



# ZONMw OPEN COMPETITION

Free, curiosity-driven research

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

FUNDING ROUND 2026

**Please note:** This document is a translation of the Dutch version of this document. In case of any differences or other inconsistencies between the Dutch text and the English translation reveal, the Dutch text is legally binding and prevails.

Den Haag, 2026

ZonMw

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# 1 Introduction

In this Call for proposals information is provided about the application procedure for the **'ZonMw Open Competition 2026'** funding round. ZonMw Open Competition is carried out by ZonMw on behalf of the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and falls under its responsibility.

In this Call for proposals, you will find information about the aim of this programme (Chapter 2), the conditions for the grant application (Chapter 3) and how your proposal will be assessed (Chapter 4). This is the information you need to submit a grant application. Chapter 5 states the obligations for grant recipients in the event you are awarded funding. Chapter 6 contains the contact details and Chapter 7 the financial annexes.

## 1.1 Background

The ZonMw Open Competition funding instrument is part of ZonMw's Open Competition programme line. Through this funding line, ZonMw offers ambitious researchers the opportunity to conduct free, fundamental and curiosity-driven research within biomedical and health research and care innovation. In doing so, ZonMw supports excellent, boundary-breaking science driven by curiosity. Free, fundamental scientific research forms the basis for understanding the world around us, for progress and development.

ZonMw Open Competition is aimed at the full breadth of the scientific field. The instruments within this programme line serve both early-career and established researchers. The programme offers options for research in different constellations, whether involving an individual researcher, as in Off Road, or a consortium.

## 1.2 Available budget

The available budget for this Call for proposals is €24,000,000. In addition, the ZonMw programme Dementia Research Programme (OPD) offers additional budget with a maximum of € 1,000,000 (Section 3.2.6). Any remaining amount will be reverted to the OPD programme. The maximum available budget for this Call for proposals thus totals €25,000,000.

## 1.3 Submission deadline(s)

When you submit your application in *My ZonMw*, you will also need to enter some details online. Therefore, please start submitting your application at least one day before the deadline of this Call for proposals. Applications that are submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration.

The deadline for submitting pre-proposals is **2 April 2026**, before 2 PM CEST.  
The deadline for submitting full proposals is **15 September 2026**, before 2 PM CEST.

The deadline for submitting a request for review of organisations established in the Netherlands (Section 3.1.1) is **19 March 2026**, before 2 PM CET.

## 2 Aim

This chapter describes the aim of the programme and the societal impact.

### 2.1 Aim of the programme

The aim of ZonMw Open Competition is to create space for curiosity-driven, creative collaboration leading to groundbreaking science of exceptional quality in the field of health research. ZonMw Open Competition has no thematic limitations and focuses on potentially groundbreaking research in all scientific disciplines with a question or problem on the borders of fundamental (bio)medical research towards healthcare and innovation.

Health research includes the study on the presence, development, recognition and prevention of diseases, the treatment of diseases, the reduction of the burden of disease, and the functioning of the healthcare system. Its purpose is to contribute to the promotion of health or the alleviation of the burden of disease. It covers the entire field of medical-biological, clinical scientific, population and (healthcare) system research.

The expected outcome of an application is primarily fundamental scientific advancement (increased knowledge, development of models and theory) within an innovative collaboration between research groups (team science). In addition, impact is an important criterion (Section 4.3). Applications may be monodisciplinary, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary in nature, if there is a clear focus on fundamental (bio)medical research.

### 2.2 Target group

ZonMw Open Competition is specifically intended to initiate and establish new lines of research. This instrument promotes an original and creative synergy of areas of expertise that do not naturally enrich each other. For such innovative and curiosity-driven team science, it is important to properly describe the synergetic composition and diversity of the team with regard to experience, gender and affiliations. In this context, complementarity in (technical) skills and expertise of individual team members is also important. See assessment criteria B for the substantive conditions (Section 4.3).

### 2.3 Societal impact

Much scientific research addresses important issues in our society, culture and economy. The potential, and preferably broadly applicable, effect of the chosen research on science and society is an important element of the ZonMw Open Competition. Knowledge utilisation may relate to results and conclusions, but also to other knowledge in healthcare research. This includes, for example, knowledge about research methods, including equipment use, data and data infrastructures, theoretical enrichment through multidisciplinary insights, or knowledge at the operational level.

To this end, ZonMw calls for plans for sharing research results outside the scientific community, even if a concrete application would not be conceivable or feasible in the near future. ZonMw values creative knowledge utilisation strategies to inspire and mobilise stakeholders, as well as to engage users and effective end-users in scientific and societal impact.

## 3 Conditions for applicants

This chapter contains the conditions that are applicable to your grant application. Firstly, it describes who can apply for funding (Section 3.1) and what you can request funding for (Section 3.2). Subsequently, you will find the conditions for preparing and submitting the application (Sections 3.3 and 3.4) and the specific funding conditions (Section 3.5).

### 3.1 Who can apply

Researchers may submit a proposal if they have a tenured position (and therefore a paid position for an indefinite period) or a tenure track agreement at one of the following research organisations:

- universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) as referred to in Article 1.8 paragraph 1 of the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act and universities listed in the [Policy Rules for Universities located in the Kingdom of the Netherlands](#);
- university medical centres by which is meant academic hospitals as referred to in Article 1.13 paragraph 1 of the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act;
- institutes affiliated to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) or NWO;
- Netherlands Cancer Institute;
- the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen;
- Naturalis Biodiversity Center;
- Advanced Research Centre for NanoLithography (ARCNL);
- Princess Máxima Center.

Individuals with a zero-hour employment agreement or with a contract fixed period of time (other than a tenure track appointment) may not submit a proposal.

It could be the case that the applicant's tenure track agreement ends before the intended completion date of the project for which funding is applied for, or that before that date, the applicant's tenured contract ends due to the applicant reaching retirement age. In that case, the applicant needs to include a statement from their employer in which the research organisation concerned guarantees that the project and all project members for whom funding have been requested will receive adequate supervision for the full duration of the project.

Applicants with a part-time contract should guarantee adequate supervision of the project and all project members for whom funding is requested.

Co-applicants may be affiliated with the research organisations listed in this Section, and to other research organisations as referred to in Article 1.1, paragraph 4 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024 and which meet the following cumulative conditions.

The organisation must:

- be established in the Netherlands<sup>1</sup>;
- be a foundation, association or

<sup>1</sup>

Co-applicants with an appointment at a research organisation abroad are allowed, but must meet all cumulative conditions for co-applicants from other organisations with the exception of the location in the Netherlands. A main applicant must be established in the Netherlands at all times.

## Chapter 3: Conditions for applicants

- or an organisation or body established and governed by public law (in Dutch: *publiekrechtelijke rechtspersoon*) (all other legal forms, including private and public limited companies, are excluded);
- have as its primary goal the independent conduct of its own fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development;
- be able to state that the organisation keeps separate accounts with regard to economic/non-economic activities and that undertakings with decisive influence on the organisation do not enjoy preferential access to the organisation's results.

NWO will not fund research organisations under this Call for proposals that are primarily engaged in the wide dissemination of the results of research activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge.

**Please note:** Prior to the submission of an application ZonMw assesses based on the above-mentioned conditions whether an organisation complies with Article 1.1, paragraph 4 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024 and may therefore participate as a co-applicant. ZonMw performs this assessment to preclude the granting of prohibited state aid.

The organisation of the prospective co-applicant must provide the following documents no less than 10 working days prior to the submission deadline (meaning no later than **19 March 2026, before 14:00:00 CET**) by email to [opencompetitie@zonmw.nl](mailto:opencompetitie@zonmw.nl):

- a recent extract from the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce;
- the deed of incorporation or current articles of association;
- the latest available annual accounts accompanied by an audit statement<sup>2</sup>;
- the completed Declaration Research organisation, available on funding page of this Call for proposals;
- the documents must be provided in English or Dutch.

The documents are submitted in English or Dutch. Other relevant documentation may be added. ZonMw may request additional information if the above documents are not sufficiently conclusive to determine whether the organisation may act as a co-applicant.

If the organisation of the intended co-applicant has been assessed against these conditions within another NWO programme, please contact ZonMw in good time before the deadline via the above email address to determine whether this organisation should be reassessed.

If the organisation of the prospective co-applicant does not submit the necessary documents for this assessment in time, ZonMw cannot accept the organisation as a co-applicant.

If new co-applicants are added to the consortium in the proposal and these new co-applicants are not affiliated to an institution listed in this Section, these conditions will also be checked for this organisation/these organisations. The following documents must be submitted no less than 10 working days before the submission deadline (meaning no later than **1 September 2026, before 14:00:00 CEST**) by email to [opencompetitie@zonmw.nl](mailto:opencompetitie@zonmw.nl):

- a recent extract from the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce;
- the deed of incorporation or current articles of association;
- the latest available annual accounts accompanied by an audit statement<sup>2</sup>;
- the completed Declaration Research organisation, available on funding page of this Call for proposals;

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<sup>2</sup>

Organisations that are not legally obliged to have their annual accounts audited do not need to provide such an auditor's statement. They must however be able to demonstrate that this legal requirement is not applicable to the organisation concerned.

