

IBIS OIS

CALL GUIDELINES

FUNDING CALL 2026





Facts about the call

Total amount available for granting:

DKK 24 million

Amount available per grant:

Track 1: up to DKK 3.3 million

Track 2: up to DKK 2.2 million

Deadlines:

- Upload idea: 26 May 2026
- Contact local advisor: 16 June 2026
- Submission of applications: 06 July 2026, 23:59 CET

Notification of funding

Primo october 2026

Earliest start date:

1 November 2026

Latest start date:

1 February 2027

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Eligible costs elaborated

Appendix B: Selection criteria elaborated

1. About the call

The first call round for the IBIS OIS platform is focusing on two tracks: **Foundational Science** and **Technology Innovation** and will support precompetitive and interdisciplinary research projects within the area of **microbial biofertilizers** that are inspired by industry needs, challenges and ideas. In each track, several themes and research questions are posed based on the four overarching pillars of the IBIS initiative that are based on extensive analysis of the barriers present in the microbial biofertilizer industry conducted by an expert panel from academia and industry: [HYSTRA report](#).



DISCOVERY



UPSCALING &
FORMULATION



QUALITY
CONTROL



MoA &
PERFORMANCE



1.1. Scientific Scope

TRACK 1: FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE

Projects in this track will aim to bridge the knowledge gaps in natural microbial biofertilizer discovery, development and performance with a focus on soil-born nitrogen and phosphorus microbial biofertilizers tested in agricultural relevant model crops such as wheat, corn, fava beans, or soybeans. The aim is to tackle one or several the following challenges:

1. Plant Responses to biofertilizers

- Advancing the understanding of how crop-plant metabolism is impacted by different soil-based microbial biofertilizers, how biofertilizer-mediated processes translate into actual nutrient uptake by plants, and how these nutrients are incorporated into plant metabolic pathways.
- Identifying and mapping plant biomarkers that are indicative of successful microbial colonization, effective nutrient transfer, and improved nutrient use efficiency.

2. Plant genotype as a gatekeeper of biofertilizer success

- Discovering how variation in plant genetic background governs the success of soil-based biofertilizers with emphasis on the impact of e.g. domestication and breeding, as well as genetic variations within plant species adapted to different agricultural environments.
- Uncovering the link between genetic diversity and microbial compatibility, colonization efficiency, and the functional outcomes of soil-based microbial biofertilizers and describing the molecular genetic and/or physiological mechanistic basis for these.

3. Soil drivers of biofertilizer performance

- Investigating how the physical and chemical properties of soils influence the performance of soil-applied microbial biofertilizers, including their nutrient-mobilization activity and persistence/survival.
- Understanding the mechanistic basis of these effects by linking soil structure, physico-chemical conditions, and nutrient availability to microbial survival, activity and functional outcomes for crops.



TRACK 2: TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION

Projects in this track focus on technology innovations that enable efficient biofertilizer development by creating low-cost solutions that can be implemented by most laboratories and third parties, e.g. by using existing equipment or 3D-printed parts.

1. New methodologies for better Lab-to-Field translation

- Developing small-size, medium- to high-throughput plant assay systems for accelerated laboratory screening and testing of microbial biofertilizers in the plant root zone. The solutions should have a small physical footprint and ideally be compatible with automation. The system should enable cultivation of agriculturally relevant plants, continuous monitoring of plant responses, and direct access to the root zone for sampling.

2. Quality control methods and tools

- Developing new methods and tools for rapid, low-cost, and robust quality control during production and at the end-user level. The technology should be able to confirm starter culture purity, detect contamination during fermentation, and quantify end-product quality, including viability and purity. Solutions that enable on-farm verification of product quality before or during application are also of interest.

3. Biosafety pipeline addressing registrability

- Developing biosafety assessment tool/software tailored for biofertilizer safety assessment and aligned with regulatory requirements in key regions (e.g., India, Sub-Saharan Africa, EU, US, and Brazil). The tools should account for the anticipated expansion of biofertilizers from a few well-characterized species to a broader and more diverse range of microorganisms.

