What happens with your application?
The work being done in ERC StG/CoG panels

European Research Council

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LS8 StG (Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology)

Panels

- Each panel have some **14 members/experts**
- One of these is the **chair**, another is deputy-chair
- New panel members selected by the panel, chair, deputy-chair and ERC in conjunction. Meticulous process...
- Selected to represent experienced and respected scholars
- Selected to show complimentary expertize - to cover the entire domain: **multi-disciplinary**
- Each defines their own **areas of expertise** (self assessment)
- Serve in panel every second year for 3-4 terms (**different panel members alternate years**)
- Receive detailed instructions and training/information (e.g. in terms of reviewer bias)
- Panels quite **autonomous** - within the common limits set by ERC guidelines and regulations

Applicants (LS8 StG 2017)

- Early- / Mid-career scientists
- Most well merited
- H-index: mean = **12.3**, median = 12 (**range: 2-23**)
- # scientific publications: mean = **25.1**, median = 23 (**range: 6-52**)

Evaluation

- Prior to review, all panel members declare **CoI's**:

Panel member must **step down from panel** if:
- submitted a proposal as a principal investigator to the call
- participates as a team member in a proposal submitted to the call
- has close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationship with the PI of any proposal submitted to their panel

Panel must **not review/discuss applications** where any of 12 conditions apply, e.g.:
- was involved in the preparation of the proposal
- stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the proposal is accepted
- has or has had during the last five years, a scientific collaboration with the PI
- has or has had a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with the PI
- has or has had in the past, a mentor/mentee relationship with the PI

Evaluation

- What is evaluated? **Excellence**!

1. **Scientific Project (0-4 points)**
   Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project
   Does the proposed research address important challenges?
   Are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?
   Is the proposed research high risk/high gain?
   Scientific Approach (primarily methodology)
   Is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain? (often less focus in Step 1)

2. **Principal Investigator (0-4 points)**
   Track-record
   Ability to propose and conduct ground-breaking research
   Evidence of creative independent thinking
   Have the achievements gone beyond the state of the art?

Evaluation

- Step 1:

  - Chair and deputy-chair first selects readers of applications – taking expertize and CoI into account
  - 5 remote reviewers (4-6) of each application **(Part B1 only)** - mostly panel members, but often also 1-2 external reviewers if expertize in the panel is lacking. Additional panel members may also read applications superficially
  - Reviewers independently read and score applications
  - Time devoted by reviewers: remunerated for **1.5 hrs** per proposal in Step 1 and **3 hrs** per proposal in step 2. In reality, more time spent than this.
  - **Discussed in depth at 1st panel meeting – 2-3 days**
  - One panel member is the **lead reviewer**; acts as the chair during the dicsussion of that application.
  - Outcome: a subset of applications (**some 30-35%**) forwarded to step 2
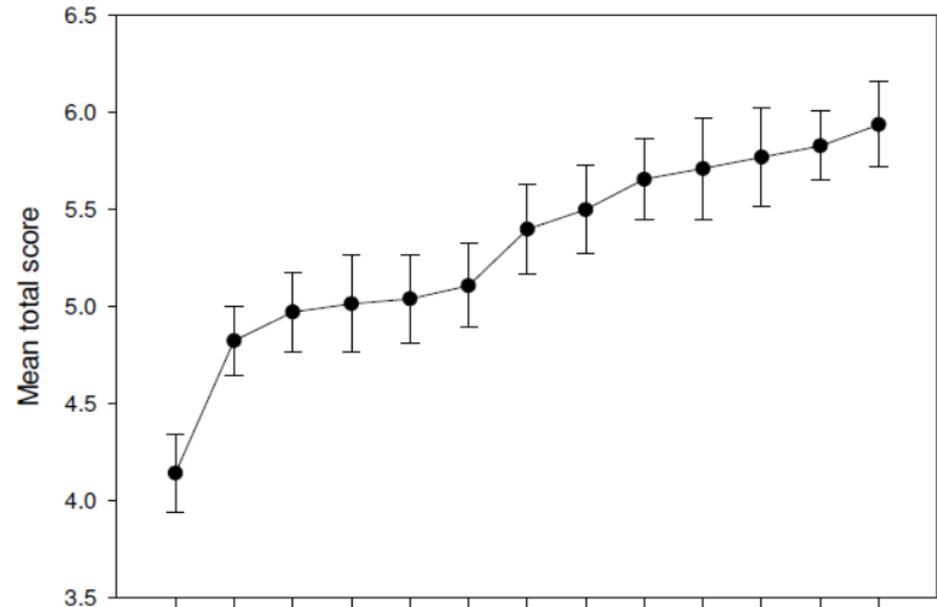
Evaluation

- Step 2:

  - Panel selects additional readers of applications
  - In total, 8-9 (7-10) remote reviewers of each application (Part B1 and Part B2), of which 2-5 are external (average = 4).
  - Reviewers independently read and score applications
  - All Step 2 candidates invited to presentation and interview by panel
  - **Interviews and in-depth discussions of applications at 2nd panel meeting – 3-4 days**
  - **-** Results in a "priority" list; overall funding rate during the last few years **12-15%** in StG and CoG calls

  Example: LS8 StG 2017 – 111 applications, 38 to Step 2, 14 funded in the end.

Evaluation

- Review process very **thorough and ambitious** – great efforts to make it transparent and as "fair" as possible. For example:

- Defined evaluation criteria

- Individual panel member's scores explicitly or implicitly normalised

- Applications close to "cut-off" discussed in especially great depth

- Success rate female ≈ male

Evaluation

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- Q: *Not sure about my merits, is it worth for me to apply?*

  LS8 StG correlation between Step 1 mean score and:
  H-index: r = 0.52
  # papers: r = 0.43
  Correlation typically around 0.4 – 0.6 between quantitaive metrics and mean score (about 50% of total evaluation is currently the PI)

- A: ***CV is far from everything***!

Current changes / discussions

- Desire among many panel chairs and the Scientific Council to **increase weight of the proposal, relative to the PI**. One possibility being discussed is by explicitly implementing a 75:25% (proposal vs PI) weighting at Step 2. Relative weighting gradually shifting towards proposal in many panels...

- Increased attention to inflated budget requests; **ERC welcomes projects with smaller budgets** (i.e., less-than-maximal)

- Further efforts to **normalize/standardize reviewers' scores**

Advice from within

- **Write for reader**: a senior scientist in your domain who knows a bit, but is no expert, on the precise topic of your project
- **The first page is 1/2 of your application**...
- **Don't rub us the wrong way**: well written, well worked through, impeccable English, no typos, complete, clear and transparent
- **Do not apply for projects that are "incremental"**: novel / ambitious / beyond the state of the art / cross-disciplinary / high risk - high gain / etc
- Keep the **page limits**!
- Use the **CV template**!

- If selected to Step 2:
  - Come well prepared (presentation and questions)
  - Place presentation at the "right" level
  - Be enthusiastic and engaged BUT be balanced and mature...not overly self-confident (can come through as arrogance...)
  - Be respectful and concerned over citical questions...all projects have their problems and limitations, consider them in a mature way