Use of space infrastructure for vegetation research

Utilisation of various types of satellite and in-situ data for research into vegetation, biodiversity and ecosystems

Call for proposals

Science

2025

Table of contents

1 Introduction

This Call for proposal explains how the application procedure is organised for the grant round 'Use of space infrastructure for vegetation research.' This round is part of the programme Use of space infrastructure for Earth observation and planetary research (GO). This Call for proposal falls under the responsibility of the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and is being carried out in collaboration with the Netherlands Space Office (NSO).

This Call for proposal contains information about the purpose of this programme (Chapter 2), the conditions for applying for a grant (Chapter 3) and how your proposal will be assessed (Chapter 4). You will need this information in order to submit a grant application. Chapter 5 contains the obligations for grant recipients in the event you are awarded for funding. Chapter 6 contains the contact details and Chapter 7 the annexes.

1.1 Background

The programme 'Use of space infrastructure for Earth observation and planetary research,' or GO programme, is funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The programme is part of Dutch space policy. Promoting the use of space infrastructure for science and society is a priority of this policy.

1.1.1 General objective of the GO programme

Various national and international space organisations and institutions have launched and maintained an advanced and extensive infrastructure in space. This space infrastructure, and the data and signals it produces, is available to scientific and other users. NWO, together with the Ministry of OCW and NSO, wants to encourage the use of this infrastructure by Dutch researchers for the benefit of science and society. Therefore, the aim of the GO programme is:

Supporting researchers who work in the Netherlands in making substantial use of infrastructure in space for the purpose of high-quality scientific research.

Within this objective, the GO programme is open to scientific research in the area of two themes: 1. Earth observation and 2. planets and other objects within our solar system. These themes are scientific priorities under the current Dutch space policy.

1.1.2 Call variants within the GO programme

In the 2023-2025 funding period, several grant rounds of the GO programme were announced, and various variants of the GO programme were used. The regular GO variant focusses on proposals from individual applicants for scientific research within the objective of the GO programme. In terms of content, these proposals must address a question in the broader GO themes of Earth observation and planets (and other objects) within our solar system. In addition to the regular GO variant, there are thematic variants that allow the GO budget to be used in a more specific and targeted manner.

The current Call for proposal concerns the third grant round in the period 2023-2025 and concerns the thematic variant. The defined theme is described in Chapter 2. The available budget is intended to fund one coherent research programme of collaborating applicants (a consortium).

1.2 Available budget

The available budget for this Call for proposals is €3,200,000. With this budget, NWO will fund one research programme.

1.3 Submission deadline(s)

When submitting your proposal in ISAAC, you will also need to enter data online. Therefore, please start submitting your proposal at least one day before the deadline for this Call for proposal. Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration.

The deadline for registration for the first preparatory workshop is **10 February 2026**, 14:00:00 CET. The workshop will take place on **13 February 2026.**

The deadline for registration for the second preparatory workshop is **24 February 2026**, 14:00:00 CET. The workshop will take place on **27 February 2026.**

The deadline for submitting proposals is **7 May 2026**, before 14:00:00 CEST.

2 Objective

This chapter describes the programme's objective and societal impact.

2.1 Objective of the programme

2.1.1 Theme and objective of this Call for proposal

This GO Call for proposal is open to innovative scientific research focused on the use of space-infrastructure for vegetation research, in which the use of various types of satellite and in-situ data for research within the application areas of biodiversity and ecosystems is central (as explained in 'Background theme description').

With regard to the general objective of the GO programme (see section 1.1.1), the following matters are specified in more detail in this Call for proposal:

- Use of space infrastructure: use of data obtained via space infrastructure, including at least hyperspectral data and other satellite data (e.g. optical, radar);
- Scientific research: this concerns interdisciplinary scientific issues, which is understood to mean scientific issues at the interface of multiple (sub)disciplines or topics in the Earth and Environmental sciences relating to vegetation, including ecosystems and biodiversity.

The policy objective of this GO Call for proposal is twofold:

- On the one hand, it aims to strengthen the interaction between the various (sub)disciplines in the Earth observation and Earth and environmental sciences community, which is one of the objectives of the Dutch Earth Observation strategic plan 2020-2025[1] .
- On the other hand, it prepares for a stronger position for Dutch research in the processing of existing and future hyperspectral data for issues relevant to the Netherlands concerning vegetation.

To achieve the objectives, this GO round focuses on funding one coherent research proposal from a consortium of applicants, in which:

- Interrelated sub-projects address scientific questions within the theme;
- Different types of data from space infrastructure are used, with the use of hyperspectral data being mandatory;
- Explicit attention is paid to the inclusion of in-situ data for the purpose of improving the quality of satellite data, for example through calibration/validation;
- The sub-projects or related sub-projects take place at the interface between (sub-)disciplines. If desired, related sub-themes can be defined within the research programme.

Coherence is a requirement to prevent the research programme from becoming a collection of separate projects.

Background theme description

Within the framework of the general GO objective, this round of the GO programme focuses on a specific theme within Earth observation research: the use of space infrastructure for vegetation research, in particular the use of different types of satellite and in-situ data for vegetation research.

[1] Earth Observation strategic plan 2020-2025:
https://www.spaceoffice.nl/files/Rapporten/EO%20research%20Strategic%20Plan%202020%20LR%20beveiligd.pdf

This theme emerged as the highest priority in a consultation with the Dutch Earth Observation research community mid-2025. The theme is explained in more detail below.

An increasing amount of satellite Earth Observation data is available, often as open data. Satellite data is an essential source for answering complex scientific questions in the Earth and Environmental sciences. For example, in the fields of climate change, the environment and living conditions, safety and health. Satellite data therefore play an increasingly important role in modelling and monitoring processes that take place above, on and below the earth's surface, on a global, regional and local scale. The usefulness of satellite data for research depends heavily on their quality and accuracy. Data issues surrounding validation, processing and interpretation are essential for obtaining reliable insights.

