



## **ERC Support Scheme 2021**

### **Rules for Participation – Non-State Aid**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST) for and on behalf the Foundation for Science and Technology is receiving proposals under the ERC Support Scheme (“The Scheme”). The Scheme aims to strengthen the opportunities for talented researchers to obtain grants from the ERC (European Research Council) for excellent and ground-breaking research based on researchers’ own ideas within all areas of research. The Scheme is divided into two options. Applicants are to fill in the appropriate sections of the form; they may select either Option A or Option B, or both:

### **i) Option A: Mentoring initiative**

The mentoring initiative will support potential ERC applicants by helping to identify international experts to provide coaching and advice.

Applicants interested to benefit from the [ERC Mentoring Initiative](#) are to indicate their interest and detail the mentoring activities they require. An expected workload and envisaged compensations for the mentors are to be specified. Following the external evaluation and upon approval of the application, MCST (the Council) will notify ERCEA with the mentoring activities required. ERCEA identifies grantees and former panel members interested in being mentors. ERCEA will then provide a list of such Mentors to the Council.

The maximum cost for Option A should be €5000.

This Scheme is developed fully in line and supports the requirements listed in the [ERC Guidelines](#).

The ERC support will consist of identifying ERC grantees and former panel members who could serve as external mentors to help national programmes. Such support will help the selected candidates to strengthen the quality of their application.

The ERC underlines that the decision for mentors to accept or otherwise the offer from the applicants, is entirely with the mentors. ERC will not intervene in the assignment of a

specific mentor to a specific mentee. The mentors will be contacted by the Council as MCST is the official contact entity for ERC and the Horizon Europe programme.

Mentors that agree to participate will be potentially ready to start the activities around end of summer 2021 for the 1<sup>st</sup> call launched in June 2021.

**ii) Option B: Proposal writing trainings.**

The objective of this activity is to raise the capabilities of potential ERC candidates to prepare successful ERC grant applications through attending ERC proposal writing trainings.

The training activities may take place in any EU Member State or Associated Country physically or online. The trainers must have extensive experience and proven track record in running ERC workshops and helping successful ERC grantees. The duration of the physical trainings should be of minimum 1 day and maximum 5 days. No restrictions apply for the online trainings.

The scheme is not to be used for organisation of trainings and workshops in Malta.

The maximum cost for Option B should be €2000.

## **2.0 Definitions**

- **Applicant** means anyone eligible to apply in terms of these Rules for Participation and who consequently applies for funding under this scheme.
- **Arm's length** means that the conditions of the transaction between the contracting parties do not differ from those which would be stipulated between independent enterprises and contain no element of collusion. Any transaction that results from an open, transparent and non-discriminatory procedure is considered as meeting the arm's length principle. Having family ties or a personal relationship between the service provider and the applicant will lead to a breach of the arm length principle.
- **Candidate** shall have the meaning of the ERC Principal Investigator who will apply for the ERC Grant.
- **Council** refers to the Malta Council for Science and Technology.

- **ERC Grants:** any of the following - Starting Grant, Consolidator Grant, Advanced Grant, Synergy Grant and Proof of Concept. More information is available [here](#).
- **Host Institution** may be any legal entity in Malta (public or private), which has the infrastructure and capacity to carry out frontier research projects. In ERC grants, the Host Institution is the only participating entity (single beneficiary) and it engages and hosts the Principal Investigator and the research team for at least the duration of the grant, under the condition that a formal commitment is made by the Host Institution to provide the Principal Investigator with the appropriate scientific and administrative environment to conduct the research.
- **Public Entity** is any Ministry, Department, Entity, Authority, Public Commission, Public Sector Foundation, or similar organisation that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and that exercises public power, or else acts in its own capacity as public authority, where the activity in question forms part of the essential function of the State or is connected with those functions by its nature, its aim and the rules to which it is subject. However, the classification of a particular entity as an undertaking depends entirely on the nature of its activities, and the overriding criterion of consideration is whether it carries out an economic activity or not, e.g. an entity that is formally part of the public administration may nevertheless have to be regarded as an undertaking within the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty. Thus, an entity that carries out both economic and non-economic activities is to be regarded as an undertaking only with regards to the former. In this case, if the economic activity can be separated from the exercise of public powers, then that entity acts as an undertaking in relation to that activity and the financing, the costs and the revenues of that economic activity shall be accounted for separately from the other non-commercial activities. If an economic activity cannot be separated from the exercise of public power, the activities exercised by that entity as a whole, remain connected with the exercise of those public powers and therefore fall outside the notion of an undertaking.
- **Research and knowledge-dissemination organisation** means an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities the financing, the costs and the

revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, in the quality of, for example, shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the results generated by it.

- **Research and Development** is defined as the systematic investigation, work or research carried out in any field of science or technology through experiment, theoretical work or analysis undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes:

a) **Fundamental Research** means experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial application or use in view.

b) **Industrial Research** means the planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services. It comprises the creation of components parts of complex systems and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation.

c) **Experimental Development** means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services. This may also include, for example, activities aiming at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes or services.

Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real-life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product, and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes. Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements.

- **Principal Investigator** is the project leader of the ERC project. He/she can be of any age and nationality and can be based in any country at moment of submitting the application, as long as he/she intends to establish and conduct their research activity under the ERC Grant in Malta. Specific professional experience is requested for each ERC Grant and detailed in the [ERC Annual Work Programme](#) and on the [ERC website](#).

### **3.0 Eligibility Criteria**

Maltese entities that plan to act as Host Institutions are eligible to benefit from the Scheme. The Applicant must be an entity registered as one of the following:

- Public research and knowledge-dissemination organisation whose main activities are education which is not offered for remuneration and independent research organisation whose results are widely disseminated on a non-discriminatory basis.**
- Public entity that does not offer goods or services on a market for remuneration.**

Applicants who have other funded projects with the Council and are in default, and/or have gone beyond the timelines of the project, are not eligible to participate.

Any application submitted by or including the participation of any legal person or legal entity having, in totality or in majority ownership, the same shareholders, partners or persons holding and / or exercising a controlling power in any other legal entity which will have been at any time prior to such application declared as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered into with the Council, shall be automatically declared as inadmissible.

Funding under this Scheme is made available on the basis that the Applicant has not benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same scope as that subject of the funding requested under this Scheme.

For a proposal to be eligible, the Candidate that intends to submit an ERC proposal with the Applicant legal entity as a Host Institution must:

- have a doctoral degree awarded and meets the eligibility requirements for the selected ERC type of grant;
- be employed by the Applicant legal entity/Host Institution or have established contact with the Applicant legal entity/Host entity which has agreed to host the candidate.

- not or have not been an ERC grantee;
- act as a Principal Investigator (PI) applying for the ERC grant.
- submit, within 12 months from the conclusion of the mentoring and/or training activity a proposal for an ERC grant (Starting, Consolidator, Advanced or Synergy) to finance research planned to be conducted in a Maltese Host Institution. Proof of Concept (PoC) call is not eligible.

#### **4.0 Conflict of Interest**

Applications are to be fully in line with the ERC's rules of conflicts of interest which can be found [here](#).

For the avoidance of doubt, a conflict of interest (COI) shall exist if the trainer/mentor/Host Researcher

- is a director / trustee / partner of the Applicant or involved in the management of the Applicant entity or is an employee of the same entity, or is otherwise related (by consanguinity or affinity) to the Candidate.

A conflict of interest (COI) exists for Option B if the trainer;

- is involved in the preparation of the ERC proposal;
- Is the Host Entity in the ERC proposal to be submitted to the European Commission.
- stands to benefit directly if the proposal is positively evaluated. Providing market research information to the applicant will not be considered a COI.
- has a family / personal relationship with any person representing an applicant
- is a director / trustee / partner of the applicant or involved in the management of the applicant's entity or is an employee of the same entity.

If it emerges that the chosen training service has a conflict of interest as explained in the previous clause, the beneficiary cannot use their services and must choose a different consultant.

#### **5.0 Financing**

The Applicant is invited to provide a breakdown of the anticipated costs to carry out the proposed activities as part of the MCST 'ERC Support Scheme Application Form'. MCST reserves the right

to request the reduction of any amount quoted by the Applicant should this be considered as being over-estimated.

The amount of the award available under the Scheme (the “**Award**”) to any one successful Applicant is capped at €5000 for Option A and €2000 for Option B. A maximum €7000 can be requested per candidate. A detailed breakdown of the estimated costs is to be included in the application form.

The financing will be provided to the Host Institution as follows:

- 40% pre-financing, following the Grant Agreement signature;
- 40% to be disbursed following submission of final report, including invoices and receipts; and
- 20% to be disbursed following successful submission of an ERC proposal.

The Host Entity Institution will receive the funds to finance the training/mentoring fees for the Candidate, including the funds to cover the costs of their stay abroad, if foreseen.

Failure to submit an ERC proposal within 12 months from the date of the completion of the activity will result in a requirement to return 50% of the funds awarded to the research Host Institution in pursuant to the Call, unless MCST agrees otherwise.

**Eligible costs:**

**For Option A:**

- Mentoring costs such as fees
- flights for travel related to the mentoring initiative (the total amount for each flight should be estimated as costing no more than €500 for EU countries and €1000 for non-EU countries and should be an economy class ticket);
- travel insurance; airport transfers; subsistence allowance (inclusive of accommodation)

**For Option B:**

- online ERC trainings/workshop fees;

- fees for attending physical ERC trainings/workshops
  - flights for travel related to the training (the total amount for each flight should be estimated as costing not more than €500 for EU countries and €1000 for non-EU countries and should be an economy class ticket);
  - travel insurance; airport transfers; and subsistence allowance (inclusive of accommodation) - when subsistence costs are calculated the local entity's pre-approved subsistence allowances should be used;

Expenses related to loans, interests and recoverable value added tax are considered as ineligible costs.