- the documents must be provided in English or Dutch.

A research organisation that was approved as an applicant prior to the submission of a pre-proposal does not need to be reassessed prior to the submission of the proposal.

### 3.1.1 Additional conditions for applicants

#### **Main applicant**

- Main applicants must have obtained their PhD at least 15 years ago at the time of the pre-proposal deadline. The date on the doctoral degree is decisive for this. This condition does not apply to co-applicants.

#### **All applicants (main and co-applicants)**

- A research team:
  - consists of one main applicant and at least one co-applicant;
  - must meet the definition of the target group (Section 2.2).
- Main and co-applicants may only be involved in one ZonMw Open Competition application in round 2026;
- Main and co-applicants must have an active role in the implementation of the project and must jointly apply for a significant part of the budget, appropriate to the described research. The main applicant and co-applicant(s) are jointly responsible for the execution of the entire project. The main and co-applicant(s) together form the research team and are described administratively in the application form. Non-budgeted participants act as collaboration partners and are not listed as members of the research team in *My ZonMw*. A collaboration partner is an entity that does not receive funding and does not provide co-financing for a ZonMw-funded project but is closely involved in the implementation of the research and/or knowledge utilisation. The role these parties play in preparing, conducting, and translating the research into society must be described in the grant application. The entire consortium, including specification of roles, can be described in the relevant Section of the application form.

#### **Excluded as main applicant**

- Researchers who have submitted a full proposal in the Vici funding round 2026 and were invited to submit a proposal to ZonMw or to any of the other NWO domains;
- Researchers who have been awarded a ZonMw Open Competition grant or a Vici grant at ZonMw or any of the other NWO domains in the 2023, 2024, or 2025 round.

### 3.1.2 Main and co-applicants

The main applicant submits the proposal via *My ZonMw*, ZonMw's electronic submission system.

During the assessment process, ZonMw will communicate with the main applicant.

After a proposal has been awarded funding, the main applicant will become the project leader and point of contact for ZonMw. The knowledge institution of the main applicant is the main beneficiary and will become the official secretary. Co-applicants have an active role in realising the project. The (sub)project leaders and beneficiaries are jointly responsible for realising the entire project.

## 3.2 What can be applied for

Per project, a grant amount of at most €800,000 can be applied for. In addition, it is possible to submit an optional investment module of a minimum of €100,000 to a maximum of €250,000 on top of the maximum subsidy that can be applied for. Therefore, the maximum total subsidy that may be applied for, including an investment module, is €1,050,000. The proposed project must have a duration of at least 48 months and no more than 60 months. The applicants can include costs for personnel, equipment, investments and knowledge utilization. The available budget modules (including the maximum amounts) are listed below. Apply only for funding that is vital to realise the project. The rates and an explanation of these budget modules are given in chapter 7.

### 3.2.1 Personnel

Funding may be requested for salary costs of personnel contributing to the project. The amount depends on the type of appointment and the organisation where the personnel is employed.

#### 3.2.1.1 Personnel at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, umc or a research organisation

For personnel working at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, university medical centre (umc) or another research organisation, as referred to in Article 1.1, first paragraph, subparagraphs c to h of the NWO Grant Rules 2024, salary costs can be claimed for the following positions: PhD student, postdoc, physician-researcher, non-scientific personnel (NWP), other academic staff (OWP), and for research leave of the applicant(s). Salary costs for applicants are not eligible for subsidy.

- A maximum of 3 positions can be applied for the type of position: PhD student, postdoc and physician-researcher.
- A maximum of €100,000 can be requested for non-academic staff (NWP) at universities.
- For each PhD candidate, postdoctoral researcher or physician-researcher applied for, a maximum of €100,000 may be requested for other academic staff (OWP) at universities.
- Research leave can be requested for up to 5% of the grant amount.

#### 3.2.1.2 Personnel of universities of applied sciences, educational institutions, TO2 institutes and other organisations

It is possible to claim salary costs of personnel of universities of applied sciences, educational institutions, TO2 institutes, other organisations. A maximum of €100,000 can be requested for this type of position.

#### 3.2.1.3 Students

It is possible to engage students in the project if they are studying at a research organisation as referred to in Section 3.1. You can enter the costs of this as material costs within the project. There is no maximum on the number of students who can participate in the project.

#### 3.2.1.4 Scientific personnel at a research organisation abroad

It is possible to claim salary costs for scientific personnel from foreign research organisations that are co-applicants. A maximum of 50% of the grant amount for personnel can be requested for personnel at research organisations abroad.

Please note: prior to submitting a proposal, NWO will assess whether the foreign organisation complies with article 1.1, paragraphs 4 and 5 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024 (see Sections 1.3 and 7.1.1).

### 3.2.2 Material

Funding may be requested for all project-specific material costs. These costs are subject to a maximum of 25% of the NWO grant amount. Up to 50% of the material budget requested from NWO may be used for work by third parties.

A maximum of 50% of the grant amount for material costs can be requested for research organisations abroad.

### 3.2.3 Investments

Funding may be requested for investments in equipment, infrastructure and other research resources that have economic value or can be reused after the project ends. Salary costs of personnel who put the equipment, infrastructure and other research resources in a state of readiness can be claimed as part of the investments. The rates and conditions of Personnel are applicable here, and the costs should be claimed as Investments. Investments can only be made at research organisations listed in Section 3.1. There are two types of investment that can be made. See Chapter 7 for more information.

### 3.2.4 Knowledge utilisation

Funding can be requested for activities that promote the use of knowledge from the research<sup>3</sup>, to increase the societal impact of the research.

### 3.2.5 Collaboration with Luxembourg

NWO and ZonMw have made agreements with the Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR) in Luxembourg on collaboration with Luxembourg researchers in ZonMw Open Competition projects. Researchers from Luxembourg involved in a ZonMw Open Competition application with a Luxembourg component must meet the conditions of the FNR INTER programme (<https://www.fnr.lu/funding-instruments/inter/>) and are requested to contact the FNR well before the deadline. ZonMw assesses an application in its entirety, as being a regular ZonMw Open Competition application and in coordination with the FNR. Please contact ZonMw if you are considering submitting an application with a Luxembourg component or would like more information. Further information can be on the FNR website and in Module 1I 'Bilateral agreement with Luxembourg' (Chapter 7).

### 3.2.6 Collaboration with ZonMw programme Dementia Research Programme

ZonMw has reached agreements with the Dementia Research Programme (OPD) on applications that focus thematically on the subject of dementia. Above all, an application must meet the objective and regular conditions of ZonMw Open Competition as described in this Call for proposals. An application is eligible if it also fits within one of the following OPD themes: work package 1 'Fundamental research', work package 2 'Risk reduction', work package 3 'Diagnostics (and prognostics)' and work package 5 'Young people with dementia'.

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<sup>3</sup>

All activities applied for under this budget module must fit within the definition of "Knowledge Transfer Activities" used by the European Commission in the Framework for State Aid for Research, Development and Innovation (OJEU 2022, C 414).

ZonMw assesses these applications as being regular ZonMw Open Competition applications. In any case, the highest-priority application, which focuses on dementia and meets the assessment criteria in this Call for proposals, will be funded from the OPD budget. The remaining applications will go through the regular procedure of prioritization and awarding.

### 3.3 Preparing and submitting an application

The steps involved in writing your application are:

- download the application form from the ZonMw web application *My ZonMw* or from the ZonMw web page (on the grant page of the funding instrument concerned);
- complete the application form;
- save the application form in *My ZonMw* as a PDF file and upload it with any compulsory annexes;
- fill in the requested information online in *My ZonMw*.

Annex(es) for the project idea:

- form non-referees (maximum 3 names; optional);
- statement appointment and project supervision (mandatory if applicable);
- declaration of research organisation (only mandatory for new organisations to be assessed).

Annex(es) for the full proposal:

- budget in MS Excel (mandatory; and the amounts must correspond to the module in *My ZonMw*);
- statement appointment and project supervision (mandatory if applicable and only for newly added members);
- declaration of research organisation (only mandatory for new organisations to be assessed).
- declaration regular co-funding (mandatory if a contribution in kind/cash has been entered);
- declaration co-funding investment module (mandatory if applicable).

The proposal and the appendix(es) must be drawn up in accordance with the template provided by ZonMw. Annexes must be uploaded in *My ZonMw* separately from the application. All the annexes, except for the budget, must be submitted as PDF files (without encryption). The budget must be submitted in *My ZonMw* as an Excel file. Any annexes other than those stated above are not permitted.

