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European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

ERC Proof of Concept 2024 Call Webinar

UK National Contact Point for the ERC

16 November 2023

Erc-uk@ukro.ac.uk



About the Presenters

Jon Brookes

- European Advisor since January 2017
- Interim ERC National Contact Point
- They/Them





All participants will be muted for the duration of the webinar.



We will be recording this session.



Slides will be shared after the webinar on the event page.



Please use the Q&A function to submit questions.



You can 'up vote' your favourite questions in the Q&A.



A chat function is available and will be monitored.

Housekeeping



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What will be covered in this webinar?



Introductions to UKRO & the ERC



What are ERC Proof of Concept Grants?



Call conditions & proposal writing



Proposal evaluation &
other aspects to consider



Q&A



About UKRO

We support UK organisations involved in EU R&I funding

UK National Contact Point for the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

Unique partnership between UKRI and subscribing organisations

Provide a service to more than 140 subscribing organisations

A Brussels-based team of advisors

Part of UKRI's wider International team



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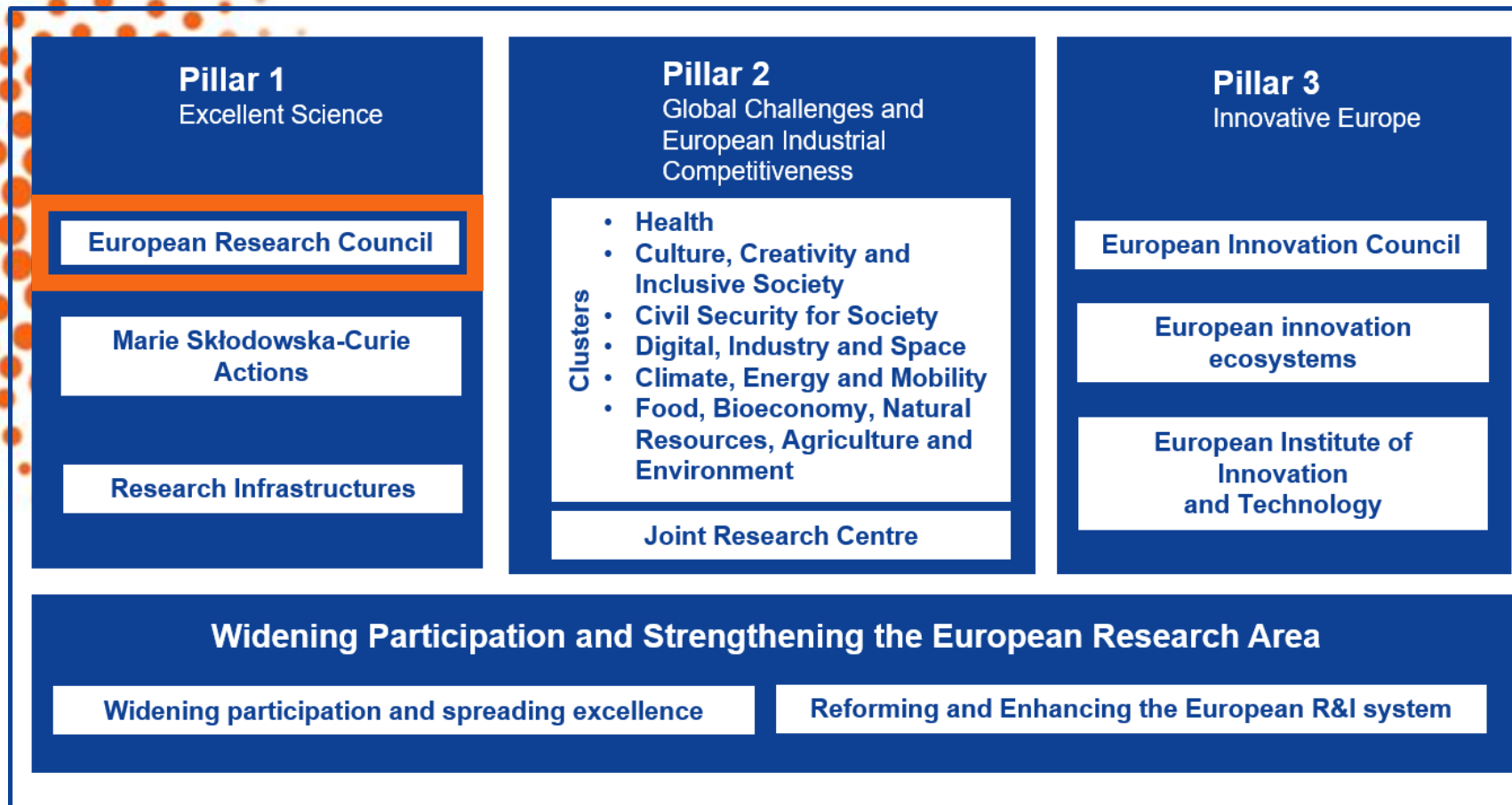


Overview of the ERC

How does it fit into the wider
Horizon Europe and what is it about?



