ERC Evaluator Perspective

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Who am I?

- Evaluator for St and Co grants in 2012 in PE3 (Condensed Matter Physics). *Two streams*
- One of the over 375 evaluators from the 25 panels (3 domain): ~ 5000 proposals
- Recruited by the ERC Scientific Council
- Assigned to one panel according to CV and expertise
- % of confidence in 20 specific fields (descriptors) within the area of the panel
- Identify 10 free keywords defining my expertise
- Establish my current interest
My CV

- **PhD in Physics** (20 month in Sweden, Ireland, Germany)
- **Postdoctoral research** in Belgium
- **Head of the Department** of Superconducting Materials and large scale nanostructures at ICMAB (25 researchers, SGR2009-770)
- Editorial Executive Board of SUST, Board of ESAS
- Co-founder of OXOLUTIA S.L., spin-off from ICMAB
- PI of several National and EU projects
- European projects (**NMP, Energy, ITN, COST**) in the field of superconducting materials and their integration in power devices
- Duran Farrell- Gas Natural, Novare-Endesa awards
- 200 peer review papers, 9 patents, 13 PhD Thesis, 30 invited talks
- **Evaluator** of AGAUR, MICINN, ANEP, MINCyt-Argentina, ERCEA
ERC comments to Evaluators

- ERC funds frontier research in Europe
- Excellent Ideas
- All fields of science and humanities without thematic priorities
- Individual scientists
- No quotas, neither on PI nationality, HI nationality, gender
- One selection criteria: EXCELLENCE
- High risk/ High gain
- Ground-breaking ideas and not good excellent research
Evaluation Panel

- Each panel is composed of 12-15 panel members (PM)
- One acts as Panel Chair (PC)
- 1 Panel Coordinator from Scientific Council
- Good balance between different fields of panel area
- Panel composition has maximum two members from one country
- PM composition is decided half a year before proposals submission. PM changes in consecutive years
- Conflict of interest (CoI) strictly attained for each individual proposal
- Non-PM can submit a proposal at the same call
Referees

- Remote external reviewers
- Typically 2000/call
- Evaluate a small number of proposals
- Answer the same evaluation questionnaire as PM
- Crucial in the second stage evaluation
- Recruited by PM upon acceptance of Scientific Council
# Evaluators Process steps

- **Two step process**: Right balance between generalist and specialized reviewers

## Stage 1

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>PC assigns proposals to panel members (3-4/RP) <em>(evaluations could be requested to other panels)</em>. Each PM evaluates 40-50 prop.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **B** | Remote assessments by panel members  
(and external referees if assigned)  
PI and Synopsis evaluation only |
| **C** | Panel meeting  
Decision of proposals retained for step 2 |
| **D** | Feedback to applicants: Grade A, B, C *(only A is retained)* |
## Evaluators Process steps

### Stage 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E- Assign external referees to retained proposals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F- Remote assessments by PM and referees (6-7/RP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full proposal evaluation includes budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each PM evaluates $\sim 10$ proposals.</td>
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<td>Also evaluations from external referees</td>
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<td>G - Panel meeting + interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ranked list of proposals</td>
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<tr>
<td>H- Feedback to applicants: Decision for proposals to be funded. All proposals receive panel comments</td>
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<td>I- Redress cases</td>
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Evaluation Criteria

- Published in the call
- Read very carefully at different stages of the writing process before submission

- Excellence of PI:
  - Intellectual capacity
  - Creativity
  - Commitment

- Excellence of RP (research project)
  - Ground breaking nature
  - Potential impact
  - Scientific approach

- Each criteria is ranked
Select the right Panel. *It can be reassigned*

Carefully ensure you considered all **evaluation criteria**

Guarantee you followed templates indications (use criteria titles/subtitles) including length

Choose carefully your **descriptors** and free **keywords** best defining your proposal

*They are extremely important for reviewers assignment*

*Matching with those from reviewers*

*You want the best reviewers for your proposal*

The proposal must be outstanding not excellent

*(evaluation criteria 1-4, 3= excellent, 4= outstanding)*

*Use figures, charts. Right references are crucial.*
Stage 1 Evaluation: Recommendations

