

**EUROPEAN FOREST INSTITUTE**

**Grant submission guidelines**

**G-01-2026**

**Knowledge to Practice:  
Develop applications and AI solutions utilizing the ForestWard Observatory**

## ACTIVITY TO BE SUPPORTED BY THE GRANT

### Introduction

European forests cover more than 1/3 of the land area and play a vital role in Europe's environment, economy, and society. Forests provide many benefits to society regarding climate regulation, raw materials, habitats for biodiversity, and many other services. Climate change is a major challenge to European forests, as demonstrated by recent heat waves, extended drought periods and disturbances (storms, wildfires, insect outbreaks). Climate change may lead to shifts in tree species ranges, changes in forest productivity, tree mortality, and increased disturbance damage. Hence, it is essential to assess the extent of the impact of ongoing climate change on the functioning of trees and forests. Past and recent changes in forest structures and functioning can be analysed with data from large long-term forest monitoring programs such as ICP Forests<sup>1</sup>, the national forest inventory (NFI) networks<sup>2,3</sup>, or networks such as ICOS<sup>4</sup>, LTER<sup>5</sup>, or TreeNET<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Within the FORWARDS Horizon Europe project, forest data from different programs, projects and other initiatives are collected, with a focus on quantifying the impacts of climate change on forests. These datasets are collected by the forthcoming ForestWard Observatory, a pan-European monitoring and evaluation tool that will help demonstrate the impacts of climate change on forests and guide decision-making for practical forest management.

### The ForestWard Observatory

The ForestWard Observatory will collect forest data collected by the FORWARDS project, and other open datasets that are relevant for Climate-Smart Forestry and restoration (such as forest inventories, species maps, stand age maps, biomass maps, disturbance maps, canopy height and so on). This data will be made available on the web with a map application where the data can be searched and displayed. Also, datasets will be possible to download for the users. The ForestWard Observatory will be programmatically accessible using a combination of REST and STAC api:s.

The ForestWard Observatory consists of a geospatial database for both tabular data from forest inventories and raster data such as stress maps, humidity maps, and other data. To a limited extent, also laser scanning data over specific sites will be available. Also, results from the FORWARDS project such as reports and instructions for Climate Smart Forestry (CSF) and restoration management will be collected.

Over the last few years, new promising technologies for utilizing earth observation data have been developed. Some interesting examples include to use a RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation) to let a user interact with a database using natural language; or analysing EO data and enhance derived products using a Foundation Model for Earth Observations (FMEO).

### API documentation

REST API: [Api Root – Django REST framework](#)

STAC API: Not implemented yet – Estimated Q2 2026

TiTiler: [TiTiler](#)

### Datasets and tools

- Tree species raster
- Biomass rasters
- Super-site data collections (ICOS)
- 3PG
- Swedish open National Forest Attribute Maps
- Sample Forest field inventory

- Sample ALS point clouds
- Sample TLS point clouds

### Objectives and supported activities

This call invites Applicants to propose projects developing applications that utilize or enrich the Forestward Observatory datasets, or systems for data collection that can be integrated, for instance developing web applications that link to the ForestWard Observatory and rely on its datasets to strengthen the outreach of practical knowledge and best practices for effective adaptation and mitigation strategies, including synergies with biodiversity, to practitioners and other end-users.

The developed application must be integrated into the Forestward Observatory as a part of the data pipeline, as an addition to the existing frontend solution, or as an API integration. Applications that should be added as tasks to the data pipeline, it would preferably be as tasks running during data ingestion, or as a nightly task. The backend is based on a GeoDjango solution with a PostGIS database, and Celery is used for scheduling of tasks. For a task to be added to the pipeline, we kindly ask to keep the need for processing resources reasonable, which we mean possible to run on a desktop setup (say 8GB GPU or similar) within minutes. Adaptions of REST API:s for specific applications can be done after dialogue.

Data and results from the supported activities must be made available open access upon completion of the project.

### Available funding

A maximum of 2 projects will be funded, with a total sum of 150 000 euro per project.

Projects must start no later than June 2026 and last a maximum of 10 months.

