

My 5 cents about ERC grants

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Who am I & why am I here?

- ▶ I'm a theoretical computer scientist at CWI and UvA, working on algorithms & complexity, mostly for quantum computing
- ▶ My experience with the ERC:
 - ▶ I received an ERC [Consolidator](#) Grant 2014–2019
 - ▶ I have been on the [Starting Grant Panel PE6](#) (computer science) in 2021 and 2023, handling mostly theoretical CS and quantum computing proposals

The selection process (for StG, similar for others)

- ▶ **Step 1:** Panel selects roughly 1/3 of submissions to invite for online interview, based on B1 (5-page proposal + CV)
- ▶ Panel consists of 15-20 European experts on various subareas; 3 or 4 will look at your proposal. You're lucky to have even just one person on the panel who is very close to your topic, so don't write your B1 for experts!
- ▶ **Step 2:** 3 or 4 panel members and at least 3 external reviewers evaluate B2. Based on this and on the interview, the panel selects $\pm 40\%$ of the remaining proposals

Getting to the interview phase: an outstanding B1

- ▶ You need a very good CV, obviously.
For Starting Grant: show **independence** from PhD advisor
- ▶ Project proposal should balance what you have done (track record) and what you want to do: **you should do new stuff that will greatly benefit from your existing expertise**
- ▶ It should be a **coherent** project, not a list of interesting but only vaguely related questions
- ▶ Emphasize that your topic is important & urgent, and why you are exceptionally well-placed to address it.
Implicitly answer the questions: **why this, why now, why me?**
- ▶ Sprinkle hints here and there that you **have some new and promising approaches to the questions** you're asking. It's easy to promise you're going to solve some longstanding open problem, but not very credible unless you have some new idea.
- ▶ At the end: mention **main risks & ways to mitigate them**

The interview, if you pass Step 1

- ▶ Make clear, sparse slides, that distinguish you from others
- ▶ Again, emphasize that your topic is important & urgent, and why you are exceptionally well-placed to address it. Implicitly answer the questions: *why this, why now, why me?*
- ▶ Be confident but don't brag
- ▶ *Don't let your talk go over time*: the committee is on a very tight schedule and you will probably be cut off harshly
- ▶ End with a good summary slide even if you don't have time to say it. This slide might stay on the screen during the interview
- ▶ Beware: *most panel members will ignore your talk!*
Only 3 or 4 of the panel members have been assigned your proposal, the rest is busy preparing their next interviews
- ▶ Think of 10-20 likely questions, prepare crisp answers to them