This Call focuses on research into vegetation using different types of satellite data. Vegetation is a crucial part of the land surface and plays a central role in various areas of application, such as ecosystems and biodiversity. These areas of application are in turn relevant to broader societal issues, including food security, health, safety, and climate change. For example, vegetation influences agricultural yields and the resilience of landscapes in extreme weather conditions. In addition, vegetation contributes to the absorption of carbon dioxide. The diversity of vegetation in the different climate zones and regions on earth makes the issue complex and underlines the importance of large-scale and inclusive global observations.

Satellite observations can make an important contribution to answering scientific questions about vegetation. Optical satellite images, such as those from the Sentinel-2 mission and similar systems, are already widely used in Earth and Environmental sciences, but cannot always be used due to cloud cover. Radar satellites, such as those from the Sentinel-1 mission, are not affected by cloud cover and therefore provide valuable additional information. However, vegetation modelling with radar data is still under development. In recent years, there has been an increasing availability of hyperspectral data, with many frequencies observed in each image. This feature makes hyperspectral data very promising, particularly for issues related to vegetation. In the coming years, with several new missions such as FLEX and CHIME, more and better quality hyperspectral data will become available as open data. Different types of satellite data, each with their own characteristics, can reinforce each other to improve the quality of the knowledge and insights derived from them. The current Call therefore also aims to promote the integration of different types of satellite data for the benefit of vegetation-related scientific issues.

In addition, calibration and validation of the information derived from satellite data is important to ensure the quality of the satellite data. Calibrating and validating different types of satellite data requires multiple types of ground data, and validation campaigns can vary greatly. In-situ data therefore plays an important role within the theme of this Call.

Issues relating to vegetation are particularly interdisciplinary in nature within the Earth and Environmental sciences. Knowledge in the fields of soil, water, land surface, atmosphere, and *remote sensing* (satellite earth observation) converge here. In the Netherlands, this knowledge is available at several universities and research institutes. By combining this knowledge and working together in an interdisciplinary manner, satellite data can be utilised even more effectively, and a significant contribution can be made to insights into vegetation issues.

2.1.2 Explanation of programme objective terminology

The terminology used in the description of the programme objective is explained below. A distinction is made between:

a. (current or past) existing space infrastructure, and

b. planned space infrastructure, which is under development within an existing programmatic framework or is at least in a peer-review process.

1. 'Space infrastructure' includes scientific and operational satellites and other spacecraft managed by national and international space agencies such as ESA, NASA, JAXA, CNES, ISRO, CNSA and DLR, international institutional organisations such as the EU and EUMETSAT, and/or commercial organisations. This space infrastructure is located in space in orbit (in free fall) around the Earth.
2. 'Use' here refers to the actual processing or handling of digital data originating from space infrastructure (actual observations or test data, see point 4).
3. 'Substantial use' refers to the degree of relevance to the research: the research cannot be conducted without the use of space infrastructure. 'Substantial use' does not refer to the amount of data processed.
4. The term 'data' refers to
   - In the case of a (current or past space infrastructure): digital data recorded/collected by the space infrastructure (using instruments/sensors) and transmitted to Earth; or consisting of signals transmitted by the space infrastructure, generated in the space infrastructure and received on Earth;
   - In the case of b (planned space infrastructure, which is under development within an existing programmatic framework, or is at least in a peer-review process): digital 'test' data obtained on the basis of equivalent data from existing space infrastructure (or modified versions of that data); or from (*end-to-end)* simulations; or using instruments/sensors located on the ground (in the field or laboratory) or in the air.
5. The 'substantial use of space infrastructure data' must involve the use of original or 'primary' data: data that has not yet been irreversibly influenced or altered, i.e. raw data or (geo)physical data derived directly from it. In the data processing chain, primary data is therefore close to the instrument and, in general, detailed technical knowledge of the instrument and the satellite mission is required in order to use the data. Many satellite missions (but not all) use so-called data levels in the data processing chain. Often (but not always), the so-called Level 0, Level 1 and Level 2 data products fall under primary data.
6. The research referred to may also include research that uses the data referred to in 4-b) (the 'test' data) for the purpose of calibrating or validating the data referred to in 4-a). The generation of the data referred to in 4-b) (the 'test' data) may also form part of the research.

2.1.3 Preparatory workshops

NWO and NSO are organising two workshops to facilitate the preparation of a joint research programme proposal. During these workshops, researchers can meet each other, share their ideas for research topics and explore opportunities for collaboration. These workshops will take place on 13 and 27 February 2026. Participation in both workshops is mandatory in order to submit an application as the main applicant. Details of the workshops will be announced on the GO programme page. For more information, please contact the persons listed in section 6.1.

2.2 Societal impact

New knowledge and insights from scientific research can make an important contribution to developing solutions for the various issues society faces, including, amongst other things, the energy transition, health and care, or climate change. By facilitating greater interaction and alignment between researchers and potential knowledge users, the chance of knowledge utilisation increases, as well as the likelihood of generating societal impact. Societal impact here stands for changes that (partly) result from research-generated knowledge and skills. These changes contribute to the well-being of people, planet and society for this and future generations. Through its policy on impact, NWO promotes the potential contribution that research can make to societal issues by encouraging productive interactions with societal stakeholders, both during the development stage and the subsequent implementation of research. It does so in a manner that is in accordance with the aim of the particular funding instrument. NWO encourages researchers to reflect on the potential desired and undesired impact of their research from a broad perspective.

2.2.1 Tailored impact

The primary aim of the funding instrument determines the method that NWO will deploy to facilitate knowledge utilisation in various phases of the project (proposal, realisation, project completion) as well as the effort required from the applicant(s) and partner(s).

In this programme, the Impact Outlook approach is applied. Here, researchers can choose which type of impact they want to specifically focus on, while proportional consideration is also given to what can be done for the remaining impact.

