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Guide for Applicants

13th Application Round
New Centers of Excellence

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DNRF in Brief:

- The DNRF was established in 1991 as an independent organization with the objective of funding basic research at a high international level.
- Since 1991, the DNRF has committed itself to supporting Danish research institutions with 10.0 billion DKK (1.3 billion EUR).
- The DNRF has an endowment of approximately 4.7 billion DKK (630 million EUR) and spends around 500 million DKK (about 67 million EUR) annually.
- The main funding instrument is Centers of Excellence, and the foundation has established a total of 143 centers since 1993.

Introduction

The Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF) funds excellent, curiosity-driven research at the highest international level and at the frontiers of all research fields to promote Denmark's research capacity.

This guide provides information to potential applicants for the DNRF's 13th application round for new Centers of Excellence.

Applicants are advised to visit www.dg.dk for further information about the foundation, the Center of Excellence funding scheme, and the existing Centers of Excellence. Applicants should regularly check the foundation's website for updates.

The deadline for pre-proposals is September 11, 2026, at 12 noon.

An electronic application system is currently being developed and will be published on the foundation's website no later than July 1, 2026. Applicants are encouraged to stay updated, as both pre-proposals and full proposals can only be submitted through the new electronic application system.

The Center of Excellence Scheme

The objective of the Center of Excellence scheme is to strengthen Danish research by providing the best possible working conditions and organizational set-up for selected top researchers. Excellence is the main criterion when assessing proposals for new centers.

A Center of Excellence grant is large and flexible and has a duration of up to 10 years, with a first funding period of six years and the possibility of extension for a second funding period of an additional four years.

The Center of Excellence scheme is open to applications from all scientific fields as well as interdisciplinary efforts. Further, the call is open to all potential applicants: new applicants, applicants who have previously submitted applications to the foundation, and applicants who have or have had a grant from the Danish National Research Foundation. Excellence is the overall criterion, and all applications will be evaluated on equal terms as described in the guidelines below.

The application procedure is "bottom-up", and applicants from all research fields are encouraged to apply. The application process is composed of two stages. The first stage involves an assessment of the pre-proposals submitted. In the second stage, a number of applicants are invited to submit full proposals. A detailed description of the funding scheme and the application process can be found on the following pages.

Significant Changes in the Call for the 13th Application Round for Centers of Excellence

Budget

The DNRF funds Centers of Excellence within and across all academic fields. The foundation acknowledges that proposed Centers of Excellence may have very different profiles, research plans, and come from very different subjects and disciplinary traditions, and thus have different financial needs. Depending on the individual requirements of the proposed Center of Excellence, the applicant can apply for a grant ranging from 30 million DKK to 80 million DKK incl. overhead for a six-year period. Budgets must be conscientiously crafted and fully aligned

with the actual needs of the proposed research plan and budgets will be thoroughly assessed as part of the board's evaluation of the applications.

In exceptional cases, it is possible to apply for coverage of extraordinary costs of up to 20 million DKK (incl. overhead) beyond the 80 million DKK limit, for example for new equipment, expensive experimental research, or field expeditions. Such extra funding must be justified separately (see further description in section on the budget).

Peer advisors

As a new initiative in the 13th CoE application round, peer advisors will be engaged to enhance the board's understanding of the ambition, originality and breakthrough potential in pre-proposals across all scientific areas, including those outside board members' immediate expertise.

For detailed information about the involvement of peer advisors, please visit the DNRF's homepage: www.dg.dk.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI)

Applicants are fully and solely accountable for all information and content submitted to the foundation. If AI is employed during the preparation of the pre-proposal or full proposal, it should be used responsibly and disclosed with full transparency in the designated part of the application. The DNRF refers to relevant guidelines in the field, such as the "[European Commission's guidelines](#)" on the use of generative artificial intelligence in research. The foundation also refers applicants to the "[Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)".

Authorities' Right to Request Other Information

The Ministry of Higher Education and Science (UFM) has requested that the DNRF collects data from applications to be used across UFM in strategies, analyses, surveys, mapping, monitoring, and other initiatives in connection with the following topics:

1. Green research, development, and innovation
2. Digitalization
3. Other themes

Please note that this information must be provided in the pre-proposal; however, it is not considered a substantive part of the proposal and will not be included in the foundation's evaluation of the proposal. Also, those applicants invited to submit a full application will be asked to provide information on these topics.

