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# The European Research Council (ERC) - Funding opportunities in the 2026 ERC work programme

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www.erc-germany.de

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# Today

- Your ERC experience?
- Some ERC news
- Basics
- Application procedure & evaluation process
- How to write
- Further information

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# Your involvement with the ERC so far?

# General news

- UK: fully associated to Horizon Europe
- CH: association agreement is due to be signed in November 2025 - Swiss institutions can participate in the role of a beneficiary

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# ERC WP 2026 news (1)

- Additional funding: researchers currently based outside Europe may request up to EUR 2 million (StG/CoG/AdG); may now also be used for personnel costs
- New proposal structure:
  → Part I (former *Extended Synopsis* / B1) 5 pages: overall idea & objectives, current state of the art, research strategy and impact (feasibility no longer assessed at Step 1)
  → Part II (former B2, 14 pages) **now 7 pages** → implementation (methods, work plan, risk assessment)

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# ERC WP 2026 news (2)

- Eligibility of StG/CoG applicants: victims of gender-based (or any other kind of) violence will be able to obtain an extension of their period following their PhD
- New funding instrument (‚Super Grants‘):
  → update of the WP 2026 expected by the end of 2025
  → up to 7 years of funding (lumps sum, without additional funding)
  → max. 30 grants envisioned
  → call may be expected first half 2026

# ERC WP 2027 news

- New eligibility rules: from 2027 on, researchers will be eligible to apply for a …
  StG: → immediately after successful defence of their PhD and within the following 10-year period
  CoG: → between 5 and 15 years after defending their PhD

  (Researchers will be awarded no more than one Starting Grant and one Consolidator Grant during their career)

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# ERC Basics

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# Horizon Europe Programme Structure (2021-2027)

Total budget 95,5 Bn EUR*

## Pillar 1
Excellent Science

16 Bn EUR*

- European Research Council
- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
- Research Infrastructures

## Pillar 2
Global Challanges and European Industrial Competitiveness

Clusters
- Health
- Culture, Creativitiy and Inclusive Society
- Civil Security for Society
- Digital, Industry and Space
- Climate, Energy and Mobility
- Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Enviroment

Joint Research Centre

## Pillar 3
Innovative Europe

- European Innovation Council
- European innovation ecosystems
- European Institut of Innovation and Technology

## Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area

- Widing participation and spreading excellence
- Reforming and Enhancing the European R&I system

*Status: Trilogue, 10.12.2020

# Eligibility: Principal Investigator (PI) + Team

Additional institution

**Host Institution (HI)**

# ERC Grant Schemes in WP2026 (I/II)

| | Starting Grants | Consolidator Grants | Advanced Grants | Synergy Grants | Proof of Concept |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target group | scientists 2-7 years after PhD | scientists 7-12 years after PhD | Established scientists | 2-4 scientists | ERC Grantees |
| Max. duration | 5 years | 5 years | 5 years | 6 years | 18 months |
| Max. budget | 1.5 Mio. € (2.5 Mio.€)* | 2 Mio. € (3 Mio.€)* | 2.5 Mio. € (3.5 Mio.€)* | 10 Mio. € (14 Mio. €)* | 150 000 € |

* Additional costs in case of high equipment costs or PI from Third Country, other major experimental and field work costs, **including** personnel costs.
**Additional funding can sum up to EUR 2 Mio. € for researchers currently outside Europe.**

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# ERC Grant Schemes (II/II)

| | Starting Grants StG | Consolidator Grants CoG | Advanced Grants AdG | Synergy Grants SyG | Proof of Concept |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PI Time commit-ment project | 50% | 40% | 30% | 30% | |
| PI Time commit-ment in EU/AC* | 50% | 50% | 50% | 50% | |

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# Expected profile of ERC grantees

**StG**
potential for research independence & evidence of maturity; promising track record of early achievements

**CoG**
research independence & evidence of maturity; promising track record of early achievements

**AdG**
10 year track-record of significant research achievements

**SyG**
Competitive track records as appropriate to the career stage; successfully bring together those elements necessary to address the scope and complexity of the proposed research question.

