

**Please note:** this call for proposals has changes compared to previous Off Road rounds

## Off Road 2025

Topics: groundbreaking, unconventional research, high-risk/high-reward research, out-of-the-box idea, fundamental research

Date Posted: 10 December 2024

Deadline: Thursday, 30 January 2025, **14.00h CEST**

***NOTE:** This document is a translation of the Dutch version of this document. The following is to be considered an extra service for international applicants at Dutch research institutions. In case of any differences or other inconsistencies between the Dutch text and the English translation, the Dutch text is legally binding and prevails.*

## Contents

1. Summary .....	1
2. Aim of the programme .....	2
2.1 Aim of the call for proposals .....	2
3. Terms and obligations .....	2
3.1 Conditions .....	2
3.1.1 Who can apply? .....	2
3.1.2 Conditions .....	3
3.1.3 Collaboration and third-party contribution .....	3
3.1.4 What amount can you apply for? .....	4
3.1.5 Financial conditions .....	4
3.1.6 Practical conditions .....	4
3.2 Obligations .....	5
4. Assessment and prioritisation .....	6
4.1 Procedure .....	7
4.2 Prioritisation .....	8
4.2.1 Relevance criteria .....	9
4.2.2 Quality criteria .....	10
4.3 NAMs Investment Module (optional) .....	11
5. Submission .....	11
5.1 Submission via My ZonMw .....	11
5.2 Tips .....	12
5.3 Substantive questions .....	12
5.4 Technical questions .....	12
5.5 Downloads and links .....	12
6. Application attachments .....	12

## 1. Summary

### Who:

The Off Road programme challenges creative and adventurous researchers, between 2 to 6 years after their PhD promotion, to explore their promising, innovative and risky ideas. The aim is to realise new insights and unexpected breakthroughs in medical and/or health research.

### What for:

By focusing on high-risk, high-reward research, ZonMw is responding to the global need for out-of-the-box ideas to promote new insights and unexpected breakthroughs in all scientific disciplines.

### What:

The total available grant budget in this grant round (Off Road 2025) is €2,000,000.-. Additionally, the ZonMw programme [More Knowledge with Fewer Animals](#) makes an amount of €600,000,- available for the New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) investment module. This amount includes a contribution of €250,000,- by Stichting Proefdiervrij ([The Dutch Society for the Replacement of Animal Testing](#)). Together with the Off Road grant budget of €2,000,000.-, the total grant budget for this round is €2,600,000.-.

Per application, a maximum of €100,000.- can be applied for by Zonmw, with a duration of 12 to 18 months. Additionally, it is possible to apply for the optional NAMs investment module for an amount of up to €30,000.-. This amount is in addition to the requested grant amount upon possible approval. The maximum subsidy amount available for applications that include an investment module is €130,000 (for more information, see the paragraph 'Financial conditions').

### When:

<b>Deadline for submitting a grant application</b>	<b>Thursday 30 January, 2025, 14:00h CEST</b>
Receipt of the preliminary decision	24 April, 2025
Deadline for a motivated response	1 May, 2025
<b>Interviews*</b>	11 and 12 June, 2025 - Book all dates in your calendar - Physical presence is required
Receipt of the grant decision	End of July, 2025
Latest start date	January 2026

\*Subject to change. You will be informed about exact deadlines at a later moment.

### Learn more

For more information, please check the [programme page](#) on the ZonMw website, which is updated regularly.

## 2. Aim of the programme

The Off Road programme explicitly focusses on curiosity-driven, fundamental research at the beginning of the knowledge chain and being able to quickly explore a promising idea into a proof of concept within the biomedical and health field.

### 2.1 Aim of the call for proposals

The aim of this call for proposals is to create opportunities for adventurous and creative researchers to develop their promising and risky ideas, ultimately achieving new insights and unexpected breakthroughs in (bio)medical and/or health research. This initiative focuses on groundbreaking research with a high-risk character that is not on the beaten track of research. It describes unconventional and groundbreaking research (or research direction), which can result in revolutionary discoveries or an important step towards them. The primary goal of the applications is to transform a promising but risky out-of-the-box idea into a proof of concept. This means that although the developed idea may have a long-term character, the project is mainly aimed at testing the hypothesis behind the concept/idea. The outcome here may be negative, but what matters is that every result, whether or not it has an effect, helps science moving forward.

