

Funding Programmes

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What Matters for a European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant?

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Abstract: European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grants are arguably the most competitive grants in Europe and their prestige is fully justified considering that they (i) allow focus on a high risk/high gain project through generous funding of 1.5–2 million Euros, (ii) they can enable the foundation of a new academic group and earn the submitting principal investigator a professorship, and (iii) they serve as a highly reputable award that can either facilitate tenure/promotion or assist in securing a subsequent academic position. However, the journey to getting one is far from easy. In this Viewpoint Article, I will discuss my first two unsuccessful attempts to secure an ERC Starting Grant and how the lessons learned during the process led me to ultimately secure a grant upon my third attempt.

Introduction

Being awarded a European Research Council Starting Grant (ERC SG) is often associated with being a “good” scientist. However, being unsuccessful with a grant application is not necessarily a reflection on your scientific rigor or potential. What are the challenges to succeed? You have to write a thorough proposal, which may take up to 3 months or more to put together. A big section of the proposal consists of your curriculum vitae (CV). At the initial stage of submission, your proposal and CV is assigned to two or three panel members who decide whether or not to send your proposal out for review. At this stage it is important to highlight your previous achievements in the CV section in order to convince the panel members that you are capable of materializing your proposal. Thus, a strong proposal needs to be accompanied by evidence of your capabilities. If the panel members are convinced, you move to Stage 2 and your proposal goes to the scientific community for external

review (Figure 1). You then automatically receive an email confirming that you made it to Stage 2 and you are invited for an interview. In a similar fashion to the publication process, the panel members serve as the editors who evaluate your proposal/CV and decide on whether it will be sent out for external peer review. However, the big difference between a paper and an ERC Grant is that there can be up to 12 independent reviewers evaluating your proposal. This is in contrast to academic publishing, whereby *Nature* and *Science* (arguably the two most prestigious journals in the natural sciences) typically require four or five reviewers before making a decision while the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* (JACS) and *Angewandte Chemie* (both highly prestigious journals in chemistry) often rely on two or three reviewers. Of course, having up to 12 reviewers (most colleagues I know had between seven and 10) makes the whole process fairer, but at the same time it is extremely challenging to convince so many people to like both you and your proposal! It is already very difficult to persuade five reviewers to support a paper and, even if I were to choose all the reviewers myself, I probably do not even have 12 family members who like me that much (and I come from a big Greek family). In addition, due to the competitive nature of the ERC, it can take only one or two negative comments on your proposal and/or on your CV to miss out entirely. The panel makes a final decision based on (i) the feedback received by the independent reviewers and (ii) your performance during the interview (Q & A session). A summary and a timeline of the important steps during the application for an ERC SG are summarized in Figure 1.

The optimistic news is that, despite the aforementioned challenges, approximately 10% of applicants are successful every year. The focus of this Viewpoint Article is to share my personal experience in both failing and succeeding at an ERC SG proposal with the aim of giving a clearer picture of the process and to encourage younger colleagues to apply while acknowledging the challenges involved. Notably, I applied for PE5 (Synthetic Chemistry and Materials) as a polymer chemist and therefore my experience may not be relevant to all applicants. Prior to applying, the reader is encouraged to review formal documents and videos provided directly by the ERC, as well as other related articles by previous ERC and other grant holders.^[1]

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Deciding When to Apply

It is important to examine your eligibility carefully. Anyone who is between 2 to 7 years post-PhD is eligible to apply but