Horizon Europe structure



What is the European Research Council?



The ERC's mission:

- Support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields
- Fund projects purely on the basis of scientific excellence
- Encourage the highest quality research in Europe

What makes the ERC unique:

- Excellence is the only criterion
- Funding is distributed on researcher demand
- Freedom of PIs to lead their project with anyone in the world in their team



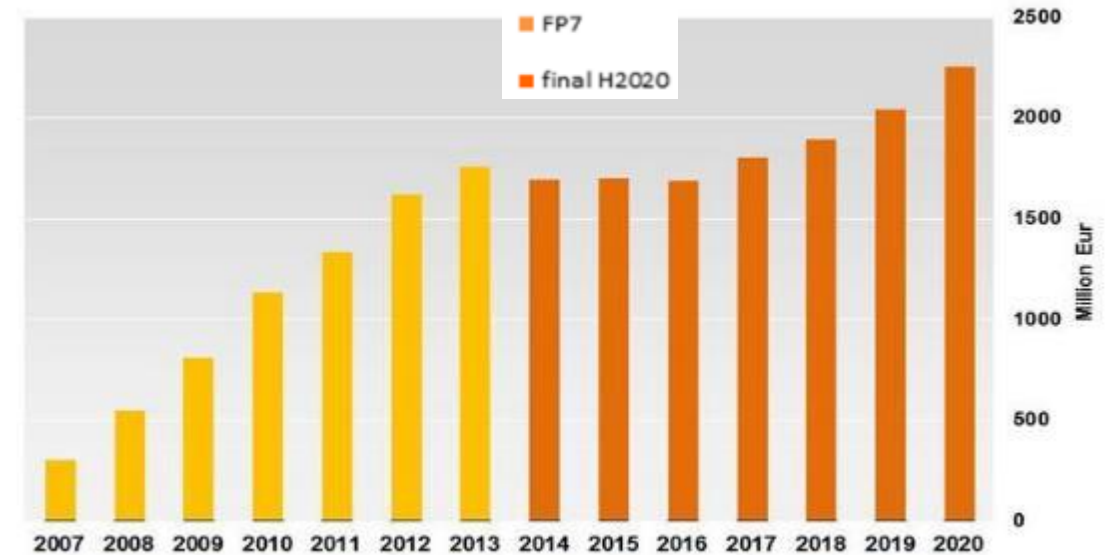
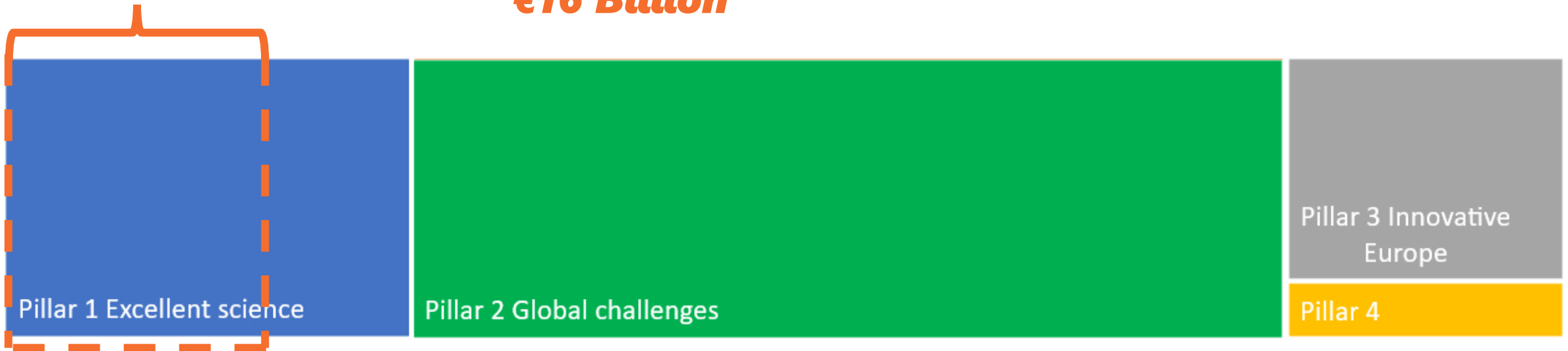
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ERC Budget in Horizon Europe

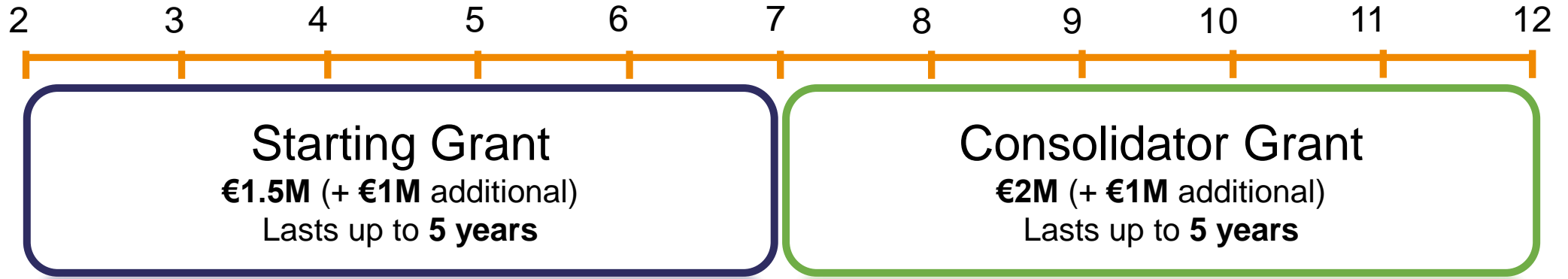
26% increase in real terms compared to Horizon 2020.

