

**Successful ERC Grants in the Social
Sciences and Humanities
A Panel Member's Subjective Viewpoint**

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Why Me?

- 2x Panel Member and 1x Panel Chair of the SH1 Panel for Consolidator Grants.
- With that I have seen close to 200 proposals.
- **SH1 covers (essentially):** economics, management, finance.
- As a member of the Extended Board of VfS, I proposed having a session on ERC applications.
- Reason:
 - some potential applicants are **unnecessarily intimidated** by a process they know little but hear a lot about;
 - I firmly believe that for those not **applying is a mistake**.

Topics Covered in SH1

- SH1_1 Macroeconomics; monetary economics; economic growth
- SH1_2 International trade; international management; international business; spa-al economics
- SH1_3 Development economics; structural change; political economy of development
- SH1_4 Finance; asset pricing; international finance; market microstructure
- SH1_5 Corporate finance; banking and financial intermediation; accounting; auditing; insurance
- SH1_6 Econometrics; operations research
- SH1_7 Behavioural economics; experimental economics; neuro-economics
- SH1_8 Microeconomic theory; game theory; decision theory
- SH1_9 Industrial organisation; entrepreneurship; R&D and innovation
- SH1_10 Management; strategy; organisational behaviour
- SH1_11 Human resource management; operations management, marketing
- SH1_12 Environmental economics; resource and energy economics; agricultural economics
- SH1_13 Labour and demographic economics
- SH1_14 Health economics; economics of education
- SH1_15 Public economics; political economics; law and economics
- SH1_16 Historical economics; quantitative economic history; insitutional economics; economic systems

Proposal Topics Covered by Panel Members in SH1

- Looking broadly: topics covered are those on the previous page.
- Looking narrowly: there are always proposals that do not fit exactly a panel member's specialization. That comes by design.
- 2019 Consolidator Grant Panel:
 - 14 members (incl. the Chair).
 - Some proposals were outside the range of topics covered by the panel members – and survived Round 1!
 - Panel members are open-minded.
 - External reviewers complement the knowledge base of the panel itself anyway.

Important Evaluation Principals

Fairness:

- Each proposal is given the **same amount of attention** (quantitatively as well as qualitatively). Ensured by Panel Chair and ERC staff together.
- Emphasis on **avoiding discrimination of any kind**: topic, gender, race, age (within the admissible brackets), etc. Discrimination is statistically demonstrably absent.

Proposal Quality:

- **Content, content, content.** It is all about the proposal.
- Outsiders are wrong in thinking that it is all about an applicant's CV. Using the CV as a predictor of success, there are always «**false positives**» (proposals which are better than an applicant's CV that win) and «**false negatives**» (proposals which are weaker than an applicant's CV that do not win). Of course, there is a positive correlation between proposal and CV quality of applicants.

The Do's of Proposal Writing

Clarity of Proposal Text:

- For winning, one needs to make it into Round 2: the proposal text needs to be crystal clear!
 - **Novelty:** why is the topic big/important relative to what there is?
 - What had been done before (by the applicant and others).
 - The panel always finds out about **redundancies**.
 - It is a drawback if the **CV** is not spelled out clearly and one has to spend time to fish for its content. The CV (incl. published and unpublished work is important to confirm novelty of the agenda).
- A good structure of the proposal is a big plus (easy for panelists to find things).

Organization of Proposal:

- Research parts/chapters/papers should be an integral of **proportionate elements**.
- Applicants should ask a **proportionate amount of funding** for high-quality research. That can but does not have to be less than the ERC ceiling. Weak proposal parts make the whole proposal weaker and reduce the overall chance for funding.
- Loose ends in the proposal unnecessarily lead to critical questions in Round 2.

The Interview

A Dry Environment:

- The introduction by the panel chair is **very short**.
- **Keep time** (rehearse this well):
 - No need to spend much time on CV (everybody knows it; except for recent acceptances; at the interview, the importance of the CV is particularly overrated).
 - Focus on **key ideas/takeaway messages** and clearly present them.
 - Finishing in time makes everybody feel more relaxed.
- **Prepare for critical questions** regarding:
 - content;
 - budget (most of the related discussions could be avoided when carefully outlining in the proposal **what is asked for and why exactly**; reason for everything, personnel, travel costs, workshop and conference expenses, etc.).

Success

- Success rates are roughly +/-12% over the years, which is not so low.
- The total number of funded proposals rises mechanically with the number of applications! I.e., more applications do not mean more relative competition!
- Winning is much **more important than just getting funding**:
 - it earns prestige with employers/universities;
 - makes one climb the career ladder faster;
 - brings co-funding opportunities with it.

Failure

- When putting enough effort into writing a proposal there is **no such thing as failure**:
 - panel rating matters for being given the **chance to reapply** (there is no fixed quota for that rating);
 - universities/departments like people who try, and **failing marginally still generates valuable information** about the high quality of their researchers;
 - **experience** is invaluable; taking the time to think about a high-quality bigger agenda of one's work is highly recommended anyway, and proposals which failed at the margin often can get easily funding from elsewhere without much additional work.
- Even when proposals are denied funding, their applicants receive a feedback from highly qualified reviewers. That helps improving the quality of write-up for any institution one subsequently applies to for funding.