



New Exploratory Research and Discovery (NERD) Programme 2024

Information and guidelines for applicants

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Information about the call

Grant capital:
DKK 98 million

Award amount:
Up to DKK 14 million per grant

Application form opens:
8 November 2023

Application deadline:
28 February 2024, 14:00 CET

Applicant notification:
End of June 2024

Earliest start date:
1 August 2024

Latest start date:
1 February 2025

Review committee:
Committee for the Natural and Technical Sciences

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1 NERD PROGRAMME 2024

Please read these guidelines carefully before initiating the application process for the NERD programme 2024.

Furthermore, please read 'General Terms and Conditions' for grants from Novo Nordisk Foundation that all Grant Recipients must comply with:

<http://www.novonordiskfonden.dk/en/content/conditions-grants>.

All applicant and application information will be treated confidentially. Read more about how NNF processes personal data under 'privacy & security' in the online application system NORMA.

1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of the NERD programme is to support creative, daring, and ambitious researchers within the natural and technical sciences, at any career stage after obtaining the PhD degree. A NERD grant is aimed at supporting a single principal investigator (PI) with ample funding and a long time-horizon, providing the required long-term stability and continuity to explore truly exceptional ideas with potential application within the life sciences, health sciences, or sustainability.

The NERD programme uses a two-stage evaluation procedure. At the first stage, applicants will remain anonymous to the evaluation committee, ensuring that emphasis is put on the proposed scientific ideas. The top evaluated applications will proceed to the second stage, where the CVs and publication lists of the applicants will be included to assess the feasibility of the proposed projects.

To ensure that the PI will dedicate time and effort to the proposed research, during the year of commencing the NERD project, the applicant cannot have a grant portfolio as PI exceeding an annual total of DKK 4 million (including possible overhead). Grants where the applicant is co-PI are not included in this total.

1.2 AREAS OF SUPPORT

The call supports fundamental research within the natural and technical sciences, including, e.g., physics, chemistry, mathematics, computer science, and technical sciences.

In alignment with the 2030 Strategy for the Novo Nordisk Foundation, applications for the NERD Programme must describe how the outcome of the project may have potential future applications within life science, health science, or sustainability. Such potential applications may be within the project period but could also be on timescales longer than the project period.

NOT WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THIS CALL

Projects focused on areas covered by other calls from the Novo Nordisk Foundation, or which fall outside the current scope of the Foundation, are not eligible for the NERD Programme. Examples of research areas **not eligible** for the NERD Programme are:

- Bioscience and basic biomedicine
- Endocrinology and metabolism
- Industrial and environmental biotechnology
- Plant science, agriculture, and food science
- Clinical and translational medicine
- Cosmology
- Zoology
- Biotechnology
- Projects that are primarily retrospective or primarily of historical value

The list is not exhaustive. Applicants are welcome to contact the Foundation with questions regarding eligible areas of support for the NERD programme.

1.3 ELIGIBILITY

Researchers at any career stage after obtaining the PhD are eligible to apply. Examples include independent researchers who have already established their own line of research, or researchers who are in the process of establishing themselves as independent researchers. Applications from PhD students will not be taken into consideration.

Other important criteria:

- The research project must be anchored at a university or other non-profit research institution in Denmark.
- The applicant must be at least 80% affiliated with a university or other non-profit research institution in Denmark.
- A hosting letter signed by the head of department must be provided, confirming the following:
 - That the institution will provide the required infrastructure, laboratory, and office facilities, as well as administration of the grant.
 - That the applicant does not have a grant portfolio exceeding an annual total of DKK 4.0 million (including possible overhead) in the year of commencing the project.
- A NERD grant cannot be used to cover a teaching substitute for the applicant.
- NERD grants are individual grants at the disposal of the grant recipient, and the grant recipient must be the clear driver of the project. However, if the applied project involves collaboration, the nature of this collaboration should be described in the project description, in an anonymous fashion. Invitation of co-applicants is not possible in this call.
- The NERD programme is intended for 'full-time' researchers who may have teaching obligations at a normal level for university faculty.

Important restrictions regarding NNF grants and proposals:

- An applicant may submit only one application to the Novo Nordisk Foundation for a grant of the NERD or NNF Investigator types (across all funding areas) and cannot submit another application for NERD/Investigator while the application is under review. If an applicant submits more than one NERD/Investigator application for simultaneously review, only the first application submitted will be evaluated, while the subsequent applications will receive administrative rejections.

- If an applicant holds an active NERD or Investigator grant, the applicant may apply for a new grant of this type during the final year of the existing grant, however, the grant periods cannot overlap.

1.4 FUNDING

The timeframe of a NERD project is up to 7 years. Projects with a duration of less than 5 years will not be taken into consideration.

