Earth Observation Excellence Award
Terms and Conditions

October 2026

Welcome to the Earth Observation Excellence Award (EO Excellence Award). This Award celebrates outstanding achievements by early-career researchers who have contributed to the innovative and unique use of Earth Observation data and/or methods to advance science and applications. The initiative aims to encourage, support, and promote scientific excellence in line with ESA's objectives and strategy, while highlighting the contribution of Earth Observation to addressing climate change and broader environmental challenges.

The EO Excellence Award will provide two grants of up to €15K each year:

- One grant will be awarded to a researcher from an ESA Member State[1].
- One grant will be awarded to a researcher from a country outside Europe[2];

By participating in the Award, the nominations (as defined below) – agree to be bound by these Terms and Conditions and other conditions, including privacy notices, released on the Award website as well as by any decision taken by ESA in the context of this Award Programme.

I. ORGANISATION OF THE AWARD – ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

This Award Programme is launched by the European Space Agency (ESA), through its Directorate of Earth Observation Programmes and organised by AZO Anwendungszentrum GmbH Oberpfaffenhofen (mentioned hereafter as "Organiser").

ESA will contribute to the organisation of the Award Programme by:

a. Defining and outlining key scientific themes aligned with ESA's Earth Observation Science Strategy and priorities (see Section VI.(1)), to guide applicants in identifying the relevance of their proposed research activities to ESA Earth Observation scientific objectives.
b. Establishing an independent evaluation committee comprising members from ESA, the European Space Sciences Committee (ESSC), and the Advisory Committee on Earth Observation (ACEO).
c. Promoting the Award Programme through its websites (e.g. the ESA Earth Observation Portal) and social media channels.
d. Sponsoring the Award Programme.
e. Overseeing the research activities proposed by the award winners through the assignment of an ESA supervisor to support and monitor the utilisation of the awarded research grants.

The Organiser (AZO) will contribute to the organisation of the Award Programme by:

a. Managing and maintaining the Award Programme website, including the publication and update of relevant information, announcements, and programme materials.

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[1] Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

[2] The selection of the award recipient from a country outside Europe will be subject to the applicable eligibility criteria and Terms and Conditions of the Award Programme.

b. Managing communication with participants, nominees, and Awardees throughout the Award Programme, including responding to enquiries and providing relevant guidance during the nomination and evaluation process.
c. Receiving and administrating nominations, verifying the completeness of submitted materials, and preparing the nomination database and documentation required for the evaluation process.
d. Supporting the promotion of the Award Programme through communication and outreach activities, including promotional campaigns, interviews with previous Award winners, and dissemination of Award-related content.
e. Supporting the organisation of the Award Ceremony and related communication activities.

II. ELIGIBILITY & EXCLUSIONS

(1) Eligible Participants

The Award Programme is open to researchers who cumulatively fulfil the following Eligibility Conditions:

a) Early-career researchers/scientists[3].
b) The research focus must be on the use of Earth Observation satellite data in the field of science and applications. Innovative technology or engineering developments for Earth observation are not considered within the scope of this Award Programme.
c) Applicants must have a record of publications in specialised journals and demonstrate sufficient research experience.

Eligible individuals shall submit a self-nomination, subject to the eligibility criteria, exclusion conditions, and compliance with these Terms and Conditions.

ESA welcomes and encourages applications from all qualified candidates irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious beliefs, age, disability or other characteristics..

(2) Exclusion Cases

The following are not eligible to be nominated for the Award:

a. ESA staff members or contractors; they are not eligible to be nominated for the Award during their terms of service and for one year after the term is finished (meaning that the nomination for these individuals cannot be accepted during their term, but can be accepted one year or more after the term ended);
b. Any member of the Award Selection Committee.
c. Any individual who is subject to rules, restrictions or guidelines regarding competitions, gifts, prices, awards, contests etc.;
d. Any individual who received an EO Excellence Award in the past.
e. Any individual which is in any of the following cases:
    i. They have acted in a manner inconsistent with ESA's reputation, status and interests including cases of scientific misconduct;

[3] Early-career researchers/scientists are defined as those who are within five years of obtaining their highest academic degree (MSc or PhD) and no more than ten years since obtaining their first degree (BSc), excluding periods of maternity leave.

ii. They have been the subject of a judgement which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity;
iii. They have violated, or are suspected of violating, or contributed to the violation of the Intellectual Property Rights of a Third Party;
iv. They have sought to negate or restrict, through specific labelling or otherwise, the use of Proprietary Information, data and/or documents supporting the Nomination, as authorised by these Terms and Conditions ;
v. They have performed, or are suspected of having performed, illegal or unlawful practices (such as corruption);
vi. They are subject to a decision preventing them from doing business with ESA.