4. Sensor technology

- Developing novel sensor technologies capable of directly measuring nitrogen and phosphorus bioavailability in soil by electrical, chemical-electrical, biological-chemical, or biology-based mechanics to allow early detection of biofertilizer activity.
- Developing novel methods to differentiate the origins of nitrogen (atmospheric versus other), to allow for early detection of biofertilizer activity in laboratory and field settings.



1.2. Grant types

The total budget available for funding in 2026 is 24 M DKK. The IBIS OIS Board decides on the overall distribution between the two tracks based on the incoming applications.

APPLICANTS CAN APPLY FOR TWO DIFFERENT TRACKS:

Track 1: Foundational Science

Purpose	Bridge knowledge gaps in biofertilizer discovery, development and performance by tackling challenges.
Mandatory participants	Min. one partner university and min. one company
Optional participants	Additional industry partners and non-profit organisations (incl. GTS, additional Danish or non-Danish universities)
Budget	Up to 3.3 M DKK
Duration	Up to 3 years

Track 2: Technology Innovation

Purpose	Develop necessary and enabling technologies for efficient development of biofertilizer.
Mandatory participants	Min. one partner university, and min. one company
Optional participants	Additional industry partners and non-profit organisations (incl. GTS, additional Danish or non-Danish universities)
Budget	Up to 2.2 M DKK
Duration	Up to 2 years

Find important dates and deadlines on page 12

1.3. Eligible costs

The budget must only include costs directly attributable to the project and be in accordance with the [NNF's General Terms and Conditions](#). Applicants must aim for cost-effective study designs where the proposed budget is proportionate to the scope, activities, deliverables, and potential impact of the project. In the review process, the IBIS OIS Board can choose to make funding nomination dependent on changes in the budget and study design.

Please refer to appendix A for more details about eligible costs.

Applicants may apply for the following expenses directly related to the project:

DANISH UNIVERSITIES	OTHER NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS
Salary Costs	
Operational Costs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consumables (excl. basic consumables)• Minor equipment (up to 50.000 DKK)• IT-equipment (up to 50.000 DKK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publication costs• Conference participation• Organization of meetings/smaller conferences• Travel costs• Costs for subcontractors
Project Supplement Up to 250.000DKK/year/ FTE (VIP-B&C)	Bench Fee Up to 8.000 DKK/ month/FTE (VIP)
	Adm. support Up to 5% adm. support
	Auditing Fee* Up to 50.000 DKK

*Only applicable for institutions not covered by the Danish Rigsrevision

PLEASE NOTE

- Due to the rules and regulations of the NNF, no funding can be allocated to for-profit company partners.
- IBIS OIS will not cover salary or other costs that are already covered by existing funding.
- IBIS OIS will not cover salary for PhD students

2. About IBIS OIS

IBIS OIS is a 3-year funding and research platform that contribute to advancing the development of effective and scalable microbial biofertilizer solutions through cutting-edge science and global collaboration. The IBIS OIS platform and IBIS initiative creates an ecosystem for biofertilizer research and innovation by bringing together academic, knowledge-, research- and technology organizations and industry stakeholders. IBIS OIS supports research and technology development activities that go beyond the expertise of the IBIS consortium partners and create an extended research and innovation ecosystem focused on microbial biofertilizers. The platform offers funding for precompetitive research projects where the partners collaborate to resolve key barriers currently faced when developing biofertilizers by creating new foundational knowledge and technologies. IBIS OIS offers an opportunity to join a research ecosystem with the collected goal of speeding up and de-risking the development and launch of microbial biofertilizer solutions.

The Novo Nordisk Foundation has awarded IBIS OIS with up to 65M DKK to facilitate the creation of novel research projects and provide funding for the academic component of joint initiatives between academia and industry partners with biofertilizers (NNF25SA0104350).

2.1. Why OIS

Open Innovation in Science focuses on open research collaborations, where the participating universities and companies agree to publish all results as soon as possible and waive any claim to intellectual property rights. The continuous sharing of results and knowledge enables researchers and companies to accelerate innovation and development activities. As no one can protect the generated foreground knowledge and results from the collaborations, anyone is free to further develop the results and potentially use them for commercial purposes downstream.