Horizon Europe structure is represented below proportionate to budget allocation.

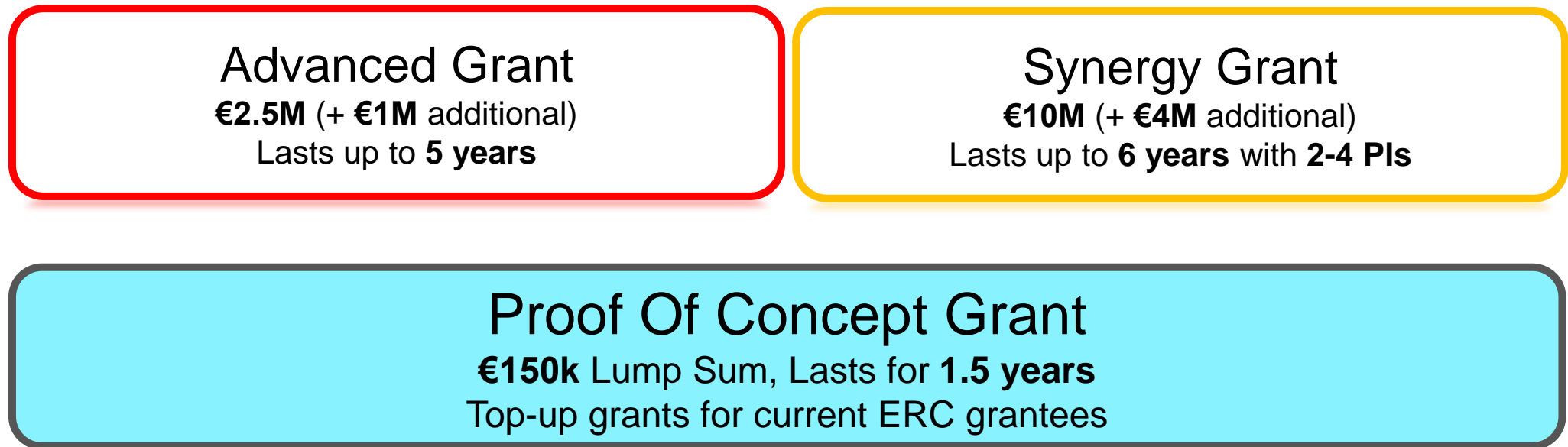
**ERC BUDGET:
€16 Billion**



Years post-PhD



No PhD Requirements



ERC 2024 Calls

	Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced Grant	Synergy Grant	Proof of Concept
Call Type	ERC-2024-StG	ERC-2024-CoG	ERC-2024-AdG	ERC-2024-SyG	ERC-2024-PoC
Call Opens	11/07/2023	12/09/2023	29/05/2024	12/07/2023	16/11/2023
Deadline	24/10/2023	12/12/2023	29/08/2024	08/11/2023	14/03/2024 17/09/2024



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What are Proof of Concept Grants?



Definition

The ERC's Proof of Concept Grant is a complementary funding only on offer to Principal Investigators that already benefit from an ERC main research grant

New objective of 'new' ERC Proof of Concept: *facilitate the exploration of the commercial and social innovation potential of ERC-funded research*

* 'Exploration': less of a focus on **achieving** economic or social impact as a direct result of the grant



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From 3 evaluation criteria to “excellence only”

3 evaluation criteria (PoC in H2020)	<u>Scientific Excellence only</u> (StG, CoG, AdG, SyG)	<u>Excellence only</u> (PoC in HE)
1. Excellence in Innovation potential	Research Project Ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility	Project Breakthrough innovation potential, approach and methodology
2. Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project• Scientific Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breakthrough innovation potential• Approach and methodology
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Quality of the proof of concept plan)	Principal Investigator(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intellectual capacity and creativity	Principal Investigator <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capacity and commitment

***ERC Proof of Concept change
to Frontier science in 2022***

What can you do with a Proof of Concept grant?

