

What I learned about the ERC granting process

Elena Pancino

Giornata ERC – INAF/IASF Milano – 17 gennaio 2024



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Disclaimer:

the ERC is personal
what I did helped me
it is not deterministic



My ERC

1. ERC StG



First attempt

- Starting Grant (2009)
 - up to 7 years from Ph.D.
 - motivation: **it's the last yr!**
- naïve approach
- two weeks preparation
- using recycled material
- **Grade C**

Lessons Learned

- Time
 - It does indeed take time
 - It does indeed take effort
 - two weeks are not enough!
- No recycling
 - Not good in general
 - Especially bad for ERC



My ERC

2. ERC CoG



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Second attempt

- Consolidator Grant (2014)
 - up to 12 years from Ph.D.
 - motivation: **it's the last yr!**
- three full months
- original project
- **Grade B**

Lessons Learned

- **Insufficient motivation**
 - go on with my science
 - you have to do and ERC
 - it's the last year
 - I will never get the AdG
- The project
 - This is not a national grant
 - Need new elements
 - Data, method, idea
 - Go out of comfort zone



My ERC

3. ERC AdG



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AdG application history

- Advanced (2020)
 - no expectations
 - grade A/A
 - no interview in H2020
- Advanced (2021)
 - first-year interview in HE
 - grade A/A
- Advanced (2022)
 - reserve list then granted
- Advanced (2023)
 - withdrawn after getting it

Lessons Learned

- Motivation & time
 - Focus on science and novelty
 - It took me a few years, really
- Determination/grit
 - Slow+steady improvement
 - Use reviewers
 - Having enemies help!
 - 3 yrs average time to get it
- Extreme preparation
 - Eurocratic language
 - (un)written rules are known
 - Paid courses for interview
 - Other ppl proposals



Am I fit?

Do I have a strong enough CV?



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Fight against yourself

- Impostor syndrome
 - *"In spite of the time I dedicate to the Gaia mission and large projects, I have a good publication record ..."*
- Impostor behaviour 😊
 - *"I have an excellent publication record, with a balanced mix of small and large collaboration works"*
 - *"Thanks to my broad and varied background, which led me to formulate the unique StarDance hypothesis, I am one of the very few researchers who can successfully carry out such an ambitious project"*

Consider the criteria

- Threshold criteria
 - You need to match as many as possible, not all
- Recent change of rules
 - 50% PI and project
 - 30% PI and 70% project
- Help the referees
 - Stand out by being yourself
 - Facilitate their work
- **Not deterministic**
 - Not all depends on you



Closing
remarks:

Slow
and
steady



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About MOTIVATION

- **A project you love**
 - a sort of state of grace
 - focus on science
- Knowledge of the process
- Reach out for experts
- Accepting you can fail

About DETERMINATION

- Conny Aerts told me ...
 - *“Congratulations! You reinforce my idea that a slow and steady improvement and a strong determination are the key to success in this very tough competition”*
- Use the feedback
 - **Harsh tones can cloud your judgement**
 - Focus on science
 - Use all information you have

