European Research Council

ERC proposal: Details & vision

From scientific idea to a compelling B1 and B2



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Day 2 challenge: “Can a panel member understand, remember and defend your proposal?”

From the form to the scientific argument

European Research Council

01	02	03	04
B1	**B2**	**Evaluation**	**Vision**
Part I + CV/Track Record	Part II + Funding ID / Resources	What changes from Step 1 to Step 2	What makes the case ERC-level

The first question is structural: what does the evaluator expect to find in each document - and what should not be duplicated?

The architecture of the ERC forms: What is actually submitted?

Part A (online platform) and Part B: B1 + B2

PART B1 — assessed at Step 1 and Step 2

- Cover page
- Proposal summary / abstract
- Part I of the Scientific Proposal - max. 5 pages
- Curriculum Vitae & Track Record - max. 4 pages
- References

PART B2 — assessed at Step 2 only

- Part II of the Scientific Proposal - max. 7 pages
- References
- Funding ID - mandatory; outside page limit

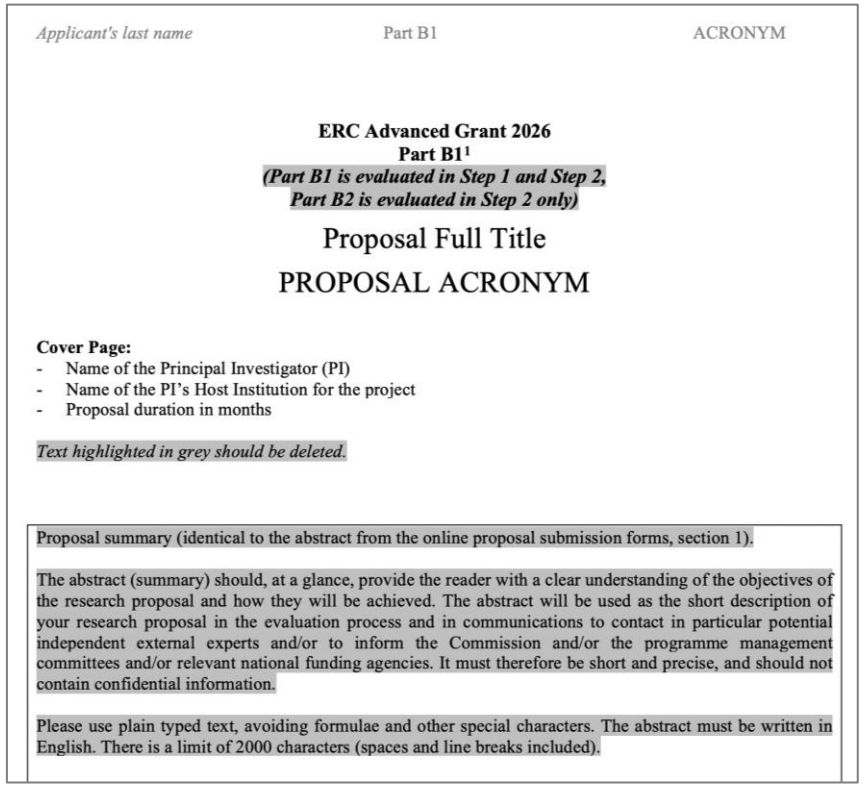
Resources / budget justification is entered in Part A, Section 3 - not inside the 7-page Part II limit

B1: Cover Page and Abstract

The abstract is not a miniature B1

How I would use it

- One sentence: problem / current limitation
- One sentence: central question or hypothesis
- One sentence: objectives / overall route
- One sentence: what changes if successful
- Use language understandable beyond the narrow subfield



Applicant's last name Part B1 ACRONYM

ERC Advanced Grant 2026
Part B1[1]
(Part B1 is evaluated in Step 1 and Step 2, Part B2 is evaluated in Step 2 only)

Proposal Full Title

PROPOSAL ACRONYM

Cover Page:
- Name of the Principal Investigator (PI)
- Name of the PI's Host Institution for the project
- Proposal duration in months

Text highlighted in grey should be deleted.