The total grant size is up to DKK 14 million in funding for a 7-year project period (pro rata for shorter projects).

Applicants may apply for funding for the following overall types of expenses when directly related to the project (see section 3.4 for details on conditions and requirements):

- Salary for the applicant, however, note the restrictions detailed in section 3.4.
- Salary for employees
- PhD tuition fee
- Operating expenses
- Equipment
- Conference participation
- Organisation of meetings / smaller conferences
- Travel
- Publication costs
- Bench fee
- Direct administrative expenses

NNF will not award funding for:

- Commercial activities
- Overhead
- Double funding of projects:
 - If the applicant has received funding for the proposed project from other sources, in part or in full, this situation **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 Novo Nordisk Foundation, it **must be** noted in the application.
- If the applicant, post application submission, receives funding for the project or parts of the applied project from others, the Novo Nordisk Foundation **must be** contacted as soon as possible.



The grant may not be used to cover 'overhead' (i.e., rent, electricity, water, maintenance etc.)

1.5 LANGUAGE

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

1.6 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>.



When all applications have been assessed, applicants will be notified about the outcome. The notification e-mail will be sent from norma-noreply@novo.dk to the e-mail address entered on initial registration.



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

1.7 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

NNF's Committee for the Natural and Technical Sciences evaluates the applications.

The NERD Programme will use a two-stage evaluation process. A full application is required already at the first stage.

At the first stage, in order to put emphasis on the proposed scientific project, the committee will only have access to the submitted project description. At the second stage, the top applications from stage one with the highest scores are selected for further review. At the second stage, the committee will also consider the CV and publication list of each applicant to assess the feasibility of the proposed project.

Applicants must take care to formulate and structure their project information so that it does not in any way reveal their identity (see section 3.3 for details). Applications in which the applicant's identity is intentionally revealed in the project description will not be taken into consideration.

The committee will include in their assessment the scientific quality, creativity, novelty, ambition, and feasibility of the project. Furthermore, the dedication (in time) of the applicant may be taken into consideration when evaluating the project.

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

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 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 username 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 re-opening 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 is 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 1650*1050 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. 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.



A list of any incorrect or incomplete entries will be generated at the top of the screen when you click SUBMIT. Clicking one of these error messages will take you to the relevant field. Amending incorrect or incomplete entries can be time-consuming, so we recommend submitting applications well before the deadline.

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

In the APPLICANT tab, the applicant fills in information about their experience, current institution and position, publication history, etc. After filling in all mandatory fields, the applicant should complete the task to save the details.

APPLICANT DETAILS

Please open the APPLICANT DETAILS task and fill in the requested information, observing the following:

- **CV:** Maximum 4,000 characters. Include in your CV a short bibliographic overview summarising total number of peer-reviewed publications, number of first authorships, number of corresponding authorships, number of citations, and *h*-index.
- **Publication list:** Maximum 5,000 characters. Include the up to 10 most relevant publications for evaluating your merits. Include names of all authors for each publication with your own name highlighted. You are strongly encouraged to include a link to an updated profile (with full publication list) in ORCID, Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, or similar.

- **Summary of own research:** Maximum 2,000 characters. Summarise your research focus and main contributions and achievements relevant for the present application.
- **Supplementary information:**
 - Describe your terms of employment (where the project is to be carried out). Non-permanent employees should describe when their current contracts are running out and how their salaries are covered. Tenure-track employees should indicate when they are up for tenure.
 - Include an overview of your current active grants and other grants obtained within the past five years and indicate how much of your research time (in %) is committed to each of these grants.
 - Indicate how much of your research time (in %) you intend to commit to the project applied for.

Kindly do not upload any SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS in the APPLICANT DETAILS tab. Only the documents requested in section 3.5 should be provided, and only in the APPENDICES tab.

3.2 INSTITUTION

Please provide information about the institution where the grant will be administered. This institution is where you will be employed during the grant period and the institution which will be responsible for budgeting, accounting, and staff supported by the grant.



Registering a new administering 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 administering institution in good time.

3.3 PROPOSAL

Enter a description of the project under the PROPOSAL tab.

The information and uploads given in this tab are the only parts of the application that the evaluation committee will be given access to during the first, blinded stage of the evaluation procedure. You must formulate and structure your project information carefully to remain anonymous, including carefully considering references and self-citations, and refraining from uploading material that may reveal your identity.

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 and key activities (maximum 2000 characters, including spaces).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please provide a detailed description of the proposed research project (maximum 30,000 characters, including spaces). The description should include purpose, background, hypotheses, methods, as well as the creativity, ambition, and originality of the project.

Please do not include information that may disclose your identity directly.

