



EXPLORATORY INTERDISCIPLINARY SYNERGY PROGRAMME 2024

Information and guidelines for
applicants

2024

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Information about the call

Grant capital:

DKK 53.75 million

Award amount

Up to DKK 5 million over 3 years per grant

Application form opens:

8 March 2024

Application deadline:

4 September 2024

Applicant notification:

End of December 2024

Earliest start date:

1 February 2025

Latest start date:

31 December 2025

Review committee:

Committee on Interdisciplinary Research

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1 EXPLORATORY INTERDISCIPLINARY SYNERGY PROGRAMME

These guidelines are intended to assist you in the application process when applying for a grant from the Novo Nordisk Foundation (NNF). It is important that you read these guidelines carefully before starting the application process.

Chapter 1 describes the overall frame and conditions of the call, eligibility criteria and evaluation process.

Chapter 2 provides technical guidance for how to access and navigate in the application and grant management system NORMA.

Chapter 3 gives essential information regarding the requirements to content, structure, and budget of the application.

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

Please read 'General Terms and Conditions' for grants from NNF which all Grant Recipients must comply with: <https://novonordiskfonden.dk/en/conditions-for-grants/>

1.1 PURPOSE

Many scientific challenges that have large implications for health and sustainability can only be addressed through interdisciplinary efforts. With the Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme, NNF seeks to strengthen the synergy between researchers, across disciplines, organisations, and national borders. The goals of the Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme are to:

- Enable creative, novel, high-risk/high-gain interdisciplinary research
- Support early-stage research that requires interdisciplinary collaboration and solutions
- Stimulate emerging research that spans across scientific disciplines and techniques
- Break down or overcome the barriers that hamper collaboration across disciplines
- Strengthen Danish research through internationalisation

The Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme is designed to fund the exploration of untested research areas that demonstrate the potential to have a high level of impact, i.e. high risk/high-gain. Specifically, this programme aims to support fundamental research between technology readiness levels (TRL) 1 and 2, as defined by the European Commission, and encourages the generation of preliminary data to guide researchers toward a more defined and expanded project stage. Opportunities for projects that have experimentally demonstrated proof of concept (TRL 3+) are available in other NNF grant calls.

1.2 AREAS OF SUPPORT

Funding from the Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy programme will generate novel, interdisciplinary approaches driven by research that aligns with NNF's strategic focus areas of Medical Sciences, Biotechnology, and Natural and Technical Sciences, with potential applicability in health or sustainability.

Please note that if the proposed research falls within Natural and Technical Sciences, the applicant must explicitly state the research's potential application in health or sustainability.

Proposals should be based on novel research ideas that require an interdisciplinary approach and can be characterised as high-risk/high-gain. Interdisciplinary research is defined by NNF as collaboration between scientific or technical disciplines that each offer unique, field specific perspective to the larger challenge. The collaboration should provide more than just a compounding of individual skills, but rather strive to synergistically combine perspectives, theories, and concepts across fields to generate novel results with broad appeal. Successful proposals will clearly demonstrate the potential for disruptive science that could lead to the development of entirely new research areas.

1.3 ELIGIBILITY

The programme supports collaborations between 2-4 research groups (the main applicant plus 1-3 co-applicants). Proposals must demonstrate interdisciplinarity by including co-applicants from different disciplines or institutional departments. Disciplines does not refer to the education or formal position of the applicants, but rather their ongoing work expertise. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary consortium forming the application does not have to be new; applicants may have previously established interdisciplinary research collaborations. Guiding principles on eligibility include:

- The main applicant must have a minimum affiliation of 70% with a Danish university, hospital, or other non-profit research organisation (verified by the hosting letter). Co-applicants and their research groups can be based either in Denmark or internationally.
- Co-applicants should significantly contribute to the scientific advancement of the project and receive part of the funding (administered by the host institution). *Ideally, all applicants should have the same level of obligation and commitment to the project.*
- Collaboration with researchers in non-academic sectors is allowed, however industrial partner(s) cannot receive direct funding through this programme.
- Receiving the Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme grant does not confer advantage in competing for the Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme
- Applicants who currently hold NNF research grants are eligible. However, the new grant period cannot overlap with the previous award for the same or similar research idea.
- A researcher may only submit one application per call as the main applicant. The researcher may participate as “co-applicant” on other applications within the same call, as long as the proposed research does not overlap.
- NNF prohibits duplication of funding for project-specific expenses. Applicants must provide a comprehensive account of any funding applied for or received for the project, or any component thereof, in the budget of the application.
- If the applicant receives partial or full funding for the project from other sources following submission of the NNF application, NNF must be contacted immediately.
- Please refer to our general terms and conditions <https://novonordiskfonden.dk/en/conditions-for-grants/> for further information.

Proposals that closely fit the criteria of the other grant programmes available through NNF (e.g. project grants), are ineligible for funding through the Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme.

Please note that the application and all supporting materials must be submitted in English.

1.4 APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process consists of a single phase submission using NNF's online application and grant management system, NORMA. For more information on using NORMA, please refer to Chapter 2.

After submission, applications are carefully reviewed by NNF's Committee on Interdisciplinary Research and selections are made based on the assessment criteria outlined in Chapter 1.5. The Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme is piloting a grant selection procedure between 2022 – 2024, where grants will be awarded either via traditional committee-based evaluation or partial randomisation. For both selection procedures, all applications are assessed by the committee and categorised as either meritorious (fundable) or non-meritorious. Grants will be awarded from the pool of meritorious applications either by the committee or through randomised selection. Applicants will not be informed which scheme their application was selected through. Partial randomisation has been implemented to minimise biases as part of NNF's dedication to improving grant awarding procedures.

Applicants will be notified regarding their selection status by the end of December via an e-mail sent from norma-noreply@novo.dk to the e-mail address provided during registration.

Please note that NNF does not provide feedback on applications from the review processes.

1.5 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated based on their demonstration of interdisciplinarity, high-risk/high-gain, and synergy of the applicants. Specific focus will be given to the following attributes:

- The scientific quality of the proposal
- The creativity and novelty of the exploratory research proposal
- The implementation and relevance of the proposed interdisciplinary approach
- The potential of preliminary data acquired during the project to lead to expanded research opportunities in health or sustainability applications
- Synergistic activities between the interdisciplinary applicants
- Managerial and scientific qualifications of the programme leader/main applicant

To foster the submission of high-risk/high-gain research proposals, the evaluation process does not prioritise absolute feasibility. Proposals are expected to be genuinely exploratory, aiming to produce preliminary data that could support a future application to the NNF Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme.

Please be aware that if the main applicant or any co-applicants currently hold active grants from NNF, this may be factored into the assessment of the new application. Generally, it is advisable for grant recipients to have demonstrated progress and results from any ongoing grants before applying for new funding from the NNF.

2 THE APPLICATION AND GRANT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – NORMA

Chapter 2 provides technical guidance on applying through NNF's online application and grant management system NORMA. All the fields of the application form must be completed in accordance with these guidelines and the instructions in NORMA.

2.1 USER REGISTRATION

NORMA can be accessed through links on NNF's website or directly at:

<https://norma.novonordiskfonden.dk>

Before you begin, please read the instructions on the login page.

If you do not have a user profile in NORMA, you can register by clicking REGISTER from the login-page. Here you can also retrieve forgotten passwords by clicking the FORGOT PASSWORD-link. The main applicant should only have one user profile. Please use your work e-mail address for registration. After registration, you will receive an e-mail with your user name and a temporary password, which you can then use to log in to NORMA. After logging in for the first time you will be asked to provide a password of your own choosing.

A registered user who submits an application is legally responsible for the truthfulness of the content of the application.

If you experience technical problems, please contact NORMA Support: norma-support@novo.dk.



An applicant cannot change the e-mail address provided at registration. Please contact NORMA Support if you need to change your e-mail address.