## 3. Terms and obligations

When applying for a grant from ZonMw, there are rights, conditions and obligations attached to this. These follow from the [Dutch General Administrative Law Act \(Awb\)](#). Article 4.2 of the General Administrative Law Act contains specific provisions that apply to grants from ZonMw. In addition, the [General Terms and Conditions Governing Grants of ZonMw](#) apply.

### 3.1 Conditions

#### 3.1.1 Who can apply?

Researchers who obtained their PhD between 2 and 6 years ago may submit an application if they meet the following cumulative conditions:

- The applicant's PhD date as stated on the PhD diploma (degree) falls within in the period of 30 January 2019 – 30 January 2023. For researchers who have completed 2 PhD trajectories, the date of the second PhD is leading.
- Researchers who obtained their PhD before 30 January 2019 may be entitled to an extension. The extension scheme offers an extension of up to 5 years on the date of the applicant's PhD defence based on events after this date, due to one or more of the following reasons: pregnancy, parenthood, care responsibilities, long-term illness or completed training in a number of clinical specialisms as described in the extension attachment.
  - The request for extension must be sent to the programme office via [offroad@zonmw.nl](mailto:offroad@zonmw.nl) at least 5 working days before the deadline of the round. Requests submitted later than **Thursday 23 January 2025** will not be considered. You will not be able to submit your application until your request has been granted. For the calculation of the extension, see the *extension attachment*.
- Researchers can apply if they have an employment contract for at least the duration of the project for which the grant is requested, or if they can obtain this employment when the grant is awarded. It is mandatory to submit an embedding guarantee signed by the organisation's administrative responsible person (see section 3.1.6).
- The research will take place at one of the research organisations listed below:
  - Universities located in the Kingdom of the Netherlands;
  - University Medical Centres;
  - University of Applied Sciences
  - Institutes affiliated to the KNAW or NWO;
  - the Netherlands Cancer Institute;

- Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen;
  - Princess Máxima Center.
- Applicants employed by *other* research organisations can submit an application if at least the following cumulative conditions are met for the legal entity:
    - is based in the Netherlands;
    - is independent in conducting research;
    - has a public task;
    - receives at least 50% public funding;
    - has no profit motive other than for the benefit of further research;
    - the researchers have freedom of publication in the international scientific literature.
- ⚠ *Please note: If you do not work at one of the above mentioned institutions, you must contact the programme office via [offroad@zonmw.nl](mailto:offroad@zonmw.nl) no later than **4 weeks before the deadline** of your application.*

### 3.1.2 Conditions

In order for an application to be processed, the following cumulative conditions must be met:

- an applicant can submit only one application within this funding round (Off Road 2025);
- an applicant must not have previously received an Off Road grant;
- from an administrative point of view, an Off Road application has only one applicant, who is also the project leader/coordinator. There are no co-applicants. The applicant is expected to be able to carry out the entire project both in terms of content and organisation.

### 3.1.3 Collaboration and third-party contribution

ZonMw encourages collaboration and participation between parties. No grant will be awarded if agreements lead or may lead to the granting of unlawful state aid or if this does not comply with the [general grant provisions](#) of ZonMw or the conditions as described in this call for proposals.

Collaboration is not required for this call for proposals, but it is encouraged. The applicant may collaborate with researchers in the same or other scientific disciplines relevant to the application, such as exact natural sciences, economic sciences, spatial sciences, and/or social sciences and humanities. Collaboration with market parties and/or (end) users/target groups is also allowed if this serves the purpose of the study. As Off Road has no co-applicants, a collaborating (market) party cannot be listed as a co-applicant.

If innovative collaboration is part of the application, the application and budget should clearly state:

- which parties are being collaborated<sup>1</sup> with: describe for each party how they actively contribute to the project; these are, in any case, parties that appear in the budget as a party that actively contribute to the total budget at their own expense and risk (in kind or in cash).
- with which party(s) a sponsorship agreement will be entered into and what the in-kind or cash contribution is.
- which parties will be hired or, if this is not yet known, for which activities it is foreseen that this will be carried out by third parties and the costs to be incurred for this (including VAT). For more information and the conditions for hiring/assignment, see the ZonMw webpage [Grants and Collaboration/contributions from third parties](#).