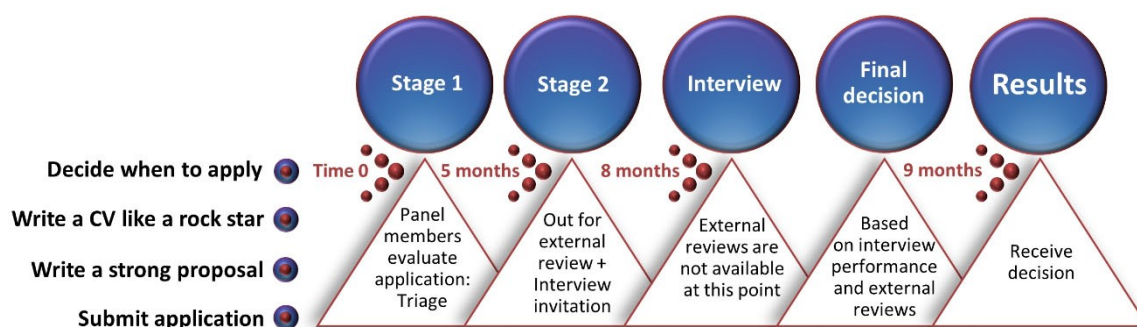


Figure 1. Summary and timeline of the important steps during an ERC SG application.

extensions are also granted for maternity leave, compulsory military service, medical leave, etc. If you are unsure, email the ERC; they are very good at clarifying eligibility. It is important to highlight that, if you are rejected at Stage 1 (i.e., your proposal is not sent out for review), you are not allowed to apply for the next call. Should this happen, do not take it too personally as many applicants do not make it to the interview despite having an amazing CV ($\approx 70\%$ are rejected at Stage 1 and a short report on this decision is provided by the panel members assigned to your proposal). Being rejected at Stage 1 imposes a certain limitation. For instance, if you apply in year six after your PhD and your proposal is not sent out for review it means that you will not have another opportunity. The right time to apply really depends on personal circumstances. To give a hypothetical example. If you are in year six and you just started your own group, you should be asking yourself questions like: “Is it likely that I will have 2 independent papers by next year that would strengthen my application significantly?” Or: “Do I expect a major paper by next year?” (either from your post-doctoral or independent work). Or: “Since I just started, maybe I will have a gap in my publication list, which can easily be picked up by the reviewers. Should I apply now before the gap shows up?” Hopefully this gives a clear impression of how important this decision is, particularly in your last 1–2 years of eligibility, and more relevant discussion is included in the “The Importance of the CV and How to Advertise Yourself” section. Otherwise, my advice is to apply as quickly as you become eligible and as early as two years from the award of your PhD. And keep applying until you are successful. My philosophy has always been to use failed attempts to guide future successes. So stop over-analyzing and apply!

Preparation Before You Start Writing

Writing an ERC SG is not easy and requires dedication but it can be made easier with the right preparation. Before starting the writing process, I strongly recommend finding a few successful grants in your research field and reading them carefully (those can usually be found through your university channels). Pay attention not only to the proposal part but also to how the applicants advertise themselves. I

am not aware of another funding call where attention to detail matters so much. You may like to consider the people in your panel that got the ERC SG in the previous 2 years. If you are as curious as I am, you will check every single person so that you can determine whether you actually have a chance. Remember though that you only have access to the people that got it rather than to the people that did not, and often times the CV of the people who failed can be better than the CV of people that did get it. Having information about previous awardees may create preconceptions, or even worse, discourage you from applying. My advice is to apply even if you think you are not as good as previous awardees, as the ERC SG puts a lot of weight on the proposal. Before you start writing, it would also be useful to come up with a handful of ideas and first discuss them with a colleague in your specific field (e.g., polymer chemistry, chemical biology, etc.) and then a few people in your broader field (e.g., chemistry, materials, etc.). Remember that the specific field will review your proposal eventually but it is the panel (broader field) who will evaluate your application and decide its future. Certainly, it may be easier to impress the panel with a real-world application; however, the ERC funds both “basic” and “applied” research. In particular, the ERC is funding “frontier research” aiming towards fundamental advances at and beyond the “frontier” of knowledge so, even if your proposal is more fundamental in nature (mine was), you can still highlight the broader benefits, even if they are long term, and how your research can lead to a potential societal impact. For more information on the ERC mission, please refer to the ERC guidelines.^[2] Although it may not always be possible, talking to a previous ERC panel may also be enlightening and provide you with additional information.

Overall, two things are essential for being successful on an ERC Grant: your proposal and your CV. Which one counts more? Both are very important as described in the next sections.

