early achievement track-record or 10-year track-record depending on career stage
 - No restrictions on location of PIs: same corridor, in one Host Institution, different Host Institutions within one country, or different countries (EU or AC)
 - All PIs: minimum 30% of total working time devoted to Synergy Grant; minimum 50% of total working time in Europe/AC

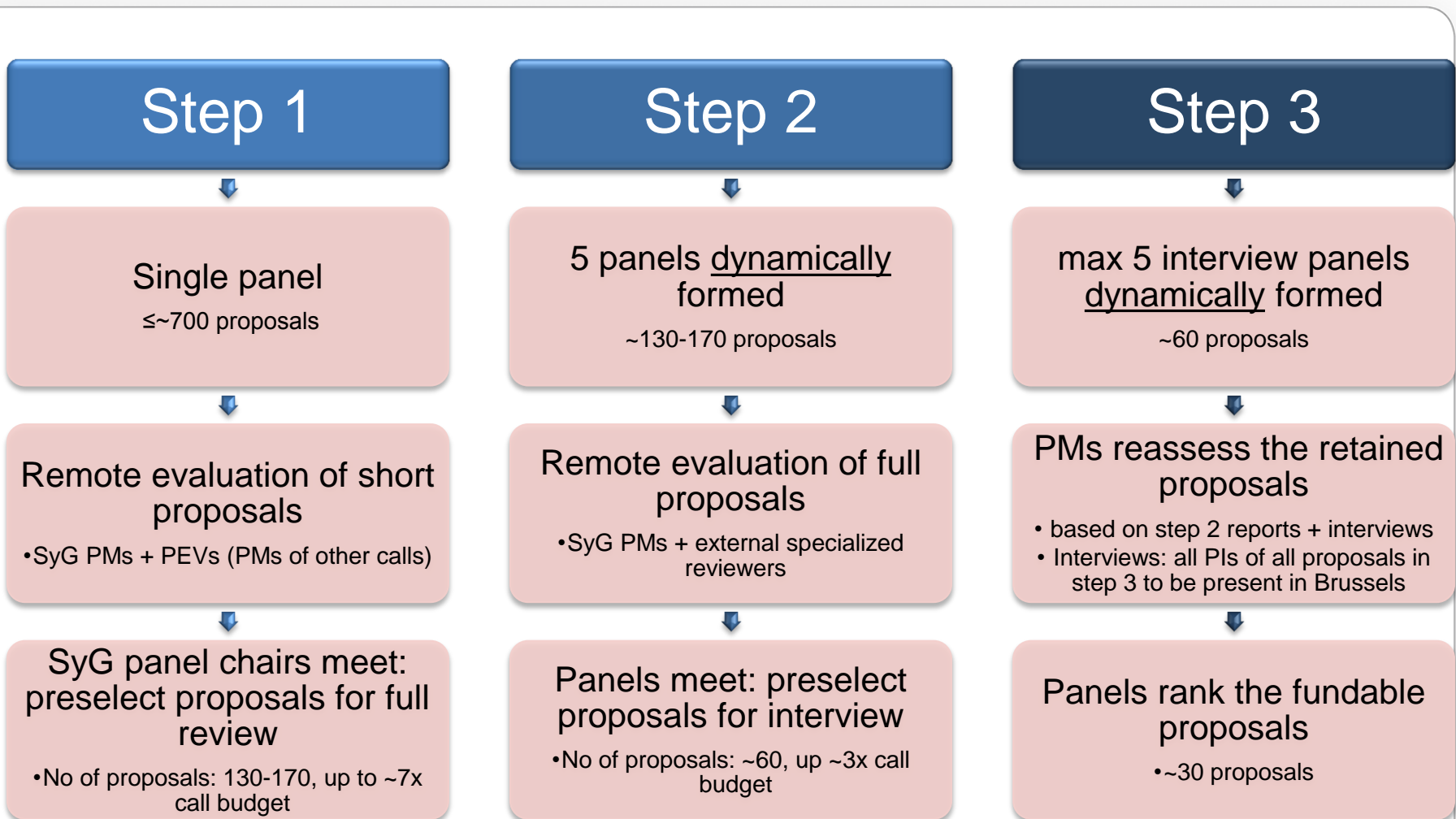
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES (3)



- **Working arrangements:**

Applicants are expected to explain the **feasibility and appropriateness of the working arrangements** by coming up with ideas on how to spend time together in ways that best suit the aims and goals of their research in order to convince the reviewing panels (or reviewers) about the outstanding and exceptional work together

SYNERGY GRANT 2018: EVALUATION PROCESS



RESUBMISSION RULES



Planned restrictions for proposal resubmissions:

A Principal Investigator whose proposal was evaluated as **category B at step 1 or step 2** in the 2018 Synergy Grant call may not submit a proposal to the 2019 Synergy Grant call.

A Principal Investigator whose proposal was evaluated as **category C at step 1** in the 2018 Synergy Grant call may not submit a proposal to the 2019 Starting, Consolidator, Advanced or Synergy Grant calls or for the 2020 Synergy Grant call.

