Cómo preparar una propuesta ERC ~~competitiva~~ a la altura de la idea

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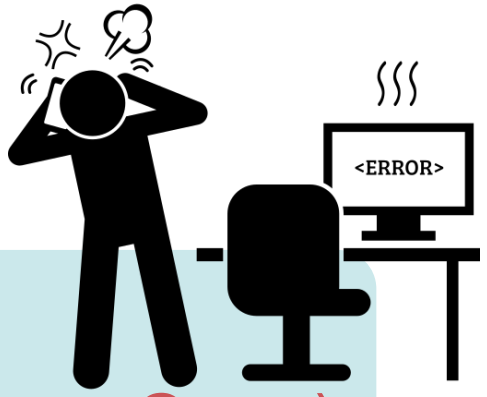
Novelties WP 2026 (IV) – New Proposal Structure



- New Proposal Structure:
  - Scientific Proposal Part I (<= five pages)
  - Scientific Proposal Part II (<= seven pages/ten for Synergy Grant)
- CV and Track Record (<= four pages)
- Resources and Time Commitment: up to two pages (>two pages for Synergy Grant)
- Annex of Running Grants/Grant Applications in Progress (does not count toward page limit)

Scientific Proposal (StG, CoG and AdG – 2026)

Part II should not be a repetition of Part I

	Part I (5 pages)	Part II (7 pages)
Objective	To convince the evaluation panel that the proposal presents an **original and creative idea** addressing an **important scientific question**, with the potential to **advance the frontiers of knowledge**	Explain **how** the project will be implemented in detail.
Content	- State of the knowledge - Scientific question and objectives - Overall approach or research strategy - *Expected contribution to the field*	- Detailed methodology - Work plan and timeline - Risk assessment and mitigation - Additional background (if needed)
Tone	- Visionary, conceptual, persuasive: focused on scientific ambition, without technical detail.	- Precise, technical, and implementation-focused — aimed at experts in the field.

** Assumed by the Spanish NCPs*

Research strategy (Part I) vs. Methodology (Part II)

B1

Purpose: : Convince the panel that your idea is original, ambitious, and scientifically sound.

- Style: **Concise, clear, accessible to non-specialists**
- What to include:
  - Overview of the **scientific approach**.
  - **Preliminary evidence** (own data, pilots, key publications).
  - **Added value** compared to the SoA and the competitors.
  - **General risk** evaluation and how you plan to address them.
  - **Key collaborations** that contribute capacity (without detailing contracts).
- **What to avoid:** Technical or methodological detail (this belongs in Part II)

B2

Purpose: Show that you have thought **thoroughly** about how to execute each part of the project.

- Style: **Technical, rigorous, detailed**, for experts in your field.
- What to include:
  - Refer back to the objectives in Part I and focus on how your methods will achieve them. No need to restate them.
  - Detailed design of the work plan (packages, tasks, schedule).
  - Specific methods you will use at each stage.
  - Methodological justification (why those methods?).
  - Technical and human resources required.
  - More specific risk evaluation and contingency plans.
  - Collaboration details: roles, contributions, planned agreements.
- **What to avoid:** Selling the idea as if it were a pitch. This section should demonstrate technical expertise