III. KEY DATES

Nomination period: Nominations will be accepted from **20 October 2026 [12:00 UTC]** until **23:59 UTC on 22 January 2027**. It shall be announced on the ESA EO Portal and launched on the Award website available at www.eoxcellence.com

Evaluation period: Evaluation of the Nominations shall start in **January 2027 and shall end in March 2027**.

Winners: The winners shall be announced on the ESA EO Portal and on the Award Website.

Change in timing: ESA reserves the right to modify any planned dates or schedules as necessary. The Organiser shall update the relevant information on the Award Website accordingly.

IV. HOW TO PARTICIPATE

(1) Nomination and Supporting Matterials

Individuals are invited to submit self-nominations. Each nomination must include a letter of recommendation (maximum one page) from a peer scientist in the relevant field, explaining why the candidate deserves this recognition. The letter must be signed by the individual who wrote it; joint or co-signed recommendation letters are not accepted.

The Nomination shall be submitted via the Award Website, and must be completed latest on **22 January 2027 [12:00 UTC]**.

The following information must be provided:

a. A Curriculum Vitae (CV). The CV should include the name, address, employment history, qualification degrees (and when obtained), research experience, and honors.
b. A list of selected bibliography (max. two pages): publications that best support the nomination and briefly state the Nominee's total number and types of publications and citations. Related images, graphics, animations, or videos supporting, explaining, or detailing the scientific achievements visually may also be uploaded.

c. A description of the project (maximum two pages). The description shall focus on the specific project for which the nomination is submitted and demonstrate its relevance to ESA EO core themes and the Selection Themes outlined in Section VI.(1).
d. Optionally, nominees may upload a pitch video (maximum 2–3 minutes) and/or a short PowerPoint presentation (maximum 5 slides) to further illustrate and explain the nominated project.

(2) Declarations – Representations - Warranties

By submitting a Nomination, the participants declare that they:

a. Fulfil the Eligibility Conditions (Section II.(1)) and do not fall in the Exclusion Cases (Section II.(2)).
b. Their work or project proposed for the Award is an original work;
c. Fulfil the conditions set forth herein, in particular the conditions referred to in Section IV.(1) above.

The participant may be required to formally declare these at submission, by accepting/clicking in each respective fields on the Award Website.

By participating in the Award Programme, the Nominee:

- Acknowledges that they have read and accepted these Terms and Conditions. The Nominee also agrees that the information, data, and materials submitted as part of the nomination or generated during the Award Programme may be used by ESA and the Organiser for the purposes of the programme and related communication activities.
- Guarantees that the Nomination does not contain any content which copy, reproduce, plagiarise or otherwise compromises, violates or infringes any copyright or other intellectual property right of any natural or legal person or which may violate any trade secret or confidentiality obligations.

(3) Reject - Disqualification

ESA may reject any Nomination or disqualify any Nominee in case ESA has any reason to believe that any of these Terms and Conditions are not complied with.

In particular - and without limitation - should ESA have a reason to believe that an infringement of a copyright or other intellectual property right or a violation of a trade secret or of a confidentiality obligation may have taken place by any means (including by means of an unauthorized or unlawful distribution, exhibition, or by any unauthorised use of any third party work), then ESA may reject any Nomination or disqualify any Nominee from the Award process.

V. LANGUAGE

The language of the Award Programme as well as any related communication shall be English unless a prior written permission was given by ESA to submit communication in another language.

VI. EVALUATION

The evaluation of nominations will focus on the innovative use of satellite Earth Observation datasets for scientific research and applications and will be based on the Selection Criteria and Weighting

Factors set out below. These criteria will be applied by the Award Selection Committee to assess the excellence, innovation, and potential impact of each nomination, taking into account factors such as the quality and significance of the scientific contribution, international collaboration, and the ability to engage with and contribute to broader scientific and societal communities. Successful nominations should provide evidence of achievement through a documented record of scientific publications or comparable contributions.

