



European Research Council

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# EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2025



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# European Research Council

## External Communication Strategy 2025

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## 1. Foreword

Regardless of the geopolitical or financial situations we are facing now, if there is one thing that is certain, it is that investing in science today will secure tomorrow's breakthroughs and drive long-term growth. European leaders must take this to heart as Europe continues to lag behind in the global competition, which is a serious concern. Europe cannot afford to be a follower in the global knowledge economy. If we lead in science, we lead in shaping our own future.

Over the past year, we have thankfully seen a growing recognition that Europe's future success depends on strategic investment in cutting-edge research - a cause for optimism. It was the focal point of Mario Draghi's report on competitiveness, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged to put research "at the centre of our economy". In this context, it was emphasised that the European Research Council (ERC) must be expanded, and Mr Draghi and others have spoken out in favour of a doubling of the ERC budget. As negotiations of the next seven-year budget of the EU and its next R&I framework programme are nearing, this is highly topical and fully in line with the ERC stance on this.

In a world where science in general is increasingly questioned, and given the political and budget context, it will be even more important to communicate about research, not least curiosity-driven, blue-sky science. We must explain how it benefits the economy and society, helps tackle our biggest challenges and improves people's quality of life. The ERC Scientific Council will continue to make the case for more ambitious levels of EU investment in research, including for the ERC.

One of our priorities will be to reach politicians, in Brussels, and around the EU's capitals, who will be deciding on research budgets. A new initiative that will help in this respect is the "Ambassadors for the ERC". One of the activities of this new network of ERC grantees will be to highlight the need for investment in frontier research.

I feel strongly about the need to communicate about science with a range of audiences, which the ERC also does via our Public Engagement with Research Award, a programme through which we hope to inspire more researchers to engage with citizens outside their labs. Spreading the word about awe-inspiring breakthroughs and innovations is important.

This year, we will reach a new milestone with 15,000 outstanding researchers funded since the launch of the ERC. We also want to share the passion for research more broadly to let people marvel at the wonders of the world of discovery. This can also inspire scientific curiosity in the newest generations.

*Maria Leptin*  
*President of the ERC*

## 2. Objectives

The ERC's communication actions in 2025 will continue to be guided by the following strategic objectives:

- a. Make the case for frontier research, its intrinsic value and its key contribution to EU's competitiveness and tackling societal, economic, environmental and policy challenges;
- b. Provide researchers in Europe and globally with timely and reliable information about funding opportunities offered by the ERC;
- c. Promote public engagement with research by offering ERC grantees opportunities and incentives to share their work.

## 3. Audiences

Whilst aiming to engage the broader public, as in the past, the ERC will target the following audiences in 2025:

- a. Potential applicants for ERC grants;
- b. ERC grantees and their research teams;
- c. Universities and research institutions that host ERC grantees;
- d. Policy-makers and research stakeholders at European and national levels;
- e. Journalists and media;
- f. In alignment with the ERC Executive Agency's internal communication strategy, we will also continue to engage Agency staff as promoters and multipliers of the ERC.

## 4. Actions

### Illustrate the intrinsic value of frontier research

The ERC Executive Agency's Communication Unit will support the Scientific Council, notably the ERC President, in their mandate to engage with policy-makers, researchers and other stakeholders, and with the public through speaking engagements, media interviews and other communication activities.

Whenever suitable, our communication activities will feed into the wider narrative on the achievements of the EU's Horizon Europe programme, and the preparation of the next Framework Programme, in cooperation with the Commission's Directorate-General for Research & Innovation (DG R&I).

The outputs of the ERC's work on 'mapping frontier research' and 'feedback to policy', which highlights the contribution of frontier research towards tackling policy and societal priorities, will keep providing valuable communication opportunities.

The Agency will work closely with the Scientific Council's Innovation Working Group to demonstrate the strong links between frontier research, innovation and industry and to foster links between ERC grantees and the media, including local and regional outlets. Communication actions will include ERC grantees whose research has led to the creation of intellectual property and companies.

In this context, the ERC will organise a workshop with academia, Members of the European Parliament, ERC grantees and industry representatives to analyse what Europe needs to bridge the gap between fundamental discovery and innovation. This will foster a deeper understanding of the complementary roles of research and innovation, encourage knowledge exchange, and advocate for supporting the advancement of fundamental research for the benefit of society.

We will highlight the importance of frontier research through the Commission-organised EU4Science campaign and by engaging ERC speakers to take part in the 'EU Research and Innovation Days', coordinated by DG R&I, as well as participating in events focusing on different EU policy priorities. We will engage and collaborate with the European Parliament's Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA).

