

## ORCA Labs Research Grant Call Guidelines

### 2026 Research Call: Sound Preference in Hearing and Listening Experiences

**Funding Organisation:** This research grant program is funded by **ORCA Labs, WS Audiology A/S**.

#### 1. Focus of the Grant Call

ORCA Labs is seeking research proposals that advance understanding of **sound preference** as a distinct construct relevant to hearing, listening, and hearing technology. For the purposes of this grant call, sound preference refers to an individual's subjective preference for one sound, processing strategy, acoustic characteristic, or listening experience over another. This may include preferences for different hearing aid signal processing approaches, device settings, sound quality, listening environments, or other auditory experiences.

Proposals should seek to generate new knowledge about the nature of sound preference itself, how it can be defined and measured, the factors that influence it, its underlying mechanisms, and its potential relevance to personalized hearing care and hearing technology selection.

Applications may explore questions such as: What is sound preference and how should it be measured? Is sound preference stable and reproducible over time? What biological, cognitive, psychosocial, environmental, or technological factors influence sound preference? How does sound preference relate to hearing aid adoption, listening behavior, adaptation, wellbeing, or long-term outcomes? Can sound preference serve as a meaningful metric to guide personalized hearing technology selection?

Applications should clearly describe how the proposed research aligns with the overarching goal of advancing scientific understanding of sound preference and its potential role in shaping future approaches to personalized hearing and listening experiences.

#### 2. Funding Available

- Total grant funding available: **EUR €100,000**, including institution overhead of a maximum 35%.
- Number of grants available: one
- Funding period: **2027-2028**
- Funding may support:
  - Salary of personnel;
  - Participant recruitment and payment
  - Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) activities;
  - Equipment and software;
  - Travel directly related to the research;
  - Dissemination and publication costs.

### **3. Guiding Principles**

The ORCA Labs Research Grant Program seeks to support the best ideas regardless of career stage, institutional prestige, or publication record.

Applications will be assessed on:

- alignment with the funding objectives;
- methodological quality;
- feasibility;
- the support and capability available to deliver the project.

Early-career researchers, clinician-researchers, and interdisciplinary teams are encouraged to apply.

### **4. Eligibility**

Applications are welcome from any organisations capable of undertaking high-quality research and meeting relevant ethical and governance requirements.

**This may include:**

- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- Research institutes;
- Hospitals or clinical research organisations;
- Not-for-profit research organisations.

### **5. Ineligible applicants and projects**

- Projects focused primarily on product marketing or commercial promotion;
- Projects that cannot demonstrate appropriate ethical oversight or governance arrangements;
- Activities unrelated to research or knowledge generation;
- Applications where one or more researchers are directly employed by a hearing aid manufacturer.

## 6. Funding Conditions

Successful applicants will be required to:

- Obtain all necessary ethics approvals before commencing research;
- Comply with relevant institutional, national, and international regulations;
- Acknowledge ORCA Labs funding in all outputs;
- Publish results and make other project deliverables publicly available;
- Present findings internally to ORCA Labs / WSA employees.

It is expected that the research will lead to at least one academic publication. All funded research must be published as **open access**.

## 7. Intellectual Property

Applicants will retain ownership of their intellectual property.

ORCA Labs / WSA reserves the right to:

- Reference funded projects publicly;
- Request summaries for dissemination purposes;
- Discuss opportunities for future collaboration.

## 8. Application Process

Applications must be submitted to the ORCA Labs email: [orcagrants@wsa.com](mailto:orcagrants@wsa.com)

Applications must be submitted in English.

Application instructions, word and page limits must be followed (see below)

## 9. Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed against four criteria:

(i) *Alignment with Grant Objectives*

The extent to which the project addresses the objectives of the funding call and contributes to advancing understanding of sound preference.

(ii) *Scientific and methodological quality*

The appropriateness, rigour, and quality of the proposed research design, methods, and analysis.

(iii) *Feasibility of the proposed work*

The likelihood that the project can be successfully completed within the proposed timeframe, budget, and available resources.

(iv) *Team capability, support, and resources available to deliver the project*

The extent to which the team has the expertise, partnerships, resources, mentoring, infrastructure, and support necessary to deliver the project.

## **10. Review Process**

Applications will be reviewed by an independent selection panel comprising members of the ORCA Labs Sound Preference Advisory Board. To support fair and objective assessment, applicant names, institutional affiliations, team roles, and curriculum vitae will be submitted separately from the research proposal and will not be provided to reviewers during the initial stages of assessment. The review process will comprise four stages:

**Stage 1: Eligibility Screening:** Each application will be screened by ORCA Labs personnel to ensure it meets the eligibility requirements. Applications that do not meet these requirements will be excluded from further consideration.

### **Stage 2: Initial Triage Assessment**

The scientific proposal (maximum five pages) will be provided to reviewers without applicant names, institutional affiliations, or curriculum vitae. Each application will be independently reviewed by at least two members of the review panel. Some applications will be triaged at this point. Applications recommended for full review will progress to Stage 3.

### **Stage 3: Independent Full Review**

The blinded five-page proposal will be provided to all four panel members. The applications will be reviewed, scored and discussed by all four reviewers to generate a final application ranking.

