

ERC PoC 2026

Last Minute Q&A

Resolviendo tus dudas antes del cierre

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What ERC PoC evaluators reward and what they reject?

Content

1. Evidence-based insights from real ESRs (successful & rejected)
2. 3 quick changes you can apply today
3. A 10-point pre-submission checklist to stress-test your draft

Why this matters?

- Findings are drawn **from real panel language**, not theory
- Patterns **repeat across domains**: health, materials, social innovation...
- Use this to do a final 2-week quality pass before submission

INNOVATION

What successful proposals ALWAYS do?

- » Clear differentiation vs. existing solutions (tables, metrics, user value)
- » High-risk/high-gain articulated with specific obstacles & prize if
- » Real traction: letters of intent, early pilots, credible use cases

What gets proposals rejected?

- » Novelty is incremental or unproven; no benchmarking table
- » “Innovation” = dissemination/education or a continuation of research (not PoC)
- » Problem not framed from user perspective; weak demand evidence

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

What successful proposals ALWAYS do?

- » Balanced plan: Technical WPs + Valorisation WPs (IP/FTO, market, adoption)
- » KPIs, milestones, stage-gates & quantifiable success
- » IP strategy aligned with exploitation route (patent | trade secret | open + services)

What gets proposals rejected?

- » Research-only plan; no translation track (IP/FTO, market, validation)
- » IP/FTO missing or generic; no landscape or FtO risks addressed
- » Validation too small/vague; no success thresholds or multi-site pilots

IP & MANAGEMENT

What successful proposals ALWAYS do?

- » PI shows domain authority and transfer mindset; governance & cadence are clear
- » Named roles cover innovation functions (BD/IP/regulatory) not just science
- » Risk log covers tech + market/adoption/IP, with owners & mitigations

What gets proposals rejected?

- » Low PI time for complex translation ($\leq 10-20\%$)
- » Team lacks innovation profiles (IP/BD/regulatory) or key hires “TBD” w/o mitigation
- » Risk register only covers technical risks; market/regulatory/adoption ignored

Quick Upgrade

15 days before the deadline

- 1. Benchmarking Table**
- 2. Mini Exploitation Plan (8 lines)**
- 3. Reframe High-Risk / High-Gain**
- 4. 10-Point ERC PoC Pre-Submission Checklist**



Quick Upgrade

Benchmarking Table

Add a ½-page table comparing your solution vs 3–5 alternatives

- Performance, cost, time-to-adopt, safety/regulatory, TRL, evidence
- Include 1–2 user-relevant metrics (e.g., cost/run, latency, cycles)

Mini Exploitation Plan

IP/FTO route: patent family? copyright/trade secret? (why aligned to model)

Initial segments & buyer: who pays first, why, how do they adopt?

Validation touchpoints: named site(s), success metric(s), timeline

Post-PoC route: license/spin-out/partner; key risks & mitigations

Reframe High-Risk / High-Gain

Risk (specific): “X might fail because Y constraint in Z context”

Gain (specific): “If X validated, enables A→B (new capability/market/standard)”

Finish with an if-then: If we validate X in Y, then Z becomes possible for the first time.



10-Point ERC PoC Pre-Submission Checklist

Innovation

- Benchmarking: 3–5 alternatives + quantified deltas (table present)
- User need: evidence of demand/Lols/pilots; value quantified
- High-risk/high-gain: obstacle + prize, both specific and evidenced

Approach & Methodology

- Dual track: WPs for technical + valorisation (IP/FTO, market, adoption)
- Validation: users/sites, sample sizes, contexts, success thresholds, stage-gates
- IP/FTO: project-specific route + preliminary landscape and risks
- Exploitation: buyer, path to market, post-PoC route, named partners

IP & Management

- Time & roles: sufficient PI time; innovation roles named (BD/IP/regulatory)
- Resources: non-technical capacity (regulatory, product, BD) resourced, not “TBD”
- Risk log: tech + market/adoption/IP/regulator y with owners & mitigations





Last Minute Q&A



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Gracias



What successful proposals consistently do in Innovation

1.1. They articulate a clear, defensible differentiation from existing solutions

- » *“The proposal provides a clear value proposition of the solution over existing technologies which are benchmarked in a comprehensive comparison table.”*
- » *“The state of the art is well described and the outcomes of the proposal are expected to improve upon existing solutions.”*
- » *“Existing solutions are well explained in the proposal, and the reluctance of some companies to change their technology is also addressed.”*

1.2. They describe high-risk / high-gain with specificity

- » *“It is technically difficult to maintain stable flow regimes... and the degree to which targets can be achieved experimentally is still a crucial unknown.”*
- » *“The technical risks are significant, but if successful the technology could lead to a breakthrough.”*
- » *“The idea is quite high risk, although the technical solution is well written and directly addresses these issues.”*
- » *“If successful, the proposed solution would represent a clear advancement... and has potential for substantial commercial adoption.”*

What successful proposals consistently do in Innovation

1.3. They show explicit market traction

- » *“Letters of support from industry confirm a solid use case and demonstrate active exchanges.”*
- » *“The attached letter of intent confirms initial market traction and identifies a preliminary partner.”*
- » *“Several partners have confirmed their interest through letters.”*

1.4. They link the innovation to a significant societal or market need

- » *“The proposal addresses a clear societal challenge.”* (e.g., health, climate, water, energy)
- » *“The potential impact on industry and society is well presented, including environmental considerations.”*