Writing a Strong Proposal

This is the difficult part. It does not matter if the reviewers/panel have good intentions at heart, they will all try to take it down. It is their job to be critical. It is competitive out

there and only a flawless (or as close to flawless as possible) proposal can win. So you have to reach perfection. How? You need the magic project that strikes the right balance between what is not a continuation of what you did in the past (or what your previous advisors would want to do) and what you are absolutely capable of pursuing—the area that the scientific community considers you as the best person in the world to develop. According to the guidelines, the proposal should be high risk/high reward. This statement is often misunderstood. What you want is a proposal that is high risk/high reward and at the same time a proposal that you can bring to fruition. For example, I am a polymer chemist so I cannot claim to solve climate change. This would indeed be a high risk/high reward proposal but I do not have the experience to deliver it so it would make my case very weak. What you propose should be very challenging and risky, but if you were to achieve it (even partially), it would really change the world (or your field, to be more realistic). Remember, you have to change the direction of your field. Any sign that your PhD or post-doctoral advisor could also change the field in the same direction is really not good. And this is tricky because how can you change the field with an idea that is not tested or inspired by your previous research? Below I provide three alternatives/options for developing a project. Although there are colleagues who have received the ERC Grant following option 1 or 2, they are rare and clearly better than me in presenting their projects and strengths. My recommendation is to always go for option 3 if you can.

Option 1: A Project That Is a Natural Continuation of Your Previous Work

It can work out if you spin it correctly but it contains a lot of risk. This is because you have to convince the reviewers about how ground-breaking the project is, since it is “just” a continuation. In addition, you have to justify why your PhD and post-doctoral advisors cannot materialize it instead of you. They have more experience and a much bigger group. More importantly, you need to consider how you would establish a reputation if you continue working in a similar area to your previous advisors. Therefore, your independence may be judged—as mine was in one of my failed attempts where one of the reviewers thought that a large part of my project was a continuation of my work at another institution, with the involvement of my previous supervisor. This resulted in my proposal being judged as an incremental advancement of my established activities, rather than a ground-breaking idea. Do not get confused here about what incremental means. Even an idea worthy of being published in a good journal could be considered incremental for an ERC SG and not as ground breaking. Remember that good journals will have two to three reviewers and an ERC SG may have up to 12! You probably need to put together four or five good ideas, which are all somehow related, and which allow you to prove that you can deliver the project better than anyone else. Yet, if those ideas are a continuation of your previous work, I would be surprised if one or two

reviewers do not notice this and take you down. Therefore, I do not recommend this option. Should you choose it, you will have to come up with an idea that somehow combines your PhD and post-doctoral experience in a unique way, and this is challenging because your idea has to look ground breaking rather than like a combination of ideas. On a positive note, option 1 at least ensures that you are a world expert in the field you chose, which is also important as it secures the feasibility of the proposed research.

Option 2: A Project in an Area Where You Have Some Experience and That Your Advisors Are Not Well Known For

For a time I believed that this was the optimal middle road. This is because the proposal would not be something that my previous advisors were working on and I hoped, naively, that this would help me to appear more independent. I came up with an idea that I thought would improve field X—a field in which my previous advisors were not considered world experts and also a field in which I was not considered an expert—and this was problematic because the ERC is not here just to help researchers grow towards a new direction. You have to convince them you can make it happen and that, out of all the people out there, you are the one that is capable of getting the project to work. If you choose option 2, the panel can still happily send your proposal out for review (assuming you write it well and convincingly, similarly to your CV) but then you have to face up to 12 reviewers in this specific field. And here comes the issue: there are many established researchers working in field X and they have to find your idea great and competitive. Moreover, many fields are not especially welcoming to newcomers. After all, you have limited experience in field X so who are you to say that your idea can improve that field (their field) profoundly? Unfortunately, I made this mistake too. I thought that it made a great proposal to say that approaches 1, 2, 3 are great developments but they have some weaknesses and this is why I want to enter the field and fix them. Although the majority of the reviewers were impressed, two of them (and it only takes two to fail) interpreted the proposal as very negative and naive, and myself as arrogant. In fact, it was this comment that made me reconsider my approach. I then talked to one of my colleagues at the ETH Zürich, and he reminded me that people simply do not like to be told that their developed approaches have weaknesses and it makes it even worse when this comes from a young principal investigator (PI). I followed my colleague's advice, who suggested coming up with a project where there is not a lot of prior literature to avoid offending anyone. Another risk of this option is that, because you do not have extensive experience on this topic, you are more likely to make mistakes which will be picked up immediately by the experts.