Test, experiment, demonstrate & validate your idea. Enable further research covering exploitation aspects & research to carry these activities out

Clarify IPR position

Provide feedback for budgeting & other forms of commercial discussion

Provide connections to potential stakeholders & end users

Cover initial expenses for establishing a company, or cost of other type of agreements

Provide connections to later stage funding
(EIC Transition Funding / EIC Accelerator Funding)

PoC Novelties for Horizon Europe

- Scope enlarged to include **further research activities** needed to explore the innovation potential of the idea proposed
- Evaluation based solely on **excellence**, with new evaluation elements as it is Frontier Science
- **Data Management Plan** now required (within 6 months from project start)
- **Letters of support or intent** can now be uploaded with your proposal



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12+6 Month Duration

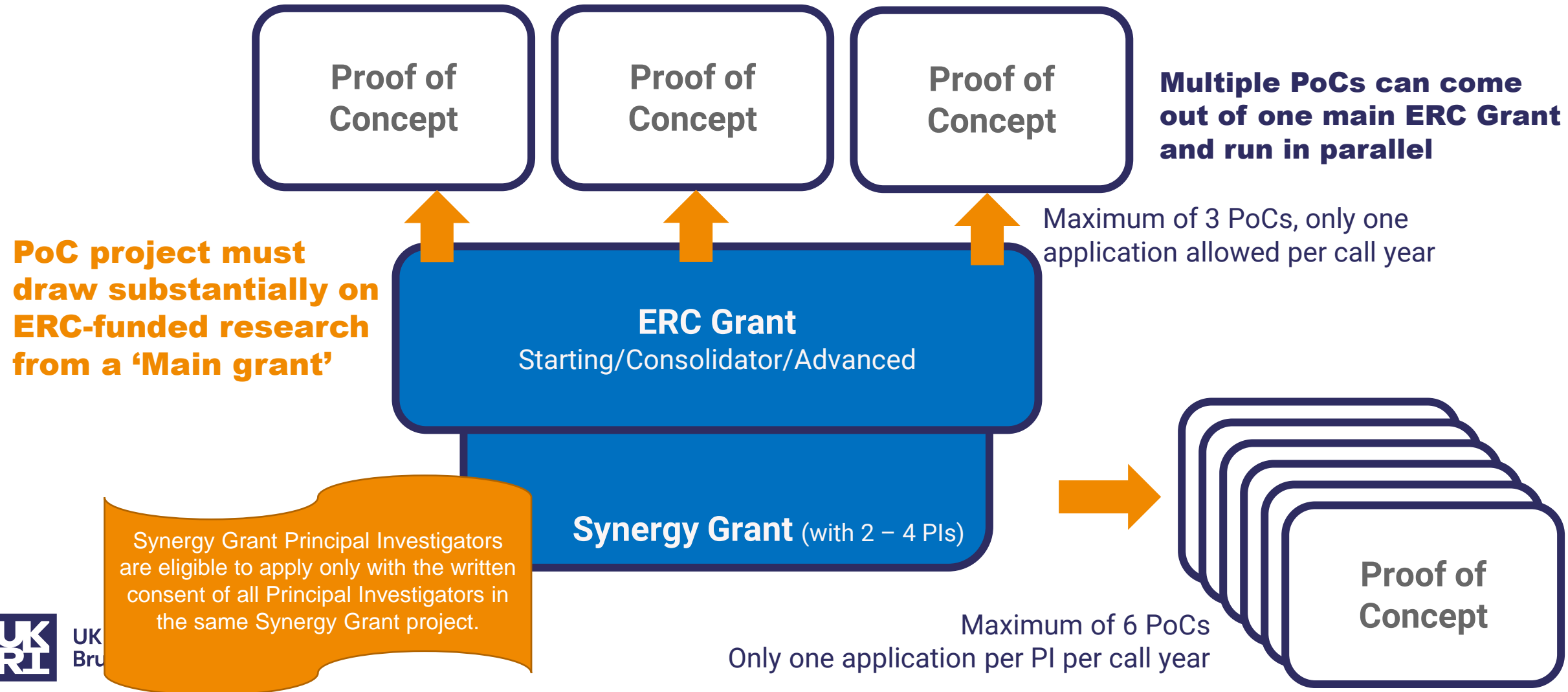


- The ERC expects that normally proof of concept activities should be completed within 12 months.
- However, to allow for those projects that require more preparation time, the grant agreements will be signed for 18 months.
- Extensions of the duration of proof of concept projects may be granted only exceptionally.

Eligibility Criteria



Reserved for ongoing or recent ERC Grantees



Eligibility Window for 2024 Call

An ERC Principal Investigator's eligibility to apply for a PoC is based on their project's dates, not their personal details.

Ongoing

If your ERC Main Grant is ongoing you will be eligible to apply.

Recent

If your ERC Main Grant **ended less than 12 months before 1 January 2024** you will be eligible to apply.

