

THE ERC EVALUATION PROCESS: A VIEW FROM THE 'OTHER SIDE'

Dragan Mihailovic

Jozef Stefan Institute, Univ. of Ljubljana, Nanocenter and JS-IPS
Ljubljana, Slovenia



MY EXPERIENCE

- Evaluator 8 times (CgG, Syg, 2x post-evaluation)
- Twice as co-chair (CdG, SyG)
- Twice as chair (CdG, SyG)
- 5 submissions
- 2 successful ones (AdG, PoC), 3 'failures'!



BEFORE STARTING

- Keep in mind the mission of the ERC:

EXCELLENT WORLD-LEVEL SCIENCE

- It is not necessary to have multiple Nature and Science papers
- The CV ('Excellence' is a bit ambiguous.)
- Take your time to think VERY carefully on the idea before you start working on the application
- The IDEA is King!



ORIGINALITY, AND HOW TO CONVEY IT?

- The abstract is extremely important! It should make the reviewer want to read the details of the project. It's best if it elicits a smile!
- If the idea sounds original, the first thing the reviewers do is to Google it.
- If they find something, it better be authored by the proposer, or at least easy to find in the SoTA!
- About the SoTA: its first most important function is to frame the topic as clearly as possible in the context of the wider field of research.
- It is important to explain the importance the proposed ideas: from a broader perspective.
- Spend more time creatively pondering and researching your idea than polishing the text.



WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF EACH PART (B1 AND B2)

- Part B1 is usually decisive.
- Part B2 is a test of credibility.
 - Can it be done?
 - Are the methods appropriate? etc.
- Do not repeat in part B2, but do summarize and refer to Part B1!



THE EVALUATION PROCESS



Consensus: the best evaluation process in the world

HOW THE EVALUATION IS DONE

PART BI (DETAILS VARY)

- The panel chair assigns 3 panel members to each proposal according to their expertise, who evaluate part A. At least one, possibly two are well acquainted with the field, and possibly with the applicant (esp. for AdG, SyG)
- 3 panel members evaluate part A before the first Panel meeting.
- There are 12-15 panel members, of which at least 2-3 are experts in the field of the applicant,
- The proposal is presented to the panel by the lead reviewer and makes a case.
- It is then discussed openly at the panel. A 20-30 minute discussion ends in a mark.
- The marks for the proposal, and the PI are kept separate!
- At the end, a ranking list is made and the proposers are invited for interview.
- The panel members find ~ 15 possible reviewers for each proposal. (~1/3 usually respond positively.)



HOW THE EVALUATION IS DONE PART B2 (DETAILS VARY)

- Marks are reset (no ranking)
- The reports from the external reviewers and panel members are collected.
- The Panel meets and discusses each project (typically 20-30 minutes)
- The marks of the external referees are not taken into account, but the TEXT IS TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY!
- The proposals are ranked and in the interview takes place.



SYNERGY: THERE IS ONE EXTRA STEP

- The first round includes a round of evaluation including all panel chairs (all panels) who make the initial selection.



THE INTERVIEW



THE INTERVIEW

- Keep in mind: The panel was impressed by the proposal, but they need to choose amongst the best ones.
- The panel should be excited about the new idea!
- Phoney excitement doesn't work (don't exaggerate).
- They will ask about plausibility, etc.

HOW SUBJECTIVE IS THE REVIEW?

There are variations between panels (the panel chair is important)

A FEW REMARKS ON THE REVIEW PROCESS

- The attitude of the reviewers.
- The external reviewer's marks or grades.
- What happens in the end of the review process? Lottery!
- The panel rarely finishes confident about its choices.
- So, it's easy to say, hard to do.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Don't be disheartened by failure. Even veterans fail. I've succeeded twice, but tried 5 times total. (<50 % success rate).
- If you did your project application well, the science is worth doing, and will be done anyway.
- For example, in my last attempt, I didn't make it in the last round. But I did succeed in doing what was deemed as impossible by the reviewers. This gives me a certain satisfaction. The point of this is that the time of writing the proposal was not wasted.
- However! One technical point made by referees was correct! This is still proving a challenge.