You must write your application in English.

The use of generative AI is not excluded when preparing your proposal, if this is done in a responsible manner. The guidelines can be found on the website ([NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence \(GAI\) | NWO](#)).

A proposal can only be submitted via the web application *My ZonMw*. Applications that are not submitted via *My ZonMw* will not be taken into consideration.

As the main applicant, you are required to submit the application via your own personal *My ZonMw* account.

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

- if you do not yet have a *My ZonMw* account, then you should create this on time to prevent any possible registration problems;
- you also need to submit other details online.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration by ZonMw. For technical questions, please contact the ZonMw helpdesk, see contact (Chapter 6).

Applicants are expected to have informed the research organisation where they work about submitting the application and that the research organisation accepts the grant conditions of this Call for proposals.

### 3.3.1 Advice about substantive suitability

For this Call for proposals the application must fit within the domain of ZonMw. You should therefore consider in good time whether the content of the application fits with the domain. In the event of any doubt, for instance because your application (partly) encompasses various domains, then please get in touch with the contact person for this programme well in advance of the deadline. This person can advise you about the substantive connection between your application and this Call for proposals. Please note that the final choice is yours. For contact details please see Section 6.1.1.

## 3.4 Conditions for submission

### 3.4.1 Formal conditions for submission

ZonMw will assess your application against all the conditions set out in this Call for proposals, including the conditions listed below. Your application will only be admitted to the assessment procedure if it meets these conditions. After submitting your application, ZonMw requests you to be available to implement any possible administrative corrections so that you can (still) meet the conditions for submission.

These conditions are:

- the main applicant and co-applicant(s) meet the conditions stated in Section 3.1 and Section 7.1.1;
- the application complies with the DORA guidelines as described in Section 4.1;
- the application form, after any requests for additions or changes, is complete and filled out in accordance with the instructions;
- the application is submitted via the main applicant's *My ZonMw* account;
- the application is received before the deadline;
- the application is written in English;
- the application budget is drawn according to the terms of this Call for proposals (using the format made available which includes the most recent rates);
- the proposed project has a duration of minimum 48 and maximum 60 months;
- all required annexes, after a possible request for additions or changes, have been completed and submitted completely and according to the instructions and in accordance with the terms of this Call for proposals.

All other annexes (including letters of intent and letters of support) are not permitted and will not be taken into account in the assessment.

## 3.5 Conditions on granting

The [NWO Grant Rules 2024](#) and the [Agreement on the Payment of Costs for Scientific Research](#) are applicable to all applications. Accordingly, awarded projects must commence within six months from the date of the grant award decision.

### 3.5.1 Knowledge Security

In the National Knowledge Security Guidelines, the Dutch knowledge sector and various government departments have laid down guidelines for those within research organisations who are involved in international collaboration and who need to weigh up the opportunities and (security) risks involved. Self-regulation by the knowledge sector is central to the approach to knowledge security within the Netherlands.

NWO expects applicants to comply with the knowledge security policy of their research organisation. If NWO receives indications that a proposal or an allocated project entails knowledge security risks, NWO may request the applicant or project leader to provide insight into the risk mitigation measures. In addition, NWO may decide to include further conditions in the award letter to protect knowledge security.

The National Knowledge Security Guidelines can be found on the website of the Dutch government: [Home | National Contact Point for Knowledge Security \(loketkennisveiligheid.nl\)](#).

### 3.5.2 Data management

The results of scientific research must be replicable, verifiable and falsifiable. In the digital age, this means that, in addition to publications, research data must also be publicly accessible insofar as this is possible. NWO expects that research data resulting from NWO -funded projects will be made publicly available, as much as possible, for reuse by other researchers. “As open as possible, as closed as necessary” is the applicable principle in this respect. Researchers, at very least, are expected to make the data and/or non-numerical results that underlie the conclusions of the published work resulting from the project publicly available at the same time as the work’s publication. Any costs incurred for this can be included in the project budget. Researchers should explain how data emerging from the project will be dealt with based on the data management section in the proposal and the data management plan that is drawn up after funding is awarded.

#### Data management section

The data management Section is part of the proposal. Researchers are asked before the start of the research to consider how the data collected will be ordered and categorised so that this can be made publicly available. Measures will often already need to be taken, both during data generation and as part of analysing the data, to make its subsequent storage and dissemination possible. If it is not possible to make all data from the project publicly available, for example due to reasons of privacy, ethics or valorisation, then the applicant is obliged to list the reasons for this in the data management section.

The data management section in the proposal is not evaluated and will therefore not be weighed in the decision whether to award funding. However, both the referees and the committee can issue advice with respect to the data management section.

### 3.5.3 Scientific integrity

In accordance with the NWO Grant Rules 2024, the project that NWO funds must be carried out in accordance with the nationally and internationally accepted standards for scientific conduct as stated in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018). By submitting the proposal, the applicant commits to this code. In the case of a (possible) violation of these standards during a project funded by NWO, the applicant should immediately inform ZonMw of this and should submit all relevant documents to ZonMw. More information about the code of conduct and the policy regarding research integrity can be found on the website: [Scientific integrity | NWO](#).

### 3.5.4 Ethical statement or licence

The applicant is responsible for determining whether an ethical statement or licence is needed for the realisation of the proposed project. The applicant should ensure that this is obtained from the relevant institution or ethics committee on time. The absence or presence of an ethical statement or licence at the time of the application process has no effect on the assessment of the application. If an ethics statement or licence is required for (part of) the research, the project leader must provide a copy of this statement or licence to ZonMw after the project has been awarded, and in any case no later than before implementation of the part of the project for which the statement is required starts. The part of the project requiring the statement and/or licence can obviously not (yet) be carried out if no statement or licence has been provided.

### 3.5.5 Nagoya Protocol

The Nagoya Protocol ensures an honest and reasonable distribution of benefits emerging from the use of genetic resources (Access and Benefit Sharing; ABS). Researchers who make use of genetic sources from the Netherlands or abroad for their research should familiarise themselves with the Nagoya Protocol ([Home - ABS Focal Point](#) NWO assumes that researchers will take all necessary actions with respect to the Nagoya Protocol).

### 3.5.6 Animal experimental research

ZonMw endorses the Code for Transparency in Animal Testing and the Biosecurity Code. Applicants should endorse and comply with the existing codes. If the application concerns animal experimental research, then the use of the ARRIVE guidelines is mandatory. The use of this guideline should be clearly motivated in the plan of approach. The ARRIVE guideline is intended as a guideline for publications but can also be used as a guideline for conditions for good animal experimental research (for example, randomization, blinding, good statistical and methodological substantiation etc.). This guideline can be found on the website of the Equator Network. You can also look at the websites of Experimental design assistant (EDA) and PREPARE.

### 3.5.7 Co-funding

All applications are subject to the [NWO Co-funding rules](#).

#### Additional definitions:

- co-funding in kind: capitalised personnel and/or material contributions from users;
- co-funding in cash is used to cover part of the total project costs and together with the grant provided by NWO constitutes the required financial resources.

Co-funding is not mandatory in this Call for proposals, except for the investment module (Section 3.2.3). However, it is possible to add co-funders in the proposal. A distinction is made between co-funding in cash (to be invoiced by the applicant), which serves to cover the budget of the project activities described in the proposal, and co-funding in kind, which may consist of personnel and/or material contributions from the organisations involved.

#### The following principles apply to co-funding:

- NWO is the main funder of an application. Applications of which the co-funding from co-funders exceeds 49% of the total project costs will not be taken into consideration;
- in-kind contributions will only be accepted under the condition that the portion contributed by the co-funder is integral to the project activities and can be tracked or designated as identifiable effort. In case of questions, ZonMw may request further justification and evidence of the rates

- used and also adjustment. In addition, any in-kind contributions in the form of services and know-how may not already be available or in place at the applicant's knowledge institution(s);
- fixed integral hourly rates are used to capitalise the human contribution (work hours) to a project. For rates, see the [Government Tariffs Manual \(HOT\)](#), Table 2 under 2.2 'average total labour costs per pay scale', column 'Hourly rate productive hours, excluding VAT'. The rate closest to the actual labour costs should be used here;
- co-funding in cash, is the net amount paid by a co-funder to the applicant. The applicant invoices co-funding in cash and, if applicable, VAT to the co-funder.

Not eligible as co-funding in cash/in kind are<sup>4</sup>:

- grant provided by NWO and ZonMw;
- co-funding may not come from parties that according to this Call for proposals can apply for funding to ZonMw.
- costs related to overhead, guidance, consultancy

#### Co-funding declaration of participating co-funders

In a co-funding declaration, the co-funder expresses financial support for the project and confirms the co-funding promised. Co-funding declarations from co-funders, which are mentioned in the application, are compulsory as attachments when submitting the proposal. The co-funding declaration must be signed by an authorised signatory of the co-funder. ZonMw provides a compulsory format for the co-funding declaration on the funding page of this Call for proposals on the ZonMw website and in *My ZonMw*.