**PI evaluation**
Intellectual capacity and creativity

- Have a well presented CV. *As important as the project*
- Fulfill all requested information. *Clearly identify your PhD supervisor*
- **Researcher ID** and **Group-Web** address are best given
  *Most reviewers will like to check*
- Demonstrate **independent creative thinking** with past publications. *Explain your transition to scientific independence*
**RP synopsis evaluation**

Ground breaking nature and potential impact of the research

- Be concise, understandable, appealing for generalists and expert reviewers
- Clarify context, clearly identify the problem to be solved, what the gain is, why it should be funded
- Demonstrate ground-breaking nature of the RP
- Convince that you address an important challenge at the knowledge frontier
- Ambitious objectives well beyond the state of the art
- Specify if novel concepts/approaches
RP synopsis evaluation

Methodology

- Appropriate selection of methodology to reach the goals
- Specify if need for a novel and/or unconventional methodology. *It depends on the RP*
- Justify high risk/high gain balance. *Identify the risks, some contingency plan might be good*
- Proposal needs to be feasible. *Do not over-dimension the work plan*
- Proposal **abstract/summary** is very important. *First read by the reviewer. Take your time writing it*
Panel meeting and retained-proposals decision

- Proposals are ranked in a list according to remote evaluation
- Discussed one by one
- Usually, \( \sim 20\% \) ranked A (retained), \( \sim 50\% \) ranked B, 30\% ranked C
- Discrepancies among PM usually are in top B / bottom A proposals
- All B and C- proposals receive the PM comments (discussion) together with all remote evaluations (unchanged). *Read carefully PM comments*
- A- proposals are requested for interview in stage 2
Full proposal evaluation

- PI and RP (Parts B1 and B2) being again evaluated
- New referees (experts) come into the evaluation
- Same evaluation criteria as 1st stage, but now with full project proposal

**New things:**
- How well conceived and organized is the activity
- Demonstrate that the goals of the proposal can be achieved with timescale and resources available
- Describe accurately the requested budget vs. RP
Stage 2 Evaluation: Recommendations

Panel meeting and interview

- Proposals are ranked in a list according to remote evaluation. Discussed one by one
- All PM evaluate all interviews (except CoI)
- Proposal’s lead reviewer (PM) directs the interview
- Questions by external referees are raised at interview
- Give a copy of presentation to all PM (~15)

*It helps to remember PI/RP during the final discussion*

- Bring extra slides for possible questions
- If new preliminary results, show them (it’s 6 month later)
- Be aware of recent publications of the field
- Panel discussion already starts after your interview

*It has several stages*
Interview evaluation

- Rehearse many times *(10’ talk +15’ questions)*
- Demonstrate your capacity, be convinced of your RP
  *Talk in 1st singular. Demonstrate maturity. You deserve it now, not next year. Be enthusiastic !.*
- Short presentation: *Excellent Idea is most important*
- Do not start explaining your CV. *Key evaluators know it.*
- Demonstrate importance of your past publications linked to the RP
- Few slides, be concise and clear, no need of details
  *Generalist won’t follow and experts know them from the proposal*
- *Go straight to the point: What the problem to be solved is, how you will solve it*
- *Answer concisely, precisely, allow for many questions*

Make the full panel be interested in your proposal
Final decision and feedback to applicants

- Decisions are taken by all the panel
- All proposals need to be ranked in one single list
- Outstanding proposals are usually agreed by most of PM and *not-to-be* funded proposal too. Discrepancies come at the “grey list”
- Your impression at the interview is a key factor
- Budget is not an elimination criterion. *If not properly justified, it will be cut down*
- Usually, ~10-12% from overall proposals are funded
- All proposals receive the PM comments (discussion) together with all remote evaluations (unchanged). *Read carefully PM comments*
“Write the best proposal you can imagine and make it outstanding, understandable for a generalist of your field and appealing for experts”

“You’ll only win if you participate”

Good luck