



## **6<sup>th</sup> Collaborative European Freshwater Science Project for Young Researchers, “(FreshProject)” - Call for Project Proposals**

We invite proposals for a project to be supported by the European Federation for Freshwater Sciences (EFFS). The call has been developed as a joint effort of the EFFS board and the EFFS federated societies, and the European Fresh and Young Researchers (EFYR). Its primary goals are: a) encouraging early career freshwater researchers (ECRs), who are members of any national society affiliated with the EFFS (see details in the section “Who is eligible”) to create collaborations that lead to new knowledge and lasting connections among peers; b) promoting networking among ECRs; and c) offering the opportunity to gain experience in generating research ideas, acquiring funding, planning and carrying out a collaborative international scientific project, and engaging with a large diverse and international team, d) engaging ECR’s participation in EFFS- federated Societies.

Collaborative projects combine research with networking and thus can be very valuable for researchers, especially for ECRs with limited prior experience. The Collaborative European Freshwater Science Projects (hereafter FreshProjects) for ECRs are an excellent opportunity to get

to know and work with people who share similar circumstances and interests, all of whom are part of the future generation of freshwater scientists in Europe. Previously, five FreshProjects have been successfully conducted:

- EURORUN, which brought together 47 ECRs across 11 European countries to investigate CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from 34 European streams (<https://freshproject-eurorun.jimdofree.com/>)
- Urban Algae, in which nearly 100 ECRs joined forces to sample urban ponds covering 5 biogeographical regions within Europe and creating a citizen science survey to investigate the perception of urban ponds (<https://freshproject-urbanalgae.jimdofree.com/>)
- EUROPONDS, which had 68 ECRs from 16 European countries sampling emerging insects from ponds and analyzing their biomass exports and fatty acid composition (<https://europonds.jimdofree.com/>)
- PhytoPlastic, in which 45 ECRs took part in a large-scale experiment addressing the mechanisms governing microalgal colonization of plastic debris in European lakes at different latitudes (<https://phytoplasic.wixsite.com/>)
- EUPHORIA, running until the end of 2026, brings together 117 ECRs from 22 European countries to investigate macrophyte phenology across the continent (<https://euphoria-fresh.jimdofree.com/>)

Proposals submitted to the present call should specify original research on any aspect of freshwater sciences. We will favour proposals which implement two aspects: (i) research relying on original and well-designed use of a simple, inexpensive methodology and (ii) multidisciplinary and inclusive interactions among European ECRs. Thus, the evaluation will consider not only the scientific quality of the proposal, but especially the opportunities to promote collaboration and networking. A focus on the collaborative approach, which can include the organization of workshops, should be integrated into the initial proposal and executed during the entire project duration. This is an equal opportunity call, which is open to all ECR members of the EFFS-federated societies. Those societies listed in Appendix financially support this programme and encourage the participation of their ECR members. ECRs that are affiliated with any of the EFFS-federated societies (<https://www.freshwatersciences.eu/effs/index.asp?page=MEMBERS&id=6>), including the societies that have not confirmed financial support for the FreshProjects, can submit a project proposal and/or participate in the awarded project.

### **Who is eligible to apply?**

Researchers at Masters, PhD or early post-doc level up to three years after PhD completion can submit proposals and participate in the awarded project. Preference will be given to ECRs from Masters to post-docs within 2 years of PhD completion. To guarantee fair opportunities and inclusivity, career breaks (e.g., parental and carer's leave) will be taken into consideration. The proposers need to be members of an EFFS-federated society (as listed at: <http://www.freshwatersciences.eu/effs/index.asp?page=MEMBERS&Id=3>) **at the time when the call closes** (15th September 2026), which has to be certified by the secretary of the respective EFFS-federated society. Once the awarded project has been selected, the final team must be assembled from respondents to a public call inviting the ECRs affiliated with any EFFS-federated society. To receive the full funding sum available, at least one participant affiliated with each of the funding societies listed in Appendix 1 of this document must be included, otherwise the amount committed by that society (see below) would not be available.

### **Duration of the project and publication strategy**

The project should be completed within two years after signing the grant agreement (see details in the section "Once the proposal is selected: Team assembly"). Publication of scientific outputs is not required within this timeframe although realistic timelines for publication should be part of the proposal and the final report. If the team decides to publish their results in an open-access (OA) journal, the publication fee should be covered by the available budget if other sources are not available. While OA is not mandatory, it is highly recommended to choose this publishing option.

### **Budget**

The maximum budget available for this 6th call is 8800 € (VAT included) based on the pledged contributions from EFFS-federated societies, which could be supplemented by funds provided by the participants or their institutions (Appendix 1). In addition, any remaining available budget from previous FreshProjects might be transferred to the newly awarded FreshProject. The whole granted budget can be used to cover consumables, travel expenses, conference fees and publication costs. Salaries and non-consumable materials cannot be funded.