NWO offers an e-learning module that can help interested parties via Online impact workshops | NWO. For more information on our policy on impact, please visit the website: Knowledge utilisation | NWO.

3 Conditions for applicants

This chapter contains the conditions that are applicable to your grant application. Firstly, it describes who can apply for funding (Section 3.1) and what you can request funding for (Section 3.2). Subsequently, you will find the conditions for preparing and submitting the application (Sections 3.3 and 3.4) and the specific funding conditions (Section 3.5).

3.1 Who can submit a proposal

Proposals are submitted by a main applicant on behalf of the consortium, which consists of three or more co-applicants in addition to the main applicant.

There are two categories of consortium applicants:
1. Main applicant
2. Co-applicant(s)

Researchers may submit a proposal if they are in permanent employment (and therefore have a paid employment contract for an indefinite period*) or have a tenure track agreement with one of the following research organisations:
- Universities as referred to in Article 1.8 paragraph 1 of the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act and universities listed in the Policy Rule on Universities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands;
- University medical centres by which is meant academic hospitals as referred to in Article 1.13 paragraph 1 of the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act;
- KNAW and NWO institutes;
- Deltares;
- the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI);
- IHE Delft
- Joint Institute for Very Long Baseline Interferometry European Research Infrastructure Consortium (JIVE).
- NCB Naturalis;
- Advanced Research Centre for NanoLithography (ARCNL).

Persons with a zero-hour employment contract or a fixed-term employment contract (other than a tenure track) are excluded from submitting a proposal.

It could be the case that the applicant's tenure track agreement ends before the intended completion date of the project for which funding is applied for, or that before that date, the applicant's tenured contract ends due to the applicant reaching retirement age. In that case, the applicant needs to include a statement from their employer in which the research organisation concerned guarantees that the project and all project members for whom funding has been requested will receive adequate supervision for the full duration of the project.

Applicants with a part-time contract should guarantee adequate supervision of the project and all project members for whom funding is requested.

Additional conditions (applicable to both the main applicant and co-applicants):
- Applicants must be employed by at least four different institutions;
- Applicants may only submit one proposal, regardless of whether this is in the capacity of main applicant or co-applicant.

3.1.1 Main and co-applicants

The main applicant submits the proposal via ISAAC, NWO's electronic submission system. During the assessment process, NWO communicates with the main applicant.
After a proposal has been awarded funding, the main applicant will become the project leader and point of contact for NWO. The knowledge institution of the main applicant is the main beneficiary and will become the official secretary.
Co-applicants have an active role in realising the project. The (sub)project leaders and beneficiary/beneficiaries are jointly responsible for realising the entire project.

3.2 What can be applied for

A maximum of €3,200,000 may be requested for a project. The maximum duration of the proposed project is six years. The applicants may claim costs for personnel, equipment, investments, and knowledge utilisation. The available budget modules (including the maximum amounts) are listed below. Only request what is essential to carry out the project. The rates and an explanation of these budget modules are provided in Appendix 7.1.

To promote interdisciplinary collaboration, a minimum of eight staff positions of PhD student and/or postdoc type should be applied for, which should be appointed at a minimum of four different organisations participating in the consortium. Staff can only be appointed at institutions listed in section 3.1.

A minimum of €5,000 and a maximum of €60,000 of the amount applied for should be spent on activities that promote interdisciplinary community building and networking.

3.2.1 Personnel

Funding may be requested for salary costs of personnel contributing to the project. The amount depends on the type of appointment and the organisation where the personnel is employed.

3.2.1.1 Personnel at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a university medical centre (UMC) or a research organisation

For personnel working at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, university medical centre (umc) or another research organisation, as referred to in Article 1.1, first paragraph, subparagraphs c to h of the NWO Grant Rules 2024 salary costs can be claimed for the following positions: PhD student, postdoc, non-scientific personnel (NWP).
Salary costs for applicants are not eligible for subsidy.

Personnel of other organisations referred to in section 3.1

It is possible to claim salary costs of personnel of other organisations mentioned in section 3.1.

3.2.1.2 Students

It is possible to deploy students for the project if they are studying at a research organisation mentioned in section 3.1. The costs of this can be entered within the project as material costs. There is no maximum number of students who can participate in the project.

3.2.2 Materials

Funding may be requested for all project-specific material costs. These costs are subject to a maximum of 25% of the NWO grant amount.
Up to 50% of the material budget requested from NWO may be used for third-party work.

3.2.3 Investments

Funding may be requested for investments in equipment, infrastructure, and other research resources that have economic value or can be reused after the project ends. Salary costs of personnel who put the equipment, infrastructure and other research resources in a state of readiness can be claimed as part of the investments. The rates and conditions of Personnel apply here, and the costs should be claimed as Investments. Investments can only be made at research organisations listed in Section 3.1.

A maximum of €500,000 can be requested for investments.

3.2.4 Knowledge utilisation

Funding may be requested for activities that promote the use of knowledge from the research[2], in order to increase the societal impact of the research.

A maximum of 5% of the grant amount can be used for this module. Use of this module is not mandatory.

3.3 Preparing and submitting the proposal

A proposal is drawn up (and submitted) after the preparatory workshops, in which ideas are brought together, possible collaborations are explored and the crucial initial agreements for the joint development of the application are made.

The steps involved in writing your application are:
- download the application form from the NWO web application ISAAC or from the NWO web page (on the grant page of the funding instrument concerned);
- complete the application form;
- save the application form in ISAAC as a PDF file and upload it with any compulsory annexes;
- fill in the requested information online in ISAAC.

Compulsory annex:
- budget

[2] All activities applied for under this budget module must fit within the definition of "Knowledge Transfer Activities" used by the European Commission in the Framework for State Aid for Research, Development and Innovation (OJEU 2022, C 414).

Optional annex:
- statement of appointment and project supervision.

