



Novo Nordisk
Foundation

Guidelines for applicants

PIONEER INNOVATOR GRANT



Facts about the call

Total amount available for granting:

DKK 56-117 million

Amount available per grant:

Up to DKK 1.2 million over 1 year

Call opens:

1 August 2026

Call closes:

15 September 2026

Applicant notification:

December 2026

Earliest start date:

1 January 2027

Latest start date:

31 December 2027

Review committee:

[Novo Nordisk Foundation's Committee on Innovation Grants](#)

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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 Pioneer Innovator Grant

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Pioneer Innovator Grant is to accelerate the commercialisation of research findings and the development of novel technologies within the health sciences, sustainability, and quantum technologies (with a clear application within health and/or sustainability). The grant supports novel academic, science-based ideas with commercial potential by funding experiments and activities that advance the idea towards proof-of-concept.

1.2 Areas of support

HEALTH

The Pioneer Innovator Grant within **Health** supports innovative research projects within pharma, medtech, and industrial biotech*. The aim is to stimulate the evaluation of ideas that may lead to (but are not limited to) the development of new medical treatments, disease prevention, diagnostic methods, health technologies, devices and technological platforms. Particular focus is placed on projects addressing cardiometabolic diseases** as well as infectious diseases***, stem cell-based medicine**** and related preventive solutions.

*According to the OECD definition of biotechnology: the application of science and technology to living organisms, as well as parts, products and models thereof, to alter living or non-living materials for the production of knowledge, goods and services.

**Cardiometabolic diseases includes: Type 1/Type 2 diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney disease (CKD) associated with CMD, and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH).

***Infectious diseases include for example: drug-resistant infections (including antimicrobial resistance, AMR), and human respiratory infections (including solutions that strengthen epidemic preparedness through medical countermeasures).

****Stem cell-based medicine includes for example: technological enablers and approaches that advance stem cell-based therapies towards treating and curing chronic diseases, including improved discovery and development of stem cell-based treatments and solutions that strengthen regenerative medicine market readiness and translation.

Areas out of scope: Applications in which the project idea is not directly linked to human

health will receive an administrative rejection during the initial screening process.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Pioneer Innovator Grant within **Sustainability** supports innovative research within agriculture, food, industrial and environmental biotech*, carbon capture utilisation and storage technologies, and technologies addressing nitrous oxide and methane emissions. The aim is to stimulate the evaluation of ideas that may lead to the development of new products, systems, devices and technological platforms. Particular focus will be placed on projects addressing sustainable and high-yielding agriculture, sustainable food for healthy diets, and climate change mitigation technologies supporting the green transition.

Areas out of scope: Projects concerning livestock and feed or concerning nutritional uptake and clinical studies will not be considered.

QUANTUM TECHNOLOGIES

Projects involving **Quantum technologies** (e.g. sensing, imaging, communication and computation) are eligible to apply provided the proposed quantum technology has a clear and credible application within health and/or sustainability and is aligned with the respective track's focus and eligibility criteria.

The projects cannot directly benefit an established company (CVR number, organizational number, or Business Identity Code) but can in principle be at any TRL level.

The projects described must have a clear outlook of scaling potential in society and commercialisation possibilities.

1.3 Eligibility

The research project must comprise a main applicant and can include co- applicant(s) when deemed relevant. Rules of eligibility are outlined in more detail below:

THE MAIN APPLICANT

The Main applicant must be a faculty member, a researcher or a student employed at a university, hospital, or other research institution in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, or Sweden). There can only be **one** main applicant for a Pioneer Innovator Grant. If the project is managed by a group of researchers, with the same level of responsibility and legal ownership, one main applicant must be formally appointed and the remaining applicants as co-applicants.

A Main applicant **can hold several Pioneer Innovator Grants simultaneously**, as long as the grants are related to separate research projects.

It is possible to apply for a Pioneer Innovator Grant and Distinguished Innovator Grant simultaneously. However, the applications must consist of separate research projects with no overlap of activities or funding. Should there be any overlap between the applications, both applications will receive an administrative rejection during the screening process.

CO-APPLICANT(S)

Co-applicants can be included in the project, but this is not a requirement. Co-applicants may come from the same hosting institution as the main applicant or from a different

university, hospitals or research institutions locally and abroad. A person hired to work on the project (e.g., research assistant or project coordinator) is not considered a co-applicant.

HOSTING INSTITUTION

A Pioneer Innovator Grant must be administered by a non-profit organisation.

Projects from accelerator/incubator programs and projects where IPR is owned by a university's holding institution, e.g., Swedish universities, are eligible to apply if:

- The administrating institution is the University
- The project and its findings are anchored in academia
- The project has not resulted in the establishment of a company (given company has not established a CVR/ Organisational number/ Business Identity Code).

