

Call for proposals Graduate School Green Top Sectors TKI 2025

The call for proposals Graduate School Green Top Sectors TKI 2025 was officially drawn up in Dutch. Where there are differences between the Dutch and English version, the Dutch version applies.

Aim

The aim of this programme is to facilitate innovative and high-quality scientific research within the research field of the top sectors Agri & Food and Horticulture & Starting Materials by engaging young talented researchers at the start of their career.

The Knowledge and Innovation Agenda, Agriculture, Water, Food 2024 – 2027

In the upcoming 25 years, the Netherlands is facing a huge challenge in the areas of agriculture, water, and food. In 2050, we will have a vital rural area and resilient nature in a climate-proof Netherlands where water and soil issues play a decisive role, agriculture and food systems are ecological and economically sustainable and healthy, and the deltas and large bodies of water are safe. This is not only a major challenge, it also presents opportunities for Dutch business and society. To face these challenges and address opportunities, the Top Sectors, Dutch ministries and other public authorities, companies, knowledge institutes and civil organisations have jointly set up a new agenda which describes the new knowledge and innovation needed to reach these goals: the Knowledge and Innovation Agenda for Agriculture, Water and Food 2024-2027 ([KIA-LWV](#)).

The Top Sectors

The top sector **Agri & Food** covers everything related to food production; primary production including supply, processing, handling, marketing and distribution including circular raw material chains. Economic and societal developments come with new opportunities and challenges for the availability of healthy and high-quality food; for sustainable food chains in which people, animals and nature are central, and for product utilization and valorisation. The Dutch agri & food sector is frontrunner in these topics and continues to improve itself in order to remain competitive and resilient.

The top sector **Horticulture & Starting Materials** covers all plant-based chains in the horticulture complex. It is a broad sector, with subsectors that range from vegetables, fruit, nursery stock to flowers and bulbs. Starting materials are products, such as propagating material, planting material and seeds in agriculture and horticulture. The Horticulture & Starting Material sector leads the way in the development of crops that are more resilient or and require fewer crop protection agents, for example. The sector also covers companies that supply, process, trade and distribute horticulture and starting material products.

Both top sectors have stated that the availability of well-trained personnel is a top priority. The expected demand exceeds the current size of the training programmes in the Netherlands. It is therefore vital for companies and organisations to attract and train talented scientists.

Themes T&U and A&F

The research projects within this call must fit within the research missions of the Knowledge and Innovation Agendas of the top sectors. The following missions are relevant for the TKIs Agri & Food and Horticulture & Starting Materials:

1. Resilient nature
2. Sustainable agriculture and horticulture
3. Vital rural area in a climate-proof Netherlands
4. Sustainable and valued food that is healthy, accessible and safe
5. Sustainable and safe use of the North Sea and other large bodies of water
 - 5A: Sustainable North Sea and oceans
 - 5B: Sustainable rivers, lakes and intertidal areas
 - 5C: Nature-inclusive agriculture, fishery and water management in Dutch Caribbean
 - 5E: Aquatic food production

These missions are supported by three key technologies:

1. ST1 Smart technologies for agriculture-horticulture-water-food
2. ST2 Fast, efficient and accurate breeding of plants and animals
3. ST3 Fermentation and bioconversion

Each mission is composed of multi-year programmes (MMIP's). The complete text of the Knowledge and Innovation Agenda, as well as the MMIPs can be found on the website kia-landbouwwatervoedsel.nl.

Graduate School Green Top Sectors TKI 2025 PhD candidates

Available budget

Two projects can be awarded within the top sector Agri & Food and 2-4 projects within the top sector Horticulture & Starting Materials. The budget is available for four-year PhD projects to be carried out by knowledge institutes that work together with one or more private partners (public private partnership (PPP)). One or more public partners can also participate.

Who can apply

For both A&F and T&U: Full, associate and assistant professors and other researchers with a comparable appointment can submit an application if they are employed by one of the organizations affiliated with one of the graduate schools EPS, PE&RC, WIAS, VLAG, WIMEK or WASS.

Applications are submitted by a principal applicant on behalf of the project consortium. There is one principal applicant per proposal; co-applicants are not permitted. If an associate or assistant professor without ius promovendi submits the application, the name of the full professor who has declared that he or she is prepared to act as promotor must be stated in the application. An exception to the required duration of appointment can be made for applicants with a "tenure track" appointment that does not cover the entire duration of the project. In such cases, the applicant should demonstrate by means of a letter that adequate supervision is guaranteed for the entire duration of the research. The proposed candidate who wrote the proposal is the person who will defend the proposal at the interview and whose performance will be taken into account in the assessment.

