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# **ASCENDING INVESTIGATOR 2021**

**PLANT SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE AND FOOD  
BIOTECHNOLOGY**

**Nordic countries**

**Information and guidelines for applicants**

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## Information about the call

Grant capital:  
DKK 30 million

Award amount  
Up to DKK 10 million per grant

Application form opens:  
November 2, 2020

Application deadline:  
January 6, 2021 at 2 pm

Applicant notification:  
April, 2021

Earliest start date:  
May 1, 2021

Latest start date:  
April 1, 2022

Review committee:  
Committee on Plant Science, Agriculture and Food Biotechnology

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# 1 ASCENDING INVESTIGATOR 2021

## PLANT SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE<sup>1</sup> AND FOOD BIOTECHNOLOGY

Please read these guidelines carefully before initiating the application process, as they contain the complete call text as well as instructions for preparing and submitting the application:

- **Section 1** describes the overall frame and conditions of the call, eligibility criteria and evaluation process.
- **Section 2** provides technical guidance for how to access and navigate in the application and grant management system NORMA.
- **Section 3** gives essential information regarding the application content, structure and budget.

NNF will treat all applicant and application information confidentially.

Furthermore, please read 'General Terms and Conditions' for grants from NNF that all Grant Recipients must comply with: <http://www.novonordiskfonden.dk/en/content/conditions-grants>

### 1.1 PURPOSE

The intention of the Ascending Investigator grant is to support the continued development and consolidation of excellent research leaders within plant science, agriculture<sup>1</sup> and food biotechnology in the Nordic countries.

The proposed research should address major challenges within plant-, agricultural- and food science associated with developing sustainable agriculture and food production. There should be a clear and strategic outlook to improve sustainability and provide high-impact solutions at a large scale.

#### 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 Plant Science, Agriculture and Food 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'.

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<sup>1</sup> Agriculture is here defined as terrestrial farming and cultivation of plants, including forestry.

## 1.2 AREAS OF SUPPORT

The proposed research must address major challenges within plant-, agricultural and food science related to sustainable agriculture and food production. The research should be fundamental in character, but have a strategic outlook to provide solutions that promote productivity and sustainability at a large scale. 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:

- Plants with increased productivity, resiliency, nutritional content and/or resource-use efficiency
- Development of plants for food, fibre, fuels, materials, chemicals and carbon storage
- Biological approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture
- Biological approaches supporting productivity and resiliency of agricultural production
- Fundamental research within sustainable foods and food processing
- Functionality and the associated structures of food components
- Data science promoting research within plant science, agriculture and food biotechnology

### The program will not support:

- Research focusing on livestock, livestock commodities and feed.
- Research with a main component within nutritional uptake and metabolic effects of specific foods.

Projects with a focus on pharmaceuticals and therapeutics should submit their application 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 single definition of biotechnology is: 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 7-15 years of research experience after having received their PhD degree (leave of absence not included).

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 annually reoccurring Data Science Investigator calls under the Foundation's Data Science Initiative, running in 2020-2022. 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.
- 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 DKK 30 million is available for grants of up to DKK 10 million for projects lasting up to five years.

Applicants may apply for funding for the following overall types of expenses when directly related to the project (see section 3.3 for details on conditions and requirements):

- Salary for the applicant
- Salary for employees
- PhD tuition fee
- Operating expenses
- Bench fee
- Equipment
- Conferences participation
- Travel
- Publication costs
- Direct administrative expenses

