

novo nordisk
foundation

Benefitting people and society

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:

16 January 2026

Call closes:

5 March 2026

Applicant notification:

July 2026

Earliest start date:

1 August 2026

Latest start date:

31 July 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 Health is to accelerate the commercialisation of research findings and the development of novel technologies within the health sciences.

The purpose of the Pioneer Innovator Grant Sustainability is to accelerate commercialisation of research findings and the development of novel technologies within sustainability.

Both research areas of the Pioneer Innovator Grant are aimed at supporting novel academic science-based **discoveries with a clear commercial potential**. The grant aims to stimulate the evaluation of ideas and to support experiments and activities **leading to proof-of-concept or beyond**.

1.2 Areas of support

The Pioneer Innovator Grant **Health** seeks to support innovative research within med-tech, industrial biotech*, pharma as well as quantum technologies. Furthermore, the intend is to stimulate the evaluation of ideas that for example (but not limited to) could lead to the development of new medical treatment, disease prevention, diagnostic methods as well as new health technologies, devices and technological platforms.

Particular focus will be placed on projects covering cardiometabolic diseases** as well as infectious diseases and preventive solutions hereto.

Applications in which the project idea is not directly linked to patients or health of people, will receive an administrative rejection during the initial screening process of applications.

The projects cannot be directly linked to an established company (CVR number) 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.

The Pioneer Innovator Grant **Sustainability** seeks to support innovative research within agriculture, food, industrial and environmental biotech*, carbon capture, utilisation and storage technologies as well as nitrous oxide and methane emissions, and quantum technologies. The aim is to stimulate the evaluation of ideas that may lead to the development of new products or systems, devices and technological platforms in relation hereto.

Particular focus will be placed on projects covering sustainable and high yielding agriculture, sustainable food for healthy diets, and climate change mitigation technologies to support the green transition.

Applications in which the project idea is not directly linked to the above, will receive an administrative rejection during the initial screening process of applications.

Furthermore, projects concerning livestock and feed or concerning nutritional uptake and clinical studies will not be considered.

The projects cannot be directly linked to an established company (CVR number) but can in principle be at any TRL level.

The projects described must have a clear outlook to scaling potentials in society and commercialisation possibilities.

**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 including for example: heart attack, stroke, peripheral arterial disease, obesity, diabetes and fatty liver disease.*

1.3 Eligibility

The research project must comprise a main applicant and has the option of including 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).

CO-APPLICANT(S)

- Co-applicants can be included in the project, but not required.
- 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.

HOSTING INSTITUTION

- A Pioneer Innovator Grant must be administered by a non-profit organisation.
- A Pioneer Innovator Grant cannot be given to a company.
- Projects from incubator development 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/company registration number)

PROJECT SCOPE

The Pioneer Innovator project idea and focus must be directly linked to improving the lives of patients and health of people (**health**), or sustainable and high yielding agriculture, sustainable food for healthy diets, and climate change mitigation technologies to support the green transition (**sustainability**).

Applications in which the project idea is not directly linked hereto will receive an administrative rejection during the initial screening process of applications.

PLEASE NOTE

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 person hired to work on the project (e.g., research assistant or project coordinator) is not considered a co-applicant.

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.

1.4 Funding

A total of up to DKK 56-117 million is available for grants of up to DKK 1.2 million for projects lasting 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.
 - **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) [delete if not relevant]

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.

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

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

PLEASE NOTE: The budget is also paid considerable attention to in the assessment by the committee, ie the budget needs to follow the tasks of the project and clearly support the overall purpose of an innovation grant.

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 main 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). This information should be included in the **Project Description**.



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 maximum of 4,000 characters.

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 maximum of 5,000 characters (including spaces, line breaks and special characters). 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 maximum of 2,000 characters. Please include a brief summary of your own research.

Supplementary Information (under Applicant Information) can be a maximum of 2,000 characters. 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 (maximum 150 characters, including spaces).

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project description (max. 20,000 characters, including spaces). Please describe your proposed research project in detail – including:

- **Background & Purpose**

Describe the background and purpose of the project, including the project's significance and novelty.

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? How would this solution differentiate from existing solutions?

- **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 related to the purpose of the project.

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

- **Assessment**

Describe the expected outcome of the project in the long and the short run, and how this will be evaluated. The outcome could, for example, be listed as criteria for success.

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

- **Commercialization potential**

Explicitly describe the plan for future commercialization, including patent situation and/or patent strategy (including relevant search reports).

For consideration: What is the commercialization potential of your research idea? What is your patent strategy? How does the solution differentiate?

- **Main applicant & Research team**

Please provide an overview of the research team, associated project team and partners (including resource allocation of each key team member). *For consideration: Does the team have the right competencies and scientific knowledge to pursue the project?*

Further, applicants are strongly encouraged to include preliminary data in the project proposal. If you have previously applied for a Pioneer Innovator Grant without being funded, please include information about this in the project description, including the year of submission, project title and how the current project applied for relates or differs from the previous application(s), including how the application has improved.

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 maximum 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 (maximum 8,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

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 (maximum 1,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

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. 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.