Additional conditions for submission:

- The proposal must fit within the research focus of the programme, as described above;
- The candidate must have a relevant master's degree or be due to receive one shortly and will be available to start their PhD within 6 months after the grant is awarded;
- The candidate must not already hold an appointment as a PhD student;
- Only one application per principal applicant may be submitted in this call.

Project consortium, private and public partners

All projects must be supported by a project consortium. The consortium must consist of at least one research institution - with which the principal applicant is associated and where the candidate will undertake his/her PhD research if the research proposal is successful - and at least one private partner. It is possible to involve more than one research institution and more than one private partner, as well as one or more public partners in the project consortium.

Definition of a private partner

A private co-financier is an enterprise or other organization or consortium, which undertakes activities in the context of the relevant programme or project that may objectively be deemed market activities. TKI considers an enterprise to be an organizational entity or person that pursues prolonged involvement in economic intercourse through the deployment of labour and capital and with a view to generating profit. Hence, an SME is considered to be an enterprise, as is a self-employed professional registered with the chamber of commerce. Institutes with 'ANBI' status may also act as private partners. Private partners from other countries may participate in consortia.

Definition of a public partner

A public co-financier is a knowledge institute or other institute that is neither an NWO-accredited knowledge institute (e.g. a heritage institute, municipal authority, intermediary organization or foundation) nor a private party (e.g. a health care foundation, health care insurer or governmental body that, in the context of its activities within the programme or project, does not act in a governmental capacity), insofar as, in its 'partner' role, it undertakes no activities that may objectively be deemed market activities.

What can be applied for

The maximum budget that can be applied for is k€ 300 per project. In view of the requirement regarding co-funding by private (and public) partners, the maximum fundable cost by TKI is 80% of the total of the knowledge institute. In the context of this call, the grant will fund one PhD student per project within a public knowledge institute.

Co-funding The private and public partners in the project consortium are required to supplement TKI funding by jointly covering at least 15% (and up to 50%) of the total cost of the knowledge institute in cash. The knowledge institute is required to supplement TKI funding with at least 5% of the total project cost in cash.

Formal demands TKI financing:

- Participants handle the rights to the results correctly. Results are made public (dissertation). For the sake of completeness, participating entrepreneurs may obtain rights to the results of the research organization under market conditions;
- There is a written, signed collaboration agreement;
- There is a true collaboration between companies and researchers, this must be evident from the project plan;
- The project contributes to the Dutch knowledge infrastructure through the participation of at least one Dutch knowledge institution;
- The project makes a substantive contribution to the TKI program by linking up with the KIA Agriculture, Water, Food;

Additional provisions 15% co-funding

Each proposal requires co-funding by at least one private partner. In addition, multiple private and/or public parties may participate in the consortium.

Definitions

- Total project cost: total cash requirement plus in-kind contributions.
- Financial resources: TKI funding plus cash co-funding and own contribution knowledge institute.
- Co-funding: financial contributions by partners.
- In-kind contributions: capitalized personnel and/or material contributions by partners. In-kind contributions are not obligatory and do not count for the calculation of the minimal private partner contribution.

Budget

In the case that the maximum TKI grant is applied for, the total project budget will be as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Requested TKI budget: | k€ 300 (80%) |
| Required cash contribution: | k€ 56.25 (15%) |
| Required contribution institute: | k€ 18.75 (5%) |
| Total project budget: | k€ 375 (100%) |

The private and public partners in the project consortium are required to supplement TKI funding by jointly covering at least 15% (and up to 50%) of the total project cost in cash. The maximum project value is therefore k€ 600.

A project consortium may involve multiple private and public partners. The contributions of the various partners may be valued collectively. No requirements are made regarding the types and proportions of

the contributions that individual partners must make to the matching sum, providing that the total matching is in the required proportion to TKI funding. Cash contributions and in-kind contributions must be accounted for retrospectively by applicants. The forms of in-kind contribution accepted by TKI are personnel time input and material contributions, such as use of specific infrastructure, software and access to facilities. Acceptance is subject to the condition that the contributions are capitalized and incorporated into the project plan.

The contributions to be made by the private and public partners must be made clear in the project description, the timetable and the budget submitted with the application. Project management, oversight, coordination and consultancy may not be included in the matching contributions.

General co-funding provisions

- Enterprises and other co-funding parties are not eligible to receive TKI funding, but may contribute to the research in cash and/or in-kind¹, where applicable. They may not receive grant funds from the project.
- An academic applicant cannot therefore represent an enterprise.
- Contributions and input made in-kind must be essential to the project and must be included in the research budget submitted with the grant application for the project in question and approved by TKI.
- The application must be accompanied by a letter of commitment from each member of the consortium setting out the contributions to be made in cash and in-kind by that party. The letter of commitment must be written in English and must contain an explicit statement of the agreed financial (cash) contribution or capitalized personnel and/or material contribution (in-kind contribution). It must be signed by a person who is authorized to represent the party in question and written on that party's headed notepaper. One letter of commitment for each partner must be appended to the application.
- Contributions in cash and in-kind that are included in the project budget must correspond to the letters of commitment in which the co-financier(s) declare to TKI that the contributions will be made.

