

Guidelines for applicants

ASCENDING INVESTIGATOR 2025

**INDUSTRIAL BIOTECHNOLOGY
AND ENVIRONMENTAL
BIOTECHNOLOGY**



Facts about the call

Total amount available for granting:
DKK 22.5 million

Amount available per grant:
Up to **DKK 11.25 million**

Call opens: **07 November 2024** Call closes: **10 January 2025 14:00 (CET)**

Applicant notification:
April 2025

Earliest start date: **1 May 2025** Latest start date: **1 April 2026**

Review committee:
Committee on Industrial Biotechnology and
Environmental Biotechnology

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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 ASCENDING INVESTIGATOR 2025 WITHIN INDUSTRIAL BIOTECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

1.1 Purpose

The intention of the Ascending Investigator grant is to support the continued development and consolidation of excellent research leaders within industrial biotechnology and environmental biotechnology in the Nordic countries.

The Research Leader Programme

To support the best and most talented research leaders at all career stages, from senior postdocs wanting to start their own independent research group to established senior principal investigators, the NNF offers three different grants under the Research Leader Programme: Emerging, Ascending and Distinguished Investigators.

Please note that only the Emerging and Ascending Investigator grants are open within Industrial Biotechnology and Environmental Biotechnology.

The Ascending Investigator Profile

Ascending Investigator grants are individual grants awarded to excellent established research group leaders with original and ambitious projects, to support them in rising to the highest international level within their research field. The Ascending Investigator is typically at the associate professor or senior assistant professor level. See further details under the section 'Eligibility'.

1.2 Areas of support

The proposed research must address major challenges within Industrial Biotechnology and Environmental Biotechnology. The research should be fundamental in character but have a strategic outlook to scaling potential(s), contribute to sustainability and, if relevant, increase productivity. The proposed research must involve a clear element of biotechnology (see box below). One or more of the following topics should preferably be included in the research:

- Use or engineering of biological/biotechnological tools, systems or microorganisms for synthesis and production of valuable products (e.g., energy, fuels, chemicals, proteins, and materials)
- Development of technologies and processes for bioproduction
- Improvement of the efficiency and/or sustainability of biomanufacturing
- Use or engineering of biological/biotechnological tools, systems, or microorganisms to protect or improve the environment
- Understanding, protection, or manipulation of natural or industrial ecosystems in relation to application of biotechnology
- Data science to advance research within industrial or environmental biotechnology, including related ecosystems research

Proposals focusing on plant science, agriculture and food biotechnology should be submitted to the Novo Nordisk Foundation Committee on Plant Science, Agriculture and Food Biotechnology, while proposals with a focus on pharmaceuticals and therapeutics should be submitted to the Novo Nordisk Foundation Committee on Bioscience and Basic Biomedicine.

IMPORTANT! For the biotechnology requirement, the OECD short definition of biotechnology will be used as a reference for assessments.

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.

Essentially, any chemical or physical modification of a biological entity or product is considered biotechnology within this call.

1.3 Eligibility

The following criteria apply to the Ascending Investigator grants.

Career stage

The applicant must at the time of application be at the associate professor level or have similar qualifications (e.g., senior assistant professor or senior researcher). Ideally, applicants should have 7-18 years of research experience after having received their PhD degree (leave of absence not included). Minor deviations will be tolerated if they can be justified.

Applicants should have their own research group with an independent research profile.

Starting group leaders are encouraged to compare the eligibility criteria of this call with that of the 'Emerging' profile to select the best fit. Professors (including MSO) cannot apply as 'Ascending' Investigators.

Applicants are expected to have a strong track-record relative to their career stage, typically including senior authorships on high-impact research papers, documented research leadership experience, contributions to relevant scientific communities, important method and technology developments etc.

Place of employment and institutional anchoring

The project must be based at a university or other non-profit research institution in a Nordic country (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway or Sweden). This host institution administrates the grant.

During the grant period, the grant recipient and the associated group members must be employed at the administrating host institution.

A hosting letter signed by the head of department/institute must be provided. The letter should confirm that the host institution will provide the required infrastructure, laboratory and office facilities, as well as administration of the grant.

The grant cannot be used to cover teaching substitutes. Grant recipients must contribute to the teaching environment at the host institution in the ways, and at the levels, that are required or expected for the grant recipient's position there.

Important restrictions

Important restrictions regarding NNF grants and proposals:

- Applicants may submit only *one* application per call.
- The present call is for the grant type "Investigator" that includes: Emerging Investigator, Ascending Investigator, Distinguished Investigator, the NERD programme, NNF Young Investigator, NNF Laurate Research grants and the Data Science Investigator calls. If an applicant submits more than one application to these calls within the same year, *only the first application submitted will be evaluated*, while the subsequent applications will receive administrative rejections. After having received notification on the funding decision, the applicant may submit a new application for a Novo Nordisk Foundation Investigator grant.
- It is not possible to hold more than one active Investigator grant. Applicants with an active Investigator grant can only apply for a new Investigator grant in the final year of the project, however, the grant periods cannot overlap.
- Invitation of co-applicants is not possible within this call.

1.4 Funding

A total of up to DKK 22.5 million is available for grants. If the IEB committee receives a large number of high-quality applications for the Ascending Investigator call, the committee may allocate up to DKK 11.25 million from the Emerging call to support an additional Ascending Investigator project within Industrial Biotechnology and Environmental Biotechnology.

Each grant be up to DKK 11.25 million over a 5-year grant period.

