

Call

Strategic Defence Initiative 2026–2029

Strategic Research and Innovation Centres in Defence Technology and Security

Application deadline phase 1: 30. juni 2026 kl. 12.00

Investment period: 2026–2029¹

Total budget for the call: Minimum 585 mio. kr.²

Maximum Innovation Fund Denmark investment level: Up to 90,0 pct. of the total budget

About the initiative

The security situation in Europe is rapidly evolving. Geopolitical tensions and a more fragmented international system are creating new and complex threats to our societies. This development places increasing demands on the ability to rapidly develop, mature, and apply advanced technologies for defence and security purposes in order to strengthen Danish and European resilience and strategic autonomy.

On this basis, Innovation Fund Denmark is investing in the establishment of up to four strategic research and innovation centres in the period 2026–2029, cf. the Agreements on the allocation of the research reserve for 2026–2029. The centres must be based on existing Danish research strengths and focus on areas that both support the operational needs of the Armed Forces and are critical to Danish supply security.

The initiative aims to strengthen national and allied capacity building and accelerate the development of defence and security technologies with the potential for rapid, effective, and direct application. The centres are thus expected to contribute directly to increased combat capability, strengthened supply security, and societal resilience.

The initiative is mission-driven and based on active portfolio management. The centres will be established as committed partnerships built on a challenge-driven approach, where activities are based on concrete operational needs and translated into a project portfolio organised around milestones and tipping points.

Progress and results form the basis for continuous prioritisation, go/no-go decisions, and further funding. For the centre grant, monitoring and disbursement are handled directly by Innovation Fund Denmark, while the project portfolio is implemented in tranches within reserved frameworks under the Fund's existing programmes. A focused and risk-tolerant approach is applied to rapid development, testing, and implementation of solutions. Priority is given to projects with high technological maturity and a short path to application.

¹ All grants under this call are awarded subject to the availability of funds in the annual Finance Acts.

² Innovation Fund Denmark may decide to increase the total budget for this call, particularly in cases of surplus funds and a significant number of high-quality applications that cannot be funded within the original budget.

Innovation Fund Denmark allocates the funding through open competition via a two-phase application process:

- Phase 1: Submission of an expression of interest including a roadmap
- Phase 2: Full application (by invitation only)

Phase 1 aims to explore a broad range of potential centre concepts, while Phase 2 involves prioritisation and selection based on the strategic objectives of the initiative and the overall portfolio.

As part of Phase 1, Innovation Fund Denmark invites relevant stakeholders to submit an expression of interest including a roadmap. The roadmap must include clear and measurable milestones and success criteria that can form the basis for monitoring and decisions on tranche funding. To ensure high quality, rapid start-up, and effective use of existing experience, the project portfolio must be built on Innovation Fund Denmark's existing instruments and programmes³, where guidelines, processes, and impacts are well documented.

The centres' professional evaluation and prioritisation of projects must be based on objective, operational, and documented criteria, and follow procedures that ensure transparency, impartiality, and traceability in decision-making. These criteria and procedures must be defined in advance and be subject to review as part of Innovation Fund Denmark's supervision and follow-up. As the Fund's financing is limited to the granted period, an exit strategy for the initiative after four years must be described, including considerations for future anchoring and transfer of responsibility for ongoing activities and projects.

Applications will be assessed based on predefined criteria, and the strongest applications overall will be invited to Phase 2.

Research and Innovation Centres in Defence Technology

The strategic research and innovation centres will be established as broad national partnerships, bringing together key stakeholders from research, industry, and public authorities to collaborate on the development of technologies critical to Denmark's defence and security.

These partnerships will integrate core competencies across the innovation ecosystem and ensure strong linkages between research, technological development, application, and commercialisation. The collaboration is intended to support the strategic direction of each centre and enable the effective delivery of research and innovation activities.

Purpose of the Centre Establishment

The national centres must build on existing Danish strengths and have the potential to develop solutions in areas that support the operational needs of the Armed Forces and are critical to Danish supply security.