The applying institute will invoice the consortium's private and/or public co-financers for their promised cash co-funding. Following receipt, the cash contributions will be made available to the applicant university/research institute.

Criteria

PhD applications are assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Quality of the candidate and research group;
2. Scientific quality of the proposal;
3. Research relevance and perspectives for utilisation.

The three criteria are given equal weight in the final score for the application.

Scores on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 9 (poor) will be used. A separate score is provided for each criterion. To be eligible for funding, the final score of the application should be very good or higher.

Criterion 1: Quality of the candidate and research group

The assessment of the intended PhD candidate weighs very heavily within this criterion. Points of attention for the assessment are:

- the motivation and persuasiveness of the candidate, the proposal is clearly written by the candidate him/herself;

¹ Unlike previous years, a private in-kind contribution is not mandatory. However, the proposal must show that it concerns an actual collaboration in which the private partner(s) are demonstrably actively involved in the project and not solely as a financial partner.

- during the interview: critical reflection on the contents of the proposal;
- the candidate's curriculum vitae (education, grades obtained, extracurricular activities);
- the letters of recommendation;
- the degree to which the candidate places the research in a broader context including the context of a private party.

In addition, for this criterion, the quality and suitability of the research group as a whole will be examined: does the research group have sufficient expertise, the right collaborations and access to the required equipment?

Criterion 2: Scientific quality of the proposal

This includes:

- the clarity of the proposal, questions posed and the objectives;
- scientifically innovative and/or groundbreaking elements;
- the scientific approach: (challenge in) the approach and its feasibility;
- the effectiveness in terms of methodology proposed.

Criterion 3: Research relevance and perspectives for utilisation

The research relevance of the proposal is determined by the extent to which the proposal fits in the research focus of the KIA Agriculture, Water, Food (missions 1-5) as research agenda of the Topsectors A&F and T&U.

So far as the perspectives for utilisation are concerned, realising an application during the duration of the projects is not a requirement, but perspectives for an application must be present. Points of attention for the assessment are:

- does the proposal provide a convincing perspective of a contribution to the required fundamental knowledge basis that underlies innovative solutions for societal and economic issues within the top sector Agri & Food or the top sector Horticulture & Starting Materials?
- does the proposal provide a realistic picture of the utilisation possibilities and a concrete action plan for these?
- the involvement and suitability of the public and private partners in the project.

Graduate School Green Top Sectors TKI 2025 EngD satellite (T&U)

As a pilot in 2025, the top sector Horticulture & Starting Materials will make budget available for up to 2 EngD proposals in a Graduate School Green Top Sectors 2025 satellite call. The budget is available for two-year EngD projects to be carried out by knowledge institutes that work together with one or more private partners (public private partnership (PPP). One or more public partners can also participate.

All the above described conditions and definitions apply for this call with the exception of the following:

Who can apply

Full, associate and assistant professors and other researchers with a comparable appointment can submit an application if they are employed by one of the organizations affiliated with the Stan Ackermans Institute (4TU).

Budget

In the case that the maximum TKI grant is applied for, the total project budget will be as follows:

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| Requested TKI budget: | k€ 150 (80%) |
| Required cash contribution: | k€ 28.125 (15%) |
| Required contribution institute: | k€ 9.375 (5%) |
| Total project budget: | k€ 187.5 (100%) |

Criteria

EngD applications are assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Quality of the candidate and research group;
2. Quality and envisioned impact of the proposal;
3. Design relevance and perspectives for utilisation.

The three criteria are given equal weight in the final score for the application.

Criterion 1: Quality of the candidate and research group

The assessment of the intended EngD candidate weighs very heavily within this criterion. Points of attention for the assessment are:

- the motivation and persuasiveness of the candidate, the proposal is clearly written by the candidate him/herself;
- during the interview: critical reflection on the contents of the proposal;
- the candidate's curriculum vitae (education, grades obtained, extracurricular activities);
- the letters of recommendation;
- the degree to which the candidate places the research in a broader context including the context of a private party.

In addition, for this criterion, the quality and suitability of the research group as a whole will be examined: does the research group have sufficient expertise, the right collaborations and access to the required equipment?

Criterion 2: Quality and envisioned impact of the proposal

This includes:

- the clarity of the proposal, questions posed and the objectives;
- expected level of innovation of the design,
- the output, creating an innovation that is not yet available at TRL >5;
- the design approach: (challenge in) the approach and its feasibility;
- the effectiveness in terms of methodology proposed.

