27-4-2023

EU funding for Neurosciences

UBNeuro

We know about ambition.
1. General introduction

2. Individual grants
   ERC & alternatives
   MSCA-PF

4. Consortium grants
   Building a strong consortium
   Tips & tricks for writing
   Upcoming calls
Research funding

Necessary, but extremely challenging:

- Access to relevant information
- Finding right partners
- Time-consuming & complex

Support system is available:

- Compliance
- Reporting
- Writing application
- Finding partners
- Finding programmes
- Application management
- Feasibility
Collaboration UBNeuro & Hezelburcht

I need help with:
• Finding a programme
• Improving my application
• Finding partners

Application strategy  Review of application  Hezelburcht Network

Feasibility & Strategy
About Hezelburcht

>25 years of experience in grant consultancy

- Founded in 1995
- 7 offices in Europe (Netherlands, Germany, Brussels)
- More than 175 specialists
- 12 areas of expertise
Hezelburcht key figures

155,000
Grants and funding applied for since 1995

€ 1B
European subsidies per year

>2,500
Clients supported per year

60%
Success rate in European grant applications

95%
Returning clients each year
Clients from Academia
Clients from the **Life Sciences, Health & Food industry**
Grant programmes

We know about ambition.
**GRANT WRITING**

**General tips & tricks**

*** Check funding criteria/ assessment form

**Backwards approach:**

1) Fill out assessment form/ list with funding criteria

Use this filled out list/form to:

2) Structure proposal

3) Highlight key points in proposal

Allows you to:

→ Write from point of view of reviewer
→ Find gaps early on
→ Receive quick feedback from peers

Provide evidence

→ Don’t expect the reviewer to simply believe your claims

→ **Concrete** evidence makes your proposal unique

Think about your competition

→ Separation from **state-of-the-art**
→ Separation from other ongoing developments in the field
Individual grants

We know about ambition.
The ERC stimulates **investigator-driven** frontier research in Europe through competitive funding **across all fields**, on the basis of scientific excellence. Both young and established scientists are eligible for this research programme. Researchers can apply for five different funding schemes:

- ✔ ERC Starting Grant (3-7 years after PhD);
- ✔ ERC Consolidator Grant (7-12 years after PhD);
- ✔ ERC Advanced Grant (10+ years of outstanding track record);
- ✔ ERC Proof of Concept Grant (ERC awardees);
- ✔ ERC Synergy Grant (consortium of PIs)

**FOR WHAT?**
Groundbreaking, high-risk high-gain academic research

**FOR WHOM?**
Both young and established researchers, as well as consortia of PIs with different levels of experience (SyG)

**Deadlines**
- StG: ~ Oct 2023
- CoG: ~ Feb 2024
- AdG: 23 May 2023
- PoC: 21 Sep 2023
- SyG: ~ Nov 2023
European Research Council (ERC) – where to start?

Question → What
Would the answer to the question be incremental or disruptive for the field?

Hypotheses
Are your hypotheses based on recent insights or methodological developments, i.e. is the project timely? Are your hypotheses specific, i.e. are they risky?

Approach → How
Is your approach novel (e.g. novel methods, novel combination of methods or novel application area of methods, i.e. goes beyond the state-of-the-art)?

Can you make a convincing case, that your approach is the most appropriate/feasible way to test your hypotheses?

Are there high dependencies between your experiments or are the results still interesting for the field if e.g. 1 WP is inconclusive?

You → Who
Do you have the needed experience/knowledge to execute the project?

Is there evidence, that the field sees you as (upcoming) expert, e.g. citation of papers, invitations to conferences, co-authorships, etc.?

Have you demonstrated independent, creative thinking, i.e. have you published relevant work without your PhD supervisor or as senior author?
European Research Council (ERC) – what if unsuccessful?