The funding must be additional and may not replace existing or planned baseline funding for university units, nor may it be used to establish new strengths from scratch. The purpose is to reinforce and accelerate existing positions to achieve rapid impact. No more than one centre may be supported within the same strength area.

³ The project portfolio may be built around the programmes Grand Solutions, Innobooster, InnoExplorer, Industrial PhD (Erhvervsforsker), InnoFounder, and international programmes. Please note that any costs related to programme activities, such as the InnoFounder incubation programme, must be covered by the project grant.

Investments must target higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) in order to deliver operationally applicable solutions quickly. At the same time, the initiative should be characterised by end-user-driven innovation, where national security needs and the operational requirements of the Armed Forces guide the direction and prioritisation of research and innovation activities.

The success of the centres will be measured by the development and realisation of concrete capabilities, systems, and technological solutions that can be produced, implemented, and scaled in practice—and that contribute to the defence of Denmark and its allies.

The objective is that, by 2030, the centres will contribute significantly to:

- strengthen Denmark's combat capability and societal resilience
- develop and mature new defence and security capabilities for operational use
- establish a competitive Danish ecosystem within defence and security technology

National Centre Partnerships

In designing both the centres and their project portfolios, the centres are expected to involve relevant partners from across the entire innovation ecosystem, including, among others:

- **Universities and research institutions**, which contribute research capacity and, in close collaboration with other partners, deliver application-oriented knowledge development tailored to concrete defence and security needs. This includes translating research into tangible contributions to product development and ensuring coherence, coordination, and progress across the consortium.
- **GTS institutes**, which contribute expertise in technological development, testing, demonstration, and validation of solutions, and act as a bridge between research and industry.
- **The Armed Forces and public authorities**, which play a key role as problem owners and representatives of the end user. Dialogue with the Armed Forces and other authorities responsible for national security should enable rapid identification of relevant challenges and ensure that projects are developed for practical application in operational contexts.
- **Actors with frontline experience**, who contribute direct insights from short and agile innovation cycles between industry and end users, and support testing and validation under realistic conditions. Centres are encouraged to collaborate with the Defence Innovation Highway, funded by the Confederation of Danish Industry.
- **Industry partners and companies**, which contribute knowledge, solutions, and production capacity to qualify, execute, and commercialise technologies relevant to defence and security, as well as deliver solutions, products, and services to end users.

The centres may also engage in collaboration with other relevant national and international actors, including innovation environments, industrial partnerships, and business clusters. This may, for example, include collaboration with the National Defence Technology Centre (NFC), international innovation initiatives, or Danish innovation clusters such as CenSec, MADE, DigitalLead, the Danish Technological Institute, the Alexandra Institute, FORCE Technology, and Odense Robotics, among others, which represent strong industry-based ecosystems.

University Anchoring, Structure, and Organisation

The strategic research and innovation centres will be established as independent, university-anchored entities with their own organisational structure, with a Danish university acting as the administrative host and main applicant for the centre.

The role of the administrative host entails the following responsibilities and tasks:

Responsibilities:

- proper financial and administrative management of the centre grant in accordance with Innovation Fund Denmark's approval and applicable rules
- establishment and maintenance of a governance structure that ensures sound and cost-effective use of funds and supports the centre's objectives
- clear frameworks for leadership and decision-making, including the establishment of a board, appointment of a centre director, and definition of relevant governance documents (e.g. rules of procedure)
- establishment of a security framework that takes national security considerations into account
- ensuring that the centre's evaluation and prioritisation processes are documented and support impartiality, transparency, and integrity

Tasks:

- act as the point of contact with Innovation Fund Denmark
- support the establishment and operation of the governance structure
- organise the professional evaluation and prioritisation of centre projects in accordance with the established criteria and procedures
- carry out ongoing professional follow-up on centre projects, including milestones, progress, and recommendations for termination or reprioritisation
- facilitate coordination among the centre's partners and across centres
- ensure efficient use of administrative functions, including communication and IT support

The winning partnership consortium or consortia will, at the conclusion of Phase 2, enter into an investment agreement with Innovation Fund Denmark and thereby commit to maturing existing research strengths into operational capabilities, including supporting commercial maturation.

