LEO FOUNDATION

Serendipity Grants

Information and guidelines for applicants

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Information about the call

Grant amount: Up to DKK 4 million for up to two years

Call opens: 04 December 2026
Call deadline: 03 February 2027 (16:00 CEST)

Application notification: September 2027

Earliest grant start date: 1 January 2028
Latest grant start date: 1 January 2029

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Further information:

https://leo-foundation.org/en/grants-and-awards/serendipity-grants/

1 Serendipity Grants

1.1 Purpose

Serendipity Grants target current LEO Foundation grantees. Its purpose is to enable explorative investigations of novel and unexpected – i.e., serendipitous – discoveries made, or ideas conceived, by the grantee during an ongoing research project funded by the LEO Foundation.

The discovery or idea must pose a significant digression from the original funded project (i.e., not merely be the "logical next step") and may even reside outside the primary research focus of the applicant. The discovery or idea must be at an early stage of maturity where it would be unlikely to receive support via other LEO Foundation funding programs.

Important: Many research projects will generate interesting findings that are not serendipitous, but still highly relevant to pursue. LEO Foundation grantees who have obtained interesting results within the scope of their ongoing project are encouraged to apply for a Research Grant in Open Competition during or after the final year of their LEO Foundation grant. If you are not sure whether your idea is eligible for Serendipity Grants, we recommend that you contact the Foundation or explore the already awarded Serendipity Grants and how their serendipitous discoveries came about (https://leo-foundation.org/en/grant-category/serendipity-grants/).

1.2 Supported areas of research

Serendipity Grants may be used for exploring novel discoveries or ideas within all aspects of life science research from basic understanding of molecular principles over translational and epidemiological studies to clinical implementation and technology development. Importantly, the discovery or idea must be born out of the applicant's work on an existing LEO Foundation-funded research project. The grant cannot be used for for-profit purposes.

1.3 Eligibility – who can apply

All LEO Foundation grantees holding an active research grant may apply for a Serendipity Grant. This includes PIs at LEO Foundation-funded centers.

1.4 The evaluation process

All applications submitted will be administratively screened for eligibility and mandatory requirements.

If approved as eligible, the application will undergo external peer review.

1.5 Evaluation criteria

The proposal will be evaluated based upon three main criteria – the discovery or idea, the proposed research plan, and the potential outcome(s):

- **The discovery or idea** will be evaluated on novelty, validity as target for further exploration and suitability for support within the Serendipity Grants.
- **The research plan** will be evaluated based on how well it is designed to support further maturation of the initial idea or discovery, to what extent it demonstrates the use of relevant resources (scientific capacity and critical infrastructure) and to what extent the proposal is groundbreaking or represents a high risk/high gain approach.
- **The possible outcome(s)/impact** of the proposed explorative study will be evaluated based on the strength of the anticipated results as described in the application to form a successful basis for further investigations and the potential to lead to full-scale scientific or clinical breakthroughs.

1.6 Application content

The application in its entirety including all appendices must be written in English.

The project plan should be laid out under the tab Project Details as follows:

- **Scientific abstract** (max 1,500 characters incl. spaces): Please provide a short abstract of your proposal aimed at scientists that may work outside your field of expertise. This will be used by the LEO Foundation and its external peer reviewers in the evaluation process. Structure it according to the following headers: Vision; Plan; Impact.
- **Background** (max 4,000 characters incl. spaces): Please provide relevant background information, e.g., previous work done in the field and how the current proposal adds to this, hypothesis, aims etc.
- **Project Strategy and Approach** (max 12,000 characters incl. spaces): This is the main section of the application where you outline your project plan, e.g., experiments to be performed, analyses to be made, methodology to be used, statistics, deliverables etc.
- **Project Literature References** (max 5,000 characters incl. spaces): Please list all publications referenced in the proposal. Preferably with direct links to, e.g., PubMed or another online resource.
- **Project Team and Resources** (max 1,500 characters incl. spaces): Please describe the competencies of the project group and the research environment in form of accessibility to essential infrastructure, relevant host organization support etc.
- **Project Significance and Impact** (max 1,500 characters incl. spaces): Please provide your vision on how the project may make a significant contribution to the field of research, how it may be used for developing better treatments or other relevant impact measures.
- **Layman's abstract** (max 1,000 characters incl. spaces): Please provide a short layman presentation of your project pinpointing which problem you aim to solve, why, and how. If you are awarded a grant, the LEO Foundation will use this text for publication, typically aimed at a science-interested public. It should not contain any confidential or IP-related information.