- Based on the date on your grant agreement.
- If the ERC project was extended, the later end date applies



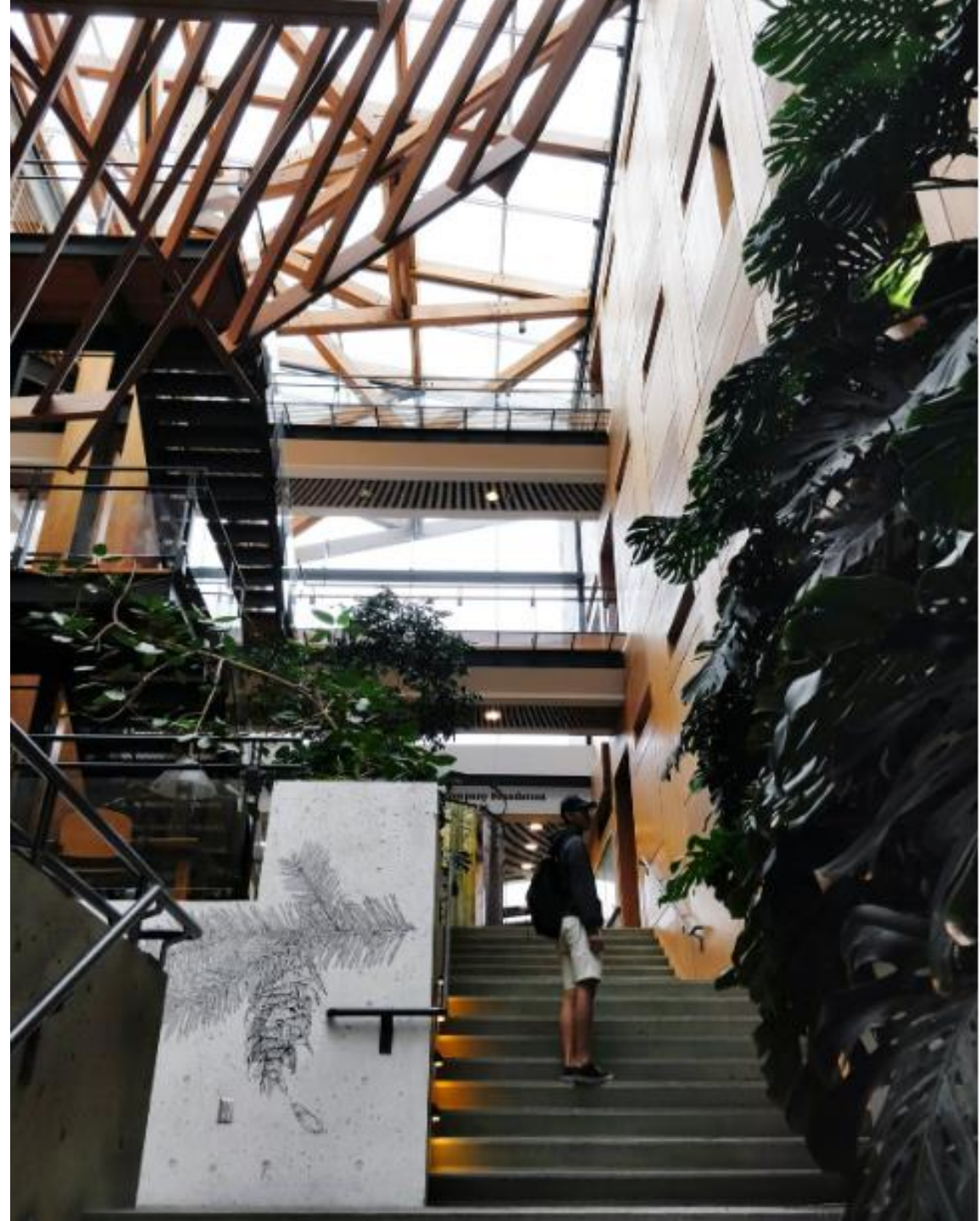
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Host Institution Eligibility Rules

- Must engage the PI for at least the duration of the project
- Must either be established in an EU Member State or Associated Country
- Any type of legal entity, public or private, including universities, research organisations and undertakings can host PIs and their teams.
- The PI can submit the PoC proposal with a different HI than the one where the ERC main frontier research grant is currently (or was) implemented
- HI must provide a binding statement according to the template annexed to this document ([see Section 4. Annex](#))



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Parts of the Proposal & how to develop them



1-Step Submission

All submitted together at the call deadline

Part A – Online Form

*Administrative Forms
and Abstract*

- General information
- Participants & contacts
- Budget
- Ethics & security questionnaire

Part B – Uploaded PDF

The PoC Proposal

- The idea: Breakthrough innovation potential (max. 3 pages)
- Approach and methodology (max. 6 pages)
- PI: strategic lead and project management (max 1 page)

Annexes – Uploaded PDFs

Host Institution Letter, Letters of Support (where applicable), Ethics, Security

Part A

Part
A

Part
B

Annexes

- General information
- Participants & contacts
- Budget
- Ethics & security questionnaire
(use the [How to Guide](#) and the [ERC Ethics page](#))

Application forms

HORIZON
Call: ERC-2022-POC1
(Call for proposals for ERC Proof of Concept Grant1)

Topic: ERC-2022-POC1
Type of Action: HORIZON-ERC-POC
(HORIZON ERC Proof of Concept Grants)

Proposal number:
Proposal acronym:
Type of Model Grant Agreement: HORIZON Lump Sum Grant

Table of contents

Section	Title	Action
1	General information	
2	Participants	
3	Budget	
4	Ethics and security	
5	Other questions	

[How to fill in the forms](#)

The administrative forms must be filled in for each proposal using the templates available in the submission system. Some data fields in the administrative forms are pre-filled based on the steps in the submission wizard.