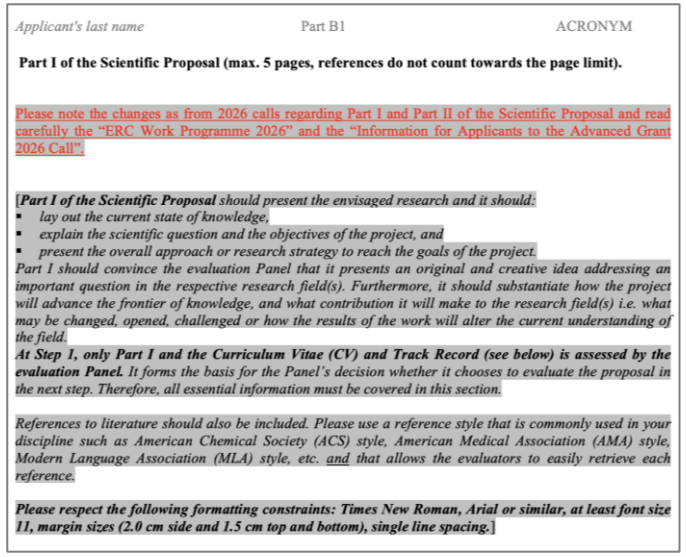
Proposal summary (identical to the abstract from the online proposal submission forms, section 1).

The abstract (summary) should, at a glance, provide the reader with a clear understanding of the objectives of the research proposal and how they will be achieved. The abstract will be used as the short description of your research proposal in the evaluation process and in communications to contact in particular potential independent external experts and/or to inform the Commission and/or the programme management committees and/or relevant national funding agencies. It must therefore be short and precise, and should not contain confidential information.

Please use plain typed text, avoiding formulae and other special characters. The abstract must be written in English. There is a limit of 2000 characters (spaces and line breaks included).

Remember: the abstract is also used to describe the proposal when contacting potential external experts.

B1 : Part I - what the 5 pages must contain



Applicant's last name Part B1 ACRONYM

Part I of the Scientific Proposal (max. 5 pages, references do not count towards the page limit).

Please note the changes as from 2026 calls regarding Part I and Part II of the Scientific Proposal and read carefully the "ERC Work Programme 2026" and the "Information for Applicants to the Advanced Grant 2026 Call".

[***Part I of the Scientific Proposal*** *should present the envisaged research and it should:*

- *lay out the current state of knowledge,*
- *explain the scientific question and the objectives of the project, and*
- *present the overall approach or research strategy to reach the goals of the project.*

Part I should convince the evaluation Panel that it presents an original and creative idea addressing an important question in the respective research field(s). Furthermore, it should substantiate how the project will advance the frontier of knowledge, and what contribution it will make to the research field(s) i.e. what may be changed, opened, challenged or how the results of the work will alter the current understanding of the field.

At Step 1, only Part I and the Curriculum Vitae (CV) and Track Record (see below) is assessed by the evaluation Panel. *It forms the basis for the Panel's decision whether it chooses to evaluate the proposal in the next step. Therefore, all essential information must be covered in this section.*

References to literature should also be included. Please use a reference style that is commonly used in your discipline such as American Chemical Society (ACS) style, American Medical Association (AMA) style, Modern Language Association (MLA) style, etc. and that allows the evaluators to easily retrieve each reference.

Please respect the following formatting constraints: Times New Roman, Arial or similar, at least font size 11, margin sizes (2.0 cm side and 1.5 cm top and bottom), single line spacing.]

The template gives four explicit content requirements:

1 **CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE** — What is known - only enough to establish the frontier.

2 **SCIENTIFIC QUESTION + OBJECTIVES** — What important question will the project answer? What knowledge will each objective produce?

3 **OVERALL APPROACH / RESEARCH STRATEGY** — The logic of how the project reaches the goals - not detailed methodology.