The ESA Earth Observation (EO) Science Strategy Overarching Themes and the Award Focus Areas are provided as guidance. They are intended to help applicants position their research in relation to ESA's Earth Observation activities and to describe the context of their project. Alignment with a particular theme or focus area is not an additional selection criterion and will not be scored separately.

(1) Selection Criteria and Weighting Factors (*How will your nomination be evaluated?*)

The following selection criteria and weighting factors are applied for the evaluation:

1. Excellence in Science (35%): Assessment of the scientific quality, significance, and impact of the work, including high-impact publications, advances in understanding Earth systems, scientific recognition, and contributions to international research collaboration.

2. Excellence in Innovation (25%): Assessment of the originality, novelty, and inventive nature of the ideas, concepts, and approaches developed. This includes new or significantly improved Earth Observation methods, data processing techniques, and capabilities that advance the state of the art.

3. EO Commercialisation and Applications (20%): Assessment of the potential to translate EO research and innovation into practical applications, products, or services with demonstrable user needs and commercial or economic value. This includes market relevance, potential users and customers, pathways to exploitation and commercialisation, and the contribution to the growth and competitiveness of the EO sector.

4. Future EO Potential and Mission Concepts (20%): Assessment of the potential to shape the future of EO through novel observation strategies, new mission concepts, or innovative approaches to data acquisition and use. This includes the potential to enable new observation capabilities, address future scientific and societal challenges, and open up new application areas that are not currently feasible or are significantly limited by existing EO capabilities.

(2) ESA's EO Science Strategy Overarching Themes (*Which Earth system challenge does your research address?*)

Applicants are invited to identify one or more of the following overarching scientific themes (STs)[4] within ESA's Earth Observation Science Strategy that are most relevant to their project:

ST-I: The Water Cycle
ST-II: The Carbon Cycle and Chemistry
ST-III: Energy Fluxes
ST-IV: Ecosystem Health
ST-V: Extremes and Hazards
ST-VI: Interfaces & Coupling in the Earth System

[4] These themes are provided as guidelines; proposals addressing topics beyond these themes are also welcome.

(3) Award Focus Areas (*What type of contribution does your research make?*)

Applicants are invited to identify one or more of the following focus areas that best describe the nature of their contribution. These focus areas are intended to provide guidance on the breadth of activities and contributions that are of interest to the Award.

a) **Mission Science and Innovative Observation Techniques:** Advancing the scientific exploitation of current and future Earth Observation missions through innovative retrieval methodologies, scientific applications, and the synergistic use of multi-mission observations.
b) **Future Mission Concepts and Advanced Observation Strategies:** Developing innovative mission concepts, and observation strategies to enhance future Earth Observation capabilities and improve the monitoring and understanding of Earth system processes.
c) **Disruptive Innovation:** Developing novel approaches based on disruptive technologies, such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, edge computing, or quantum information theory.
d) **Open EO Data and Reproducibility:** Demonstrating the use of open EO data, transparent methodologies, AI-ready datasets, and/or reproducible workflows.
e) **EO for Commercialisation:** Developing technologies and/or EO-based solutions with clear commercial potential.
f) **EO for Adaptation Actions:** Demonstrating how EO data can be combined with other data sources to support adaptation measures, including early warning systems.
g) **EO for Resilience:** Developing solutions that help societies, infrastructure, and ecosystems anticipate, withstand, and recover from environmental and societal challenges.

(4) Award Selection Committee

The Award Selection Committee shall evaluate the nominations and propose the winners to the ESA's Director of Earth Observation Programmes for approval.

The Award Selection Committee shall be established and managed by ESA and shall reflect a diverse composition. It shall be composed of:

- 4 ESA representatives (from 4 divisions of the Climate Action, Sustainability and Science Department of the ESA's Earth Observation Directorate)
- 2 ESSC members (to be nominated by the ESSC Chair)
- 2 ACEO members (to be nominated by the ACEO Chair)

All members of the Award Selection Committee will be bound by:

a. Confidentiality on the evaluation and the outcome of selection until it is approved; and
b. Impartiality and lack of conflict of interest ; in case of conflict of interests, the member of the Award Selection Committee will promptly inform in writing the Award Selection Committee chair, who shall take all the necessary measures to ensure that such potential conflict does not impair the fairness of the evaluation.