---

<sup>1</sup> When submitting the grant application, a signed letter of commitment must be submitted for each cooperating party with a specification of the in-kind or cash contribution. If awarded, such cooperation must be ratified in a so-called consortium agreement (cooperation agreement) or sponsorship agreement. You can read more information about this on the [ZonMw webpage Grants and Collaboration/contributions from third parties](#) and the section 'Obligations' of this call for proposals.

### 3.1.4 What amount can you apply for?

The total available grant budget in this grant round (Off Road 2025) is €2,000,000.-. Additionally, the ZonMw programme [More Knowledge with Fewer Animals](#) makes an amount of €600,000,- available for the New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) investment module. This amount includes a contribution of €250,000,- by Stichting Proefdiervrij ([The Dutch Society for the Replacement of Animal Testing](#)). Unspent funds from this allocated amount will revert to the programme More Knowledge with Fewer Animals. Together with the Off Road grant budget of €2,000,000.-, the total grant budget for this round is €2,600,000.-.

Per application, a maximum of €100,000.- can be applied for by Zonmw, with a duration of 12 to 18 months. Additionally, it is possible to apply for the optional NAMs investment module for an amount of up to €30,000.-. This amount is in addition to the requested grant amount upon possible approval (for more information, see section 4.3).

### 3.1.5 Financial conditions

The requested grant amount can be used for (partial) financing of the applicant's appointment, material costs and any Open Access publications. You cannot request a bench fee.

- A **maximum of 30%** of the grant amount requested from ZonMw may be used for supporting non-academic staff (MBO/HBO).
- The appointment of academic staff (e.g. PhD students and/or postdoc) other than the applicant is **not** permitted.
- The applicant must spend **at least 0.2 FTE** on this project. This condition should be clearly visible in your submitted project budget.
- If the applicant's salary is not charged to the total expenses, this amount is considered as a contribution from third parties. This contribution is not mandatory and does not provide any benefit in the assessment.
- If you apply for the NAMs investment module, you must indicate in your project budget how these additional funds will be spent. Claims on the NAM investment module can only be made if the entire project is animal-free. Moreover, cell culture experiments should preferably be free of the foetal calf serum (FCS) and foetal bovine serum (FBS).
- Only approved Off Road applications can receive additional funding from the NAMs investment module.
- ZonMw offers applicants the opportunity to include Open Access publication costs in the project budget if this is according to the full gold route and up to a maximum reimbursement of €5,000.-. In the project budget, you include 'Open Access' as a separate budget line. The maximum period for which this amount can be claimed is 12 months after the official end date of the project. For more information about Open Access, see section 'Obligations'.

### 3.1.6 Practical conditions

- Closing date for submitting a grant application is Thursday, **30 January 2025 at 14:00h CEST**. We strongly advise you to start your application early, at least one week before the deadline. If you have any questions or problems, please contact us as soon as possible.
- Write your grant application in English.
- Your grant application should be understandable to a broad group of experts, avoid abbreviations and jargon as much as possible.
- The '[Statement of agreement to your detailed grant application](#)' must be signed by the person responsible for the administrative procedure and the applicant, in most institutions this is the dean of the faculty. The signed declaration can then be added to My ZonMw.
- Submission of a signed embedding guarantee is mandatory. A link to this form can be found at the bottom of this grant call. The embedding guarantee form must be signed by the organisation's administrative responsible person, which in many cases is the dean of the faculty. Send the signed form as a PDF file to [offroad@zonmw.nl](mailto:offroad@zonmw.nl).
  - *Please note: The 'Statement of agreement to your detailed grant application' and the 'embedding guarantee' should be signed by the same person.*
- If an attachment is not mandatory, this attachment will not be included in the assessment of your application. The only permitted optional attachment is:
  - [A Letter of Commitment](#) in the event of a collaboration and/or sponsorship.