If the application is awarded, the co-funder must confirm its contribution(s) in the consortium agreement. This agreement also contains further agreements between the co-funder(s) and the applicant(s) (see Section 5.1.3).

#### Justification co-funding in cash and in kind

The ratio of co-funding (both in cash and in kind) to the grant provided by ZonMw in this Call for proposals, applies from submission of an application until the grant is determined. Co-funding in cash affects the grant amount provided by NWO because both ZonMw's contribution and co-funding in cash are used for the same project-specific costs (unlike co-funding in kind).

One-off indexing due to other applicable rates after submission does not affect the ratio and co-financing requirement for the ZonMw contribution. For this, ZonMw assumes the ratio in the application budgets accepted by ZonMw.

After determination of a project the final grant amount is settled based on the final report, the financial conditions and the co-funding ratio as present in the application budget.

In case of partly provided co-funding in cash (due to unforeseen circumstances, such as bankruptcy) ZonMw's contribution is based on the original grant award, considering the co-funding in cash that was provided and the applicable minimum co-funding requirement, if applicable.

Co-funding in cash in excess of the co-funding requirement affects the applied ratio of co-funding to grant provided by ZonMw. If a project has co-funding in cash in excess of the co-funding requirement and partial in cash co-funding has been provided at determination, the ZonMw contribution is never more than the original contribution from the grant award. The ratio of the ZonMw contribution is then at most the contribution that follows from the co-funding requirement.

<sup>4</sup>

For inadmissible co-funding, see also the NWO Co-funding Rules, Article 6.

## Chapter 3: Conditions for applicants

At all times ZonMw must be notified of problems in expected co-funding (in cash and/or in kind). In addition to financial implications for a project, ZonMw may also require adequate changes to a project as a change request so that research can be continued to the best of its ability.

## 4 Assessment procedure

This chapter first describes the assessment according to the DORA principles (Section 4.1) and the course of the assessment procedure (Section 4.2). Second, it states the criteria that the assessment committee will use to assess your application (Section 4.3).

The NWO Code for Dealing with Personal Interests applies to all persons and ZonMw employees involved in the assessment and/or decision-making process ([Code for Dealing with Personal Interests | NWO](#)).

The use of generative AI is not excluded when preparing your proposal, if this is done in a responsible manner. The guidelines can be found on the website ([NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence \(GAI\) | NWO](#)).

ZonMw and NWO strive to achieve an inclusive culture where there is no place for conscious or unconscious barriers due to cultural, ethnic or religious background, gender, sexual orientation, health or age ([Diversity and inclusion | NWO](#)). ZonMw and NWO encourage referees and members of an assessment committee to be actively aware of implicit associations and to try to minimise these. ZonMw will provide them with information about concrete ways of improving the assessment of an application.

### 4.1 The San Francisco Declaration (DORA)

NWO is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). DORA is a worldwide initiative that aims to improve the way research and researchers are assessed. DORA contains recommendations for research funders, research organisations, scientific journals and other parties.

DORA aims to reduce the uncritical use of bibliometric indicators and obviate unconscious bias in the assessment of research and researchers. DORA's overarching philosophy is that research should be evaluated on its own merits rather than based on surrogate measures, such as the journal in which the research is published.

When assessing the scientific track record of applicants, NWO makes use of a broad definition of scientific output.

NWO requests committee members and referees not to rely on indicators such as the Journal Impact Factor or the h-index when assessing applications. Applicants are not allowed to mention these in their applications. You are, however, allowed to list other scientific products besides publications, such as datasets, patents, software and code, et cetera.

For more information on how ZonMw and NWO are implementing the principles of DORA, see [DORA | NWO](#).

### 4.2 Procedure

The application procedure consists of the following steps:

- submission of the pre-proposal;

## Chapter 4: Assessment procedure

- admissibility of the pre-proposal;
- assessment of the pre-proposal;
- decision-making;
- submission of the proposal;
- admissibility of the proposal;
- peer review by referees;
- rebuttal;
- Pre-advice assessment committee;
- interview selection;
- decision-making;
- interview;
- assessment committee meeting;
- decision-making.

An external, independent assessment committee will be assigned for this Call for proposals, consisting of representatives from science and practice with knowledge of the field.

The task of the assessment committee is to assess the applications and the relevant documents that are submitted, in conjunction with each other and regarding both the respective merits of each application and the assessment criteria outlined in this Call for proposals.

#### 4.2.1 Submission of the pre-proposal

The submission of a pre-proposal is compulsory for this Call for proposals. The pre-proposal is a concise proposal. For the pre-proposal submission, a standard form is available on the funding page of this Call for proposals on the ZonMw website. The pre-proposal form that you complete must be received prior to the deadline via *My ZonMw* (see Section 1.3). After submitting the pre-proposal, the main applicant will receive confirmation of receipt.

#### 4.2.2 Admissibility of the pre-proposal

You will hear from ZonMw as quickly as possible after having submitted your pre-proposal whether it will be taken into consideration. ZonMw will make this assessment based on several administrative-technical criteria (see the formal conditions for submission, Section 3.4). ZonMw can only take your pre-proposal into consideration if it meets these conditions.

Please bear in mind that within two weeks after the submission deadline, ZonMw may approach you with any possible administrative corrections that need to be made so that your pre-proposal can (still) meet the conditions for submission. You will be given one opportunity to make corrections, and you will be given five working days to complete this.

#### 4.2.3 Assessment of the pre-proposal

The assessment committee assesses the pre-proposals based on the criteria in a comparative manner and prioritises them, without the use of external referees. It selects and formulates its comments based on the substantive assessment criteria and assigns a numerical score to the pre-proposal submissions. The NWO score table is used for this (on a scale of 1 to 9, where '1' is excellent and '9' is insufficient).

Applicants will receive the intended advice from the assessment committee. Applicants with preliminary negative advice will also receive the motivation provided by the committee. If an applicant believes that the motivation contains a factual error, they have a number of working days to request a correction using the provided format. This option is not intended to provide additional new information regarding the application or to pose questions to the committee. Taking these requests into account, the assessment committee will determine whether it sees reason to change its intended advice. Thereafter, the advice on the final prioritization will be submitted to the decision-making body.

#### 4.2.4 Decision pre-proposals

The assessment will result in a decision on whether to further elaborate on the pre-proposal. The advice of the assessment committee on the pre-proposals is submitted to the ZonMw board for decision-making, which reviews the procedure and the advice, determines the final qualifications, and decides which applicants will be invited to submit a proposal.

will receive the decision in due time, along with an invitation to submit a proposal before the deadline. The other applicants will receive a decision that they may not submit a proposal. The number of applicants to be invited is determined based on the available budget. As a guideline, about two to three times as many applications are worked out as can ultimately be granted.

#### 4.2.5 Submission of a proposal

The proposal must be a development of the assessed pre-proposal; significant changes to the research design and research team are therefore not permitted unless this is apparent in the preliminary advice of the pre-proposal.

For the submission of the proposal, a standard form is available on the funding page of this Call for proposals on the ZonMw website. When you write your proposal, you must adhere to the questions stated on this form and the procedure given in the explanatory notes. You must also adhere to the conditions for the maximum number of words and pages.

Your complete application form must have been received before the deadline via *My ZonMw* (see Section 1.3). After this deadline, you can no longer submit a proposal. After submitting the proposal, the main applicant will receive confirmation of receipt.

#### 4.2.6 Admissibility of the proposal

As soon as possible after you have submitted your proposal, you will hear from ZonMw whether your proposal will be taken into consideration. ZonMw will determine this based on several administrative-technical criteria (see the formal conditions for submission, Section 3.4.1). ZonMw can only take your proposal into consideration if it meets these conditions.

Please bear in mind that within two weeks after the submission deadline, ZonMw may approach you with any possible administrative corrections that need to be made so that your proposal can (still) meet the conditions for submission. You will be given one opportunity to make the corrections, and you will be given five working days to do this.

#### 4.2.7 Peer review by referees

Prior to the assessment committee considering your proposal, ZonMw will request input from at least two external referees. These are independent advisers who are experts in the subjects of the proposal. They will assess the proposals based on the assessment criteria outlined in the Call for proposals (Section 4.3).

A maximum of three non-referees can be registered. Applicants can register these non-referees in *My ZonMw* when submitting the pre-proposal. ZonMw will not approach these non-referees to assess the proposal as external referees.

#### 4.2.8 Rebuttal

The main applicant subsequently receives the anonymous referee reports. The applicants then have the opportunity to formulate a rebuttal. You will be given ten working days to submit your rebuttal via *My ZonMw*. If you decide to withdraw the proposal, then you should do this as quickly as possible by sending an email stating this to the office and withdrawing the proposal in *My ZonMw*. If ZonMw receives your rebuttal after the deadline, then it will not be included in the rest of the procedure.

