

Guiding Document

for UHOH Applicants:

ERC Starting Grant (StG)/ Consolidator Grant (CoG)

ERC Starting Grant 2027: Call Opening July 22, 2026, **Deadline October 14, 2026**
ERC Consolidator Grant 2027: Call Opening September 24, 2026, **Deadline January 12, 2027**

What makes an ERC-StG/CoG proposal competitive

ERC Starting and Consolidator Grants fund **individual, investigator-driven frontier research**. Excellence is the decisive evaluation criterion, assessed jointly through the project and the Principal Investigator. A successful application is therefore not merely a strong research plan. It is a coherent argument that **this PI, at this institution, can open a new scientific direction with credible ambition**.

Core success logic

1. The project addresses an **important unresolved scientific question**, not a routine extension of existing work.
2. The idea is **ambitious, original and potentially field-changing**, but not a fishing expedition.
3. The **PI has the intellectual independence, creativity, track record and expertise** to lead the work.
4. **B1 convinces a broader panel audience; B2 convinces specialists** that the strategy is executable.
5. **Part A, the budget** and the host-institution documents are **consistent with the scientific plan** and submitted cleanly.

The support of the Hohenheim EU-Office

The EU-Office supports the development of your application as pre-award partner according to your wishes. We offer added value with regard to ERC fit, proposal logic, an appropriate timeline and budget plan, seed funding, external services, interface with finance/administration, and preparing the applicant for panel expectations.

EU-Office service point	Applicant benefit	Recommended timing
ERC fit and go/no-go	Clarifies whether the project and PI profile are ERC-competitive before major writing effort is invested	6-12 months before deadline
Panel Choice	reveals disciplinary breadth, expertise/ scientific perspectives of former panel members, and which aspects of the proposal are likely to be immediately recognised, where terminology or conceptual framing requires clarification, and whether the project genuinely fits the panel's remit, thus anticipate the disciplinary lenses through which a proposal may be read	Before starting to write B1/B2
Timeline and milestone planning for the proposal development	Converts the ERC deadline backwards into internal draft, review, finance and host-commitment milestones, in line with your calendar	Immediately after "GO" decision
Concept feedback	Test gap – hypothesis - ambition logic, high-gain, risk, novelty and PI fit	Before full B1/B2 drafting
Part B1/B2 review	Improves on reviewer readability, logical flow, ERC framing and consistency between WHAT and HOW	Two review rounds if possible
Part A, resources and budget coordination	Setup proposal in / guidance for EU Funding & Tenders Portal Ensures budget narrative, personnel, equipment, third parties, ethics/ security section, open access and additional funding are justified and institutional rules are respected	Once call is opened Before near-final scientific draft
Host Institution Letter	Obligatory "Commitment of Host Institution" letter signed by the Rector/ Chancellor is uploaded in the portal	1-2 weeks before deadline
Submission quality check	Reduces avoidable administrative, formatting and upload errors.	1-2 weeks before deadline
Interview preparation	For Step 2 invitations: aligns pitch, slides, Q&A and PI narrative with panel expectations (Panel analysis, Mock Interview Questions)	Immediately after invitation

1. ERC-fit: GO/NO-GO Check

A competitive ERC proposal begins before writing. We invite applicants to **prepare a concise concept note** and use it for a structured go/no-go discussion to

- check on the competitiveness of the idea (box at the end of this page)
- avoid that the project appears incremental, over-fragmented, too applied, insufficiently risky, or insufficiently anchored in the PI profile
- assess whether the timing (eligibility) is right and time to submission deadline sufficient (timeline feasible).

1.1 Minimum eligibility and institutional checks

Check	Guiding Question	EU-Office Action
Call type	Is the applicant targeting Starting Grant or Consolidator Grant under the current Work Programme? Has the applicant previously held or is in parallel applying to an ERC Starting Grant or Consolidator Grant?	Check current ERC Work Programme , call page , confirm eligibility window / extension documents StG/CoG Grants Limited to One Per Career Going Forward ¹
Reference date	Which date is used to calculate the PhD eligibility window?	Check CV for successful defense date conditions that might prolong eligibility
Time commitment	Can the PI commit the required project time (min 50% StG/ 40% CoG) and EU/associated-country presence (min 50%)?	Flag institutional workload and employment implications early
Host institution	Is the project convincing and feasible within UHOH structures?	Coordinate host commitment, institute involvement, finance and HR assumptions
Ethics/security	Are there ethics, data, dual-use, AI, human/ animal/ environmental, access or security issues?	Start self-assessment early and avoid generic answers.
Budget /additional funding	Does the project fit standard funding limits or require justified additional funding?	Involve finance/Third Party Funds early.

