

Qualification Project (former Milestone Project) – Research Commercialisation from Publicly Funded Research

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Application type: Commercialisation Project

Application deadline: Open-ended

Relevant thematic areas for this call: [Trade and industry](#)

Target groups: Industry, Research organisations

Funding scale: NOK 200 000-500 000

Amount of funding presumed available for this call for proposals:

NOK 75 000 000

Project duration: 3-12 months

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This call has an open-ended deadline. A unique grant application may only be submitted once, whereas calls with a fixed deadline may be submitted and resubmitted multiple times up to the submission deadline. The grant application that is submitted is therefore the one that will be processed. We will provide three months' notification of any significant revisions to the call.

Purpose

The aim of the application type Commercialisation Project is to contribute to increasing commercial exploitation of publicly-funded research in Norway.

The purpose of a qualification project is to undertake initial investigations into the commercial potential of research results that aim to clarify which course to pursue as regards the direction of research, technology development or strategic decisions. The results from a completed Qualification Project will often form the basis for decisions on the subsequent course of commercialisation, and the results can be used to support an application for commercialisation funding in the form of a Proof-of-Concept.

Call for proposals

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About the call for proposals

The Research Council's call for proposals for Qualification Projects is for NOK 75 million. The funding must be used to clarify the commercial potential of promising research results. The anticipated long-term economic gains are increased value creation, sustainability, competition and increased ability to address major societal challenges.

The call is open for applications in all thematic areas.

Norway's funding system targets two different funding gaps in relation to the commercialisation of research results. The first concerns the road from technology to the pre-commercial phase, and the second from the pre-commercial to commercial phase.

The Research Council covers the first phase, from technology to the pre-commercial phase, where there is still close interaction with professional and research communities. At the same time, close dialogue with market players (investors, clients, partners etc.) is strategically important in order to ensure the right technology and risk focus, as is a sufficient trigger effect leading into the next phase after the project's completion.

The call is for proposals for a new Commercialisation Project that has not previously been awarded funding by the Research Council.

The call is available in both Norwegian and English. The Norwegian-language call for proposals is the legally binding version.

State aid

The part of this call for proposals that involves support to start-up companies constitutes a funding scheme that is notified to the EFTA Surveillance Authority. Funding awarded under this scheme is granted in accordance with Article 22 of the General Block Exemption Regulation for state aid (Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014).

This funding scheme must be practised in compliance with the EEA state aid rules. This means that conditions and concepts are to be interpreted in keeping with corresponding conditions and concepts in the state aid rules. In the event of conflict between the text of the call and the state aid rules, the latter will have precedence. The text of the call may be adjusted for this same reason.

State aid may not be given to an undertaking that is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a formal decision by the EFTA Surveillance Authority or the European Commission stating that state aid received is illegal and incompatible with the internal market.

The call for proposals has been approved as an aid scheme by The EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) with the reference: GBER32/2020/R&D&I.

Who is eligible to apply?

The following actors are eligible to seek funding:

- [Approved research organisations](#)
- Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs);
- Start-up enterprises originating from an approved research organisation from which the research results originate, and that fulfils the criteria set out in Article 22 of the EU Commission's General Block Exemption Regulation. Start-ups must enclose a signed declaration from the research organisation's management or its affiliated TTO confirming that the research originated in the said research organisation and that the company has the

necessary rights to further develop its research results for commercial use. Sole proprietorships may not be listed as applicants.

For more information, read the section "Conditions for funding" below.

Who can participate in the project?

Requirements relating to the Project Owner

The organisation listed as the Project Owner in the application form must have authorised the project manager to submit the grant application.

Requirements relating to project partners

Eligible partners include research organisations and TTOs, private or public sector entities and other Norwegian or foreign actors (that carry out economic activity in Norway and have been issued an enterprise number under the Norwegian Register of Business Enterprises).

If the Project Owner is a TTO, the research organisation that owns the intellectual property rights must participate as a project partner.

A project partner may only have one role in the project, i.e. the Project Owner and any partners may not be R&D providers in the project, or vice versa.