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# Call calendar Work Programme 2026

| Funding line | StG | CoG | AdG | SyG |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opening date | 9 July 2025 | 25 September 2025 | 28 May 2026 | 10 July 2025 |
| Deadline | 14 October 2025 | 13 January 2026 | 27 August 2026 | 5 November 2025 |
| Budget(≈) | € 705 mio. | € 673 mio. | € 747 mio. | € 500 mio. |
| Grants(≈) | 450 | 328 | 294 | 49 |
| Info to applicants (≈) | 28 April 2026<br>25 August 2026 | 17 July 2026<br>11 December 2026 | 29 January 2027<br>11 June 2027 | 13 April 2026<br>14 August 2026<br>27 October 2026 |
| GA (≈) | 22 December 2026 | 12 April 2027 | 16 November 2027 | 24 March 2027 |

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# Success rates

| Funding scheme | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Starting Grants | 13.3 % | 13.3 % | 11.7 % | 13.9 % | 14.8 % | 14.2 % |
| Consolidator Grants | 12.3 % | 13.2 % | 12 % | 14.4 % | 14.5 % | 14.2 % |
| Advanced Grants | 9.8 % | 8 % | 14.6 % | 13.2 % | 13.9 % | 11 % |
| Synergy Grants | 13.3 % | 7.8 % | | 8.2 % | 9.6 % | 10.7 % |

Statistics show that success rate is equal throughout most of the eligibility window!
→ Do not wait until the last moment

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# Application Procedure and Evaluation Process

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# Main documents to consult

- ERC work programme – every year 2026
- Proposal templates – call specific
- Information for Applicants – call specific
- ERC rules for submission and evaluation

→ Familiarize yourself early with the evaluation sub-criteria and the electronic submission system

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# One Evaluation Criteria: Excellence

## 1. Research Project

**Ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility**

- Address important challenges
- Ambitious objectives & beyond the state of the art
- ambitious research

**Scientific Approach**

- Feasibility
- Appropriateness of research methodology to achieve goals
- Timescales, resources & time commitment

## 2. Principal Investigator

- Ability to conduct ground-breaking research
- Evidence of creative independent thinking
- Scientific expertise & capacity to execute the project

# Evaluation Criteria - Intellectual capacity and creativity

- 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?
- To what extend has the PI demonstrated sound leadership in the training and advancement of young scientists? (AdG)

# Evaluation Criteria - Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project

- 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)?

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# Evaluation Criteria – Scientific Approach

- To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind te ground-breaking nature and ambition of the proposed project (based on the Ext. Synopsis)?
- To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?
- To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources and PI commitment adequate and properly justified (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?

# Proposal Basics

- Online submission
  - process is started via the call page in the Funding & Tenders Portal
- A submitted proposal can be revised until the call deadline by submitting a new version and overwriting the previous one
- Stick to the structure of the proposal and consider the evaluation criteria
- Respect the formatting rules and page limits
- Clear, understandable language & structure, supportive illustrations

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Novelties for Work Programme 2026

# Proposal Parts – StG/ CoG 2026

Administrative Forms/
Proposal Submission Forms

- General Information
- Participants & Contacts
- Budget + Resources description
- Ethics and security
- Other call specific questions

| B1 | B2 |
| --- | --- |
| Part I (5p.) | Part II (**7 p.**) + Funding ID |
| CV + Track record (4 p.) | |

- Host Support Letter (Host Institution Binding Statement of Support)
- PhD-Certificate/ PhD defence (StG/CoG)
- Further documents (if applicable)

# Evaluation Basics – StG/CoG

- Peer-review: research field specific evaluation panels consisting of 1 panel chair and 10 - 15 members
- Three scientific domains:
  - Physical Sciences & Engineering (PE): 11 panels
  - Life Sciences (LS): 9 panels
  - Social Sciences & Humanities (SH): 8 panels
- Applicants choose panel and indicate one or more keywords
- Up to 3 reviewers can be excluded in advance