4 **ADVANCE OF KNOWLEDGE** — Why the idea is original and creative; what it may change, open or challenge in the field.

All essential information for the Step-1 decision must be in Part I

B1 Part I - State of knowledge: Build the scientific necessity

The background should lead to the question - not simply describe the field.

01

WHAT WE KNOW

Select only the knowledge needed to understand the problem.

→

02

WHERE KNOWLEDGE STOPS

Define the unresolved mechanism, limitation, contradiction or missing knowledge.

→

03

WHY IT MATTERS

Explain what we cannot understand because this remains unresolved.

→

04

THE QUESTION THAT FOLLOWS

Make the central question feel like the logical consequence of the argument.

The background is not there to prove that the topic is important. It must explain why the project has to exist and demonstrate why resolving it matters

B1 Part I - Objectives: scientific outcomes, not tasks

From the central question to knowledge-producing objectives

CENTRAL QUESTION

What do I fundamentally want to understand?

↓

CENTRAL PROPOSITION / HYPOTHESIS

What new explanation, principle or possibility am I putting forward?

↓

OBJECTIVES

What must I establish to answer the question?

Objectives: task vs knowledge

TASK LANGUAGE

Aim 1: Perform single-cell profiling
Aim 2: Validate candidates
Aim 3: Test in vivo

The reader sees a workflow.

→

KNOWLEDGE LANGUAGE

Determine whether…
Establish how…
Define when / why…

The reader sees what will be learned.

Ask after every objective:
“What new knowledge exists if I complete this?”

An objective is not an experiment. It is a piece of knowledge the project must produce.

B1 Part I – Overall Strategy without writing Part II

Part I shows the logic. Part II demonstrates how that logic will be executed.

PART I · OVERALL STRATEGY SHOULD SHOW

- Conceptual sequence of the project: How the objectives connect to the central question
- Why the approach answers the question
- Key experimental / analytical logic
- Where the pivotal scientific uncertainty lies

LEAVE THE DETAIL FOR PART II

- Detailed protocols
- Extensive methodological justification
- Work-package chronology
- Detailed risk mitigation
- Technical contingencies
- A compressed copy of Part II

2026 matters here: feasibility is assessed at Step 2. Part I still needs a convincing overall strategy - but not detailed feasibility.

Give enough methodology to understand the scientific logic - not enough to turn Part I into Part II.

B1: Part I - Make the advance explicit

The template asks what the work may change, open or challenge - do not leave the panel to infer it.

CHANGE	OPEN	CHALLENGE
A mechanism, interpretation, classification or causal model	A previously inaccessible question, research direction or capability	A dominant assumption, framework or explanation

This is where "ground-breaking" becomes concrete:
not "highly innovative", but a precise statement of how the field is different afterwards.

B1: CV & Track Record - evidence of scientific capacity

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MAX. 4 PAGES

The CV is not a list of achievements. It helps the panel judge whether this PI can make this scientific leap.

SELECT

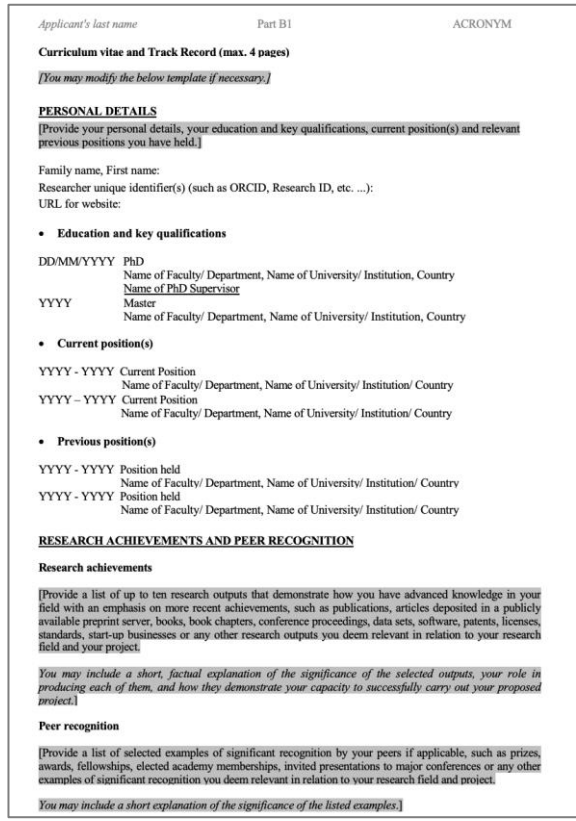
Up to 10 outputs that best represent your contribution to advancing knowledge.