In a separate paragraph, please describe how the outcome of the proposed research may have potential future applications, possibly in the long term, in the life sciences, health sciences, or sustainability.

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 1650*1050 pixels. Do not include any information that may disclose your identity directly.

LITERATURE REFERENCES

Please provide the reference information for the literature cited in the project description (maximum 4000 characters, including spaces). References should include authors, year, title, journal name, volume number (or other relevant information) for all numbered references.

If you reference your own publications in the project description, please anonymise the data. This can be done by referencing a relevant publication by listing it as 'Anonymised Reference [number]' both in the project description and in the reference list. To assist the evaluation in stage two, the anonymised references may be disclosed in a separate full publication list, which can be uploaded in the APPENDICES tab (see section 3.5).

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 1000 characters, including spaces).



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

3.4 BUDGET

The budget for the project applied for only comprises the information entered on the BUDGET tab. Additional budget information attached under UPLOADS or added on any other tabs than BUDGET will not be considered.

GRANT PERIOD

Before you can fill in the budget template, start by entering the start and end dates for the grant. This will determine the number of years available from the budget template. The grant period is the duration of NNF's grant for the project, and the budget counts years following the project start date rather than calendar years.

CREATE BUDGET

After saving the project start and end dates, the budget template will become available to edit. The budget will open in a new tab, in which you will need to add the subcategories you need for your budget. Please follow the instructions at the top of the screen to complete the budget.

Notes:

- The budget continuously saves changes you have made without the need to manually save. You are free to leave the budget at any time and come back at a later point.
- When you are done filling in your budget, please use the **SAVE AND CLOSE** button. This will check that all information has been filled out correctly and in accordance with the guidelines, saving the budget to your application.
- You can now return to the **BUDGET** tab. A summary of the budget will be displayed, review it to ensure that it is correct.
- The full budget details can be viewed or edited at any time before submission of the application by reopening the budget template.

BUDGET

Full-time equivalents (FTE)

For salary items, the number of full-time equivalents in years must be stated in the field FTE. One full-time employee for one year equals 1.0 FTE. Most institutions have defined a standard number of annual working hours which equals 1.0 FTE. NNF does not require the institutions to use a particular number of annual working hours.

EXAMPLE: To find the FTE for e.g., 74 hours, the calculation is: $74 \text{ (hours)} / 1554 \text{ (standard annual hours (example))} = 0.05$, which is what should be stated in the FTE field.

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. Salary for the applicant cannot be covered if the applicant is in a time-unlimited position. In exceptional cases, where the applicant is contractually obligated to undertake specific commitments that are not compatible with the proposed research project, the applicant may apply for a part of his/her salary. Salary at professor level cannot be awarded with this grant.
- **Salary for employees**, e.g., postdoctoral researchers, PhD students, and technicians. Salary expenses cannot cover employees of similar or higher academic employment level than the applicant.
- **PhD tuition fee** up to DKK 80,000 per budget year (must be included separately).
- **Operating expenses**, e.g., materials, consumables, and purchase of services.
- **Equipment** required for the project. Equipment above DKK 100,000 must be located at the host institution for the duration and following the termination of the project.
- **Conferences**.
- **Travel** expenses for, e.g., conferences, meetings, or experiments carried out at other laboratories.
- **Publication** costs.

- **Bench fees** 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 and may only be used for expenses that are related to the research project and which cannot be included within another individual budget category. The budget must specify the expenses covered by the bench fees, 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

Note that bench fees cannot cover rent, administrative support, representation, social contributions, etc. To include a bench fee in the budget, the fee must be a part of the general expense policy of the administrating institution, and it must apply for all employees independently of funding source. Documentation that the administrating institution has a general bench fee policy should be included in the Hosting Letter from the administrating institution (see section 3.5). An unspecified bench fee without documentation will not be accepted. Maximum DKK 8,000 per month per FTE working on the project is acceptable for this post.

- **Administrative support** of up to 5% of the total budget (must be included separately):
 - can cover expenses such as 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.

Funding, both received and applied for, from the applicant's own organisation or 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.

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



Applicants may only apply for the types of expenses listed in section 3.4.

3.5 APPENDICES

The following uploads are required:

- A hosting letter signed by the head of department:
 - Confirming that the institution will provide the required infrastructure, laboratory and office facilities, as well as administration of the grant.
 - Confirming that the applicant does not have a grant portfolio exceeding an annual total of DKK 4.0 million (including possible overhead) in the year of commencing the project.
 - If bench fee is included in the project, please include documentation that the administering institution has a general bench fee policy (see section 3.4).
- If the project description contains anonymised references, please provide as an appendix a full reference list including author, year, title, journal name, volume number (or other relevant information) for all numbered references (see section 3.3, 'Literature references').

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

October 2023

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