Benefits regardless of success
Forces to answer two critical questions:
• What research questions really interest me?
• What is my unique profile?
→ Gives structure for applications for PI position

Basis for other grant applications
• ERC project criteria (novelty, risky, timely, etc.) are the basic criteria for all other Horizon Europe grants
• Often re-used for national funding programs

Alternative international programmes

EU calls
• ERC SyG, MSCA (PF, DN, COFUND), Horizon Europe RIA, ERA-NET NEURON

Foundations
• NY Stem Cell Foundation- Robertson Neuroscience Investigator Awards: ~$ 1.5 Mil for PIs who have established their own lab within last 6 years

• Brain & Behaviour Research Foundation- Investigator Rewards
  • Young Investigator: up to $70,000 for 2 years
  • Independent Investigator: up to $100,000 for 2 years
  • Distinguished Investigator: up to $100,000 for 1 year

• Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research: $50,000- $2 Mil

• Huntington’s Disease Society of America- HD Human Biology Project: up to $75,000 for 2 years (directed at young Postdocs)

• Wings for Life (Spinal Cord Injury):
  • Individual grant: salary for young researcher for up to 3 years
  • Project research grant: up to EUR 300,000 for 3 years

US/UK funding
• Human Frontier Science Program: 3 years for 2-4 team members (assistants, PhD, Postdocs)

• Wellcome trust (co-applicant): Wellcome Discovery Awards (PI salary for up to 8 years + research costs)
The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellowships is a leading programme in developing talent and advancing exchange of knowledge to foster excellent research. This grant is available to individual researchers who hold a PhD degree. Additionally, they cannot have more than eight years of experience in research from the date of the award of their PhD degree.

- European Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Global Postdoctoral Fellowships

**FOR WHAT?**
Stimulating mobility, research talent and career opportunities

**FOR WHOM?**
Individual researchers who hold a PhD

**Deadline**
13 Sep 2023

**Added benefits for hosting PI**
- High-quality Postdoc for “free”
- Strengthens leadership CV
- Extension of own network
GRANT

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships – where to start?

Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder-specific outreach plan

Include industry/ patients/ etc. directly in project

**Increase impact** of project

Scientific excellence – going beyond the **state-of-the-art**

Feasibility – you only have a short period of time

Results are meaningful/ have potential **outside of academia**

Project

Host(s) offers **unique career perspective**

Combination of **disciplines**

Candidate brings **unique knowledge** to host

**Synergy** candidate & host group
We know about ambition.

Consortium grants
Consortium Grants – new important trends

Topics/ Approaches
Main motivation:
• Healthcare system might collapse
• Europe as technological frontrunner

Translates to:
• Needs to be oriented towards realistic real-world applications (economic and societal feasabile)
• Efficient healthcare: prevention, personalized medicine, healing vs. treatment, smart decision systems
• Digital approaches

Consortium
• Eastern European partners
• Diversity
• Include the whole stakeholder chain
  • social scientists with focus on real-world applications
  • Industry
  • Lobby & policy making
  • End-user
We know about ambition.

Consortium grants – the consortium
Use Hezelburcht’s network, if you are

→ Interested in a call, but have no consortium → possible that we have a consortium in our network

→ Part of a consortium, but search for more partners → possible that we have potential partners in our network
CONSORTIUM GRANT

Building a consortium – finding partners

Academic partners

- No connections
- Contacts from colleagues
- Network from RSO
- Previous collaborators
- Direct contacts

- Conferences == Networking
  - Use Networking features & events
- Join information sessions about call/programme
  - High density of interested parties
- Don’t be afraid to contact people “out of the blue”

Also increases chances of being approached to join as partner
Industrial & societal partners

- Often want to join consortia
- Networking events ➔ e.g. Brain Innovation Days
- Existing connections via university (RSO)
- Hub & lobby organizations: European Brain Council, FENS, Mental Health Europe, etc.
- “Cold” acquisition
Building a consortium – finding partners

Industrial partners – things to consider

- IP & data ownership
- exploitation of results
- Trust between industrial partners
- Budget
- Time (internal processes)
Societal partners – how to utilize them

→ **Co-creation** approach
→ **Data acquisition**

→ **Dissemination/ communication**
  → Professional companies
→ **Lobby**
Elements of Scope and Excellence (call text)

- A)
- B)
- C)
- D)
- E)

Partners
- Partner 1
- Partner 2
- Partner 3
- Partner 4
- Partner 5

→ Every single word in topic text counts
→ Every requirement & cross-cutting element (e.g. digital technologies, social sciences) counts
Working in a consortium during the application phase

**Most common mistakes**

→ Avoidance of **uncomfortable topics** (IP, budget, etc.)