EXPLAIN

Briefly state significance, your intellectual role, and relevance to the proposed project.

CONTEXTUALISE

Use career stage, field and relevant career circumstances to make the record interpretable.



Applicant's last name Part B1 ACRONYM

Curriculum vitae and Track Record (max. 4 pages)

[You may modify the below template if necessary.]

PERSONAL DETAILS

[Provide your personal details, your education and key qualifications, current position(s) and relevant previous positions you have held.]

Family name, First name:
Researcher unique identifier(s) (such as ORCID, Research ID, etc. ...):
URL for website:

- **Education and key qualifications**

DD/MM/YYYY PhD
Name of Faculty/ Department, Name of University/ Institution, Country
Name of PhD Supervisor
YYYY Master
Name of Faculty/ Department, Name of University/ Institution, Country

- **Current position(s)**

YYYY - YYYY Current Position
Name of Faculty/ Department, Name of University/ Institution/ Country
YYYY – YYYY Current Position
Name of Faculty/ Department, Name of University/ Institution/ Country

- **Previous position(s)**

YYYY - YYYY Position held
Name of Faculty/ Department, Name of University/ Institution/ Country
YYYY - YYYY Position held
Name of Faculty/ Department, Name of University/ Institution/ Country

RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENTS AND PEER RECOGNITION

Research achievements

[Provide a list of up to ten research outputs that demonstrate how you have advanced knowledge in your field with an emphasis on more recent achievements, such as publications, articles deposited in a publicly available preprint server, books, book chapters, conference proceedings, data sets, software, patents, licenses, standards, start-up businesses or any other research outputs you deem relevant in relation to your research field and your project.

You may include a short, factual explanation of the significance of the selected outputs, your role in producing each of them, and how they demonstrate your capacity to successfully carry out your proposed project.]

Peer recognition

[Provide a list of selected examples of significant recognition by your peers if applicable, such as prizes, awards, fellowships, elected academy memberships, invited presentations to major conferences or any other examples of significant recognition you deem relevant in relation to your research field and project.

You may include a short explanation of the significance of the listed examples.]

What should remain in the evaluator's mind?

What has this person contributed? · What was their intellectual role? · Why are they equipped to lead this project?

B2: Part II - now the question changes

B2 · PART II · MAX. 7 PAGES

Part I asks: Why is this an important, original scientific proposition?

↓

Part II asks: How exactly will this proposition be implemented?

Part II is not the place to introduce a different project.
It should make the Part I strategy executable, testable and credible.

B2 · PART II

What belongs in the 7 pages?

Part II = detailed explanation of project implementation

1	**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**	How the research will be carried out
2	**WORK PLAN**	How the project is organised and delivered
3	**RISK ASSESSMENT**	What could compromise implementation
4	**MITIGATING MEASURES**	How important risks will be managed
	SCIENTIFIC OUTCOMES	What new knowledge / tools / datasets / frameworks the work is expected to produce

IF NECESSARY **Further background not already included in Part I**

B2 · WRITING PRINCIPLE

Make B2 easy to navigate

Practical recommendation: The easiest B2 to review is one whose structure mirrors Part I. Keep the same objectives as in Part I. Then use Part II to deepen implementation.

