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Call for proposals Open Mind 2027, Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek

Technology for society

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1 Summary and introduction

This chapter contains a brief summary of the round and an introduction.

1.1 Brief summary

Title: Open Mind 2027.

Aim: The Open Mind programme aims to support outside-the-box research ideas that offer sustainable solutions to global societal challenges through the power of cutting-edge technological research and development. Open Mind focuses on original, creative research ideas with meaningful and lasting impact. NWO is looking for high-risk high-gain ideas with the potential to be groundbreaking.

Budget: The maximum grant available per project is € 100,000. No more than ten proposals are expected to be awarded funding in this round.

Submission deadlines:

The Call for proposals opens on 15 December and closes on 9 March 14:00:00 CET. Please note that the call may close earlier if the maximum number of applications is reached (see section 3.6).

Procedure: The application procedure consists of four steps: (1) submission of the proposal, and video, (2) admissibility check of the proposal, (3) pre-selection for pitches at TEKNOWLOGY by the assessment committee, (4) pitches and funding decision at NWO's innovation festival TEKNOWLOGY.

1.2 Introduction

This Call for proposals describes the application process for the "Open Mind 2027" round and consists

of seven chapters. This Call for proposals falls under the responsibility of the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

The NWO Grant Rules 2024 and Approval of Funding for Scientific Research apply to all proposals.

NWO processes personal data in the context of this round in accordance with the NWO Privacy Statement.

1.2.1 Changes since the previous Call for proposals

This Open Mind funding round accepts a maximum of 75 proposals to be applied. NWO can decide to close the Call for proposals once 75 applications have been received, regardless of the official deadline (see section 3.5).

2 Aim and background

This chapter provides information about the aim and background of Open Mind 2027.

2.1 Aim of the programme

The Open Mind programme aims to support outside-the-box research ideas that offer sustainable solutions to global societal challenges through the power of technology. The programme supports projects focused on **technology development,** whether by pioneering entirely new technologies, significantly advancing existing technologies, or applying technologies in radically new contexts. Whether your research seeks for example to transform education, build disaster-proof communication systems, empower people with disabilities, or advanced environmental sustainability, **we want to hear from you**!

Open Mind focuses on **daring, high-risk, high-gain research** and **original, creative ideas** with the potential for **meaningful and lasting impact**. We are looking for bold proposals that challenge conventional approaches, question established assumptions and have the potential to lead to **breakthrough technological innovations** within or beyond your field.

Original and innovative approaches may include:
- new or unconventional technologies or methods that are being explored for the first time;
- creatively rethinking and reframing existing challenges;
- unexpected or novel combinations of research disciplines;
- applying established methods or insights from one field to an entirely different context;

The Open Mind programme supports one-year projects aimed at **bringing these creative ideas to life** and laying the foundation for future technological breakthroughs with meaningful and lasting impact.

2.2 Background

NWO is dedicated to supporting world-class research that drives innovation and addresses critical societal challenges. Whether fundamental, applied, or practice-oriented research, science plays a crucial role in shaping a better future. Through creativity and perseverance, researchers push the boundaries of knowledge and technology, creating new opportunities to address current and future challenges.

The NWO Domain Applied and Engineering Sciences (NWO Domain AES) supports technical scientific research and technology development that benefit society. Spanning the full spectrum of applied and engineering sciences, the domain contributes to solutions for societal challenges and helps shape the future.

The Open Mind programme is part of NWO's Open Competition funding line and is designed for researchers with bold ideas that may be too unconventional, exploratory, or high-risk for traditional funding schemes. Creativity, curiosity, and the courage to test unconventional ideas are key ingredients of a successful proposal.

Technology development lies at the heart of the programme and may include areas such as environmental technology, energy technology, digital technologies, robotics, materials, manufacturing, medical technology or emerging technological concepts that do not yet fit within established scientific or technological frameworks. Advancing existing technology refers to research that generates a substantial technological advance beyond the current state of the art, for example by introducing new

technological principles, capabilities, methodologies or architectures, rather than merely applying or incrementally improving existing technologies.

Over the years, the Open Mind programme has fostered a range of successful projects that exemplify innovative problem-solving and impactful research. From groundbreaking developments in sustainable energy, such as *Metal powder: the unexpected energy carrier*, to creative solutions for combatting plastic pollution, like *Aquatic plants as a tool for tackling plastic pollution*. These success stories demonstrate how bold technological ideas can evolve into transformative innovations. These, and other inspiring projects, are featured on the Open Mind website.**Will your idea be next?**

If you are a researcher with a creative technological research idea that has the potential to transform how we address societal challenges, this is your call. **Submit your bold research idea, sketch it**, and **pitch it in a catchy video** for a chance to showcase your work at **TEKNOWLOGY**, NWO's annual innovation festival, on June 22, 2027. A maximum of **ten grants of up to € 100,000 will be awarded** to the most original and impactful proposals. Don't miss this opportunity to bring your groundbreaking technological ideas to life!

