The European Research Council
Funding opportunities

Miklos Nagy
ERC Scientific Management Department
Portorož, 5 June 2019
Outline

- Some basics on the ERC
- Submission process
- Evaluation
- Proposal preparation
ERC has a unique mission

- To encourage the highest quality research in Europe through competitive funding
- To support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields, on the basis of scientific excellence
ERC governance

Governance by the Scientific Council
The ERCEA

The ERC Executive Agency
- Implements calls for proposals
- Organises peer review evaluation
- Establishes and manages grant agreements
- Administers scientific and financial aspects
- Carries out communications activities

ERC Scientific Officers
- Work closely with the panel members
- Manage all practical aspects of the evaluations
- Carry out scientific follow-up

.. What is the ERC
ERC’s funding: it is part of H2020

For 2019, the budget is more than 2 billion euros, the highest ever since the beginning of the ERC.

ERC Budget € 13 billion
What does ERC offer?
Creative Freedom of the Individual Grantee

ERC offers selective and generous grants, independence, recognition & visibility

- Work on any research topic: **bottom-up**
- Gain **financial autonomy** for 5 years
- Negotiate the **best work conditions** with the host institution
- Attract **top team members and collaborators (EU and non-EU)**, **flexible team structure**
- **Portability of grants**
- **Attract additional funding and gain recognition:** ERC is a quality label
Who can apply?

- **Excellent** Researchers
- **Any nationality, any age** or any current place of work
- In conjunction with a Host Institution based in Europe EU or associated countries
- If granted, you need to spend at least 50% of your working time in the EU or associated countries
Contrary to what you may think…..

✓ ERC funds "frontier research", including applied research.
✓ The budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand.
✓ The panel descriptors do not represent ERC scientific priorities.
✓ The success rate is virtually flat across the eligibility window (StG, CoG).
✓ The Host Institution is not an evaluation criterion.
Particular emphasis on…..

Frontier of science, scholarship and engineering, i.e.

✓ Multi- or interdisciplinary proposals which cross boundaries between different fields of research, or

✓ Pioneering proposals addressing new and emerging fields of research, or

✓ Proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions.
ERC achievements
Priority to young scientists

Two-thirds of ERC grants to early-stage Principal Investigators.

+ 40,000 PhD and post-doc researchers working in ERC teams.
# ERC Funding Schemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Eligibility</th>
<th>Funding Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starting Grant</strong></td>
<td>• 2-7 years after PhD</td>
<td>• up to €1.5M (+0.5M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• for 5 years</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidator Grant</strong></td>
<td>• 7-12 years after PhD</td>
<td>• up to €2M (+0.75M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• for 5 years</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced Grant</strong></td>
<td>• 10 year track-record of significant research achievements</td>
<td>• up to €2.5M (+1M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• for 5 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proof-of-Concept</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>• for ERC grant holders only</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Supporting innovative potential of ideas from ERC projects</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• up to €150,000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• for 1 year</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Synergy Grant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2-4 PIs at any career stage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• up to €10 M (+4M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• for 6 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>NEW</strong> (2019): one PI can be based outside EU/AC</td>
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[Re-launched 2018]
ERC schemes are highly competitive

Average success rate 12%

Starting/Consolidator Grant

Advanced Grant
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ERC calls</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Call Opening</th>
<th>Submission Deadline(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starting Grants</strong></td>
<td><strong>580 M€</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 August 2018</strong></td>
<td><strong>17 October 2018</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>ERC-2019-StG</td>
<td>(390 grants)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Synergy Grants</strong></td>
<td><strong>400 M€</strong></td>
<td><strong>2 August 2018</strong></td>
<td><strong>8 November 2018</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>ERC-2019-SyG</td>
<td>(48 grants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidator Grants</strong></td>
<td><strong>602 M€</strong></td>
<td><strong>24 October 2018</strong></td>
<td><strong>7 February 2019</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>ERC-2019-CoG</td>
<td>(314 grants)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced Grants</strong></td>
<td><strong>391 M€</strong></td>
<td><strong>21 May 2019</strong></td>
<td><strong>29 August 2019</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>ERC-2019-AdG</td>
<td>(166 grants)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proof of Concept</strong></td>
<td><strong>25 M€</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 October 2018</strong></td>
<td><strong>22 January 2019</strong></td>
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<td>ERC-2019-PoC</td>
<td>(167 grants)</td>
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<td><strong>25 April 2019</strong></td>
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<td><strong>19 September 2019</strong></td>
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ERC Starting and Consolidator Grants
The applicant’s profile

“Am I competitive enough?”

