

SPECIAL TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT FOR INTELLECTUAL SERVICES

**Scientific editing services for research proposals
submitted by applicants to the European Research
Council (ERC) calls for proposals**

CCTP no.: 25PIA025

**Deputy Directorate for Research, Innovation and Technology
Transfer (DGD RIV)**

Fostering Science Programme

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1 - Overview

1.1 Fostering Science programme

Since 2012, the Fostering Science programme has been supporting researchers in the Grenoble-Alpes region who wish to submit a proposal to the European Research Council (ERC). Fostering Science supports researchers throughout the process of preparing for the call for projects, from understanding the ERC's requirements through to preparing for the interview, including project design and the actual submission of the research proposal.

Fostering Science is a project run by the Université Grenoble Alpes (UGA), under the Deputy Directorate for Research, Innovation and Technology Transfer (DGD-RIV), and funded through its IDEX grant. Fostering Science helps to strengthen the appeal of the Grenoble region by supporting the local scientific community in preparing ambitious research projects.

Fostering Science supports scientists wishing to submit an ERC proposal in collaboration with a laboratory based in Grenoble, regardless of the organisation (university or research institution) with which they are affiliated.

Fostering Science's mission is to support researchers who wish to apply for ERC calls with a view to carrying out their research project at an institution in Grenoble. Through its work, Fostering Science helps to encourage applications for European Research Council (ERC) grants within the Grenoble scientific community.

The European Research Council (ERC) is a European programme designed to fund exploratory research projects at the frontiers of knowledge across all fields of science and technology.

The ERC forms part of Horizon Europe, the European framework programme for funding research and innovation. Funding for Horizon Europe and the ERC has been secured for seven years, from 2021 to 2027. The ERC programme will undoubtedly be renewed as part of the new European Framework Programme for 2028-2035.

The services we require must meet the criteria set out by Horizon Europe up to 2030.

A new framework programme for research and innovation funding is expected to be set up for the period from 2028 to 2034. Consequently, if the ERC's conditions change after 2027, the contract may be subject to a review clause (see Article 17 of the CCAP in this regard).

Each year, the ERC launches four types of calls for individual projects and one call for group projects:

Call for projects	Target	Objectives	Project duration	Maximum amount of funding
ERC Starting Grant	Early-career researchers, 0-10 years after completing their PhD	Support for outstanding early-career researchers to help them build their research teams to work on projects involving ambitious and high-risk topics, addressing innovative	5 years	Up to €1,500,000 over 5 years

		scientific challenges or bottlenecks that have not yet been tackled.		
ERC Consolidator Grant (CoG)	Early-career researchers, 5-15 years after completing their PhD	Support for outstanding researchers to help them strengthen their research teams working on projects involving ambitious and high-risk topics, addressing innovative scientific challenges or bottlenecks that have not yet been tackled.	5 years	Up to €2,000,000 for 5 years
ERC Advanced Grant (AdG)	Experienced researchers	Support for outstanding researchers wishing to develop an innovative exploratory research topic that differs significantly from their current scientific activities.	5 years	Up to €2,500,000 over 5 years
ERC Synergy Grant (SyG)	No specific criteria	Support for a small group of 2 to 4 principal researchers aiming to jointly develop an ambitious research project at the frontiers of knowledge, focusing on questions that could not be resolved by individual researchers.	6 years	Up to €10,000,000 over 6 years
ERC Plus Grant	Researchers with an outstanding track record at the forefront of their field	Support for leading researchers in their scientific fields and their teams. Projects aimed at advancing the field or opening up new avenues of research are encouraged	7 years	Up to €7,000,000 over 7 years

1.2 National context

Until 2020, France ranked third in Europe for individual ERC calls. Unfortunately, France has slipped to fourth or fifth place in the most recent calls from 2023 to 2026. There is a noticeable lack of participation by early-career researchers in France. It is also apparent that many researchers are reluctant to apply to ERC calls, which are considered highly competitive, mainly for two reasons: a lack of understanding of what is expected in these calls for projects, and researchers' tendency to underestimate their own ability to be successful applicants.

It is this weakness that Fostering Science aims to address with this initiative. The goal is to support applications from researchers wishing to tackle groundbreaking projects designed to push the boundaries of knowledge in the latest calls under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme (2021-2027) and subsequently for the period 2028-2035.