For further information, see [Projects requiring collaboration agreements](#).

What can you seek funding for?

Project costs are the actual costs that are necessary to carry out the project. [For more information, see our Budget pages](#).

Typical activities include optimising, clarifying and demonstrating technology concepts and verifying results. Clarifying areas of application, market potential and willingness to pay, and developing business models and strategies. Establishing contact with potential investors, partners, customers and users. "Freedom to operate", prepare and submit patent applications.

The following are examples of costs that cannot be included in the project costs:

- costs related to new PhD- or post-doctoral candidates, but PhD- and post-doctoral candidates can be included in the project group
- licences or purchase of the rights to research results
- costs related to the maintenance of patents, marketing and other operational activities

Scope of funding

Under this call, funding may be sought for up to 100 per cent of the budgeted project costs, and there is no own contribution requirement.

Conditions for funding

Support for research organisations and TTOs:

Approved research organisations and their affiliated TTOs must satisfy the definition of a research and knowledge dissemination organisation set out in the state aid rules:

- Definition in the state aid rules:
'research and knowledge dissemination organisation' or 'research organisation' means an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities, the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, for example in the quality of shareholders or members, may not enjoy a preferential access to the results

generated by it.

Support awarded to research organisations or their affiliated TTOs may only be used to cover project costs related to activities of a non-economic character in the form of knowledge-transfer activities, cf. Item 19(b) of the EFTA Surveillance Authority's guidelines on state aid for research and development and innovation.

Both the Project Owner (research and knowledge dissemination organisation) and any partners that are to receive support must satisfy the definition of a research organisation under the state aid rules. Any other partners will not be eligible to receive support from the Research Council under these projects. Steps must be taken to ensure that no indirect state aid is provided to partner companies through, for example, beneficially priced rights to research results. The collaboration agreement must ensure that the rights to the results are distributed in accordance with item 28 of the EFTA Surveillance Authority's guidelines on state aid for research and development and innovation.

Definition of 'knowledge transfer' in the EFTA Surveillance Authority's guidelines on state aid for research and development and innovation:

'knowledge transfer' means any process which has the aim of acquiring, collecting and sharing explicit and tacit knowledge, including skills and competence in both economic and non-economic activities such as research collaborations, consultancy, licensing, spin-off creation, publication and mobility of researchers and other personnel involved in those activities. Besides scientific and technological knowledge, it includes other kinds of knowledge such as knowledge on the use of standards and regulations embedding them and on conditions of real life operating environments and methods for organisational innovation, as well as management of knowledge related to identifying, acquiring, protecting, defending and exploiting intangible assets.

To be considered part of the research organisation's non-economic activity, the knowledge-transfer activity must, according to the EFTA Surveillance Authority's guidelines, be conducted either by the research organisation itself or jointly with, or on behalf of, other such entities. Additionally, all profits from these activities are to be reinvested in the primary activities of the research organisation. Support for knowledge-transfer activities is not considered to be state aid under these conditions. The non-economic nature of these activities is not compromised by contracting the provision of such services by third parties by way of open tenders.

The Research Council requires a clear separation of accounts for the research organisation's economic and non-economic activities.

For more information, see [Conditions for awarding state aid](#).

Support for start-ups

Support for start-ups constitutes state aid according to Article 61 of the EEA Agreement. Support is granted in accordance with Article 22 of the General Block Exemption Regulation: Aid for start-ups.

Article 22 states that support can only be awarded to enterprises that:

- are not listed on the stock exchange;
- have not been registered in the Register of Business Enterprises for five years or more;
- have not taken over the activity of another enterprise;
- have not issued dividends;
- are not the result of a merger.

In addition to the requirements under Article 22, the Research Council sets the following requirements:

- the enterprise does not have more than 10 employees;
- the balance sheet of the enterprise is not to exceed NOK 2 million.

