NWO Spinoza Prize 2021
Introduction and Purpose

The NWO Spinoza Prize is a funding scheme directed at individuals at the high-end of the research profession. The Prize is a unique lifetime achievement award but above all an encouragement for further research. The granting of a NWO Spinoza Prize represents an appreciation of what the winners have accomplished so far as well as confidence in what they will achieve in the next couple of years. As of 2020 the prize will be awarded to a researcher or a team of two or three persons. NWO invites a select group of individuals to nominate candidates for an NWO Spinoza Prize.

The NWO Spinoza Prize provides a way of identifying and acknowledging world-class research by rewarding the individual researcher. The setting in which the candidates work is also important but the key factors are the achievements of the researchers.

Who can nominate

Candidates for the NWO Spinoza Prize can only be nominated by individuals who NWO has invited to submit nominations; researchers may not submit applications themselves. NWO invites each of the following individuals to nominate candidates:

- the principals of the universities established in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (a maximum of two candidates each)
- the president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) (a maximum of two candidates for each domain and the Young Academy)
- the chair of the Netherlands Academy of Technology and Innovation (a maximum of two candidates)
- the chair of the Dutch Network of Women Professors (a maximum of two candidates).

Who can be nominated

Candidates for the NWO Spinoza Prize should:

- have a permanent position at a research institute established in the Kingdom of the Netherlands;
- should be able to spend the Spinoza Prize fully before their retirement age;¹
- may not have already received a Spinoza Prize or a Stevin Prize. If a candidate is nominated independently by different nominators for both Prizes, NWO will contact the nominators.

The nomination should state the scientific cluster to which the candidate belongs: humanities and social sciences (alpha/gamma), natural sciences (beta) or life sciences. If a candidate is doing multidisciplinary research then more than one cluster may be listed but the cluster in which the focus of the research lies should be stated.

World-class, creative and innovative research requires a diverse scientific staff so that subjects can be approached from different perspectives. NWO is committed to improving gender balance in Dutch academia so as to ensure all available talent is fully exploited. Therefore NWO wholeheartedly encourages the nomination of female researchers.

¹ A candidate is not eligible for a Spinoza Prize when the candidate’s official retirement based on the birth date starts within five years after 1 October 2021 (AOW-leeftijd). In case a team is nominated this condition applies to each team member.
NWO Spinoza Prize

What can the candidates be nominated for

NWO reserves a budget of 10 million euro’s annually for the Spinoza Prize. Each NWO Spinoza Prize amounts to 2.5 million euros for scientific research in the Netherlands. This amount may be spent (up to a certain point) at the discretion of the recipient. In the scientific and financial plan which needs to be approved by the Executive Board of NWO the recipient may include costs of staff, materials, investments, travel expenses and accommodation costs, visits by foreign researchers, etc. The prize should in principle be spent within a 5-year period.

When can the nominations be submitted

This call for proposals is valid until the closing date November 2, 2020, 14:00:00 CE(S)T. Each nomination should be sent as a PDF-document to NWO by email, spinoza@nwo.nl. In case there is any doubt, the moment of receipt is decisive, not the moment of submission.

Preparing a nomination

Instructions on how to draw up a nomination for a NWO Spinoza Prize are included in the Annex to this brochure.

Specific conditions

The NWO Grant Rules 2017 and the Approval of Funding for Scientific Research apply to all applications.

NWO expects strict confidentiality during the nomination procedures, also towards the nominated candidates. If NWO detects that confidentiality has not been guaranteed, NWO reserves the right to refuse the nomination.

Each year a maximum of four NWO Spinoza Prizes are awarded of which no more than two awards may be within any one of three scientific clusters - physical sciences, chemistry, mathematics and engineering; life sciences (including medicine); and humanities & social sciences. In addition, when three or four prizes are awarded, a substantial part of the research of at least one recipient should belong to the humanities & social sciences.

Procedure

The first step in the assessment procedure is to check whether an application is admissible. In case a nomination does not follow the instructions and conditions as stated in this brochure or if the information is insufficient, NWO will send a request for a revised nomination to be submitted within five weekdays. If the request is not met within the given time-limit or if the requested revision is still insufficient, NWO will not accept the nomination.