1.4 Funding

Pioneer Innovator grant size: Projects can apply for up to DKK 1.2 million with a duration of up to 1 year.

Applicants may apply for funding for the following types of expenses:

- **Salary** for research assistance at every level (including technicians, postdoctoral researchers, PhD students (incl. tuition fee up to DKK 80,000 per year, which must be specified in the budget).
- **Salary** for employees or project consultants at all staffing levels, including project management (including technical and administrative assistance).
- **Operating expenses:** consumables, materials, animals, human test subjects, expenses relating to clinical trials, services, access to registries, access to laboratory facilities, databases, and infrastructure etc.
- **Equipment** required for the project, up to DKK 200,000 per budget year.
- **Communication activities:** Communication and outreach in the form of conferences, books, articles and other dissemination directly related to the project.
- **Conference participation:** Travel and registration expenses in relation to presentation of the project and research results at conferences and workshops.
- **Travel:** Travel expenses related directly to the project, i.e., experiments carried out in other labs for a limited period, workshops etc., up to DKK 25,000 per budget year.
- **Publication costs:** Publication of results emanating from the research project, up to DKK 25,000 per budget year.
- **Commercialization** costs directly related to the project (fees for consultants, etc.).
- **Direct administrative expenses** of up to 5 % of the total funding applied for. Direct administrative expenses must be included in the budget.
- **Bench fee** (not applicable to Danish universities)*.
- **Intellectual Property (IP):** Counselling support for landscape analysis, freedom-to-operate assessments, development of IP strategies, IP training and licensing advice. The Pioneer Innovator Grant **does not cover expenses for filing patent applications**.
- **Project supplement** (Danish universities only)**.

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.

***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.

****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.

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
- Salary for main applicant and co-applicant(s)
- 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.
- In general, grants and projects involving use of products where Novo Group companies have a commercial interest (e.g. anti-obesity medications) must be in accordance with the Foundation's [Guidelines for Philanthropic Collaboration with NNF-Controlled Companies](#), as well as internal conflict of interest policies.

1.5 Language

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

1.6 Application process

The application must be completed and submitted using NNF's online application and grant management system, [NORMA](#).

Further information on how to access and navigate in NORMA can be found in the [NORMA Help Center](#).

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

NNF's [Committee on Novo Nordisk Foundation's Innovator Grants](#) will primarily assess the applications based on the following criteria:

- Novelty of the project idea and potential impact
- Commercial potential of the research idea/project – AND/OR – scalability
- Competencies and management qualifications of the Main Applicant and research team

The three criteria are equally weighted in the Committee's overall assessment of the application.

PLEASE NOTE: The Committee also places considerable emphasis on the budget during the assessment, including whether the allocation is well justified and clearly aligned with the proposed activities.

If the **main applicant has an active grant** from the Foundation, this may be taken into consideration in the evaluation of an application for a new grant. In general, it is recommended that results have been delivered on the active grant(s) prior to submission of a new application to the Foundation.

If an application is submitted while the main applicant holds an active grant from the Foundation, the **Project Description** must briefly describe (i) how the proposed project is different from and/or coherent with the project(s) already funded and (ii) the progress of the already funded project(s).



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 pertains to information about all those involved in an application, meaning the main applicant or contact person applying on behalf of an organisation/institution as well as any co-applicants, including:

APPLICANT DETAILS

The main responsible party for the application can enter their details through the Applicant Details-task with the type 'Applicant'. Click on OPEN, fill in all mandatory fields and click COMPLETE THE TASK to save the details.

PERSONAL DETAILS

The main applicant should provide information on their full name, title, phone number, work e-mail address, date of birth, gender, and nationality under PERSONAL DETAILS. Some of the fields may have been transferred from the user profile. Enter details of the main applicant's highest educational degree achieved using the drop-down menu. If you need to enter details for another degree, select OTHER from the drop-down menu.

CURRENT INSTITUTION

Main applicants should enter the contact details of their current workplace. If your current institution or organisation is not available for selection, please contact support at Norma-support@novo.dk.

EXPERIENCE

CV for the main applicant can be a max. of 4,000 characters incl. spaces.

Please include in your CV, a short bibliographic overview summarizing total number of peer-reviewed publications, number of first authorships, number of corresponding authorships, number of citations, and h-index.

Publications list (for main applicant) can be a max. of 5,000 characters incl. spaces. Please only include the 10 most relevant publications for evaluating your merits. Include a complete specification of all authors for each publication with your own name highlighted. Applicants are strongly encouraged to provide a full list of publications in ORCID. ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor Identifier) is a global database for researchers and science authors and entering your ORCID number is only relevant for research projects.

Summary of own research can be a max. of 2,000 characters incl. spaces. Please include a brief summary of your own research.