2.2.1 Societal impact of research

New knowledge and insights from scientific research can make an important contribution to developing solutions for the various issues society faces. By facilitating greater interaction and alignment between researchers and potential knowledge users, the chance of knowledge utilisation increases, as well as the likelihood of generating societal impact. Societal impact refers to changes that (partly) result from research-generated knowledge and skills. These changes contribute to the well-being of people, planet and society for both now and in the future. Through its policy on impact, NWO promotes the potential contribution that research can make to societal issues by encouraging productive interactions with societal stakeholders, throughout the research process from development to implementation of research. This is done in a manner that is in accordance with the aim of the particular funding instrument. NWO encourages researchers to reflect on both the potential desired and undesired impact of their research from a broad perspective.

The Open Mind programme supports creative research ideas aimed at tackling global societal challenges. As part of the application, applicants are asked to consider NWO's Impact Plan approach (see Application form). When the project ends, the final report must outline potential pathways the research could take toward achieving real-world impact. NWO offers an e-learning module that can help interested parties via Online impact workshops | NWO. For more information on our policy on impact, please visit the website: Knowledge utilisation | NWO.

3 Preparation and submission

This chapter contains information on how to prepare and submit a proposal. The term 'proposal' also refers to a letter of intent or pre-proposal, insofar as these items are applicable for this round.

The use of generative AI when preparing a proposal is not explicitly prohibited as long as this happens responsibly. Applicants are not permitted to include hidden prompts[1] in their application. For guidance, see the NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) | NWO. Please note that a completely AI-generated sketch and/or video is not permitted.

3.1 Timeline

The submission deadlines and a timeline for the entire assessment procedure for this round are given below. NWO reserves the right to make adjustments to this timeline in the course of the procedure if needed. These will be communicated to the main applicant. Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration by NWO. NWO can decide to close the Call for proposals earlier if the maximum number of 75 applications has been reached. From the moment the maximum number of 75 applications is reached, proposals will not be taken into consideration by NWO.

2 December 2026	Online information session
Proposals 9 March 2027 before 14:00:00 CET	Deadline for proposals

[1] A hidden prompt is a command given to a GAI application that is not, or only partially, visible to the reader of a document, with the intention of influencing the GAI application's output. An example would be instructing the GAI to generate a positive assessment of the text in question. The use of hidden prompts is not permitted under any circumstances.

The Call for proposals may close earlier if the maximum number of 75 applications has been reached.

End of May 2027	Outcome pre-selection for pitches
22 June 2027	TEKNOWLOGY pitches and announcement of winners

3.2 Who can apply

To be eligible to submit a proposal, researchers must be employed for an indefinite period (with the associated employment contract) or have a fixed term or tenure track appointment at any of the following research organisations:

- Universities, as described in section 1.8, subsection 1 of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act, or universities referred to in the Policy Rules for Universities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands;
- university medical centres, as described in section 1.13, subsection 1 of the Higher Education and Research Act;
- KNAW institutes and NWO institutes;
- Netherlands Cancer Institute;
- Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen;
- Naturalis Biodiversity Center;
- Advanced Research Centre for NanoLithography (ARCNL);
- Princess Máxima Center.

Researchers eligible to submit a proposal include PhD students, postdocs, assistant, associate, and full professors, as well as scientific staff like AIOS (residents in specialist training), ANIOS (doctors not in specialist training), doctors/researchers, scientific programmers, or employees with a master's degree.

Individuals with a zero-hour contract cannot submit a proposal. Applicants with a part-time appointment must ensure adequate supervision of the project and all project members for whom funding is requested.

It may be that the main applicant or a co-applicant's tenure track or fixed term employment contract ends before the intended completion date of the project for which grant funding is being requested, or that the main or co-applicant's tenure agreement ends before this date due to their reaching retirement age. In such cases, the proposal must include a statement from the employer. In this statement, the research organisation in question guarantees that the project and all project members for whom funding is being requested will receive adequate supervision for the full duration of the project.

3.3 What can be applied for

The available budget for this Call for proposals is € 1,000,000. Per project, it is possible to apply for a grant with a maximum of € 100,000. The project's proposed duration cannot exceed one year. The applicant and co-applicants can include costs for personnel and materials. The available budget modules are given below. Request only the amounts of funding necessary to complete the project. Rates and explanations of these budget modules are given in annex 7.1.