1.2 ERC competitiveness screening

Use the following questions as advice. A weak answer to one question does not automatically disqualify your proposal, but it identifies where proposal development should focus.

- What is the **important unresolved scientific question**, and why has the field not solved it yet?
- **What becomes possible if the project succeeds?** Does your project change scientific understanding in your field, methods, theory, paradigms, cross-field opportunities (scientific advance first!), data resources (second), or provide other transfer potential/ societal impact (third complementary, not decisive criterion)?
- What is the **project hypothesis or central proposition**, and could it be wrong in a scientifically meaningful way?
- What is **genuinely non-incremental** compared with your current work, your supervisor's work, and the field's obvious next steps?
- Where is the **conceptual risk**? Which uncertainties cannot simply be solved with more staff, equipment or time?
- Why is this **PI uniquely positioned** to lead this project **now**?
- Is the project one **coherent programme**, or a collection of related subprojects?
- What **evidence shows feasibility without removing the ambition**?

Check your proposal for no-GO red flags

- ❖ The proposal mainly scales up or continues an existing line of work **without a new intellectual leap**.
- ❖ The gain is mostly technical, local or applicative, with **limited contribution to fundamental scientific knowledge**.
- ❖ **Operational risk is presented as the main scientific risk of the proposal:** recruitment, access, equipment, samples, field logistics or data availability.
- ❖ The **methodology is vague** because the applicant assumes details can be developed later.
- ❖ The **PI's role is hidden** behind a large collaboration, supervisor, consortium or institutional infrastructure.
- ❖ **B1 cannot be understood by non-specialist panel members** without relying on B2.

¹ Only one eligible ERC Main Grant proposal under WP 2027; no more than one Main Grant proposal may be under evaluation at a time; a current ERC Main Grant must end less than two years after the new call deadline; a new 2027 application is not permitted while the grant agreement is being prepared following a successful 2025/2026 application. Panel Members cannot apply in the same Main-Grant-Type, where they served 2 years before (Conflict of Interest).

2. Proposal concept: from good research to ERC-level science

2.1 Start with thinking, not the template

A strong ERC proposal is the result of rigorous conceptual development before writing. Resist starting with the template and filling sections mechanically. The **first** task is to **define the field-level insufficiency**, your **bold scientific move**, and the project **logic that converts ambition into a research programme**.

Concept element	Applicant must be able to state	Common proposal weaknesses
Knowledge gap	a significant unresolved question or limitation in current understanding (e.g. missing perspective, methodology ...)	a missing dataset, technique or case study without field-level consequence.
Central hypothesis/proposition	a testable and daring idea linking variables, relations and predicted outcomes	too broad objective, research theme or list of overarching aims
Ambition	the specific frontier being advanced and why the move is ambitious and non-trivial	a claim that the topic is important or timely without convincing justification
Gain	what the field can understand or will do differently if the project succeeds	a list of outputs, publications, applications or deliverables
Risk	scientific uncertainty inherent to the concept and methods	operational problems that can be mitigated through resources
PI fit	the unique blend of achievements, independence, tools, theory, data and leadership that makes the proposal possible and PI credible (narrative CV explaining different steps with regard to the PI's ambition / proposal idea)	a generic CV summary, like for a job

2.2 Choose your Evaluation Panel wisely

Select the **primary evaluation panel** that best reflects the proposal's central scientific question and intended contribution to the field. Both the **overall project goal** and each of its deduced **objectives** should align convincingly with the panel's scientific remit and expertise, while being individually excellent, scientifically compelling and capable of substantially advancing the state of the art.

An **optional secondary panel** may be indicated where substantial expertise from another panel is genuinely required, and the proposal may be identified as **cross-panel or cross-domain** where scientifically justified. Such designations should be used cautiously and not as a substitute for a clear primary-panel fit. Panel choice should remain strategically focused, as the primary panel defines the main evaluation context and reviewer expectations. Applicants may also identify up to **three individuals** whom they wish to exclude from evaluating the proposal, provided that sufficient expertise remains available for a robust assessment.

2.3 Hypothesis-driven research

Even when a discipline does not traditionally formulate hypotheses explicitly, ERC proposals benefit from a central proposition that structures ambition and risk. A **strong hypothesis** is not a safe prediction that preliminary data already prove. It **identifies variables or concepts, the relations between them, and a daring prediction whose confirmation or contradiction would be informative**.

