DEVELOPING COMPETITIVE ERC PROPOSALS

A CASE-BASED WORKSHOP

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Workshop programme

0 ERC introduction

1 ERC logic and case diagnosis

2 Building a ground-breaking research idea

3 Fictional PI evidence and leadership

4 B1/B2 proposal architecture

5 Thinking like an ERC panel

6 Individual Meetings

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Workshop purpose

Purpose

Help researchers understand ERC proposal strategy through fictional cases, without public disclosure of their ideas or career information.

Target participants

- Researchers preparing a Starting or Consolidator Grant
- Potential applicants planning one to three years ahead
- Research managers supporting proposal development

Confidential workshop format

- Exercises use fictional or published astrophysics cases.
- Sharing remains optional and can focus on structure.
- Participants may discuss their own proposal privately with the trainer.

No participant needs to disclose an unpublished idea, CV or application plan in public.

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ERC STARTING + CONSOLIDATOR



From a bold astrophysics question to a fundable ERC proposal

Current 2027 framework and the changes compared with calls up to 2024

15 slides

SATURN TECH
AIMING YOUR TARGET



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What the ERC funds

One selection criterion

EXCELLENCE

Frontier research

Ambitious questions at the edge of knowledge. High scientific risk can be acceptable when the potential gain is substantial.

Bottom-up competition

No predetermined topics. Astrophysics competes through the Physical Sciences and Engineering panels.

PI-led project

A single Principal Investigator defines the programme, builds the team and retains scientific independence.

Flexible, long-term and portable funding supports the researcher's own scientific vision.

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WHERE STARTING AND CONSOLIDATOR FIT

The ERC grant family

Starting	Consolidator	Advanced	Synergy	ERC Plus
0–10 years	5–15 years	Established leaders	2–4 PIs	Transformative scale
€1.5M / 5 years	**€2.0M / 5 years**	**€2.5M / 5 years**	**€10M / 6 years**	**€7M / 7 years**

Workshop focus

Starting and Consolidator share the same scientific proposal structure and two-step evaluation.

Additional funding may apply. Amounts shown are the standard maximum EU contribution.

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Starting or Consolidator in 2027

STARTING GRANT

0–10 years after PhD defence

- Up to €1.5 million for 60 months
- At least 50% of working time on the project
- At least 50% of working time in EU or an Associated Country

CONSOLIDATOR GRANT

5–15 years after PhD defence

- Up to €2.0 million for 60 months
- At least 40% of working time on the project
- At least 50% of working time in EU or an Associated Country

Extensions remain possible for documented circumstances. Confirm dates against the call-specific calculator and documents.

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The PI, host and team

Principal Investigator

Any nationality. The PI applies with one host institution and must demonstrate the independence and capacity expected for the career stage.

Host Institution

A public or private legal entity in an EU Member State or Associated Country. Employment at submission is not required, but commitment is.

Research team

Team members may have any nationality. Additional team members can work at other entities when they add scientific value.

For astrophysics

- Host access can include observatories, archives, HPC centres and international facilities.
- The proposal must show why the PI needs this team and these resources to answer the question.
- The grant remains portable under the conditions of the Grant Agreement.

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How panels interpret excellence

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

- Does it address an important scientific question?
- Are the objectives ambitious and frontier advancing?
- Is the overall approach scientifically convincing?
- At Step 2, are methodology, timing and resources appropriate?

THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

- Evidence of ground-breaking research
- Creative and original thinking
- Scientific expertise and capacity to execute
- Achievements assessed in relation to career stage and circumstances

Panels judge both elements at Step 1 and Step 2. Scientific excellence remains the sole criterion.

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Application architecture in 2027

PART A

Online forms

Budget and resources
Time commitment
Ethics and administrative data

PART B1

Step 1 package

Part I scientific proposal: 5 pages
CV and Track Record: 4 pages

PART B2

Step 2 detail

Part II scientific proposal: 7 pages
Funding ID: outside page limit

References do not count toward the scientific page limits. Use the call template supplied in the submission system.

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Two-step evaluation

STEP 1 — **Part I + CV and Track Record**
Generalist panel view. Up to 44 proposals per panel proceed.

STEP 2 — **Complete proposal + interview**
Part I, Part II, CV, resources and time commitment are assessed together.

Core implication

B1 must stand alone
Do not reserve the decisive logic, novelty or scientific promise for B2. Reviewers cannot access it at Step 1.