#### 4.2.9 Pre-advice assessment committee

After this, your proposal, the referees' reports and your rebuttal will be submitted for comments to several members of the assessment committee (the pre-advisers). The pre-advisers will provide a written substantive and reasoned response to the proposal. The assessment committee weighs the referees' arguments (including in comparison with each other) and considers whether a substantively adequate response has been provided in the rebuttal to the comments in the referees' reports. The referees' reports are largely guiding for the final assessment, but the assessment committee forms an independent judgment on the proposal. They will formulate these comments based on the substantive assessment criteria (see Section 4.3.1) and will give the proposal a numerical score per assessment criterion. For this, the NWO score table will be used (on a scale of 1 to 9, where "1" is excellent and "9" insufficient).

#### 4.2.10 Interview selection

The proposals, the referees' reports and the rebuttal/the pre-advice and the rebuttal will be submitted to the assessment committee. The assessment committee will then make its own assessment based on these documents.

During the interview selection meeting the assessment committee will determine an advice regarding which proposals are marked as "highest prioritized proposals". These prioritized proposals must at least meet one of the following criteria:

- Minimally qualified as "relevant" (score of 2,4 or lower);
- Minimally on average qualified as "excellent to very good" for quality (score of 2,2 or lower);
- Minimally on average qualified as "very good" for methodology and investing module (if requested; score of 3,4 or lower);
- Positive advice by minimally three pre-advisers of the assessment committee.

#### Decision on the category 'highest ranking applications'

The group proposals categorized as the "highest prioritized proposals" are eligible for direct admission without an interview. The board of ZonMw assess the followed procedure and the advice of the

assessment committee. Then the ZonMw board determines the definitive qualifications and decides about granting proposals belonging to this category.

#### 4.2.11 Interview

During the interview, the assessment committee will have the opportunity to pose questions, including new questions that have not been asked by the referees before. A delegation of applicants, including the main applicant of the consortium, can respond during the interview at the discussion part. Hereby, fair hearing is applied. The interview is the most important part of the assessment and can lead to adjustment of the assessment and the score.

#### 4.2.12 Meeting of the assessment committee

The committee will make its own assessment based on the available material. Although the referee reports guide the assessment committee, these documents are not blindly accepted without question. The committee will consider and compare the arguments of the referee reports (also amongst each other) and examine whether the rebuttal contains a well-formulated response to the critical comments from the referee reports. Furthermore, the committee, unlike the referees, will assess the quality of all the proposals and rebuttals submitted. Therefore, the committee's assessment may differ from that of the referees. Following the discussion, the committee draws up a written recommendation addressed to the ZonMw board about the quality and ranking of the proposals. This recommendation is based on the assessment criteria. The complete proposal must receive an overall qualification of at least "relevant" and for the section quality at least "very good" to be eligible for funding. In addition, the sections methodology and investing module (if requested) also require a minimal qualification of "good" to be eligible for funding.

For more information about the qualifications, see [Applying for funding, how does it work? | NWO](#).

If, after the discussion of the proposals, two or more of the proposals cannot be distinguished from each other based on their weighted total score, then this will result in an *ex aequo* situation (see Section 4.2.13).

#### 4.2.13 *Ex aequo*

NWO understands *ex aequo* to be a situation in which two or more proposals based on their weighted score cannot be distinguished from each other. An *ex aequo* situation is relevant with respect to the borders of the available budget or the selection borders. The existence of an *ex aequo* situation is determined as follows. The starting point in this process is the ranking drawn up by the assessment committee, with the final scores rounded to two decimal points. The reference score here is the score of the lowest-ranked proposal within the borders of the available budget or the selection borders. All proposals with a score that is within 0.05 or less of the reference score will be considered. Hereby, the proposals that are equal within a score of 0.1 will be selected.

If an *ex aequo* situation occurs at the borders of the available budget or the selection borders, a female main applicant will end as the highest, to help increase the number of women working in science. If the *ex aequo* situation is not resolved via this procedure, then the proposal with the highest score for "quality of research" will be decisive. If the proposals subsequently remain unresolved, the proposal with the highest score for the criterion "team" will be decisive. If the proposals remain equal the assessment committee, with the help of a (anonymous) majority vote, will determine the ranking (in accordance with Article 2.2.6, paragraph 5 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024). If this vote also fails to provide a resolution, or if it is deemed to be undesirable to vote, then the *ex aequo* situation will be sent onto the decision-making body.

#### 4.2.14 Decision-making

Finally, ZonMw will assess the procedure followed as well as the advice from the assessment committee. They will subsequently determine the final qualifications and decide regarding the awarding or rejecting the proposals.

#### 4.2.15 Timetable

Below, you will find the timetable for this call for proposals. Consider that ZonMw may deem it necessary to adjust the timetable during the procedure. Obviously, the applicant will be informed about adjustments in time.

##### Pre-proposals

|                                |                                                                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 March 2026                   | Information session                                                         |
| 19 March 2026, 2 PM CET        | Deadline submitting documents for assessment of organisation (if necessary) |
| <b>2 April 2026, 2 PM CEST</b> | Deadline pre-proposals                                                      |
| Mid June 2026                  | Results pre-advice of the committee                                         |
| Mid to end of June 2026        | Deadline submitting request for corrections                                 |
| Start of July 2026             | Decision pre-proposal                                                       |

##### Proposals

|                                         |                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 September 2026, 2 PM CEST             | Deadline submitting documents for assessment of organisation (if necessary) |
| <b>15 September 2026, 2 PM CEST</b>     | Deadline proposals                                                          |
| End of September to end of October 2026 | Consultation of referees                                                    |
| Start of November 2026                  | Applicants can submit a rebuttal                                            |
| End of January 2027                     | Results regarding the highest ranked proposals                              |
| 3 & 4 February 2027                     | Interviews offline meeting, Utrecht                                         |
| End of March 2027                       | Decision by the ZonMw board                                                 |

### 4.3 Criteria

The applications submitted within this Call for proposals will be assessed based on the content by the following criteria:

#### 4.3.1 Relevance

The relevance of a proposal for a ZonMw Open Competition grant is assessed by the assessment committee. The purpose is to select the pre-proposals that have the best fit regarding the objectives, as described in chapter 2:

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- Innovative (groundbreaking) fundamental biomedical or health science with a broad effect on the scientific community or society in general;
- *Team science*: synergistic and creative cooperation between research groups, renewed in composition and content (see chapter 2.2); as evidenced by the fact that the members of the team have not previously collaborated or published together on the topic described.

### 4.3.2 Quality

In addition to the relevance criterium, the quality of a proposal is assessed based on the three following criteria:

- Pre-proposal
  - A. Scientific quality (60%);
  - B. Quality of the research group (40%).
- Proposal
  - A. Scientific quality (50%);
  - B. Quality of the research group (30%);
  - C. Utilization of knowledge and participation (30%).

Besides, the methodology and investment module sections of the proposal must receive a minimum qualification of “good” to be eligible for funding. Noteworthy, the scores for these sections are not included in the calculations of the average final quality score.

#### 4.3.2.1 Scientific quality (What)

- High innovative value in terms of scientific content;
- An original research question with the potential to make a groundbreaking contribution to science;
- Integrates all relevant perspectives for the central research question. The potential of the project clearly exceeds the sum of its parts;
- The research project is focused, optimally coherent, with an effective plan;
- Effectiveness and a solid methodology;
- Feasibility, risk analysis and a back-up plan.

#### 4.3.2.2 Quality of the project team (Who)

- The team includes researchers with a strong national and international scientific reputation. These experts and innovative researchers can make a highly significant and unique contribution to the development in their field of expertise.
- The composition of the research team, both at the group and individual level, and the expertise present are excellently aligned with the implementation of the proposed research;
- The composition of the team is synergistic: the expertise of the various project members is complementary and mutually reinforcing;
- Where applicable, collaboration with the international co-applicant is essential;
- The main applicant has demonstrable capacity to lead and inspire teams and collaborative partnerships, and together with the other members forms a well-balanced team;

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- The team is optimally structured and tailored to the content and implementation of the proposed research project, with sufficient attention to individual roles in research as well as in management, teaching/training, and knowledge utilization. ZonMw specifically asks for attention to inclusivity in this context, for example regarding levels of seniority, gender, and ethnic diversity.