The proposal and the appendix(es) must be drawn up in accordance with the template provided by NWO. Annexes must be uploaded in ISAAC separately from the application. The budget must be submitted in ISAAC as an Excel file. All of the other annexes, except for the budget, must be submitted as PDF files (without encryption). Any annexes other than those stated above are not permitted.

You must write your application in English.

The use of generative AI is not excluded when preparing your proposal, provided that this is done in a responsible manner. The guidelines can be found on the website (NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) | NWO).

An application can only be submitted via the web application ISAAC. Applications that are not submitted via ISAAC will not be taken into consideration.
As the main applicant, you are required to submit the application via your own personal ISAAC account.

It is important to start with your application in ISAAC on time:
- if you do not yet have an ISAAC account, then you should create this on time to prevent any possible registration problems;
- any new research organisations must also be added to ISAAC by NWO;
- you also need to submit other details online.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration by NWO.
For technical questions, please contact the ISAAC helpdesk, see contact (Chapter 6).

Applicants are expected to have informed the research organisation where they work about submitting the application and that the research organisation accepts the grant conditions of this Call for proposals.

3.3.1 Advice about substantive suitability

For this Call for proposals, your application must fit within the thematic description of this GO Call for proposal. Therefore, please consider well ahead of time whether your application meets the substantive criteria. In the event of any doubt, for instance because your application (partly) encompasses various domains and/or has a ZonMw character, then please get in touch with the contact person for this programme well in advance of the deadline. This person can advise you about the substantive connection between your application and this Call for proposals. Please note that the final choice is yours. For contact details please see Section 6.1.1.

3.4 Conditions for submission

3.4.1 Formal conditions for submission

NWO will assess your application against all the conditions set out in this Call for proposals, including the conditions listed below. Your application will only be admitted to the assessment procedure if it meets these conditions. After submitting your application, NWO requests you to be available to implement any possible administrative corrections so that you can (still) meet the conditions for submission.

These conditions are:

- the main applicant and co-applicant(s) meet the conditions stated in Section 3.1
- the application complies with the DORA guidelines as described in Section 4.1;
- the application is submitted via the main applicant's ISAAC account;
- the application is received before the deadline;
- the application is written in English;
- the application budget is drawn according to the terms of this Call for proposals (using the format made available which includes the most recent rates);
- the proposed project has a duration of maximum 6 year;
- the main applicant has participated in both workshops.

All required annexes, after a possible request for additions or changes, have been completed and submitted completely and according to the instructions and in accordance with the terms of this Call for proposals.

3.5 Conditions on granting

All proposals are subject to the NWO Grant Rules 2024 and the Agreement on the Funding of Scientific Research.

3.5.1 Knowledge Security

In the National Knowledge Security Guidelines, the Dutch knowledge sector (including NWO) and various government departments have laid down guidelines for those within research organisations who are involved in international collaboration and who need to weigh up the opportunities and (security) risks involved. Self-regulation by the knowledge sector is central to the approach to knowledge security within the Netherlands.

NWO expects applicants to comply with the knowledge security policy of their research organisation. If NWO receives indications that a proposal or an allocated project entails knowledge security risks, NWO may request the applicant or project leader to provide insight into the risk mitigation measures. In addition, NWO may decide to include further conditions in the award letter to protect knowledge security.

The National Knowledge Security Guidelines can be found on the website of the Dutch government: Home | National Contact Point for Knowledge Security (loketkennisveiligheid.nl).

3.5.2 Data management

The results of scientific research must be replicable, verifiable, and falsifiable. In the digital age, this means that, in addition to publications, research data must also be publicly accessible as far as this is possible. NWO expects that research data resulting from NWO-funded projects will be made publicly available, as much as possible, for reuse by other researchers. “As open as possible, as closed as necessary” is the applicable principle in this respect. Researchers, at very least, are expected to make the data and/or non-numerical results that underlie the conclusions of the published work resulting from the project publicly available at the same time as the work’s publication. Any costs incurred for this can be included in the project budget. Researchers should explain how data emerging from the project will be dealt with based on the data management section in the proposal and the data management plan that is drawn up after funding is awarded.

Data management section

The data management section is part of the proposal. Researchers are asked before the start of the research to consider how the data collected will be ordered and categorised so that this can be made publicly available. Measures will often already need to be taken, both during data generation and as part of analysing the data, to make its subsequent storage and dissemination possible. If it is not possible to make all data from the project publicly available, for example due to reasons of privacy, ethics, or valorisation, then the applicant is obliged to list the reasons for this in the data management section.

The data management section in the proposal is not evaluated and will therefore not be weighed in the decision whether to award funding. However, the committee can issue advice with respect to the data management section.

3.5.3 Scientific integrity

In accordance with the NWO Grant Rules 2024, the project that NWO funds must be carried out in accordance with the nationally and internationally accepted standards for scientific conduct as stated in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018). By submitting the proposal, the applicant commits to this code. In the case of a (possible) violation of these standards during a project funded by NWO, the applicant should immediately inform NWO of this and should submit all relevant documents to NWO. More information about the code of conduct and the policy regarding research integrity can be found on the website: Scientific integrity | NWO.

3.5.4 Ethical statement or licence

The applicant is responsible for determining whether an ethical statement or licence is needed for the realisation of the proposed project. The applicant should ensure that this is obtained from the relevant institution or ethics committee on time. The absence or presence of an ethical statement or licence at the time of the application process has no effect on the assessment of the application. If an ethics statement or licence is required for (part of) the research, the project leader must provide a copy of this statement or licence to NWO after the project has been awarded, and in any case no later than before implementation of the part of the project for which the statement is required starts. The part of the project requiring the statement and/or licence can obviously not (yet) be carried out as long as no statement or licence has been provided.