Try the following to make your ERC proposal convincing and competitive

Complete this sentence in one paragraph: "I **propose that** [mechanism/relation/principle] **explains or enables** [phenomenon/problem], **and if this is correct, then** [field-changing consequence] **should become observable/testable/achievable through** [overall strategy]." **Test** whether your statement is **specific, falsifiable, ambitious, grounded in preliminary knowledge, and consequential beyond the project's immediate outputs**.

2.4 Ambition, risk and feasibility

For ERC, **ambition should be conceptual**, not merely operational. Operational risk concerns delays, access, equipment, recruitment or logistics. Conceptual risk concerns whether the **scientific idea, mechanism, model, interpretation or approach** will work as proposed. **Competitive proposals make conceptual risk visible while showing that the PI has a credible strategy to address it**.

Risk type	Weak presentation	ERC-appropriate presentation
Conceptual risk	hidden because applicants fear it looks weak	Frame explicitly , as the scientific uncertainty makes your project ambitious and worth ERC funding
Methodological risk	"The method may fail."	Link to specific objectives ; include decision points, alternatives, validation and present preliminary evidence that mitigates the risk
Feasibility	presented as certainty, which can make the project look incremental	Demonstrate through your PI expertise , preliminary data , staged work plan , contingency logic and independence of critical paths
Operational risk	"Samples may not arrive on time."	Briefly handle in B2 with practical mitigation and no exaggeration

2.5 High gain and unrestricted significance

The gain of an ERC project is not the same as deliverables, publications or application potential. It is the scientific consequence of success. Your proposal should **explain what would change in the field and which new lines of inquiry, theory, methods or applications become possible beyond the immediate project**. This open-ended dimension is especially **important for your chosen evaluation panel(s) assessing whether the project advances the frontier of knowledge**.

2.6 Non-incremental, but not disconnected

Applicants often struggle to be both credible and non-incremental. The solution is not to disconnect the proposal from the PI's previous work. You need to show that **previous achievements enable your proposed new leap: you as PI have built the platform, insight or capability needed** to attempt something that the field could not previously attempt.

Phrase test

Too incremental: "Building on my previous work, I will extend the analysis to a larger dataset."

Stronger ERC framing: "My previous work revealed a limitation in the currently dominant model. I will now test a new explanatory principle that, if validated, changes how the field understands ..."

3. Proposal Structure

Section	Page Limit	Focus / Expected Contents
Part A , incl. Resources & Time Commitment	entered directly by "Edit Forms" at the online submission system	Administrative and call-specific information, including applicant and Host Institution details, panel and keyword selection, ethics and security self-assessment, eligibility information, detailed justification of the resources required to implement the project, incl. a realistic budget table, personnel costs by team-member category, and any additional funding requested. Specify the percentage of the PI's working time devoted to the ERC project and the percentage spent in an EU Member State or Associated Country. Resources narrative should address all cost categories , team size and roles, additional funding, equipment, open-access costs and existing infrastructure that does not require ERC funding. Ensure full consistency B1/B2 .
Part B1 — Cover page and abstract (summary)	1 page	Concise project identity: title, acronym, abstract/summary Your proposal's "business card" >>> set the stage and make frontier ambition visible >>> trigger review board in wanting to read more
Part B1 — Scientific Proposal	max. 5 pages	Scientific idea – target vision – ambition – high level plausibility section: Assessed by chosen B1 Evaluation Panel to check on (1) field-changing idea ; how the project advances current knowledge/ state of the art, (2) core research questions , (3) research objectives , and (4) overall research strategy, including whether the overall scientific approach is convincing . Emphasize ambition, novelty, ground-breaking nature and potential impact (primarily scientifically/ if appropriate societal). Avoid WPs or detailed methodology, this all is for B2.
Part B1 — References	no page limit	Bibliography of State-of-the-art supporting references in Part B1 . Keep concise and well-formatted; keep in mind your panel members and their links to your topic
Part B1 — CV and Track Record	max. 4 pages	Narrative CV in line with template: Assessed by chosen B1 review panel to check PI's intellectual capacity, creativity and independence to deliver the project . Should include career trajectory, key achievements, and up to 10 selected research outputs that best demonstrate contribution to knowledge. Outputs may include publications, preprints, datasets, software, patents or licences.
Part B2 — Scientific Proposal	max. 7 pages for StG/ CoG	Implementation section providing detailed plausibility of your research programme: covers your detailed work plan with methodology, risk assessment and mitigation, resources, and necessary background in Part B1 yet. Assessed in the second evaluation step (B2 review panel with invited experts) to check on feasibility, robustness and execution credibility .
Part B2 — Referenc.	no page limit	Bibliography of supporting references in Part B2 . Keep concise and well-formatted
Part B2 — Funding Record	No page limit	Table listing current research grants and their subject , amount, duration, role of the PI, and relation to the ERC proposal; also include ongoing/submitted applications where required. Reviewers check on funding overlaps, complementarity, available resources and time commitment . Use the template table; do not turn it into a narrative annex.