3.3.1 Personnel

It is possible to apply for funding of the salary costs of personnel contributing to the project. The amounts depend on the type of appointment and the organisation employing the personnel in question.

Personnel at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherland, university medical centre or research organisation

For personnel employed by a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, university medical centre or other research organisation as referred to in article 1.1, first section, sections c to h of the NWO Grant Rules 2024, salary costs may be included for the following positions: PhD student, Engineering Doctorate, postdoc, physician researcher, students, non-scientific personnel. You can include the applicant's salary costs for the part of the appointment spent on project-related tasks.

Applying for funding of an Engineering Doctorate (EngD) position is only possible if also applying for funding of a PhD student or postdoc.

Students

Costs for students can be included as material costs, as long as the students are working on the

project and study at one of the research organisations listed in section 3.2 (see annex 7.1.2). There is no maximum number of students who may work on a project.

3.3.2 Materials

All project-specific material costs as well as costs related to student involvement are eligible for funding. Funding for such costs cannot exceed 50% of the NWO grant amount. Up to 50% of the material budget requested from NWO may be used for third-party work.

3.3.3 Knowledge utilisation

Funding can be requested for activities that promote the use of knowledge from the research[2], in order to increase the societal impact of the research.

3.4 Preparing and submitting a proposal in ISAAC

NWO makes use of the ISAAC system. Start preparations for your ISAAC proposal submission in good time.

The steps involved in writing your application are:
- create an account or update your existing account details if necessary;
- use ISAAC to download the proposal form and required formats for annexes; see Explanatory Notes in the application form for instructions). Make sure that all Statement of commitment boxes on the application form are ticked;
- save the completed proposal form as a PDF file and submit it in ISAAC. Submit any annexes separately;
- in ISAAC, fill in all the requested information, including the research fields NWO research fields | NWO and a summary for non-experts in Dutch and English;
- NWO will publish this summary for non-experts along with the press release about the grant awards. It should have a length of 50–100 words and be written for a general audience. Due to intellectual property concerns, no scientific summary is published;
- if you need to register an organisation that is not yet included in the ISAAC database, this is possible until five working days before the deadline by email to relatiebeheer@nwo.nl;
- the proposal is in English.

It is mandatory to upload the following annexes to the proposal in ISAAC:
- budget (Excel file);
- video: in English, maximum two minutes long, and royalty free (see further instructions on the application form).

Optional annexes only:
- In case of applicant(s) with a fixed-term appointment statement of Appointment and Project Supervision (PDF).

Always use the templates provided by NWO for all annexes. Annexes other than those listed above are not permitted. All attachments, with the exception of the budget, must be submitted as PDF files (without security). The budget must be submitted as an Excel file in ISAAC.

Documentation including proposal submission formats is also available on the funding page for this round on the NWO website.

For questions about ISAAC, use the 'Help' button in ISAAC to consult the ISAAC manual or contact the ISAAC helpdesk. The ISAAC helpdesk can be reached Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 17:00 at +31 (0) 70 34 40 600. Emails may be sent to isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl. You will receive a reply within two working days.

3.5 Maximum number of applications submitted

Applications can be submitted until 9 March 2027, 14:00:00 CET at the latest.

Applications will be taken into consideration in the order in which they are received. The time of receipt is the time at which the application is submitted through the application system.

[2] 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).

This Call for proposals accepts a maximum of 75 proposals. Once 75 applications have been received, NWO may close this Call for proposals before the deadline. NWO will announce the decision to close the Call for proposals as soon as possible on the funding page of this Call for proposals.

From the moment the maximum number of 75 applications submitted has been reached, applications submitted thereafter will no longer be taken into consideration. This also applies if the decision to close the Call for proposals has not yet been published at that time. The applicants concerned will be informed accordingly. The maximum limit of 75 submitted proposals remains in effect, even if it turns out – in accordance with the submission conditions – that the number of applications to fulfill the submission requirements does not reach this maximum of 75.

3.6 Requirements for consideration

NWO checks that a proposal meets all the conditions applicable to this Call for proposals, including those set out below. A proposal must meet these requirements to be taken into consideration.