3.5.5 Nagoya Protocol

The Nagoya Protocol ensures an honest and reasonable distribution of benefits emerging from the use of genetic resources (Access and Benefit Sharing; ABS). Researchers who make use of genetic sources from the Netherlands or abroad for their research should familiarise themselves with the Nagoya Protocol (Home - ABS Focal Point). NWO assumes that researchers will take all necessary actions with respect to the Nagoya Protocol.

3.5.6 Co-funding

Co-funding is not allowed in this Call for proposal.

4 Assessment procedure

This chapter first describes the assessment according to the DORA principles (Section 4.1) and the course of the assessment procedure (Section 4.2). Second, it states the criteria that the assessment committee will use to assess your application (Section 4.3).

The NWO Code for Dealing with Personal Interests applies to all persons and NWO employees involved in the assessment and/or decision-making process (Code for Dealing with Personal Interests | NWO).

The use of generative AI is completely prohibited when assessing an application. More information about the policy on generative AI can be found on the website (NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) | NWO).

NWO strives to achieve an inclusive culture where there is no place for conscious or unconscious barriers due to cultural, ethnic or religious background, gender, sexual orientation, health or age (Diversity and inclusion | NWO). NWO encourages members of an assessment committee to be actively aware of implicit associations and to try to minimise these. NWO will provide them with information about concrete ways of improving the assessment of an application.

4.1 The San Francisco Declaration (DORA)

NWO is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). DORA is a worldwide initiative that aims to improve the way research and researchers are assessed. DORA contains recommendations for research funders, research organisations, scientific journals and other parties.

DORA aims to reduce the uncritical use of bibliometric indicators and obviate unconscious bias in the assessment of research and researchers. DORA's overarching philosophy is that research should be evaluated on its own merits rather than on the basis of surrogate measures, such as the journal in which the research is published.

When assessing the scientific track record of applicants, NWO makes use of a broad definition of scientific output.

NWO requests committee members not to rely on indicators such as the Journal Impact Factor or the h-index when assessing applications. Applicants are not allowed to mention these in their applications. You are, however, allowed to list other scientific products besides publications, such as datasets, patents, software and code, et cetera.

For more information on how NWO is implementing the principles of DORA, see DORA | NWO.

4.2 Procedure

The application procedure consists of the following steps:

- preparatory workshops;
- submission of the proposal;
- admissibility of the proposal;
- pre-assessment
- interview;
- assessment of the proposal and advice;

- decision-making.

Assessment committee

An external, independent assessment committee will be assigned for this Call for proposals, consisting of representatives from science with knowledge of the field.
The task of the assessment committee is to assess the applications and the relevant documents that are submitted, in conjunction with each other and with regard to both the respective merits of each application and the assessment criteria outlined in this Call for proposals.

Due to both the expertise present in the assessment committee and the small size of the grant, NWO has decided with regard to the assessment of these applications to exercise the option outlined in Article 2.2.4, paragraph 2, of the NWO Grant Rules 2024, to assess all applications without involving referees.

The assessment committee is composed by the NWO office in consultation with the NSO office. To this end, it is necessary for NWO to share details of the proposal with NSO.

4.2.1 Preparatory workshops

The first phase of this Call for proposal comprises two consecutive preparatory workshops.
The preparatory workshops aim to promote optimal networking around the theme and stimulate collaboration. The workshops offer the opportunity to combine ideas and form an innovative consortium (pooling of resources). This contributes to focus and reduces competition and application pressure. It is then up to the participants to start a collaboration. Interested researchers are encouraged to participate in the workshops, as they offer opportunities to meet potential new partners and develop ideas for the research proposal. A facilitator and subject experts from NWO and NSO will be present at the workshops. Participation in both workshops is mandatory for the main applicant; for co-applicants, participation is strongly recommended but not a requirement for submission.

More information about the workshops will also be announced on the programme page on the NWO website.

Participants are asked to register in advance of the workshops. When registering, participants are asked to explain how their expertise can contribute to the theme. Registration is possible via the registration form on the grant page. The deadline for registration is three working days before the workshop. Registered expertise will be shared with workshop participants and published on the website for this grant round to encourage new parties to join the consortium.

4.2.2 Submission of a proposal

For the submission of the proposal, a standard form is available on the funding page of this Call for proposals on the NWO website. When you write your proposal, you must adhere to the questions stated on this form and the procedure given in the explanatory notes. You must also adhere to the conditions for the maximum number of words and pages.
Your complete application form must have been received before the deadline via ISAAC (see Section 1.3). After this deadline, you can no longer submit a proposal. After submitting the proposal, the main applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt.

4.2.3 Admissibility of the proposal

As soon as possible after you have submitted your proposal, you will hear from NWO whether or not your proposal will be taken into consideration. NWO will determine this based on several administrative-technical criteria (see the formal conditions for submission, Section 3.4). NWO can only take your proposal into consideration if it meets these conditions.
Please bear in mind that within two weeks after the submission deadline, NWO may approach you with any possible administrative corrections that need to be made so that your proposal can (still) meet the conditions for submission. You will be given one opportunity to make the corrections, and you will be given five working days to do this.

4.2.4 Pre-advice from the assessment committee

After this, your proposal will be submitted for comments to members of the assessment committee (the pre-advisers). The pre-advisers will provide a written substantive and reasoned response to the proposal. They will formulate these comments based on the substantive assessment criteria (see Section 4.3.1) and will give the proposal a numerical score per assessment criterion. For this, the NWO score table will be used (on a scale of 1 to 9, where “1” is excellent and “9” unsatisfactory). The pre-advisers also identify which parts need to be clarified, explained or explored in more depth during the interview.

4.2.5 Interview

During the interview, the assessment committee will have the opportunity to pose questions. During the interview, the consortium will be able to respond to these in the discussion with the committee. In this manner, the principle of having a hearing and an opportunity for rebuttal is applied. The interview is an important part of the assessment procedure and can lead to an adjustment of both the assessment and the score of the proposal.