An international selection committee selects, on behalf of NWO, the best candidates on the basis of the assessment criteria below taking into account the advice of experts and gives advice to the Executive Board of NWO. The Executive Board then decides who will receive a Spinoza Prize based on the advice from the selection committee.

The selection committee consists of leading scientific researchers from outside the Netherlands and is chaired by a non-voting chair person. The NWO Code for Dealing with Personal Interests applies to all persons and NWO staff involved in the assessment and/or decision-making process. See also: www.nwo.nl/en/code.
NWO processes any personal data necessary for the selection of the candidates in accordance with the NWO Privacy Statement.

Criteria

The assessment and selection of the candidates takes place on the basis of past performance taking into account the following quality criteria:

1. Internationally acknowledged scientific quality (weight 70%)
   This should be evident from the scientific achievements of the candidate and the influence he or she has had on the development of the relevant field of research, for example by realizing paradigm shifts or behavioral change. Scientifically innovative breakthroughs and the breadth of the oeuvre of the candidate are of great importance during the assessment.

2. Leadership and Power of attraction to early stage researchers (weight 20%)
   This criterion is about the mentorship and coaching of early stage researchers. The committee takes into account to what extent the candidate is successful in attracting and inspiring Master students, PhD students and postdocs from the Netherlands or from abroad. If a candidate has a substantial number of mentees who have succeeded in advancing their career in academic research, this will sustain the quality of the supervision by the candidate.

3. Knowledge exchange and impact (including outreach activities) (weight 10%)
   This should be clear from the relevance of the research results for and meeting the needs of third parties within and outside of the academic sector. This does not concern the use of knowledge by fellow researchers within the researcher’s own scientific discipline. For examples and more information please see: https://www.nwo.nl/en/policies/knowledge+utilisation.

Additionally, it should be evident that the NWO Spinoza Prize is expected to enable the candidate to make substantial advances in his or her research. The quality of the candidate/team is continually assessed in relation to what is prevalently regarded as high quality within the relevant disciplines.

Additional criterion for a nomination of a team

When a team of two or three candidates is nominated, the added value of the team according to the three quality criteria above should be demonstrably greater than the individual achievements of the team members. This does not necessarily mean that all members of the team are of the same calibre as long as there is a clear added value and synergy between the team members.

Contact

For specific questions about NWO Spinoza Prize please contact:

- H.R. (Helga) Varwijk MA
- e-mail: spinoza@nwo.nl
- phone: +31 (0)70 344 05 29
Annex:

The nominations should be written in English. Each nomination must clearly state the achievements that qualify the candidates to be regarded as highly qualified researchers in the national and international arena, the further advances that their research is expected to achieve, and the probable knock-on effect of the award on the candidate’s research group.

To facilitate a comparative and smooth assessment of the nominated candidates, the nominations should be filled in in the digital nomination form and submitted by e-mail to spinoza@nwo.nl.

- The nomination form will be distributed through a personal invitation to nominate candidates
- Complete the form, save it as a pdf file and send it by e-mail to spinoza@nwo.nl.

The maximum length of the nomination is 4 pages A4, excluding annexes and the general information on the nominator and the nominated candidate. The nominations may not include recommendation letters.

In drafting nominations it should be taken into account that the selection committee has a broad range of expertise and a part of the committee will have only a ‘lay’ understanding of the relevant research topic. In the first phase of the assessment, the nominations are the primary source of information for the committee. Well-written nominations are therefore essential for a sustainable assessment.

As a result of NWO signing the DORA (San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment) any references to Journal Impact Factors or H-index are not allowed in the nominations. The nominations will receive a qualitative assessment, any quantitative indicators merely function to sustain the narrative text in the nomination.

Each nomination should include the following annexes as set out in the nomination form:

- An overview of 10 most important research products in relation to the field of research (see the nomination form for examples). The qualitative scientific and societal impact of each product should be briefly described as well as the individual contribution of the candidate to these products.
- A recent CV