

ERC Synergy Grants
reflections from a former jury member

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Synergy

joint new project

by multiple (typically 3, 4 or 5) excellent researchers
with different backgrounds, in intensive collaboration

large funding (up to 15 M€)

very low success rate for applications:

11 out of 697 in 2012

13 out of 427 in 2013

ideal research question:

What could we do that is essentially new and very challenging if we bring together people with different background and get substantial support?

review process year 2013, budget 150 M€
at all stages: external referees with written reports and grading
panel meetings 3 days

submitted 427 proposals	427
round 1a: preselection, remaining 111 proposals selection by the 5 panel chairs of round 1b	111
round 1b: panel evaluation, each panel 13 people 2 panels physical sciences and engineering (49 prop.) 2 panels in life sciences (39 prop.) 1 panel in social sciences and humanities (23 prop.)	33
round 2: new panel for all sciences (20 members, incl. panel chairs 1b) 2a: 33 proposals received, 19 selected 2b: presentations by proposers, discussion with panel 13 proposals recommended to ERC board	13

critical aspect for jury

round 1a: miss an exciting good proposal

round 2b: select a proposal with serious flaws

criteria for selection

quality of people:

each PI has proven excellent track record

commitment: intense collaboration for large fraction of time

infrastructure, experience

proposed research:

new, challenging, important, realistic

synergy from new team

could not be done without Synergy support

proximity:

not groups that are already positioned too close

not groups that are too far away for intensive interaction of all team members

risk

high risk fully acceptable

not based on false premise

budget

realistic, tight, substantiated

not simply filling up to maximum amount

recommendations for the written proposal

explain why these particular partners are essential for the project
make sure each partner qualifies

prepare well in advance, a synergy idea needs maturing
spend a weekend together 2 months before submission

a weak paragraph in the proposal can do serious harm

evaluate the risk aspect, what if...

make the budget tight and realistic
do not throw the budget together at the last moment
specify where the money goes