WHAT MAKES A COMPETITIVE SYNERGY GRANT PROPOSAL?



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- **research project:**
 - groundbreaking nature
 - ambition
 - feasibility; high risk/high gain
 - synergies, complementarities,*
 - scientific added-value;*
 - working arrangements*

- **PIs:**
 - intellectual capacity
 - creativity
 - commitment

SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PILOT SYNERGY CALLS



- majority of PIs at ERC Advanced Grant level
- sufficient focus also important for Synergy Projects
- different degrees of “interdisciplinarity“
- funding ranged from ~2 million to ~ 15 mio EUR
- frequently a history of previous collaborations between PIs in funded projects
- time commitment of PIs frequently above 30% in funded projects

PROJECT EXAMPLES (1)



- **MODELCELL: Building a Model Cell to Achieve Control of Cellular Organization.** A hallmark of profound understanding of the organization of a living cell is the ability to reconstitute essential cellular functionalities from minimal components. To achieve this breakthrough a concerted effort of cell biology, biochemistry and biophysics is required.
- **NEXUS 1492 - New World Encounters in a Globalising World:** This Synergy Programme intends to rewrite a crucial and neglected chapter in global history initiated by European colonisation by focussing on transformations to indigenous, Amerindian cultures and societies.

PROJECT EXAMPLES (2)



- **BLACKHOLECAM:** We propose to build a Black Hole Camera that for the first time will take an actual picture of a Black Hole and image the shadow of its event horizon.
- **IMBALANCE-P:** Effects of phosphorus limitations on Life, Earth system and Society
- **Domestic Devotions:** We aim to demonstrate that religion played a key role in attending to the needs of the laity, and explore the period 1400-1600 as an age of spiritual - not just cultural and artistic - revitalisation.

EVALUATORS QUICKLY WANT TO KNOW:



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- What is the research challenge?
- Why is this challenge important?
- Why was it not tackled until now?
- What is the new idea/approach?
- What are the concrete aims of the project?
- Is this groundbreaking, potentially transformative research?
- Is this composition of PIs required to tackle the challenge?
- Is this group likely to succeed with the project?

PROPOSAL STRUCTURE – PART B1

COMMUNICATING THE ESSENCE



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

- „**one story**“, not assembly of parallel projects
- convince **generalist and specialist panel members**



Abstract (2000 characters)

PART B2: CONVINCING GENERALIST AND SPECIALIST REVIEWERS



Scientific proposal (15 pages)

- a) **State of the art and objectives:** objectives clearly specified in context of state of the art; importance + impact of proposed research
- b) **Methodology:** detailed; key intermediate goals; novel/unconventional aspects, key risks and contingency plans, work and time plan
- c) **Resources:** team members, expertise, explanation for all cost categories, budget table; (time) commitment of PIs

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A COMPETITIVE SYNERGY PROPOSAL (1)



- What is the core novelty of your project?
- What are the main research questions/testable hypotheses?
- What are your central research objectives? Are they well integrated with each other?
- How will you interpret and validate your results?
- Gain/Risk-balance? Preliminary results?
- What is your long-term research vision?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A COMPETITIVE SYNERGY PROPOSAL (2)



- What are important definitions for your project?
- Theoretical framework?
- Explanatory power: e.g. descriptive vs. experimental; causality vs. correlation
- Methodology: selection criteria for case studies; statistical power analysis, experience
- Examples/scenarios?
- Compelling, consistent narrative?

USEFUL LINKS AND DOCUMENTS



ERC homepage <http://erc.europa.eu/>

→ERC Work Programme; Information for Synergy Grant Applicants

Abstracts, PIs, Panels of granted ERC projects

<https://erc.europa.eu/projects-figures/erc-funded-projects>

Previous ERC Panel Members:

<https://erc.europa.eu/document-category/evaluation-panels>

ERC Homepage FFG

<https://www.ffg.at/erc>; contact: ylva.huber@ffg.at

SYNERGY GRANT - OVERVIEW



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2-4 Principal Investigators (PI)

+

Host Institution(s)



**including 1 Corresponding
PI (admin. contact)**

Excellent scientists in all career stages

Unique combination of expertise to enable transformative research on global scale

- Minimum 30% time commitment to project by each PI
- Minimum 50% of total working time spent in EU-28/AC by each PI

Q&A



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TIMEFRAME SYNERGY GRANT 2018 EVALUATION (ERC-2018-SYG)

This timeframe indicates dates when we expect to have sent evaluation results to applicants after each evaluation step.

Timeframe for sending information to applicants (ERC-2018-SyG)	
Results of Step 1	23/04/2018
Results of Step 2	29/08/2018
Step 3 Interviews	4-7/9/2018
Results of Step 3	19/10/2018

If you have not heard from us within this timeframe, please check this website for an update.

Please note also that this timeframe is **preliminary** and may be subject to changes.