OBJECTIVE 1	**Approach · key methods · expected scientific outcome · risk**
OBJECTIVE 2	**Approach · key methods · expected scientific outcome · risk**
OBJECTIVE 3	**Approach · key methods · expected scientific outcome · risk**

Same scientific story. Greater resolution.

Part II B2 Methodology: organise it around the scientific test

For each objective, answer

- What exactly is being tested / estimated / compared?
- Why is this model, cohort, archive, dataset or system appropriate?
- What are the decisive measurements or analyses?
- What constitutes evidence for or against the hypothesis?
- How will different strands of evidence be integrated?

Avoid the equipment-catalogue effect

- Do not list methods without linking them to a question
- Do not spend equal space on routine and pivotal methods
- Do not hide the decisive experiment in technical detail
- Do not assume sophistication = appropriateness
- Explain non-standard or high-stakes methodological choices

Methodological detail should increase confidence in the scientific inference — not merely display technical capacity.

B2 · WORK PLAN

Show the architecture of execution

The work plan should reveal organisation without turning frontier research into a deliverables exercise.

ACTIVITIES

what will be done

DEPENDENCIES

what relies on what



TIMING

when it happens

INTEGRATION

how the work comes together

Deliverables / milestones are not required

A Gantt can show timing; the narrative should show how the research hangs together.

B2 Risk and mitigation: protect the question, not every experiment

For every pivotal risk, use a four-part logic:

RISK	TRIGGER	ALTERNATIVE	LEARNING
What can genuinely fail or remain unresolved?	How will you know that the planned route is insufficient?	What credible route preserves the scientific objective?	What remains informative even if the initial hypothesis fails?

Do not convert every scientific uncertainty into a technical contingency.
transformative potential requires uncertainty; good B2 writing shows that the PI can navigate it.

Technical risk: method may fail | Conceptual risk: hypothesis may be wrong

What the panel sees at Step 1 and Step 2

EVALUATION

STEP 1

PART I + CV / TRACK RECORD

Ground-breaking nature and ambition
Advance of knowledge
Overall research strategy
PI intellectual capacity, creativity, expertise and capacity

Detailed feasibility is not assessed at this step.

STEP 2

FULL PROPOSAL + RESOURCES / TIME

Everything from Step 1 remains relevant
Detailed methodology and implementation
Feasibility
Risk / mitigation
Resources and time commitment
Interview at Step 2

The 2026 change is not “feasibility no longer matters”. It is “feasibility is assessed later, with the information designed for it.”

Why excellent proposals still fail at ERC?

