



Guidelines for FreeNovation Applicants 2025

Can your project idea change biomedical research? - Apply until March 16th!

1. What kind of proposals are considered?

FreeNovation provides funding opportunities for unconventional, bold projects that have the potential to open up novel research directions and aim beyond incremental innovation and discovery.

In this year's call, proposals in the following fields will be accepted:

- ***Glycobiology***
- ***Therapeutic future of epigenetics***
- ***In vivo biology: the power of the whole organism***

Proposals need to be particularly original and hard to fund by conventional funding programs due to the "unorthodox" character of the idea irrespective of the academic reputation held by the researchers.

Projects should be relevant to biomedical research with an ultimate aim to provide innovative healthcare solutions for patients. However, proposals must be unrelated to a business relationship with Novartis.

2. What are the overall objectives of FreeNovation?

With this program, the Novartis Research Foundation (*Novartis Forschungsstiftung*) wants to encourage unconventional thinking and enhance the attractiveness of Switzerland as a research location.

3. What are the general terms of the grants?

Grants are for a period of 18 months and up to a maximum of CHF 220'000.

If positively evaluated, a grant award is further conditioned on reaching a written agreement between the Novartis Research Foundation, the applicant's institution (i.e., reputable healthcare or healthcare-related organization, university, university hospital, or university of applied sciences) and the applicant on the following terms and conditions:

- Applicant's institution endorses the project and is accountable to administer the grant.
- Applicant shall publish all results suitable for publication. In the spirit of FreeNovation, the results shall be made available to the public without restricting use and free of charge (except for access fees of journals), and no patent application will be filed for the results from the research conducted with the grant.
- The grant activity shall include neither commercial activities nor be influenced by commercial interests, and the planning and execution of the grant activity shall be consistent with the principles of good scientific practice.
- All required notifications and required permissions, licenses, consents and/or approvals to perform the grant activity have to be obtained.
- Applicant provides a written and an oral report including positive and negative results at the end of the funding period.

4. How many projects will be funded?

A maximum of 12 projects will be funded, depending on the quality of the proposals as judged by the review committee.

5. Who can apply?

Applicants are eligible to submit a proposal if they fulfill all requirements below:

- The applicant has a completed doctoral degree or equivalent qualification,
- The applicant is an employee of a reputable healthcare or healthcare-related organization, university, university hospital, or university of applied sciences, in Switzerland, for the duration of the project,
- The applicant has the agreement of applicant's institution to apply for this grant and carry out the project if it is funded.

It is possible to submit a proposal together with a co-applicant who also fulfills these requirements.

6. How do I apply?

Applications must be submitted online at <https://novartisgrants.smapply.io/>

Applications must be written in English and include:

- Summary of the research project (*max. 200 words; and one slide using the template provided on the submission portal*)
- Background and motivation (*max. 400 words*)
- Hypotheses and specific aims (*max. 400 words*)
- Novelty and potential application if successful (*max. 400 words*)
- Description of "truth telling" experiments, i.e., hypotheses testing experiments that will be conducted within the funding period and that will indicate whether the original idea is valid or not (*max. 400 words*)

7. What is the application deadline?

The submission deadline is **16th March 2025, 23:59h CET.**

8. What are the selection criteria and how does the review work?

Applications that comply with these guidelines will be evaluated by an international review committee chaired by Prof. em. Gerd Folkers, ETH, with six academic and three Novartis scientists, who are experts in the field.

The review committee will decide on funding based on the following criteria:

ORIGINALITY:

- Is the proposal creative, unprecedented and does it have the potential to open novel research directions?
- Even though unproven, is the concept plausible? Or are there reasons to assume upfront that the hypotheses are invalid?

POTENTIAL:

- If successful, does the proposal enable innovation and discovery beyond incremental changes?
- Are the proposed "truth telling" experiments suitable to draw conclusions about the validity of the concept at the end of the funding period?

The following criterion will **not** be considered:

- Scientific track record of the applicant. Reviewers will not see CVs; the project evaluation will be anonymous.

Applicants are not allowed to approach the review committee members (incl. chairman) in relation to their proposal before the funding decision is taken.

9. When will the decisions be communicated? What kind of feedback can I expect?

Applicants will be informed of the decision by **mid-July 2025**.

No reasons for acceptance or rejection of the project proposal or comments made by the reviewers will be communicated.

If accepted by the review committee, a written agreement will be negotiated between the Novartis Research Foundation, the applicant's institution and the applicant, based on the terms and conditions described above, see point 3.

10. In what forum will the results be presented?

Towards the end of the funding period a **FreeNovation Science Forum** will be organized. Project leaders will be invited to present their results orally and on posters to publicize their work and network with scientists from other universities and Novartis.

11. What if I have further questions about FreeNovation?

General information: www.freenovation.ch

Submit your proposal: <https://novartisgrants.smapply.io/>

If you have any questions, contact: myriam.duckely@novartis.com