ERC Evaluator Perspective

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Who am I ?

- Evaluator for St and Co grants in 2012 in PE3 *(Condensed Matter Physics)*. *Two streams*
- One of the over 375 evaluators from the 25 panels (3 domain): ~ 5000 proposals
- Recruited by the ERC Scientific Council
- Assigned to one panel according to CV and expertise
- % of confidence in 20 specific fields (descriptors) within the area of the panel
- Identify 10 free keywords defining my expertise
- Establish my current interest

My CV

- **PhD in Physics** (20 month in Sweden, Ireland, Germany)
- **Postdoctoral research** in Belgium
- **Head of the Department** of Superconducting Materials and large scale nanostructures at ICMAB (25 researchers, SGR2009-770)

- Editorial Executive Board of SUST, Board of ESAS
- Co-founder of OXOLUTIA S.L. , spin-off from ICMAB

- PI of several National and EU projects
- European projects (**NMP, Energy, ITN, COST**) in the field of superconducting materials and their integration in power devices

- Duran Farrell- Gas Natural, Novare-Endesa awards

- 200 peer review papers, 9 patents , 13 PhD Thesis, 30 invited talks

- **Evaluator** of AGAUR, MICINN, ANEP, MINCyt-Argentina, ERCEA

ERC comments to Evaluators

- ERC funds frontier research in Europe
- **Excellent Ideas**
- All fields of science and humanities without thematic priorities
- Individual scientists
- No quotas, neither on PI nationality, HI nationality, gender
- One selection criteria: **EXCELLENCE**
- High risk/ High gain
- Ground-breaking ideas and not good excellent research

Evaluation Panel

- Each panel is composed of 12-15 panel members (PM)
- One acts as Panel Chair (PC)
- 1 Panel Coordinator from Scientific Council
- Good balance between different fields of panel area
- Panel composition has maximum two members from one country
- PM composition is decided half a year before proposals submission. PM changes in consecutive years
- Conflict of interest (CoI) strictly attained for each individual proposal
- Non-PM can submit a proposal at the same call

Referees

- Remote external reviewers
- Typically 2000/call
- Evaluate a small number of proposals
- Answer the same evaluation questionnaire as PM
- Crucial in the second stage evaluation
- Recruited by PM upon acceptance of Scientific Council

Evaluators Process steps

- Two step process : Right balance between generalist and specialized reviewers

Stage 1

A- PC assigns proposals to panel members (3-4/RP) *(evaluations could be requested to other panels).* *Each PM evaluates 40-50 prop.*

B- Remote assessments by panel members
(and external referees if assigned)
PI and Synopsis evaluation only

C- Panel meeting
Decision of proposals retained for step 2

D- Feedback to applicants: Grade A, B, C (only A is retained)

Evaluators Process steps

Stage 2

E- Assign external referees to retained proposals

F- Remote assessments by PM and referees (6-7/RP)
 Full proposal evaluation includes budget
 Each PM evaluates ∼10 proposals.
Also evaluations from external referees

G - Panel meeting + interview
Ranked list of proposals

H- Feedback to applicants: Decision for proposals to be funded.
All proposals receive panel comments

I- Redress cases

Evaluation Criteria

- Published in the call
- Read very carefully at different stages of the writing process before submission

- Excellence of PI:
  - Intellectual capacity
  - Creativity
  - Commitment
- Excellence of RP (research project)
  - Ground breaking nature
  - Potential impact
  - Scientific approach

- Each criteria is ranked

Proposal submission

- Select the right Panel. *It can be reassigned*
- Carefully ensure you considered all **evaluation criteria**
- Guarantee you followed templates indications (use criteria titles/subtitles) including length
- Choose carefully your **descriptors** and free **keywords** best defining your proposal

 They are extremely important for reviewers assignment
 Matching with those from reviewers
 You want the best reviewers for your proposal

- The proposal must be outstanding not excellent
 (evaluation criteria 1-4, 3= excellent, 4= outstanding)
 Use figures , charts . Right references are crucial.