Conditions:
- the proposal was received before the deadline;
- the proposal was received before the maximum limit of 75 proposals that could be submitted had been reached;
- the main applicant and co-applicants meet the conditions stated in section 3.2 and annex 7.1.3;
- there is a maximum of two applicants of which one is a co-applicant;
- an applicant may submit only one proposal in the role of main applicant.or co-applicant;
- the proposal complies with the DORA guidelines described in section 4.3.4;
- the proposal has been prepared using the forms provided in ISAAC and on the NWO website's funding page (web page) for this round;
- the data management section (showing how the applicants will handle data generated by the research) has been completed;
- the proposal form and the required annexes are, after a possible one-time request to make additions or changes, correct and complete and have been filled out according to the instructions;
- the proposal has been submitted via the main applicant's ISAAC account;
- the proposal is in English;
- the proposal meets the page count and word limit requirements;
- the budget for the proposal has been compiled according to the requirements of this Call for proposals, using the provided format with the most recent rates;
- the proposed project has a duration of at most one year;
- the required video is in English, maximum two minutes long, royalty free and submitted before the deadline and before the maximum number of 75 submitted proposals in Isaac had been reached;
- the proposal should involve technology (or a combination of technologies) with a current Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of no higher than five. Individual technologies can be more advanced, but in multidisciplinary proposals, it's the combination that matters. For more details on TRL, see Additional Annex 7.3.

Consideration of proposal and administrative corrections

- After submission of the required documents, the applicant receives notice of whether NWO intends to take the proposal into consideration as soon as possible. Be aware that NWO may contact applicants for up to two weeks after the early closure of the Call for proposals or after the submission deadline to request any administrative corrections required to allow the conditions for submission to be met.
- The applicant is given one opportunity to make these corrections and must do so within five working days. If the corrected documents remain incomplete and/or incorrect, NWO will not take the proposal into further consideration.

Notification of own research organisation

NWO works on the assumption that applicants have informed the research organisations where they are employed about the proposal submission, and that these organisations have accepted the grant conditions pertaining to this Call for proposals. During the application process, NWO will communicate with the main applicant.

The proposal form may include additional requirements, explanations, procedures and questions necessary for the form's correct completion.

4 Assessment

This chapter contains information on the assessment procedure for a proposal.

4.1 Criteria

The assessment is based on substantive assessment criteria and commences once a proposal has been taken into consideration. Proposals are substantively assessed against the following criteria:
1. Boldness (40% weighting in assessment)
2. Quality (30% weighting in assessment)
3. Impact (30% weighting in assessment)

1. **Boldness (40%):**
   - Novelty and Innovation:
     Your proposal introduces fresh, unconventional ideas for the development, advancement or novel application of technology that clearly stand out from existing research. It challenges established thinking and opens up new directions.
   - Creative Vision:
     Your idea demonstrates courage and imagination: it is original, creative, and has the potential to lead to unexpected breakthroughs, for example through pioneering technologies, surprising interdisciplinary combinations, or a new perspective on existing problems.
   - High-Risk High-Gain:
     Your proposal deliberately takes risks and deviates from safe, conventional approaches. Precisely because success is not guaranteed, the potential for groundbreaking results and significant societal impact is high.
2. **Quality (30%):**
   - Clarity:
     Your research question, motivation, and proposed technological solution are presented in a clear and compelling way across all formats (text, sketch, and video). Your proposal is easy to understand and effectively conveys its core message.
   - Methodological Soundness:
     Despite the exploratory nature of your idea, the proposed approach is methodologically coherent. The plan includes clear steps, appropriate techniques, and a rationale for how your idea will be tested or developed.
   - Realistic Risk:
     Although your idea is inherently high-risk due to its ambitious nature, the proposal demonstrates a thoughtful and well-structured approach. Your research project is realistically achievable within one year and the € 100,000 budget.
3. **Impact (30%):**
   - Relevance and Urgency:
     Your proposal addresses a pressing societal challenge, demonstrating the significance of the problem and why it requires immediate exploration or action.
   - Gap in Existing Solutions:
     Your idea targets a problem for which no straightforward solution currently exists, or where existing approaches have clear limitations, thus addressing a gap in current knowledge or practice.
   - Meaningful Impact:
     Your research has the potential to create meaningful, lasting change, contributing to societal benefits that extend beyond the project's duration.

The Boldness, Quality and Impact criteria are each assigned a score. Scores are determined based on the NWO score table using a scale of 1 to 9, where '1' is excellent and '9' unsatisfactory.

All proposals are given a weighted average total score for the Boldness, Quality and Impact criteria and then ranked based on this score. For rounds with five or more proposals, the assessment committee members' scores are standardised for ranking. NWO performs this standardisation based on the median and average deviation.

The proposal must receive an overall qualification of at least "very good" to be eligible for funding. The proposal must also receive at least the qualification "very good" for the assessment criterium 'Boldness'.

4.2 Procedure

The assessment procedure for a proposal consists of the following steps (see timeline in section 3.1):
- pre-selection for pitches at TEKNOWLOGY;

– pitches at TEKNOWLOGY;
– assessment committee meeting and decision-making.

An external independent assessment committee will be appointed by the NWO Domain Board AES for this round. Members are drawn from science and society featuring a mix of creative minds. It is the assessment committee's task to assess the proposals received against the assessment criteria. Each proposal is assessed on its own merits.