### **Provide information on ERC funding**

We will further promote ERC grant schemes and funding opportunities to potential applicants, including through webinars following the adoption of the 2026 ERC Work Programme and by supporting events set up by National Contact Points (NCPs) in the Member States and in countries associated to Horizon Europe. We will also provide relevant information on how to manage an ERC grant, including scientific and financial reporting, ethics, open science requirements and recommendations for public engagement and communication.

A new network of Ambassadors for the ERC will be launched in 2025 by the Association of ERC Grantees (AERG) together with the ERC. This network will unite ERC grantees from each EU Member State, acting on a voluntary basis, with the aim of extending it to countries associated to Horizon Europe. The Ambassadors for the ERC will be invited to act as advocates for the importance of frontier research and the ERC, and as information multipliers, providing potential support to the ERC NCPs. They will create and manage relationships with scientists and the wider research community in their countries, and seek engagement with local and national governments, the media, and the public. The Ambassadors for the ERC will also help to address issues that arise for ERC grantees in their interactions with national institutions.

We will provide information and statistics on the outcomes of the evaluations of the ERC calls for proposals, highlighting the envisaged research of a selection of the new grantees. We will continue to work with both new grantees and their host institutions in announcing the results of ERC calls, to provide stories to inspire future applicants and examples that illustrate the value of frontier research.

The ERC will award a grant to its 15 000th grantee in 2025. This will also be a key communication opportunity to highlight our grantees and the research they undertake.

The ERC's work on widening European participation will be supported with targeted communication actions, including through collaboration with ERC NCPs. This will include awareness-raising activities in selected countries (in agreement with the Scientific Council's Widening European Participation Working Group) as well as promotion of the ERC's mentoring and fellowship schemes.

We will pursue our collaboration with the Euraxess Worldwide network, and the Science Counsellors and other staff in EU Delegations to reach research talent worldwide.

## Promote public engagement with research

Public engagement with research, including the ERC Public Engagement with Research Award, is especially relevant in today's climate of widespread dis- and misinformation and divisive politics. Such activities encourage scientists to engage directly with the public, promoting fact-based dialogue and fostering trust in credible research.

The winners of the 2024 ERC Public Engagement with Research Award have valuable lessons and recommendations for researchers who would like to involve the broader public in their research or increase the effectiveness of their dissemination actions. We will collect the award winners' insights and share them on ERC channels to encourage other ERC grantees to engage different audiences with their research. This activity will lay the foundation for a potential future public engagement award contest in 2026.

The first placements of journalists under the ERC's science journalism initiative will be completed in 2025. These are designed to support stronger relationships and improve mutual understanding between researchers, research institutions and science journalists. We will help share the experience of these journalist-residents and their hosts with relevant publics, with the aim of promoting further future placements.

We will keep reaching out to young students and schools through supporting the participation of ERC grantees in 'Science is Wonderful!', the annual science fair led by the European Commission's DG for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture (EAC) in Brussels, as well as events during the annual European Researchers' Night.

Our cooperation with the European Network of Science Centres and Museums (Ecsite) will be pursued and we will facilitate the participation of ERC grantees as speakers in their annual conference.

We will collaborate with grantees to produce ERC science stories (website articles, podcasts, and other audio-visual materials) that highlight their ERC-funded research. These testimonies will demonstrate not only the intrinsic value of frontier research, featuring basic science projects that push the frontiers of knowledge, even without immediate applications or impacts, but also highlight how such research can inform policy by delivering relevant results.

This effort supports the dissemination of the ERC's work on "feedback to policy", with 2025 priority themes expected to include AI and health, carbon capture and oceans, biomaterials and bioengineering, and planetary ethics. These priorities will further evolve in response to shifting policy needs and scientific achievements. Communication actions will include disseminating the reports and factsheets from these policy studies, ensuring effective outreach and engagement across all relevant policy audiences.

The stories will be shared through the ERC's own channels and in collaboration with the European Commission (corporate campaigns, "research success stories", Cordis etc) and the European Parliament (European Science Media Hub etc.).

The Agency will offer further training in public speaking, public engagement and communication (including media relations, and the use of social media etc) to selected ERC grantees, including the Ambassadors for the ERC, to empower them to communicate about their research and engage with the public.

A more detailed calendar of events and communication opportunities is annexed to this communication strategy.

A key feature of our work in 2025 will be to systematically and critically review all our communication actions to examine their effectiveness, their reach to and interaction with the target audiences, and their return on investment. This evaluation work will be carried out primarily internally and, where necessary, with external support. The outcomes of the review will inform and help shape the communication strategy for 2026 and subsequent years.