PI evaluation

Intellectual capacity and creativity

- Have a well presented CV. *As important as the project*
- Fulfill all requested information. *Clearly identify your PhD supervisor*
- **Researcher ID** and **Group-Web** address are best given
    Most reviewers will like to check
- Demonstrate **independent creative thinking** with past publications. *Explain your transition to scientific independence*

RP synopsis evaluation

Ground breaking nature and potential impact of the research

■ Be concise, understandable, appealing for generalists and expert reviewers

■ Clarify context, clearly identify the problem to be solved, what the gain is, why it should be funded

■ Demonstrate ground-breaking nature of the RP

■ Convince that you address an important challenge at the knowledge frontier

■ Ambitious objectives well beyond the state of the art

■ Specify if novel concepts/approaches

RP synopsis evaluation

Methodology

- Appropriate selection of methodology to reach the goals
- Specify if need for a novel and/or unconventional methodology. *It depends on the RP*
- Justify high risk/high gain balance. *Identify the risks, some contingency plan might be good*
- Proposal needs to be feasible. *Do not over-dimension the work plan*
- Proposal **abstract/summary** is very important. *First read by the reviewer. Take your time writing it*

Panel meeting and retained-proposals decision

■ Proposals are ranked in a list according to remote evaluation

■ Discussed one by one

■ Usually, ~20% ranked A (retained), ~50% ranked B, 30% ranked C

■ Discrepancies among PM usually are in top B / bottom A proposals

■ All B and C- proposals receive the PM comments (discussion) together with all remote evaluations (unchanged). *Read carefully PM comments*

■ A- proposals are requested for interview in stage 2

Full proposal evaluation Remote evaluation Part B2

- PI and RP (Parts B1 and B2) being again evaluated
- New referees (experts) come into the evaluation
- Same evaluation criteria as 1st stage, but now with full project proposal

- <u>New things:</u>
  - How well conceived and organized is the activity
  - Demonstrate that the goals of the proposal can be achieved with timescale and resources available
  - Describe accurately the requested budget vs. RP

Panel meeting and interview

- Proposals are ranked in a list according to remote evaluation. Discussed one by one
- All PM evaluate all interviews (except CoI)
- Proposal's lead reviewer (PM) directs the interview
- Questions by external referees are raised at interview
- Give a copy of presentation to all PM (~15)

It helps to remember PI/RP during the final discussion

- *Bring extra slides for possible questions*
- *If new preliminary results, show them (it's 6 month later)*
- *Be aware of recent publications of the field*
- Panel discussion already starts after your interview

It has several stages

Interview evaluation

■ Rehearse many times *(10' talk +15' questions)*

■ Demonstrate your capacity, be convinced of your RP
*Talk in 1st singular. Demonstrate maturity. You deserve it now, not next year. **Be enthusiastic !.***

■ Short presentation: **Excellent Idea is most important**

■ Do not start explaining your CV. *Key evaluators know it. Demonstrate importance of your past publications linked to the RP*

■ Few slides, be concise and clear, no need of details
Generalist won't follow and experts know them from the proposal

■ *Go straight to the point:* *What the problem to be solved is, how you will solve it*

■ **Answer concisely, precisely**, allow for many questions
Make the full panel be interested in your proposal

Final decision and feedback to applicants

- Decisions are taken by all the panel

- All proposals need to be ranked in one single list

- Outstanding proposals are usually agreed by most of PM and *not-to-be* funded proposal too. Discrepancies come at the "grey list"

- Your impression at the interview is a key factor

- Budget is not an elimination criterion. *If not properly justified, it will be cut down*

- Usually, ~10-12% from overall proposals are funded

- All proposals receive the PM comments (discussion)together with all remote evaluations (unchanged). *Read carefully PM comments*

"Write the best proposal you can imagine and make it outstanding, understandable for a generalist of your field and appealing for experts"

"You'll only win if you participate"

Good luck