Given the expertise present in the assessment committee and the small size of the grant, NWO has opted to apply the provision in article 2.2.4, section 2 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024 for assessment of applications without involving referees.

4.2.1 Pre-advice by assessment committee

The proposal is shared with the assessment committee for review. Preferably, at least two pre-advisers should be appointed for each proposal. The pre-advisers provide written, substantive and reasoned responses to each proposal. They formulate these responses based on the substantive assessment criteria (see section 4.1) and give the proposal numerical scores for each assessment criterion. Scores are determined based on the NWO score table using a scale of 1 to 9, where '1' is excellent and '9' unsatisfactory. A proposal's data management section is not assessed and does not affect the decision on whether to award funding. However, the assessment committee may still provide advice on this section.

4.2.2 Selection for pitches at TEKNOWLOGY

If NWO receives more than 20 proposals (the maximum that can be invited to pitch at the NWO innovation festival TEKNOWLOGY) then a selection of the proposals will take place. The proposals, referee assessments, rebuttal and pre-advice are shared with the assessment committee. The assessment committee comes to a decision based on these documents, resulting in a ranking. The applicants with the 20 highest ranked proposals are invited for a pitch at Technology. Applicants who do not receive an invitation for a pitch are not considered eligible for a grant.

4.2.3 Pitches at TEKNOWLOGY

A maximum of 20 applicants will present their ideas to both the assessment committee and a public audience during NWO's innovation festival TEKNOWLOGY. Please note that physical attendance of (at least one of) the applicant(s) is required. Each pitch will be followed by a brief interview session (hereafter: Q&A session), during which the committee will pose questions and applicants will have the opportunity to respond. This format ensures a fair and transparent process of hearing and rebuttal. Both the pitch and the Q&A session are integral components of the assessment procedure and may influence the evaluation and final score of the proposal.

4.2.4 Assessment committee meeting

After the pitch session at the NWO's innovation festival TEKNOWLOGY, the assessment committee will meet to discuss the proposals pitched by the applicants. The assessment committee makes its own assessment based on the proposal, the pitch and subsequent Q&A session.
Following the discussion, the assessment committee will determine the final ranking of the proposals, based on the scores assigned to the assessment criteria. The proposal must receive an overall qualification of at least "very good" to be eligible for funding. The proposal must also receive at least the qualification "very good" for the assessment criterium 'Boldness'.

4.2.5 Decision-making

The assessment committee will determine the final ranking and qualifications and make a decision over awarding or rejecting the proposals. The winners will be announced live at NWO's annual innovation festival TEKNOWLOGY. Afterwards, the board of NWO domain AES will be informed about the procedure followed as well as the decision from the assessment committee.

4.3 Guidelines and frameworks for assessment

The following guidelines and frameworks apply during the assessment of a proposal.

4.3.1 Code for Dealing with Personal Interests

The NWO Code for Dealing with Personal Interests applies to all individuals and NWO employees

involved in the assessment and/or decision-making process.

4.3.2 Generative AI

The use of generative AI to assess proposals is completely prohibited. This also applies to the use of GAI as a language aid or for translating assessments and/or application documents. More information about NWO's policy on the use of generative AI can be found on the website (NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) | NWO).

4.3.3 Diversity and inclusion

NWO strives to achieve an inclusive culture in which there is no place for conscious or unconscious barriers based on cultural, ethnic, or religious background, gender, sexual orientation, health or age (Diversity and inclusion | NWO). NWO offers assessment committee members guidance on how to ensure an inclusive written assessment and assessment committee meeting (Inclusive assessment | NWO).

4.3.4 Broad definition of scientific output (DORA)

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

NWO asks assessment committee not to rely on indicators such as the Journal Impact Factor or the h-index when assessing proposals. There should be no mention of such indicators in the proposal. It is, however, permitted to list other scientific products besides publications, such as datasets, patents, software and code.

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

4.3.5 Knowledge security

Together, the Dutch knowledge sector, including NWO, and various branches of government have created the National Knowledge Security Guidelines as guidance on how to weigh opportunities and security risks for anyone involved in international collaboration at research organisations. The approach to knowledge security in the Netherlands relies heavily on self-regulation by the knowledge sector.

NWO expects applicants to adhere to the research organisation's knowledge security policy. In case of signs that a proposal or awarded project may present risks to knowledge security, NWO can ask the applicant or project leader to provide insight into risk mitigation measures. Additionally, NWO may impose further conditions to protect knowledge security in the award letter.

The National Knowledge Security Guidelines are available on the central government website at: Home | National Contact Point for Knowledge Security

4.3.6 Compensation scheme

Force majeure extension scheme

Applicants who are prevented from providing necessary input within the allotted time during the assessment procedure have recourse to the NWO force majeure extension scheme.