## 3.2 Obligations

Obligations apply when you are awarded a grant. To this end, ZonMw follows the [General Terms and Conditions Governing Grants of ZonMw](#). In addition, the following obligations also apply:

- **Collaboration with third parties**
  - No later than 6 months after awarding, a collaboration with third parties must be ratified in a so-called consortium agreement (cooperation agreement) or sponsorship agreement. If ZonMw does not accept the agreement, no subsidy can be awarded. You can read more information about this on the ZonMw webpage [Grants and Collaboration/contributions from third parties](#).
- **Impact strategy**
  - ZonMw believes it is important that the results of all Off Road projects are shared, including the results of projects that do not show the expected outcomes. During the project, your cooperation regarding knowledge-sharing activities and communication (such as meetings, presentations, vlogs, blogs, etc.) is mandatory. For each awarded project, ZonMw publishes a news item and a public summary on our website. We might also organise a number of project leader meetings. Approximately one month before the end date of your project, you will receive a request from ZonMw to submit your final report. This must be no later than 13 weeks after the end of your project. In this report, you will be asked again about your activities involved in knowledge development. More information can be found on the ZonMw webpage [Knowledge development](#).
  - In these high-risk, high-reward projects, attention is also drawn to the potential benefits and by-products of the project, the knowledge utilisation and further development with/by third parties. If this project is successful, how does the researcher intend to follow up on this in collaborations, within the academy and outside with stakeholders and/or (end) users; see the ZonMw webpage [Knowledge utilisation](#).
- **Open Access**
  - Participatory knowledge exchange (Open Science) and making the results freely accessible to science, society and the economy (Open Access) are important for increasing the quality and impact of scientific research. ZonMw considers this open stimulation of science as the innovation engine for renewal with scientific, social and economic impact on the long term.

All publications resulting from (scientific) research that is fully or partially funded by ZonMw must be made available Open Access (in accordance with ZonMw Open Access policy). ZonMw accepts various Open Access routes. In addition to articles, ZonMw also encourages other types of (scientific) publications to be made available Open Access (such as *monographs*, books, *conference proceedings* and *grey literature*), as well as research data and knowledge products from practice-oriented research (such as models, protocols, prototypes, digital tools, demonstrations). For more information about the ZonMw Open Access policy, the full conditions and possibilities, please refer to the ZonMw webpage [Open Access](#).
- **Conditions for valorisation**
  - ZonMw strives for broad accessibility of projects it funds, therefore, the [Ten principles for Socially Responsible Licensing \(NFU\)](#) (MVL) should be applied when licensing results. If applicable, describe how intellectual property rights are arranged with cooperating parties and possibly third parties. Also indicate how these parties will comply with the MVL principles.
- **Access to data**
  - ZonMw encourages optimal (re)use of data files. ZonMw therefore requires that these remain available after a project finishes and are suitable for verifying research results,

- for reuse in follow-up research and/or for substantiating innovations in policy and practice.
- The requirements with regard to data files also apply to other output that forms the basis of research results, such as collections of biological material, lab journals, audio and visual material or software. You do not have to submit a data management plan until your application has been granted.
  - More about ZonMw's policy, the subsidy provision for databases and practical methods for generating reusable data can be found on the ZonMw webpage [FAIR data policy](#).
- **Ethical aspects**
    - It is the applicant's responsibility to determine whether the implementation of the proposed project requires a declaration of ethics or permit. The applicant must ensure that this is obtained in a timely manner from the relevant institution or ethics committee. When allocated, the grant will be awarded on the condition that the necessary ethics statement or permit is obtained before the project start deadline. The project can only start after ZonMw has received a copy of the ethics statement or permit.
  - **Animal experiments**

ZonMw encourages researchers to conduct their research without the use of animals as much as possible. If animal testing is however necessary to answer the research question, this must be convincingly justified in the application. Subsequently, we also want to ensure that the execution of animal testing is done as well and transparently as possible. Therefore, the following obligations apply:

