

Guidelines for applicants

New Exploratory Research and Discovery (NERD) Programme 2026



Facts about the call

Total amount available for granting:

DKK 160 million

Amount available per grant:

Up to DKK 16 million

Call opens:

11 November 2025

Call closes:

19 February 2026, 14.00 CET

Applicant notification:

End of June 2026

Earliest start date:

1 August 2026

Latest start date:

1 February 2027

Review committee:

Committee for Natural and Technical Sciences

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All Grant Recipients must comply with the [‘General Terms and Conditions’](#) for grants from the Novo Nordisk Foundation (the Foundation).

The Foundation will treat all applicant and application information confidentially. Read more about how the Foundation processes personal data under ‘privacy & security’ in the online application system, NORMA. See how to access NORMA in section 2 of these guidelines.

You can find more information about the Foundation’s application and granting process at the [NORMA Help Centre](#). Detailed information about the different parts of the application is available in NORMA.



1 NERD Programme 2026

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the NERD programme is to support creative and ambitious researchers within the natural and technical sciences, at any career stage after obtaining the PhD degree. A NERD grant is aimed at supporting a single principal investigator (PI) with ample funding and a long time-horizon, providing the required long-term stability and continuity to explore truly exceptional ideas with potential application within the life sciences, health sciences or sustainability.

The NERD programme uses a two-stage evaluation procedure. At the first stage, applicants will remain anonymous to the evaluation committee, ensuring that emphasis is put on the proposed scientific ideas. The top-ranked applications will proceed to the second stage, where the CVs and publication lists of the applicants will be included to allow for feasibility assessment of the proposed projects.

In the year in which the NERD project begins, the applicant's grant portfolio as Principal Investigator must not exceed an annual total of DKK 4 million, including potential overhead. Grants where the applicant is co-PI are not included in this total.

1.2 Areas of support

The call supports fundamental research within the natural and technical sciences, including, e.g., physics, chemistry, mathematics, computer science and technical sciences.

In alignment with the Novo Nordisk Foundation's 2030 Strategy, applications for the NERD Programme must describe how the outcome of the project may have potential future applications within life science, health science or sustainability. Such potential applications may be within the project period but could also be on timescales longer than the project period.

NOT WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THIS CALL

The Novo Nordisk Foundation offers investigator grants within the scientific areas listed below. If the primary focus of the proposed research falls within these areas, the applicant

should apply to those programmes instead of the NERD programme. It is the applicant's responsibility to apply to the most appropriate call.

- Bioscience and basic biomedicine
- Endocrinology and metabolism
- Clinical and translational medicine (for clinicians)
- Industrial and environmental biotechnology
- Plant science, agriculture, and food biotechnology
- Data Science

The NERD programme does not support research areas outside the Novo Nordisk Foundation's 2030 Strategy. Examples include

- Cosmology
- Projects that are primarily retrospective or primarily of historical value

The list is not exhaustive. Applicants are welcome to contact the Foundation with questions regarding eligible areas of support for the NERD programme.

1.3 Eligibility

Researchers at any career stage after obtaining the PhD are eligible to apply. Examples include independent researchers who have established their own line of research, or researchers who are in the process of establishing themselves as independent researchers. Applications from PhD students will not be taken into consideration.

Other important criteria:

- The research project must be anchored at a university or other non-profit research institution in Denmark.
- The applicant must be at least 80% affiliated with a university or other non-profit research institution in Denmark (at the time of starting the project).
- A hosting letter signed by the head of department must be provided, confirming the following:
 - That the institution will provide the required infrastructure, laboratory, and office facilities, as well as administration of the grant.
 - That the applicant does not have a grant portfolio exceeding an annual total of DKK 4.0 million (including potential overhead) in the year of commencing the project.
- NERD grants are individual grants at the disposal of the grant recipient, and the grant recipient must be the clear driver of the project. However, if the applied project involves collaboration, the nature of this collaboration should be described in the project description, in an anonymous fashion. Invitation of co-applicants is not possible in this call.
- The NERD programme is intended for 'full-time' researchers who may have other obligations in connection with their employment (e.g., teaching, scientific advice to authorities).

Important restrictions regarding Novo Nordisk Foundation grants and proposals:

- An applicant may submit only one application to the Novo Nordisk Foundation for a grant of the NERD, RECRUIT, or Investigator types (across all funding areas) and cannot submit another application for these calls while the application is under review. If an applicant submits more than one application for the mentioned calls for simultaneous review, only the first application submitted will be evaluated, while the subsequent applications will receive administrative rejections.
- If an applicant holds an active NERD, RECRUIT or Investigator grant, the applicant may apply for a new grant of these types during the final year of the existing grant, however, the grant periods cannot overlap.

1.4 Funding

The timeframe of a NERD project is up to 6 years. Projects with a duration of less than 5 years will not be taken into consideration.

The total grant size is up to DKK 16 million in funding for a 6-year project period (pro rata for shorter projects).