**NNF will not award funding for:**

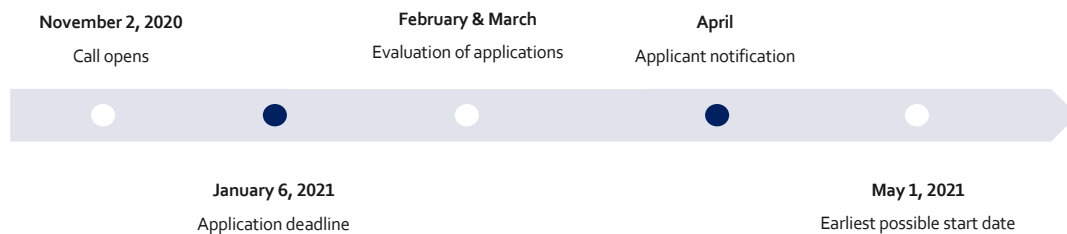
- Commercial activities
- Overhead
- Double funding of projects:
  - If the applicant has received funding for parts of the project from other sources, in part or in full, this must be accounted for in the budget, as no budgetary overlaps are allowed.
  - If an identical or overlapping project proposal has been submitted to other funding institutions than the NNF, it must be noted under 'supplementary information'.
  - If the applicant, after submission of the NNF application, receives funding for the project or parts of the applied project from others, NNF must be contacted as soon as possible.



The grant may not be used to cover commercial activities or 'overhead' (i.e. rent, electricity, water, maintenance, office space, access to scientific literature etc.)

## 1.5 APPLICATION PROCESS

The application must be completed and submitted using NNF's online application and grant management system, NORMA, which can be accessed from: <https://norma.novonordiskfonden.dk>. Further information on how to access and navigate in NORMA can be found in chapter 2.



When all applications have been assessed, applicants will be notified about whether or not they have been awarded a grant. The notification e-mail will be sent from [noreply@norma.novonordiskfonden.dk](mailto:noreply@norma.novonordiskfonden.dk) to the e-mail address entered on initial registration.



NNF does not provide feedback in case an application is not selected for funding.

## 1.6 LANGUAGE

The application and any additional uploads must be written in English.

## 1.7 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

NNF's Committee on Plant Science, Agriculture and Food Biotechnology will evaluate the applications.

### Primary assessment criteria:

- Novelty and originality of the research idea
- Potential impact on the research areas mentioned in Section 1.2
- Feasibility of the proposed research
- Independence, maturity and research leadership experience of the applicant
- Mobility and international experience, as well as engagement in the research community

Ascending Investigator grants are individual grants awarded to excellent and established research group leaders with original and ambitious projects. 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:

- The current funding situation of the applicant will not affect the evaluation of the proposal per se. However, 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 his/her own salary, or has own salary covered by host institution or other funding, will be irrelevant for the evaluation.

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 the applicant has 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). The above information should be entered under the PREVIOUS AND CURRENT GRANTS FROM NNF tab.



## 2 THE APPLICATION AND GRANT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – NORMA

Sections 2 and 3 provide guidance on completing and submitting an application through NNF's online application and grant management system NORMA. Section 2 contains general technical information, while section 3 contains information specific to the individual call. 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 on REGISTER AS APPLICANT. You will be asked to fill in a contact form, which will appear in a new window. The main applicant should only have one user profile. Use your work e-mail address for registration. After the registration, you will receive an e-mail with your user name and password. You can now log in to NORMA. When you log in for the first time, you will be asked to change your password.

Applicants who have previously applied for a grant from NNF or have an active grant may already have a user profile in NORMA. If you are in doubt, an existing user profile can be retrieved by clicking FORGOT PASSWORD and entering an e-mail address. If you have a user profile in the system, you will receive an e-mail with login information and a new password within 5–10 minutes.

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](mailto: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

To initiate a new application, you first need to identify the call and grant you wish to apply for. In NORMA, go to the OPEN CALLS tab, which is located in the upper right corner of the screen. All currently available grants are visible in tabs that are sorted by NNF's overall grant areas.

Initiate an application by clicking the blue APPLY NOW button. Your draft application is then created and will remain a draft version until you actively submit the application.

You can create and subsequently edit a draft version of the application until the deadline. A draft application can be saved by clicking SAVE DRAFT and may be cancelled at any time up to the deadline by clicking the button CANCEL APPLICATION. An application is not submitted to NNF until an applicant has clicked SUBMIT.