In particular, the members of the Award Selection Committee will be required to declare if they had any personal and/or professional relationship with any Nominee, including:

a) Known family relationship as spouse, child, sibling, or parent;
b) Current business or professional relationship;
c) Past or present association as thesis advisor or thesis student;
d) Having had substantial collaboration during their professional career;
e) Current employment at the same institution;
f) Previous employment at the same institution within the last 12 months.

In case of any conflict of interest with a Nominee, the member of the Award Selection Committee shall refrain from the evaluation procedure.

If more than half of the members of the Evaluation Committee declare a conflict of interest for a nomination, external evaluators will be consulted.

(5) Evaluation Process

The evaluation process consists of the following two stages:

Stage 1: Eligibility Check: Assessment based on eligibility and exclusion requirements outlined in Section II.
Stage 2: Merit-Based Evaluation: Assessment of eligible nominations against the Selection Criteria and Weighting Factors outlined in Section VI. (1).

(6) Notice

The Award winning Nominee shall be notified upon completion of the evaluation and the selection process by the Director of ESA Earth Observation Programmes – or a person to whom she has delegated such authority.

(7) Conditional Award

The granting of the Award is conditional upon the acceptance and compliance, by the Nominees, of these Terms and Conditions.

ESA reserves the right to withdraw the Award and select another Awardee in case ESA has any reason to believe that any of these Terms and Conditions are not complied with.

In addition, ESA reserves the right to ask the Nominee to execute any document necessary to confirm the rights granted by these Conditions.

VII. AWARD PRIZE & CEREMONY

The Awardee of the EO Excellence Award Programme may receive funding to support and advance the research activities for which the Award was granted.

- Following the announcement of the Awardees, each Awardee shall submit a proposal (maximum two pages) outlining the intended use of the awarded funds (the exact submission deadline will be confirmed). The proposal shall identify at least one of the ESA themes outlined above to which the proposed research is aligned and demonstrate how the planned activities contribute to this theme.
- Each Awardee may receive a maximum grant of €15K, depending on the nature and scope of the proposed activities.
- An ESA staff member will be assigned to supervise the proposed research activities and monitor the utilisation of the awarded funds.
- Eligible uses of the awarded funds include, but are not limited to:
    - Travel and networking activities, including research visits and participation in workshops organised by the Awardee(s).
    - Purchase of necessary Earth Observation data to support the research activities.
    - Field data collection and validation activities to support the research activities.
    - Student support to contribute to the advancement of the awarded research.

The Awardees will be invited to participate in the Award Ceremony, which will take place during the Living Planet Symposium (LPS). As the LPS is organised every three years, the Awardees will be invited to attend the next available edition following the announcement of the Award. ESA will sponsor the Awardees' participation in the LPS.

VIII. RIGHTS GRANTED BY PARTICIPAN IN THE AWARD

By participating in this Award Programme, the Nominee acknowledge and agree that ESA, the Organiser and any person acting under their responsibility as well as the Award Selection Committee are authorised to use (including to publish, distribute, share, edit, modify, store, display etc.) any material related to the award for communication and promotional purposes (e.g. by displaying it on ESA EO Portal and the Award Website). These may include:

a. the Nomination and the supporting documentation, including visuals like images, graphics and video material.
b. the identification data of the Nominees, as submitted in the Award process,
c. statements or declarations made by the Nominee in connection with the Award Programme or process,
d. any recordings of the voices, images or other attributes of the Nominee collected or performed in connection with the Award Programme or process.

This authorisation is granted without a formal declaration being needed in this respect, on a free of charge, perpetual, worldwide and transferable basis, for ESA's needs, in particular for:

a) the verification of the eligibility conditions and of the selection;
b) for Organisers' Communication purposes, in particular to highlight the Award Programme and to promote similar initiatives in the future.

IX. PERSONAL DATA

Personal Data is processed according to the ESA Personal Data Protection Framework. ESA collects and/or processes personal data to the extent such collection and processing is necessary or useful in the context of this Award and related communication activities.