4.3.7 Ex aequo

NWO defines ex aequo as a situation in which it is not possible to distinguish between two or more proposals based on their weighted scores. An ex aequo situation is relevant when approaching the limits of the grant cap or selection threshold. The existence of an ex aequo situation is determined as follows. The starting point is the ranking by the assessment committee, with final scores rounded to two decimal places. The score for the lowest-ranked proposal within the limits of the grant cap or the selection threshold is used as a reference score. All proposals with scores within 0.05 of the reference score are taken into consideration. The result is a selection of proposals with scores within 0.10 of each other. In the event of a tied ranking at the limit of the grant cap or selection threshold, the proposal with the highest score for the Boldness criterion will receive precedence. If this still does not

resolve the situation, the assessment committee will determine the ranking by a majority vote, which may be anonymous, in accordance with article 2.2.6, fifth section of the NWO Grant Rules 2024. If this vote also fails to break the tie, or is deemed unacceptable, the ex aequo situation will be passed on to the NWO Domain Board AES.

5 After the grant award

This chapter lists the conditions and obligations that apply once the grant has been awarded. As such, it is mainly relevant to applicants with approved proposals.

5.1 Start of the project

Once a proposal has been awarded funding, the main applicant automatically becomes the project leader and point of contact for NWO. The project leaders' research organisation is designated as the main beneficiary and becomes the grant administrator. The project leader and grant administrator share joint responsibility for the execution of the entire project. Co-applicants also play an active role in the project's execution and are project co-leaders.

The project leader for the project receives an award letter on behalf of the NWO Domain Board AES. This letter also notes any specifically required forms and guidelines. The start form, and data management plan must be submitted before the project's start. Without these documents, work on the project cannot start. The grant will be paid out in instalments once all start-up requirements have been met.

5.1.1 Start form

A start form must be used to indicate the start of the project. The project leader receives this start form along with the award letter. Project leaders can authorise others to carry out administrative tasks relating to their project in the ISAAC system. For more information about the authorisation scheme for project leaders, go to: Authorisation scheme for project managers | NWO.

5.1.2 Data management plan

Good research goes hand in hand with responsible data management. Before the start of the project, the project leader must elaborate the data management section (see section 3.7) into a data management plan. If the referees or assessment committee offered any advice on data management, this may be included. In the plan, the project leader indicates whether use will be made of existing data or whether new data collection will be involved, and how this collection will then be made FAIR, i.e. Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable.

The data management plan should be checked by a data steward or similar officer at the organisation where the project is to be carried out. The data management plan must have been submitted to NWO via ISAAC before the project start date. NWO will assess the plan. The grant's award is conditional upon approval of the data management plan by NWO. The plan may be adapted in the course of the research.

5.2 Monitoring and project management

The project leader must keep NWO informed of the project's progress throughout. This is achieved in several ways.

5.2.1 Research output

NWO wants to be kept abreast of all the output resulting from the research, both scientific and for a wider audience. The NWO website offers more information on various forms of output. Project leaders can use the ISAAC system to submit such output.

5.3 Guidelines and frameworks for project execution

The following describes the guidelines and frameworks applicable to the project's execution.

5.3.1 Compliance with the National Knowledge Security Guidelines

As with the assessment (see section 4.3), the National Knowledge Security Guidelines apply after the grant award. NWO expects project leaders to adhere to the research organisation's knowledge security policy. The grant award letter may contain further conditions to protect knowledge security. The

National Knowledge Security Guidelines are available on the central government website at: National Contact Point for Knowledge Security

5.3.2 Ethical statement or licence

It is the project leader's responsibility to determine whether execution of the proposed project requires an ethical statement or licence. The presence or absence of an ethical statement or licence at the time of application will not impact the proposal's assessment. If an ethical statement or licence does prove necessary for all or part of the research, the project leader must provide NWO with a copy of this statement or licence once the project has been approved and before starting work on the relevant project components. Naturally, the statement or licence must have been issued to be able to work on these components.

5.3.3 Scientific integrity

Research must be conducted in accordance with the standards set out in the 2018 Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. In the case of an actual or suspected violation of these standards, the project leader must immediately inform NWO and submit all relevant documents to NWO. Researchers can also report complaints to their research organisation's Scientific Integrity Committee or to the NWO Scientific Integrity Desk.

NWO places a high value on the scientific integrity of the research it funds and exerts itself to prevent and detect any integrity violations. Research irregularities can cause damage directly, for example to the environment or to patients, and prejudice public trust in scientific research as well as trust between individual researchers.