Collaborating in an OIS project allows the participants to:

- Create new collaborations with ease between academics and industry partners through facilitated matchmaking, and with fast project starts based on standard contracts and no IP negotiations.



- Find new solutions to technical problems and easily gain access to new knowledge and robust data that can help move the industry forward by solving common challenges and tackling barriers faced by everyone.
- Access a robust foundation of knowledge based on excellent research from all funded projects that can be applied for downstream innovation and used for commercial purposes with no strings attached.

2.2. Open sharing

All funded IBIS OIS projects are obligated to share their results and data across the network as soon as possible. They can do this through Zenodo, the IBIS knowledge sharing platform, relevant databases, and through open-access publishing in preprint archives and journals, as described in the IBIS OIS Framework Agreement and in the grant notification for each subproject – incl. explicitly stating support from the NNF (incl. reference of the IBIS OIS grant number) in all written and oral presentations of the project. IBIS OIS will provide a manual for the open sharing of project output and grantees will be invited to a course in open data management.

2.3. About IBIS

The IBIS OIS programme is implemented as part of the Initiative for Biofertilizer Innovation and Science (IBIS), coordinated by the Technical University of Denmark (DTU). IBIS is a global research and innovation initiative accelerating the development of effective, scalable, and locally adapted microbial biofertilizer solutions. The initiative addresses the gaps in foundational knowledge, and lack of standardized methods, and enabling technologies needed to reliably translate laboratory discoveries into consistent in-field performance. You can read more about the initiative here: [IBIS Press release](#)

Projects will be part of the IBIS ecosystem, where they can connect with expertise, access shared data resources, and explore potential collaborations with other projects and the IBIS core consortium partners. The interaction is intended to support projects by adding additional value, accelerate progress, and allow for the potential inclusion in a shared and open IBIS Development Pipeline created by a joint research ecosystem.



2.4. Precompetitive projects

The open projects funded under IBIS OIS must be of a precompetitive nature and have broad value creation for more than just the project participants. The results originating from the projects shall similarly be useable by others. Broadly speaking, precompetitive projects are characterized by and focus on:

- Challenges and problems that are relevant for groups of companies or the entire industry, for example by tackling market barriers, foundational gaps in knowledge, or developing common tools and methods.
- Creating open results and data that provide a generic knowledge foundation through early-stage high-risk research, which allows companies and others to use these for downstream innovation and included in new products and services.
- The results of the project can be shared openly with the public without compromising the participating companies' ability to adapt the open results for specific, commercial, and protectable applications.

ADVICE FOR APPLICANTS

Ensure that the results of your project will be applicable to the relevant industry broadly and is solving a common challenge for all players in said industry.

Clearly identify in your application the timing of when the industrial partner will make commercial use of the results and ensure that this happens after the IBIS OIS project is finalized.

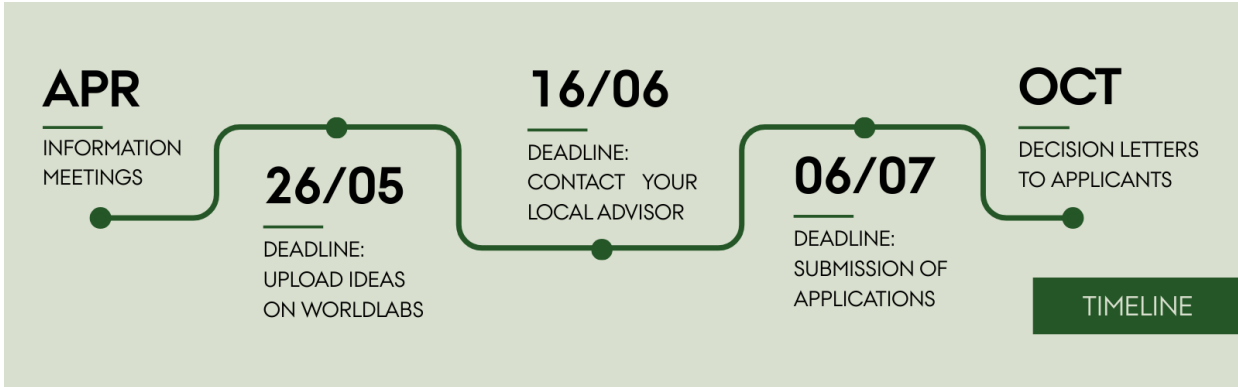
2.5. Legal requirements

Projects must follow local institutional rules for security in international and innovation collaboration (URIS guidelines) and ensure that your project application is aligned with your institution's processes, requirements, and policies.