1.7 Mandatory appendices

Please upload your CV and a graphical visualization of the proposal as mandatory attachments (see below for details).

Requirements for mandatory attachments:

CV (maximum five pages) structured in the following order:

- Academic employment(s)
- Education
- Academic Awards and recognition
- Teaching, supervision, and mentoring experience
- Short description of main scientific focus area
- List of current active funding (funder, title, and total amount (including information on applicant's share in %, if shared)
- Short bibliographic overview summarizing total number of peer-reviewed publications, number of first and last/corresponding authorships, number of citations, and h-index
- Detailed list of Top 10 publications by applicant (including doi or direct link to relevant database, e.g., Scopus, Pubmed or similar)

1-page graphical visualization of the current proposal structured by 1) Description of the serendipitous discovery or idea in the setting of the currently funded project, 2) High-level suggestive approach for the exploration and 3) Anticipated outcome(s) (See here for suggestive examples).

1.8 Funding

A Serendipity Grant has an upper limit of DKK 4 million. Funding may be requested for the following items:

- Salary and mandatory benefits for main applicant
- Salary and mandatory benefits for project-group members (scientific and technical)
- Running costs / operating expenses incl. bench fees
- Equipment
- Publication costs
- Travel and conference expenses (conference support only for active participation)
- Indirect administrative costs up to 5%

For Danish universities, administrative costs and bench fees are replaced by project supplements. (See page 10)

Costs not covered include: Salary for student workers, graduates and undergraduates (i.e., below PhD student level).

2 How to submit an application

All applications must be submitted through the online portal LEOnora (https://leo-foundation.smartsimple.ie)

2.1 User registration

If you access the system for the first time you will need to create a user account. Upon initial registration you will receive an email with an activation link which must be activated within two hours to confirm your account. In case you exceed this limit, you may request a new from the “Forgot password” link. If you are a returning user, simply log in with your existing credentials. Remember that your password will need renewal every 90 days.

2.2 Completing your profile

Once logged in you will need to complete all mandatory fields of your user account profile before you can create applications for any open calls. In addition to the mandatory fields, we recommend that you add your academic or business title under “Job title”. Your profile can be accessed by clicking the circle with your Initials in the top right corner of the dashboard.

2.3 Creating an application

First, you will need to identify the correct call. Current calls (recently closed, active and coming) can be found in the list at the bottom of your dashboard when logged in but only the active can be accessed. Some of these calls may include a very short eligibility quiz. You create a draft application for an active call by pressing “Apply Now” for that call. Once created, you can edit the application and save changes at any time until the submission deadline for the related call.

NOTE: Remember to press “Save draft” to save any changes.

2.4 Structure of the application form

The application form consists of several sub-sections (tabs) which are explained in detail below. For most fields there are guidance and/or tooltips available within the system. If you experience any problems, feel free to contact the LEO Foundation at applications@leofoundation.org. Please note that the text fields only accept plain text formatting so any rich text formatting which is copied in will be lost.

Section 1, Applicant details: This tab is partly auto-populated from the user account profile. Optionally, you can indicate your nationality.

Section 2, Project information: This tab includes information on the original project on which the application is based, the project title for the current application, proposed start and end dates of the grant period and categorization of the project:

- **Original grant ID:** Please select the appropriate grant ID for the original, and still active, grant using the drop-down. If the grant is not in the list, please select "Application not in LEOnora" and enter the ID manually in the "Input original grant ID" field that appears. For PIs at centers please use the Center grant ID.
- **Original grant ID application:** If the application for the currently funded project is not available in LEOnora, please use this field to upload a PDF-version of the application. For center PI's please upload a short description (max 1 p) of the Center'related work that forms the basis for the serendipitous discovery.
- **Project title:** A short, concise title for the proposed work
- **Proposed start and end dates:** Please indicate your preferred start and end dates of the project (both days included and a combined maximum of 2 years). Please bear in mind that the earliest possible grant period start date for this call is 1 January 2027.
- **Project type:** Please indicate the overall category of the proposed project:
    - Basic research
    - Translational research
    - Clinical research
    - Epidemiological research
    - Technology development
    - Other (Save and specify in text box)
- **Main research area of proposal** (maximum 250 characters): Please briefly describe the high-level research field of the proposal.

Section 3, Project details: In this tab, you present your project proposal. Please adhere to the guidance indicated under "Application content" above.

