

INTO INNOVATION AWARD

Call for nominations: Into Innovation Award 2026

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Call for nominations: Into Innovation Award 2026

Denmark is defined by its spirit of invention and innovation, and have contributed with innovations and new technology within life science, green transition, digitalization, space and security and many more areas that have had far-reaching impact – not only shaping Danish society but also contributing to progress in numerous fields both in Europe and globally.

However, as the Draghi Report have highlighted, EU's competitiveness and strategic autonomy is under pressure as the technology and innovation gap is widening in relation to global competitors. The current geopolitical climate further highlights the urgency of addressing this trend.

Scientific breakthroughs and strengthened innovative capacity are prerequisites for addressing these major societal challenges facing Denmark and the EU. In addition, there is also a huge untapped potential in translating the high quality of research, technology and knowledge that is created at the research institutions into commercial deep-tech innovation and entrepreneurship. Focus in Denmark have thus shifted to improving innovative capacity, by creating better access to capital and strengthen the role of research institutions as engines of innovation and knowledge-based growth and for ensuring continued growth and job creation of the future.

The Into Innovation Award thus aims to recognise new role models among researchers, innovators, or collaborative groups that have made significant contributions to knowledge-driven innovation through the creation of start-ups or established scale-ups.

1. Objective

With the Into Innovation award¹, a researcher, innovator, or group of collaborators will be recognised for their role in either founding one or more knowledge-based start-ups or scale-ups, or for having played a key role in enabling others to do so based on research.

Special emphasis will be placed on the degree of innovation and the scaling potential of the established start-up(s) or scale-up(s).

The award consists of an honorary award of DKK 200,000, along with a grant of DKK 2,000,000, which may be used to fund research and innovation activities either within the prize recipients' area of expertise or within the supported start-up(s) or scale-up(s). The honorary award of DKK 200,000 will be paid directly to the individual recipient or shared equally among the members of a group.

The Into Innovation Award is presented by the Danish Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Digital Affairs and is made possible in 2026 through a generous contribution from Innovation Fund Denmark.

All nominations for the Innovation Award will be assessed by expert panel members from Innovation Fund Denmark's established committees. Based on these assessments the Board of Directors of Innovation Fund Denmark recommends the most qualified candidates to the Minister for Science, Higher Education and Digital Affairs for final selection.

¹ www.ufm.dk/en/into-innovation

2. Who can be nominated?

The prize is awarded to researchers or innovators working at Danish higher education and research institutions or to individuals who have committed fully to their start-ups or scale-ups and are working there full-time, or to collaborative groups comprising members from academic institutions, start-ups, or other sectors².

Eligible higher education and research institutions includes universities, university hospitals, sector research institutions, university colleges, business academies, art academies, maritime education institutions, or GTS institutes.

If an individual nominee is currently employed full-time at a start-up or scale-up, they must have a previous affiliation with a Danish higher education and research institution beyond simply having earned a higher education degree. Acceptable prior affiliations include roles such as teacher or researcher, either full-time or part-time, including PhD studies. The start-up or scale-up must be currently based in Europe.

In the case of group nominations, nominators must designate a group leader or representative. The group leader or representative must have a current or previous affiliation with a Danish higher education and research institution. This is not required of other group members.

All nominees must be persons and must be named in the nomination form.

Groups of Collaborators

By allowing the nomination of collaborative groups, the award also aims to acknowledge the collective efforts behind some innovative ventures – whether through start-ups or scale-ups with multiple founders, structured projects and incubators, or informal networks and communities. There are no specific requirements regarding the structure or composition of a collaborative group, as this can vary widely across scientific disciplines and innovation contexts. However, the maximum number of individuals in a nominated group is five. Nominators must provide a description of the composition and nature of the group, including the names of all members proposed as potential prize recipients.

Letters of support may also be submitted, including from partners at foreign research institutions, private companies, start-ups, or other relevant organisations.

Who can nominate?

Nominations are invited through an open call. Nominations can be submitted by Danish universities, university hospitals, sector research institutions, university colleges, business academies, art academies and maritime education institutions or GTS-institutes. Danish private and public foundations³, academies of letters and sciences, etc., can also submit nominations.

Self-nominations are not accepted. All nominees must be living.

² Please note that nominated individuals or groups that would like to use the award to support economic activities in start-ups or scale-ups, must comply with EU state aid rules and the conditions set out in the *de minimis* Regulation (Commission Regulation (EU) No. 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023).