ERC-POC-20210720 Page 1 of 17 Last saved 27/07/2021 12:31

[Application form template PDF](#)



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Lump Sum budget

Highlighted guidance from the [PoC Information for applicants](#):

- **Applicant defines the amount**, within €150k maximum for 18 month period
- In case of several beneficiaries, provide an estimated breakdown of the lump sum showing the **share per beneficiary** (and any linked third party)
- **The resources should NOT be described financially**. Do NOT present any breakdown of the lump sum with cost figures per category.
- Applicants should be able to **justify** the good use of the lump sum for the resources described.
- The overall value of the PoC action may be higher than the lump sum if covered by additional contributions. These must be specified for evaluators
- The rules on subcontracting for ERC POC Lump Sum actions are in principle the same as for ERC Main Grants

Lump sum has a distinct EC Model Grant Agreement, [see here](#).

3 - Budget

No	Name of Beneficiary	Country	Requested grant amount
1			0,00
	Total		0,00

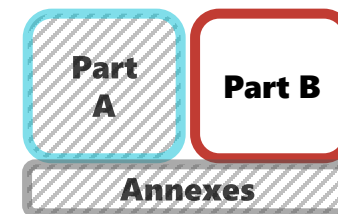
EC's [Lump Sum Section of the EC Portal](#) has lots of guides and support.

[EC Webinar: How does it work? How to write a proposal? \(19 May 2022\)](#)



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Part B



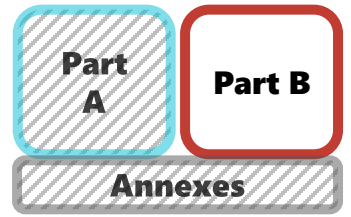
Strict minimum formatting requirements (as usual for ERC):

Page Format	Font Type	Font Size	Line Spacing	Margins
A4	Times New Roman, Arial or similar	At least 11	Single	2cm Side 1.5cm Bottom

The editable template
will be on the EC portal
once the call opens

Use the [PoC Part B
template](#) provided in the
meantime

The Idea – Breakthrough innovation potential



TEMPLATE CHANGE: High-risk/high-gain idea simplified, risk table moved

The idea to be taken to proof of concept

- **The problem** – what is the problem or need that your idea will solve/alleviate?
- **The solution** –
 - 1) How does the idea solve user's problems or improve their situation?
 - 2) Why would potential users/sponsors pay for this solution over existing ones?
- **The origin** – describe the ERC project that this idea has come from

Breakthrough innovation potential

- Describe how your idea has the potential to **drive innovation** and **business inventiveness** and/or tackle **societal challenges**
- Describe how your project outcomes will be **innovative and disruptive**
- Describe any competing products or solutions

High-risk/high-gain idea

- Explain how your idea will result in **breakthrough innovation**
- Describe which are the **aspects that may be difficult to overcome** or what are the **features that might require development of new approaches**.

Novelties in PoC application template

SECTION 1a 'The Idea'

Clarification of page limit:

3 page maximum does not count title pages etc.

Rephrased guidance in 1a.iii.:

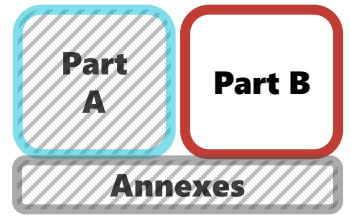
Describe ~~what can go wrong~~: which are the aspects that ~~might not work~~ **may be difficult to overcome** or what are the features of the ~~problem~~ that **might** require development of new approaches.

Moved:

Risk mitigation table from Section 1a.iii to Section 1c (formerly called Section 2)



Approach and methodology



The approach and methodology

- Describe how the project will make progress on the path from **ground-breaking research** towards **innovation**
- Demonstrate the **feasibility** and **effectiveness** of the project
- Demonstrate the **relevance** of the approach chosen for establishing the **technical** and **commercial/societal feasibility** of the project

Describe the activities

- Plans for **validation activities** and related **research**
- Clarify **IPR position** and strategy or **knowledge transfer** strategy
- Involve **industrial partners, societal/cultural organisation, policy makers** or other potential stakeholders
- Assess the potential “**end users**” of your expected innovation

Plan of the proof of concept

- Provide a narrative description of the **resources planned** for each activity and fully justify
- No breakdown of budget with cost figures needed (Lump Sum)
- Use a GANTT chart and/or milestones table
- Describe the size and nature of your **team**

Novelties in PoC application template

SECTION 1b 'Approach and Methodology'

Additional guidance in 1b.i. :

short paragraph added: 'Outline the approach and methodology to explore the innovation potential of your ERC-funded research'

Clarification of guidance for 1b.ii

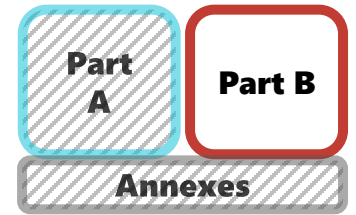
letters of support can be uploaded as PDFs and will be part of the evaluation of the description of activities

Clarification of guidance for 1b.iii. :

the description of team includes the PI and all team members



PI's strategic lead and project management



Strategic lead

- Describe your role in the project, including how you will take the strategic lead of it.