Most rejected ERC proposals are excellent

- ✓ Scientifically strong
- ✓ Technically rigorous
- ✓ Well-designed

However they are not Outstanding

- ➢ The **question is predictable**
- ➢ The **conceptual shift is limited**

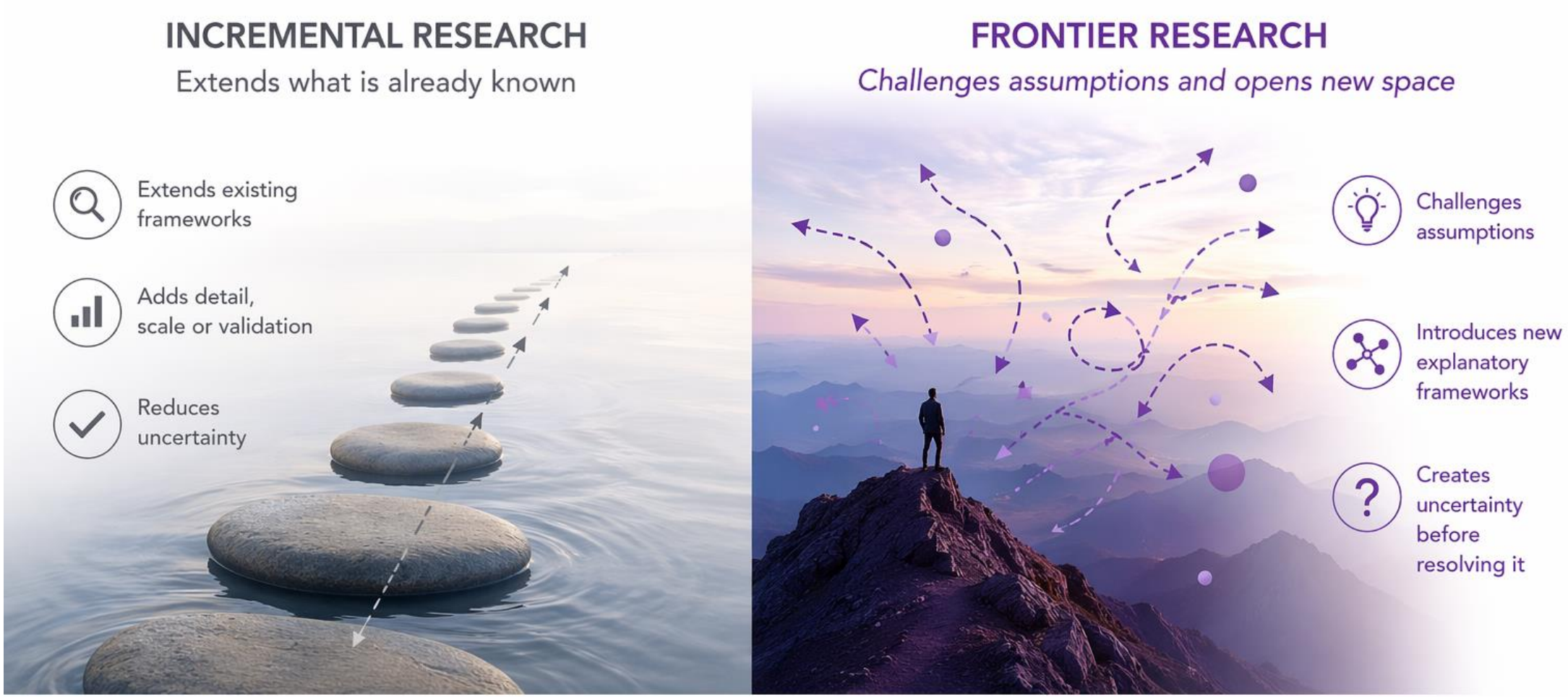


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ERC evaluates ideas - not only execution

Beyond incremental science

ERC does not fund the next step. ***It funds a different direction – exploring NEW FRONTIERS***



Incremental science moves forward.
Frontier research changes direction.

From Methods to Questions and Groundbreaking Ideas

Weak starting point:

- New technology
- More data
- Better resolution

Strong starting point:

- **A question that reframes the field**

If the question is conventional,
the proposal will be incremental - regardless of methods

What is NOT groundbreaking

Common patterns:
- Incremental work with advanced tools
- “Omics / AI” without a conceptual question
- Over-complex, unfocused proposals
- Safe ideas presented as high risk



Complexity is not ambition.
Innovation is not the same as originality.

Pillar 1: Conceptual shift

A groundbreaking idea:

- Reinterprets existing observations
- Challenges dominant models
- Connects previously separate domains

Not:

- More detail

But:

- **Different logic**

It changes how the problem is understood.



Pillar 2: Meaningful risk

a calculated, purposeful step into uncertainty that holds the potential for significant growth, reward, or positive transformation

Risk in ERC is often misunderstood.

Technical risk:
- Method may fail

Conceptual risk:
- Hypothesis may be wrong



ERC prioritises:

- **Epistemic risk linked to high conceptual gain**

A strong proposal makes both success and failure informative.