4. Part B1: your Step 1 gateway

Part B1 is your **bold pitch** to the chosen evaluation panel(s) **WHY the project is essential and timely for your field**. It must be **self-contained and understandable** to panel members, who are not necessarily specialists in your niche. Make B1 convincing and accessible without becoming superficial.

This proposal part is pivotal because it decides on your proposal's evaluation score and fate²:

Score	Meaning	Fate/ Practical Consequence (*as of 07/2026)
A invited	Excellent proposal, ranked high enough to proceed	You go to Step 2 / interview
A not invited	Excellent proposal, but not ranked high enough within the panel cut-off	Not invited/ can be resubmitted next year
B	High quality, but not sufficient to pass to Step 2	Rejected/ 1-year application ban
C	Not of sufficient quality to pass to Step 2	Rejected/ 2-year application ban
ATTENTION: After Stage 2, i.e. having been invited to the interview phase, scores A and B does not lead to any quarantine>>> you can apply immediately again, if you are still eligible in this funding scheme²		

4.1 B1 Composition and Function

Component	Function	Writing principle
Cover page and abstract (1 page)	Create the first impression: title, acronym, host, duration and a precise 2000-character summary (graphical summary can be added if space permits)	Make the unresolved question, central idea, ambition and expected breakthrough immediately visible
Part B1 Scientific Proposal (5 pages)	Explain WHAT the project will investigate, WHY it matters, and the overall strategy /methodological approach	Gap -> Main goal -> hypothesis/objectives -> research strategy -> expected advance
CV and Track Record (4 pages)	Show that the PI has the intellectual capacity, independence, creativity and expertise to lead the project	Use narrative context and selected outputs; do not simply list achievements

4.2 Recommended B1 structure (Scientific Pitch)

Appr. Space	Section	What it must achieve
0.5 page	Opening: the field problem	Define the unresolved question and why it matters now. Avoid slow background
1.0 page	Scientific Gap in the light of the state-of-the-art	Show command of the field (incl. knowledge of relevant concepts from other fields) + the precise limitation that creates the ERC prospect
0.75 page	Central hypothesis / conceptual move	Present your bold idea and why it is original, non-incremental and testable
1.0 page	Research Objectives (RO) and expected breakthroughs beyond the state-of-the-art <i>You can merge this section with the overall research strategy section to not referring/repeating too much</i>	State 2-4 objectives that build a coherent project frame (not fragmented tasks) In B1, reviewers assess how ambitious the objectives are. For each Objective, I therefore tried to rearrange your text according to the following points: • RO scope and role in achieving the overall goal; • what must be discovered or understood; • how it advances beyond the state of the art. Then briefly methodology is explained as high-level approach and why it is appropriate to deliver the expected outcome. Technical / methodology and implementation details (e.g. sampling) are kept for B2, as in B1 you just aim to provide the reviewer with the understanding that the approaches you are proposing are appropriate/convincing to realize the expected outcomes
1.0 page	Overall research strategy	Explain your strategic/ methodological approach at a level sufficient for credibility, without becoming too detailed (WP details belong to B2 work-plan content)
0.5-0.75 page	Impact on the field/ PI fit	Outline what changes if the project succeeds and why you as PI should lead it

² As rules have been changed, as of 2027 there is a rather complex regulation, we unravel in Annex E

4.3 B1 writing rules

- Use a strong story line: Each subsection should move the reader forward from field problem to breakthrough logic
- Keep in mind your chosen Evaluation Panel (see ERC Work programme, p.55 ff)
- Use “I” where appropriate. ERC rewards individual excellence; the PI must not disappear behind “we” or institutions
- Use figures to clarify the concept, not as decoration - a single conceptual figure can be decisive
- Use bold and other formatting sparingly to guide non-specialists to the key message
- Do not include detailed budget, resources, extensive work packages, full risk tables or “see B2” references
- Define field-specific terms/ abbreviations the first time they appear – not all panel members know niche terminology
- Every objective should map to a gap, a hypothesis component and an expected advance.