B2 then demonstrates that the ambitious programme can be pursued rigorously.

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B1: make the scientific leap visible

FICTIONAL PUBLIC CASE

Can stellar streams expose dark structures that remain invisible to conventional surveys?

1

Known limit

Current analyses lose information when streams depart from simplified dynamical assumptions.

2

Scientific question

Which perturbations retain a measurable signature across realistic survey selection effects?

3

Conceptual advance

Treat the full stream population as a field-level inference problem rather than isolated detections.

4

Overall strategy

Connect simulations, survey systematics and inference in one testable scientific programme.

Exercise: rewrite only the four elements above using a fictional or already-published case. No disclosure of a participant's proposal is required.

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B2: turn ambition into a credible programme

AREA	WHAT B2 MUST EXPLAIN	REVIEWER TEST
Methodology	Data model, simulations, inference chain and validation logic	**What would falsify the central assumptions?**
Work plan	Packages and dependencies tied to scientific decisions	**Which result unlocks the next phase?**
Resources	People, compute, observing time, archives and specialist support	**Why is each resource necessary for the science?**
Risks	Access delays, compute scaling, calibration bias, null signals	**What is the scientifically valid fallback?**

Keep B2 complementary to B1. Detailed budget justification belongs in Part A and must remain consistent with the work plan.

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CV and Track Record: evidence with context

SELECT

Up to ten outputs that best demonstrate how you advanced knowledge

EXPLAIN

Your contribution, the significance of each output and its relevance to the proposed project

CONTEXTUALISE

Career breaks, diverse paths, life events and contributions to the research community

Astrophysics evidence can include

- Survey or instrument leadership with a clear personal role
- Open software, catalogues or simulations that changed practice
- Key papers selected for significance, not citation count alone
- Peer recognition appropriate to career stage
- Evidence of independence from supervisors or senior collaborations

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The main structural change since calls up to 2024

CALLS UP TO 2024		CURRENT 2026–2027 FORMAT	
Extended Synopsis	5 pages	**Part I**	5 pages
Ground-breaking nature and feasibility		Scientific idea, question, objectives and overall strategy	
Scientific Proposal	14 pages	**Part II**	7 pages
Full scientific approach and implementation		Detailed methodology, work plan, risks and mitigation	

~~BECAME~~

The redesign took effect with the 2026 calls and continues in 2027.

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Eligibility changed again for the 2027 calls

STARTING

2–7 years	0–10 years
Calls up to 2026	2027 call

CONSOLIDATOR

7–12 years	5–15 years
Calls up to 2026	2027 call

One grant of each type

A PI who has already held a Starting Grant cannot receive another Starting Grant. The same applies to Consolidator.

Relocation funding

Up to €2 million additional funding may apply when moving from a non-associated third country to the EU or an Associated Country.

Resubmission rules

Prior evaluation outcomes can restrict a new application. Check the current call table before committing to submission.

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RESUBMISSION RULES

Call to which the PI applied under previous ERC WPs and proposal evaluation outcome		2027 Calls to which a PI is *NOT* eligible
2025 Starting, Consolidator, Advanced Grant, or Synergy Grant	Rejected on the grounds of a breach of research integrity[29]	STG, COG, ADG, Plus and SYG
2026 Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, ERC Plus or Synergy	Rejected on the grounds of a breach of research integrity[30]	STG, COG, ADG, Plus and SYG
2025 Starting, Consolidator, or Advanced Grant	C at Step 1	STG, COG, ADG, Plus and SYG
2026 Starting or Consolidator Grant	A or B at Step 2	No restrictions
	A not invited at Step 1	No restrictions
	B or C at Step 1	STG, COG, ADG, Plus and SYG
2026 Advanced Grant	A or B at Step 2	No restrictions
	A not invited at Step 1	No restrictions
	B or C at Step 1	STG, COG, ADG, Plus
2025 Synergy Grant	C at Step 1	SYG
2026 Synergy Grant	B or C at Step 1	SYG
2026 Plus Grant	Not retained at Step 1	Plus

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Practical tips for astrophysics applicants

Write for the panel first

Define specialised terms and make the conceptual leap visible before technical detail.

State the counterfactual

Explain what the field cannot learn if the project is not attempted.

Own the scientific choices

Show where the PI makes the decisive conceptual and methodological decisions.