These first two options summarize how my proposal failed during the first two ERC SG attempts. However, I would like to reiterate that unsuccessful grants do not necessarily coincide with bad ideas. Luckily, most academics, including myself, are stubborn. So my group went ahead

anyway and we realized the proposed research—arguably at a much slower rate than if we had received the grant^[3,4]—so do not let a failure change what you want to achieve. Be stubborn and persistent.

Option 3: A Dream Project That, If Successful, Could Change Your Field

There are so many reasons why this is the best option. Firstly, as there is always some luck involved with ERC (and any grant), you might as well enjoy the process and apply with your dream project. My colleagues at ETH have convinced me that this typically leads to the best research. You need something that is clearly high risk and, if successful, it would most certainly yield high reward. Why spend a few months of your time in writing a project that cannot change the world? Inspiration is very important and usually this is reflected in your proposal. Secondly, the ERC panel is interested in frontier research and a high-risk and high-reward proposal. However, remember that although the proposal is of high risk, you are the only person in the world that can get it to work. What does this mean? In practice, this means that you already have an amazing reputation in the field of research (so that the reviewers believe than you can do it) and that the project is revolutionary and ideally does not have a lot of literature associated with it. In other words, my advice is to stick to your field but introduce a new direction. To give you an example, I had at the time X publications in making polymers by a certain technique. I therefore wrote a proposal (the one that received funding) where I wanted to reverse the polymerization (unmake the polymers). This had not been achieved through this technique so I did not have to refer much to previous literature. Not offending reviewers is really the key! In addition, this is something unrelated to my previous advisors' work. They became famous by making polymers, so I thought I could establish a lab that unmakes polymers. You may argue that I do not have any experience in unmaking polymers, which is true. Nevertheless, I am so good at making them (designing catalysts, optimizing conditions, etc.) that no one can argue that I cannot make different catalysts and come up with different conditions to unmake them. You can win the game easier if you play in your court! It is not as easy as it sounds to come up with such an idea but if there is one such idea in your area, you have to find it. Getting preliminary data for such a project would help but there are many candidates that were successful without it, so do not let the lack of preliminary data prevent you from applying. Preliminary data may be more necessary the further you are from your current field and from the mainstream of the field you will join, and such data can be used to demonstrate the required expertise needed for the proposed project.

Regardless of the preferred option, my advice is to start with writing the B1 part of the proposal (the five-page extended synopsis), whereby the key ideas need to be clearly summarized and articulated, and then move on to the B2 part (the detailed scientific proposal). Since the panel will

only look at B1 (and your CV) at Stage 1, you need to ensure it can stand out as a strong and independent document. It is often the case that you have to re-write the entire B1 section upon writing B2.^[1d]