Applicants may apply for funding for the following types of expenses directly related to the project:

- **Salary for the applicant** for all or part of the project period. Salary for the applicant cannot be covered if the applicant is in a time-unlimited position.
 - A NERD grant cannot be used to cover a teaching substitute for the applicant.
- **Salary for employees**, e.g., postdoctoral researchers, PhD students, and technicians. Salary expenses cannot cover employees of similar or higher academic employment level than the applicant.
- **PhD tuition fee** up to DKK 80,000 per budget year (must be included separately).
- **Operating expenses**, e.g., materials, consumables, compute time, and purchase of services.
- **Equipment** required for the project.
- **Conferences**.
- **Travel** expenses for, e.g., conferences, meetings, or experiments carried out at other laboratories.
- **Publication** costs.
- **Project supplement** (universities only).
- **Bench fee** (not applicable to universities).
- **Administrative support** (not applicable to universities).

Full-time equivalents (FTEs)

For each salary entry, please specify the FTE in years within the designated FTE field. This will indicate the proportion of a full-time position that the project funding will support for each year of the grant period. One full-time employee for one year equals 1.0 FTE.

Project supplement for research grants: (Danish universities only)

The project supplement contributes to the coverage of indirect costs at Danish universities, and replaces budget posts such as administrative costs, bench fee and parental leave.

More information on the joint model for project supplement is found at [Universities Denmark's website](#). Questions related to the project supplement should be directed to the research support units at your university.

Bench fee (not applicable to Danish universities)

Bench fee can be included in the budget for support of individual researchers to cover expenses needed to conduct the proposed research.

Bench fee is calculated per academic employee actively working on the project [eligible to apply for salary]. It may only be used for expenses related to the research project which cannot be included within another individual budget category. Bench fee may account for a maximum of DKK 8,000 per month per FTE. The budget must specify the expenses covered by the bench fee, which may include:

- Common or shared laboratory expenses and consumables
- Laboratory utilities (electricity, gas, water)
- Maintenance of essential equipment
- Service contracts
- Technical and IT support

PLEASE NOTE that bench fee cannot cover rent, administrative support, representation, social contributions etc. A valid bench fee policy in line with the Foundation's requirements must be available at the time of application, and this official documentation from the administrating/co-applicant's institution must be provided upon request.

Administrative support (not applicable to Danish universities)

Administrative support may account for a maximum of 5% of the total budget and must be included therein. The administrative support:

- can cover expenses such as for accounting, payment of salaries, purchasing, hiring, as well as auditing and financial reporting on the project
- cannot cover administrative expenses that are not directly related to the project
- can via the host institution be shared between the institutions of the main- and co-applicant(s), as detailed in the application budget
- is not automatically included in the grant and must be stated/applied for in the application budget but should not be specified in detail

The Foundation will not award funding for:

- Commercial activities
- Overhead/indirect costs (such as rent, electricity, water and maintenance)
- Double funding of projects:
 - If the applicant has received funding for the proposed project from other sources, in part or in full, this must be accounted for in the budget, as no budgetary overlaps are allowed
 - If an identical or overlapping project proposal has been submitted to other funding institutions than the Foundation, it must be noted in the application
 - If the applicant receives funding for the project, or parts of the project, from other sources following submission of the application to the Foundation, the Foundation must be informed immediately

1.5 Language

The application and all additional materials must be submitted in English.

1.6 Application process



When all applications have been assessed, applicants will be notified about whether they have been awarded a grant. The notification e-mail will be sent from norma-noreply@novo.dk to the e-mail address used when creating a profile in NORMA.

PLEASE NOTE: The Foundation does not provide feedback in case an application is declined.

1.7 Assessment criteria

The Novo Nordisk Foundation's Committee for Natural and Technical Sciences evaluates the applications.

The NERD Programme will use a two-stage evaluation process. A full application is required already at the first stage.

At the first stage, the committee will only have access to the submitted project description, to put emphasis on the proposed scientific project. At the second stage, the top-ranked applications from stage one are selected for further review. At the second stage, the committee will also consider the CV and publication list of each applicant to assess the feasibility of the proposed project.

Applicants must take care to formulate and structure their project information so that it does not reveal their identity (see section 3.3 for details). Applications in which the applicant's identity is intentionally revealed in the project description will not be taken into consideration.

In their assessment, the committee will evaluate the scientific quality, creativity, novelty, ambition, and feasibility of the project. Furthermore, the dedication (in time) of the applicant may be taken into consideration when evaluating the project.

If you have an active grant from the Foundation, this may be taken into consideration in the evaluation of your application for a new grant. In general, it is recommended that the applicant has delivered results on the active grant(s) before submission of a new application to the Foundation. If you apply while having an active grant from the Foundation, you must describe how the project you propose in this application is different from and/or coherent with the project(s) already funded and briefly describe the progress of the already funded project(s); the same applies if you have other active applications to the Foundation. This information should be included under **Applicant > Supplementary information**.