4.2.6 Meeting of the assessment committee

The committee will make its own assessment based on the available material. Although the pre-advices will ‘guide’ the final assessment to a large extent, it will not be blindly accepted without question by the committee. The committee will consider and compare the arguments of the pre-advisers (also amongst each other) and examine whether the rebuttal contains a well-formulated response to the critical comments from the pre-advices.

Following the discussion, the committee draws up a written recommendation addressed to NWO Science domain about the quality and ranking of the proposals. This recommendation is based on the assessment criteria. The proposal must receive an overall qualification of at least “very good” to be eligible for funding. The proposal must also receive at least the qualification “good” for each of the individual assessment criteria.
For more information about the qualifications, see Applying for funding, how does it work? | NWO.

If, after the discussion of the proposals, two or more of the proposals cannot be distinguished from each other based on their weighted total score, then this will result in an ex aequo situation (see Section 4.2.7).

4.2.7 Ex aequo

NWO understands ex aequo to be a situation in which two or more proposals based on their weighted score cannot be distinguished from each other. An ex aequo situation is relevant with respect to the borders of the available budget or the selection borders. The existence of an ex aequo situation is determined as follows. The starting point in this process is the ranking drawn up by the assessment committee, with the final scores rounded to two decimal points. The reference score here is the score of the lowest-ranked proposal within the borders of the available budget or the selection borders. All proposals with a score that is within 0.05 or less of the reference score will be considered. In this way, the proposals that are equal within a score of 0.1 will be selected. If an ex aequo situation occurs at the borders of the available budget or the selection borders, the proposal with the highest score on the criterion 'Coherence of the research programme and alignment with the objective of the Call for proposal' will be ranked highest. If the ex aequo situation is not resolved via this procedure, then the proposal with the highest score for the criterion 'Scientific quality' will be ranked highest. If the proposals subsequently still remain tied, then the assessment committee, with the help of an (anonymous) majority vote, will determine the ranking (in accordance with Article 2.2.6, paragraph 5 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024). If this vote also fails to provide a resolution, or if it is deemed to be undesirable to vote, then the ex aequo situation will be sent onto the decision-making body.

4.2.8 Decision-making

Finally, the board of the NWO Domain Science will review the procedure followed and the recommendation of the assessment committee. They will subsequently determine the final qualifications and make a decision over awarding or rejecting the proposals.

4.2.9 Timetable

Below, you will find the timetable for this Call for proposals. During the current procedure, NWO might find it necessary to make further changes to the timetable for this Call for proposals. You will be informed about this in time.

Workshop

10 February 2026	Deadline for registration for the first preparatory workshop and submission of contributions
13 February 2026	First preparatory workshop (participation mandatory for main applicant)
24 February	Deadline for registration for second preparatory workshop and submission of contributions (if applicable)
27 February	Second preparatory workshop (participation mandatory for main applicant)

Proposals

7 May 2026, before 14:00:00 CEST	Application deadline
June 2026	Interview with the assessment committee
June/July 2026	Board decision

4.3 Criteria

4.3.1 Substantive assessment criteria

The applications submitted within this Call for proposals will be substantially assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Coherence of the research programme and alignment with the objective of the Call for proposal (25%)
2. Scientific quality (30%)
3. Quality of the consortium (25%)
4. Scientific and/or societal impact (20%)

The following aspects are distinguished within the four assessment criteria:

1. Coherence of the research programme and alignment with the objective of the Call for proposal (25%)

   This refers to:
   - the suitability of the proposal to the objective of the Call as described in section 2.1;
   - the extent to which the research questions correspond to the theme of the Call for proposal;
   - coherence and balance between the sub-projects within the proposed research programme;
   - the interdisciplinary nature of the research programme and the extent to which the research programme stimulates integration and collaboration between (sub)disciplines;
   - effectiveness of the plan of action for interdisciplinary community building and networking, including the proposed budget for the relevant activities;
   - the extent to which the research programme contributes to a strong positioning of the Netherlands in the field of research.

2. Scientific quality (30%)

   This refers to:
   - clarity of the proposal, research question and objectives;
   - the extent to which the research proposal contains scientifically innovative and/or groundbreaking elements;
   - feasibility of the proposed scientific approach and plan of action, including the proposed budget;
   - effectiveness of the proposed methodology.
   - the degree of integration and complementarity with which the various types of satellite data contribute to answering the research question;
   - the extent to which the use of hyperspectral data contributes to answering the research question;
   - the extent to which the use of in-situ data for the purpose of improving the quality of satellite data is relevant to the research question to be answered;

3. Quality of the consortium (25%)

   This refers to:
   - the composition of the consortium logically matches the knowledge, skills and expertise required for the implementation of the project;
   - the added value of the consortium compared to individual research projects, including the degree of cooperation between different research disciplines and research groups;
   - the extent to which the researchers involved have access to the necessary equipment;
   - the clarity and effectiveness of the consortium's organisational structure.

4. Scientific and/or societal impact (20%)

The applicant can choose whether to focus the research proposal on achieving scientific impact, societal impact, or a combination of both. Choosing a focus *does not* mean that the other aspect of impact does not need to be described, but it does mean that proportionally less attention needs to be paid to it.

Scientific impact is understood to mean:

- the potential and relevance of the research results for the applicant's own and related field(s);
- the potential and relevance of the research results for the broader scientific field.

Societal impact is understood to mean:

- the added value of the project for societal impact (see definition[3])
- the potential for societal impact in the short and long term;
- a vision of the way(s) in which the proposed research can lead to societal impact.

In addition to the above, the assessment committee will also consider the following as part of this criterion:

- the motivation for the focus on scientific impact and/or societal impact and the appropriateness of the motivation in relation to the objective of the Call (see Chapter 2);
- if the focus is primarily on scientific impact: how proportional attention will be given to increasing (unforeseen) opportunities for societal impact during the course of the project;
- if the focus is primarily on societal impact: how proportional attention will be given during the course of the project to increasing (unforeseen) opportunities for scientific impact;
- sufficient attention to the main risks of undesirable societal impact and the measures proposed to prevent or mitigate this and increase the chance of desirable impact.