Innovation Fund Denmark will oversee the centres' scientific, administrative, and financial activities as well as their achievement of objectives. For centre projects, the Fund is responsible for, among other things, administrative checks, financial controlling, compliance, state aid assessments and reporting, as well as the formal handling of significant project changes and potential termination.

Applicants must describe a governance structure tailored to the specific strength area, as well as the centre's purpose and vision, including the organisation of leadership, decision-making authority, and prioritisation of activities. The university anchoring may be organised with considerable flexibility, including independent centre management, a board, and clear decision-making forums, provided that

the overall setup supports effective progress, sound governance, and the realisation of the centre's vision and roadmap.

The centres are expected to establish a board responsible for decisions on strategic direction and prioritisation of the project portfolio based on recommendations from the centre's management. The board will participate in the annual dialogue with Innovation Fund Denmark regarding progress, updates to the roadmap, and the professional basis for further allocation of project funding within the reserved frameworks. The board must be composed of relevant stakeholders with the necessary competencies and decision-making authority, and both the chair and a majority of board members must represent industry.

The centre board makes decisions based on recommendations from the centre's director, who is delegated the day-to-day responsibility for management and coordination of activities.

The centres must establish a robust security framework that addresses both technological and national security considerations and ensures the proper handling of sensitive knowledge, data, and collaborations. This framework must be integrated into the centre's organisation and activities and support collaboration among partners and relevant stakeholders.

International Perspectives

The centres must actively engage in European and Nordic collaborations and initiatives within defence and security technology. From the outset, activities must be aligned with relevant international efforts, thereby contributing to the strengthening of international research and innovation as well as the development of new defence and security capabilities.

The centres are expected, among other things, to address the following dimensions:

- **The EU** plays a central role in the development of common European defence and security capabilities. The centres must follow relevant European initiatives and priorities and contribute to the development of technologies that support European security, supply security, and strategic autonomy.
- **NATO** constitutes a key framework for the development of new technologies and capabilities for the Alliance's defence. The centres must align with NATO's technological priorities and Denmark's commitments and contribute to solutions that support the Alliance's operational needs.
- **International research and innovation collaborations** should be used to strengthen the development of new technological solutions and provide access to relevant competencies, test environments, and markets. The centres may therefore collaborate with international research institutions, companies, and innovation actors.
- **International programmes** are expected to play an important role in funding and collaboration. The centres should help strengthen Danish participation in relevant programmes, including EU defence programmes under the European Defence Fund, and may serve as platforms for establishing international consortia.
- **International industrial collaborations** can strengthen the development, scaling, and implementation of solutions. Collaboration with international companies and industry partners can

also enhance the position of Danish companies in global value chains within defence and security technology.

A central part of the centres' work is the systematic identification of needs, ensuring that activities and development projects are aligned with concrete operational and industrial requirements. The centres are expected to act as focal points for stakeholders contributing both challenges and solutions, and to translate these—through collaboration—into concrete products and capabilities.

The Centres' Mission-Oriented Operating Model

The centres' activities are organised into two tracks, each with its own dedicated funding framework:

1. Establishment and operation of a research and innovation centre, including its management
2. Development and continuous prioritisation of research and innovation projects organised in a project portfolio

Centre Grant:

The grant for the centre structure—including any facilities, development activities, communication, administration, and management—is awarded as a single four-year grant with an annual disbursement profile. The centre is expected to allocate the multi-year funding strategically to support its mission and objectives.