Make access credible

Separate confirmed access, requested access and fallback routes for facilities or data.

Quantify computing

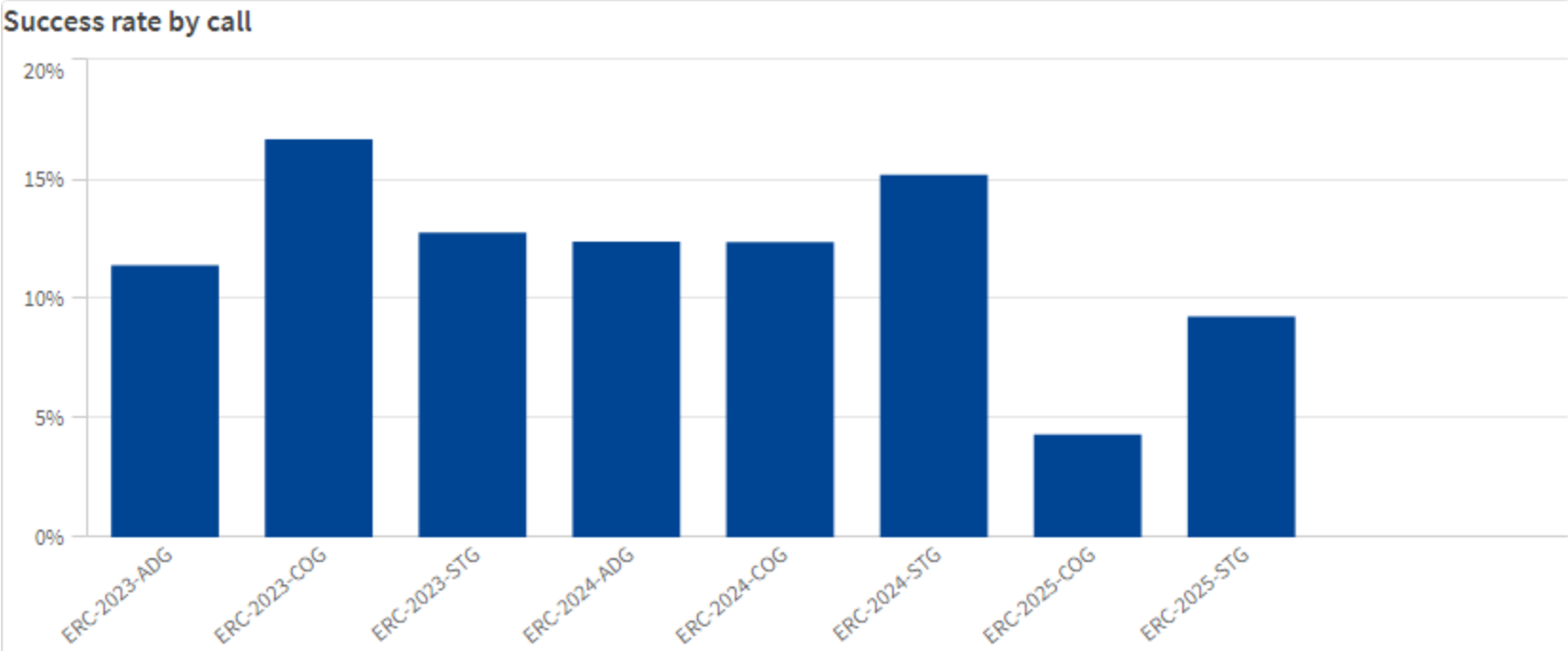
Connect storage, GPU or HPC demand to simulations, inference runs and uncertainty analysis.

Keep sections consistent

Methods, people, timing and Part A resources must describe the same project.