Criterion 3: Design relevance and perspectives for utilisation

The design relevance of the proposal is determined by the extent to which the proposal fits in the research focus of the KIA Agriculture, Water, Food (missions 1-5) as research agenda of the Topsector T&U. So far as the perspectives for utilisation are concerned, realising an application during the duration of the projects is required, and perspectives for application must be present. Points of attention for the assessment are:

- does the proposal provide a convincing innovative solution for societal and economic issues within the top sector Horticulture & Starting Materials?
- does the proposal provide a realistic picture of the utilisation possibilities and a concrete action plan for how to integrate these?
- the involvement and suitability of the public and private partners in the project.

Procedure

Eligibility of applications

The first step in the assessment procedure is to test whether an application is admissible. Only those proposals that satisfy the criteria described above are admissible and will be taken into consideration.

TKI will not consider any applications to which one or more of the following aspects applies:

- the application has not been correctly or fully completed, and the applicant has not, or has not on time, satisfied the request to submit a corrected application;
- the application has not been written in English;
- the principal applicant does not satisfy the description as stated in the call;
- the application is not in line with the aim and themes of this call;
- the application was submitted after the deadline.

If the application can be corrected, the applicant will be given the opportunity to submit a revised application within 48 hours. If the application has not been corrected by that deadline, the proposal will not be accepted for processing. Revised applications will be accepted for processing once they have been approved.

Assessment of applications

Three committees, one for A&F, one for T&U and one for T&U EngD will be appointed to evaluate the proposals. After the deadline the proposals will be divided over T&U, T&U EngD and A&F. No use of external referees' reports will be made in this process.

The selection committee will consist of scientists with relevant expertise and will be complemented with one or more members who represent the top sectors. Two graduate school representatives and one EngD committee representative will act as secretaries of the committees.

The consideration of applications will be in two stages:

Phase 1: Written assessment

The committee members will assess the individual applications based on the assessment criteria. They will give a provisional score and itemize for themselves which parts should be clarified, explained or described in greater detail during a possible interview.

Phase 2: Interview

Interview selection:

Based on the written assessment (phase 1), a provisional ranking will be made by the selection committee. The candidates with the highest ranks will be invited for an interview.

Interview:

The proposed PhD candidate will explain his or her application to the selection committee. The committee members will ask questions about the project and the candidate's curriculum vitae and motivation. After each interview, the members of the selection committee will discuss the proposal, the interview and the candidate's curriculum vitae and score their individual impressions on a form. Once all of the interviews have been completed, the committee members will discuss the applications on the basis of the assessment criteria, which will result in a ranking of all applications. The interview is therefore an integral part of the assessment and may lead to a re-evaluation of the written assessment of the proposals, as they were scored in phase 1.

Ranking

In view of the allocation of the available grant budget between projects that fall under the top sector Agri & Food and projects that fall under the top sector Horticulture & Starting Materials, the three committees will make separate final rankings. Both top sectors would like to see that the projects awarded funding are a good reflection of the entire breadth of the top sector concerned. Therefore, based on policy considerations, the committee can give due consideration to a proper distribution across the scientific disciplines and related research schools when making a ranking.

Decision

The TKI Board will take a decision based on the selection committee's advice. The TKI Board reserves the right not to use all of the available budget depending on the quality of the proposals received.

Planning:

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|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Deadline for applications: | 1 October 2025 |
| Interviews: | November/December 2025 |
| Decision: | December 2025 |

Applicants should hand in their application using this [link](#).

An application should include:

- The application form;
- Letters from the consortium partners in which they tangibly confirm the nature and value of their contributions to the project;
- Two letters of recommendation: The letters should at least say something about the candidate's academic merits and motivation with regard to the conduct of scientific research. Candidates may choose who they ask to write the letters of recommendation. The principal applicant or the intended thesis supervisor cannot write one of the letters of recommendation.
- A motivation letter of the candidate in which the candidate also explains the writing process of the proposed research.

Appendix 1: Eligible costs for collaborative projects

The eligible costs in collaborative projects are:

- personnel costs: researchers, technicians and other support personnel to the extent that they are involved in the research project;
- costs of equipment to the extent and for as long as they are used for the project. When this equipment is not used for the project throughout its useful life, only depreciation costs corresponding to the life of the project, calculated according to generally recognized accounting principles, are considered eligible costs;
- costs of buildings and land to the extent and for as long as they are used for the project. For buildings, only depreciation costs corresponding to the duration of the project, calculated according to generally recognized accounting principles, are considered eligible costs. With regard to land, the cost of the commercial transfer or the cost of capital actually incurred are eligible;
- costs of contract research, knowledge and patents purchased on arm's length terms from or licensed from outside sources, as well as costs for consultancy and equivalent services used exclusively for the project;
- additional general costs and other operational expenses, including those for materials, supplies and similar products, that arise directly from the project.