The Importance of the CV and How to Advertise Yourself

This part of the process can be really messy. The name of the grant (“Starting”) suggests that you get it at the very beginning of your academic career and you use it to establish your independent group. The guidelines also say that one paper without your PhD advisor is the minimum requirement to demonstrate independence. This is all well and good but I do not think that this information has been efficiently conveyed to the reviewers who have to answer an important question: “To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative independent thinking?” From all my discussions with successful and unsuccessful candidates, this is the question that usually takes you down. Your specific subfield would know (to an extent) how independent you have been as a post-doc. For instance, your advisor can acknowledge your contributions in invited talks, people know you through being involved in discussions with senior figures, you have perhaps won a few awards, etc. However, the reviewers are not going to necessarily belong to your subfield (maybe two to three will, but not all of them). And they will have no idea about your reputation. Depending on how strict they are, they are going to look for solid proof of your independence, and if you have 10 reviewers, chances are that one or two will require this. The ultimate proof of independence (at least in the field of chemistry and materials) is having last author papers, ideally without any of your previous advisors. Anything else, can be easily taken down. I failed in my first two attempts, largely due to not having any last author papers, so I think it is much harder to win this grant as a post-doc, unless you find a way to demonstrate your independence. To understand how important your independence is I have to provide a brief background for my case. The first time I applied was October 2017. At the time, I had been applying for tenure-track positions but had not yet secured a position. In over 6 years of research, I had published 63 peer-reviewed papers, all in high-impact chemistry and polymer journals, of which I was first author in 19 and a corresponding author in eight of them; my h-index was 27 and I had 1900 citations; I won the best PhD award in my university department and in polymer chemistry in the UK, as well as some less significant awards; I received two fellowships (e.g., the Marie Curie); I had five invited talks at major conferences as a post-doc (e.g., ACS, APME) and another five invited talks at smaller events. I was also a web writer for a good field-specific journal (Polymer Chemistry, RSC), a community member for Materials Horizons, and a regular reviewer of many respectable journals. My specific community had already recognized me as an independent scientist (relative to my career stage). On my second attempt, my CV improved further (i.e., 71 total papers with 21 as a first author and 12 as a corresponding author, h-index of 32, 2650 citations,

three extra awards, 10 invited talks at major conferences, I was about to start a tenure-track position at ETH, and I was on the advisory board of two polymer journals). Considering I was a post-doc, I thought I had a pretty solid CV. It turned out that the reviewers had a different opinion and strongly doubted my independence. In spite of comments that expressed admiration and acknowledgement of my achievements, some reviewers expressed doubt over my independent thinking. Their doubt was based on a) my autonomous activities being merged with the global activities of my previous advisors, b) publications having multiple authors, and c) I did not have publications as a senior author...all of which puzzled me. Do not think about whether the comments you receive are fair or not. There are so many different reasons that can explain why we receive “unfair” comments. Since I could not change the comments, it was obvious that I had to do something to demonstrate my independence more visibly. In my second failed attempt, although many people that were successful had a comparable CV to mine, most of them had a couple of independent papers. I knew I needed a last author paper to increase my chances during my third attempt. I only had 9 months to achieve that together with setting up my new lab (in my new position). Fortunately, my group managed to make the impossible possible and gave me three last author papers. After this improvement and 20 invited talks, an h-index of 36, 3500 citations, 79 papers, five journal boards, etc., on my third attempt, I was criticized for having an h-index thanks to papers that I had published with well-known scientists. In other words, a reviewer was saying that my laboratory's three independent papers, published a month before, had not yet reached enough citations to positively contribute to my h-index. This illustrates how strict reviewers can be. However, as there was only one negative comment, the panel could support me and there was a happy ending.

Remember, if two or three reviewers doubt your independence your application is likely to fail. Even if the panel disregards reviewers' comments about your CV, they cannot disregard the comments about your proposal, which is logical. If the reviewers do not believe in you, why would they believe in your proposal? So do your best to convince the reviewers that you are independent. How do you do this? My advice is that you should dissolve any doubts by publishing a couple of papers as a senior (last) author when in an independent position. Even if you are not in a fully independent position yet (e.g., post-doc, fellow, group leader, etc.), do not hesitate to apply. Just keep in mind that you need to somehow show signs of independence. For instance, you can try to get correspondence or last authorship by supervising students. I know that not all advisors would be open to this but you can try to negotiate with them. Anything that suggests independence should be explicitly mentioned in your application. For instance, if you have won an award that is typically awarded to independent PIs but you are instead a senior post-doc, do not forget to highlight this information in your CV. Although your subfield may know how important this award is, the slightly broader field that will review your grant may not know, so make it easier for them to notice it. Other items that suggest

independence are: acquiring independent funding (e.g., individual post-doctoral fellowships and/or grants where you are listed as a PI), invited talks, organizing conferences, being on journal's boards, invited papers (with you being invited rather than your PI), single-authored perspectives (without including experimental data, so this is something you can do in your free time), etc. In any case, whatever your strengths are you really have to highlight them.