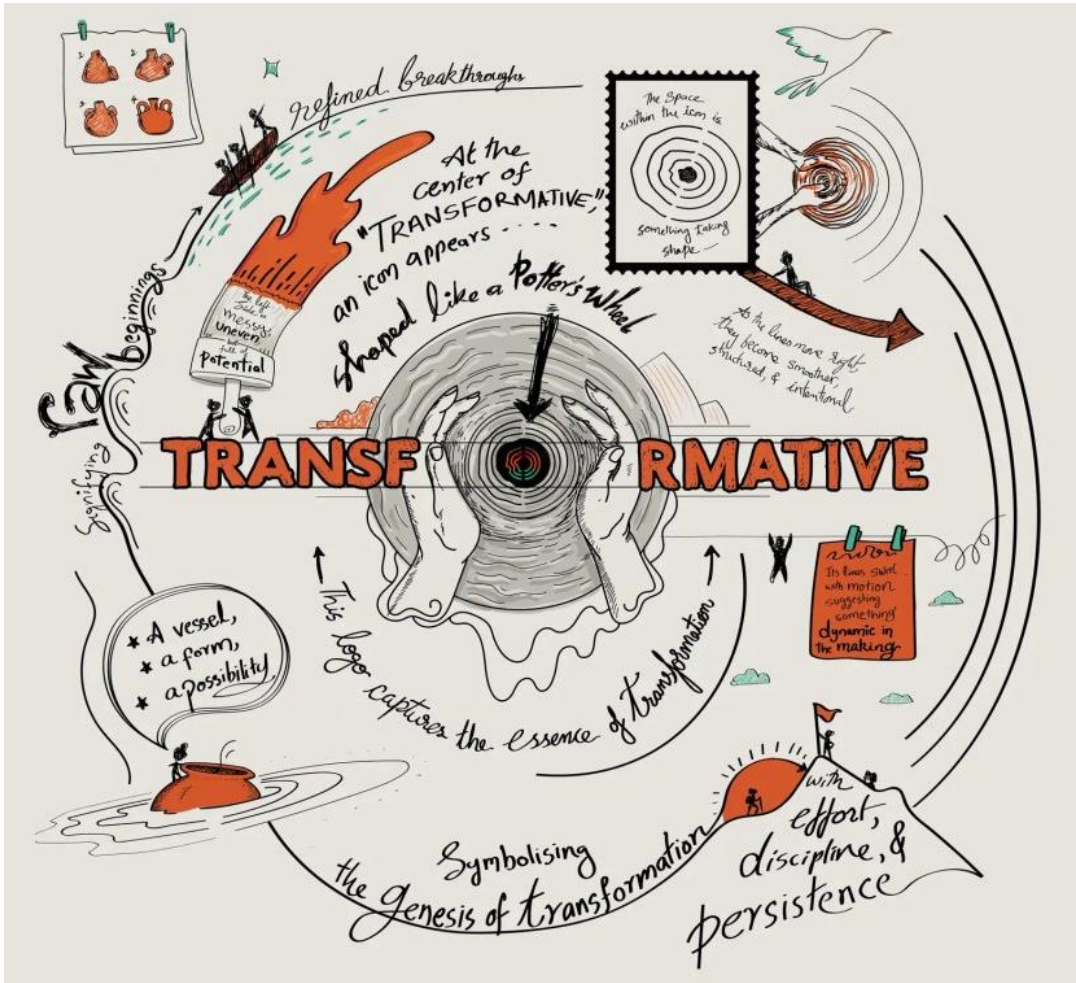
Pillar 3: Transformative potential

Transformative means:
- Redefines mechanisms
- Changes interpretation
- Opens new research directions

Not:
- “important”
- “useful”

But:
- **field-level impact**

If correct, the field would think differently.



The ERC test

Before submitting, ask:

- Does this challenge a core assumption?
- Would the field change if correct?
- Is the risk meaningful - not technical?
- Am I proposing a question - or just a project?



ERC does not fund certainty.
It funds ideas worth being wrong about.



ERC Ambassadors:

Together, we amplify research voices for a stronger future

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Contact:
Email: talissafi@med.uoa.gr
Linkedin: linkedin.com/in/themis-alissafi

Useful URLs
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