5.3.4 Principles of socially responsible licensing

A project may generate knowledge that is applicable in society. When entering into licensing or transfer agreements for research results developed in this funding round, due consideration must be given to the ten principles of socially responsible licensing provided on the UMCNL website.

5.3.5 Genetic resources and the Nagoya Protocol

Researchers must take whatever measures are necessary to ensure compliance with the Nagoya Protocol. The Nagoya Protocol aims to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilisation of genetic resources and traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources (Access and Benefit-Sharing; ABS). Researchers who make use of such resources, including in or from other countries, should familiarise themselves with the tenets of the Nagoya Protocol (ABS Focal Point).

5.3.6 Intellectual property

NWO's policy on intellectual property (IP) can be found in the NWO Grant Rules 2024.

Project leaders must execute a project funded by NWO during their period of employment with the beneficiary research organisation. If a project leader or researcher funded by NWO has multiple employers, the non-beneficiary employers must waive any IP rights arising from the project.

Summary and video

By submitting an Open Mind proposal, applicants consent to the use of their project's public summary (as entered in ISAAC) and video for public communication purposes. Please be mindful of potential confidentiality issues. In case of doubt or questions, applicants are encouraged to contact NWO.

Pitch at TEKNOWLOGY

Applicants invited to pitch their Open Mind idea at NWO's annual innovation festival, TEKNOWLOGY, are required to attend the event in person. If applicants anticipate any IP-related concerns that may hinder their ability to pitch or present project results, NWO expects these issues to be resolved prior to the relevant TEKNOWLOGY event. In case of doubt or questions, applicants are encouraged to contact NWO.

5.4 Completion

Project leaders must submit a substantive and a financial final report to NWO within three months of the project's completion. Failure to submit these reports or to submit them in time can lead to the

grant being reduced or withdrawn altogether. The project leader will receive a request by email, along with the relevant deadline. Templates for a basic final report and a financial final report are available at: Completing a project | NWO. If a different final report template applies for the project, the project leader will be provided with this information in due course.

5.5 Research results – Open Science

Open Science is the movement aimed at more open and collaborative research practices in which publications, data, software and other types of academic output are shared at the earliest possible stage and made available for reuse.

Scientific publications relating to the project must be made available Open Access upon publication, in accordance with the Open Access Policy. The NWO website sets out the specific conditions for making various types of publications – such as scientific articles, books, book chapters and theses – available via Open Access. The NWO website also provides information on which open licences may be applied to each type of publication. Any costs associated with open access publishing must be included in the application budget. Costs for publications in so-called 'hybrid open access journals' are not eligible for reimbursement by NWO. For open access books, applications may be made to the separate NWO Open Access Books Fund.

NWO-funded research can lead to publications or other relevant research output. If so, the grant administrator must note NWO's funding in the acknowledgements.

5.6 Evaluation

NWO may approach applicants or project leaders to ask them to complete an evaluation of the procedure and/or research programme.

6 Contact

Questions about the funding of proposals

For more information, see Applying for funding, how does it work? | NWO.

Questions about the content of this round

For substantive questions about this round, contact:

E-mail: openmind@nwo.nl

Open Mind team:

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Technical questions about the ISAAC electronic application system

For questions about ISAAC, use the 'Help' button in ISAAC to consult the ISAAC manual. You can also contact the ISAAC helpdesk. The ISAAC helpdesk can be reached Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 17:00 CET/CEST at +31 (0) 70 34 40 600. You can also submit your questions by email to isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl. You will receive a reply within two working days.

7 Annexes

7.1 Explanation of budget modules

For applicable salary tables and rates, see Salary tables | NWO.

7.1.1 Personnel at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, university medical centre or research organisation

For personnel employed by a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, university medical centre or other research organisation as referred to in article 1.1, first section, sections c to h of the NWO Grant Rules 2024, salary costs may be included for the following positions.

PhD student

It is not possible to request funding for a PhD student who was already working on the proposed project before the grant award.

Use the rates for PhD students from the UNL and UMCNL salary tables.

Postdoc

A postdoc is appointed for a specific time and FTE.

Use the rates for senior scientific personnel from the UNL salary tables and the rates for postdocs at a university medical centre from the UMCNL salary tables.

It is not possible to request funding for a postdoc who was already working on the proposed project before the grant award.

Physician researcher

Funding may be requested for the appointment of a Doctor of Medicine or physician assistant to carry out medical research at a university medical centre as a physician researcher.

It is not possible to request funding for a physician researcher who was already working on the proposed project before the grant award.

Use the rates for researchers and physician researchers from the UMCNL salary tables.

Non-scientific personnel

Funding may be requested for non-scientific personnel required for the project's execution. Examples include programmers, technical assistants or analysts. Non-scientific personnel's deployment must be described in the proposal.