Project Management

- Describe your organisational structure and the decision-making process
- Explain why these are appropriate to the complexity and scale of the project
- Risk mitigation table

Novelties in PoC application template

SECTION 1c 'Principal Investigator' (formerly called Section 2)

Section retitled:

~~Capacity and commitment of the~~ Principal Investigator-
strategic lead and project management

Moved:

Risk mitigation table from Section 1a 'The Idea'. Guidance seems to be unchanged. Not counted towards 1 page max.

Clarification and restructuring of PI role in criteria

Criteria point retitled 'Strategic lead' and guidance rephrased
New criteria point title 'Project Management'

Criteria point removed from Section 1c:

No longer includes "Explain any experience or achievements you may have..."



Help yourself to write a good PoC proposal

Read the reference documents carefully:

- ERC 2024 Work Programme
- 2024 PoC Information for Applicants

Reach out for support at your Host Institutions, including from experts in tech transfer

Look up existing and past PoC grantees on the [ERC database](#)

Reach out to PoC grantees for advice and feedback



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**Proposal
submission**

Recommended Approach

Register in the Funding & Tender Opportunities Portal and create an ECAS account



Get in touch with your research support office



Add relevant contact people to the online application



Submit early and often – latest version will be accepted



Keep the Information for Applicants in front of you throughout!!!



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ERC Proposal Submission

Part A – online form

- General information
- Participants and contacts
- Budget
- Ethics and security questionnaire

Part B – uploaded PDF

- The idea – breakthrough innovation potential
- Approach and methodology
- The PI – strategic leadership

Annexes – uploaded PDF

- Host Institution Letter
- Ethics & security (self assessment and supporting documentation)
- Letters of support (where applicable)

1-step submission all parts submitted together by the cut-off point

- Remember there are 2 cut-off points for Proof of Concept
- A PI can only apply to one cut-off point in the 2024 call

Template PDF of Part B of the PoC application form [available here](#)

Submission on the EC platform...**submit early and often!**

Call (almost) open on EC Portal

- Same as any ERC proposal on the EC portal.
- The call is not yet open to start a submission.
- As ERC grantees you will have an account on the portal already



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A screenshot of the European Commission's 'Funding & tender opportunities' portal. The header includes the European Commission logo, the text 'Funding & tender opportunities' and 'Single Electronic Data Interchange Area (SEDIA)', a language selector for 'English', and 'Register' and 'Login' buttons. A navigation bar contains links for 'SEARCH FUNDING & TENDERS', 'HOW TO PARTICIPATE', 'PROJECTS & RESULTS', 'WORK AS AN EXPERT', and 'SUPPORT'. The main content area is titled 'ERC PROOF OF CONCEPT GRANTS' with the 'TOPIC ID: ERC-2023-POC'. A 'Grant' button is visible. On the left, a sidebar lists navigation options: 'General information' (selected), 'Topic updates', 'Topic description', 'Conditions and documents', 'Partner search announcements', 'Submission service', 'Topic related FAQ', 'Get support', and 'Call updates'. The main content under 'General information' shows the 'Programme' as 'Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)', the 'Call' as 'Call for proposals for ERC Proof of Concept Grant (ERC-2023-POC)', a 'See budget overview' button, an 'Open for submission' button, and the 'Type of action' as 'HORIZON-ERC-POC HORIZON ERC Proof of Concept Grants'. At the bottom right, it specifies the 'Type of MGA' as 'HORIZON Lump Sum Grant [HORIZON-AG-LS]'.

European Commission | Funding & tender opportunities
Single Electronic Data Interchange Area (SEDIA)

English EN Register Login

SEARCH FUNDING & TENDERS HOW TO PARTICIPATE PROJECTS & RESULTS WORK AS AN EXPERT SUPPORT Get started

ERC PROOF OF CONCEPT GRANTS

TOPIC ID: ERC-2023-POC

Grant

General information

Topic updates

Topic description

Conditions and documents

Partner search announcements

Submission service

Topic related FAQ

Get support

Call updates

Programme
Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)

Call
[Call for proposals for ERC Proof of Concept Grant \(ERC-2023-POC\)](#)

See budget overview

Open for submission

Type of action
HORIZON-ERC-POC HORIZON ERC Proof of Concept Grants

Type of MGA
HORIZON Lump Sum Grant [HORIZON-AG-LS]

Evaluation process



Evaluation timeline



Read the [Proof of Concept Guide for Peer Reviewers](#) for more details about who your audience is and how they get to see your proposal

Project Criteria

Breakthrough innovation potential

- Does the proposed idea have the **potential to drive innovation** and **business inventiveness** and/or tackle **societal challenges**?
- Are the proposed expected outcomes **innovative or distinctive** compared to existing solutions?
- Is the proposed project **high-risk/high-gain**?