- Potential for research independence
- Evidence of scientific maturity
  - For example, at least one (StG) / several (CoG) publications without participation of PhD supervisor

Condition StG: PhD at least 2 and up to 7 years before 1 January 2019 (for 2019 call, which has already closed)
Condition CoG: PhD over 7 and up to 12 years before 1 January 2019

Promising track-record of early achievements

- Significant publications
- Invited presentations in conferences
- Funding, patents, awards, prizes

All these need to be shown in your proposal that will include your CV and an early achievements track record.
Shall I apply now or wait another year?

2018 STG-COG-ADG Calls

Age of Grantees

2018 Grantees by age and success rate

# funded proposals

Success rate

age on 1 Jan 2018
2018 Calls "Academic age" of grantees

All calls 2018 Grantees by years since PhD

Years since PhD on 1 Jan 2018

# grantees

STG Grantees
COG Grantees
ADG Grantees
Success rate

Established by the European Commission
ERC Advanced Grants
The applicant’s profile

“Am I competitive enough?”

- Exceptional leader in terms of originality and significance of your research
- Excellent track record and achievements during the last 10 years (this time window can be extended in case of eligible career breaks)

*Substantial track-record of significant research achievements*

- as appropriate for the field
- publications in peer-reviewed journals, monographs, invited presentations, funding, patents, awards, prizes
- Organisation of international conferences
- Major contributions to the early careers of excellent researchers
- Bibliometric data may be one of the proxies used (where appropriate) among many others
Established by the European Commission

**Design of the Synergy call in a nutshell**

**Grant size:**
- up to 10M€
- + 4M€ for 6 years

**2018:**
- Call budget: 250 M€
- 2018: 25-30 projects
- 2018: Call budget: 250 M€

**2019:**
- 400 M€
- 2019: 40-45 projects
- 2019: 400 M€

**HI in general to be in EU or Associated Country (AC)**

**SyG2019:**
- possible for one PI to be outside of EU or AC

**2-3-4 Principal Investigators**

**No restrictions on their location**

**SyG2019 call closed for submission on 8/11/2018**

**SyG2019:**
- 3 step evaluation to finish in September 2019
- 3 Step evaluation: with interviews for all PIs in step 3

**2018:**
- ≥50% of working time in EU or AC and ≥30% of working time on the ERC project

**SyG2019:**
- it does not apply to the Principal Investigator applying with a Host Institution outside of EU or AC

**Deadline for SyG2019 proposal submission:** 8 November 2018

**SyG2020:** submission opening planned for July 2019
Maximise the value-creation of the excellent ERC-funded research

Provide funds to bring ERC-funded ideas to a pre-demonstration for:

• *Generation of return for innovators (economic, reputation, prestige, influence, …)*

• *Generation of new value for users (socio-economic benefits)*
PoC data (2011-2018)

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<th>Budget 10ml</th>
<th>Budget 10ml</th>
<th>Budget 10ml</th>
<th>Budget 15ml</th>
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<td>160</td>
<td>159</td>
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<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Panel members: typically 375 / call (SyG:~90)
- High-level scientists
- Recruited by ScC from all over the world: ~14% from outside Europe
- About 12-16 members plus a chair person

Referees: typically 2000 / call
- Evaluate only a small number of proposals
- Similar to normal practise in peer-reviewed journals

Evaluation- StG/CoG/AdG
Peers
StG/CoG/AdG: Submission to Panels
(SyG: all proposals are submitted to a single panel)

• Proposals are submitted to a Targeted Panel (of PI's choice)
  ➔ Can flag one “Secondary Review Panel”

• Applicant chooses his/her panel, this panel is “responsible” and takes ownership for the evaluation of the particular proposal

• Switching proposals between panels not possible unless clear mistake on part of applicant, or due to the necessary expertise being available in a different panel

• But: In case of cross-panel or cross-domain proposals, evaluation by members of other panels possible
Online Submission
Proposal structure

Administrative forms (Part A)
1 – General information
2 – Administrative data of participating organisations
3 – Budget
4 – Ethics
5 – Call specific questions

Part B1 (submitted as pdf)
Evaluated in Step 1 & Step 2
Text box - Cross-domain nature explanation
a – Extended synopsis 5 pages
b – Curriculum vitae 2 pages
Appendix – Funding ID
c - Track-record 2 pages

Part B2 (submitted as pdf)
NOT evaluated in Step 1 (Step 2 only)
Scientific proposal 15 pages
a – State-of-the-art and objectives
b – Methodology
c – Resources

Annexes
Commitment of the host institute, PhD certificates, certificates on extension of eligibility, ethics issues etc

→ Read the Information for Applicants
Project - Ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility

- To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
- To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?
- To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a higher-than-normal risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?
To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain?