→ Avoidance of **making decisions** → keep in the cycle of pros & cons

→ No clear distribution of **tasks** and **responsibilities**

→ Too little **communication** between WPs → no coherence

**Best practices (no one size fits all)**

→ **Top-down approach** for e.g. budget, IP, etc.

→ Clear **deadlines** for **input**

→ Start with the **WPs** → critical discussions start there

→ Regular meetings between **WP leaders** → **Expectation** management

→ If possible: (external) **project management** team
Consortium grants – the proposal

We know about ambition.
**CONSORTIUM GRANT**

**Excellence – tips & tricks**

**Most common mistakes & best practices**

**Objectives**

- too broad/ not clear: “We aim to improve the life of Parkinson patients”

- **Specific Measurable Acceptable Realistic Timely** : “We aim to bring our technology from TRL 2 to TRL 6 within 5 years, demonstrating increased efficacy in min. 300 patients across Europe”
Most common mistakes & best practices

Methodology

- Project not clear imbedded in the state-of-the-art and other ongoing initiatives: “Our approach is better than current clinical practices”

- Contrast project not only to current practices, but also other initiatives: “Our approach is better than current clinical practices and has advantage X, Y, Z over current initiatives A & B, as well as current technological development C. We work closely with initiative A & B to [describe synergistic effects].”

- Not enough attention to cross-cutting approaches
  - Digital technologies
  - Multi-actor co-creation approach
  - Social Sciences & Humanities
Most common mistakes & best practices

Pathway towards impact

- **Mid-term and long-term goals** too vague and too unrealistic: “Potentially all patients will benefit from our technology”

- **Quantifiable outcomes & targets**: “At the end of the project we will have [describe clear deliverables, e.g. PoC of prototype, validated model, etc.]. Partner X and Y are dedicated to further develop our technology to reach market introduction/ clinical certification within 2 years after the project in at least 3 European countries, reaching >30.000 patients.”
Most common mistakes & best practices

Pathway towards impact

• **Requirements** and **barriers** often ignored
• **Theory of change**
**Most common mistakes & best practices**

**Dissemination, Communication & Exploitation**

- Strategies are not **stakeholder-specific**: focus points differ
- **One-way** communication: get **feedback** from stakeholders
- No way to **evaluate** strategy: make quantifiable (mid-)targets
- **Policy makers** often neglected – make specific deliverables
Most common mistakes & best practices

- **WPs** are not appropriately **interlinked** — reference between WPs and create a PERTH

- **Deliverables & Milestones** are not in line with **Excellence & Impact** — deliver on what you promise

- **Partners** are too **dominant** (e.g. WP leaders come from 2-3 universities)

- No appropriate **risks** and **mitigation measures** — needs a mix of low, medium & high risks
Consortium grants – upcoming calls of interest

We know about ambition.
Upcoming calls of interest:

**HORIZON-HLTH-2024-STAYHLTH-01-02-two-stage:** Towards a holistic support to children and adolescents’ health and care provisions in an increasingly digital society.
Deadline: 19.09.2023 (first stage)/ 11.04.2024 (second stage)

**HORIZON-HLTH-2024-STAYHLTH-01-05-two-stage:** Personalised prevention of noncommunicable diseases - addressing areas of unmet needs using multiple data sources.
Deadline: 19.09.2023 (first stage)/ 11.04.2024 (second stage)

**HORIZON-HLTH-2024-DISEASE-03-13-two-stage:** Validation of fluid-derived biomarkers for the prediction and prevention of brain disorders.
Deadline: 19.09.2023 (first stage)/ 11.04.2024 (second stage)

**HORIZON-HLTH-2024-DISEASE-03-14-two-stage:** Tackling high-burden for patients, under-researched medical conditions.
Deadline: 19.09.2023 (first stage)/ 11.04.2024 (second stage)