Contact Information

Applicants are invited to contact the secretariat if they have any questions about the application process. Questions may be directed to:

- Senior Adviser Johanne Juhl Ryø, e-mail: jj@dg.dk, tel.: +45 3318 1951
- Senior Adviser Morten Andreasen, e-mail: ma@dg.dk, tel.: +45 3318 1953
- CEO Niels Mejlgaard, e-mail: nm@dg.dk, tel.: +45 3318 1950

What Is a Center of Excellence?

Centers of Excellence are research units located at Danish research institutions (typically universities) with a common idea or vision and a clearly defined set of research objectives.

There is no fixed formula for creating a Center of Excellence. Centers may differ in size and mode of organization, depending on their subject and scope. Some centers become rather large during the grant period, employing more than 60 people divided into several research teams, while others have fewer than 15 members. The center must have a well-defined framework for cooperation and must be committed to fostering team science. Centers of Excellence are important sites for the nurturing of talented early-career researchers. The foundation finds it essential that the centers form a joint physical community that facilitates intensive daily interaction. Centers may also choose to form partnerships with other researchers or institutions either in Denmark or abroad.

The foundation expects a Center of Excellence to be an integral part of and to actively work with its host institution in terms of educational activities and ongoing interactions with other research groups. Research-based education is an important part of a center's mission as the centers serve as important training sites for the next generation of researchers, often attracting exceptional students from Denmark and abroad.

Centers are strongly encouraged to pursue collaboration with leading international researchers and to include and attract exceptional and talented employees and visitors from abroad.

Center Leader and Co-applicants

A Center of Excellence is headed by a center leader (the applicant). The center leader must be a distinguished researcher with excellent scientific accomplishments. The center leader must also be a visionary leader able to create a dynamic and thriving research environment. The foundation expects the center leader to be fully committed to the Center of Excellence for the full duration of the grant. At least 80 percent of the center leader's full-time employment should be reserved for the center's research area and activities.

Co-applicants of the proposed center bring high-level scientific competencies within their respective fields, contribute substantially to the research and play an active and critical role in the success of the proposed endeavor. Co-applicants are expected to be scientists of high standing, and each co-applicant is expected to devote a specified percentage of their time to the center, if funding is granted.

The center leader and the co-applicants constitute the core group for the proposed Center of Excellence and are expected to work closely together to lead the team. When submitting, the applicant must have carefully considered the range of commitments of the co-applicants and the diversity of the core group in terms of age, gender, and other relevant aspects.

Setting the Scene for Highly Ambitious Research

The foundation welcomes outstanding research of a high international caliber that may be described as ambitious, highly creative, truly novel, scientifically daring, and potentially groundbreaking basic research.

Centers can be established within all scientific areas, including interdisciplinary approaches, are expected to engage in original research questions and to address the challenges that intrigue them the most. A Center of Excellence should strive to push forward the frontiers of knowledge

by enabling exceptional teams of researchers to work collaboratively to explore problems that spark their passion. In other words, the foundation welcomes curiosity-driven research – or what might be described as “dream projects”.

The Budget and Eligible Costs

A DNRF Center of Excellence grant is large and flexible. The grant may cover expenses that are directly attributable to the center, such as salaries, travel costs and conferences, operational costs, and equipment, and that are relevant and necessary in order to carry out the research plan.

It is possible to request funding within a budget range from 30 million DKK to 80 million DKK incl. overhead for a six-year period.

In exceptional cases, the foundation will cover extraordinary costs of up to 20 million DKK (incl. overhead) beyond 80 million DKK, if it can be clearly justified that such expenses are a prerequisite for conducting the center’s research, e.g., equipment, costs for expensive experimental research, or field expeditions.

Overhead should be included in the budget; 44 percent for Danish universities, for other institutions please refer to www.dg.dk.

Although a DNRF Center of Excellence grant is flexible, please observe the following general guidelines:

- Ph.D. students, postdocs, assistant professors, and equivalent non-permanent research positions may be fully funded by the DNRF grant.
- The DNRF grant can fund a maximum of one full-time administrative employee for the duration of the Center of Excellence.
- To a limited extent, technical staff can be funded by the DNRF grant, when their tasks are distinctly related to the Center of Excellence and not to the broader operations of the host institution. Such personnel may include laboratory technicians, data managers, or similar categories.
- Any salaries for tenured positions cannot be covered by the DNRF grant.

The DNRF is conscientious about the importance of Centers of Excellence for the development of talented early-career researchers. In general, the foundation would expect a significant part of the grant to be reserved for salaries for Ph.D. students, postdocs, assistant professors, and equivalent research positions. To ensure conducive environments, the foundation encourages longer (3-4 years) over shorter (1-2 years) appointments for researchers at the postdoc/assistant professor level, to the extent that it fits the research plan.