The Applicant must follow applicable procurement regulations and the Council can request evidence that the services were good value for money. eg. quotations, , etc.

Award holders/ERC candidates will be responsible for arranging all relevant activities including, but not limited to, travel plans, accommodation, logistics planning, insurance coverage for any participant travel, etc. The Applicant should provide an estimated breakdown of the anticipated costs to carry out the project's activities in the application form.

**No double funding** is permitted for the **same** activities carried out under the Scheme and in conjunction with other schemes.

## **6.0 Submission of Application Form**

The Scheme will open twice in 2021 - in June and October/November 2021.

Interested Applicants are to submit their application form electronically to [horizon.malta@gov.mt](mailto:horizon.malta@gov.mt) with "ERC Support Scheme - Application 2021" as a subject heading by not later than noon (CET) of 20<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

The application must be dated and signed by the Candidate and the legal representative of the Applicant. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

Submissions should include the following documents:

- ‘ERC Support Scheme Application Form’ in such template format as published by MCST in connection with the Call.
- For Option B quotation for the training event/s

It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure the timely and correct delivery of the application form to MCST. It should be noted that emails larger than **6MB** will be automatically rejected by the mail system. The Applicant may make use of data transfer via cloud storage for the purpose of the application.

## **7.0 Selection Process**

Eligible applications will be assessed by a selection panel set up by the Council against the following criteria:

- Research achievements of the Candidate;
- Excellence of the ERC proposed project idea (project’s brief) and relevance to the pre-identified call topic.
- For Option B Proven track record of the ERC proposed trainer/s.

Proposals are subject to an eligibility check and a peer review.

Priority will be given to well-defined proposals which demonstrate increased odds of success for securing third party-funding or which demonstrate a clear benefit to enhancing the international dimension of local research & innovation activity.

## **8.0 Award Duration**

Upon successful completion of the evaluation stage, it may be necessary for MCST to negotiate the amount of the Award requested in the application form. MCST retains the right to provide Awards of a different sum should the amount in the ‘breakdown of costs’ appears to have been overestimated.

The deadline for completion of the projects/activities funded under the Award is 12 months from the starting date on the applicable grant agreement, although projects may be completed within a shorter period. Upon completion of the activities/projects, the Applicant is to submit a final report within 30 days according to a standard template provided by MCST. The final report will need to be accompanied by all relevant documentation, including receipts demonstrating how the Award was spent. MCST retains the right to audit the financial documentation and to request further proof of expenditure of the Award. Should there be a significant discrepancy between the sum of the Award disbursed by MCST and the amount spent by the applicant (as substantiated through receipts or other financial documentation) MCST retains the right to request a reimbursement of unspent funds.

Any requests for change of use of the Award should be addressed in writing to [horizon.malta@gov.mt](mailto:horizon.malta@gov.mt). Such request needs to receive consent from MCST prior to being effected. Requests for the extension of an Award needs to be sent by a formal letter from the Applicant at least 2 months before the deadline of the applicable grant agreement. The Council will review the request and reply within 2 weeks from the date of receipt of the said request. Requests for an extension cannot be for more than 3 months. Applicants are reminded of the importance of retaining all documents proving expenditure of the awarded funds for submission with the final report.

## **9.0 Correspondence**

Successful applicants will be required to communicate to [horizon.malta@gov.mt](mailto:horizon.malta@gov.mt) and to Lili Kankaya at [lili.vasileva@gov.mt](mailto:lili.vasileva@gov.mt) at MCST regularly of any direct or indirect outputs resulting from the Award during and beyond the lifetime of the Scheme.

Successful Applicants are also required to submit a detailed report on the activities undertaken under the Award within thirty days from the date of completion of the activities funded by the Scheme. For those activities extending for the full duration of this Scheme (i.e. one year from the starting date on the grant agreement), final reports should be submitted to MCST by no later than 30 days from the said starting date. MCST reserves the right to take any necessary legal action should such reporting not be submitted.

Reference to the Award under the Scheme should be made on any publication, marketing or PR material that is generated in relation to the project or activity undertaken.

## **10.0 Confidentiality of Submissions**

Unless otherwise indicated, all application submissions shall be treated in strict confidence.

The data collected by the Council via the application for the aid and its subsequent processing by the Council to evaluate data subject's request for aid under the Scheme is in line with:

- i. The National Rules for Participation;
- ii. Data Protection Act, Chapter 586 of the Laws of Malta and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).
- iii. The legitimate basis to process personal data submitted by the data subject by virtue of his/her written application for aid is Regulation 6 (1)(b) of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as 'processing is necessary in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract'.

## **11.0 Further Information**

For further information on the Scheme or the ERC, please send an email to [horizon.malta@gov.mt](mailto:horizon.malta@gov.mt) or to:

Lili Kankaya  
Senior Executive  
Framework Programmes Unit  
Email: [lili.vasileva@gov.mt](mailto:lili.vasileva@gov.mt)