³ Innovation Fund Denmark may not submit nominations, as it participates in the award decision process.

3. Assessment criteria

When assessing nominated candidates for the award, the following criteria will be considered. Nominators must motivate the nomination, stating clearly in what ways the candidate(s) meet these criteria.

It is expected that each criterion mentioned below be addressed as fully as possible in the nomination letter, as well as in any accompanying letters of support, CVs, and lists of publications or relevant activities.

Nominators should explicitly describe how the nominee(s) fulfil the following three overarching criteria:

- 1) Significance of the contributions to knowledge-based start-ups or scale-ups
- 2) The innovation and scaling potential
- 3) Societal impact and significance

The individual assessment will be based on a concrete, overall evaluation, in that the various criteria may be fulfilled to a greater or lesser extent.

1. Significance of the Contribution to Knowledge-Based Start-Ups or Scale-Ups

The researcher(s), innovator(s), or group of collaborators must have made a significant contribution to the creation of one or more knowledge-based start-ups or scale-ups, or played a key role in collaborative initiatives that led to the establishment of such ventures with economic scaling potential.

2. Level of Innovation and Scaling Potential

The start-up(s) or scale-up(s) should demonstrate a high degree of innovation⁴ – for example, through the development of novel products, applications, processes, technological advancements, enabling technologies or platforms, or through serial entrepreneurship that creates new ventures or capabilities that can scale up globally. Metrics for measuring the level of innovation and scaling potential can also include the ability to attract financing and capital investments, or customer validation. It can also be the ability – especially if it's concerning scale-ups – of generating growth in employees or revenue that can scale over time. It will be considered an advantage if the innovations involve critical technologies as defined by the European Commission.

3. Societal Impact

The start-up(s) or scale-up(s) should have achieved – or show credible potential to achieve – measurable and lasting societal impact by addressing major global challenges e.g., climate, digitalisation, health, demographics, or security. Impact may take the form of changed practices, improved environmental or enhanced quality of life. It may be broad (affecting large populations) or deep (transforming key sectors or systems). It can also be socio-economic impacts through innovation that have the potential to disrupt markets or cause sectoral transition that helps securing jobs for the future.

⁴ Innovation is defined according to the [OSLO-manual](#)

4. Requirements for the Nomination

Nominations can be submitted via the online system e-grant (www.e-grant.dk) to the Danish Innovation Fund.

Contents of the Nomination

A justification for the nomination (in English), in accordance with the assessment criteria outlined in section three. The justification is entered into three text boxes in the nomination form on e-grant contain the following:

1. Description of the contributions of nominees to knowledge-based start-ups or scale-ups: Provide a brief description of how the nominated researcher, innovator, or group of collaborators has contributed to the founding of start-up(s) and/or to a collaborative effort that has fostered knowledge-based start-up(s) or scale-up(s). Describe the scientific research, knowledge or technology component on which the start-up(s) or scale-up(s) are based (3,000 characters incl. spaces).

In the case of groups, please describe the contributions of each individual candidate. An extended version of this section may be submitted for group nominations (4,000 characters incl. spaces).

2. Description of the innovation level and scaling potential: Describe the level of innovation and scaling potential of the start-up(s) or scale-up(s), including the novelty and scalability of the innovation and the business model or economic metrics. Describe how the research, knowledge or technology component has been translated into the development and commercialisation of new products, practical applications, processes, and/or technological advances. This section should not exceed 3,000 characters incl. spaces, unless the nomination covers multiple start-up cases. In that case, an extended version may be submitted (4,000 characters incl. spaces).

3. Description of societal impact and significance: Describe how the start-ups or scale-ups have achieved – or have the potential to achieve – significant and lasting societal impact. This may include changes in practices or environmental outcomes, or improved quality of life, or socio-economic effects etc. (1,000 characters incl. spaces).

4. Letters of support: The nomination may include letters of support from involved start-ups, scale-ups, or other organisations recognising the contributions of the nominee(s). While not mandatory, letters of support can serve as a positive indicator. A maximum of five (5) letters of support can be included with each nomination (1,000 characters incl. spaces per letter).

The nomination must include the name and contact information of the formal nominator/author of the justification/nomination. All members of the nominated research group must have agreed to proceed with the nomination.