To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?

To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology?

To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources and PI commitment adequate and properly?
To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?

To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative independent thinking?

To what extent does the PI have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?
Evaluation
Review procedure (StG, CoG and AdG)

STEP 1
Remote assessment by Panel members of section 1 – PI and synopsis
Panel meeting
Proposals retained for step 2

STEP 2
Remote assessment by Panel members and reviewers of full proposals
Panel meeting + interview (StG and CoG)
Ranked list of proposals

Feedback to applicants
• Right balance between generalist + specialized review
• Appropriate treatment of interdisciplinary proposals
• Good cost-benefit ratio
Evaluation
Review procedure (SyG)

**STEP 1**
Remote assessment by Panel members of PI and synopsis

Panel chair meeting

Proposals retained for step 2

**STEP 2**
Remote assessment by Panel members and reviewers of full proposals

Panel meetings (dynamically arranged)

Proposals retained for step 3

**STEP 3**
Re-assessment by Panel members

Interviews

Ranked list of proposals

Feedback to applicants

- Right balance between generalist + specialized review
- Appropriate treatment of interdisciplinary proposals
- Good cost-benefit ratio

* Dynamically arranged
How to prepare and submit a successful ERC research proposal?

- Have a **bright, original, exciting idea**
- Design a **research project** to implement the idea
- Get a letter of support from a **Host Institution** where the project is to be carried out (the HI must be located in the EU or any of the H2020 associated countries)
- Write your **research proposal**
- **Fully electronic/web based submission system**
- **Submit** your research proposal **before the deadline**
Preparation your proposal

Generalities

- **Register early**, get familiar with the system and templates and start filling in the forms
- A submitted proposal can be **revised until the call deadline** by submitting a new version and overwriting the previous one
- Follow the formatting rules and page limits.
- Download and proof-read the proposal before submitting.
- Make use of the **help tools and call documents** (Information for Applicants, Work Programme, Frequently asked questions)
- Talk to the National Contact Points and your Institution's grant office
Preparing your proposal
Make sure you are eligible (StG/CoG)!

Extensions of eligibility window possible for StG and CoG for documented cases of:

- Maternity – 18 months per child (before or after PhD)
- Paternity – actual time taken off
- Military service
- Medical specialty training
- Caring for seriously ill family members

No limit to the total extension
Preparing your proposal
Host Institution

• You **can change** it during the project's life
• **Negotiate** with the HI (your position, equipment, administrative support, access to infrastructure, etc.)

**Rumour 1:** *The quality/fame of the HI is increasing my chances/scores.*

✗ **NOT true:** the HI is not an evaluation criterion!
Choosing the right Panel is very important

- Proposals are assigned to the Panel of the PI's choice
- The PI can flag one "Secondary Review Panel": the PI must explain the interdisciplinary nature of the proposal in Part B1
- Choose your descriptors/free keywords carefully!
- The Panel Chair can request cross-panel review(s)
- Transfer of proposals between panels may occur if:
  - there is a clear mistake on part of the PI
  - the necessary expertise is available in a different panel
Choosing the right Panel is very important.

**Rumour:** Choose the panel “strategically” in order to increase chances of success

**NOT true:** The budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand ➔ success rate is equal amongst panels ➔ choose the Panel that is right for your proposal!

If you choose the "wrong" one because it has an X, Y, Z reputation, you will most probably hurt your proposal's chances of success!
Preparing your proposal
Check past panel members for the call

IMPORTANT: You are not allowed to contact panel members about the evaluation! Any such contact can lead to exclusion from the call.
Preparing your proposal
Choosing descriptors

- Descriptors and free keywords may influence:
  - Evaluation Panel
  - Panel members
  - Whether a cross-panel evaluation is necessary

**Rumour 2**: The more cross-panel descriptors I indicate, the higher the funding chances, since I emphasize like this the interdisciplinarity of my proposal.