2.2 CREATING AN APPLICATION

Initiate an application by finding the call you wish to apply for in the OPEN CALLS-section on the Applicant Portal in NORMA. Use the search filters at the top of the section to filter by e.g., overall funding area, and initiate an application by clicking APPLY NOW next to the relevant call.

Applications can be edited up until the deadline. A draft application can be saved by clicking SAVE DRAFT and may be cancelled at any time up until the deadline by clicking CANCEL APPLICATION. An application is not submitted to NNF until an applicant has clicked SUBMIT and has received confirmation that the application has been successfully submitted.

You can review the application at any time by reopening from within NORMA. Opening the application will also allow you to download the application in its entirety as a PDF. Make sure the PDF is readable and formatted appropriately before submitting your application.

2.3 TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

For all applications, the individual fields must be completed in accordance with these guidelines and the instructions supplied in NORMA.



To prevent loss of data, it is essential to press **SAVE DRAFT** before you leave NORMA or navigate in the system.

TEXT FIELDS

Text from Microsoft Word or comparable word processors can be copied and pasted into most text fields of the application. It is, however, important to check that formatting, special characters, and symbols have not been converted or lost in the text fields after copying and pasting. If the formatting looks wrong in NORMA or in the PDF, try changing all text to *Normal* using the **FORMAT** dropdown. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the pdf looks correct before submitting.

The available options for formatting text are at the top of the text fields. Some shorter text fields do not have the option to use rich text formatting.



For readability purposes, standard fonts, font size 11-12, and line spacing between 1.0 and 1.5 must be used.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations such as figures, charts, tables, images, etc. related to the project description can be uploaded under **PROPOSAL**. A Maximum of four illustrations are allowed. The illustrations will be placed on a separate page in the application PDF but can be referenced throughout the project proposal as needed. For readability, please name the files numerically by the order in which they are referenced.

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

2.4 SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION

The application in its entirety must be submitted electronically via the application system by clicking **SUBMIT**. It is not possible to submit an application or any part of it by standard mail or e-mail. Any material submitted outside the application system will not be included in the evaluation and will not be returned.



Please remember to check that the PDF version of the application is legible and contains all data and uploads before submitting.

All applicants must read and accept NNF's [Standards for Good Research Practice](#) before submitting the application. Further, the applicant must declare that the information provided in the application is true and accurate.

An application cannot be submitted unless all the required fields have been completed. *However, the system does not provide a check of mandatory uploads, e.g. hosting letter and bench fee documentation.* Applications can be cancelled at any time before submission. If you need to withdraw an application after the deadline, please get in touch with NNF via e-mail, using the contact information on page 3.

3 APPLICATION CONTENT

Chapter 3 provides detailed guidelines on the content required in each part of the online application form for this call.

3.1 APPLICANTS

The APPLICANT-tab pertains to information about the main applicant and up to three co-applicants.

MAIN APPLICANT

The main applicant is responsible for the application and should enter their details under APPLICANT DETAILS. After filling in all mandatory fields, the applicant should complete the task to save the details.

CO-APPLICANT(S)

Between 1 and 3 collaborators must be invited through NORMA to register as 'co-applicant' in the system and enter their details under APPLICANT DETAILS. Please follow the instructions in NORMA on how to invite co-applicants to your application.

Co-applicants are expected to actively participate in organising and implementing the project and should, consequently, receive 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' share of the total budget. Co-applicants will only be able to edit their own APPLICANT DETAILS-task and make changes to the main application. The main applicant will be able to review and edit all APPLICANT DETAILS for the application including those for co-applicants.

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.

APPLICANT DETAILS

The following information is mandatory for all applicants and is collected through individual tasks in the APPLICANT DETAILS- section:

- **CV:** Maximum of 4,000 characters. Please include a short bibliographic overview summarising total number of peer-reviewed publications, first authorships, corresponding authorships, total number of citations, and h-index. Applicants are strongly encouraged to provide a link to an updated profile with a full publication list (e.g., ORCID, Google Scholar, Web of Science, or Scopus).