### **Stage 4: Applicant and Team Review**

In this final stage reviewers will be provided with: Applicant names; institutional affiliations; team roles; and curriculum vitae. The information will be used to confirm that the proposed team possesses the expertise, support, infrastructure, governance arrangements, and resources required to successfully deliver the project. If significant concerns arise regarding the capacity of a team to deliver the proposed work, the panel may reconsider the ranking and funding recommendation.

### **Final Funding Recommendation**

Following completion of all review stages, the panel will make a final funding recommendation to ORCA Labs. The highest-ranked application will normally be recommended for funding. However, the panel reserves the right not to recommend any funding if no application is considered of sufficient quality or feasibility.

Should ORCA Labs not be able to settle on a collaboration agreement with the recommended project institution, ORCA Labs reserves the right to award the funding to the second highest ranked project.

## 11. Conflict of Interest Procedure

Members of the review panel are not eligible to apply for funding through this program.

Members of the review panel are required to disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest as soon as they become aware. To minimise the influence of potential conflicts, applications will be reviewed using a staged assessment process in which applicant names, institutional affiliations, team roles, and curriculum vitae are withheld during the initial triage and scientific review stages.

Given the collaborative and interconnected nature of the hearing research field, prior collaborations, professional relationships, or institutional affiliations with applicants will not automatically exclude a reviewer from participating in the assessment process.

Potential conflicts that should be disclosed if they arise, include:

- current or recent research collaborations;
- supervisory or mentoring relationships;
- shared institutional affiliations;
- financial interests;
- personal relationships; or
- any circumstance that could reasonably be perceived to influence impartiality.

Where a significant conflict is identified, management strategies may include:

- exclusion from discussion of a particular application;
- exclusion from final ranking decisions involving the application; or
- additional independent review.

The review panel will seek to ensure that all applications are assessed fairly, transparently, and primarily on the quality, feasibility, and relevance of the proposed research.

## 12. Key Dates

| <b>Milestone</b>      | <b>Date</b>       |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Call opens            | 1 July 2026       |
| Application deadline  | 15 September 2026 |
| Outcome notification  | 15 October 2026   |
| Research commencement | Beginning of 2027 |

\*These dates are provisional and subject to change.

### 13. Contact Information

For questions regarding the grant program, please contact:

Filip Marchman Rønne

[orcagrant@wsa.com](mailto:orcagrant@wsa.com)

[orca-labs.net](http://orca-labs.net)

## Appendix One

### ORCA Labs Sound Preference Research Grant Program 2026 Grant Application Form

#### General Instructions

Applications should not exceed **10 pages** in total

Applications will be assessed on:

- Alignment with the grant objectives
- Scientific and methodological quality
- Feasibility of the proposed work
- Team capability, support, and resources available to deliver the project

#### Section 1. Applicant Information (1 page maximum)

##### Lead Applicant:

- Name, Position/Role, Organisation, Country, Email

##### Project Team

- Please describe all team members and their roles in the project.

#### Section 2. Research Proposal (5 pages maximum)

##### Project Title

##### Plain Language Summary (200 words maximum)

- Provide a summary suitable for a general audience.
- This summary may be used by ORCA Labs for communication purposes if the project is funded.

##### Aims and Rationale:

- the problem or opportunity being addressed
- why the work is important
- how the project aligns with the objectives of the ORCA Labs Sound Preference Research Grant Program

##### Methodology and Approach:

- study design
- participants and recruitment
- data collection methods
- analysis approach
- anticipated challenges and mitigation strategies

##### Project Feasibility:

- access to participants, data, equipment, or facilities
- existing collaborations or partnerships

**Team Capability and Support:**

- relevant expertise within the team
- support available to deliver the project
- any mentoring or supervisory arrangements (if applicable)

Applicants are not required to demonstrate an extensive publication record.

**Stakeholder and Lived Experience Input:**

Describe how stakeholders, end users, people with lived experience, clinicians, consumers, or other relevant groups have informed, or will inform project design, project delivery, interpretation of findings, and/or dissemination activities.

If not applicable, please briefly explain why.

**Section 3. Timeline & Budget (1 page maximum)**

**Provide key milestones for the project.**

| <b>Milestone</b> | <b>Expected Completion</b> |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| Ethics approval  |                            |
| Recruitment      |                            |
| Data collection  |                            |
| Analysis         |                            |
| Dissemination    |                            |

**Total Funding Requested (EUR)****Budget Summary**

| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Amount (EUR)</b> |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Personnel         |                     |
| Consumables       |                     |
| Participant Costs |                     |
| Travel            |                     |
| Other             |                     |
| Total             |                     |

**Budget Explanation (200 words maximum)**

Briefly describe the major costs and how the requested funds will support project delivery. Please also identify any in-kind or institutional support that will contribute to the project.

Detailed cost justifications are not required.

**Section 4. Investigator Profiles.** (Maximum one page per investigator)

Please provide information most relevant to the proposed project. This may include:

- relevant expertise
- previous research experience
- selected publications (max 5)
- presentations
- implementation experience
- lived experience expertise
- consumer advocacy experience

Applicants are encouraged to include only information relevant to the proposed project.