



European Research Council
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Press release

**ERC Synergy Grants:
13 exceptional research projects awarded up to €15 million each**

18 December 2013

The European Research Council (ERC) today announced the winners of 13 Synergy Grants, who will share a total of €150 million. The projects, at the crossroads of many disciplines, will receive funding of up to €15 million each for the coming six years. Each project brings together two to four outstanding researchers, which means that 45 scientists based in 11 countries are supported through these prestigious grants. This is the second competition for ERC Synergy Grants, which is a pilot scheme introduced in 2011 by the ERC Scientific Council.

The selected researchers will explore a wide variety of topics in all disciplines. The projects include: creating the first ever picture of a black hole; addressing the future of Internet security; evaluating the environmental impact of the lack of phosphorous; and developing new instruments for non-invasive eye treatments. (Read [more](#))

European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science Máire Geoghegan-Quinn commented: *"You have to take risks to get exceptional results. ERC Synergy Grants invest in remarkable research, bringing together top-notch scientists. These projects will push the frontiers of our knowledge. That's exactly the type of science that we need if we are to make Europe more innovative and globally competitive."*

On this occasion, ERC President Helga Nowotny said: *"The eagerly awaited outcome of the second ERC Synergy Grant has yielded some truly exciting science among the 13 projects selected. Applicants have understood well that 'Synergy' entails the unique combination of individual skills and knowledge, often crossing disciplinary boundaries in exceptionally innovative ways. The results prove that the strength of the Synergy Grant lies in enabling up to four top scientists to jointly tackle a challenging problem where none of them could succeed alone. The Scientific Council will soon carefully assess its experience with this innovative pilot scheme."*

The projects selected unite 45 researchers of 14 different nationalities, based in 11 countries in the European Research Area. Two of them are returning to Europe (Germany) from the US with their new grant. All in all, 12 are based in Germany, seven in Spain, six in the UK, four in both France and Switzerland, and three in both Hungary and the Netherlands. Denmark, Norway, Austria and Belgium also host grantees. In this call, researchers from an unusually wide range of career stages are awarded grants, with ages ranging from 34 to 74 years old.

Compared to the first Synergy Grant competition, participation in this call was more in line with the expectations of the ERC Scientific Council: just under 450 applications were submitted, compared to over 700 in 2012. Overall, the research community now seems to



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have a good understanding of the spirit and objectives of this scheme. After a two-step evaluation procedure, specifically designed for this purpose, the 13 projects were selected for funding. The success rate rose to 3%, from last year's 1.5%.

In contrast to consortia, which are funded by other parts of EU research programmes, the ERC Synergy Grant targets individual investigators whose complementary skills, knowledge and resources enable them to take risks that can lead to exceptional results. The Synergy Grant allows unique results to happen by bringing together the right kind of scientists at the right time, in the right configuration, to work on the right kind of question.

A limited part of the overall ERC budget (around 10%) is used for this initiative, while the core-business of ERC funding is dedicated to individual researchers. There will be no call for Synergy Grant under the 2014 Work Programme. The ERC Scientific Council will analyse the pilot phase of this grant scheme before deciding on future calls.

Full [list of results](#) for the 2013 Synergy Grant call

(All projects and researchers selected for funding)

[DISCOVER SOME PROJECTS](#) selected in this call

Note to the editors

As an addition to the ERC's core funding schemes (Starting Grants, Consolidator Grants and Advanced Grants), the ERC Synergy Grant scheme was introduced by the Scientific Council in 2011 as a pilot scheme. The first call was published in October 2011 and the second in October 2012. In this latest call, a Synergy Grant is on average worth €11.5 million, but can go up to €15 million. Several of the 13 selected proposals are crossing the boundaries of established disciplines. Six projects are mainly in the Physical Sciences and Engineering domain (but some range over into Life Sciences or Social Sciences), five in the Life Sciences, (including several with challenging developments and approaches from Physical Sciences) and two in the Social Sciences and Humanities.

ERC Synergy Grants in detail:

- Bottom-up, investigator-driven approach. Funding pioneering frontier research in any field.
- Interdisciplinarity is not a requirement, be it within domains or cross-domain, but it is expected that many projects will have this feature.
- The funding per grant is a maximum of €15 million for a period up to 6 years (pro rata for projects of shorter duration)
- Calls for proposals: published annually with one deadline
- Groups applying for the ERC Synergy Grant must be made up of a minimum of two and a maximum of four Principal Investigators (PIs) and their teams. One of the PIs acts as the 'Corresponding PI' on behalf of the group.
- Coming from different institutions does not provide neither an advantage nor a disadvantage for PIs. What matters is that the PIs demonstrate that the synergy is indispensable for the success of the project.



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Set up in 2007 by the European Union, the **European Research Council** aims to stimulate scientific excellence in Europe by encouraging competition for funding between the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age based in the European Research Area. The ERC operates according to an "investigator-driven", or "bottom-up", approach, allowing researchers to identify new opportunities in all fields of research.

From 2007 to 2013 under the seventh EU Research Framework Programme (FP7), the ERC's budget was €7.5 billion. Under the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), *Horizon 2020*, the ERC will have a budget of over €13 billion, which is a substantial increase.

Since its launch, the ERC has funded over 4,000 researchers and their frontier research projects and has become a "benchmark" for the competitiveness of national research systems complementing existing funding schemes at national and European levels.

The ERC is composed of a Scientific Council and an Executive Agency. The Scientific Council is made up of 22 top researchers and sets the ERC's scientific strategy. The ERC is led by President Prof. Helga Nowotny and the Scientific Council is represented in Brussels by Secretary General Prof. Donald Dingwell. The ERC Executive Agency implements the "Ideas" programme and is led by Director Pablo Amor.

Links

[European Commission press release](#) (also available in Danish, Dutch, French, German, Hungarian and Spanish)

[ERC website](#)

[Press release on ERC Synergy Grants 2012](#)

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