Reviewer test for evaluation step 1

After 10 minutes with B1, a panel member should be able to answer: What is the unresolved question? Why is this not incremental? What is the ambitious proposition for each objective / the overall goal? Why is the gain substantial? Why is the PI credible? Why should this proposal be forwarded to and discussed at evaluation step 2?

4.4 CV and Track Record: Narrative evidence of independence/leadership

Your CV and Track Record should be treated as **part of the scientific argument**. All selected outputs and narrative sections should **demonstrate your independence, originality, leadership and readiness for the proposed leap**. Strong applications do not list everything; they curate **evidence relevant to the ERC project**.

Narrative elements

- Explain your career development as a trajectory toward independence and the proposed ERC vision
- Contextualise career breaks, non-linear paths, sector changes, part-time periods, mobility constraints or pandemic-related effects if relevant
- Include peer recognition selectively: awards, invited talks, fellowships, editorial roles, major collaborations, leadership roles or community contributions
- For StG applicants, make independence visible even if the applicant is still early-career. Evidence may include first/last/corresponding author outputs, independent funding, invited talks, independently developed methods, datasets, software, patents, supervision or research agenda ownership
- For CoG applicants, show consolidation: independent research line, leadership, recognised expertise, team-building capacity and a credible envisioned career leap.

Selecting up to ten research outputs

For each output, explain briefly	Purpose
What the output contributed to the field	Shows scientific significance beyond publication metrics
What the PI's role was	Shows your independence, leadership and intellectual ownership
How it connects to the ERC proposal	Shows why you as PI are uniquely positioned for the project
Evidence of recognition or uptake, if relevant	Showcase peer recognition without over-relying on journal prestige

5. Part B2: Convince specialists with implementation logic/ credibility

Although everything has to be submitted at the deadline, **Part B2 is not evaluated at Step 1. Only at Step 2, the panel assesses the complete Research Proposal (B1+CV, B2+Track Record, and Part A, incl. Resources and Time Commitment) and conducts the interview.** B2 should be more technical and discipline-specific than B1. B2 answers **HOW the project will achieve its goals**, without simply repeating the B1 narrative.

5.1 Recommended B2 structure

Section	Content	Reviewer question answered
Conceptual bridge (max. 1/3 page)	Short opening that reconnects B2 to the B1 objectives and strategy, some applicants refer to the objectives in a box	How does this implementation serve the big idea?
Methodology by objective/work package (WP)	Detailed methods, models, data, experiments, theory, analysis, validation and decision logic	Can the work technically address the objectives?
Work plan and timeline	Work packages, dependencies, milestones, PI/team roles, decision points and sequencing/cascading logic A GANTT chart is usually included	Is the plan coherent and credible over five years?
Risk assessment and mitigation	Conceptual, methodological and operational risks linked to work packages, with specific alternatives	Has the PI understood and managed the key uncertainties?
Team and working arrangements	Scientific roles and added value of (interdisciplinary) team members, collaborations or host resources where needed (link to tasks/objectives)	Are the working arrangements appropriate?
Additional background (if needed)	Specialist details that would overload B1 but is necessary for expert assessment	Do experts have enough depth to judge the approach?
Appendix 'Funding ID' (Current and Pending Support)	Current grants and submitted applications; relationship/overlap with ERC proposal	Is there scientific or funding overlap?

5.2 Risk table template

Risk	Type	WP/objective	Early indicator	Mitigation / alternative
Example: model does not reproduce predicted pattern	Conceptual/ methodological	WP2 / Objective 2	Validation fails by month 18	Switch to alternative model class; use independent dataset; narrow hypothesis branch while preserving main question
Example: recruitment delay	Operational	WP1/WP3	Position vacant after month 6	Use existing network, revise hiring profile, bridge with technician/postdoc capacity
Example: access to field sites/data	Operational/ methodological	WP1	Access not secured by month 9	Pre-agreed alternative sites/data source; adjust sampling strategy

5.3 B2 writing rules

- Do not copy-paste B1: Use B2 to specify and prove effective implementation of your concept.
- Link every method to an objective and every objective to the central hypothesis or scientific question.
- Use a timeline figure if possible: It should show dependencies, personnel involvement, milestones and risk points.
- Be transparent about weaknesses. Reviewers trust applicants who identify specific challenges and manage risks confidently.
- Keep budget descriptions out of B2 unless the current template explicitly requires them: Budget/resource justification is normally handled in Part A (see also guidelines for [personnel justification in our EU-Toolbox](#)).