When assessing an enterprise's size, consideration must also be given to the number of employees and the turnover/balance sheet for companies with a holding of 25 per cent or more of the capital or voting rights or in which the enterprise itself has a holding of 25 per cent or more of the capital or voting rights. See the definition of the concept, "small and medium-sized

enterprises” or “SMEs”, in the General Block Exemption Regulation: Aid for start-ups, Annex I, as well as in [the EU Commission’s User guide to the SME definition](#).

Archiving of research data

The Project Owner (company/research organisation) is responsible for selecting which archiving solution(s) to use for storing research data generated during the project. The Project Owner must specify the planned solution(s) in connection with the revised grant proposal.

Typical characteristics of the project

- The project is based on promising research results (not open source) that are sufficiently robust to contribute to developing new products, processes and services that represent significant improvements relative to existing solutions (state-of-the-art) within the same area.
- The project is in a pre-commercial phase, defined by the applicant not already having received revenues from products and/or services related to this project.
- The project will undertake initial investigations that aim to clarify which course to pursue, whether the direction of research, technology development or strategic decisions.
- The project is clear about what it seeks to achieve, clarify and/or trigger on completion.

Termination of contract

It is important that the approved milestones are met by the stipulated deadlines. This will be given particular weight when assessing whether to continue providing support or to terminate the contract.

Other examples of key issues that can lead to amendment or termination of a contract include the following:

- the conditions set out in the call and the approved prerequisites for funding are not met
- the project is not progressing according to plan
- key partners are no longer involved in the project
- the project no longer has access to critical and necessary resources or equipment
- new results or new information become available that substantially diminish the commercial potential of the project

Relevant thematic areas for this call

Funding for the projects comes from the Research Council’s different budget items that are earmarked for industry-oriented R&D.

The Research Council emphasises ensuring a balanced portfolio of supported projects, both within the thematic areas and through representation of projects across sectors and disciplines.

Trade and industry

The call is open to all topics, but we would like the applicant to link their grant application to one or more of the industries and markets listed below. Remember to tick the topics/markets that are relevant to the grant application in the application form.

Building, construction and mining, Animal health, Energy, Finance and banking, Fisheries and aquaculture, Health industry, ICT industry, Agriculture, Aviation, Maritime industry, Food, Media and communication, The environment, Food industry, Oil, gas, Police, fire and rescue, defence, Processing industry, Travel and tourism, Space exploration, Shipping, Forests and wood, Smart city, Gaming and entertainment, Sports, training, Textile industry, Telecommunications, Transport and communications, Education, Retail/wholesale, Manufacturing industry, Other services

Practical information

Requirements for this application type

Applications must be created and submitted via My RCN Web. This call has an open-ended deadline. A unique grant application may only be submitted once, whereas calls with a fixed deadline may be submitted and resubmitted multiple times up to the submission deadline. The grant application that is submitted is therefore the one that will be processed.

If the project has previously applied for funding for a Qualification Project and the application was rejected, it must be clearly stated at the start of the project description what has changed since the previous application.

All project costs must be budgeted in accordance with [Calculating payroll and indirect expenses](#).

A complete application consists of the online application form and the mandatory attachments. The application and all attachments must be submitted in English. All attachments must be uploaded in PDF format.

All requirements set out in the call must be met. Applications that do not meet the formal requirements, or requirements relating to the Project Owner, collaboration and roles in the project, will not be considered.

Use the templates for attachments where specified. There is no technical validation of the content of the attachments, so please make sure that you use the correct templates and upload the correct files for the selected type of attachment.

Links in the application form or project description to websites and documents, as well as other attachments than those specified above, will not be considered in the application review process.

All the templates for attachments are available for download at the end of the call for proposals.

Mandatory attachments

- A project description of maximum five pages, using the designated project description template.
- CVs for the project manager and other key project participants, using the designated template.
- Start-ups must include a signed letter of confirmation from the research organisation stating that the project is based on research conducted by a specified institution, that the research results have not been published and that the company has the necessary rights to develop their research results for commercial use. Use the designated template.
- Additional information about the project, using the designated template.
- A one-page project summary using the designated template.

Optional attachments

Letters of intent from potential customers, industrial partners or other project partners.