    - ZonMw endorses the Code of Openness in Animal Testing and the Code of Biosecurity. Applicants must subscribe to and comply with the existing codes. If the application concerns animal research, the use of the [ARRIVE guidelines](#) is mandatory. A clear justification for the use of these guidelines should be included in the plan of action.
    - The ARRIVE guidelines are intended as a guideline for publications but can also be used as a guideline of conditions for good animal experimental research (such as randomisation, blinding, good statistical and methodological support, etc.). This guideline can be found on the Equator Network website. In this regard, also check the websites of Experimental design assistant ([EDA](#)) and [PREPARE](#)
  - **Reporting guidelines:**
    - In order to improve the transparency and quality of (bio)medical or health research, ZonMw expects researchers to use the relevant suggestions from the various available *reporting guidelines* within their research plan, research and publications. Briefly describe in the action plan which guideline(s) have been used and why. Available guidelines can be found on the [Equator Network](#) website.

## 4. Assessment and prioritisation

For the procedures of assessing grant applications, please refer to the website '[How to apply for funding?](#)' and to the [applicants' procedure brochure \(Dutch\)](#).

### Code 'Personal interests'

The '[Personal Interests](#)' Code applies to all persons involved in the assessment and/or decision-making and to all ZonMw employees involved. In addition, ZonMw strives for an inclusive culture, in which there is no place for conscious or unconscious barriers due to cultural, ethnic or religious background, gender, sexual orientation, health or age. For more information, please visit the ZonMw webpage [Diversity](#).

### DORA

On 18 April 2019, ZonMw signed the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA). DORA is a statement that calls for an improvement in the way the products of scientific research are evaluated. This is based on a broad definition of 'products', in addition to publications, including data, reagents, software, intellectual property or well-educated young applicants. In addition, DORA focuses

on the quality of scientific work and advises to stop using bibliometric indicators (such as h-index, journal impact factor) that do not directly say anything about the quality of individual work when assessing scientists and their work. Applicants are therefore not allowed to mention these in their applications. When assessing the scientific track record of candidates, ZonMw uses a broad definition of scientific output. In addition to publications, applicants are encouraged to list other scientific products, such as datasets, patents, software and code. For more information about what ZonMw is doing to implement the principles of DORA; see the ZonMw webpage [Recognition & Rewards](#).

### **Committee**

For the assessment of applications, the ZonMw board has put together a broad and diverse committee, consisting of members from various (bio)medical disciplines. The committee advises the ZonMw board on the allocation of applications. The composition of the programme committee is public and can be found on our [website](#). Communication with the programme committee takes place exclusively through the Off Road programme office.

## **4.1 Procedure**

The application process consists of several steps. Below is an overview of the possible steps in the application procedure:

- Submission of the application
- Processing the application
- Pre-advice programme committee
- Interview selection meeting
- Preliminary decision
- Interviews and review meeting of the programme committee
- Decision

### **Submission of the application**

For this call for proposals, submission of an application is mandatory. A standard form for submitting the application is available in My ZonMw. In the form, you must adhere to the questions and the instructions as stated in the form. You should adhere to the conditions for the maximum number of characters, words and pages. The application you have completed must be submitted via *My ZonMw* before the deadline, see section 'Terms and obligations'. The applicant will receive an automated confirmation of receipt after submission of the application. All submitted applications are in competition with each other.

### **Processing the application**

After you have submitted your application, you will hear as soon as possible whether ZonMw will process your application. This is determined on the basis of a number of administrative-technical criteria (see the formal conditions for submission, section 'Terms and obligations'). Only if your application meets these requirements, ZonMw can process it.

Please note that ZonMw may approach you within 2 weeks of the submission deadline to make any administrative corrections in order to (still) meet the conditions for submission. You will have one opportunity to make the corrections, which have to be made within 2 working days. Amended applications that are received by ZonMw in a timely manner and meet the conditions will still be processed and considered.

### **Pre-advice programme committee**

When writing the application, please bear in mind that the committee assessing your application is broadly composed with members from various (bio)medical disciplines. During the pre-advisory review, your application will be presented to a number of members of the committee. The pre-advisors provide a written, substantive commentary on the evaluation criteria for relevance and quality (see section 'Prioritisation') and will give a numerical score for each component. External referees are not used in the procedure.

### **Interview selection meeting**

During the interview selection meeting, the most promising applications will be selected for the next step in the application procedure. These are the applications that best fit the objective of this call



(relevance criterion) and have the highest qualitatively (quality criterion). The applications will be prioritised according to their potential based on the criteria and the prioritisation matrix.

