My gutsy approach to an ERC Starting Grant

Tove Fall
2019-11-21
European Research Council grants in brief

• Scientific excellence is the sole selection criterion
• Any field of research, age, career stage and nationality
• Grants are portable and coupled to the researcher
• Success rate 12-13 %
Starting Grants

- 2-7 years post-PhD
- Scientific track record showing great promise
- A ground-breaking research proposal
- Spend a minimum of 50% in EU country
- Project duration 5 years
- € 1.5 M
My background

- Veterinary medicine degree, 2005
- PhD SLU, 2009
- Post-Doc Karolinska Insitutet
- Docent 2013 at UU
- Main goal to identify novel ways to prevent diabetes and cardiovascular disease

My CV “failures”
- PhD from small university
- Not a medical doctor
- No international post-doc experience
I had some grant writing experience…

- Applied for VR 2011-2014 with good scores but no money
- I had more focus on the science than how I conveyed my idea
- You need both
VR 2015

- Participated in Junior Faculty’s workshop
- BIG changes
- Simplified over and over again
- Scaled down - “clean project”
- The project was granted money from VR unga forskare, HLF och Diabetesfonden
The ERC proposal

- In 2016 I decided to apply for ERC Starting Grant
- One stage submission process
- Multi-stage evaluation with interview in last stage
- The proposal:
  - B1: 5 page synopsis
  - B2: 15 p full proposal
ERC StG 2017

- Project on Dog ownership and health
- Large framework – planned about 10 articles/subproject
- About 1 month full time for writing application
- Spent 70% of time on B1
- Sent around to many colleagues for feedback
- Invitation for interview!!
- I prepared my presentation carefully
- Good scores – but REJECT
- My feeling was that I failed the Q&A session
Decided in September to apply with new project on gut microbiota and cardiovascular health
Made a Facebook competition for the best acronym - GUTSY
Discussed my plan with colleagues
Wrote B1 in September (max 10 days)
Went to Gotland to write B2 (4 days)
More focused project, three main aims
Aims of GUTSY

**OBJECTIVE 1.**
Link microbiota characteristics with atherosclerosis

**OBJECTIVE 2.**
Identify biomarkers for linked microbiota characteristics

**OBJECTIVE 3.**
Test which links represent causal effects

cause → effect
Professional illustrator - examples

1. Dense metabolic profiling in plasma samples
2. Association with atherosclerosis-prone gut flora
3. Targeted metabolomics analysis in plasma samples from independent samples
Professional illustrator - examples

- Carotid arteries (Ultrasound, MRI)
- Ascending aorta (CCTA)
- Epicardial fat (CT)
- Coronary artery calcification score (CT)
- Coronary plaques (CCTA)
- ECG
- Lungs (CT, spirometry)
- Blood pressure
- Liver steatosis (CT)
- Fat depots, subcutaneous/visceral (CT)
- Intra-muscular fat (CT)
- Ankle brachial index
- Questionnaires
  - Blood chemistry (lipid profile, HbA1c plasma glucose, hsCRP, creatine)
  - Biobanking
  - Site-specific investigations
Professional illustrator- examples
Invited for interview June 2018
Invited for interview

• Prepared about full time for a 3 weeks
• Focus on Q&A
• Coach Andrew Derrington
• Preparation workshop Yellow Research
• Prepared 65 questions with answers
• Showed presentation for many experts
Some advice for you

• Be visionary, do not be shy
• Make it easy for the reader
• Be consistent throughout the application
• Add preliminary results if you have
• Be aware of other’s research
• Do not leave anything to chance
• Idea, methods and presentation needs to be top notch
THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL EXECUTIVE AGENCY
IS DEDICATED TO SELECTING AND FUNDING
THE EXCELLENT IDEAS THAT HAVE NOT HAPPENED YET
AND THE SCIENTISTS THAT ARE DREAMING THEM UP.

ERC

ERCEA MMXII D.C.
Good luck!!