Assessment criteria

Project proposals will be assessed in relation to the following criteria:

Excellence

To what extent is the project based on promising R&D results (not open source) that are sufficiently mature and will thereby contribute to developing new products, processes and

services that will be significant improvements relative to existing solutions (state-of-the-art) within the same area?

i. Research results:

- To what extent is the research base underlying the project adequately described, and to what extent are the results considered to be sufficiently mature to initiate a process towards commercialisation?

ii. Degree of innovation:

- To what extent is the state-of-the-art described and to what extent do the research results represent innovation that can contribute to significant improvements of existing solutions (state-of-the-art) within the same area?

Impact

To what extent does the project have long-term potential for value creation and how likely is it that the innovation will be successfully realised?

i. Market insight and areas of application:

- To what extent are potential areas of application/markets targeted by the project quantified and accounted for?
- To what extent is the competition situation identified and accounted for?

ii. Strategy for realisation:

- To what extent does the application outline a realistic long-term strategy for realising the innovation, and to what extent are the details considered to be sufficiently accounted for given the project's current level or maturity, e.g. investment needs, human resources needs, expected revenues, logistics distribution etc.?

iii. Risks, conditions and rights:

- To what extent does the application explain the full risk situation and the conditions and rights that must be in place for successful commercialisation?

iv. Benefit to society and sustainability:

- To what extent are the relevant societal challenges and the potential impacts of the project accounted for?

Implementation

To what extent is the project sufficiently feasible, and does the application clearly outline what the project seeks to achieve, clarify and/or trigger upon completion?

i. Project plan:

- To what extent does the application outline a realistic implementation plan, including milestones, deliveries, activities and methods, which are clearly based on what the project seeks to achieve, clarify or trigger upon completion?
- To what extent does the application adequately and convincingly outline the anticipated results of the project upon completion?

ii. Management, team and expertise:

- To what extent is the project considered to have access to the necessary resources and expertise, and to what extent does the project have a plan for involving external actors (mentors, customers, partners, investors, stakeholders, relevant social actors etc.)?

iii. Budget:

- To what extent is the budget and the financing realistic, cost-effective, and clearly rooted in the project's plans and resource needs?

Relevance to the call for proposals

The extent to which the project satisfies the guidelines and stipulations set out in the call for proposals.

The Research Council will attach importance to achieving a balanced project portfolio and will also act in accordance with the Research Council's general policy for allocation of funding, including policy on:

- research ethics perspectives
- prioritisation of projects led by women project managers, assuming all other quality-related factors are essentially equal.
- prioritisation of projects based on the impact on sustainability and the environment, assuming all other quality-related factors are essentially equal

Administrative procedures

Applications will be assessed by the Research Council's case officers. Each application will be considered by at least two case officers. The results of the assessment are summarised as an 'overall mark', which represents the overall assessment of the application.

The Research Council administration will present the project proposals and their respective marks for the final funding decision. The Chief Executive of the Research Council is the granting authority and makes the final decision regarding funding awards. In the application process, the Research Council places emphasis on prioritising the best projects and on the assessments that are made being well-grounded. The assessments will thus be valuable feedback to applicants, regardless of whether their project is granted funding.

Please note that rejected applications that are resubmitted without significant changes to the project and project application will be considered on the basis of the original assessment.

Expected funding decision

Applications will be assessed by the Research Council's case officers on an ongoing basis. Applicants will be notified of the funding decision as soon as possible (normally within two to four weeks) and no later than three months after the application was submitted.

When a project is recommended for funding, more information about the project and any project partners will be required.

Create application

Applications for Qualification Project (former Milestone Project) – Research Commercialisation from Publicly Funded Research should be created on My RCN Web. Application templates should be filled and uploaded in the application.

[Create application](#)

Download templates

	Template for Project Description - Qualification.docx	
	CV Template.docx	
	Declaration from Technology Transfer Office (TTO) or Research Organisation (RO).docx	
	Additional Information for Commercialisation Projects.docx	
	Onepage presentation.pptx	

[Download all templates](#) ↴