2 The application and grant management system NORMA

2.1 Creating and submitting an application

The Foundation uses the application and grant management system NORMA:

<https://norma.novonordiskfonden.dk>

If you do not have a user profile in NORMA, you can create one by clicking **Register** on the login page. The main applicant should only have one user profile. Please use your work e-mail address for registration.

The registered user who submits an application will be legally responsible for the truthfulness of the content of the application.

You can find guidance on how to create and submit an application at: [NORMA Help Centre](#).

If you experience technical problems and cannot find a solution in the NORMA Help Centre, please contact NORMA Support: norma-support@novo.dk.



3 Application content

This section provides guidelines on the content required in the sections of the online application form for this call. Detailed information about the different parts of the application is available in NORMA.

3.1 Applicant

The **Applicant** tab relates to information about the main applicant.

- **CV:** Maximum 4,000 characters. Include in your CV a short bibliographic overview summarising total number of peer-reviewed publications, number of first authorships, number of corresponding authorships, number of citations, and *h*-index.
- **Publication list:** Maximum 5,000 characters. Include the up to 10 most relevant contributions for evaluating your merits. Include names of all authors for each publication with your own name highlighted. You are encouraged to include a link to an updated profile (with full publication list) in ORCID, Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, or similar.
- **Summary of own research:** Maximum 2,000 characters. Summarise your research focus and main contributions and achievements relevant for the present application.
- **Supplementary information:**
 - Describe your terms of employment (where the project is to be carried out). Non-permanent employees should describe when their current contracts are running out and how their salaries are covered. Tenure-track employees should indicate when they are up for tenure.
 - Indicate how much of your research time (in %) you intend to commit to the project applied for.
 - Include an overview of your current active grants and other grants obtained within the past five years; indicate how they are different from/coherent with the project proposed here and how much of your research time (in %) is committed to each of these grants.

3.2 Institution

Please provide information about the institution where the grant will be administered. This institution is where the main applicant will be employed during the grant period, and the institution that will ultimately be responsible for administering and allocating the grant, including budgeting, financial reporting and staff supported by the grant.



It can take up to five working days to register a new administrating institution in NORMA.

The application cannot be submitted before the institution has been registered.

3.3 Proposal

Describe the project using the fields in the **Proposal** tab.

The information and uploads given in this tab are the only parts of the application that the evaluation committee will be given access to during the first, blinded stage of the evaluation procedure. You must formulate and structure your project information carefully to remain anonymous, including carefully considering references and self-citations, and refraining from uploading material that may reveal your identity.

PROJECT TITLE

Please provide a short title for the project (maximum 150 characters, including spaces).

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please provide a brief stand-alone summary of the project describing its purpose and key activities (maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please provide a detailed description of the proposed research project (maximum 30,000 characters, including spaces). The description should include purpose, background, hypotheses, methods, as well as the creativity, ambition, and originality of the project.

Please do not include information that may disclose your identity directly.

In a separate paragraph, please describe how the outcome of the proposed research may have potential future applications, possibly in the long term, in the life sciences, health sciences, or sustainability.

Abbreviations should be defined at the first use, and preferably a list of abbreviations should be included in the project description.

ILLUSTRATION UPLOADS

A maximum of four illustrations can be uploaded here.

The following file formats for illustrations are accepted in the system: JPG, JPEG, PNG and BMP. The maximum accepted size for each illustration is 50 MB and 1050*1650 pixels. Do not include any information that may disclose your identity.

LITERATURE REFERENCES

Please provide the reference information for the literature cited in the project description (maximum 8,000 characters, including spaces). References should include authors, year, title, journal name, volume number (or other relevant information) for all numbered references.

If you reference your own publications in the project description, please anonymise the data. This can be done by referencing a relevant publication by listing it as 'Anonymised Reference [number]' both in the project description and in the reference list. To assist the evaluation in stage two, the anonymised references may be disclosed in a separate full publication list, which can be uploaded in the **Appendices** tab (see section 3.5).

LAY PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please provide a brief summary in lay language. If the application is awarded a grant, the text may be used for publication (maximum 1,000 characters, including spaces).

3.4 Budget

Enter the project grant period, and the budget template will become available. Only budget information submitted via the **Budget** tab will be considered in the review process. Any additional budget information attached under **Appendices** (or any other tabs) will not be considered.

3.5 Appendices

All uploads must be in PDF format. NORMA automatically places these uploads at the end of the application. Appendices other than those specified here are not permitted and will not be included in the evaluation.

- **Hosting letter** signed by the head of department:
 - Confirming that the institution will provide the required infrastructure, laboratory and office facilities, as well as administration of the grant.
 - Confirming that the applicant does not have a grant portfolio exceeding an annual total of DKK 4.0 million (including potential overhead) in the year of commencing the project.
- **Reference list (not anonymised):** If the project description contains anonymised references, please provide as an appendix a full reference list including author, year, title, journal name, volume number (or other relevant information) for all numbered references (see section 3.3, 'Literature references').