**NOT true**: even though these are used to allocate proposals to Panel Members, once the proposals are allocated, Panel Members do not see the keywords and descriptors used.
.. Questions to ask yourself when writing PART B1

**Research Project**

Is my project new, **innovative**, bringing in new solutions/theories?

Does it promise to go **substantially beyond the state of the art**?

Why is my project **important**? Think Big!

How can I **prove/support** my case? Have I proven the project's **feasibility**?

Is it **timely**? (Why wasn't it done in the past?)

What's the **risk**? Have I proposed **alternatives**?

Have I given a realistic picture of my **collaborations**? Show that it is you who will be leading the project.

**Principal Investigator**

Why am I the **best/only person** to carry it out? Know your competitors

Am I able to work **independently**, and to manage a 5-year project with a substantial budget?

Am I **internationally competitive**?

Have I shown my **scientific leadership** in my CV?

.. How to apply
When writing your CV

- Remember that the CV/Track Record are as important as your project!
- Explain what has been your own contribution to your key publications (incl. papers published without your PhD and postdoc supervisor).
- If you know that you have gaps or other issues in your CV (e.g. co-authored publications), explain them.
- Describe accurately any other activity which can indicate scientific maturity.
- Do not forget to put your h-index, total number of publications and citations (with and without self-citations)!
- Fully fill in your Funding ID

**Rumour:** One needs publications in Nature/Science/High Impact Factor journals to succeed.

**NOT true:** However, publishing only with senior scientists (former supervisors) may raise doubts about maturity/scientific independence.
.. Differences between PART B1 and PART B2

- Do not repeat the synopsis, go into details on your methodology and work plan!
- Make sure that there is an obvious link between B1 and B2
- Explain hypothesis or provide preliminary data (if it exists)
- Make sure that the quantitative and qualitative differences to the state of the art are clear and referenced - show you did your homework!
- Provide alternative strategies to mitigate risks
- Make use of the evaluation criteria (Ground breaking nature, Potential impact, Scientific Approach) - use them as title/subtitle

Rumour: I need preliminary results.

NOT true: however explain how the literature supports your "hypothesis".

.. How to apply
.. Differences between PART B1 and PART B2

- Make the project "easy to read and attractive" – use paragraphs and correct typos!
- Check coherence of figures
- Use full space available (15 p.)
- Make sure you give full references (these are excluded from page count)
- You should add some sort of timeline
- Explain involvement of team members and collaborators (ERC proposals are NOT collaborative)
- Justify requested resources – explain your budget properly

STEP 2

B1 + B2
Assessment by Panel members and Remote Reviewers

.. How to apply
**.. Explain your budget properly!**

- Budget analysis carried out in Step 2 evaluation.
- Panels have responsibility to ensure that resources requested are reasonable and well justified.
- Budget cuts need to be justified on a proposal-by-proposal basis.

**Not explained costs are often cut!**

💡 **Ask for funding for Open Access – this is obligatory in Horizon2020!**

**Rumour:** Ask for more money, the reviewers will anyhow cut it down.

❌ **NOT true:** unexplained or non-motivated requests can be cut down, so if you artificially inflate your budget, the extra funding will be indeed cut.
I have been invited for an interview... now what?

💡 Have clear and representative slides and focus on SCIENCE!
💡 Anticipate questions.
💡 Know the details of your proposal and methods, as well as your research area – who are your main competitors/collaborators?
💡 Your last slide is normally left on the screen during the questions/answers section of your interview
💡 Bring additional slides on new supporting data, if you have, and for possible explanations.
💡 Don't over-explain your CV!
When the panel asks questions, keep your reply clear and concise. The more questions they ask the more details you can clarify.

Keep the time.

**PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE!!!!!**

**Rumour**: Choose your Acronym in alphabetical order, interviews are planned alphabetically.

✗ **NOT true**: the important thing is to choose an easy-to-remember acronym since this helps identifying the project during discussions!

**Rumour**: Late afternoon interviews have less chance, PMs are tired.

✗ **NOT true**: you need to "shake" the PMs up no matter what time of day!
I did not get the grant, can I apply next year?

In order to make the evaluation process more effective, the Scientific Council has introduced re-submission restrictions.