[3] Societal impact refers to the societal (cultural, economic, industrial, ecological, or social) changes that are (partly) the result of knowledge and expertise generated by research. These changes contribute to the well-being of people, the planet and society for present and future generations.

5 Obligations for grant recipients

This chapter details the various obligations that - in addition to the conditions stated in Section 3.5 - apply after funds have been awarded.

5.1 Accountability and closure

Accountability during the project

During the project, the main applicant is responsible for reporting on the project. NWO may request interim substantive and financial reports in order to monitor the progress of the project. More information on this will follow in the grant letter.

Closure of a project

Upon completion of a project, substantive and financial final reports will be requested. After approval, the final amount of the grant will be determined.

5.2 Data management

After a proposal has been awarded funding, the researcher should elaborate the data management section into a data management plan. For this, applicants can make use of the advice from the referees and committee. The applicant must describe in the plan whether existing data will be used, or whether new data will be collected or generated, and how this data will be made FAIR: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable. Before submission, the data management plan should be checked by a data steward or similar officer of the research organisation where the project will be realised. NWO will check the plan as quickly as possible. Approval of the data management plan by NWO is a condition for disbursement of the funding. The plan can be adjusted during the research.
More information about the data management protocol of NWO can be found at: Research data management | NWO.

5.3 Intellectual property and consortium agreement

With respect to intellectual property (IP), the NWO IP policy applies. This can be found in Chapter 4 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024.

Applicants must carry out a project funded by NWO during the time that they work for the research organisation. If an applicant or a researcher funded by NWO is appointed by more than one employer, then the other employer should relinquish any possible IP rights that emerge from the project of the applicant.

NWO strongly recommends concluding a consortium agreement after the grant award of the proposal, but this is not a condition for the start of the project. In this agreement, arrangements are made about intellectual property and publication, knowledge transfer, confidentiality, progress reports, and final reports. The responsibility for arranging the consortium agreement lies with the applicant. NWO is not a party in the consortium agreement and does not sign the agreement itself.

The model agreement that NWO makes available must be used and can be found on the funding page of this Call for proposals. This model agreement has been drawn up in accordance with the NWO Grant Rules 2024.

5.4 Socially responsible licensing

The knowledge that emerges from the project could be suitable for use in society. When agreements about licensing and/or the transfer of research results developed under this Call for proposals are made, due consideration should be given to the ten principles for socially responsible licensing, as stated in the UMCNL factsheet "Ten principles for Socially Responsible Licensing".

5.5 Open Access

As a signatory to the Berlin Declaration (2003) and a member of cOAlition S (2018), NWO is committed to making the results of the research it funds openly accessible via the internet (Open Access). By doing this, NWO gives substance to the ambitions of the Dutch government to make all publicly funded research available in Open Access form. Scientific publications arising from projects awarded on the basis of this Call for proposals must therefore be made available in Open Access form in accordance with the Open Access Policy.

Scientific articles

Scientific articles must be made available in Open Access form immediately at the time of publication (without embargo) via one of the following routes:

- publication in a fully Open Access journal or platform registered in the DOAJ;
- publication in a subscription journal and the immediate deposition of at least the author accepted manuscript of the article in an Open Access repository registered in Open DOAR;
- publication in a journal for which a transformative Open Access agreement exists between UNL and a publisher. For further information, see Home | Open access.

Books

Different requirements apply to scholarly books, book chapters and edited collections. See the Open Access Policy Framework at Open Science | NWO.

CC BY licence

To ensure the widest possible dissemination of publications, at least a Creative Commons (CC BY) licence must be applied. Alternatively – in case of substantial interest – the author may request to publish under a CC BY-ND licence. For books, book chapters and collected volumes, all CC BY licence options are allowed.

Costs

Costs for publication in fully Open Access journals can be budgeted in the application using the budget module for "material costs." Costs for publications in hybrid journals are not eligible for reimbursement by NWO. For Open Access books, a separate NWO Open Access Books Fund is available.

For more detailed information about NWO's Open Access policy, see Open Science | NWO.

.

6 Contact and other information

6.1 Contact

6.1.1 Specific questions

For questions about the Call for proposal, please contact:
Lisa Catsburg (NWO), tel: +31 (0)623410382, e-mail: go@nwo.nl
Jolien Diekema (NSO), tel: +31(0)627062992, e-mail: j.diekema@spaceoffice.nl

6.1.2 Technical questions about the web application ISAAC

For technical questions about the use of ISAAC, please contact the ISAAC helpdesk. Please read the manual first before consulting the helpdesk. The ISAAC helpdesk can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 17:00 hours on +31 (0)70 34 40 600. However, you can also submit your question by email to isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl. You will then receive an answer within two working days.

6.2 Other information

The whole text of this Call for proposals has been published in both Dutch and English. The Dutch version is deemed authentic. For legal interpretation the text of the Dutch version will be decisive.

NWO processes data from applicants received in the context of this Call for proposals in accordance with the NWO Privacy Statement, Privacy Statement | NWO.

NWO might approach applicants for an evaluation of the procedure and/or research programme.

Within the framework of the joint implementation of this grant round, it is necessary for NWO and NSO to exchange data. This exchange will be carried out with due care and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and other applicable laws and regulations concerning the processing of personal data.

7 Appendix

7.1 Explanation of budget modules

7.1.1 Personnel

For salary tables and rates: see Salary tables | NWO.