When submitting a pre-proposal, applicants are asked to include an estimated budget for a six-year period covering the funding requested from the foundation.

If invited to submit full proposals, applicants are asked to include a full comprehensive budget estimate for the proposed center including explanatory notes for all budgeted costs. The foundation expects commitment from the host institution, particularly in terms of in-kind allocations of scientific and technical-administrative staff and infrastructure, which must be evident from the budget and described in detail in the support letter from the host institution.

Assessment and Selection

Calls for new Centers of Excellence involve a two-stage application process. In the first stage, prospective center leaders are invited to submit a short pre-proposal. In the second stage, selected applicants are invited to submit full proposals that are peer reviewed by three international experts in the field. Prior to the final selection, the board of the DNRF interviews each applicant.

The overall success rate from submission of a pre-proposal to the establishment of a center has been about 6-7 percent in previous application rounds. About 14 percent of the pre-proposals have moved on from the outline stage to the full application phase, and about 42 percent of those proposals have resulted in new Centers of Excellence.

Pre-proposals

As a new initiative in the 13th CoE application round, peer advisors will be engaged to enhance the board's understanding of the ambition, originality and breakthrough potential in pre-proposals across all scientific areas, including those outside board members' immediate expertise. For detailed information about the involvement of peer advisors in, please visit the DNRF's homepage: www.dg.dk.

Decisions on pre-proposals are made solely by the board of the foundation, which consists of nine members who possess insight into research at the highest international level within their respective fields. Thus, the applicant should pay attention to the fact that the pre-proposal is written for educated generalists, and not necessarily peers within the application's scientific area.

The foundation must receive pre-proposals no later than September 11, 2026, at 12 noon.

An electronic application system is currently being developed and will be published on the foundation's website no later than July 1, 2026.

The pre-proposal must be written in English and besides standard information about the applicant, it must include:

A list of 5-10 scientific keywords for the proposed center, to be used to identify potential peer reviewers if the applicant is invited to submit a full proposal.

A list of names, titles, and institutional affiliations of the co-applicants of the proposed center

Note that co-applicants are members who, with their high-level scientific competences within their respective research field, contribute substantially to the research and play an active and critical role in the success of the proposed endeavor. If the proposed center is granted funding, co-applicants will devote a specified percentage of their time to the center throughout the funding period.

A short description of the proposed research endeavor (max. 1,500 characters incl. spaces)

This text will also be used as an introduction to the proposal when identifying potential peer reviewers if the applicant is invited to submit a full proposal.

An argument for supporting the proposed endeavor (max. 1,500 characters incl. spaces)

For instance, the argument could address the following questions:

- How will it redefine the research in its respective field and lead to potential breakthroughs?
- What kind of new insights and results may it produce?
- Why should this particular proposed team pursue this research?

A presentation of the research idea (max. 10,000 characters incl. spaces)

For instance, the presentation could address the following questions:

- A description of how the proposed *research idea* compares to “state of the art” within the given field, including its dimension of novelty and potential for groundbreaking results and an argument for its scientific relevance.
- A *strategy* for addressing the challenges. How will the center be organized? Which competencies/capacities will be involved? How will a creative and dynamic research environment be established? Which methodologies and approaches will be employed?

References to the relevant literature (max. 50 publications)

A description of institutional affiliations (max. 2,400 characters incl. spaces)

The organization of a center may involve more than one institution. If considerable parts of the proposed center are located outside Denmark, the description should include an account of how the center will strengthen Danish research.

Internationalization and recruitment strategy (max. 2,400 characters incl. spaces)

Information about formalized international cooperation and how the applicants envisage attracting junior and senior researchers to the center.

Curriculum vitae of the proposed center leader (max. 7,200 characters incl. spaces)

The CV must include:

- A brief and concise outline of the applicant’s professional career
- A list of up to five major research accomplishments (which may include several references to the applicant’s own academic publications) including a brief factual explanation of importance
- Selected examples of peer recognition, with brief factual explanation of importance
- Selected examples of research leadership and supervision
- A list of up to ten most important publications with a brief explanation of relevance to the proposed research
- Relevant publication metrics, including number of peer reviewed articles, monographs, book chapters and output in proceedings.

Curriculum vitae for each of the participating core members (max. 4,800 characters incl. spaces per CV).