6. Part A, budget and supporting documents

Administrative quality and filling Part A in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal convincingly does not win an ERC grant (**ERC is about scientific excellence!**), but **inconsistency in your forms can weaken reviewer confidence in you/ your host institution**. For this, integrate Part A, finance and host commitment into the proposal development timeline early rather than as afterthoughts. The **EU-Office offers support in setting up and checking on Part A** and also takes care of the Host Institution Support Letter.

6.1 Part A checklist

Area	Applicant/EU-Office check	☑
General information	Title, acronym, abstract, keywords and panel selection are consistent with B1 . Abstract is plain English, non-confidential and convincing	☐
Participants	UHOH host information, PIC, department/chair, contact persons and other necessary information are correct	☐
Budget	Costs use whole euro values; categories are justified; additional funding is included and justified where needed	☐
Ethics and Security	Self-assessment is complete, specific and consistent with the research plan; supporting documents are prepared	☐
Eligibility and commitment	Eligibility extension documents, PhD defence proof and time-commitment data are provided	☐
Uploads	B1, B2, host commitment letter, PhD/extension documents and ethics/security documents are loaded in the correct places and not split incorrectly; include Support Letters where needed (e.g., use of infrastructure, data)	☐
Submission	Proposal is submitted early enough to download and verify every uploaded file before the deadline , as there might be conversion errors, you'd like to correct	☐

6.2 Budgeting

Your ERC budget should be high-level and well **justified, aligning with the work plan and methodology**. Reviewers must see easily why the requested resources are necessary/proportionate, even without a highly granular accounting document.

AF/ EU-Office Support

We offer support in checking on and finalising your project budget. If relevant, we also coordinate with our financial department (AW) and other administrative units to ensure personnel rates, overhead logic, depreciation, additional funding, eligibility of costs and institutional constraints are correct before submitting final budget tables and resources justification.

Budget item	What to justify
Personnel	Number and disciplinary profile of PhDs, postdocs, technicians or other personnel; approximate timing with link to work packages ; state clearly your supervision as PI
Equipment	Technical need, use in the project, depreciation, full capitalized, or use-cost logic, and whether it is standard budget (1,5 Mill EUR for StG/ 2 Mill EUR for CoG) or additional funding up to 1 Mill EUR
Consumables/ materials/ data/ access	Link to methodology and work packages; avoid unexplained lump sums
Travel	Purpose, type of trips (e.g., for fieldwork, conferences, collaboration visits), and institutional rules where applicable
Open access and data	Realistic costs for fully open-access publishing and project outputs during the project lifetime
Subcontracting third parties	Scientific necessity, added value, legal/administrative fit and cost logic
Existing resources/ in-kind	Host infrastructure, equipment, platforms, data or other project support available without EU funding, complementing the ERC funds (Support Letter to confirm availability if not covered by the 'Commitment of the Host Institution' letter)
Overhead	„25% indirect-cost flat rate on qualifying direct costs, excluding direct costs for subcontracting and internally invoiced goods and services“; it's not on top but part of the 1,5 million EUR

7. Proposed timeline for applicants and supporting EU-Office

The following **timeline is indicative and ideal** for you as applicant to prepare thoroughly for an ERC grant, allowing for at least two feedback/revision rounds. Time constraints and other circumstances might prevent you from following the proposed timeline – don't worry; we will adapt our services accordingly (if feasible).

Time before deadline	Applicant task	EU-Office service
9-12 months	Indicate ERC interest and share your idea and PI profile with the EU-Office	Eligibility check + ERC-fit conversation + go/no-go advice + supporting information (necessary documents, seed funding; agreed timeline/ tasks) and integrating external services (e.g., coaches, professional illustrators, proofreading by National Contact Points KoWi/NKS)
6-9 months	Prepare and share concept note (B1 skeleton) with gap, hypothesis, objectives, gain, risk and PI fit	Conceptual feedback ; identify weak ERC elements and propose improvements
4-6 months	Prepare and share B2 skeleton (i.e., headers with bullet points), work plan, methodology and budget logic	Advise on structure ; connect with necessary administration, prepare 'Commitment of the Host Institution' letter and get the signature of the rector/chancellor
3-5 months	Setup and check the proposal Part A in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal (agree on duties for PI & EU Office before)	
3-4 months	Prepare and share full B1 draft + CV/Track Record	B1 check for Step 1 logic, non-specialist readability and ERC framing of scientific pitch + narrative CV
2-3 months	Prepare and share full B2 draft , risk table + funding record; fill budget + justification/ ethics/ security forms in Part A	B2 + Part A check + funding record review for consistency across B1/B2 and budget/ethics/security forms in Part A
4-6 weeks	Integrate feedback, improve and share near-final proposal	Upload readiness check : Administrative, budget, host commitment; consistency across all elements of the application
1-2 weeks	Final PDF generation and portal upload >>> download for final check/ completeness	Verify downloaded proposal files ; send "quality checklist" to applicant
1 week	Submission	Check confirmation email from EU Funding & Tenders Portal
After invitation	Interview pitch and slides according to your invitation (differs in length 2-10 min)	Mock interview support, panel analysis/ Q&A, narrative and slide feedback; A detailed guide for the interview you'll find in our EU-Toolbox under " E" – ERC-Interview Training ."