## 4.3.2.3 Knowledge utilisation and participation (Why)

Knowledge utilization concerns the sharing and/or further development of knowledge in consultation with researchers from their specific or other disciplines, stakeholders, and/or end users. ZonMw encourages the early involvement (participation) of stakeholders and, if possible, the target group or end users with experiential knowledge in a project. Since knowledge utilization and participation can take many different forms, it is up to the applicant to specify which objectives are relevant, which strategy fits these objectives, and which approach and resources are required. ZonMw acknowledges that knowledge utilization and participation are not applicable to all research outcomes. If knowledge utilization and/or participation are not relevant for the proposed research, this is acceptable if this is well justified. Based on the programmes objectives, three focus areas of knowledge utilization and participation are relevant:

- 1) **Knowledge utilisation and participation in science, widely projecting. This includes the following criteria;**
  - Engaging, informing, and integrating new knowledge, results, and insights across various scientific disciplines, both nationally and internationally;
  - Participation is included as part of the strategy to stimulate research creativity and enhance quality;
  - Opportunities for dissemination through Open Science strategies are described;
  - Sharing the knowledge gained through the investment module (if applicable) is included as part of the strategy.
- 2) **Knowledge utilisation and participation to facilitate innovation development and valorisation. This includes the following criteria:**
  - There is a clear vision, including clear and feasible plans, regarding the potential impact, applications, and further development in areas both within and beyond the scientific field, even if this may only materialize in the long term;
  - Opportunities for valorisation are explored.
- 3) **Knowledge utilisation and participation aimed at the practice, education, policy, industry and society in general. This includes the following criteria:**
  - Informing and implementing knowledge and results among the parties involved and those relevant to the project is part of the strategy. Examples of such parties include:
    - a. Patients, patient organisations and professionals
    - b. policy and education;
    - c. cultural institutions;
    - d. companies;
    - e. citizens as a broad group, with a possible focus on specific subgroups.

## 4.3.3 Methodology

In assessing the methodology, the description of the following criteria plays a role:

- The type of research for example, qualitative and/or quantitative research;
- Core components of the study design;

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- Power calculation (where applicable), including statistical methods and justification, theoretical and/or empirical arguments;
- Data characteristics, including inclusion and exclusion criteria, potential bias, and confounders;
- Methods of data collection and outcome measures;
- Data analysis and the (statistical) tools used;
- The validity, reliability (accuracy), and reproducibility of the methodology/techniques used to answer the research questions;
- A clear description on how sex, gender, and diversity (ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation) will be considered in the design, implementation, analysis, and reporting of results. If certain forms of diversity are not relevant to the proposed research, or if it is practically not possible to account for differences between subgroups, this must be clearly justified.

Consult the reporting standards of the relevant disciplines to describe the methodology rigorously. Existing reporting guidelines can be used as inspiration to tailor this section to the needs of the proposal:

<https://www.equator-network.org/reporting-guidelines/>. In addition, the [SAGER-guidelines](#) may be consulted as inspiration for integrating sex and gender into the project plan. Information on sex, gender, and diversity in research can also be found on the [ZonMw website](#).

#### 4.3.4 Investment Module (Optional)

The investment module is a grant intended for establishing medium scale research infrastructure. An application is eligible for funding only if there is clear scientific relevance and at least local, and where possible national, significance (for example through shared use by researchers from other institutions). The following criteria play an important role in the assessment:

##### Scientific quality

- the relevance, urgency, and innovative value of the investment for the proposal and for the research field concerned; technological innovation;
- the technical feasibility and effectiveness of the investment;
- the quality and competence of the project team in relation to the investment module.

##### Local and national importance

- potential impact at the local and national level; accessibility (also in the long term) for researchers other than the directly involved applicants and those covered by the scheme;
- alignment with other groups in the relevant field;
- embedding of the investment within the institution's (long-term) research strategy.

##### Financial/technical aspects

- the extent of co-financing and its proportionality to the size and objectives of the project;
- the necessity of the personnel requested and listed as own contribution;
- assurance of housing for the investment;
- embedding of the investment in an appropriate setting within the institution;
- the management and operational plan for the investment;
- risk analysis, including proposed mitigation measures.

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## Effectiveness of the investment

- the proportionality between the scale of the investment and the number of users/the extent of use;
- the expected utilization rate of the investment;
- the continuity of the investment after the grant period;
- the future plan for replacement/modernisation.

## Knowledge utilisation/participation: potential and implementation

- the extent to which the realisation of the investment contributes to (technological) innovation in companies or in society;
- the extent to which potential results obtained through the investment contribute to important scientific, technological, or societal developments;
- the action plan for ensuring that the outputs generated using the facility benefit the potential knowledge users;
- whether potential knowledge users are involved in the design, implementation, and use of the facility, and if so, how this is done;
- the expected timeframe for potential knowledge utilisation and participation.

## 5 Obligations for grant recipients

This chapter details the various obligations that apply after funds have been awarded. These are in addition to the conditions stated in Section 3.5.

### 5.1 Additional terms and conditions

#### 5.1.1 Data management

After a proposal has been awarded funding, the researcher should elaborate the data management Section into a data management plan. For this, applicants can make use of the advice from the referees and committee. The applicant must describe in the plan whether existing data will be used, or whether new data will be collected or generated, and how this data will be made FAIR: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable. Before submission, the data management plan should be checked by a data steward or similar officer of the research organisation where the project will be realised. NWO will check the plan as quickly as possible. Approval of the data management plan by NWO is a condition for disbursement of the funding. The plan can be adjusted during the research.

More information about the data management protocol of NWO can be found at: [Research data management | NWO](#).

#### 5.1.2 Intellectual property and consortium agreement

Regarding the intellectual property (IP), the NWO IP policy applies. The NWO IP policy can be found in Chapter 4 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024.

Applicants must carry out a ZonMw funded project during the period in which they are employed by the research organisation. If an applicant or a ZonMw funded researcher is appointed by multiple employers, the other employer must waive any potential IP rights arising from the project on behalf of the applicant.

Concluding a consortium agreement after the award of the application is one of the conditions for the start of the project. This agreement sets out arrangements regarding intellectual property and publication, knowledge transfer, confidentiality, payments of co-funding, and progress and final reports. Approval by ZonMw is required before the project is started. The responsibility for arranging the consortium agreement lies with the applicant. If ZonMw does not accept the consortium agreement, no funding can be granted.

The (model) agreement that NWO makes available must be used and can be found on the funding page of this Call for proposals. This model agreement has been drawn up in accordance with the NWO Grant Rules 2024.

#### 5.1.3 Socially responsible licensing

The knowledge that emerges from the project could be suitable for use in society. When agreements about licensing and/or the transfer of research results developed under this Call for proposals are made, the ten principles for socially responsible licensing should be taken into account, as stated in the NFU factsheet "[Ten principles for Socially Responsible Licensing | NFU](#)".

### 5.1.4 Open Access

As a signatory to the Berlin Declaration (2003) and a member of cOAlition S (2018), NWO is committed to making the results of the research it funds openly accessible via the internet (Open Access). By doing this, NWO and ZonMw accommodate the ambitions of the Dutch government to make all publicly funded research available in Open Access form. Scientific publications arising from projects awarded based on this Call for proposals must therefore be made available in Open Access form in accordance with the Open Access Policy.

#### Scientific articles

Scientific articles must be made available in Open Access form immediately at the time of publication (without embargo) via one of the following routes:

- publication in a fully Open Access journal or platform registered in the DOAJ;
- publication in a subscription journal and the immediate deposition of at least the author accepted manuscript of the article in an Open Access repository registered in OpenDOAR;
- publication in a journal for which a transformative Open Access agreement exists between UNL and a publisher. For more information consult [Home | Open access](#).

#### Books

Different requirements apply to scholarly books, book chapters and edited collections. See the Open Access Policy Framework at [Open Science | NWO](#).

#### CC BY licence

To ensure the widest possible dissemination of publications, at least a Creative Commons (CC BY) licence must be applied. Alternatively – in case of substantial interest – the author may request to publish under a CC BY-ND licence. For books, book chapters and collected volumes, all CC BY licence options are allowed.

#### Costs

Costs for publication in fully Open Access journals can be budgeted in the application using the budget module for “material costs”. Costs for publications in hybrid journals are not eligible for reimbursement by NWO. For Open Access books, a separate NWO Open Access Books Fund is available.

For more detailed information about NWO’s Open Access policy, see [Open Science | NWO](#).

## 6 Contact and other information

### 6.1 Contact

#### 6.1.1 Specific questions

The most recent information about the current round can be found on the ZonMw Open Competition website. A document with answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ) is also available there, which you can consult before contacting ZonMw.

For substantive questions, you can email the programme team at [opencompetitie@zonmw.nl](mailto:opencompetitie@zonmw.nl) or contact them by phone at +31 (0)70 349 5115.

#### 6.1.2 Technical questions about the web application MijnZonMw

For technical questions about the use of MijnZonMw, please contact the ZonMw helpdesk. Please read the manual first before consulting the helpdesk. The ZonMw helpdesk can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 9:00 and 17:00 hours on +31 (0)70 349 51 76. However, you can also submit your question by email [servicedesk@zonmw.nl](mailto:servicedesk@zonmw.nl). You will then receive an answer within two working days.