### Preliminary decision

Applicants will receive the preliminary decision, including the reasoning of the programme committee, in a timely manner. Applicants who believe that a preliminary negative decision contains factual inaccuracies will have 5 working days to submit a motivated response. The response is not intended to provide additional, new information regarding the application or to ask questions to the committee, but to correct factual inaccuracies. Taking this response into account, the committee will assess whether there is reason to change its proposed decision.

### Interviews and review meeting of the programme committee

During the interview, the programme committee has the opportunity to ask questions. The applicant can respond to this during the interview in the discussion with the committee. In this way, the principle of hearing both sides is applied. Please note that the time per candidate is limited. An audio recording will be made during the interview. At the end of the application process, the audio recording will be destroyed. The interview may lead to adjustments in the assessment of the criteria of the application, as described in section 'Prioritisation'.

### Decision

The programme committee makes its own assessment based on the available information and grant budget. After this, the programme committee will draw up its funding advice and submit it to the ZonMw board. The ZonMw board assesses the procedure followed and the advice of the programme committee. Subsequently, the ZonMw board will determine the final qualifications and decide whether to grant or reject the applications. The funds available for a round determine the final number of grants to be awarded to the applications whose qualification is minimally assessed '*relevant*' for relevance criteria and at least '*very good*' for the quality criteria. If a NAMs module is requested, an additional requirement for awarding the grant, is that the candidate must achieve a minimum qualification of '*good*' for this module.

Applicants will be informed of the results by letter, including the qualification of the assessment and the justification.

## 4.2 Prioritisation

After assessment, the application must meet the following final qualifications in order to be eligible for funding, provided that the grant budget is sufficient.

Relevance criteria: **Highly Relevant** or **Relevant**

Quality criteria: **Excellent** or **Very Good**

The mutual weighting of relevance and quality is done on the basis of the following prioritisation matrix:

		Prioritisation matrix			
		Highly relevant	Relevant	Low Relevance	Not Relevant
Quality	Relevance				
	Excellent	1	3	-	-
	Very Good	2	4	-	-
	Good	-	-	-	-
	Sufficient	-	-	-	-
	Moderate	-	-	-	-
Insufficient	-	-	-	-	

Relevance outweighs quality in this table. Applications are eligible in the order of prioritisation 1 to 4. In practice, it is usually the case that only the highest prioritised applications can be awarded due to the grant budget. Applications in the non-numbered cells are not eligible for funding and will therefore be rejected.

Please note: the NAMs Investment Module (question A4 in the application form) is assessed separately by the programme committee and must at least be qualified as “good” in order to be eligible for funding. This qualification is not part of the prioritisation, but serves as a cumulative condition for funding for applications where applicable.

#### Ex aequo

If, after prioritising the applications, it appears that two or more applications near the subsidy ceiling are numerically indistinguishable, then there is an *ex aequo* situation. The reference score is the score of the lowest-ranked application within the selection threshold. All applications with a score that deviates by 0.05 or less from the reference score will be considered. This ensures that applications with a score difference of up to 0.10 are treated as equal. In the event of a tie, the committee will give priority to the application with the highest score on the relevance criterion. If this score equal, the application with the highest score on the quality criterion will be given the highest priority. If these scores are also equal, priority is given to the application submitted by a female applicant, in order to stimulate the share of women in science. If applications still end up equal, the programme committee will determine the prioritization using an (anonymous) majority vote.

#### **4.2.1 Relevance criteria**

The purpose of this criterion is to select applications that best fit within the objectives of this call for proposals, as described in the section ‘Aim of the programme’.

##### **High-risk, high-reward research**

The application demonstrates what the out-of-the-box idea is and what makes this application a high-risk, high-reward study. High-risk, high-reward research can be seen<sup>2</sup> as research that:

- 1) strives to understand or support solutions to ambitious scientific, technological or societal challenges;
- 2) and strives to cross scientific, technological or social paradigms in a revolutionary way;
- 3) and involves a high degree of innovative value in terms of scientific content;
- 4) and carries a high risk of realising its ambition as well as the potential for high, transformational impact on a scientific, technological, or societal challenge.