Tips during the Interview

Congratulations, you have reached Stage 2 which means you have convinced the panel to send your proposal out for review! You are automatically invited for an interview without having access to the reviewer's comments, unlike the publication process where you have time to construct a comprehensive response. In a 10 minute presentation, followed by 20 minutes of questioning, you have to respond to the panel members' queries, which can represent the comments of the reviewers. Bear in mind that, if you received too many negative comments from the reviewers, the interview is just a formality and there is nothing you can do to restore your position. Otherwise, the interview is important and you need to give an excellent presentation.

Tips for a good presentation:

- No one likes a proposal that does not have a clear goal, and doesn't specify what you want to do. At the interview you have the opportunity to further clarify your proposal. Always remember that the panel members will not be in your subfield, so make sure that you convey your goals clearly and see it as an opportunity to demonstrate your 'teaching skills'. Think of it like being at a conference where you have to present to an audience from many fields. Put yourself in the panel's shoes. For example, if your idea is about organic chemistry and not all panel members are from this subfield, they will struggle to follow you, unless you can adjust your presentation to your audience.
- No one likes a proposal that does not sound important, so explain why what you want to do is important. Making a molecule that no one has made before can indeed be challenging but the reason why you need to make the molecule are what matters. Having an innovative idea can impress the panel but you equally have to make them aware of the importance of your project.
- Either at the beginning or at the end of your presentation, summarize your previous achievements and state why you are in the best position to make the project work.
- Here are a couple of things that are useful to know. Firstly, at the start of your presentation there is a clock next to you counting down the duration of the interview (10 minutes). Secondly, you do not use your own laptop to present and at the end of the 10 minutes your screen turns black. Make sure your talk is designed to last 9 minutes and 40 seconds. Practice at home with a 10 minute countdown to familiarize yourself with the process. Hopefully, this will reduce the stress levels and you will not be surprised like I was the first time.

- Practice in front of a person in your subfield, a person in your broader field (chemistry if you are a chemist), and a person slightly outside (e.g., a materials scientist if you are a chemist). Satisfy all three of them.
- Apparently, periodic blackouts do happen occasionally in Brussels, so you should also be prepared to present with just a projector or your printed slides, if requested.
- Be memorable (in a good way). The panel has back-to-back presentations all day, potentially for several days, so they may be tired during your presentation. It is thus important to energize them and stand out of the crowd.

It is also important to be prepared to answer all sorts of questions. Even though not all of the panel members will belong to your subfield, they will have in front of them some very challenging questions posed by the reviewers. So it is possible that a panel member asks you one of the reviewers' questions and they do not know the exact right answer. It is your chance to respond with confidence and convince them that you are the expert and that the reviewer who originally raised the question perhaps misunderstood an element of your proposal (respond with confidence even if you are not confident). Be very fast when answering questions. At the beginning I thought to be slow at answering the questions I could answer so that they do not have time to ask me a difficult question. I was wrong. They have in front of them a list of questions and if you can only address some of them in the time allocated to you then some questions will be left unanswered. This can only be a bad thing as you have no further opportunity to defend your proposal. Answer quickly, with confidence, and to the point.

Understanding the Role of the Panel

I think the panel is one of the biggest strengths of ERC Grants. Unlike many fellowships and grant schemes across the world, the ERC panel has considerable power. I always felt that the panel is supportive. Naturally, they are unable to reverse 10 negative reviews but they will step in if they see one or two unfair reviews. For instance, in my first two failed attempts, when two to three reviewers questioned my CV and my independence, the panel compensated for this by highlighting in their report that the PI has an outstanding track record and the expertise to carry out the polymer-related part of the project. Being graded three out of five in spite of having 60 peer-reviewed publications in well-respected journals can be heart breaking. Although the panel did not reverse the decision of the reviewers who rejected my proposal, they were very friendly during the interview. In any case, I found the panel extremely professional and nice. Despite failing twice, I am grateful to them for spending their invaluable time doing such a difficult job.