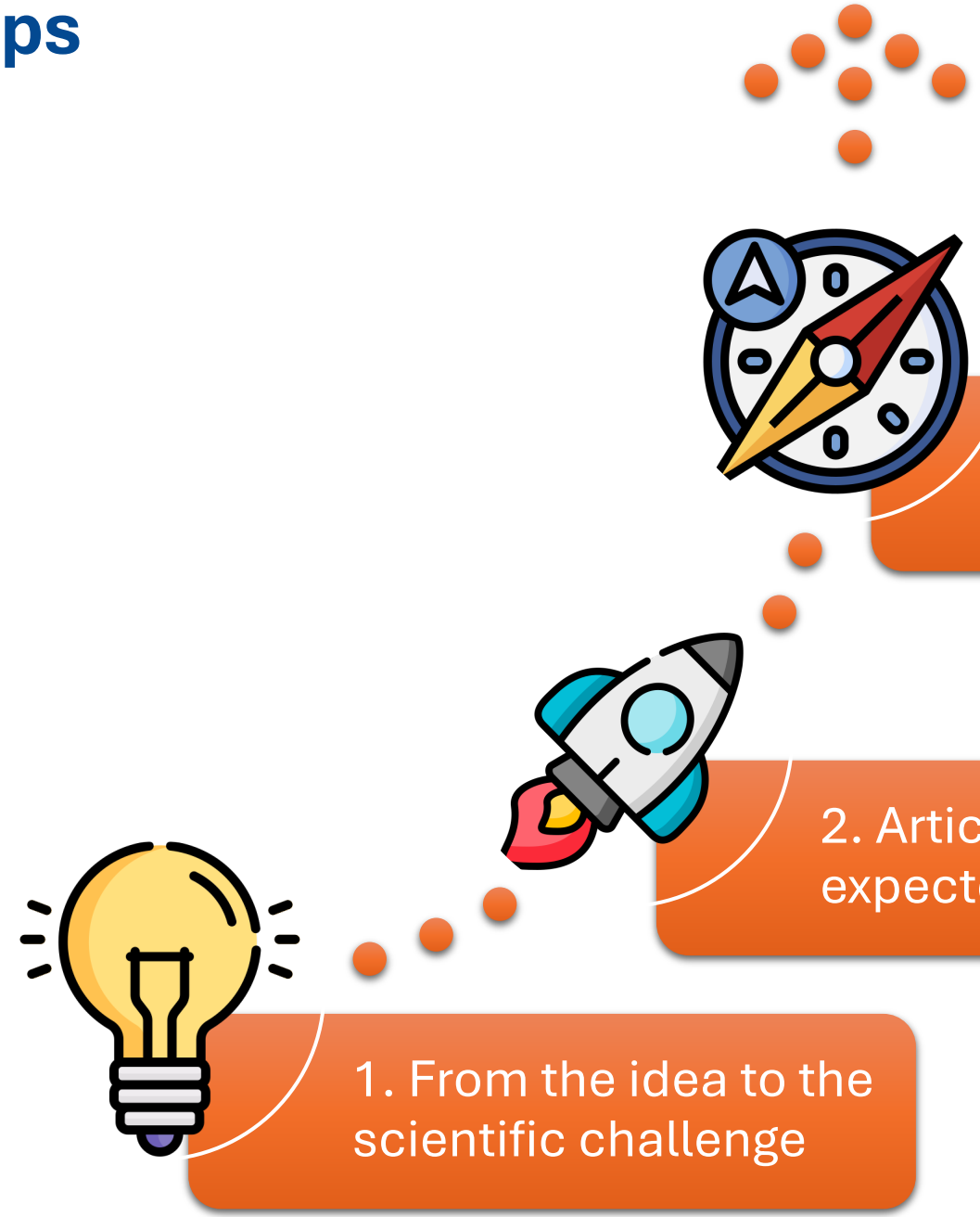
Practical Tips

Understanding the ERC Evaluation Process

Write your proposal so that a few experts can defend it and the full panel can support it

- Each ERC panel includes 12–18 members, collectively covering all disciplines represented by the panel's keywords.
- In Step 1, your proposal is read in detail by 2–3 panel members—those most familiar with your field.
- If you reach Step 2, it means you've convinced those experts (during the interview and final discussion)
- There are no quotas by discipline: all proposals compete equally, regardless of topic.

First Steps



1. From the idea to the scientific challenge

2. Articulating the expected advance

3. Building the initial scientific approach

1. From the idea to the scientific challenge

What characterizes a strong ERC research question?

- Starts from a **conceptual gap**, not a technical limitation.
- A question **simple to state, difficult to answer**
- If solved, **it changes how we understand a phenomenon**.

Quick test: Is my idea ERC-level?

- Which assumption/framework does it challenge?
- What new hypothesis are you putting on the table?
- Why has this not been tackled convincingly yet?
- Which panel experts would defend its importance?

How to write it in Part I

- Explain the **conceptual gap in 2–3 sentences**.
- Formulate the **central scientific question clearly and ambitiously.**
- **Add a one-line credibility check**: the “green shoots” that show feasibility
- (Optional and field-dependent) Briefly clarify why your approach or perspective makes the **question timely or ripe for progress** — only if this actually strengthens the case.?

2. Articulating the expected advance

What “transformative, not incremental” means?

- **Advancing the frontiers** = a conceptual shift that opens new lines of research.
- Not “doing more” but **reframing** how the field thinks/asks/tests.
- And/or … creating **new connections** between ideas, methods, or fields.

Quick test: Is the expected advance truly transformative?

- Will this enable research that would **not happen otherwise?**
- Does it **remove a conceptual bottleneck** in the field?
- Who else is tackling this globally, and **why does your route have more transformative potential?**
- After this project, what will the **community** be able to think/test/explain that is impossible today?

How to write it in Part I

- Short subsection: **Expected Contribution to the Field.**
- Map **each objective → the specific conceptual advance** it enables.
- Name the **bottleneck & competitors’ routes** and state why your conceptual path is the best bet.
- Close with **credibility** (preliminary results): ambition supported by early evidence.

3. Building the initial scientific approach

What characterizes a strong conceptual approach in Part I?

- A clear **scientific logic** linking the research question → objectives → conceptual leap.
- A justification of **why this intellectual route** can unlock a transformation in the field.
- Focus on **ideas and reasoning**, not technical execution (methods belong in Part II).
- Shows **how you think scientifically** and why your route is more promising than existing ones.
- Supported by early evidence ("green shoots") that make the conceptual leap **credible**, not speculative.

Quick test: Is the approach strong?

- Can you describe the chain of reasoning with **"zero technical detail"?**
- Do the objectives form a **coherent intellectual progression**?
- Are the **conceptual risks** identified and addressed?
- Do you state the **types of evidence** needed to validate the idea?
- Does your conceptual route **offer more transformative** potential than competitors' approaches?

How to write it in Part I (no methods)

- **Make the reasoning explicit**: show the logical pathway from the question to the anticipated conceptual shift.
- **Organize the narrative around steps of thought**, not tasks or methods.
- **Indicate the types of evidence** that would support or challenge your reasoning (conceptual, empirical, theoretical).
- **Explain briefly why your reasoning is more promising** than existing approaches in the field.
- (SyG) Describe the **intellectual interdependence between PIs** — how their conceptual contributions unlock the transformation together.

Summarizing

Everything starts with a big question

A question that challenges the status quo and seeks to expand the frontiers of knowledge

Ambition = conceptual advance, not complexity

ERC rewards ideas that change how we understand a phenomenon

Excellence lies also in the “how”

A coherent, rigorous strategy shows leadership and feasibility

Your voice and vision matter

The panel wants to see the creative mind behind the project

In SyG, synergy drives discovery

Synergy arises from combining perspectives to achieve what no single team could.

Final recommendations

Think in two complementary parts: Part I (Vision) & Part II (implementation)

Be clear, concrete and persuasive: avoid jargon, justify claims, show your voice

Ambition = reframing how the field thinks (not doing more) supported by early evidence.

Transformative impact: open new research avenues, inspire others, etc.

Build trust with the panel: show leadership, coherence and execution capacity.

Gracias