Approach and methodology

- Are the outlined approach and methodology feasible to **explore the innovation** of ERC-funded research?
- Are the proposed activities and planning appropriate and effective to **explore the pathway from ground-breaking research towards innovation**?
- Are the proposed **timescales and resources** adequate and properly justified?

Principal Investigator

**. Principal Investigator
- strategic lead and
project management.**

- Does the PI demonstrate the ability to conduct the management of the project, the consolidation of information and data needed to take strategic decisions and implement the proposed plan?

The awarded mark for each criterion can be:

1. very good
2. good
3. fail.

How are PoC evaluation panels different?

- The panellists are selected for their **technical expertise in technology transfer**
- A **single panel** per call, no disciplinary schema
- Reviewers do not necessarily have similar professional background.
- No panel chair...at least 3 individual reviewers.

Look up past PoC panellists on the [ERC Website](#)

Panellist tasks include:

- remote individual evaluations with succinct comments.
- participation in at least one panel meeting
- Ranking/voting on proposals collectively

Read the [Proof of Concept Guide for Peer Reviewers](#) for more details about who your audience is and how the get to see your proposal



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How PoC proposals are ranked

Fundable =

- ✓ very good/good from..
- ✓ a majority of experts...
- ✓ on all 3 evaluation elements.

All conditions must be met

Enough budget to fund all applications	Not enough budget, some applications fall below cut-off
All fundable proposals pass: invited to grant agreement preparation invitation.	<p>Ranked according to the marks received.</p> <p>Sorted by the following order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.a Breakthrough innovation potential 1.b Approach and methodology 1.c Principal Investigator

1. Fundable Proposal
2. Fundable Proposal
3. Fundable Proposal
4. Fundable Proposal
- ...
54. Fundable Proposal
55. Fundable Proposal
56. Fundable Proposal
57. Fundable Proposal

Ranking set by evaluators

Cut-off set by budget allocation

**Other points
to consider**



Open Science

It is the same set of rules for PoC as main ERC grants

[Rules related to Open Science can be found on pages 107 – 109 of the Model Grant Agreement](#)

Open access means accessible on:

- a trusted repository
- under a CC BY (or equivalent) licence (either to the 'author accepted manuscript' or the published 'version of record').

For innovation, open science is balanced with Intellectual Property:

"as open as possible, as closed as necessary".

Resources for your consideration

- [The EC's Intellectual Property Helpdesk](#)
- [ALLEA statement on aligning intellectual property rights with open science](#)
- [Open Science and Innovation | FOSTER \(fosteropenscience.eu\)](#)
- [How to make your data FAIR](#) (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable)



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- ❖ www.openaire.eu
- ❖ <https://www.fosteropenscience.eu/>

Publishing Fees

Will not be eligible for funding if the publication venue is not fully open access

Why Gender?

Sex & Gender is not an evaluation criteria, but it could have a lot to do with your proposal's scientific excellence.

Make sure you think about it in your research design relative your field/discipline, evaluators might see this as a gap in your proposal.

Some ideas to ponder:

- Integrating the gender dimension in R&I can be added value in terms of **excellence** and **creativity**
- S&G helps researchers question gender norms and stereotypes, to rethink standards and reference models – **improve methodology**
- It can **enhance** the **validity of results** and the **societal relevance** of the knowledge, technologies and innovations produced.
- It also contributes to the **production of goods and services** better suited to potential markets – not specifically important for winning an ERC but it could be a big deal further down the line.

[Click here to watch an ERC workshop](#)

ERC grantees talking about how the **Sex and Gender Dimension is involved in each ERC domain**

(Physical Sciences & Engineering, Life Sciences and Social Sciences & Humanities)



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Resources

- ERC 2024 PoC call on the Funding and Tenders portal
- ERC 2024 PoC Information for Applicants
- [ERC 2024 Work Programme](#)
- [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement](#)
- [UKRO's InnovateUK Blogs about innovation and the European Research Council](#)
- [ERC YouTube Channel](#) with explainer videos
- ERC FAQ
<https://erc.europa.eu/support/frequently-asked-questions>
- [ERC Information System](#) and [Project database](#) to search for examples of past Proof of Concept Grant Projects
- [Guide for Peer Reviewers on 2022 PoC Calls](#) (2023 will be published soon, we understand there will not be major changes)



Stories about past PoC grantees

How businesses can connect with the brightest minds in Europe



Phil Holliday

Groundbreaking EU research programme creates ecosystems for new business



Sean Rowlands

European Advisor at the UK Research Office (UKRO)

Click these to find out about interesting case studies



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Thank you, any questions?



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