### 6.2 Other information

ZonMw processes data from applicants received in the context of this Call for proposals in accordance with the [ZonMw Privacy Statement](#).

ZonMw might approach applicants for an evaluation of the procedure and/or research programme.

## 7 Annexes

### 7.1 Budget modules and rates

In this Call for Proposals, the modules Personnel (1), Materials (2), and Knowledge Utilisation (4) are mandatory and may be requested as often as needed for the intended research, within the maximum grant amount. The Investments (3) is optional.

Funding is provided according to the UNL rates, UMCNL (formerly NFU) rates, or HOT rates applicable at the start of the project.

All budget components must be proportionate to the research and must be justified in the proposal. The budget should be prepared together with a financial controller from the applicant's institution.

#### 7.1.1 Personnel

For salary tables and rates: see [Salary tables | NWO](#).

##### Module 1A: PhD student

A PhD candidate is appointed for 48 months at 1.0 FTE at a university within the Netherlands, a university medical center (UMC), or a research organisation as referred to in Article 1.1 of the NWO Grant Rules. The equivalent of 48 full-time months for example, an appointment of 60 months at 0.8 FTE is also permissible. In exceptional situations, it is possible to request a shorter appointment duration; this must be well justified. The assessment committee will evaluate such requests. If a project has a shorter duration than 48 months, the dean or institute director must provide a written commitment to finance the remaining part of the PhD trajectory. It is not possible to request funding for a PhD candidate who has already started the project to be funded before the award decision.

Please use the rates of a PhD student in the salary tables of UNL and NFU. A one-time personal bench fee of €5,000 is obligatory for each PhD student to stimulate their scientific career.

##### Module 1B: Postdoc

A postdoctoral researcher is appointed at a university within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a university medical center (UMC), or a research organisation as referred to in Section 3.1.

Use the salary rates for a senior scientific staff member as listed in the UNL salary tables, and the salary rates for a postdoctoral researcher as listed in the UMCNL salary tables.

It is not possible to request funding for a postdoctoral researcher who has already started the project to be funded prior to the award decision.

Only a postdoctoral position with an appointment of at least 12 months at 0.5 FTE qualifies for a mandatory one-time, individual bench fee of €5,000 to support scientific career development. If the appointment covers a shorter period, the individual bench fee may be adjusted proportionally.

## Module 1C: Physician-scientist

Funding may be requested for appointing a physician or a physician-scientist for conducting medical scientific research at a UMC. A physician-scientist is appointed for a minimum of 36 and a maximum of 48 months at 1.0 FTE. The equivalent of 36 or 48 full-time months for example, an appointment of 48 or 60 months at 0.8 FTE is also acceptable. If a project has a duration of less than 48 months, the dean or institute director must provide a written commitment to finance the remaining part of the PhD trajectory.

It is not possible to request funding for a physician-scientist who has already started the project to be funded prior to the award decision.

Use the salary rates for physician-scientists as listed in the UMCNL salary tables. For each physician-scientist, a mandatory one-time individual bench fee of €5,000 applies to support scientific career development. If the appointment covers a shorter period, the individual bench fee may be adjusted proportionally.

## Module 1D: Other scientific personnel (OSP)

For each requested PhD candidate, postdoctoral researcher, or physician-scientist, a maximum of €100,000 in OSP funding may be requested. The following conditions apply to this module:

Funding for the appointment of other scientific personnel, such as AIOS (residents in specialist training), ANIOS (physicians not in specialist training), or individuals with a university master's degree or equivalent (e.g., data scientist, methodologist), can only be requested in combination with a PhD candidate or postdoctoral researcher. The maximum appointment duration is 48 months for a 1.0 FTE position and 60 months for part-time appointments. The minimum appointment size is 0.5 FTE for a period of 12 months. This effort may be distributed over a longer or shorter period, for example across the entire duration of the project. The product of FTE × duration must always equal at least 6 full-time months.

## Module 1E: Non-scientific personnel

Funding may be requested for non-scientific personnel (NWP) required for the implementation of the project. This may include, for example, programmers, technical assistants, analysts, or project managers. The involvement of NWP must be described in the application. The duration of the appointment may not exceed the duration of the NWO-funded project, and the maximum amount of funding that can be requested is €100,000.

Depending on the job level, salary rates must be selected from the UNL or UMCNL salary tables for NWP-MBO, NWP-HBO, or NWP-academic. No individual bench fee is available for NWP.

## Module 1F: Research leave

In this call, applicants may request replacement funding up to a maximum of 5% of the total requested budget. This module applies only to applicants based in the Netherlands. The following conditions apply to each replacement request:

This budget module allows funding to be requested for the costs of replacing the main applicant and/or co-applicant(s). This enables the employer of the applicant concerned to cover the costs of relieving them from teaching, supervision, administrative, or management duties (but not from research duties). The applicant may use the time freed up through replacement exclusively for project-related work. The application must describe which project-related activities the applicant(s) will carry out during the exempted time.

NWO finances replacement based on the salary tables in force on the decision date for a senior scientific staff member (UNL) or a postdoctoral researcher (UMCNL).

## Module 1G: Staff of universities of applied sciences, educational institutions and other (research) organisations

Costs up to a maximum of €100,000 for personnel employed by a university of applied sciences, educational institution (excluding personnel covered by UNL or UMCNL), or other organisations are reimbursed in accordance with table 2.2, column 'Hourly rate productive hours, excl. VAT' of the Handleiding Overheidstarieven ([Salaristabellen | NWO](#)).

Funding may be requested for personnel from universities of applied sciences, TO2 institutes, other educational institutions, and other (research) organisations. The applicable rates are determined using the Handleiding Overheidstarieven (HOT), Table 2 under section 2.2 'average total labour costs per salary scale', column 'Hourly rate productive hours, excl. VAT'. The salary scale of the requested position determines the rate from the HOT table.

For organisations that do not use the central government collective labour agreement or a comparable agreement (such as the collective agreements for universities of applied sciences, secondary education, and local governments), the rate that most closely approximates the actual labour costs must be used.

## Module 1H: Students

Students may be involved in the research. If students contribute as part of their curriculum, the rate applied is the standard internship allowance of the university or university of applied sciences. If students contribute as a part-time student assistant alongside their studies, the applicable rate is the one listed in the Handleiding Overheidstarieven (HOT), Table 2 under section 2.2 'average total labour costs per salary scale', column 'Hourly rate productive hours, excluding VAT', scale 1.

## Module 1I: Scientific personnel at a research organisation abroad

Funding may be requested for personnel costs of a foreign research organisation contributing to the project. The foreign research organisation must meet the definition of research organisation as referred to in Article 1.1, paragraphs 4 and 5 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024 and to the cumulative conditions listed under 'conditions foreign research organisation'.

Provide a convincing justification of how the researcher from the foreign research organisation contributes specific expertise to the project that is not available in the Netherlands at the level required for the project. The assessment committee will evaluate this justification as part of the Quality criterion. This justification is not required if ZonMw/NWO has concluded a bilateral Money-Follows-Cooperation agreement with the national research funder of the country in which the foreign research organisation is located. The NWO website lists the research funders with whom such agreements have been established. NWO does not provide funding to co-applicants abroad who are subject to applicable sanctions legislation.

The main applicant receives the grant and is responsible for transferring grant funds to the co-applicant's foreign research organisation and for accounting for the use of the foreign part of the grant. The exchange rate risk lies with the applicant. Benefits or expenses due to exchange rates are not eligible.

Use UNL tariffs adjusted with country correction coefficients. These rates are maximums. No person-specific bench fee is available.

If more than €125,000 per organisation is requested within this budget module, an audit statement is required with the final financial statement.

#### Conditions foreign research organisation

The organisation must be:

primarily engage in independently conducting fundamental research, industrial research, or experimental development;  
be able to declare that it maintains separate accounting for economic and non-economic activities, and that enterprises with decisive influence over the organisation do not receive preferential access to the organisation's research results.

Under this Call for Proposals, NWO does not fund research organisations that primarily engage in the broad dissemination of the results of their own research activities through education, publications, or knowledge transfer.

**Please note:** Prior to submitting a proposal, NWO will assess, on the basis of the above conditions, whether the foreign organisation complies with Article 1.1, paragraphs 4 and 5 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024 and is therefore eligible to participate as a co-applicant.

NWO carries out this assessment partly to check that there is no question of granting prohibited state aid.

The main applicant will submit the following documents from the foreign research organisation(s) by email to [opencompetitie@zonmw.nl](mailto:opencompetitie@zonmw.nl) at the latest 10 working days before the submission deadline (i.e. by **1 September before 2 PM CEST**).

- a recent extract from the Chamber of Commerce or its equivalent in the country of establishment of the foreign organisation;
- the deed of incorporation and/or current articles of association;
- the latest available annual accounts with an audit report<sup>5</sup>;
- a Research Organisation Declaration completed by the foreign organisation, available on the funding page of this Call for proposals;
- the documents must be provided in English or Dutch.