PhD candidate

A PhD candidate is appointed for 48 months at 1.0 FTE at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a university medical centre or a research organisation as referred to in Article 1.1 of the NWO Grant Rules. The equivalent of 48 full-time months, for example an appointment of 60 months for 0.8 FTE, is also possible. It is not possible to apply for funding for a PhD student who started the project to be funded before the grant is awarded.
Please use the rates of a PhD student in the salary tables of UNL and UMCNL. A one-off personal bench fee of €5,000 is available for each PhD student to stimulate the scientific career.

Postdoc

A postdoc is appointed at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a university medical centre (UMC) or a research organisation as referred to in section 3.1.

Use the rates of a senior academic employee in the salary tables of UNL<<<, and the rates of a postdoc at an umc in the salary tables of UMCNL.

It is not possible to apply for funding for a postdoc who started the project to be funded before the grant is awarded.

Only a postdoc position with an appointment of at least 12 months for 0.5 fte qualifies as an appointment for which a one-off personal benchfee of €5,000 is available to boost the scientific career.

Non-scientific staff

Funding may be requested for non-scientific personnel (NWP) needed to execute the project. These may include, for example, programmers, technical assistants, analysts, or project managers. The use of NWP must be described in the proposal.
The duration of the appointment cannot be longer than the duration of the project funded by NWO. Depending on the job level, a choice is made from the UNL or UMCNL salary tables for NWP-mbo, NWP-hbo and NWP-academic. No one-off personal benchfee is available for NWP.

Staff of other organisations mentioned in section 3.1

Funding may be requested for personnel of other organisations mentioned in section 3.1. The rates are determined using the Government Tariff Manual (HOT), Table 2, under 2.2 ‘average total salary cost per salary scale’, column 'Hourly rate productive hours, excluding VAT'. The salary scale of the requested position determines the rate from the HOT table.

Students

Students may be engaged in research. If the students contribute as part of their curriculum, the rate according to the usual internship fee of the university or universities of applied sciences applies.
If students contribute as a secondary job alongside their studies as student assistants, the rate according to HOT table 2, under 2.2 ‘average total salary cost per salary scale’, column 'Hourly rate productive hours, excluding VAT', scale 1 applies.

7.1.2 Material

Funding may be requested for all project-specific costs relating to, among others, consumables, purchase of services, materials, small instruments, access to (inter)national facilities, software and research resources that have no economic value after use. Travel and accommodation costs (national and international) for all people working on the project incl. foreign guest researchers, costs for the organisation of (international) workshops and symposia, costs for data management, publications, and costs in the context of citizen science also fall under this module. Up to 50% of the material budget requested from NWO can be used for work by third parties (e.g. laboratory analyses, data collection, etc.).

Travel expenses (national and international) will only be reimbursed on the basis of second class/economy class fares. For publications, the provisions in Section 4.5 Open access apply. Costs for an audit statement can only be claimed for organisations that are not subject to OCW's education audit protocol for a maximum of €5,000 per audit statement.

It is not permitted to include costs for:
- organisational infrastructure and overhead, including a fully functioning workplace, accommodation, office automation, personnel administration, commuting expenses, training, facilities, HR advice and business care, documentary information provision and home office allowance;
- the use and maintenance of in-house developed scientific infrastructure;
- regular teaching activities;

7.1.3 Investments

Funding may be requested for any project-specific resources for research or costs related to construction or further development of scientific infrastructure that retain economic value or can be reused after project completion. The beneficiary acquires ownership of these research resources on completion of the project. In case the beneficiary achieves profits from the beneficial ownership of the research funds, these profits must be invested in primary activities of the beneficiary as referred to in Article 3.1.4, paragraph 2 of the NWO Grant Rules 2024. This includes the purchase of equipment with residual value for the performance of research and investments in the construction or (further) development of scientific infrastructure. Personnel costs as part of the investment can be recorded as personnel costs.

Investment costs should be adequately specified and justified in the proposal.

Eligible costs are:
- costs for investments in scientific equipment;
- costs for investments in datasets;
- salary costs for personnel with essential technical expertise necessary for the development or construction of an investment.

Ineligible are:

- costs for infrastructural facilities that can be considered part of the usual infrastructure full functioning workplace, accommodation, office automation, personnel administration, travel expenses commuting, training, facilities management, HR advice and business care, documentary information provision, home working allowance);
- data collections and any related software and bibliographies already available in other ways;
- other personnel costs, including personnel costs for operating and conducting research with the facility;
- costs for maintenance and use of equipment on a project. Costs for the use of equipment on a project can be requested through the material budget.

7.1.4 Knowledge utilisation

The budget requested should be adequately specified in the proposal. To determine the rates, use the provisions of the budget modules Personnel (7.1.1) and Material (7.1.2.).

It is possible to use up to 5% of the grant amount for this module. There is no obligation to use this module. Examples of possible costs, but not limited to, are the creation of a teaching curriculum, a feasibility study on application possibilities, costs for filing a patent application or engaging a business developer.

7.2 Indexing

The rate at the time of the decision date applies. NWO will, if necessary, apply a one-off indexation of personnel costs when awarding the grant. The date on which the rates take effect is used for this purpose. If the date of publication of the fees is later than the effective date, the date of publication is used. The tariffs of the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) usually take effect on 1 July, of the Dutch Federation of University Medical Centres (UMCNL) on 1 August and of the Government Tariffs Manual (HOT) on 1 January.

The on-off indexation does not affect the grant ceiling and the maximum grant amount to be applied for. The grant ceiling and maximum requestable grant amount remain unchanged during the assessment procedure. If awarded, one-off indexation will be applied to the grant amount.

If co-funding is required or permitted, the one-off indexation does not affect the requirements for own contributions and co-funding, nor the IP rights that may result from the co-funding.

Publication: December 20256

Dutch Research Council

Visiting address:
The Hague location
Laan van Nieuw Oost-Indië 300
2593 CE The Hague
The Netherlands

Utrecht location
Winthontlaan 2
3526 KV Utrecht

Cover image: shutterstock 2523445323

Dutch Research Council | NWO