The application comprises tabbed sheets that need to be completed but not necessarily in chronological order. Fields marked with a red star (\*) are obligatory to fill in.

You can review the application at any time by clicking OPEN under MY APPLICATIONS on the NORMA front page. The whole application, including any currently entered data, can be downloaded as a PDF file by clicking on APPLICATION PDF. Make sure the PDF is readable and formatted appropriately before submitting your application.

## 2.3 TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

### FILLING IN THE FIELDS

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.

### APPLICATION TEXTS

Text from Word, for example, can be copied and pasted into most text fields of the application. It is, however, important to check that formatting, special letters and symbols have not been converted or lost in the text fields after copying and pasting. If the formatting looks wrong in NORMA and in the PDF, you can try to change all text to "Normal" under the tab FORMAT.

The available functions for formatting text are at the top of the text fields. Some shorter text fields do not have the option to format.



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

### ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations with figures, charts, tables, images etc. related to the project description can be uploaded under PROJECT INFORMATION (a maximum of four illustrations are allowed). Include the illustration number and a legend or caption for each illustration file when uploading. The illustrations will be integrated in the final application PDF.

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.

All applicants must read and accept NNF's Standards for Good Research Practice before submitting the application. A link can be found under "Policies" in the top right corner of the window. 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. Fields in the application that are incorrectly completed or incomplete will be listed in a box at the top of the screen. Clicking on each individual line marked in red takes you directly to the incomplete field. The box will disappear when you select **SAVE DRAFT**. This allows you to continue with the application and submission.



A list of any incorrect or incomplete entries will be autogenerated when you click **SUBMIT**. Amending incorrect or incomplete entries can be time-consuming, so we recommend submitting applications well before the deadline.

If you wish to modify a submitted application before the deadline, it is possible to reopen the application. Be aware that the application must be resubmitted before the deadline. Applications cannot be modified after the submission deadline.

Once the application has been submitted, a confirmation of receipt will be sent to the e-mail address used for logging into the system. If you do not receive a confirmation of receipt (please check your spam folder), you should contact NNF as soon as possible using the contact details on page 3.

If you wish to withdraw a submitted application after the deadline, you must contact NNF via e-mail, using the contact information on page 3.



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

## 3 APPLICATION CONTENT

This section provides guidelines on the content required in the sections of the online application form for this call, as well as essential information regarding the project description, structure and budget.

### 3.1 APPLICANT INFORMATION

Enter information on the main applicant and administrating institution in the following tabbed sheets:

- Personal information.
- Current institution.
- Educational information.
- Administrating institution.

#### Applicant information

##### **CV (4,000 characters):**

- Education.
- Employment history.
- Research funding.
- A short bibliographic overview summarizing total number of peer-reviewed publications, number of first authorships and corresponding authorships, number of citations, development in citations per year and H-index.
- International experience also including shorter research stays.
- Substantial findings and contributions to science, society, technology and innovation (incl. patents).
- Other relevant information, e.g. contribution to teaching.

##### **Publications (5,000 characters)**

Applicants should include a link to an updated profile with a full publication list, e.g. Google Scholar, ORCID, Web of Science or Scopus. Below that, list the 10 most relevant publications for evaluating your merits. Please include all authors (or number of authors on publications with more than 10 authors) and highlight your own name. Please also provide the 5-year impact factor for the individual journals.

##### **Summary of own research (2,000 characters)**

Please provide a summary of your research achievements and describe how you expect your research will contribute to solve major challenges within plant-, agricultural- and food science associated with developing sustainable agriculture and food production.

##### **Supplementary information (2,000 characters)**

This field can be used to provide additional information that is important for the committee's evaluation of your application, e.g. leave of absences, employment situation, possible considerations regarding your fit with the 'investigator' profile, teaching obligations, other project obligations.



Registering a new administrating institution in NORMA can take up two working days. The application can be edited but cannot be submitted before this information is registered. We therefore recommend that you register an administrating institution in good time.