Please consult IBIS OIS's Privacy Policy for more information on how the applications and your personal data are handled. The Privacy Policy can be found here: [IBIS OIS Privacy Policy](#).



3. Application process



3.1. Mandatory steps and important deadlines

The following steps are mandatory for all applicants to complete:

UPLOAD A PROJECT IDEA (by 26 May 2026, 23:59 CET)

If you have an idea for a research project within the IBIS OIS scope, you can showcase it in our online community. As openness is a vital element in IBIS OIS, applicants must upload ideas before developing it into a full project application. Share your ideas on WorldLabs.

START A PROJECT APPLICATION

When you are set with a good idea and the right team to match it, you and your partners from industry and academia must collaborate to translate the idea into an IBIS OIS research project, where all project partners play an active role. We advise you to familiarize yourselves with the application templates. If in doubt, contact the IBIS OIS secretariat.



CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ADVISOR (by 16 June 2026)

The IBIS OIS secretariat and the local advisors at the OIS partner universities will assist potential applicants with identifying the precompetitive aspects of their ideas.

It is the responsibility of the main applicant to make sure that the proposed research and results are precompetitive and that the output can be shared openly without violating historical IP or e.g. licenses on bits of software codes.

The main applicant must contact the local university advisor before 16 June 2026 to discuss the precompetitive nature of the project scope. Please share your idea post on WorldLabs when contacting your local advisor.

LOCAL ADVISORS			
University	Contact person	E-mail	Phone
Aalborg University (AAU)	Kristian Bering	kbe@bio.aau.dk	+45 9940 9935
Aarhus University (AU)	Contact your department's business developer: Department contacts		
Technical University of Denmark (DTU)	Jacqueline Ameri	jacam@dtu.dk	+45 2069 2673
University of Southern Denmark (SDU)	Thomas Schmidt	thos@sdu.dk	+45 6550 7547
University of Copenhagen (UCPH)	Julie Sand Jørgensen	jsj@adm.ku.dk	+45 4090 1274

SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION (by 6 July 2026, 23:59 CET)

Submit your application to our online community, WorldLabs. For direct link to the application site, [click here](#).



3.2. Ideation and matchmaking

JOIN WORLDLABS

The IBIS OIS application process takes place on our online community hosted by [WorldLabs](#). Here, you can create a profile for yourself, your research group, or your company, showcasing your interests and competencies. You can upload ideas for new projects, look for partners, give input to other ideas, and browse through our events. A profile makes it easier for potential partners to find you. You also apply for funding on our online community.

JOIN OUR EVENTS

Each call round comes with a series of information and ideation meetings. Join to learn about the aim and scope of IBIS OIS, terms for the specific call round, meet new potential partners, and details of application process. All events are published on our WorldLabs community and our website.

FIND COLLABORATORS

Good connections between collaborators are essential. Join us at one of our events, either in person or online, where the IBIS OIS team facilitates a day of sharing ideas and finding partners – perhaps even from non-obvious sources. Or reach out to potential partners on the WorldLabs [marketplace](#).

REACH OUT IF YOU NEED HELP

Need more help finding the right idea, project or partner, e.g. relevant main applicant? Contact the IBIS OIS secretariat. We can help you find the right partner or guide you to bring your competencies in play in the right project. IBIS OIS has a network of skilled ambassadors within the five partner universities and a great network of relevant players in the industry.



3.3. How to set your team

IBIS OIS projects must have participants from both academia and industry to be eligible. All projects must include at least one company partner and one university partner that has joined the OIS framework agreement (AAU, AU, DTU, UCPH, SDU). The parties co-create the project application and co-execute the project, if granted.