### References

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- <sup>1</sup> George, J.-P. *et al.* Long-term forest monitoring reveals constant mortality rise in European forests. *Plant Biology* **24**, 1108-1119 (2022). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/plb.13469>
- <sup>2</sup> Bontemps, J.-D., Bouriaud, O., Vega, C. & Bouriaud, L. Offering the appetite for the monitoring of European forests a diversified diet. *Annals of Forest Science* **79**, 19 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13595-022-01139-7>
- <sup>3</sup> Yu, Y. *et al.* Making the US national forest inventory spatially contiguous and temporally consistent. *Environmental Research Letters* **17**, 065002 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ac6b47>
- <sup>4</sup> Heiskanen, J. *et al.* The Integrated Carbon Observation System in Europe. *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* **103**, E855-E872 (2022). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-D-19-0364.1>
- <sup>5</sup> Holmberg, M. *et al.* Modelling study of soil C, N and pH response to air pollution and climate change using European LTER site observations. *Science of The Total Environment* **640-641**, 387-399 (2018). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2018.05.299>
- <sup>6</sup> [TreeNet - The biological drought and growth indicator network - TreeNet](#)
- <sup>7</sup> Zweifel, R. *et al.* Networking the forest infrastructure towards near real-time monitoring – A white paper. *Science of The Total Environment* **872**, 162167 (2023). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023.162167>
- <sup>8</sup> Zweifel, R. *et al.* TreeNet–The Biological Drought and Growth Indicator Network. *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change* **4** (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/ffgc.2021.776905>

## 1. QUESTIONS

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Questions regarding the grant process must only be sent to the following address:

[forwards@efi.int](mailto:forwards@efi.int)

Questions can be sent until:

13 March 2026

Questions and answers for this grant process will be published at <https://efi.int/grants-training/grants/G-01-2026>

The following schedule will be followed for the publication of the Questions and answers:

- Answers for questions received during the period call launch – 18 February 2026, will be published on 27 February 2026
- Answers for questions received during the period 19 February 2026 – 13 March 2026, will be published on 20 March 2026

Individual questions will not be replied to separately.

Potential applicants are advised to visit <https://efi.int/grants-training/grants/G-01-2026> regularly before the deadline for the submission of applications for any Q&A, and updates or modifications regarding this grant process.

## 2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

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Grant applications can be submitted by one legal entity or a consortium of legal entities.

Applicants must, by the deadline for submission of the Application, meet the following criteria to be eligible for the grant:

Criteria	Description of criteria	Clarification
E1	Applicant is a legal entity (legal person)	If the application is submitted by a consortium (grouping of legal persons represented by a coordinator), this criterion applies to all the participants. This call is not open for applications from natural persons
E2	Applicant eligible for funding under the European Union Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Program	If the application is submitted by a consortium, this criterion applies to all the participants

Applications not fulfilling the above stated eligibility criteria will be rejected.

Furthermore, the following legal entities (legal persons) will not be eligible for funding:

- Beneficiary or associated partner of the FORWARDS project under the Grant Agreement No. 101084481
- Entities subject European Union restrictive measures
- Israeli entities due to activities in the territories occupied by Israel (European Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05)

- Public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity maintained by such a public interest trust (Council Implementing Decision 2022/2506)
- Legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government-controlled territories of Ukraine

### 3. ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

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All applications shall apply the following structure:

- I. Administrative information
  - i) Application Form - Part A, using template provided in annex 1
- II. Technical Description
  - i) Application Form - Part B, following Template annex 2
  - ii) The length of the technical description must not exceed 12 pages and shall be submitted in one single PDF document (this does not include the instructions and guidance provided in annex 2).
  - iii) Technical Description must be written in English

*All the documentation must be submitted in PDF format (Two separate pdfs for I. Administrative information and II. Technical Description).*

What procedures to follow for applying:

Grant application shall only to be submitted by the applicant (coordinator as applicable) to:

[grants@efi.int](mailto:grants@efi.int)

Please note that it is not allowed to send the email to another recipient (i.e. not in the To: field, the cc: field, or the bcc: field)

The email with the application shall contain only the following heading in the subject line:

G-01-2026, Knowledge to Practice: Develop applications and AI solutions utilizing the ForestWard Observatory

The grant application must have been received by EFI by the following deadline at the latest:

3 April 2026 at 21:00 UTC +2

### 4. AWARD CRITERIA

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Criteria that will be applied for awarding of the grant:

<b>A1</b>	<b>Excellence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clarity and relevance of the objectives in relation to the call topic.</li> <li>▪ Soundness of the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, and assumptions.</li> </ul>
<b>A2</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quality, coherence, and effectiveness of the work plan, including extent to which the resources and tasks assigned are in line with the objectives of the activities.</li> <li>▪ Complementarity of the participants and extent to which the consortium brings together the necessary expertise.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Appropriateness of risk management.</li> </ul>
<b>A3</b>	<b>Impact (Legacy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sustainability in terms of how the activities will be continued beyond the duration of the project and/or how the activities shall create impact and legacy</li> </ul>

Applications will receive a score of 0-5 for each criterion. Scores can be given in half points.