The CV must include:

- A brief and concise outline of their professional career
- A list of up to five major research accomplishments (which may include several references to core member’s own academic publications) including brief factual explanation of importance
- A list of up to five most important publications, with a brief explanation of relevance to the proposed research
- Relevant publication metrics, including number of peer reviewed articles, monographs, book chapters and output in proceedings.

An estimated budget for a six-year period covering the requested funding from the DNRF

Other funding

A list of active grants and pending applications over 5 million DKK that will overlap in time with the proposed Center of Excellence, and for which the applicant (the proposed center leader) and the co-applicants are PIs. The list must include a description of how the applicant and the co-applicants will be able to manage a potential Center of Excellence grant in terms of time and engagement.

Declaration of the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI)

Declaration from proposed center leader

A letter of declaration signed by the proposed center leader that states full commitment to the center, including at least 80 percent of full-time involvement for the full duration of the center. Also included must be a statement that both the proposed center leader and all co-applicants agree on the pre-proposal and that they have read the Privacy Policy of the foundation on www.dg.dk. By signing the letter, the co-applicants confirm that they will take an active part in the proposed center's activities.

Full Proposals

When invited to submit full proposals, applicants should further develop the pre-proposal following the guidelines below set by the foundation. The full proposal must consist of:

A one-page generalist summary (maximum: 2,400 characters incl. spaces)

The summary must outline the center's vision, the co-applicants involved, organization, the amount applied for from the DNRF, and a description of the institutional environment and geographical location.

A visionary presentation (max. 12,000 characters incl. spaces) expanding the overall research idea, including:

- A description of its dimension of novelty and potential for groundbreaking results and an argument for its scientific relevance and expected impact.
- A strategy for addressing the challenges. How will the center be organized? Which competencies/capacities will be involved? How will a strong, creative, and dynamic research environment be established? With which institution(s) will it be affiliated? What are the qualifications of the proposed center leader (scientific as well as managerial skills)? Is the core group adequately diverse and if not what measures will be implemented to address it during the lifetime of the center? Which specific initiatives will be undertaken to attract and develop young and talented researchers? How do the applicants plan to attract international researchers? What sort of international collaboration is envisaged? How will the research activities relate to existing Danish research in this area?

A description of the planned research program (max. 24,000 characters incl. spaces, excl. necessary references) including:

- A description of how the proposed center leader and co-applicants participate in the center's leadership structure, including the added value of their collaboration and how it supports the center's overall goals and success.
- Information on the different sub-projects together with the active roles of the proposed center leader and the co-applicants.
- A Gantt diagram or timeline illustrating the research program, its sub-projects and the people involved.

Curriculum vitae of the proposed center leader (max. 7,200 characters incl. spaces)

*The CV must include:

- A brief and concise outline of the applicant's professional career
- A list of up to five major research accomplishments (which may include several references to applicant's own academic publications) including a brief factual explanation of importance
- Selected examples of peer recognition, with brief factual explanation of importance
- Selected examples of research leadership and supervision
- A list of up to ten most important publications with a brief explanation of relevance to the proposed research
- Relevant publication metrics, including number of peer reviewed articles, monographs, book chapters and output in proceedings.

Curriculum vitae for each of the participating core members (max. 4,800 characters incl. spaces per CV)

*The CV must include:

- A brief and concise outline of their professional career
- A list of up to five major research accomplishments (which may include several references to core member's own academic publications) including a brief factual explanation of importance
- A list of up to five most important publications, with a brief explanation of relevance to the proposed research
- Relevant publication metrics, including number of peer reviewed articles, monographs, book chapters and output in proceedings.

*Please note that the requirements for the CVs of the proposed center leader and co-applicants in the full application may be modified.

A detailed budget for a six-year period covering the applied funding from the DNRF

The budget must also include the financial commitment from the host institution and possible funding from other sources as well as explanatory notes for the expenses.

If the applicant is asking for extraordinary expenses in excess of a grant of 80 million DKK, a separate budget must be filled and documentation for those expenses must be enclosed.

Other funding

A list of active grants and pending applications over 5 million DKK that will overlap in time with the proposed Center of Excellence, and for which the applicant (the proposed center leader) and the co-applicants are PIs. The list must include a description of how the applicant and the co-applicants will be able to manage a potential Center of Excellence grant in terms of time and engagement.

Declaration of the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI)

A letter of support from the host institution signed by the Head of Department and the Dean documenting the institution's commitment to the proposal and how the host institution prioritizes the center's research area. The foundation expects a high level of commitment from the host institution, particularly in terms of in-kind allocations of scientific and technical-administrative staff and infrastructure, which must be described in detail in the support letter from the host institution. If the commitment includes the opening of new positions within the center's scientific field, these should also be described in detail.