2 - General conditions for the performance of services

- All services shall be provided exclusively in English, which is the language required for the submission of this type of project.
- Prior to the contract being awarded, the contractor must sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) undertaking to maintain confidentiality, not to disclose any information or documents provided, and not to use artificial intelligence (see Articles 4 and 5 of these CCTP).
- A support timetable must be drawn up and signed before each service is provided for each cohort, as agreed between the contractor and Fostering Science (see also Article 10.4.2 of the CCAP in this regard).
- There shall be no success-based fees.
- The contractor shall draw up a quotation based on this timetable and receive a corresponding purchase order from Fostering Science.
- Fostering Science shall put each researcher in each cohort in touch with the contractor.
- The contractor, in agreement with the researcher, shall draw up a support timetable which must be adhered to.
- The contractor must copy Fostering Science in on all correspondence with researchers.
- The contractor must comply with the conditions of each of the services set out in the Special Technical Specifications (CCTP) and the Special Administrative Specifications (CCAP).

The service must comply with the ERC work programme timetable, starting with the 2027 work programme calls.

For calls for projects under the 2028-2030 programme, the timetable will be adjusted to reflect the publication of the work programmes.

AdG 2026	Janvier - March 2027	Assignment 2
StG 2027	March - June 2027	Assignment 2
CoG 2027	May - September 2027	Assignment 2
AdG 2027	April - August 2027	Assignment 1
	January - March 2028	Assignment 2
SyG 2027	January - May 2027	Assignment 1
	January - April 2028	Assignment 2
ERC Plus 2027	April - September 2027	Assignment 1
	January - April 2028	Assignment 2

3 - Detailed description of the assignments

Before each assignment: Agree on a schedule for your support programme in consultation with Fostering Science and adhere to that schedule.

All assignments shall be carried out remotely.

3.1 Assignment 1: Assistance with writing, revising and proofreading the ERC proposal: phase 1 of the ERC selection process (Section I + Section II)

Objectives:

- Provide a better understanding of the call for projects and help avoid pitfalls: analysing the requirements, understanding the structure of the proposal;
- Provide methodological support, in particular by offering feedback and advice on the various drafts of the different sections of the proposal: Section I and Section II;
- Provide assistance with writing and structuring the application where necessary: writing, reviewing and proofreading the ERC proposal;
- Provide a general review of the two sections of the ERC proposal, while ensuring that the assessors' expectations are met;
- Review CVs and provide advice on how to highlight researchers' relevant experience in line with the proposal and the ERC's expectations;
- Review the proposal against the assessment criteria;
- Ensure that the final version of each proposal is flawless in terms of compliance with ERC requirements, by providing the necessary feedback to improve the document (in terms of both content and form), particularly with regard to the quality of the English.

Expected services for Assignment 1:

Depending on the amount of time the researcher can devote to the ERC proposal, the contractor will offer a greater or lesser level of support based on two indicative fixed-price support packages. The indicative fixed-price packages are used to determine the type of support provided: i) intensive (Service A) or ii) light (Service B). These packages also determine the maximum fee for support services for each researcher.

The indicative fixed-price packages must accurately reflect the contractor's hourly rate, as each service will be paid for based on the number of hours worked, where applicable at half the support rate, and once the service has been completed (see Article 9.1 of the CCAP in this regard). The contractor will have specified in their bid the number of hours required for each type of service.

Service A:

- At least 3 reviews of Section I and 2 reviews of Section II per proposal
- At least 1 one-hour meeting with the researcher to discuss the proposal in person
- Written feedback from the expert to the researcher on their proposal, which must include comments and explanations. The expert's written feedback must be provided within a maximum of one week for each review.

Service B:

- At least 2 reviews of Section I and 1 review of Section II per proposal
- At least 1 one-hour meeting with the researcher to discuss the proposal in person
- Written feedback from the expert to the researcher on their proposal, which must include comments and explanations. The expert's written feedback must be provided within a maximum of one week for each review.

Conditions for the provision of Service A or B:

- The expert must be readily available to researchers, for at least 16 weeks before the submission deadline.
- The contractor may only commence support once it has received the purchase order covering support for the cohort involved in an ERC call.
- For each researcher in each cohort, Fostering Science must give its written approval (by email) to provide the contractor with the researcher's name, the panel and the call to which the proposal relates.
- The support timetable must be agreed between each applicant and the contractor. Fostering Science must be notified before the collaboration begins.
- The contractor undertakes to copy Fostering Science in on all correspondence with researchers.

- The contractor undertakes to provide Fostering Science with a description of its support methodology if it differs from Service A or B. In such cases, Fostering Science must give its approval before support begins.

DELIVERABLES:

- o For each researcher receiving support: written feedback to the researcher on their proposal, which must include comments and explanations, for each review carried out by the expert. For each review, the expert's written feedback must be provided within a maximum of one week from the date the researcher submits the proposal for review.
- o For the Director of Fostering Science: a final written assignment report setting out the current status of the support provided to the cohort comprising all researchers. This report must include the names of the researchers who received support and the number of reviews carried out per section of the proposal.