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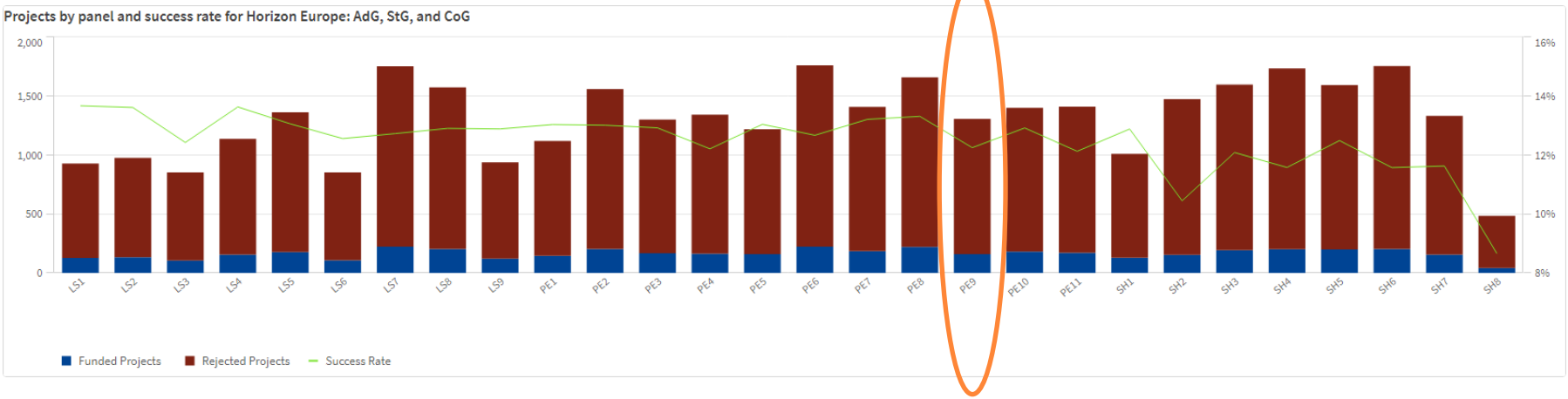
ERC Success rate



Bar chart illustrating the success rate by call. The success rate is calculated by dividing the number of funded projects for each call by the total number of evaluated proposals for the respective call. Click on a call bar to see the success rate per country (in the graph on the left).

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ERC GRANTS – STATISTICS



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New deadlines

Grant Scheme	Expected Deadline Window
Starting Grant (StG) 2027	Oct 2026 / Oct 2027
Consolidator Grant (CoG) 2027	Jan 2027
Advanced Grant (AdG) 2027	Aug 2026 / Aug 2027
Synergy Grant (SyG) 2027	Nov 2026 / Nov 2027
ERC plus	September 2027
Proof of Concept (PoC) 2027	Jan–Oct 2027 (several cut-offs)