- **STEP 1**
  - **B**: you have to wait 2 years before re-applying

- **STEP 2**
  - **B**: you can apply next year
  - **A** (unfunded): you can apply next year

.. How to apply
Some useful tools and links

- Read **Information for Applicants** and Work Programme
- View the **step-by-step video** Introduction to application process, including tips & tricks for the interview [https://vimeo.com/94179654](https://vimeo.com/94179654)
- Consult **ERC website** for latest funding opportunities, view ERC funded projects
Preparing an application
Check funded projects

Menu allows searching by Funding Scheme, Research Area, Panel/Domain Country of Host Institution etc.
Preparing an application
Check statistics on projects and submissions

Menu allows searching by Funding Scheme, Call year, Domain/Panel and Grantees by Country of Host Institution.
ERC Funded Projects by Country of HI

ERC grants 2007 to present

# projects

EU15 EU13 AC

Total StG CoG AdG
Success Rate by Country of HI

Success rate (2007-2017)

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ERC grantees 2007-2017
Applications before and after funding
7514 grantees

Unsuccessful application
Successful application

7514
- 2759
  - 895
    - 277
      - 82
        - 2
      - 60
        - 20
        - 2
      - 11
        - 5
        - 2
      - 1
    - 195
      - 54
        - 23
        - 4
        - 1
      - 1
      - 8
      - 1
    - 618
      - 278
        - 53
        - 25
        - 1
      - 101
      - 1
      - 2
    - 5
  - 1864
    - 4755
      - 780
        - 400
      - 195
      - 87
      - 4
      - 5
      - 21
      - 1
      - 1
    - 34
      - 1
The ERC: Some take-home messages

Do apply! and Re-apply!

The ERC:
- Has lean procedures for proposal evaluation and grant management
- Keeps administrative hassle away from you
- Lets you do what you do best: Excellent Research!
The European Research Council

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Thank you!
Miklos.Nagy@ec.europa.eu
After 11 Years, a Success Story

- Over 8,000 top researchers funded since the ERC's creation in 2007
- Over 60,000 researchers and other professionals employed in ERC research teams
- €13 billion ERC budget for 2014-2020 under Horizon 2020
- Over 110,000 articles from ERC projects published in prestigious scientific journals
- 748 research institutions hosting ERC grantees – universities, public or private research centres in the EU or associated countries
- 74 nationalities of grant holders
2019 Panel Structure

Each panel: Panel Chair and 12-16 Panel Members

Social Sciences and Humanities
- SH1 Individuals, Markets and Organisations
- SH2 Institutions, Values, Environment and Space
- SH3 The Social World, Diversity, Population
- SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity
- SH5 Cultures and Cultural Production
- SH6 The Study of the Human Past

Life Sciences
- LS1 Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, Structural Biology and Molecular Biophysics
- LS2 Genetics, 'Omics', Bioinformatics and Systems Biology
- LS3 Cellular and Developmental Biology
- LS4 Physiology, Pathophysiology and Endocrinology
- LS5 Neuroscience and Neural Disorders
- LS6 Immunity and Infection
- LS7 Applied Medical Technologies, Diagnostics, Therapies, and Public Health
- LS8 Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology
- LS9 Applied Life Sciences, Biotechnology and Molecular and Biosystems Engineering

Physical Sciences & Engineering
- PE1 Mathematics
- PE2 Fundamental Constituents of Matter
- PE3 Condensed Matter Physics
- PE4 Physical & Analytical Chemical Sciences
- PE5 Synthetic Chemistry and Materials
- PE6 Computer Science and Informatics
- PE7 Systems and Communication Engineering
- PE8 Products and Processes Engineering
- PE9 Universe Sciences
- PE10 Earth System Science
Established by the European Commission

Opportunities for:

- Canada Research Chair holders or Banting PostDoc Fellows (Canada)
- NSF CAREER Awardees or NSF Postdoc Fellows (USA)
- MSIP Career Awardees or NRF Young Researchers (Korea)
- CONICET Investigator with a PICT or PIP grant (Argentina)
- JSPS Fellows (Japan). NEW: Similar agreement with JST
- NSFC Grant holders (China)
- NRF Career Advancement or Postdoctoral Fellows (South Africa)
- CONACYT Research Fellows or Postdoc Fellows (Mexico)
- PostDoc grantees of FAPs, CAPES, CNPq (Brasil)
- Early-Career Researchers, National PostDoc Fellows or Doctoral Candidates funded by SERB (India)