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

- **Salary** for the applicant for all or part of the project period in case the applicant is not tenured or guaranteed her or his own salary. *Salary at professor level cannot be awarded*

with this grant, and host institutions of grant recipients who may be promoted to professors in the grant period are expected to cover any such extra costs.¹

- **Salary for employees**, e.g., PhD students, postdoc and/or for research or technical assistance. Salary for employees can only be applied for if they are employed at a lower job structure/salary level than the applicant.
- **PhD tuition fee** up to DKK 80,000 per student per budget year (must be included separately in the budget).
- **Operating expenses** such as lab consumables, chemicals and reagents, computing resources or software, sequencing/omics-analyses and other chemical analyses directly associated with the project.
- **Equipment** required for the project. The costs may not exceed 20% of the total budget.
- **Conference participation** up to DKK 50,000 per budget year.
- **Travel** expenses directly related to the project, for example, to perform experiments or analysis in another lab for a limited period. Up to DKK 30,000 per budget year.
- **Publication costs** of results originating from the research project, up to DKK 25,000 per year.
- **Project Supplement** only available for Danish Universities. More information is below.
- **Bench fee** not applicable Danish Universities. More information is below.
- **Administrative expenses** not applicable Danish Universities. More information is below.

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

¹ Institutions can apply for funding of additional expenses if they incur for leave in connection with the birth of a child for all grant recipients and all personnel employed in Denmark with salary covered by a Foundation grant. For more information: [Novo Nordisk Foundation increases support for parental leave to promote diversity and equal opportunities - Novo Nordisk Fonden](#)

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: (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
- 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



Application system opens	07 November 2024
Application deadline	10 January 14:00 CET
Evaluation of applications	February - March 2025
Applicant notification	April 2025
Earliest possible start date	01 May 2025

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 Industrial Biotechnology and Environmental Biotechnology](#) will primarily assess the applications based on the following criteria:

Scientific quality and impact of the project proposal

- Research question and scientific impact
- Scientific approach
- Societal impact

Applicant(s) merits and potential

- Quality of past performance
- Research leadership and/or potential
- Collaborations and scientific environment

Ascending Investigator grants are individual grants awarded to excellent and established research group leaders with original and ambitious projects of high international standard. Hence, independence and research leadership experience of the applicant constitutes important assessment criteria. As such, both 'Project' and 'Person' will be considered in the assessment.

The following elements will not be given weight during the evaluation:

- The current funding situation of the applicant. However, NNF does not allow double funding of projects and the level of commitment of the candidate to the project can be taken into consideration by the committee, for instance, if the applicant has existing major obligations or large grants.
- Whether the applicant applies for funding for their own salary, or has own salary covered by host institution or other funding.

The applicant, as the principal investigator of the proposed project, should during the project act independently from more senior researchers and other research groups at the host institution where the project and the applicant is based. If the project involves collaboration with other groups or independent investigators, the applicant must clearly demonstrate ownership of the project. The nature of collaboration, including roles and responsibilities, should be well described in the application.

Other grants from NNF

If you have an active grant from NNF, this may be taken into consideration in the evaluation of your application for a new grant. In general, it is recommended that the Grant Recipient has delivered results on the active grant(s) before submission of a new application to NNF. If you apply, while having an active grant from NNF, 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).



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.

CV

Please provide your brief CV with information on education, employment history, recent research funding, current supervision/training/teaching activities, summary of publication and bibliometric information (total number of peer-reviewed publications, first/corresponding/senior authorships, citation information, h-index), and other relevant information if space allows (max. 4,000 characters, including spaces).

PUBLICATION LIST

Please provide the complete reference information for your most important publications (up to 10). Include all authors (or number of authors, if necessary) for each publication and use bold or underline for your name. Applicants should include a link to an updated profile with a full publication list for the applicant on either Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus or ORCID. (max. 5,000 characters, including spaces).

SUMMARY OF OWN RESEARCH

Please summarize your own research that is of relevance to this application. (max. 2,000 characters)

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

This field can be utilized if there is additional information that is important for the committee's review of your application. (max. 2,000 characters, including spaces).

PREVIOUS AND CURRENT GRANTS FROM NNF

If you have previously submitted other applications in the same calendar year, summarize how these applications are related to the current application.

If you have received any grants from NNF as an applicant or a co-applicant within the past five years, you must 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 summarize how any of the grants are related to the current application.

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.

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, including the major challenge and knowledge gaps being addressed, overall purpose and expected outcomes.

(Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please describe your proposed research project in detail. Elements to be included are (maximum 30,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

- Major challenge being addressed and strategic outlook. How does the proposed research help to provide solutions improving productivity, enabling sustainable industrial production or environmental improvements?
- Critical knowledge gaps and identification of important research questions.
- Specific aims, testable hypotheses, and success criteria.
- Scientific background covering state-of-the art most relevant to the project.

- Experimental plan including methods and technologies to be utilized and/or developed.
- Alternative approaches, risk assessment and contingency plans.
- Discussion of experimental outcomes and potential impact.
- Ambition as ascending research group leader.

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.

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).

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).

3.4 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 LETTERS

Only the following **mandatory upload** will be considered in the assessment:

- **A hosting letter** signed by the head of department/institute must be provided. The letter should confirm that the host institution will provide the required infrastructure, laboratory, and office facilities, as well as administration of the grant. If relevant, the general bench fee policy of the institution should be included.

V.1 November 2024