8. Visual communication and reviewer readability

- ERC reviewers read proposals under time pressure (~1-2 hours/ proposal). A clear layout and supporting illustrations help them identifying your arguments and logic quickly. **Visual design must support scientific clarity** and never compensate for weak logic.
- Use informative headings that carry the argument, not generic labels
- Use short paragraphs and topic sentences; avoid dense text blocks
- Use one conceptual figure in B1 if it clarifies the hypothesis, objectives or breakthrough logic
- Use one work-plan/timeline figure in B2 if space permits; additional figures only for explaining a new methodology or complex experiment
- Use boxed summaries scarcely and only for the most important take-home messages or the bridging paragraph at the start of B2
- Ensure all figures are readable/ understandable when printed or converted to PDF (upload to/download from Submission Portal., to check for conversion errors)
- Follow the specifications in the template tightly and respect font, margin, page limit and reference instructions exactly.

9. Submission quality checklist

Before final upload

- ☐ All grey/template instruction text has been removed
- ☐ B1 and B2 use the required template structure, font size, margins and page limits
- ☐ B1/ B2 addresses the right Evaluation Panel
- ☐ B1 is a single file containing all required B1 elements, incl. CV/Track Record
- ☐ B2 is a single file containing all required B2 elements incl. Funding ID appendix
- ☐ B1 is self-contained and does not refer readers to B2 for essential Step 1 information
- ☐ Title, acronym, abstract, keywords, objectives and terminology are consistent across Part A, B1 and B2
- ☐ Budget/resources/justification in Part A match the work plan, personnel and equipment described in B2
- ☐ Current grants and submitted applications clearly state relation/non-overlap with the ERC proposal
- ☐ Ethics/security answers match the objectives, methods, data, and potential impact described in the proposal
- ☐ Host commitment, supporting letters and eligibility documents are uploaded in the correct places
- ☐ All PDFs open correctly after download from the portal; figures and special characters render correctly

After submission

- ☐ Confirm that the portal email confirmation was received
- ☐ Download the submitted proposal package from the portal and compare it to the intended final files
- ☐ Archive the final submitted files, budget version and submission confirmation internally according to UHOH procedures and update RES information
- ☐ Upon Step 2 invitation, contact the EU-Office immediately to plan interview preparation.

10. Interview preparation: Step 2

If your StG and CoG proposal have been retained for Step 2, please treat the interview as a scientific leadership assessment. The panel has already seen your proposal; the interviewers now test whether you as the PI can demonstrate scientific clarity, strategic thinking, responsiveness, project understanding, and the ability to defend your idea, handle risks, make strategic choices, and communicate across expertise levels.

Preparation element	Focus
Pitch (check time!)	A clear narrative: problem, idea, ambition, approach, gain, PI fit
Slides	Minimal text; concept figure and project logic; no attempt to reproduce the proposal
Q&A	Prepare answers for novelty, feasibility, risk, independence, budget, team, alternatives, ethics and field impact
Panel adaptation	Use the selected panel's scope and likely expertise to calibrate explanations
Mock interview	Include both specialists and non-specialists; train concise answers under pressure

Annex A: Template for one-page concept note (B1 skeleton)

Section	Prompt
Project title/acronym	Short, memorable, understandable beyond the narrow field
Field problem	What important scientific question remains unresolved?
State-of-the-art limitation	What exactly can current theory/methods/data not explain or do?
Central hypothesis/proposition	What bold explanation, mechanism, model or principle will the project test?
Objectives	2-4 coherent objectives, each linked to the central proposition
Non-incremental leap	What makes this more than the obvious next step?
Risk and feasibility	What is conceptually risky, and what makes the PI able to attempt it?
Expected gain	What changes in the field if the project succeeds?
PI fit	Which 3-5 achievements or capabilities prove readiness?
UHOH fit	Which host resources, environment and support structures matter?