## 5. Channels

### 5a. ERC communication tools and channels

#### Website

- > The ERC website attracted around one million visits in 2024. The website will be further improved, notably regarding search engine optimisation (for increasing ranking and visibility), usability and sustainability, and data visualisation. With 30% of visits to the website coming from mobile devices, we will take further measures to optimise our website for such devices.

#### Multimedia

Audiovisual content is highly valued by our audiences, consistently driving strong engagement. This demand reinforces the importance of investing in this format to connect effectively with our community.

- > In 2025, the ‘ERC Classes’ - a series of video tutorials created in 2021 to guide potential applicants through the application and evaluation processes - will be updated to reflect recent procedural changes. New videos will be produced to cover topics such as Synergy Grants and ethics requirements for applicants, along with a new animated, step-by-step guide to the application process.
- > A series of short explanatory videos will be developed for grantees, addressing topics such as project monitoring procedures, open science, and financial aspects of grant management. To support public engagement and science communication, we will create videos featuring the winners of the 2024 Public Engagement for Research Award, sharing guidance and best practices. We will keep exploring diverse formats to present ERC stories and data in the most impactful way.

#### Social media

- > The ERC’s social media presence has seen significant growth, demonstrating its effectiveness in engaging with the research community. LinkedIn is currently the leading platform with 233k followers (in November 2024). In 2025, we aim to maintain LinkedIn’s high and constructive engagement levels and will keep exploring options to extend our audience. Meanwhile, our X account maintains a reasonably robust performance (162k followers in November 2024), despite an increasingly hostile environment for much content on that platform. We will also monitor the use of microblogging platforms by the political and research community with a view to assessing potential future changes.
- > The ERC presence on Instagram (11k followers in November 2024) will be further strengthened. In 2025, we will continue to show original images of ERC-funded projects and, to reach out to the younger generation of researchers, we will experiment further with reels.

- > The ERC's WhatsApp channel saw the fastest growth rate among our communication channels in 2024. After we started using WhatsApp in late 2023 as a channel to researchers interested in ERC funding news, we reached 12k followers in a year. The aim of the channel is to provide researchers with “unpolluted” information on ERC funding opportunities in a simple and direct manner. In 2025, we will reinforce awareness raising of this channel among researchers in Europe and beyond.
- > Across all our social media channels, we will continue to explore various features and content formats - especially video - and maintain diligent community management. This includes addressing the needs of our online audience through timely responses to comments and questions and sharing content that resonates with our followers. We will further investigate which social media platforms most easily allow us to reach various stakeholders. In 2025, we plan to experiment with targeted advertising campaigns to expand the reach of selected content and initiatives to our key audiences.

### **Online magazine**

- > The ERC online magazine will maintain its editorial approach with quarterly collections of articles on specific themes, featuring op-eds from thought leaders in the broader research community, insightful analysis, and hands-on advice for ERC grantees and applicants. The magazine will remain an essential platform for engaging with the latest in scientific research policy; through a consistent editorial offering, the magazine aims to inform, inspire, and connect the ERC with the global research community.

### **Email alerts**

- > The ERC maintains a database of over 100,000 subscribers who have chosen to receive alerts about ERC funding and stories. This will remain an important channel.

### **Publications**

- > We will maintain a ‘digital only’ approach to content production as well as interactive publications for the website (including the ERC Annual Report and specific factsheets).

## **5b. Earned media**

The ERC is frequently in the news. Every month, more than a thousand articles mention us in the online and printed media.

During 2025, we will provide media relations support to the ERC President and the Scientific Council and actively seek media opportunities both through media interview and press briefings at events and during visits when opportune.

We will work with grantees and their host institutions to encourage media reporting of the results of ERC grant competitions, as well as ground-breaking research results by ERC grantees. We will connect interested journalists with grantees who are experts on specific topics. We will continue to cooperate closely with journalists covering science, EU affairs, international and national affairs. Our media relations work involves prompt responses to journalists' enquiries, as well as reaching out proactively to the media with newsworthy information. We will proactively pitch stories and news about ERC grantees and their research to relevant new media, such as podcasts, YouTube channels and other social media influencers. We will also organise media briefings on hot topics from a science perspective.



## 5c. Multipliers and communication partners

### National Contact Points

The ERC's National Contact Points (NCPs) are typically the first port of call for potential applicants. We will keep ensuring that the NCPs have the latest information on ERC grant schemes and calls, operational developments and call outcomes. Three meetings with the NCPs and ERC Executive Agency staff will be organised throughout the year, including an in-person meeting in Brussels during the first half of the year. Specific support for NCPs will be provided through a new project funded through the ERC 2025 Work Programme which is planned to start in mid-2025. This project will help identify and share good NCP practices and raise the general standard of support to ERC applicants.