We encourage all interested parties to participate in the matchmaking process by uploading ideas and resources on WorldLabs, reaching out to potential partners on WorldLabs and joining our events. By engaging in the matchmaking, you can broaden your network and find new and ideal partners to collaborate with.

Who can receive funding?

Only not-for-profit parties are eligible to receive funding from IBIS OIS.

Who can be main applicant?

The main applicant must be a permanently employed researcher from an OIS partner university:

- Technical University of Denmark (DTU)
- Aarhus University (AU)
- University of Copenhagen (UCPH)
- University of Southern Denmark (SDU)
- Aalborg University (AAU)

Who can be part of the project?

- Researchers from OIS partner universities.
- Any interested company*.
- Researchers from non-OIS partner universities/knowledge institutions (see below)
- Non-profit organizations.

* Companies cannot receive funding due to the NNF's rules of only supporting non-profit organizations.

ACADEMIC PARTNERS

The main applicant must be from an OIS partner university (AAU, AU, DTU, UCPH, SDU), however, researchers from other universities or knowledge institutions can participate as co-applicants. In order for the researchers to be part of the application (with a budget), the researchers' host institutions must accept and be able to comply with the open approach to e.g. universal use-rights without restrictions to all IP generated in the project and that all data and results from the project must be published as soon as possible. All project participants must sign the non-negotiable Project Agreement if the project is awarded funding.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

In IBIS OIS, companies and university researchers co-create and co-execute research projects based on needs, challenges, and ideas derived from the partners. The projects must address generic challenges that are shared by many companies – either within a certain link of the value chain or across links. Projects thus cannot focus on needs or challenges that are specific to a single company or where said company would be the main or sole beneficiary of the project's results. Companies are not asked to co-finance projects but should contribute with in-kind assets, e.g. expertise and know-how, datasets, methods, or access to equipment. University researchers cannot propose or be part of research projects as researcher that involve their own spinout companies as a company partner.

SUBCONTRACTORS

Subcontractors are companies that are paid to perform a specific service for the project partners. They are not considered project partners themselves, and do not participate in internal sharing of project data/knowledge. The costs for subcontractors are only eligible insofar as the acquired competencies/services are not available from partnering universities and/or companies. The option to include subcontractors cannot be used to ensure financial support for company partners.

PROJECT AGREEMENT

The Project Agreement is the same for all IBIS OIS projects and is based on the principles of openness agreed upon by the five OIS partner universities and company partners in the framework agreement. The Project Agreement is pre-negotiated and is available for download on WorldLabs under '[Resources](#)'. All Projects must comply with project agreement, framework agreement and the NNF policy for research integrity and -freedom, as well as The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

3.4. Administrative rejections

The IBIS OIS Secretariat reserves the right to administratively reject if the application without peer-review if the application does not meet the requirements of the call guidelines.

3.5. Anonymization

To ensure a fair and unbiased assessment, the International Review Panel (see section 4) reviews all applications in a double-blind process. This reduces the risk of conscious or unconscious bias related to factors such as institutional affiliation, gender, career stage, or personal background, and strengthens the overall integrity and credibility of the evaluation process.

It is therefore important that you do not use any personal names anywhere in the application other than in the list of proposers.

We ask you to use the format for abbreviations as listed below:

Organisation and department	Name of main applicant	Name of researchers/ employees
Applicant 1 Main applicant organisation	A1 Main applicant name	A1-R1 1st employee involved in project in applicant group
		A1-R2 2nd employee involved in project in applicant group
Applicant 2* Organisation	A2 Leader of applicant group	A2-R1 1st employee involved in project in applicant group
		A2-R[...]
Company 1*	CE1 Executive/signature authority of company	C1-R1 1st employee involved in project in company group
		C1-R[...]

*There is no limit to number of organisations and company partners in a project. Please allocate a number to each applicant and company partner in the same format as above.

3.6. Application checklist

Please familiarize yourself with the templates well ahead of the submission deadline, as the application process includes steps that require involvement from partners and/or support functions at all project partners' local universities.

Templates can be downloaded on WorldLabs [Resources](#).