The grant is disbursed retrospectively based on submitted financial statements (with the possibility of limited advance payments). Innovation Fund Denmark will oversee the centres by, among other things, requiring annual reporting, financial statements, and assessment of progress against the centre's objectives. The centres are expected to establish and maintain strong relationships with other centres funded under the initiative in order to promote knowledge sharing, coordination, and synergies.

Research and Innovation Projects:

The funding for the centre's initial project portfolio in Year 1 is allocated in parallel with the four-year centre grant. Funding for projects beyond the first year is reserved as separate pools within Innovation Fund Denmark and is released in annual tranches within the centre's proposed programmes, subject to approval by the Innovation Fund Denmark Defence Expert Committee (DEC) (possibly with comments or conditions). Approval is based on progress, results, and plans for the continued effort as set out in an updated roadmap.

The roadmap thus serves as the central management tool for the centre's activities and must ensure the development of the selected strength position as well as the delivery of concrete solutions addressing operational defence and security needs. The centres must actively utilise the full four-year budget period by strategically allocating project expenditures so that resources support progression, scaling, and the realisation of concrete results over time. Achievement of milestones and documented progress form the basis for decisions on continued funding.

It is emphasised that the portfolio from Year 1 should include projects with a short path to production and commercialisation. This requires a focus on high technological maturity levels (TRL 5–9) and early, active involvement of industrial partners. Resources must be continuously reallocated from projects with insufficient potential to those demonstrating progress and impact, and/or to new high-poten-

tial projects. Within the objectives of the initiative and the defined criteria, the centres have the academic freedom to build and develop a relevant project portfolio based on Innovation Fund Denmark's existing programmes.

Projects are carried out in collaboration between the respective centre and Innovation Fund Denmark. The centre defines an investment budget distributed across programmes within the reserved funding. Innovation Fund Denmark then establishes relevant funding calls or tracks with centre-specific allocations under these programmes and manages the administrative framework for implementation.

The centre is responsible for the professional evaluation, prioritisation, and follow-up of projects, including progress, milestones, and potential recommendations for termination. Innovation Fund Denmark is responsible for financial controlling, compliance, and state aid management, ensuring adherence to programme rules, issuing grant agreements, and, where necessary, formally terminating projects or reallocating funds to new centre projects. Further details are available in the guidelines for the individual programmes.

Ongoing Evaluation and Prioritisation

The centres must establish an operating model for leadership and governance, including board involvement, that ensures continuous monitoring and active management of the centre's activities and project portfolio. Projects must be systematically assessed in terms of progress, continued relevance, and expected impact.

On this basis, the centres must actively prioritise the portfolio by quickly and efficiently adjusting, scaling, or terminating projects. Projects that do not sufficiently contribute to achieving the approved roadmap must be deprioritised or discontinued, and resources reallocated to projects with greater potential for rapid and tangible impact in terms of increased combat capability, resilience, and supply security, in line with the objectives of the initiative.

Risk must be actively managed as a prerequisite for progress, and insufficient progress or lack of potential must lead to timely go/no-go decisions. For centre projects, such decisions are made through coordination between the centre and Innovation Fund Denmark, where the centre may recommend project termination, while Innovation Fund Denmark is responsible for the formal grant-related handling.

Application Format

Roadmap

Applicants are invited to submit an expression of interest including a roadmap that clearly describes the centre's vision, direction, and priorities. Please refer to the assessment criteria below. As a minimum, the roadmap must include:

- Vision and objectives for the centre, including success criteria and impact in the short term (after 1 year) and medium term (after 4 years)
- National research strengths, including key challenges and technological opportunities underpinning the centre
- Strategic development tracks with clear milestones and tipping points⁴ towards 2030 to ensure success

⁴ A tipping point is a critical moment in a process of change that leads to a significant shift. These moments mark the transition from gradual development to rapid and far-reaching transformation driven by technological, market, regulatory, systemic, or cultural changes.