Applications must receive a score of at least 4 points in each of the categories A1, A2, and A3 to be considered for a grant award and a total score of at least 13 points overall.

In case of equal scores, the following will apply: applications will be prioritised according to score under criteria A1, then A2, and thereafter A3. In case of equal scores under A1, A2 and A3, applications will be prioritized according to gender balance in respect of the personnel that will primarily carry out the tasks in the project.

## 5. GRANT DISBURSEMENT

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EFI will disburse the grant in lump sum instalments (fixed sums):

- 35% entry into force of the grant agreement
- 25% upon approval of the interim technical report
- 40% upon approval of the final technical report

Applicants must, however, as part of the Application include the global amount needed to cover all implementation of the project.

## 6. GRANT AGREEMENT

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Template grant agreement is provided as annex 3.

Please note that the Grant Agreement is only signed by EFI and the successful Applicant(s) (all Participating organizations) following decision by EFI on award of the Grant(s).

## 7. NEGOTIATION PHASE

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In respect of applications selected for funding, further documentation to validate the legal and financial capacity of the Applicant (all Participating organizations), provided by and signed by the Applicant (all Participating organizations), may be required before EFI can sign the grant agreement – as further instructed by EFI. If the requested documentation is not submitted within deadline set by EFI, EFI may in a new decision reject the application.

## 8. TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF AN APPLICATION

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- 8.1 In addition to what has been stated in the Call for grant and these Grant submission guidelines, EFI applies the EFI Grant rules which have been made available at <https://efi.int/grants-training/grants/efi-grant-rules>
- 8.2 By submitting an application for a grant, the applicant accepts all the terms and conditions set out in the Call for grant and these Grant submission guidelines (including its annexes) and waives all other terms.
- 8.3 EFI may reject an application that is not in compliance with the instructions in the Call for grant or the Grant submission guidelines.

- 8.4 No information communicated in this grant process, including the Call for grant and these Grant submission guidelines (including its annexes), bind EFI in any way to an award or a grant agreement. EFI shall only be bound by written grant agreements.
- 8.5 An applicant must be able to prove to the satisfaction of EFI, any information given as part of its application. Failure to do so, within a time limit set by EFI, may result in rejection of the application.
- 8.6 EFI may ask the applicant for clarifications regarding any information submitted as part of the application. EFI may reject any applicant from the grant process that fails to submit the requested clarification.
- 8.7 Only applications sent to *grants@efi.int* will be considered.
- 8.8 Applications submitted after the deadline for submission will not be considered.
- 8.9 An Applicant may only submit one application. In case of multiple applications from the same economic operator EFI will only consider the last one received.
- 8.10 Withdrawal of an application shall be done in writing.
- 8.11 Information provided by the applicants cannot be considered confidential, unless so designated by EFI
- 8.12 All applications shall be quoted in Euros.
- 8.13 Expenses incurred in the preparation and dispatch of an application will not be reimbursed by EFI.
- 8.14 Applications must be legible. EFI may reject applications that are not legible.
- 8.15 EFI will disregard any information given by an Applicant outside the format for submission as stated in the Call for Grant or Grant submission guidelines.
- 8.16 The application shall be complete when submitted. EFI will disregard additional documentation or information submitted separately from the application, where not requested by EFI.
- 8.17 EFI may at its own discretion disclose the contents of any application, as well as information on the Beneficiary awarded the grant as well as any other information of the grant awarded.
- 8.18 Unless otherwise stated in the Call for grant and these Grant submission guidelines, the Application and all correspondence related to it shall be in English. EFI retains the right to correspond in English with the Applicant even if the application may be submitted in a language other than English.
- 8.19 Applicants are not entitled to contact EFI staff members, or any other person referred to in the EFI grant rules after the closing date of the receipt of applications to ask for information on the evaluation. EFI may eliminate from the evaluation any Applicant contravening this provision.

## **ANNEXES**

- Annex 1: Application Form Part A
- Annex 2: Application Form Part B
- Annex 3: Grant Agreement Template