MAIN APPLICATION

We recommend preparing the application in a document before filling out the application questions on WorldLabs.

Template
provided

CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)

From the main researchers/employees of each partner university/organization/company. Max. 1 page per person. Upload as one PDF.

LETTER OF SUPPORT

From each involved company confirming its involvement (and the nature thereof) in the precompetitive and open research activities in the project. Upload as PDF.

Use
Template

GANTT CHART

With work packages and activities for all participants. Upload as Excel and PDF

Use
Template

BUDGET

Must be approved and signed by all relevant Heads of Department to ensure that individual budgets comply with local budgeting rules. Upload as Excel and PDF.

Use
Template

BENCH FEE DOCUMENTATION - if relevant

Upload bench fee policy or documentation of bench fee calculation if relevant.

4. Review process

All applications must be submitted as full-length applications and will be reviewed in a one-step process. Proposals are first check for compliance with formal requirement by the IBIS OIS secretariat, and non-compliant proposals are rejected. The applications will be reviewed in full length and scored by both the International Review Panel, as double blinded to guarantee an unbiased assessment, and by the IBIS OIS Board.

The reviewers will score the applications based on eight criteria (see p. 17) using a 0-5 scale (0=fails to address criterion, 5=excellent).

The 15 applications with the highest average scores will be qualitatively assessed by the IBIS OIS Board at a board meeting and will be included in the consultation procedure. All applications outside top 15 will be rejected without feedback. The IBIS OIS Board may decide to include applications outside of the top 15 in the qualitative assessment based on economic or portfolio considerations.

IBIS OIS BOARD

The board has of five members: a permanent member from IBIS (DTU), two temporary members from IBIS OIS partner universities, and two temporary members from industry.

The Board conducts a full review of all proposals, after applications has passed the eligibility check by IBIS OIS secretariat. During a board meeting, the Board considers its internal assessments alongside data from the International Review Panel's review. The Board holds the final authority on funding decisions, which will be made after consultation procedure of the 15 highest scored applications.

Read more about the board [here](#).

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW PANEL

The International Review Panel consists of three specialists representing different scientific areas within microbial biofertilizers and agronomy. The panel reviews all proposals in full, based on anonymized application material.

The panellists' individual scores are compiled as independent review data. These assessments do not constitute a nomination or ranking but serve as an important input and quality control to the IBIS OIS Board's decision-making.

The International Review Panel are double blinded to guarantee unbiased assessment.

4.1. Selection criteria

Please see appendix B for more elaborate information about the selection criteria.

Criterion	WHAT WILL THE REVIEWERS FOCUS ON?
1. Relevance to track scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track 1: Does the proposed project answer/address the asked IBIS research question. Track 2: Does the project result in a new technological solution that solves/meet the IBIS technology challenge (overall aim, design specifications for in/output).
2. Potential for downstream innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does it have potential for short-term innovation? Does it have potential for long-term innovation? Is it likely to deliver research results supporting product development or process innovation in the industry? Will it open new innovation opportunities for the academic partner(s)?
3. Engagement of industry and other relevant stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project have sufficient and active industry engagement (with intellectual, data/ material, and/or infrastructural contributions)?
4. Scientific excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project offer novel scientific objectives and/or approaches to obtaining the objective compared with state of the art? Will it create new knowledge? Is the choice of scientific methodology and technological solutions sound? Does the application sufficiently explain state of the art? Does the project have a competitive edge (scientific and technical level) compared with adjacent technologies?
5. Interdisciplinarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project include both academic and industrial partners? Does the project include relevant partners across scientific disciplines and industrial expertise? Track 2: Does the project include the necessary experts to build prototypes of hardware suggestions.
6. Broadness in value creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project (and/or the project output) relevant to a broader range of companies than the project partner(s)? Does the project's concept/output benefit other projects or research areas/questions within biofertilization?
7. Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project pre-competitive? Does the project have a sound plan to openly share its output and results with the public? Are there any factors in the project design that limit open sharing of output?
8. Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the budget cost effective? Is the budget proportionate to project aim, activities and expected output?



Open Innovation in Science

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