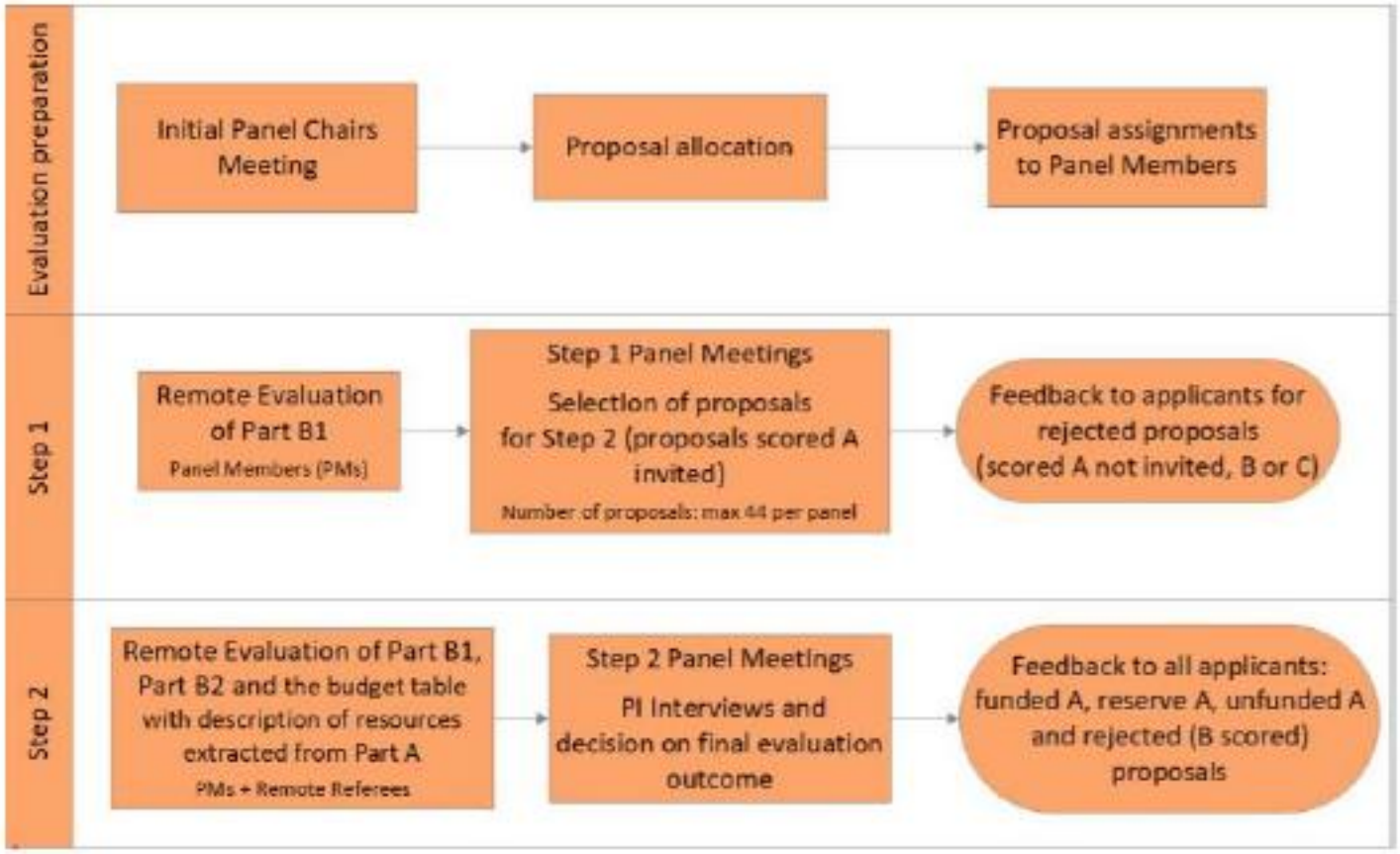
Criterios y procedimiento de evaluación



- Step 2
  - Parts B1 and B2 evaluated
  - New referees (experts) come into the evaluation
  - Resources are evaluated

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Evaluation process



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EVALUATION CRITERIA

Evaluation Elements applying to Excellence

1. Research Project

Ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility

Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grants

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project

To what extent does the proposed research address important scientific challenges?

To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g., novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?

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EVALUATION CRITERIA

Scientific Approach

To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the ground-breaking nature and ambition of the proposed research (based on the Extended Synopsis)?

*To what extent does the proposal go beyond what the individual Principal Investigators could achieve alone (**for Synergy Grants,** based on the Extended Synopsis)?*

*To what extent do the Principal Investigators succeed in proposing a combination of scientific approaches that are crucial to address the scope and complexity of the research questions to be tackled (**for Synergy Grants,** based on the Extended Synopsis)?*

To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project (based on the research proposal)?

To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources, and PI commitment adequate and properly justified (based on the research proposal)?

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EVALUATION CRITERIA

2. Principal Investigator(s)

Intellectual capacity and creativity
Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grants

To what extent has/have the PI(s) demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?

To what extent does/do the PI(s) provide evidence of creative and original thinking?

To what extent does/do the PI(s) have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

Synergy Grant Group
Synergy Grants

To what extent does the Synergy Grant Group successfully demonstrate in the proposal that it brings together the know-how – such as skills, experience, expertise, disciplines, teams – necessary to address the proposed research question (based on the Extended Synopsis)?

The Host Institution is not an evaluation criterion.

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Comments from ERC evaluators

- Objectives not clearly defined
- Hypothesis not convincing
- Proposal too descriptive
- Independence / Leadership of PI not clear
- Project not sufficiently focussed/too ambitious
- Project „incremental“, no scientific breakthrough expected;
  - “continuation of previous research“
- Not enough information on methodology
- Doubts on feasibility

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A confidential way to work on the proposal

WORKSHOP METHOD

- Exercises use fictional or published astrophysics cases.
- Participants write privately and keep their pages.
- Sharing is optional and can focus on structure rather than content.
- Individual discussion with the trainer remains possible.
- No public pitch of a participant's idea is required.

BEFORE SUBMISSION

- Confirm scheme, eligibility and resubmission status.
- Make Part I complete for Step 1.
- Keep Part II complementary and methodologically explicit.
- Align work plan, people, compute, access and budget.
- Use the current call template and submit early.

The proposal belongs to the researcher. The workshop provides a safe framework to strengthen it.

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Thank you

Questions can remain general during the workshop.

Individual proposal discussions are available privately.

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