### **Application rules**

Each ECR can only submit one project proposal as principal investigator (PI). Each project can have up to three PIs, preferably from different countries/EFFS-federated societies, who will lead the project. The PIs and any number of co-investigators make up the final project team. The PIs will

manage the project funds and report the main results and account of expenses to EFFS periodically. A final report is required at the end of the project. ECRs from across Europe will be invited to join the successful project once awarded, but the PIs can also provide a list of potentially interested participants from different European countries and their societies in their proposal. The PIs must be members of any of the EFFS-federated societies, and to receive the total sum available, **the final team must include at least one participant affiliated to each funding society**. The PIs must contact the EFFS-federated society to which the potential participants declare to be affiliated, to obtain a letter confirming their affiliation.

### **How to apply**

ECR interested in applying should prepare a Project Proposal and send it by email to the contact persons listed below with “EFFS Early Career FreshProject” in the subject line. This proposal will be shared with the EFFS-federated society or societies to which the PI(s) are affiliated by the EFFS chairperson through the EFFS-board representatives. The name of the project proposal file should include the first initial and last name of the PI(s) (e.g. “FreshProject\_ASilva” or “FreshProject\_ASilva+WJohnson” without spaces or accents, with the 1st letter of each word in capitals). The proposal should be written in English, in minimum font size 11pt, font Calibri, and submitted as a single file containing the following sections:

- Title of the project
- Name(s) and affiliation(s) of the PI(s)
- Up to five keywords.
- Abstract (maximum length 500 words).
- Abstract in any official language of the EFFS-federated society to which the PI(s) is/are affiliated (maximum length 500 words).
- State of the art (maximum length 850 words).
- Methods and project management plan, including task descriptions and a clear tabular timetable (maximum length 3500 words).
- Impact of the project (maximum length 850 words)
- Mandatory appendices are: (i) letter(s) testifying that the PI(s) has/have the support from their host(s) institution(s) to carry out the project; (ii) letter(s) from the EFFS-federated society or societies to which they are affiliated testifying that the PI(s) are members; and (iii) CV of the applicant(s) (maximum four pages). These appendices should be provided at the end of the proposal.

The EFFS chairperson will acknowledge receipt of the application within three working days.

To answer questions that inform preparation of the proposal prior to its submission, a webinar will be organized by the EFYR and PIs of previous FreshProjects. The webinar is an opportunity to learn more about FreshProjects, clarify any doubts on eligibility criteria and to share tips on proposal preparation, including structure and project management plan. The webinar will be held in mid-July. Expressions of interest to participate in the webinar will be collected via this Google form, which must be submitted by 30 June 2026: <https://forms.gle/SjheUk125mJCh6gJ6>

### **Submission deadline**

The deadline for the submission of proposals is 11:59 pm (GMT) on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2026, with the time of the email header as proof of date. The applications must be sent to Mary Kelly-Quinn (EFFS Chairperson; [chair\\_effs@freshwatersciences.eu](mailto:chair_effs@freshwatersciences.eu)), Rachel Stubbington (EFFS Secretary; [secretary\\_effs@freshwatersciences.eu](mailto:secretary_effs@freshwatersciences.eu)) and to EFYR ([efyr.fresh.efs@gmail.com](mailto:efyr.fresh.efs@gmail.com)). After the deadline, all applications will be sent to panel members for evaluation.

### **Evaluation criteria**

The panel will comprise five members nominated by the EFFS Executive board and EFYR board, without any conflicts of interest with the projects or their PIs. Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

**A. Scientific merit, excellence and innovation (40%):** The scientific contribution (i.e. excellence and originality of the proposed project and the extent to which the hypotheses tested have the potential to contribute to scientific knowledge), the robustness and feasibility of the proposed methodology and the relevance to the wider society are evaluated. The methodology for carrying out the project includes available equipment at the host institutions where the research will be performed.

**B. Networking and collaboration potential (40%):** The potential for interactions among European ECR within the discipline of freshwater sciences is evaluated. This criterion also evaluates the potential for balanced representation of participants from differing geographical, cultural and gender backgrounds.

**C. Feasibility of the work plan (20%):** The feasibility of the overall organization of the project in terms of the proposed objectives and resources is considered.

Only one project proposal will be awarded funding.

The panel decision will be announced by 15th October 2026, by email to all PIs that applied. The successful project will be featured on the EFFS website, along with the titles of unfunded proposals. Applicants will receive an evaluation report outlining feedback in relation to the criteria. The decision of the panel is final.