The 'high-reward' can be further classified into:

- 1) the scientific impact through knowledge creation;
- 2) and/or the economic impact through technological breakthroughs and innovation embodied in new value-added goods and services;
- 3) and/or the societal impact through the translation of new knowledge and/or technologies to solve societal challenges.

The elements below are *not* considered high-risk, high-reward research and are not or less relevant to the program. This is research that:

- a logical (next) step is;
- does not have a new angle;
- repeats what others have done in a different but similar setting;
- offers a solution(direction) that already exists or is working, but is used in a new way, on a related problem or in a new field;
- is in line with existing models;
- is RCT through time, money and innovation in the field;
- constitutes a continuation of, or within, an existing line of research;
- an evaluation of an existing programme, project or app;
- test the effectiveness of an existing intervention, website or app.

---

<sup>2</sup> These definitions are based on the definitions from the OECD Global Science Forum report 'Effective Policies to foster High-Risk/High-Reward research'.

#### 4.2.2 Quality criteria

In addition to the relevance criteria, the quality of an application is assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- Scientific quality
- Quality of the applicant
- Impact strategy

For all criteria, there is an explanation below of what is taken into account during the assessment.

##### Scientific quality

When assessing the scientific quality of the application, the following factors are taken into account:

- Rationale/substantiation of the question (despite no/little preliminary data);
- Integrates all relevant angles for the central question. The potential of the project as a whole clearly exceeds the sum of its parts;
- The research project is focused, optimally cohesive, and well balanced between challenge and feasibility;
- A convincing and well-thought-out methodology;
- Feasibility, opportunities and obstacles in the implementation of the project with a convincing risk analysis and back-up plans. Aspects that can be taken into account in the assessment include appropriateness of network and institutional embedding, the logical, technological and ethical framework, planning and timetable, budget (such as staff allocation), data, tools, technology and institutional support where available.

##### Quality of the applicant

The assessment of the academic profile will include:

- Clear indications that the applicant possesses an exceptional talent for generating creative and innovative scientific research;
- Clear alignment of the candidate profile with the research plan, or clear vision on how this alignment will be achieved;
- The applicant possesses the qualities for stakeholders engagement, e.g. consulting, seeking advice, collaborating and/or allowing (co-)decision-making in the implementation of the project;
- Clear indications that the applicant is contributing to *Open Science*, such as, but not limited to:
  - Scientific: 'academic citizenship' (e.g. key-note speaker at conferences/meetings, contributions to *Open Science* or education; interaction with academic peers, etc.);
  - Social: such as blogs/vlogs, contributions to publications in written media for general broad audiences or advisory work for social institutions.
- The applicant is expected to be able to carry out the entire project (given its high-risk nature) both in terms of content and organisation with the necessary creative approach and perseverance.

##### Impact strategy

The applicant may focus on achieving scientific, social, and economic impact or a combination of these. Knowledge utilisation is about sharing or further developing knowledge in consultation with researchers from your own or other disciplines, stakeholders and/or (end) users.

Projects funded by ZonMw must have an impact. New knowledge and skills must be usable in practice, policy, education and/or scientific research. More information can be found on the ZonMw webpage [Implementation support](#). ZonMw advises involving an implementation expert at an early stage. More information about implementation strategies and activities can be found on the ZonMw webpage [Draw up your own implementation plan](#).

The assessment of the impact strategy will include consideration of:

- Whether, if the project is successful, the application has a convincing exploratory vision and concisely describes the ways in which the application can lead to scientific, societal and/or economic impact in the short and long term;

- And/or whether, if the project is successful, the application describes an innovative and well thought-out strategy with regard to dissemination through the strategies of Open Science and/or the implementation of the research results in one's own field, related fields and the broader scientific field, both nationally and internationally;
- And/or whether, if the outcome is negative, the application describes a convincing plan of action regarding the handling and dissemination of negative results.

As part of this criterion, the programme committee also takes into account:

- To what extent the motivation for the focus on scientific, societal and economic impact is convincing;
- Whether sufficient attention has been paid to the possible participation and involvement of the relevant (internal and external) parties in the project;
- Attention to possible pitfalls and how to overcome them.

