



A funding program for physician-scientists

## Information and guidelines for application

### EXCLUSION OF SWITZERLAND FROM ERC PROGRAMS

Currently, Switzerland is excluded from the ERC programs, but the SNSF covers this vacuum (<https://www.snf.ch/en/w728UqT1Yw256Mz2/funding/snsf-starting-grants-2022>). Therefore, physician scientists are emphatically invited to submit ERC-for-me proposals.

### About the program

1. Researchers of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Zurich (UZH) successfully acquire ERC grants, but physician-scientists are underrepresented amongst the grantees. In contrast to researchers without clinical duties, physician-scientists often have insufficient time for generating preliminary data that are necessary for a competitive application for an ERC starting or consolidator grant. In addition, time to write the grant proposal is lacking. **We want to improve this situation through ERC-FOR-ME, a funding program for physician-scientists.**
2. Physician-scientists who are employed at the UZH or one of the University Hospitals in Zurich and who have an unequivocal intention of submitting an ERC starting grant (StG) or consolidator grant (CoG) and consider themselves within the top-10% regarding scientific excellence, can apply for the **ERC-FOR-ME** program. Please, see under "Eligibility" for further information.
3. Successful applicants will be supported by 40-50% protected research time (not less) for an uninterrupted period of at least 12 months (max. CHF 100'000) preceding the StG or CoG application deadline. During the period of support, applicants must be employed by the UZH or one of the University Hospitals in Zurich.
4. There will be one call per year; physician scientists planning to submit a StG or CoG can equally apply for **ERC-FOR-ME**. Maximally one **ERC-FOR-ME** grant (intention StG or CoG) per call will be supported. Because of the difference in "academic age", applicants for **ERC-FOR-ME** (StG) and **ERC-FOR-ME** (CoG) will not be directly compared; the main criterion is academic potential with the given academic age.
5. **ERC-FOR-ME** grantees must submit their ERC grant application in response to the first possible call towards the end of **ERC-FOR-ME** supported time; otherwise, the entire sum of the **ERC-FOR-ME** grant must be returned within 6 months.

### Eligibility<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Based on the ERC website. Extension of eligibility time window possible in case of maternity, paternity, long illness, military service or clinical training – see p. 17 of the ERC Work Programme 2020; specific eligibility rules for MDs – see Annex 2 of the ERC Work Program.

1. Starting Grant (StG): 2-7 post PhD, any age, any nationality, all fields of research, project budget up to €1.5 million for a duration of 5 years.
2. Consolidator Grant (CoG): 7-12 post PhD, any age, any nationality, all fields of research, project budget up to €2 million for a duration of 5 years.
3. You must spend  $\geq 50\%$  (StG) or  $\geq 40\%$  (CoG) of total working time on the ERC project and  $\geq 50\%$  of total working time in EU member states and/or associated countries.

## Self-assessment<sup>2</sup>

1. Are you amongst the best researchers in Europe in your scientific field at your academic age?
2. Do you have at least one (for StG applicants) or several (for CoG applicants) important publication(s) without your PhD advisor?
3. Can you demonstrate potential for research independence?
4. Can you demonstrate your achievements in terms of significant publications (as first or last author) patents, awards, prizes etc.?
5. Can you demonstrate your ability to conceive and conduct ground-breaking research?
6. Have your achievements typically gone well beyond the state-of-the-art?
7. Can you provide abundant evidence of creative independent thinking?
8. Can you convincingly argue that an ERC grant will contribute significantly to the establishment and/or consolidation of your research independence?
9. To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
10. To what extent are the objectives ambitious and go well beyond the state-of-the-art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or developments across disciplines)?
11. To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain?
12. To what extent is the scientific approach feasible?
13. To what extent is the research methodology appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?
14. To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology?
15. To what extent are the proposed timescales and resources necessary and properly justified?

## Structure of the research plan

Because your ERC application is still quite ahead, we don't expect a detailed research plan for your **ERC-FOR-ME** application. Instead, we recommend addressing the points 9-15 listed above under "Self-assessment" in the appropriate chapters.

Your research plan should contain following parts:

- Summary (max. 150 words)
- Current status of the field (1 page)
- Your current contribution to the field (1 page)
- Aims (max. 3 bullet points, max. 15 words each)
- Research plan including methods (max. 3 pages)
- Significance (1/2 page)

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A confirmation of formal eligibility from the ETHZ/UZH EU grant office (<https://grantsaccess.ethz.ch>) must be included in the application.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the ERC evaluation criteria. We recommend answering these questions honestly to yourself, don't include the answers in your **ERC-FOR-ME** application. Points 9-15 may be addressed in the research plan.

## Requested documents (checklist)

- ◇ Motivation letter.
- ◇ Confirmation of formal eligibility for an ERC StG or CoG by the UZH/ETHZ EU grant office.
- ◇ Research plan. Please, see under “Structure of the research plan” for further information.
- ◇ Career plan including a statement about current independence (2-3 pages).
- ◇ CV (2 pages).
- ◇ List of original and peer-reviewed publications (no reviews, book chapters or case reports).
- ◇ List of extramural funding as main or sole applicant. Mention the title, the funding body, the period that the grant is active, and the amount of money.
- ◇ Letter of support #1 (LoS#1) by the institute director. This letter must clearly state that 40-50% protected time (specify) for at least 12 months (specify) will be granted when the **ERC-FOR-ME** application is successful. Also, his/her opinion about your academic potential must be given.
- ◇ Letter of support #2 (LoS#2): Written by an external (i.e. outside of Zurich) expert. This letter must explain why the expert ranks you amongst the top-10% of your peers and elaborate on your academic potential.

## Submission

- Proposal can be submitted any time (no deadline).
- Send your application as a single pdf to [silvia.herren@dekmed.uzh.ch](mailto:silvia.herren@dekmed.uzh.ch).
- The contents must be ordered according to the list under “Requested documents”:  
Motivation letter – Confirmation of formal eligibility – Research plan – Career plan – CV – PubList – GrantList – LoS#1 – LoS#2.
- Further information can be obtained from Maries van den Broek, vice-Dean for Research MeF ([vandenbroek@immunology.uzh.ch](mailto:vandenbroek@immunology.uzh.ch)).
- Applications that have the wrong format or are incomplete will not be considered.