Announcement of the Results

For my three attempts (ERC Starting Grant 2018, 2019, and 2020), the results were announced at the end of July and always on the day I leave for my holidays, so plan accordingly because it is almost certain that you will not be successful in your first attempt (there are exceptions of course). Unless you fail a couple of times, you may underestimate how difficult the grant is. If you have not been successful, you will receive an email delivering the bad news and a couple of weeks later you will receive the evaluation report. If you are successful though, you receive an intriguing email saying that the results are out and you have to login to find out how it went for you. It took me about 10 minutes of searching and pressing buttons to discover that I had been awarded the grant! If you see "grant preparation", it means that you can start jumping up and down for joy. The take home message here is that, if you struggle to figure out whether you have been successful, the news is good and I hope ERC changes the successful email into something like "Congratulations, you have received the grant". Nevertheless, I was so happy at that point that I started crying and could not sleep that night.

I would also like to share a secret in case you are unsuccessful for the ERC SG and you can no longer apply. Unsuccessful applicants of the ERC SG have a lot of chances to apply for the consolidator grant (five attempts), while colleagues that win a starting grant typically have just one or two chances, as they win it towards the end of their eligibility window. There are very few people that get both grants. For the rest of us, we will apply as many times as necessary. So again, do not be disappointed if you do not get it as you have more chances for the next level and much more time to prepare. Notably, there are numerous examples of unsuccessful ERC projects that were funded through other national or international funding schemes leading to outstanding lines of research.

Conclusion

The ideas discussed in this Viewpoint Article may be relevant to not only prospective ERC Starting Grant applicants but also to other related grant or even faculty position applicants. The message is common: having the right attitude helps. Embrace rejection, be persistent, and improve your proposal. I never thought it was unfair that I was rejected twice. I thought that someone else was just better than me or that I failed to convey my strengths clearly. So I tried harder the next time. I learned the hard way that expectations when applying for such a grant should be realistic to avoid disappointment but, at the same time, you need to dream that you are able to get it. My father told me before I applied the first time that I should not be chasing the impossible. Yet, I was stubborn enough. I dreamed of "the impossible" and aimed at it methodically and the dream came true. If you are a successful scientist, do not be afraid to let people know that you can fail too. It means a lot to many younger colleagues. I mentioned to a

Athina Anastasaki@AthinaAnastasa1 July 9, 2018
Today I found out that I failed the ERC Grant! @ERC_Research
Knowing that I did my absolute best means it was out of my
control to get it! Congratulations to the ones who got it, very well
deserved! For the rest of us, let's keep trying!

Comments: 6 Retweets: 0 Likes: 15

Athina Anastasaki@AthinaAnastasa1 Sep 3, 2020
Sometimes you have to lose in order to win. Very excited to
announce that after failing twice, I was awarded an ERC Starting
Grant. Thanks to my group @AnastasakiLab and colleagues
@ETH_Materials for their support! Trust me, you have to keep
applying! @ERC_Research @ETH_en

Comments: 53 Retweets: 19 Likes: 444

Figure 2. Personal tweets after a) an unsuccessful ERC SG attempt and b) a successful ERC SG attempt.

senior figure of polymer chemistry that I was preparing my third ERC application and he casually mentioned that it took them three attempts to get their ERC grant and told me to keep trying. I thought that if a full Professor with hundreds of papers, awards, and such a reputation needs to apply three times, I will never complain again and continue applying. He does not know it but he gave me a lot of courage. And as I mentioned during one of my Tweets you really need to know how to lose in order to eventually know how to win (Figure 2). It is also true that sometimes you are just unlucky so you just have to throw the dice again. Continue applying until you get it. Good luck to everyone!

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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