### 4.3 NAMs Investment Module (optional)

ZonMw wants to encourage researchers to conduct their research without animal testing, and to use animal-free research models or New Approach Methodologies (NAMs). However, developing and/or using NAMs can entail additional costs due to the expensive (culturing) reagents, cells, plastics and/or equipment. In order to encourage researchers to use these animal-free models, the NAMs Investment Module can be used to cover these costs. The application must clearly state how the NAMs Investment Module is used to develop and/or use NAMs in the project plan.

This module concerns a subsidy for the development and/or implementation of NAMs. An application is only eligible for this subsidy if there is an evident interest for the associated Off Road application. The following criteria therefore play an important role in the assessment:

- importance, urgency and/or innovation of the NAM for the application and the research area;
- technical feasibility and effectiveness of the investment;
- importance of the development or implementation of the NAM for the lab or research group where the research is conducted.

## 5. Submission

### 5.1 Submission via My ZonMw

Grant applications can only be submitted by the applicant via the online submission system of ZonMw ([My ZonMw](#)). The closing date for submitting the grant application is **30 January 2025, at 14:00h CEST**.

#### Timeline Off Road 2025

<b>Deadline for submitting a grant application</b>	<b>Thursday 30 January 2025, 14:00h CEST</b>
Receipt of the preliminary decision	24 April 2025
Deadline for a motivated response	1 May 2025
<b>Interviews*</b>	11 and 12 June, 2025 - <i>Book both dates in your calendar</i> - <i>Physical presence is required</i>
Decision	End of July 2025
Latest start date	January 2026

\*Subject to change. You will be informed about exact deadlines at a later moment.

## 5.2 Tips

- ZonMw has transitioned to a different online submission system. If you have not worked with My ZonMw before, you must first register as a 'New user'.
- For more information, see the [My ZonMw Manual](#).

It is important to start your application in My ZonMw on time:

- If you do not yet have a My ZonMw account, you must create one in time to avoid any login problems;
- New organisations may still have to be added by ZonMw to the online My ZonMw system;
- You also have to enter data online, and in case of technical problems, you can report this in time;
- Before you submit your application digitally, we recommend that you print a Word version of your application (via My ZonMw) and check for any irregularities. Especially if you first drafted your application in Word and then copied it to My ZonMw, it is possible that some characters (such as quotation marks) are not translated correctly. You can correct this yourself in My ZonMw.

⚠ *Please note: Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered by ZonMw.*

## 5.3 Substantive questions

For substantive questions, please contact [offroad@zonmw.nl](mailto:offroad@zonmw.nl) or by telephone via the programme office 070 515 03 21.

Eva Vlaar, programme manager  
Femke Groenveld, programme secretary  
Annemieke Rozeboom, programme secretary  
Jacqueline Steenwinkel, programme support

## 5.4 Technical questions

For technical questions about the use of ZonMw's online submission system, please contact the ZonMw service desk: Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on 070 349 51 78 or [servicedesk@zonmw.nl](mailto:servicedesk@zonmw.nl). Please include your phone number in your email so that we can contact you if necessary.

## 5.5 Downloads and links

- [Subsidiebepalingen 2013](#)
- [How to apply for funding? \(website\)](#)
- [Procedure brochure for applicants \(pdf only in Dutch\)](#)
- [Conditions and obligations \(website\)](#)
- [Grants and Collaborations/contributions from third parties](#)
- [Everything about FAIR data management \(website\)](#)
- [Open Access \(website\)](#)
- [Ten principles for socially responsible licensing \(NFU\) \(pdf\)](#)
- [Implementation support \(website\)](#)
- [Manual My ZonMw \(website\)](#)
- <https://www.nwo.nl/en/salary-tables>

## 6. Application attachments

- Appendix 1. [Application form Off Road 2025](#)  
Appendix 2. [Budget form](#)  
Appendix 3. [Embedding guarantee form](#) (mandatory; send this form via e-mail to [offroad@zonmw.nl](mailto:offroad@zonmw.nl))  
Appendix 4. [Letter of Commitment](#) (optional) in the event of a collaboration and/or sponsorship.