**HORIZON-CL3-2023-DRS-01-03:** Enhanced citizen preparedness for disaster response and health emergencies.
Deadline: 23.11.2023 (single stage)

**HORIZON-HLTH-2024-TOOL-11-02:** Bio-printing of living cells for regenerative medicine.
Deadline: 11.04.2024

**HORIZON-HLTH-2024-TOOL-05-06:** Innovative non-animal human-based tools and strategies for biomedical research.
Deadline: 19.09.2023 (first stage)/ 11.04.2024 (second stage)

**HORIZON-CL4-2024-RESILIENCE-01-36:** Advanced biomaterials for the Health Care.
Deadline: 07.02.2024 (first stage)/ 24.09.2024 (second stage)
Expected outcomes beyond effective biomarkers

1) Have or create a strong bio-behavioural model, that allows the tool to be integrated into personalized approaches→ Do not only look at biological mechanisms but integrate them with social and behavioural characteristics.

The scientific and clinical communities make effective use of state-of-the-art information, data, technologies, tools and best practices to underpin the development of the diagnostics, and as such can also facilitate the development of effective therapeutics and/or preventive strategies.

The scientific and clinical communities advance the field through a better understanding of mechanisms underlying brain disorders at the molecular, cellular and systemic level.

Sex and gender aspects, age, socio-economic, lifestyle and behavioural factors should be taken into consideration in the study.
Expected outcomes beyond effective biomarkers

2) Have a concrete strategy for how the data & technology is widely made available for other developments → Integration with other running projects targeted at treatment and prevention. Include SMEs.

The scientific and clinical communities make effective use of state-of-the-art information, data, technologies, tools and best practices to underpin the development of the diagnostics, and as such can also facilitate the development of effective therapeutics and/or preventive strategies.

The scientific and clinical community make wide use of newly established and where relevant open access databases and/or integrate them with existing infrastructures for storage and sharing of collected data according to FAIR principles, thereby encouraging further use of the data.

SME participation is encouraged.
Expected outcomes beyond effective biomarkers

3) Have a strong societal link and co-creator approach include patient organizations, policy makers/ lobby groups, first line healthcare professionals, SMEs etc. Include a theory of change model for each stakeholder. Include HTA experts and Social Sciences.

Policymakers, funders, scientific and clinical communities, patient organisations, regulators and other relevant bodies are informed of the research advances made, while health professionals envisage use of the biomarker tests for early detection of the disorder and for guiding patients in the selection of personalised treatments/interventions.

Patients and caregivers are sufficiently engaged with the research, which also caters for their needs.

Sex and gender aspects, age, socio-economic, lifestyle and behavioural factors should be taken into consideration in the study.

To enable the management of brain disorders, consideration should be made in demonstrating the gained cost efficiency.
The current European Innovation Council (EIC) has been established under the Horizon Europe programme. It is one of the flagship innovation programmes that helps identify, develop and scale up groundbreaking technologies and game changing innovations. The EIC programmes are:

- **EIC Pathfinder** (directed at academia)
- **EIC Transition** (directed at ERC PoC and EIC Pathfinder/ FET Open awardees)
- **EIC Accelerator** (directed at SMEs)

### FOR WHAT?
State-of-the-art technologies and innovations

### FOR WHOM?
Ambitious researchers and innovators

### Deadlines
- Pathfinder: ~March 2024
- Transition: 27 Sep 2023
- Accelerator: 4 Oct 2023
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) is the leading programme in developing talent and advancing research. The programme is aimed at improving 'human research potential' by offering (post)doctoral training and funding for excellent researchers at any career stage:

- ✔ Doctoral Networks: Financing of 10-15 PhDs
- ✔ COFUND: Up to 10 Mil EUR funding per project – ~20-50 PhDs/ Postdocs

→ Extremely high importance of including non-academic partners in the training

**FOR WHAT?**
Stimulating research talent and career opportunities

**FOR WHOM?**
Organisations, companies and knowledge institutes who want to employ researchers

**Deadlines**
- Doctoral Networks: 28 Nov 2023
- COFUND: 8 Feb 2024
Thank you!
Get in touch: n.dehaas@hezelburcht.com

We know about ambition.