## 3.2 PROJECT INFORMATION

Enter a description of the project under the PROJECT INFORMATION tab.

### Grant period

After you enter the start and end dates for the grant, NORMA generates a grant period in whole years. The grant period is the duration of NNF's grant for the project.

### Project title (150 characters)

Please provide a short title for the project.

### Brief project description (2,000 characters)

Please provide a brief stand-alone summary of the project including the major challenge and knowledge gaps being addressed, overall purpose and expected outcomes.

### Project description (30,000 characters)

The applicant is free to choose any preferred structure for the project description. The following elements should be included:

- Major challenge being addressed and strategic outlook. How does the proposed research help to provide solutions enabling sustainable agriculture and/or food production?
- 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.

### Illustration uploads

It is possible to upload a maximum of four files to support the evaluation of the proposal (images, figures, tables, etc.). See Section 2.3 for more details. **Do not upload your CV (see Section 3.1.1), Hosting letter or Letter of confirmation here (see Section 3.4).**

### Literature references (4,000 characters)

Please provide the reference information for the literature cited in the project description.

### Lay project description (1,000 characters)

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.



Please note that the application should address all the assessment criteria listed in Section 1.7.

## 3.3 BUDGET

The budget only comprises the information entered in the BUDGET tab. Additional budget information attached under UPLOADS or added under other tabs than BUDGET will not be considered.

The way in which the budget is set up influences any later financial reporting to NNF. Please note that any later financial accounts must have the same headings as the budget posts in the original application.

Before you begin to fill in the budget template, enter GRANT PERIOD START DATE and GRANT PERIOD END DATE under the PROJECT INFORMATION tab and press SAVE DRAFT. The budget must be entered in budget years following the grant period and not calendar years.

Complete the budget as follows:

- Click on the blue OPEN/EDIT icon to open a budget in a pop-up window.
- Click the + key to add budget rows.
- Select one of the budget headings, enter an amount under VALUE (DKK) and specify what the amount is for under DESCRIPTION.
- All amounts must be stated in Danish kroner (DKK) without decimal points, commas or spaces. NORMA automatically inserts the thousands separator.
- Save and close the budget spreadsheet by clicking SAVE and CLOSE (in that order) and then return to the BUDGET tab.

**Important:** If you make any changes to the grant period after filling out the budget, you must clear the budget table before making the change to the 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.
- **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).
- **Operating expenses** such as lab consumables, chemicals and reagents, computing resources or software, sequencing/omics-analyses and other chemical analysis 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.
- **Bench fee.** To include a bench fee in the budget, the fee must be part of the general expense policy at the department/section/institute and apply to all employees for which the policy concerns. Bench fees may only be used for operating expenses, lab consumables, and access to laboratory space and facilities that cannot be included within another individual budget category. It must be specified what is included in the bench fee, the price per month and how many months per year the bench fee covers.
- **Administrative support** up to 5% of the total budget (must be included separately):
  - 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.
  - is not automatically included in the grant and must be stated/applied for in the application budget but should not be specified in detail.

Any comments about the budget can be entered in the SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION field.

Funding, both received and applied for, from the applicant's own organisation and from other sources should be entered under ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE PROJECT. The amount entered should be the

total sum for the entire grant period. The NNF does not allow double funding and there can be no budgetary overlaps between projects. The INFORMATION FOR ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS field must clearly describe what the additional contributions cover and how the project proposed in this application is different from the project already funded or applied for from other parties than NNF. If the applicant, after submitting the application, receives funding for the project or parts of the applied project from others, the NNF must be contacted as soon as possible.



Applicants may only apply for the types of expenses listed in Section 1.4.

### 3.4 UPLOADS

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.

**All uploads must be in PDF format.** NORMA automatically places these uploads at the end of the application.

### 3.5 PREVIOUS AND CURRENT GRANTS FROM THE FOUNDATION

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.

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

October 2020

## The Novo Nordisk Foundation

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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 contribute significantly to research and development that improves the lives of people and the sustainability of society.