Section 3a, Appendices: Please upload all mandatory documents as PDF files (.PDF). See section "Mandatory appendices" above for specific requirements.

In addition to the mandatory documents, you can upload up to four (4) figures in support of the application either through the regular upload field as PDFs or through the Image Upload Field (.jpg or .png format only). Please ensure sufficiently high resolution for proper evaluation. Please add figure number and legend or caption to each figure.

Section 4, Project participants:

- **Project group member(s):** Please include all active participants of the project who will be benefiting directly from the funding, excluding the main applicant. A one-page mandatory CV must be uploaded as a PDF file under "Project group member CV(s)" for everyone listed here.
- **Project affiliations:** Should include all contributing project partners not benefiting directly from the funding. Should only be included if relevant for the application.

Section 5, Requested budget:

Please note that the Serendipity Grants are limited to a maximum of two years and up to DKK 4 million in combined requested funding from the LEO Foundation (i.e., including any requested administrative costs or project supplements)

Detailed budget (NB: must be provided in Danish kroner (DKK)): Here, you specify details of the budget for the proposed work including budget year, type (e.g., salary, equipment, travel, publication etc.), requested amount (in DKK), actual or potential funding source (e.g., LEO Foundation, host organization, other funder etc.) and a brief, high level description (max 1,000 char-acters including spaces) of the individual budget items. Once you close the pop-up form remember to press "Save Draft" to ensure that the main budget page is updated. Remember to add only direct costs as the selected percentage for administration costs (up to 5%) is added automatically.

Note on salaries: The Foundation will not support salary posts that are already covered by existing base salary or any other funding. In particular, if salary for PIs or co-applicants at the level of Assistant Professor or higher is requested, it is mandatory to provide an explanation as to why these posts are required by the host institution and what exactly they cover (e.g., simply stating "fringe" or "benefits" is not acceptable). Please use the "Salary for existing full-time employee(s) justification" field for such purpose.

Additional information: Here, you specify if you would like to request administrative costs (up to 5%), add information on the total number of people to receive salary from the LEO Foundation during the project and add an estimate of the average annual full-time equivalents (FTE) for the project – e.g., if a postdoc works 100% and a technician works 50% on the project you should add 1.5 in this field. Remember to press "Save draft" again after specifying overhead to update the budget calculations.

FOR DANISH UNIVERSITIES ONLY: PROJECT SUPPLEMENTS FOR RESEARCH GRANTS

Project supplements contribute to the coverage of indirect costs incurred at Danish universities and replace budget posts such as administrative costs, bench fees, etc.

Please visit Universities Denmark's website for detailed guidelines on project supplements. Questions concerning project supplements should be directed to the research support staff at your university.

Kindly note that the organization that your user account is affiliated with determines your access to either project supplements or administrative costs in the budget. If you are affiliated with both a Danish university and another research institutions, you must create your application from a user account affiliated with the relevant institution.

If your applicant profile is associated with a Danish university, project supplements will be calculated and included in your budget automatically:

- If you apply for salary for PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, or research/clinical assistants, select the salary budget type 'Group B/C' (cf. appendix A in Universities Denmark's guidelines)
- Fill in salary costs, associated FTE, research type, and funding source:
  - FTE: Full-time equivalent, i.e., the proportion of a full-time position that the requested funding will support per project year
  - Research type: 'Wet' covers natural, health and technical sciences; 'Dry' covers humanities and social sciences
- Fill in position type in the text box

Section 6, Host approval and grant terms: By ticking the box you acknowledge that your host organization approves that the project can be performed there, that your project group member(s) and project affiliations agree to participate, and that you have read and understood the current Grant Terms.

2.5 Submitting the application

Once you have completed your application, you can submit it by pressing "Submit". It is your responsibility to check the generated application PDF before submitting to ensure that all sections are readable and that all mandatory elements are included.

If any mandatory elements are missing, you will not be able to submit, and you will be presented with a list of missing elements. Correcting the missing elements may take time, so we recommend that you initiate and complete your application well in advance of the application deadline.

You will be notified by email if there are changes requested to your application or if any decision has been made.

The LEO Foundation

The LEO Foundation is one of the largest private funders of independent skin research at universities and hospitals worldwide.

The Foundation provides philanthropic grants to support research that pioneers new discoveries and transforms our understanding of the skin and its diseases.

The LEO Foundation has awarded more than DKK 1.8 billion in total funding to independent research.

www.leo-foundation.org