- **Publication list:** Maximum of 5,000 characters. Please list the 10 most relevant publications for evaluating your merits related to the proposal. For each publication, include a complete author list with your name highlighted and a short description (<100 words) on the impact the paper has had on the scientific community.
- **Research Summary and support of application:** Maximum of 2,000 characters. Please provide a short summary of your research, your support for this application, and explain how your research interests fit into the current proposal and collaboration.
- **Previous and current grants from NNF:** If you have previously submitted other applications in the same calendar year, summarise how these applications are related to the current application. If you have received any grants from NNF as an applicant or co-applicant within the past five years, please provide the application number, project title, grant period (in years), grant amount and the percentage share of the grant (100% if there is no co-applicant). Briefly summarise how any of the grants are related to the current application and what results have been delivered.

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 will ultimately be responsible for budgeting, accounting, and staff supported by the grant.

Please note registering a new administrating institution in NORMA can take up to two working days. The application can be edited but cannot be submitted before this information is registered. We therefore recommend that you register the administrating institution well before the submission deadline.

3.3 PROPOSAL

Describe the project using the fields on the PROPOSAL tab. Each field (PROJECT TITLE, BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION, PROJECT DESCRIPTION, ILLUSTRATION UPLOADS, LAY PROJECT DESCRIPTION) have instruction text describing the expected input and maximum characters available.

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 including the target group, planned activities, and justification of the interdisciplinary synergy in the project (maximum 2000 characters, including spaces).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please provide a comprehensive project description (maximum 30,000 characters, including spaces). The project description should be clear, concretely describe the scope of the project, and avoid unnecessary repetition from the brief project description. The project description is expected to be developed and written jointly by the group of applicants, clearly describing the role of each applicant. The project description must provide:

- A description of the exploratory interdisciplinary idea, its timeliness, and how the expected preliminary data will support the overall research direction and potentiate higher impact research.
- Clearly formulated hypotheses and details on work packages and methodologies (existing or developing).
- Details on why the project requires the proposed combination of complementary interdisciplinary expertise and how the synergy between disciplines will ensure advancement of the project.
- Details on the role of each of the applicants including both scientific input and project function (e.g. supervising students, access to resources).
- Overall impact of the completed project including any benefits to the individual scientific disciplines that may be generated from the success of the project.
- A description of identified risks in the project, i.e. describe which part(s) of the proposal contains high risk elements. *Please note as the programme is focused on high-risk/high-gain and exploratory ideas, a mitigation plan is not expected.*

Please do not use abbreviations and limit the use of acronyms. The applications will be evaluated by a diverse, interdisciplinary committee with expertise spanning biomedical, biotechnological, natural and technical sciences. Your proposal should be comprehensible to individuals with a strong academic background that may not specialize in your research area.

ILLUSTRATION UPLOADS

A maximum of four illustrations of 50 mb each can be uploaded.

LITERATURE REFERENCES

Please provide the reference information for the literature cited in the project description (maximum 8000 characters, including spaces).

LAY PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please provide a brief summary for non-experts. The NNF may publish this text to highlight funded research (maximum 1000 characters, including spaces).

3.4 BUDGET

Only budget information submitted via the BUDGET-tab will be considered in the review process. Any additional budget information attached under UPLOADS (or any other tabs) will not be considered.

Please note that NNF does not allow duplicate funding for projects – if co-funding is obtained from other sources for any part of the proposed research, the applicant must inform NNF as soon as possible.

GRANT PERIOD

Begin the budget section by entering the proposed start and end dates for the grant. This will generate the appropriate number of years in the budget template. The grant period is the duration of NNF's funding for the project, with the budget year based on the project start date rather than calendar years.

CREATE BUDGET

The budget will open in a new tab, where subcategories can be added. Please follow the instructions at the top of the screen to complete the budget. Please note:

- NORMA automatically saves changes to the BUDGET-tab. You are free to leave the budget at any time and come back at a later point.
- When you **SAVE AND CLOSE**, NORMA will check if all information has been filled out according to the guidelines.
- The full budget details can be viewed or edited at any time before submission by reopening the budget template.