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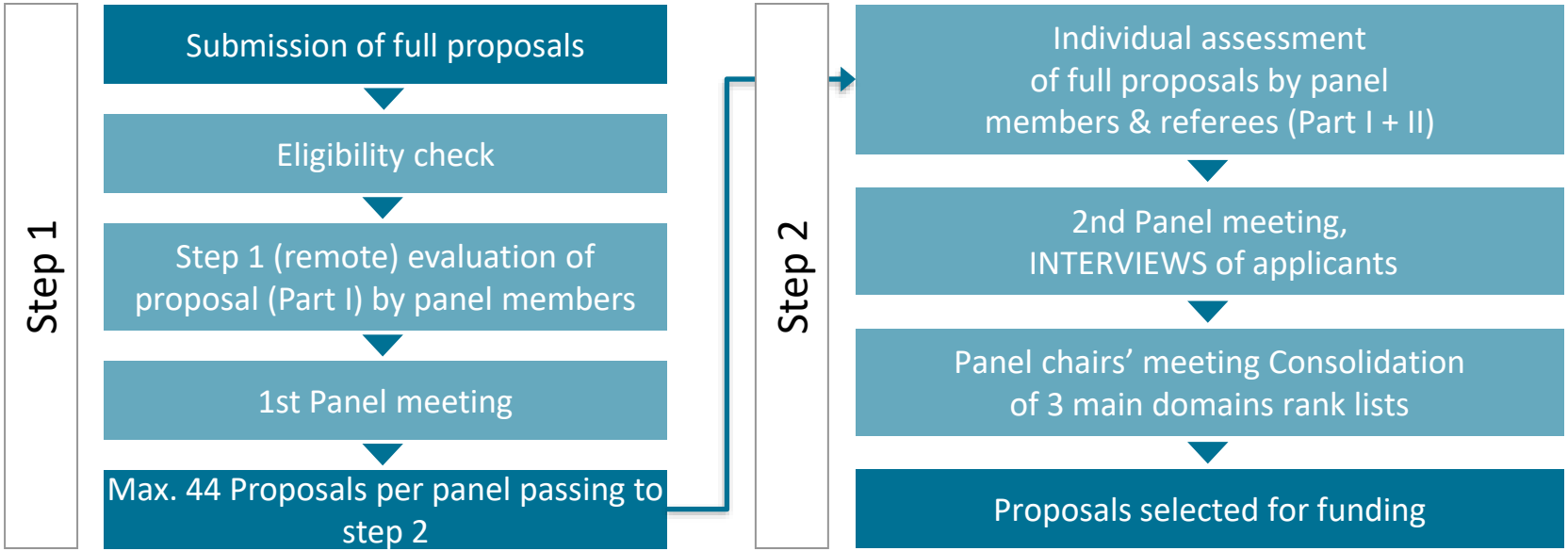
# Evaluation Process (StG, CoG, AdG)



## Physical Sciences & Engineering

**PE1 Mathematics**
All areas of mathematics, pure and applied, plus mathematical foundations of computer science, mathematical physics, and statistics.

**PE2 Fundamental Constituents of Matter**
Particle, nuclear, plasma, atomic, molecular, gas, and optical physics.

**PE3 Condensed Matter Physics**
Structure, electronic properties, fluids, nanosciences, biological physics.

**PE4 Physical and Analytical Chemical Sciences**
Analytical chemistry, chemical theory, physical chemistry/chemical physics.

**PE5 Synthetic Chemistry and Materials**
New materials and new synthetic approaches, structure-properties relations, solid state chemistry, molecular architecture, organic chemistry.

**PE6 Computer Science and Informatics**
Theoretical and experimental computer science, information processing, intelligent systems.

**PE7 Systems and Communication Engineering**
Electrical, electronic, communication, optical and systems engineering.

**PE8 Products and Processes Engineering**
Product and process design, chemical, civil, environmental, mechanical, vehicle engineering, energy processes and relevant computational methods.