ESA is subject to a Personal Data Protection framework composed of the following elements:

a. The Principles of Personal Data Protection, as adopted by ESA Council Resolution (ESA/C/CCLXVIII/Res.2 (Final)) adopted on 13 June 2017
b. The Rules of Procedure for the Data Protection Supervisory Authority, as adopted by ESA Council Resolution (ESA/C/CCLXVIII/Res.2 (Final)) adopted on 13 June 2017
The Policy on Personal Data Protection adopted by Director General of ESA on 5 February 2018 and effective on 1 March 2018

Participants are required to comply with ESA Framework on Personal Data Protection available at the following URL: esa.int/About_Us/Law_at_ESA/Highlights_of_ESA_rules_and_regulations

X. MISCELLANEOUS

(1) Modification – termination of the Award Program

ESA has the right to modify, suspend, cancel or terminate the Award Programme, at any time and without any obligation, liability or responsibility, for any reason, in particular, if the Award Programme is not capable of being run as planned or if its requirements are not fulfilled.

(2) Compliance with Laws and Regulations

All Participants must observe all local, regional, national, and international laws, orders, directives, ordinances, treaties, rules and regulations which may apply to them in connection with all aspects of their participation to the Award Program. Participants are solely responsible for acquiring the appropriate licenses, waivers, or permits from the applicable regulatory bodies or other applicable third parties. Organisers shall in no way be responsible for providing the Participants any advice or counsel, legal or otherwise, with regard thereto.

(3) Applicable Law and Settlement of Disputes

Except for personal data matters or incidents for which ESA Framework on Personal Data Protection shall apply, and for which ESA Supervisory Authority shall have jurisdiction:

a. Without prejudice to the applicability of ESA Convention on privileges of ESA, the agreement resulting from acceptance of these Terms and Conditions shall be governed by and shall be interpreted in accordance with the Law of France.

b. All disputes between ESA, the Organiser, and Nominees in connection with or arising out of the existence, validity, construction, performance and termination of this Award Programme (or any terms thereof) which the parties cannot resolve amicably within a reasonable period of time, shall be finally settled under the Rules of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce by 3 arbitrators appointed in accordance with the said rules. The cost of arbitration, including the fees and expenses of the arbitrators, shall be shared equally by the involved parties unless the award otherwise provides. Each involved party shall bear its own representation fees and costs associated with the arbitration. The arbitration proceedings shall be conducted in the English language in Paris (France) and the arbitration award shall be final and binding upon the parties, their successors and assigns which shall comply in good faith with such decision.

(4) Limitation of ESA liability

By participating in the Award Programme, Nominees agree:

a. that ESA will be liable only for losses resulting from procedural breaches of the Award Programme, only in the event of wilful intent (including fraudulent intent) and gross negligence on the part of ESA, provided that the claim is formulated within three (3) months of the date when the first loss occurred. Any claims beyond the above shall be excluded;
b. to release ESA and the Organiser from any and all liability, illness, injury, death, loss, litigation, claim, or damage that may occur, directly or indirectly, in connection with this Award Program.

(5) Modification of the Conditions

These Conditions may be changed by ESA at any time and shall be applicable upon notification of change at least on the Award Website. The amendments shall be numbered sequentially for the sake of traceability.

XI. LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS AND/OR DEFINITIONS

	esa.int/About_Us/Corporate_news/ESA_Headquarters
"ACEO"	Advisory Committee for Earth Observation
"Agency" or "ESA"	European Space Agency, governed by ESA Convention opened for signature in Paris on 30 May 1975 and available on www.esa.int, having its Headquarters located at 8-10 Rue Mario Nikis CS 45741 F, 75738 Paris Cedex 15, France,
"Award Website"	means either the website accessible at the following URL (eoxcellence.com) and/or the Database.
"Awardee"	the Nominee(s) selected as a winner of the EO Excellence Award, in accordance with these Terms and Conditions.
"Database"	A database made available by a third party licensor, under its own terms and conditions and its own privacy notice available on the Database, used as a tool for collecting information from the participants.
"EO Excellence Award"	Earth Observation Excellence Award to which these Terms and Conditions apply.
"ESSC"	European Space Science Committee, essc.esf.org
"Nominee"	Any Eligible person nominated themselves for the EO Excellence Award under these Terms and Conditions.
"Organiser"	AZO Anwendungszentrum GmbH Oberpfaffenhofen, Claude-Dornier-Straße 1, Gebäude 401, 82234 Weßling, Germany, azo-space.com
"Proprietary Information"	Any information or data of financial, personal, commercial or technical nature marked as proprietary, whether it is in written, electronic, photographic, oral and/or any other form relating to and/or disclosed by or on behalf of the disclosing party to the receiving party, pursuant to these Terms and Conditions.