Supplementary Information (under Applicant Information) can be a max. of 2,000 characters incl. spaces. This field can be utilized to describe special circumstances regarding your application that the evaluation committee should be aware of, e.g., current terms of employment. Please do not include any personal information of a sensitive nature, e.g., illnesses, family conditions etc.

Previous and Current Grants from NNF

If you have received any grants from NNF as an applicant or a co-applicant within the past five years, briefly summarise how any of the grants are related to the current application and the percentage share of the grant (100% if there is no co-applicant).

3.2 Co-applicant(s)

For this call, co-applicants are allowed for the application. Co-applicants are expected to actively participate in organising and implementing the project and should, consequently, be allocated a share of the grant. The project description should clearly describe the role of all co-applicants, and the budget should clearly indicate the co-applicants' allocation of the total budget. Co-applicants must be invited through NORMA and subsequently enter their details in the system. Please follow the instructions in NORMA on how to invite co-applicants to your application.

Please note that co-applicants can read, edit and upload information into the application portal, **but only the main applicant is able to submit the final application.**



Inviting co-applicants can be time-consuming.

Please invite any co-applicant(s) as soon as possible and well in advance of the submission deadline.

3.3 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.

3.4 Proposal

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

PROJECT TITLE

Please provide a short title for the project (max. 150 characters incl. spaces).

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please provide a brief stand-alone summary describing the project's purpose, target group and main activities (max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces). Keep in mind that the purpose of the grant is to accelerate the commercialisation of research findings and development of novel technologies.

For consideration: Which specific problem/need does your project address, who experiences it (target users/beneficiaries/customers), and why does it matter (scale/importance).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project description (max. 20,000 characters incl. spaces). Please describe your project in detail, including the sections below. All sections are considered **equally important in the assessment process**, so aim for broadly similar length and level of detail across sections.

Background & purpose

Describe the background and rationale for the project, including the scientific/technical idea and the problem or unmet need it addresses. Clearly state the purpose of the project and why it matters.

For consideration: Is the project idea new or is it a development of existing initiatives? Which need or challenge will the project address? Why is it important to address this need?

State of the art and differentiation

Describe the current state of the art relevant to your project (key research findings, existing solutions and relevant patents/published applications, to the extent known). Explain the gap your project addresses and how your approach is scientifically/technically differentiated from current alternatives.

For consideration: What exists today (baseline) and what is the key limitation? What are the most relevant alternatives/competitors and known IP in the area (as far as you are aware)?

Methods and design

Describe what you intend to do and how, including a description of the individual activities and how these will be incorporated into an overall plan aligned with the purpose of the project.

For consideration: What are the planned activities? Which methods will you use throughout the project?

Assessment and project outcome

Describe the expected outcomes within the grant period and briefly the intended longer-term outcome. Define how outcomes will be assessed during the project period by stating high-level milestones, success criteria and/or deliverables.

For consideration: Which high-level milestones do you expect to achieve? What will you deliver during the project period? What is the potential short- and long-term impact?

Commercialization potential

Explicitly describe the plan for future commercialisation beyond the project period. State your intended route to market (e.g. licensing, spin-out, partnerships) and who the primary users/customers are. Briefly summarise the patent situation and IP strategy (e.g. any filed patents, planned filings, and planned patentability).

For consideration: What is the commercialization potential of your research idea? What is your patent strategy?

Main applicant, team and partners

Provide an overview of the main applicant, project team and key partners, including each key person's role, responsibilities and resource allocation.

For consideration: Does the team have the scientific/technical and translational competencies needed? Which critical competencies will be sourced via collaborators/partners/consultants?

Applicants are strongly encouraged to include preliminary data (where relevant). If you have previously applied for a Pioneer Innovator Grant without being funded, please include the year of submission, project title, and how the current application differs from and/or improves upon the previous application(s).

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

ILLUSTRATION UPLOADS

The following file formats for illustrations are accepted in the system: JPG, JPEG, PNG and BMP. The max. accepted size for each illustration is 50 MB and 1050*1650 pixels.

LITERATURE REFERENCES

Please provide the reference information for the literature cited in the project description (max. 8,000 characters incl. spaces).

If not applicable, please fill in N/A.

LAY PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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

3.5 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. Please describe the budget lines in a way so the expenses can be easily linked to project activities described in the proposal. Any additional budget information attached under **Appendices** (or any other tabs) will not be considered.

You can find additional information on how to fill in the budget in [NORMA Help Centre](#).

3.6 Appendices

For this call it is mandatory to upload the following appendices:

- Hosting Letter (incl. acknowledgement of bench fee, if relevant)

A hosting letter supporting the project must be signed by the management, e.g., Head of Department/Institute and uploaded with the application.

If relevant, confirmation that the institution has a bench fee expense policy and process should be included in the host letter from the institution. An unspecified bench fee without documentation will not be accepted.

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.