### Host Institutions

The communication departments of universities and research institutions that host ERC grantees are key partners when it comes to the communication of call results, as well as project examples. We aim to expand our network of communication officers in host institutions and organise three to four online events during 2025. We will further our work with host institutions to co-publish press releases on key scientific results achieved by ERC grantees.

### ERC Grantees

ERC grantees are important multipliers, reached through multiple channels, e.g. direct emails from the ERC President, social media, emails on communication activities, and via interaction with the independent Association of ERC Grantees (AERG), which has established itself as an independent voice for the growing community of current and former grantees. We will collaborate closely with the AERG on the new Ambassadors for the ERC initiative.

### European Commission Representations

The European Commission's Representations in the Member States play a key role in raising the visibility of EU policies and programmes amongst the media and the public. We will continue to cooperate with them on the President's visits, call results, success stories and other announcements.

### European Parliament

We will pursue our close collaboration on various events and activities with the European Parliament's Committee for Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), the Science and Technologies Options Assessment Panel (STOA), as well as the European Science Media Hub (ESMH).

### EU Delegations / Euraxess network

Following on from the previous successful experience of global outreach webinars, we will continue to work with the Science Counsellors in EU Delegations and the Euraxess Worldwide Network to bring ERC grant schemes and calls to the attention of talented researchers around the world. We will also pursue our collaboration with the International Cooperation Directorate in the Commission's DG R&I.

### Commission DGs and EU staff

Commission DGs use a wide range of communication channels to reach European citizens and stakeholders. In 2025, further synergies will be built with their communication services to amplify the ERC's messages and identify opportunities, working in close synergy with the Agency team responsible for Feedback to Policy. The ERC will continue to tap into this internal network, strengthening its relations and counting on this essential audience to relay its messages. The ERCEA staff will be part of this effort. We will keep updating general Commission staff about ERC activities using channels such as Commission en Direct (for internal news) and encourage them to act as multipliers of our messages on social media.

To ensure that ERCEA staff are aligned with the ERC's goals, have the necessary resources, and share consistent messages, the ERCEA's internal communication strategy will remain focused on connecting staff members to the mission of the ERC, the Scientific Council and the research we fund.

## 6. Key Performance Indicator (KPIs)

We will track the following KPIs to assess the performance of our communication actions, with an aim for a sustained increase. The current baseline figures for December 2024 are given below.

Indicator	Baseline (31 December 2024)
Website visits	970,000
Social media followers	X/Twitter – 183,000 LinkedIn – 265,000 Facebook – 44,000 YouTube – 7,900 Instagram – 11,300 WhatsApp – 12,400
Media mentions	23,000
Views of ERC videos across different platforms	920,000
Subscribers of e-mail newsletter	107,000
Grantees speaking at events organised by the ERC	43
ERC science articles published on own channels and channels of EU services	231
Events (No. of people who participated or watched the event recordings)	105,900

## Annex – Key Communication Opportunities in 2025

### January

- World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland
- Proof of Concept 2024 call results,

### February

- ERC Annual Report 2024
- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), Boston, USA (remote attendance)
- Scientific Council plenary, Brussels
- “Exciting Minds” exhibition with the Estonian Research Council, Brussels

### March

- MIT Career Fair, Boston, USA
- Science is Wonderful!, Brussels
- ERC National Contact Points meeting

### April

- ERC Industry event, Brussels
- Scientific Council plenary, Brussels
- Launch of the Ambassadors for the ERC network, Brussels

### May

- UN Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI Forum), New York, USA
- Global Research Council 13th Annual Meeting, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

### June

- Scientific Council plenary, Durham, UK
- ERC National Contact Points meeting
- Ecsite Annual Conference, Warsaw (tbc)
- Advanced Grant call results
- HIRO meeting, Republic of Korea

### July

- ERC 2026 work programme adoption
- Joint info session for researchers in Poland

## **September**

- European Researchers' Night, Brussels
- Starting Grant call results
- Research and Innovation Days, Brussels
- All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance event, Brussels (tbc)
- Webinar on ERC 2026 work programme

## **October**

- Scientific Council plenary, Copenhagen, Denmark
- Science and Technology in Society Forum, Kyoto, Japan

## **November**

- European Business Summit, Brussels
- Falling Walls Science Summit, Berlin, Germany
- Annual ERC Scientific Conference, Brussels
- National Contact Points meeting
- Synergy Grant call results
- Scientific Council plenary, Brussels
- Brain Innovation Days, Brussels (tbc)

## **December**

- Consolidator Grant call results



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