**PE9 Universe Sciences**
Astro-physics/-chemistry/-biology; solar system; planetary systems; stellar, galactic and extragalactic astronomy; cosmology; space sciences; astronomical instrumentation and data.

**PE10 Earth System Science**
Physical geography, geology, geophysics, atmospheric sciences, oceanography, climatology, cryology, ecology, global environmental change, biogeochemical cycles, natural resources management.

**PE11 Materials Engineering**
Advanced materials development: performance enhancement, modelling, large-scale preparation, modification, tailoring, optimisation, novel and combined use of materials, etc.

## Life Sciences

**LS1 Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions**
*For all organisms:* Molecular biology, biochemistry, structural biology, molecular biophysics, synthetic and chemical biology, drug design, innovative methods and modelling.

**LS2 Integrative Biology: From Genes and Genomes to Systems**
*For all organisms:* Genetics, epigenetics, genomics and other 'omics studies, bioinformatics, systems biology, genetic diseases, gene editing, innovative methods and modelling, 'omics for personalised medicine.

**LS3 Cell Biology, Development, Stem Cells and Regeneration**
*For all organisms:* Structure and function of the cell, cell-cell communication, embryogenesis, tissue differentiation, organogenesis, growth, development, evolution of development, organoids, stem cells, regeneration, therapeutic approaches.

**LS4 Physiology in Health, Disease and Ageing**
Organ and tissue physiology, comparative physiology, physiology of ageing, pathophysiology, inter-organ and tissue communication, endocrinology, nutrition, metabolism, interaction with the microbiome, non-communicable diseases including cancer (and except disorders of the nervous system and immunity-related diseases).

**LS5 Neuroscience and Disorders of the Nervous System**
Nervous system development, homeostasis and ageing, nervous system function and dysfunction, systems neuroscience and modelling, biological basis of cognitive processes and of behaviour, neurological and mental disorders.
*– in humans and all other organisms*

**LS6 Immunity, Infection and Immunotherapy**
The immune system, related disorders and their mechanisms, biology of infectious agents and infection, biological basis of prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, innovative immunological tools and approaches, including therapies.

**LS7 Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Diseases**
Medical technologies and tools for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of human diseases, therapeutic approaches and interventions, pharmacology, preventative medicine, epidemiology and public health, digital medicine.

**LS8 Environmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution**
For all organisms: Ecology, biodiversity, environmental change, evolutionary biology, behavioural ecology, microbial ecology, marine biology, ecophysiology, theoretical developments and modelling.

**LS9 Biotechnology and Biosystems Engineering**
Biotechnology using all organisms, biotechnology for environment and food applications, applied plant and animal sciences, bioengineering and synthetic biology, biomass and biofuels, biohazards.

## Social Sciences & Humanities

**SH1 Individuals, Markets and Organisations**
Economics, finance, management.

**SH2 Institutions, Governance and Legal Systems**
Political science, international relations, law.

**SH3 The Social World and Its Interactions**
Sociology, social psychology, education sciences, communication studies.

**SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity**
Cognitive science, psychology, linguistics.

**SH5 Texts and Concepts**
Literary studies, literature, philosophy.

**SH6 The Study of the Human Past**
Archaeology and history.

**SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, and Space**
Human geography, demography, health, sustainability science, territorial planning, spatial analysis.

**SH8 Studies of Cultures and Arts**
Social anthropology, studies of cultures, studies of arts.

# Panel structure 2026

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# Scores & Re-application rules

## Evaluation Step 1

A = excellent quality

B = high quality but not sufficient

C = insufficient

A – invited: moves on to evaluation step 2
A – not invited: no restrictions for re-submissions
B: suspended for one call year
C: suspended for two call years

## Evaluation Step 2

A = recommended for funding

B = not funded

Unfunded A & B:
no restrictions for a resubmission

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# Orientation: How to prepare, how to write

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# Readability

- Understandable for non experts of your field
- Leave no question & no evaluation criteria unanswered
- Concise title, headings, sub-headings
- Clear, comprehensible language, short sentences
- Paragraphs, Bullet points, tables, graphics…
- Time chart, roles of team members etc

Panel members receive 20-45 proposals – make their live easier

# Some thoughts on your proposal

- Can you explain your project idea briefly and concisely?
- Are the objectives and the novelty clear from the beginning?
- Which important challenges will you tackle?
- Which are the ground-breaking or novel aspects?
- What makes the project ambitious but feasible?
- What is the expected impact on your research field?
- Why are you the right person to carry out the project?