A letter of declaration signed by the proposed center leader that states commitment to the center, including at least 80 percent of full-time involvement for the full duration of the center. Also included must be a statement that both the proposed center leader and all co-applicants agree on the full proposal and that they have read the Privacy Policy on www.dg.dk. By signing the letter, the co-applicants confirm that they will take an active part in the proposed center's activities.

Assessment Criteria

In assessing both the pre-proposals and the full proposals, the foundation will emphasize the following dimensions:

- The research idea is ambitious and original and has the potential for real scientific breakthroughs in the relevant research field(s).
- The proposed center leader has a high standing in the international research community, the needed leadership skills, as well as the time and capacity to undertake the task of running a Center of Excellence.
- The center includes co-applicants with high-level scientific competences within their respective research fields and strong commitment to the center, in order to establish a creative and dynamic international research environment that will also provide an inspirational training ground for early-career researchers.
- The focus, structure, and size of the proposed center are such that the center sets the stage for scientific ventures that are not feasible within conventional funding from other sources.

The Peer-Review Process

The DNRF will send full proposals for external peer review to three international experts within the relevant research area(s). Each peer reviewer is asked to deliver a report of three to five pages addressing a number of crucial questions. Peer reviewers are not asked to rank or grade the proposal. The Guide for Peer Reviewers, which informs the peer reviewers of their task, is available for applicants at www.dg.dk.

The foundation will identify the three peer reviewers based on recommendations from external and/or internal sources. Applicants are given an opportunity to comment on the composition of the peer review panel to ensure that the composition is relevant to the application's scientific field. Further, before the DNRF sends the proposals to the peer reviewers, both peer reviewers and applicants are asked to declare possible conflicts of interest. If such a conflict is identified, the peer reviewer will not be used.

The foundation uses an open and transparent process. Peer reviewers and applicants will know each other's identities. Applicants will be offered the opportunity to comment on the peer reviews prior to the board's decision.

Interview with Applicants

The board of the DNRF conducts a short interview with each applicant (proposed center leader) prior to the decision. The interviews will take place on September 6 - 8, 2027. During the interview, the applicant is asked to present the overall research idea and to elaborate on the strategy for realizing the idea.

Board Processing and Decision

The board bases its decision on the full proposals, the three peer reviews for each proposal, the applicant's responses to the peer reviews, and the interview. The quality of the peer reviews

received is generally very high, and the peer reviews usually provide valuable advice to the board as well as to the applicants/centers. However, although the peer reviews serve as very important input to the board, it is the board that makes the final decision. The board thoroughly discusses each proposal, arguing in each case why a proposal should or should not be funded. Ultimately, the board must choose to fund relatively few research proposals from a large number of exceptional proposals.

Contract Negotiations

After the board makes its final decision, the foundation, the proposed center leader, and the host institution initiate negotiations regarding conditions such as co-financing and office and laboratory space. It should be noted that no funding is granted before the final contract has been signed.

An official inauguration of the new center is held shortly after it starts operating.

Overall Time Frame

An electronic application system is currently being developed and will be published on the foundation's website no later than July 1, 2026.

Time frame 13th CoE application round:

September 11, 2026, at 12 noon	Deadline for pre-proposals
November 30 - December 1, 2026	Board's assessment*
December 2, 2026	Board's preliminary conclusions on pre-proposals
January 4, 2027	Deadline for consultation (partshøring) of applicants, if needed
January 11, 2027	Board's decision on pre-proposals
Mid-January 2027	Decision letters (letters of rejection and invitation for full application)
April 1, 2027	Deadline for submission of invited full applications
April – June 2027	Extensive peer review process of full applications incl. consultation (partshøring) of applicants
September 6 - 8, 2027	Board's interview of applicants
September 9, 2027	Decision on invitations for contract negotiations
Mid-September, 2027	Decision letters (letters of rejection and invitation for contract negotiations)
From January 2028	New centers may start operating following successfully completed negotiations

*The board will assess pre-proposals under involvement of peer advisors. Read more here: www.dg.dk.

Privacy Policy

The foundation processes personal data including names, addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, CPR numbers, ORCID numbers, CV, etc. concerning applicants, co-applicants, external peer reviewers and employees assisting in the performance and implementation of the foundation's grants.

Read more about the DNRF's Privacy Policy here: www.dg.dk.