It is permitted to add other relevant documentation. NWO may also request additional information if the above documents are not sufficiently conclusive to determine whether the organisation may act as co-applicant.

If the organisation of the intended co-applicant has been assessed against these conditions within another NWO programme, please contact NWO in time via the above email address to determine whether this organisation should be reassessed.

If the main applicant does not submit the documents required for the condition assessment in time, NWO cannot accept the organisation in question as a co-applicant.

<sup>5</sup>

Organisations that are not legally obliged to have their annual accounts audited do not have to provide such an audit report. However, they must be able to demonstrate that this legal requirement does not apply to the organisation concerned.

If new foreign organisations are added to the application under this budget module, and these organisations have not yet been assessed in the manner described above, they must also undergo the eligibility assessment. For these organisations as well, the main applicant must submit the following documents from the foreign research organisation(s) by email no later than 10 working days before the submission deadline (i.e. no later than **1 September 2026 before 2 PM CEST**):

- a recent extract from the Chamber of Commerce or its equivalent in the country of establishment of the foreign organisation;
- the deed of incorporation and/or current articles of association;
- the latest available annual accounts with an audit report<sup>6</sup>;
- a Research Organisation Declaration completed by the foreign organisation, available on the grant page of this Call for proposals;

A foreign organisation that has been assessed and approved prior to submitting a pre-proposal does not need to be reviewed again prior to submitting the application.

#### Bilateral agreement with Luxembourg

Collaboration with researchers in Luxembourg is possible by extending an application with a Luxembourg component (funded by FNR). The foreign contribution does not count towards determining the minimum or maximum budget size on the Dutch side. The Luxembourg component may amount to a maximum of €500,000. Please contact ZonMw for more information or if you are considering including a Luxembourg component in the application.

### 7.1.2 Module 2 Materials (obligatory)

Funding may be requested for all project-specific costs relating to, among others, consumables, purchase of services, materials, small instruments, access to (inter)national facilities, software and research resources that have no economic value after use. Travel and accommodation costs (national and international) for all people working on the project incl. foreign guest researchers, costs for the organisation of (international) workshops and symposia, costs for data management, publications, and costs in the context of citizen science also fall under this module. Up to 50% of the material budget requested from NWO can be used for work by third parties (e.g. laboratory analyses, data collection, etc.).

Travel expenses (national and international) will only be reimbursed based on second class/economy class fares. For publications, the provisions in Section 4.5 Open access apply. Costs for an audit statement can only be claimed for organisations that are not subject to OCW's education audit protocol for a maximum of €5,000 per audit statement.

It is not permitted to include costs for:

- organisational infrastructure and overhead, including a fully functioning workplace, accommodation, office automation, personnel administration, commuting expenses, training, facilities, HR advice and business care, documentary information provision and home office allowance;
- the use and maintenance of in-house developed scientific infrastructure;
- regular teaching activities;
- members of the guidance committee/user committee.

<sup>6</sup>

Organisations that are not legally obliged to have their annual accounts audited do not have to provide such an audit report. However, they must be able to demonstrate that this legal requirement does not apply to the organisation concerned.

**Note:** If funding is requested for the above project-specific costs from foreign organisations, these organisations should be assessed before submission in the manner described in Section 7.1.1 *Scientific staff at a research organisation abroad*.

### 7.1.3 Module 3 Investments (optional)

In the budget, a distinction must be made between two types of investments:

#### Module 3A: Investments small

Equipment and/or software (such as lasers, specialised computers or computer programmes, etc.). For these small scale equipment and/or software, the amount per application may not exceed €100,000. No compulsory co-funding is required for this module, and the budget falls within the maximum of €800,000.

#### Module 3B: Investing module

Funding may be requested for all project-specific resources required for research or for costs related to the construction or further development of scientific infrastructure that retains economic value after the project has ended or can be reused. After completion of the project, the beneficiary acquires ownership of these research assets. If the beneficiary generates profit from the economic ownership of these assets, such profits must be reinvested in the beneficiary's primary activities as defined in Article 3.1.4, paragraph 2 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024. This concerns the purchase of equipment with residual value for conducting research and investments in the establishment or further development of scientific infrastructure. Salary costs forming part of the investment may be included as personnel costs.

This module is optional and may be used only once per application. A convincing justification must be provided to demonstrate how the investment contributes to and is necessary for the project. The assessment committee evaluates this justification as part of the Investment Module criterion.

Within this budget module, funding may be requested for project-related investments in scientifically innovative equipment and/or data collections of at least local or (inter)national importance. The minimum amount that may be requested from ZonMw is €100,000 (for data collections the minimum is €25,000). ZonMw funds a maximum of 75% of the total investment costs, up to a maximum of €250,000. The institution hosting the investment must contribute at least 25% of the costs in cash. This institutional contribution must be confirmed in writing by the applicant's institution upon submission of the proposal.

The amount awarded under this investment module is additional to the regular maximum grant amount of €800,000.

*Example 1: Your investment costs €300,000 in total. In the budget, you specify this as €225,000 requested from ZonMw and €75,000 in co-funding.*

*Example 2: Your investment costs €130,000 in total. In the budget, you specify this as €97,500 requested from ZonMw and €32,500 in co-funding. However, since the requested ZonMw contribution for the investment is below €100,000, it cannot be included in the investment module.*

If equipment is not used for the full duration of its economic life for the proposed project, only the depreciation costs corresponding to the duration of the project calculated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles are eligible for funding.

The costs of investments must be adequately specified and justified in the application.

Eligible costs are:

- costs for investments in scientific equipment;
- costs for investments in datasets;
- salary costs for personnel with essential technical expertise necessary for the development or construction of an investment.

Ineligible are:

- costs for infrastructural facilities that can be considered part of the usual infrastructure full functioning workplace, accommodation, office automation, personnel administration, travel expenses commuting, training, facilities management, HR advice and business care, documentary information provision, home working allowance);
- data collections and any related software and bibliographies already available in other ways;
- other personnel costs, including personnel costs for operating and conducting research with the facility;
- costs for maintenance and use of equipment on a project. Costs for the use of equipment on a project can be requested through the material budget.

#### 7.1.4 Module 4 Knowledge utilisation (obligatory)

The budget requested should be adequately specified in the proposal. To determine the rates, use the provisions of the budget modules Personnel (7.1.1) and Material (7.1.2.).

Funding may be requested for activities that promote the utilisation of knowledge generated by the research, with the aim of increasing the societal impact of the project. Up to 5% of the grant amount may be allocated to this module.

The aim of this module is to support the activities described under the criterion ‘Knowledge Utilisation and Participation’ (see also Section 4.3). If the maximum amount is insufficient to carry out the proposed activities, it may be exceeded, provided this is well justified in the application. Since knowledge utilisation and participation can take many different forms across scientific disciplines, it is the responsibility of the applicant to specify which costs are required. This includes not only resources for knowledge production in the narrow sense, but also a wide range of activities and resources needed to gather knowledge from the field, as well as to share it with stakeholders and/or potential (end) users. Examples include:

- Creating or maintaining collaborations and/or jointly developing various knowledge products;
- Costs for organising national or international meetings/symposia/workshops primarily aimed at knowledge utilisation and participation;
- Developing an educational package, conducting a feasibility study on potential applications, or costs related to filing a patent application;
- Obtaining advice from the field on knowledge utilisation, dissemination, and/or implementation (for example, communication or implementation advisers);
- Engaging stakeholders (participation) and, where possible, the (end) target group or (end) users with experiential knowledge;

- Involving citizens, known as ‘citizen science’, can contribute to the quality of science. Citizen involvement can generate data and insights that would otherwise not be available for research. Researchers may decide for themselves whether it is useful to involve citizens in the research and how to allocate this budget (for example, reimbursement of citizen expenses, skills training for citizens, or technical tools for participating citizens). The requested budget must be adequately specified in the application. For determining applicable rates, use the provisions under Personnel and Materials."

## 7.2 Indexing

The rate applicable on the decision date will be used. When awarding the grant, ZonMw will, if necessary, apply a one-time administrative indexation of salary costs. The effective date of the new rates will be used for this purpose. If the publication date of the updated rates is later than the effective date, the publication date will apply. Rates from Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) generally come into effect on 1 July, those from the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres (UMCNL) on 1 August, and those from the Guide to Government Tariffs (HOT) on 1 January.

Administrative indexation does not affect the subsidy ceiling or the maximum grant amount that can be requested. The subsidy ceiling and the maximum grant amount remain unchanged throughout the assessment procedure. Indexation is applied to the grant amount only upon award.

If co-funding is required or permitted, administrative indexation has no impact on the requirements for own contributions and co-funding, nor on the intellectual property rights that may arise from the co-funding.

Chapter 7: Annexes

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