- Approach to professional evaluation, prioritisation, and follow-up of centre projects, including criteria, impartiality, and interaction with Innovation Fund Denmark’s funding, administrative, and financial management
- Organisation, structure, and governance of the centre and partnership, including key risks and how they will be mitigated
- Key stakeholders across the value chain participating in the partnership, as well as the framework for collaboration
- Preliminary plan for additional investments and international collaborations to ensure relevance, anchoring of activities, and “best-in-class” development and innovation
- Plan for long-term funding, anchoring, and scaling
- Approach to establishing and managing an effective project portfolio and the initial focus areas of projects
- Key technical, regulatory, and market barriers, as well as the security framework

The roadmap must be prepared as a coherent text and may not exceed 10 pages. Supplementary illustrations may be included, such as an organisational chart, a visual representation of the roadmap, and other figures that support understanding (maximum 5 pages).

Together with the expression of interest, the roadmap forms the basis for selection for Phase 2 and will be further developed into a full application.

Evaluation of Applications

Assessment Criteria

The three overall assessment criteria are:

- **Quality of the idea** – the quality of the proposed research and innovation
- **Impact** – value creation during and after the investment period
- **Quality of execution** – efficiency in planning, implementation, and budgeting

The criteria are weighted equally.

Quality of the idea: In Phase 1, the extent to which the applicant convincingly demonstrates the following will be assessed:

- **Strengths and ecosystem**

The centre brings together and further develops existing Danish research and innovation environments within defence and critical technologies, building on national strengths. It will be assessed whether the relevant research environments are broadly represented, and whether both large companies and SMEs are actively involved across the entire value chain—from development and testing to production and commercialisation.

- **Relevance to operational needs and strategic alignment**

The centre operates within areas that support the operational needs of the Armed Forces and Danish supply security, while being clearly aligned with national and international priorities, including defence agreements, national strategies, and EU and NATO priorities.

- **Portfolio logic and mission-driven approach**

The centre establishes and manages a project portfolio with a clear mission-oriented structure, where activities are based on concrete operational challenges defined by identified problem own-

ers. The portfolio must be organised around clear objectives, milestones, and tipping points leading to the development of concrete capabilities. The extent to which the centre demonstrates the ability for active portfolio management—including continuous prioritisation, scaling, and termination of projects to focus efforts on solutions with the greatest potential for rapid and tangible impact on Danish combat capability—will be assessed.

- **Portfolio balance and technological maturity**

The centre demonstrates a well-balanced project portfolio in terms of technological maturity and time horizon. It will be assessed whether the portfolio balances activities across development stages, with a clear emphasis on projects at high technological maturity levels (TRL 5–9) and with potential for rapid development and implementation.

Impact: In Phase 1, the extent to which the applicant convincingly demonstrates the following will be assessed:

- **Overall impact and effect on operational capabilities**

The centre's overall impact for participants, partners, and Danish society is clearly defined, well justified, and directly linked to concrete operational needs and capability challenges. It will be assessed to what extent the centre contributes to strengthening Denmark's combat capability, supply security, and resilience through the development and realisation of concrete technological solutions and capabilities.

- **Ecosystem and national capacity**

The centre strengthens and consolidates existing Danish environments within defence and critical technologies and contributes to building a strong and coherent national capacity.

- **Industrial development and solutions**

Activities lead to the development, production, and scaling of solutions within Danish industry that support the needs of the Armed Forces and Danish supply security. It will be assessed to what extent there is a clear pathway from development to implementation and market application.

- **Objectives and long-term effects**

The centre defines clear and measurable success criteria after 1 year and 4 years, and outlines expected long-term effects. It will be assessed whether there is a clear link between objectives, milestones, and the expected impact over time.

Quality of execution: In Phase 1, the extent to which the applicant convincingly demonstrates the following will be assessed:

- **Partnership and competencies**

The partnership is effectively composed with complementary competencies and sufficient capacity to carry out activities at a high professional level and deliver the expected impact. It is also assessed whether the centre establishes a well-functioning collaboration model with strong national anchoring and accessibility, as well as a relevant international outlook.

