

ново nordisk  
**foundation**

Benefitting people and society

Guidelines for applicants

**EXPLORATORY  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
SYNERGY  
PROGRAMME 2025**



## **Facts about the call**

Total amount available for granting:  
**DKK 81 million**

Amount available per grant:  
Up to **DKK 6.5 million** over 3 years

Call opens:                      Call closes:  
**7 March 2025**                      **3 September 2025**

Applicant notification:  
**End of December 2025**

Earliest start date:                      Latest start date:  
**1 February 2026**                      **31 December 2026**

**Review committee:**  
[Committee on Interdisciplinary Research](#)

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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 Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme

## 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
- Educate and train the next generation of researchers with interdisciplinary skills

The Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme is designed to fund the exploration of un-tested 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.

## 1.2 Areas of support

Funding from the Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme is aimed at generating novel, interdisciplinary approaches driven by research that aligns with NNF's strategic focus areas of Medical Sciences, Biotechnology, and Natural and Technical Sciences, with 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.

For the Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme, proposals should explore the potential of an un-tested, high-risk/high-gain idea. The project period will support early testing of the idea and its basic concepts, and secure preliminary data that can reinforce continuing into a more complex and expanded project stage. Following the conclusion of this exploratory programme, the applicant may choose to apply for the full Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme.

### 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 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 with current NNF grants are eligible, but the new grant period must not overlap with the existing one for the same or similar research.
- Main applicants may only hold one active Exploratory Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme or Interdisciplinary Synergy Programme grant at a time.
- 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.
- 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 refer to our general terms and conditions <https://novonordiskfonden.dk/en/conditions-for-grants/> for further information.

## 1.4 Funding

A total of DKK 81 million is available annually to fund interdisciplinary grants of up to DKK 6.5 million over a 3 year project period.

### ELIGIBLE BUDGET COSTS

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.

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.

Please note **that this grant cannot be used to cover salary for the main applicant or any co-applicants.**

**Full-time equivalents (FTEs)**

For each salary entry, please specify the FTE in years within the designated FTE field. This will indicate the proportion of a full-time position that the project funding will support for each year of the grant period. One full-time employee for one year equals 1.0 FTE.

**Bench fee** (not applicable to Danish universities)

Bench fee can be included in the budget for support of individual researchers to cover expenses needed to conduct the proposed research.

Bench fee is calculated per academic employee actively working on the project [eligible to apply for salary]. It may only be used for expenses related to the research project which cannot be included within another individual budget category. Bench fee may account for a maximum of DKK 8,000 per month per FTE. The budget must specify the expenses covered by the bench fee, which may include:

- Common or shared laboratory expenses and consumables
- Laboratory utilities (electricity, gas, water)
- Maintenance of essential equipment
- Service contracts
- Technical and IT support

**PLEASE NOTE** that bench fee cannot cover rent, administrative support, representation, social contributions etc. A valid bench fee policy in line with the Foundation's requirements must be available at the time of application, and this official documentation from the administrating/co-applicant's institution must be provided upon request.

**Project supplement for research grants:** (Danish universities only)

The project supplement contributes to the coverage of indirect costs at Danish universities, and replaces budget posts such as administrative costs, bench fee and parental leave.

More information on the joint model for project supplement is found at [Universities Denmark's website](#). Questions related to the project supplement should be directed to the research support units at your university.

**Administrative support** (not applicable to Danish universities)

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

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



Application system opens	<b>7 March 2025</b>
Application deadline	<b>3 September 2025</b>
Evaluation of applications	<b>September - December 2025</b>
Applicant notification	<b>End of December 2025</b>
Earliest possible start date	<b>1 February 2026</b>

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 1.7. When all applications have been assessed, applicants will be notified regarding their selection status from [norma-noreply@novo.dk](mailto:norma-noreply@novo.dk) to the e-mail address associated with the NORMA submission profile.

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

## 1.7 Assessment criteria

NNF's [Committee on Interdisciplinary Research](#) will primarily assess the applications based on the following criteria:

- 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.

If you have an active grant from the Foundation, this may be taken into consideration in the evaluation of your application for a new grant. In general, it is recommended that the main applicant has delivered results on the active grant(s) before submission of a new application to the Foundation. If you apply while having an active grant from the Foundation, you must describe how the project you propose in this application is different from and/or coherent with the project(s) already funded and briefly describe the progress of the already funded project(s). This information should be included in the Project Description.



## 2 The application and grant management system NORMA

### 2.1 Creating and submitting an application

The Foundation uses the application and grant management system NORMA:  
<https://norma.novonordiskfonden.dk>

If you do not have a user profile in NORMA, you can create one by clicking **Register** on the login page. The main applicant should only have one user profile. Please use your work e-mail address for registration.

The registered user who submits an application will be legally responsible for the truthfulness of the content of the application.

You can find guidance on how to create and submit an application at: [NORMA Help Centre](#).

If you experience technical problems and cannot find a solution in the NORMA Help Centre, please contact NORMA Support: [norma-support@novo.dk](mailto:norma-support@novo.dk).



## 3 Application content

Chapter 3 provides guidelines on the content required in the sections of the online application form for this call. Detailed information about the different parts of the application is available in NORMA.

### 3.1 Applicant

The **Applicant** tab pertains to information about all those involved in an application, meaning the main applicant or contact person applying on behalf of an organisation/institution as well as any co-applicants.

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, highlight your name in the author list and provide 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 Co-applicant(s)

For this call, between 1 and 3 co-applicants are required for the application. Co-applicants are expected to actively participate in organising and implementing the project and should, consequently, be allocated a share of the grant. Clearly describe the role of all co-applicants in the project description and respective budget allocations. Co-applicants must be invited through NORMA and subsequently enter their details in the system. Please follow the instructions in NORMA on how to invite co-applicants to your application.

Please note that co-applicants can read, edit and upload information into the application portal, **but only the main applicant is able to submit the final**



**Inviting co-applicants can be time-consuming.**

Please invite any co-applicant(s) as soon as possible and well in advance of the submission deadline.

**application.**

## 3.3 Institution

Please provide information about the institution where the grant will be administered. This institution is where the main applicant will be employed during the grant period, and the institution that will ultimately be responsible for administering and allocating the grant, including budgeting, financial reporting and staff supported by the grant.



**It can take up to five working days to register a new administrating institution in NORMA.**

The application cannot be submitted before the institution has been registered.

## 3.4 Proposal

Describe the project using the fields in the **Proposal** tab.

### **PROJECT TITLE**

Please provide a short title for the project (maximum 150 characters, including spaces).

### **BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Please provide a brief stand-alone summary of the project including the target group, planned activities, and justification of the interdisciplinary synergy in the project. (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

### **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).
- The overall impact of the completed project and the 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 focuses 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.* Your proposal should be comprehensible by all members on the [Committee on Interdisciplinary Research](#).

### **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 x 1550 pixels.

### **LITERATURE REFERENCES**

Please provide 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).

### 3.5 Budget

Enter the project grant period, and the budget template will become available.

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

### 3.6 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 letter** (limit of 1 upload): 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).

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