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# Meet the panel's expectations…

"The PI has an excellent track record of publishing in high impact journals and is first author on a significant number of these papers"

"incredibly ambitious proposal"

"Ground-breaking project that if successful could have a huge impact in the field"

"scientific approach is feasible but clearly ambitious"

"The PI is an eclectic, original thinker"

"originality and importance of the proposal"

"highly sophisticated and inventive technology underlying this proposal"

"methods are on the cutting edge of work in this area"

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# Avoid typical weaknesses

"solid track record … however, was not considered as internationally competitive"

"I consider this proposal to be high risk, but I am not convinced that the **potential gains** are truly very high"

"serious doubts about the independence of the PI"

"Confusingly written proposal"

"neither the lead question nor the approaches are clearly defined"

"rather incremental than groundbreaking"

"Feasibility is hard to judge based on the information provided"

"There is hardly any form of work plan"

"the principal investigator does not seem to have the **capacity** and is not prepared to execute the outlined project"

"The novelty of insights is not always clear"

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# Reasons for rejection*

| Based on the research project | Based on the research profile |
|---|---|
| X Too narrow or too broad<br>X The project is incremental research<br>X It is collaborative research of several researchers<br>X Not enough information (hypothesis, objectives, work plan)<br>X Insufficient risk management strategy | X Insufficient track record<br>X Insufficient potential / proof for independence<br>X Insufficient experience leading projects |

* Source: ERC Classes: How to write part two of your proposal

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# Don’t forget operational aspects…

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yourself | Position / salary | Career prospects | Teaching |
| | Overhead 25% | | |
| Team | Recruitment | Contract/ salary | Premises |
| Equipment | Depreciation | co-financing | purchase |
| | After the project | | |
| Third Parties | Subcontracts | Associated Partners | |

Get in touch with your institution for budget planning

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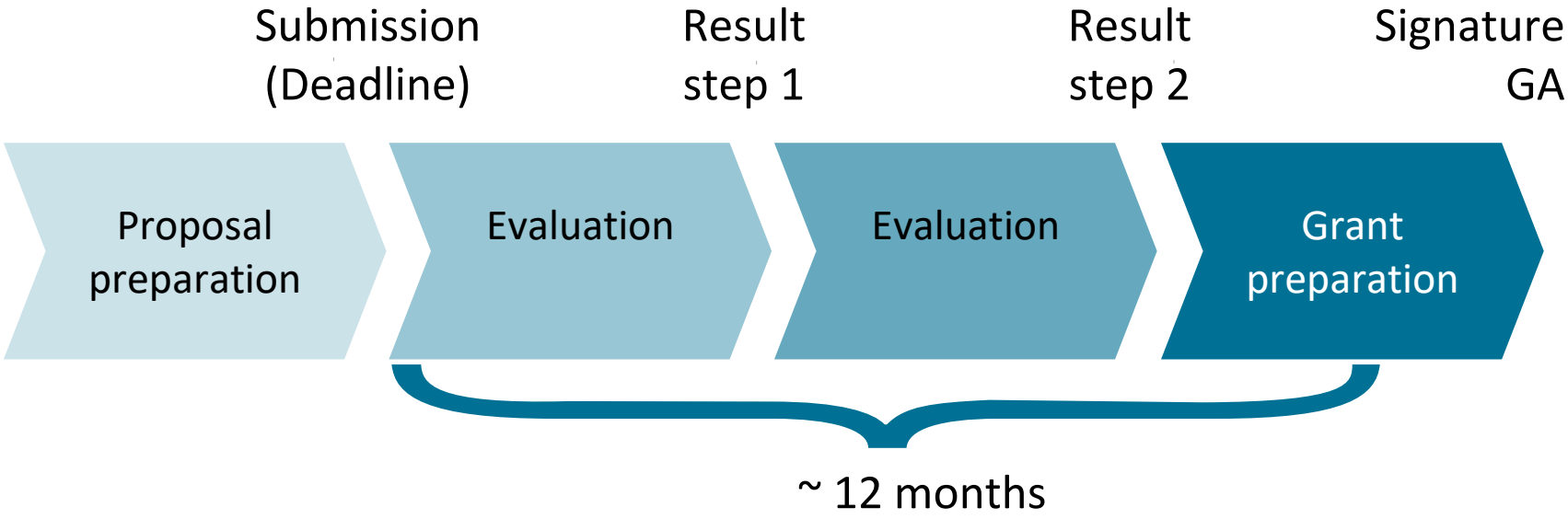
# From Submission to Funding