ELIGIBLE BUDGET COSTS

The grant cannot be used to cover the main applicant's or the co-applicant's own salary.

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

- **Salary for scientific and technical employees** *in time-limited contracts* e.g., PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, assistant/associate professors, researchers/senior researchers, laboratory administrators. *Salary will not be covered for applicants, co-applicants, or scientific personnel with time-unlimited contracts.*
- **PhD tuition** fee up to DKK 80,000 per student per year (must be included separately).
- **Equipment** that is essential for the proposed project, and where justification of its use after completion of the project can be made.
- **Operating expenses** e.g., materials, consumables, data management, and services.
- **Collaborative activities** e.g., workshops, meetings, exchange, seminars, and other efforts directed at ensuring collaboration and synergy between the grant partners.
- **Conference participation** e.g., travel, accommodation, and registration for scientific conferences.
- **Publication costs** related to scientific publications originating from the project.
- **Bench fee** calculated per academic employee actively working on the project and may only be used for expenses that are related to the research project. Bench fee may account for maximum DKK 8,000 per month per full-time equivalents (FTE). The fee must be a part of the general expense policy of the administrating institution and/or the hosting institutions of the co-applicants, and it must apply for all employees independently of funding source. The budget must specify the expenses covered by the bench fee such as:
 - 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. and that we require official documentation from the administering/co-applicant's institution stating the general bench fee policy.

- **Administrative support** may account for up to 5% of the total budget and must be included in the total budget request. 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 be shared between the institutions of the main- and co-applicant(s) via the host institution, as detailed in the application budget
- is not automatically included in the grant, and must be stated/applied for in the application budget

Please clearly indicate the allocation of each expense to its respective applicant, and include a high-level summary of the budget in the SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION field that details the distribution of funds across collaborators and activities.

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS

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. In a year, there are 1924 gross hours from which you must deduct non-working days to arrive at the total net working hours.

Example: 6 weeks of holidays (222 hours), 10 public holidays (74 hours) 10 educational days (74 hours) deducted from 1924 amounts to 1554 net hours per year. The calculation for 30 hours would then be: 30 (hours) / 1554 (net hours) = 0.02.

Budget item (illustrative purposes only)	FTE	Description (illustrative purposes only)
Salary – PhD	1	PhD (1 person-year full time)
Salary – project employees	0,08	Project staff (2 x 60 hours)
Salary – TAP	0,21	Technical staff 2.5 person months full time

3.5 APPENDICES

- **Hosting institution letter:** a signed letter of commitment from the Danish host institution which assumes the responsibility to host the project as well as administering the grant and explicitly stating the applicants' affiliation (in %) to the institution (1 page maximum).
- **Bench fee policy documentation (if applied for):** Official Documentation stating that the administrating- and co-applicant institutions has a general bench fee policy

Please DO NOT attach other appendices such as recommendations, support letters from collaborators, quotes for equipment, etc.

All uploads must be in PDF format. NORMA automatically places these uploads at the end of the application. Please respect page limits and the upload requirements stated in the call. Uploads in excess of these limits will not be considered for evaluation.

3.6 SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

While NORMA supplies information about each of the fillable sections, *the system does not provide a check of mandatory uploads.* Please make sure the following documentation are in alignment with the guidelines above and are correctly uploaded into NORMA before completing the submission:

- Applicant details (Main and co-applicants)
 - CV
 - Publication list
 - Summary of research/support of application
 - Previous/current awards from NNF (if applicable)
- Project Title
- Brief project description
- Project description
- Illustrations (if applicable)
- Literature references
- Lay project description
- Completed budget
- Hosting institution letter
- Bench fee policy documentation (if applicable)

The Novo Nordisk Foundation

The Novo Nordisk Foundation is an independent Danish Foundation with corporate interests. The objective of the Novo Nordisk Foundation is twofold: To provide a stable basis for the commercial and research activities conducted by the companies within the Novo Group and to support scientific and humanitarian purposes.

The vision of the Novo Nordisk Foundation is to improve people's health and the sustainability of society and the planet.