

ERA Chair experience

RareBoost: Boosting the Rare Disease research and innovation capacity of the Izmir Biomedicine and Genome Center (IBG)

Gerhard Wingender, Ph.D.



Disclaimer


- The project writing is independent of the host country.
- All points were probably mentioned already – just my personal highlights.
- Based on my experience alone (i.e. $n = 1$).
- I will focus mainly on the writing part (our project started 1.10.2020).



ERAC – key messages

(1) All Widening grants are NOT research grants!

- Your research outline is ‘just’ the nail to hang the main parts; it provides the keywords.
- The main goal/topic/aim is capacity building.
- EC’s approach: Excellent people, make excellent research (i.e. to create an environment that supports excellency).



Capacity building, to become better at:

- doing research (e.g. research skills, methodologies);
- obtaining funding (e.g. grant writing);
- collaborating (e.g. networking, social and transferable skills);
- communicating (presentation skills, scientific writing) and disseminating (outreach) science.

- And, to remove roadblocks (e.g. administrative/technical limitations).

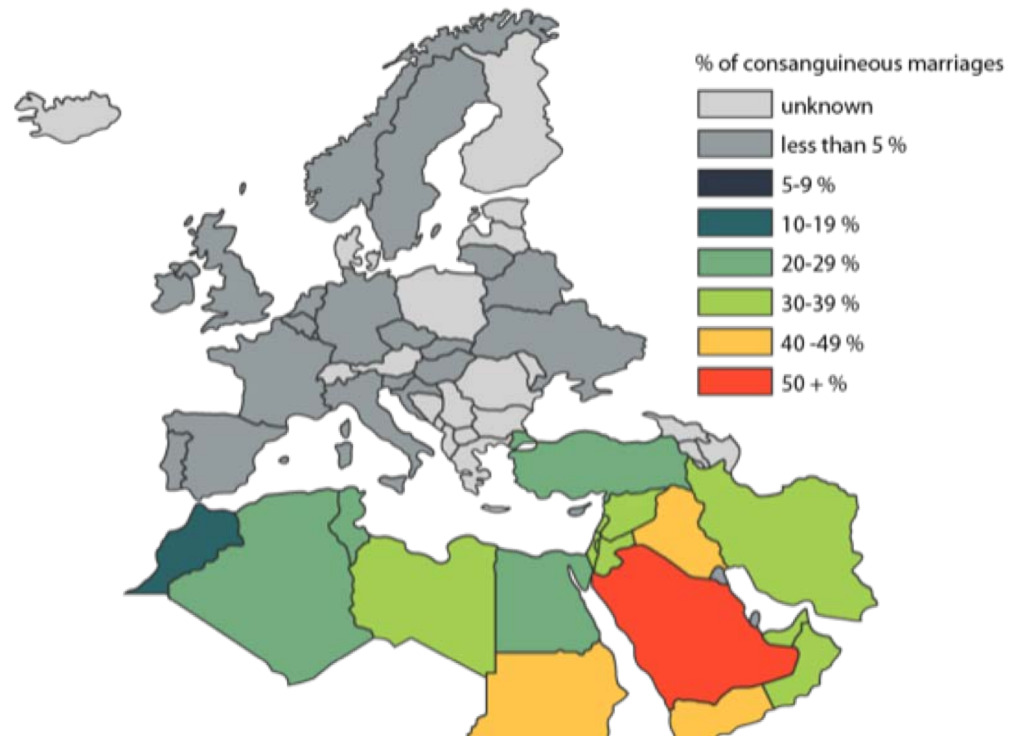
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- (2) Find your niche.

What is your unique topic, which not any random institute could do as good as you?

We applied 2017 unsuccessful for a Teaming grant with the topic ‘Precision medicine’. In hindsight, this topic was too generic.

In 2019, we applied to the ERAC with the topic ‘Rare diseases’. Rare diseases are – within ERA – most frequent in Turkey. Research on these disease requires genomic approaches (a strength at IBG) and IBG already had several national and international projects on rare diseases.



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(3) The grant is not even about your department/institute.

- For the EC, supporting you is just a mean to an end.
- Their aim is increasing excellence in science in your home country (‘Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation’).
- Your department/institute needs to serve as a lighthouse that can spread excellence all over your country.
- Therefore, the impact beyond your department/institute is essential. How do you spread your improvements all across your country? How can you lift the boat for everyone?

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 - (4) The grant is not even about a project, but a vision.**
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- How will the ERAC project at your department/institute be a game changer for research and innovation in your country? What is your vision on how you can lift the boat?

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 - (5) Dream big and outline your strategy clearly and detailed.**
- How will the ERAC project at your department/institute be a game changer for research and innovation in your country? What is your vision on how you can lift the boat?
 - Aim for a point just beyond your best-case scenario.
 - With a focus on changes within 6-12 years.
 - BUT, keep in mind: How can the reviewers distinguish a wishful thinking project from one realistic best-case scenario? Solely on how you describe how you are getting there (i.e. the strategy).
 - SMART goals;
 - KPI (key performance indicators);
 - Clear and numerous specific examples;
 - Extensive risk assessment;
 - Numbers, details, and more numbers.

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- (6) Expect an enormous work load and get all the help you can get.**

For example, I worked on the Teaming project 9 months half-time (with team support); and on the ERAC for 4.5 months full-time. Do not believe that you can be competitive with a last-minute crunch effort.

As project coordinator, delegate specific topics (numbers!) and get (professional) writing support (where possible).

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- (7) Do not solely rely on the official position announcements, but reach out to potential candidates.**

Do not expect that an outstanding experts randomly will apply to your ERAC position based on your announcements.

Our selected ERAC holder, Dr. Ioannis Ragoussis, was already within IBG's extended network and was reached by our concerted effort to disseminate the option through our networks.

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