### **Once the proposal is selected: Team assembly**

To reach ECRs across Europe who may want to join the project, the PIs will send email invitations via their own networks and institutions and should also request support from EFFS through the societies' representatives of the EFFS General Board, as well as the EFYR network. Social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Bluesky, Instagram, Facebook) should be used to further advertise the opportunity to participate in the project. ECRs wishing to participate should write a short confirmation affirming that they are willing and able to do so following the terms described in the proposal, also including the name of the EFFS-federated society to which they are affiliated (as well as if they may make local subgroups). Affiliations will be recorded via email or Google form and checked by the PIs. Instructions on how to participate will be given in an invitation email. ECRs meeting the eligibility criteria must contact the PIs of the project, who will assess if they qualify to join the team according to the call rules (i.e. ,BSc, Masters, PhD or post-doc- status; affiliation to an EFFS-federated society). The final project team must be assembled by 31 December 2026. Projects will officially start on 1 January 2027. PIs of the awarded project must establish an internal procedure to ensure the active participation of all team members throughout the project. Non-active members may be excluded from the team upon consultation with EFFS and the EFFS-federated society to which they are affiliated. After the project team is confirmed, the grant agreement will be signed and the project will develop as specified in the proposal, under the leadership of the PIs. The final funding amount will be transferred directly from the funding societies to a specific bank account created for this purpose by the PIs. The PIs must deliver a specific receipt confirming funds received to each funding society, and a financial report must be sent to the EFFS Treasurer ([mirela.sertic.peric@biol.pmf.hr](mailto:mirela.sertic.peric@biol.pmf.hr)) in each of the years of the project, plus a final financial report for the completed project.

## Dissemination of results

The PIs of the awarded project must deliver a short progress (scientific and financial) report to the EFFS secretary ([secretary\\_effs@freshwatersciences.eu](mailto:secretary_effs@freshwatersciences.eu)) every 3 months during the term of the project. Each report will be sent to all the EFFS-federated societies and the EFFS board (including EFYR).

A final report of project results and conclusions should be submitted by the PIs via email to Mary Kelly-Quinn (EFFS Chairperson; [chair\\_effs@freshwatersciences.eu](mailto:chair_effs@freshwatersciences.eu)) and Rachel Stubbington (EFFS Secretary; [secretary\\_effs@freshwatersciences.eu](mailto:secretary_effs@freshwatersciences.eu)) within three months of the end of the project. The report should have a maximum length of 3500 words (minimum font size 11pt, including Figures and Tables). The report should include expected deadlines for publication of scientific outputs and detailed justification of the project expenses. The report can be distributed by the EFFS-federated societies to their members and will be available after distribution upon request to the representatives of EFFS-board as well as on the project webpage.

All **active** project participants will be considered as potential co-authors in the project outputs (except theses). At least one scientific paper should be submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal within three years of the project start date (i.e. by 1 January 2030), covering complete or partial aspects of the research carried out. Data generated in the project must be made available in a public data repository upon publication and implement FAIR principles.

Among the outputs of the project, an oral presentation of project progress must be presented at SEFS-15, to be held in Utrecht, Netherlands, in July 2027, as well as another with the final results at the first meeting of SEFS after the end of project (SEFS-16, to be held in 2029). Presentation of the project and its outcomes is also encouraged at the ECR-led conference Fresh Blood for Fresh Water (FBFW) in 2028. **The EFFS and all funding societies of this call must be acknowledged in each publication or conference presentation.**

Participants should set up a website featuring regular updates on project progress and activities, linked to the EFFS webpage and EFYR social media. Use of other social media and alternative outreach venues to promote visibility for the project, the project call and its participants is encouraged.

### **Appendix 1. The EFFS-federated funding societies:**

- Association Française de Limnologie (France). Contribution: 1000 €.
- Association of Austrian SIL-Members: SIL-Austria (Austria). Contribution: 500 €.
- Associazione Italiana di Oceanologia e Limnologia (Italy). Contribution: 500 €.
- Asociación Ibérica de Limnología / Associação Ibérica de Limnologia (Spain and Portugal). Contribution: 2500 €.
- České Limnologické Společnosti (Czech Republic). Contribution: 1000 €.
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Limnologie e.V. (Germany). Contribution: 1000 €.
- Hrvatsko Udruženje Slatkovodnih Ekologa (Croatia). Contribution: 500 €.
- Irish Freshwater Sciences Association (Ireland). Contribution: 500 €.
- Magyar Hidrológiai Társaság (Hungary). Contribution: 400 €.
- Societatea Romana de Ecologie (Romania). Contribution: 400 €.
- Slovak Limnological Society (Slovakia). Contribution: 500 €.