The following appendices must be attached to the nomination in PDF format:

- A. CVs (in English)
- B. Selected list of publications and activities (in English)
- C. Letters of support from involved start-ups, scale-ups, or other organisations (optional but recommended)

Please note: The CV and selective list of publications and activities should not exceed five (5) A4

pages in total per person in the group.

5. Process and further details

The Into Innovation Award will be disbursed at the end of 2026. The total award of DKK 2,200,000 will be awarded as a grant for distribution to a single recipient or split between a group of recipients. The award consists of an honorary award of DKK 200,000, along with a grant of DKK 2,000,000. Innovation Fund Denmark has contributed DKK 1,000,000 of the total award in 2026.

The grant of DKK 2,000,000 will be awarded as a framework grant either to the recipients' institution or directly to the start-up or scale-up where the recipients are employed. It must be used within three years.

Award recipients will be required to submit a brief budget detailing the intended use of the grant. In the case of group recipients, the budget must also indicate how the funds will be divided among group members. Please note that the grant must be administered by one of the recipient's place of employment, either at a Danish higher education and research institution or at a start-up or scale-up.

If the prize is awarded to recipients employed at Danish higher education and research institutions, it includes overhead costs and must be administered by the recipients' place of employment.

If awarded to recipients that wants to use the award for supporting economic activities in their start-ups or scale-ups, the grant falls under the scope of the EU State aid de minimis rules, as the amount is below the threshold of EUR 300,000 over a rolling three-year period. Consequently, the grant must comply with the conditions set out in the de minimis Regulation (Commission Regulation (EU) No. 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023), (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202302831). Before the aid can be granted for supporting economic activities the undertaking concerned have to submit a declaration about any other de minimis aid received to which this Regulation or other de minimis regulations apply over any period of three years.

The personal honorary award will go directly to an individual or be equally divided among all prize winners.

Incomplete nominations will be assessed only on the basis of the materials submitted.

For the nomination to be given active consideration, the following requirements should be met:

- The nomination must be received before the nomination deadline.
- The nomination is submitted via e-grant (www.e-grant.dk)
- The nominated candidate must have a current or previous affiliation with a Danish higher education and research institution.
- In the case of group nominations, the group leader/representative must have a current or former affiliation with a Danish higher education and research institution.
- The start-up(s) or scale-up(s) must be currently located in Europe.
- Nominations must respect the group size limit (no more than five people).

Submitted nominations will be assessed by expert panel members from Innovation Fund Den-

mark's established committees. Based on these assessments, the Board of Directors of Innovation Fund Denmark select a shortlist of the most qualified candidates to the Minister for Science, Higher Education and Digital Affairs. The final award recipient will be selected by the Minister for Science, Higher Education and Digital Affairs.

Evaluation of the nominations and selection of award recipient will be completed by November 2026. The award ceremony is expected to take place in Copenhagen 16 December 2026 (date to be confirmed).

Timeline:

- 10 June 2026: Submission of nominations opens
- 14 August 2026: Submission of nominations closes
- August-October: Assessment of nominations
- October: Shortlisted nominees are notified and announced
- November: Award recipients are notified
- December 2026: Award recipients are announced
- 16 December, 2026: Award ceremony (date to be confirmed)

6. Research integrity and research security

Award recipients are expected to comply with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

Due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, nominations involving participants employed at Russian or Belarusian institutions will not be accepted. Furthermore, award funds may not be used for research activities in Russia or Belarus.

Award recipients will be asked to submit a budget detailing the intended distribution of funds and the planned research and innovation activities. Based on this, prize recipients will receive a grant letter, further detailing these and similar expectations.

All nominees from Danish higher education and research institutions are also expected to comply with the administering institution's implementation of the recommendations outlined in the European Commission's Council Recommendation on Enhancing Research Security of 23 May 2024 on enhancing research security (C/2024/3510).

7. Deadline for submission of nominations

The deadline for submission of nominations is 14 August 2026 at 12:00 noon (CET).

8. Processing of personal data

Documents containing personal data are registered and processed in accordance with the Access

to Public Administration Files Act (*offentlighedsloven*) and transferred to the national archive system of Denmark in accordance with the Archives Act. After transferring data to the national archive system of Denmark, the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science will preserve a copy of the documents for around five years, after which the data will be deleted by the Agency.

9. Contact

For further information, please contact the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science via e-mail at intoinnovation@ufm.dk