Annex B: EU-Office review codes

Criterion	STRONG (Green)	MEDIUM (Yellow)	WEAK (Red)
Gap	Specific and field(s)-significant	Important but too broad, underexplained	Not underpinned by SoA
Novelty	Clear intellectual leap	Novel elements but incremental framing	Continuation or scale-up
Hypothesis	Daring, testable, consequential	Present but vague, not ERC style	No central proposition
Risk	Conceptual risk visible and manageable	Mostly methodological risk	Only operational or hidden risk
Gain	Field-changing scientific consequence	Moderate or mainly local gain	Outputs/deliverables only
PI fit	Strong independence, unique positioning	Good record, but fuzzy link to project	PI role not convincing
B1 readability	Clear to non-specialists with depth	Readable but lacks edge or focus	Too technical or vague
B2 credibility	Detailed, coherent, risk-aware	Methods described, weak dependencies	Generic or fragmented
Budget alignment	Resources match work plan	Mostly aligned but needs detail	Unjustified or inconsistent
Part A	All Sections filled, consistent with B1/B2	Mostly aligned but needs detail	Unjustified or inconsistent

Annex C – EU-Office Check List after “Go”

Check	Prompt	☒
Information Package for applicants	Make sure it's aligned with the current work programme	☐
Timeline & responsibilities	Make sure they match PI and other supporters / external services availability	☐
Seed Funding for preparatory work	For what useful / compatible with time frame?	☐
External Coaching	When useful / compatible with time frame?	☐

Annex D: Source basis and links for this document

This guide is a synthesis and adaptation. It is not an official ERC document and does not replace the current ERC Work Programme, Information for Applicants, call templates or UHOH internal procedures.

Source	Used for
TUM ForTe	ERC Grant Application Horizon Europe: TUM Guidelines for Applicants, 2026.
ERC-StG & ERC-CoG	ERC Work Programme 2027 and current ERC Starting/Consolidator Grant webpages.
AF: EU-Office	EU-Office contact, ERC-toolbox and support information
Enspire Science ERC posts / Eligibility calculator	ERC knowledge base articles on unwritten rules, hypothesis, ambition/high-risk, high-gain, non-incremental projects, open-ended research, B1/B2 and budget presentation.
ERC National Contact Point / official national guidance (KoWi)	Use current NKS ERC or equivalent national contact point materials for German call-specific briefings and statistics.

Annex E: Resubmission Restrictions for ERC Main Grants under the 2027 Work Programme

Application under a previous ERC Work Programme	Evaluation outcome	Eligibility to apply under the ERC Work Programme 2027	Calls affected in 2027	Practical consequence
Starting Grant 2026	B or C at Step 1	Not eligible	All ERC Main Grant calls 2027: StG, CoG, AdG, ERC Plus and SyG	No application to an ERC Main Grant call under the 2027 Work Programme is permitted.
Consolidator Grant 2026	B or C at Step 1	Not eligible	All ERC Main Grant calls 2027: StG, CoG, AdG, ERC Plus and SyG	No application to an ERC Main Grant call under the 2027 Work Programme is permitted.
Starting Grant 2025	C at Step 1	Not eligible	All ERC Main Grant calls 2027: StG, CoG, AdG, ERC Plus and SyG	The score-based two-year restriction extends to the 2027 Work Programme.
Consolidator Grant 2025	C at Step 1	Not eligible	All ERC Main Grant calls 2027: StG, CoG, AdG, ERC Plus and SyG	The score-based two-year restriction extends to the 2027 Work Programme.
Advanced Grant 2025	C at Step 1	Not eligible	All ERC Main Grant calls 2027: StG, CoG, AdG, ERC Plus and SyG	The score-based two-year restriction extends to the 2027 Work Programme.
StG, CoG or AdG 2025/2026	A not invited at Step 1	No score-based restriction/ quarantine	In principle, an application to an ERC Main Grant call in 2027 is possible	All other eligibility and submission restrictions must still be checked.
StG, CoG or AdG 2025/2026	A invited at Step 1, followed by B at Step 2	No score-based restriction/quarantine	In principle, an application to an ERC Main Grant call in 2027 is possible	A B score after the interview does not result in a resubmission restriction under Table 6. Other eligibility rules may nevertheless apply.

Note: "No score-based restriction" does not automatically mean that the applicant is eligible to apply. Other eligibility conditions must still be checked, including previous ERC grants of the same type, ongoing ERC projects, simultaneous applications, panel membership restrictions and scheme-specific eligibility requirements.