See also, in this regard, Article 10.1 of the CCAP relating to the submission of deliverables. Fostering Science shall have a maximum of 30 calendar days from receipt of the deliverables to notify the service provider of any breach of contract, specifying the details, or to proceed with payment for the services provided.

3.2 Assignment 2: Individual support for researchers who have progressed to stage 2 of the assessment, to help them prepare for the “question and answer” section of the oral interviews

Objective:

- The expert must train the researchers to answer the assessors' questions clearly and accurately.

Expected services for Assignment 2:

Service C: for applicants who have passed the written selection stage of the ERC assessment only.

The fixed price for Service C corresponds to the maximum amount that Fostering Science will owe the contractor for a full support package (4 hours) per researcher. Depending on the amount of time the researcher can devote to preparing for their ERC interview, the expert will offer support (one-to-one coaching) of up to 4 hours per researcher to practise the questions and answers for the oral part of the ERC selection process. Payment for the service will be made based on the number of hours actually worked once the service has been completed.

Conditions for Service C:

- The contractor must assign, for this second phase, the same expert who provided support to the researcher for Assignment 1 (see also Article 10.3 of the CCAP).
- The expert must be readily available to researchers: *at least* 4 times during the 6 weeks leading up to the date of the oral interview.
- The contractor may only commence support once it has received the purchase order covering support for the cohort involved in the ERC interviews.
- For each researcher in each cohort, Fostering Science must give its written approval (by email) to provide the contractor with the researcher's name, the panel, the call to which the proposal relates and the maximum number of hours of support.
- The support timetable must be agreed between each applicant and the expert, with a maximum number of support hours tailored to each researcher. Fostering Science must be notified before the collaboration begins.
- During the working sessions, the expert must provide the researchers with guidance on managing their stress, response times and unforeseen situations.

DELIVERABLES:

- For each researcher in each cohort, the expert will provide a confidential report to the Director of Fostering Science on the progress of the support provided, following the first session between the researcher and the expert.
- At the end of this assignment, the expert will provide the Director of Fostering Science with a confidential final written assignment report on the current status of the support provided to each of the researchers who have progressed to stage 2 of the assessment. This report must include the names of the researchers who received support, the number of interviews conducted per researcher, and the expert's assessment of the support provided. The aim of this report is to learn from this experience and optimise the process.

See also, in this regard, Article 10.1 of the CCAP relating to the submission of deliverables.

4 - Non-Disclosure Agreement

Prior to the contract being awarded, the contractor shall sign an NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement), which binds them to maintain the confidentiality and non-disclosure of all information and documents provided concerning the researchers and their projects. The contractor undertakes to maintain the confidentiality of all documents provided to it in connection with all the services covered by the contract, and further undertakes not to disclose them to any artificial intelligence software.

Article 5: Minimum skills required for experts responsible for supporting researchers

Fostering Science is looking for experts with experience in assisting with writing and/or assessing ERC proposals.

Experts must be able to adhere to the Fostering Science timetable, which is itself aligned with the ERC timetable, and must ensure that all information relating to the project proposals submitted to them remains confidential and is not disclosed. Experts must be able to carry out their assessments, comments and revisions without disclosing the content of the project proposals, either in whole or in part, to third parties or to programs. Experts must not delegate scientific editing tasks - such as reviewing proposals or even parts of proposals - to artificial intelligence as part of their work in supervising and supporting researchers.

The team responsible for delivering the service must have proven experience in organising and managing this type of activity or similar activities.

The expert (or experts) responsible for supporting researchers must, *at the very least*:

- Be available and qualified to carry out both support assignments for the same ERC proposal
- Provide personalised support: one expert per ERC proposal (the same expert provides support for both Sections I and II)
- Have a level of English that is either that of a native speaker or C2 equivalent (Master's degree taught in English, or equivalent as a minimum; or have studied for at least three years at an English-speaking institution or in an English-speaking country, starting from at least the second year of higher education; or have published at least five articles or one book in English in their original version)
- Educational qualifications for experts: PhD
- Experience in supporting ERC proposals
- The contractor undertakes to provide Fostering Science with a description of its support methodology, including an estimated breakdown of the time required. This may vary depending on the panel or project category.

Article 6: Minimum skills required for the Contract Manager

The team responsible for delivering the service must have proven experience in organising and managing this type of activity or similar activities. The contractor must designate a single point of contact for Fostering

Science for each service provided. This person will serve as the Contract Manager and will be responsible for acting as Fostering Science's sole point of contact for all matters relating to service provision. See also Article 10.2 of the CCAP in this regard.

The Contract Manager must, *at the very least*:

- Be available and qualified to carry out all the assignments covered by the contract
- Have a level of English that is either that of a native speaker or C2 equivalent
- Have a level of education of *at least* 5 years of higher education
- Have in-depth knowledge of the ERC funding programme.