What successful proposals do in Approach & Methodology

2.1. They present a balanced plan: technical + valorisation

- » *“The project plan is well described and complete... integrating both technical and valorisation dimensions.”*
- » *“The work plan is well structured, including clear milestones and deliverables.”*
- » *“A strong IPR strategy is described, supported by the technology transfer office.”*

2.2. They define validation with users in a realistic and credible way

- » *“Validation is appropriately supported by the attached Letters of Intent.”*
- » *“The involvement of end-users is described adequately, and access for testing is guaranteed.”*
- » *“User testing with clinicians and students is a strength of the proposal.”*

What successful proposals do in PI Leadership & Project Management

3.1. They demonstrate strong technical authority

- » *“The PI has an excellent track record and demonstrates clear capability to lead the project.”*
- » *“The PI is a leading expert in the field, with relevant industrial and academic experience.”*
- » *“The PI demonstrates a clear strategic vision.”*

3.2. They present a realistic governance and management structure

- » *“The management plan is clearly presented, with regular meetings and defined responsibilities.”*
- » *“The project team seems well structured to address the different challenges.”*
- » *“The organisational structure and decision-making process are sufficiently explained.”*

What successful proposals do in PI Leadership & Project Management

3.3. They articulate a credible exploitation pathway

- » *“A credible exploitation pathway is presented, including potential spin-off creation.”*
- » *“Licensing to interested partners is considered, supported by early discussions.”*
- » *“The knowledge transfer plan is appropriate and supported by the TTO.”*

Innovation — patterns that drive rejections

1.1. Missing or weak benchmarking against the state of the art

- » “does not convincingly demonstrate how it differs from existing solutions”
- » “no meaningful comparison with existing approaches is provided”
- » “the expected outcomes are not sufficiently innovative”

1.2. The “innovation” is actually dissemination, education, or a continuation of research

- » deliverables are academic publications or toolkits for awareness, not validated innovation assets
- » activities extend the lab program instead of de-risking adoption and use

1.3. Incremental change → no credible high risk / high gain

- » “modest incremental adjustment rather than breakthrough innovation”
- » “high risk/high gain not demonstrated convincingly”

Innovation — patterns that drive rejections

1.4. Weak problem framing from the user perspective

- » no evidence of user demand or pain points
- » thin analysis of who benefits, why, and how much

1.5. Limited generalisability or too local scope

- » *Reviewers flag concepts tied to one region, site, or context without a credible scale path.*
- » *Takeaway: show transferability (contexts, segments, partners) and what changes across settings (and how you'll handle it).*

1.6. Insufficient evidence that the technical jump is real

- » *Panels push back when the “breakthrough” lacks a concrete validation plan or relies on undemonstrated assumptions.*
- » *Takeaway: define the make or break hypotheses and the experiments/metrics that will retire them within the PoC window.*

Approach & Methodology — recurring weaknesses

2.3. Validation that's too small, narrow, or underspecified

- » *tiny pilots (one partner/site) → poor generalisability*
- » *success criteria not defined*
- » *testing relegated to the end instead of staged gates*

Takeaway: specify target users, sample sizes, contexts, quantified success thresholds, and stage-gate go/no-go points.

2.4. Market and exploitation pathways asserted, not demonstrated

Frequent gaps:

- » *no business model, pricing or buyer; vague “spin out”/“licensing” claims*
- » *no stakeholder commitments or letters*
- » *no regulatory/standards plan where relevant*

Takeaway: add concrete demand signals (LOIs, pilot MoUs), a first pass unit economics view, and a credible post PoC route.

Approach & Methodology — recurring weaknesses

2.5. Stakeholder engagement that is symbolic

Common issues:

- » *partners named but not engaged in tasks or milestones*
- » *absent plan for consensus when interests conflict*

Takeaway: embed partners in WPs/deliverables and define a decision framework (who decides what, when, based on which evidence).

2.6. Resourcing and timelines that don't add up

Examples:

- » *ambitious scope in 12–18 months*
- » *under resourced non technical tasks (e.g., regulatory, BD, IP)*
- » *key hires “to be recruited” with no mitigation*

Takeaway: right size scope, pre identify specialists, and show capacity for the valorisation track— not only the lab work.

PI Leadership & Project Management — red flags

3.1. Low PI time commitment

- » *Panels call out sub 10–20% effort for complex translation projects as insufficient.*
- » *Takeaway: show meaningful PI dedication or name a seasoned translational lead with clear authority.*

3.2. Great scientific pedigree, thin innovation experience

- » *Typical comment: strong research vision, limited market/IP/regulatory literacy.*
- » *Takeaway: add a transfer-savvy co-lead or advisors (TTO/IP counsel, industry/regulatory) embedded in governance and milestones.*

3.3. Incomplete or research only team

- » *missing business development / product / regulatory profiles*
- » *key team “to be hired” without risk plan*
- » *Takeaway: name the people (or committed suppliers), define roles, and cover all competencies across the whole pathway.*

PI Leadership & Project Management — red flags

3.4. Risk registers focused only on technical risks

- » *market, IP, regulatory, adoption and resourcing risks omitted or trivialised*
- » *generic mitigations (“dissemination”) instead of actionable plans*
- » *Takeaway: present a balanced risk log with likelihood/impact (pre/post mitigation), owners, and concrete actions.*