- **Leadership and governance**

The centre establishes a clear and robust leadership and governance model with well-defined roles, responsibilities, and structures that ensure progress, prioritisation, and coherence

across activities and the project portfolio. It is also assessed to what extent the applicant describes a governance model that enables a clear, documented, and operational interaction between the centre's scientific prioritisation and Innovation Fund Denmark's funding, administrative, and financial functions.

- **Project portfolio and implementation**

The centre establishes an operational model for managing the project portfolio, including prioritisation, follow-up, and continuous development of projects. It is assessed to what extent the centre demonstrates the ability for rapid start-up, efficient implementation, and active portfolio management, including go/no-go decisions. It is also assessed whether the model for centre projects is operational, well-documented, and compatible with the requirements of Innovation Fund Denmark's instruments and programmes, including administration, compliance, and state aid requirements.

- **Resources and budget**

The overall budget is realistic and cost-effective, with a clear link between resources, activities, and expected results, and supports an efficient and strategic use of resources, including leveraging existing administrative structures and multi-year planning.

- **Risk and robustness**

The centre demonstrates an active approach to managing risks and uncertainties, including those related to national security. It will be assessed to what extent risks are used as a basis for prioritisation and learning, and whether there is a realistic and decisive approach to addressing insufficient progress or inadequate potential.

Evaluation Process

Applications submitted under this call will be assessed by Innovation Fund Denmark's Defence Expert Committee (DEC) based on the established criteria. DEC will select the centre applications to be invited for further dialogue and subsequent submission of a full application.

The dialogue process leading up to Phase 2 will be organised as an active and structured process, in which Innovation Fund Denmark—on behalf of DEC—provides applicants with targeted feedback. The purpose is to strengthen and further develop the centre application's model, governance structure, and project portfolio, as well as to ensure clear alignment with the objectives, priorities, and administrative and funding framework of the initiative. Feedback will be provided within a framework that ensures equal treatment and transparency among applicants.

The final investment decision based on the Phase 2 applications will be made by the Board of Innovation Fund Denmark following a recommendation from DEC.

Phase 1: Expression of interest and roadmap must be submitted via www.e-grant.dk, which is Innovation Fund Denmark's electronic application system. The call is expected to open in e-grant on 12 May 2026.

Phase 2: Applicants invited to Phase 2 must submit a full application via www.e-grant.dk. The call will open in e-grant once decisions for Phase 1 have been made.

Timeline:

- Deadline for expression of interest and roadmap (Phase 1): 30 June 2026 kl. 12:00
- Applicants in Phase 1 can expect notification of results: mid-August 2026

- Expected start of Phase 2: mid-September 2026
- Expected deadline for Phase 2 applications: early November 2026
- Applicants in Phase 2 can expect notification of results: mid-December 2026

Applicants will receive notifications via www.e-grant.dk. A list of frequently asked questions and corresponding answers is available in e-grant and can be accessed [here](#). For questions regarding the use of e-grant, the secretariat can be contacted using the details below.

Additional Information

Guidelines and inspiration

Applications submitted under this call must take into account the guidelines for the initiative, which are available on Innovation Fund Denmark's website.

The following may serve as inspiration for applications under this call:

- [Aftaler om Forskning og Innovation 2026-2029](#)

Contact the Secretariat

For inquiries, please contact us here:

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About Innovation Fund Denmark

Innovation Fund Denmark accelerates Danish research and innovation into solutions that strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of Danish society. This is achieved by investing in researchers, companies, and entrepreneurs who create value, generate jobs, and address societal challenges—and by unlocking the potential of the entire innovation ecosystem.

Innovation Fund Denmark is committed to promoting diversity in all its forms. Therefore, all interested applicants are encouraged to apply to the Fund's programmes, regardless of ethnic background, religion, gender identity, disability status, age, field of expertise, or other characteristics.