Depending on the job level, a choice is made from the UNL or UMCNL salary tables for NWP-mbo, NWP-hbo and NWP-academic. No one-off personal benchfee is available for NWP.

Personnel temporarily appointed to the project

Temporary personnel positions for which the costs can be financed with the Open Mind grant, are: PhD students, Professional Doctorate in engineering (PDEng), Postdoc and non-scientific personnel (like technicians).

7.1.2 Materials

Funding may be requested for all project-specific costs pertaining to such items as consumables, purchasing of services, materials, small instruments, access to facilities in the Netherlands or abroad, software and research resources with no economic value after use. This module also covers national and international travel and accommodation costs for everyone working on the project, including visiting researchers from abroad, costs for the organisation of (international) workshops and symposiums, data management costs, publications and costs in the context of citizen science. A maximum of 50% of the material budget requested from NWO may be applied to work by third parties such as laboratory analyses, data collection, etc.

Students may contribute to the research. If the students are contributing as part of their curriculum, the standard internship allowance rate of the research university or university of applied sciences applies. If they are contributing as paid student assistants alongside their studies, the applicable rate is determined according to the Manual tariffs Dutch Government (HOT), Table 2, under 2.2 'Average total salary costs per salary scale', column 'Hourly rate for productive hours excluding VAT', scale 1. Please indicate the number of hours on the budget form (and not FTE or months).

For national and international travel, only the costs of second class or economy fares will be covered. For publications, see the provisions on Open Science in section 5.5.

Costs cannot be included for:
– organisational infrastructure and overhead, including a fully operational workplace, accommodation, office automation, human resource management, commuting expenses, training, facilities services, HR consulting, health and safety, documentary information services and working-from-home allowance;
– use and maintenance of internally developed scientific infrastructure;
– regular teaching and educational activities;

7.2 Indexation

Applicable rates are based on the date of the decision. If indicated, NWO may conduct an official one-time indexation of salary costs when awarding a grant. This indexation is based on the date on which the rates go into force. If rates are announced later than the date of entry into force, the announcement date is used. Generally speaking, rates go into force on 1 July for the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), on 1 August for the University Medical Centres of The Netherlands (UMCNL) and on 1 January for the Manual tariffs Dutch Government (HOT).

The official indexation does not affect the grant cap or the maximum amount per proposal. The grant cap and maximum amount will remain unchanged during the assessment procedure. The grant amount is indexed at the time of the award.

If co-funding is required or permitted, the official indexation will not affect the requirements regarding supporting contributions and co-funding, nor any IP rights arising from the co-funding.

7.3 Other annexes

Technology Readiness Level (TRL) scale

The TRL scale is a metric for describing the maturity of a technology. The acronym stands for Technology Readiness Level. The scale consists of 9 levels. Each level characterises the progress in the development of a technology, from the idea (level 1) to the full deployment of the product in the marketplace (level 9).

This scale was developed by NASA in the 70s to assess the maturity of a technology prior to integrating this technology into a system. It contained 7 levels at that time. Nowadays, 9 levels compose the scale. These levels are detailed below.

Level 1 – Basic Research: basic principles are observed and reported

Lowest level of technology readiness. Scientific research begins to be translated into applied research and development. Examples might include fundamental investigations and paper studies.

Level 2 – Applied Research: technology concept and/or application formulated

Once basic principles are observed, practical applications can be formulated. Examples are limited to analytic studies and experimentation.

Level 3 – Critical function, proof of concept established

Active research and development is initiated. Laboratory studies aim to validate analytical predictions of separate components of the technology. Examples include components that are not yet integrated or representative.

Level 4 – Laboratory testing of prototype component or process

Design, development and lab testing of technological components are performed. Here, basic technological components are integrated to establish that they will work together. This is a relatively "low fidelity" prototype in comparison with the eventual system.

Level 5 – Laboratory testing of integrated system

The basic technological components are integrated together with realistic supporting elements to be

tested in a simulated environment. This is a “high fidelity” prototype compared to the eventual system.

Level 6 – Prototype system verified

The prototype, which is well beyond that of level 5, is tested in a relevant environment. The system or process demonstration is carried out in an operational environment.

Level 7 – Integrated pilot system demonstrated

Prototype is near, or at, planned operational system level. The final design is virtually complete. The goal of this stage is to remove engineering and manufacturing risk.

Level 8 – System incorporated in commercial design

Technology has been proven to work in its final form under the expected conditions. In most of the cases, this level represents the end of true system development.

Level 9 – System ready for full scale deployment

Here, the technology in its final form is ready for commercial deployment.

Level beyond 9 – Market introduction

The product, process or service is launched commercially, marketed to and adopted by a group of customers (including public authorities).