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# Further information & support

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Nationale Kontaktstelle zum
EU-Programm Horizont Europa

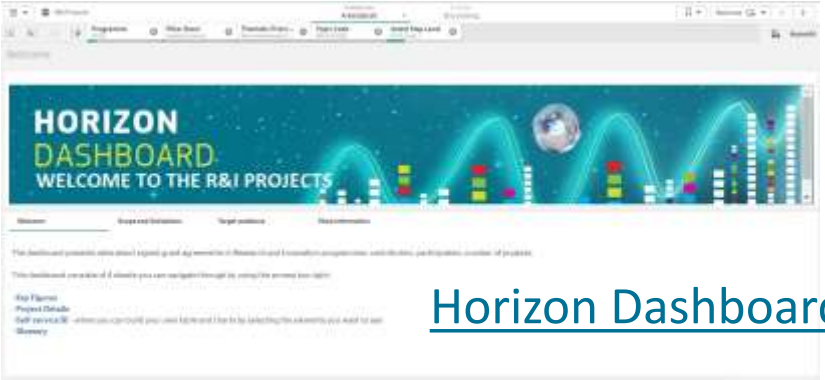
# Further information: sources

ERC Dashboard


CORDIS


ERIS tool

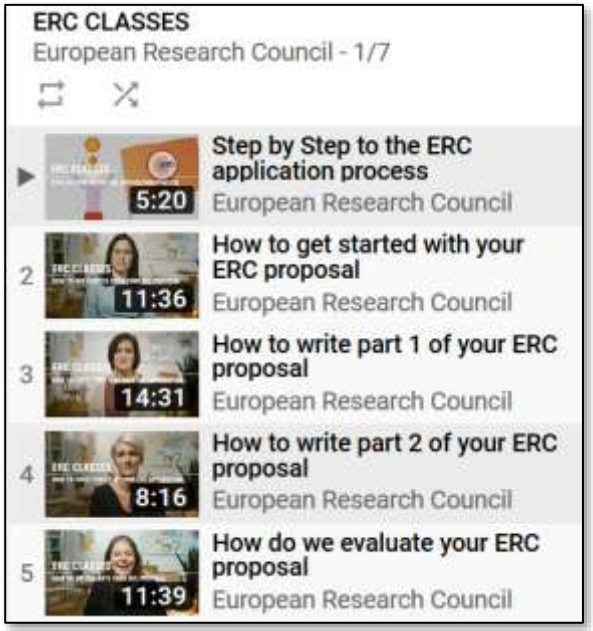
Horizon Dashboard



# ERC classes

ERC Classes

[Step by step to the ERC Application process]

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# National Contact Point ERC: Our Services

- General information on the ERC
- Advice on grant application and grant management
- Individual proposal check
- Events (e.g. interview trainings)
- Newsletter & website (DE)/(EN)

Close collaboration with EU liaison officers of host institutions

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