



Research Fund



2021
2030 United Nations Decade
of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development

Towards more resilient Coastal Livelihoods

Call for proposals | Call for Decade Actions

October 2021

Coastal Livelihoods

The Ocean covers 70% of our planet and contains 80% of life that can be found on Earth, making it the largest repository of biodiversity¹. It provides priceless products and services on which humankind depends. However, the planet's greatest asset, is in crisis. Climate change, pollution, overfishing, rising levels of acidity and biodiversity loss are eroding its sustainability at significant cost to communities, societies and businesses in both the short and long term. Proper management of marine environments is especially important for those whose main source of food and income directly relies on the ocean². The livelihoods of 10-12% of the world's population depend on fisheries and aquaculture while over 3bn people worldwide rely on food from the Ocean as a significant source of animal protein. Increasing intensity of storms, sea level rise and flooding are also threatening coastal communities. Coastal floods and storm surges currently cost the world between US\$10bn and US\$40bn a year³. By 2050, an estimated 800 million people will be at risk of storm surge and over 570 low-lying coastal cities will face a sea level rise of at least 0.5 meters.⁴

The cost of inaction in the area of coastal environmental issues is considerable. By 2050, rising sea levels and extreme weather are expected to cost coastal communities around the world up to US\$1 trillion annually while floods will cost coastal cities US\$1 trillion a year⁵. Additionally, these events are not only a threat for land based coastal assets, which are at risk of becoming "stranded assets", but also for shipping, fishing, coastal tourism and other sectors in the "blue economy" that have been valued at \$2.5trn per year⁶. Overall, these events will create further risks for the stability of many countries and communities inducing illegal migration and thereby endangering national and food security.

These pressures are undermining the resilience of the world's coastal and marine natural capital and increasing the level of ocean-derived risks to virtually all marine and coastal sectors. This makes protecting oceans and building coastal resilience a matter of capital importance. The UN estimates that investing just \$US6 billion a year in nature-based disaster risk management measures, such as restoring coastal ecosystems, would save the world US\$360 billion over the next 15 years. That's why it is critical to build resilience and protect oceans with the global financial community, governments and civil society having an important role to play to drive systemic change in a system that places a value on nature.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP26 and the start of the UN Decade for Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the Ocean Decade) offers a unique opportunity for the world to take a stand and make a step change both in how we treat the ocean and its resources and how we invest to protect its biodiversity and the lives and livelihoods of those who depend upon it. The Ocean Decade will support efforts to reverse the cycle of decline in ocean health and gather ocean stakeholders worldwide behind a common framework that will ensure ocean science can fully support countries in creating improved conditions for sustainable development of the Ocean⁷. A key premise of the Ocean Decade is that it will transform the way in which ocean science is generated and used for sustainable development solutions. Through regular Calls for Decade Actions, the Ocean Decade will encourage diverse actors to collaborate in designing and performing transformative ocean science that will contribute to fulfilling a series of ten Ocean Decade Challenges.

¹ Amanda P. Jaksha, Biodiversity in the Ocean, National Geographic, <https://media.nationalgeographic.org/assets/file/one-ocean-chapter-3.pdf>

² IUCN, Securing Coastal Livelihood, <https://www.iucn.org/theme/marine-and-polar/our-work/securing-coastal-livelihoods>

³ Association of British Insurers: Financial Risk of Climate Change

⁴ C40 Cities Staying Afloat: The Urban Response to Sea level Rise

⁵ Stephane Hallegatte, Colin Green, Robert J. Nicholls & Jan Corfee-Morlot, Nature Climate Change, <https://www.nature.com/articles/nclimate1979?message-global=remove>

⁶ World Wildlife Fund: Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles

⁷ UNESCO, United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), <https://en.unesco.org/ocean-decade>

The AXA Research Fund's mission is to support outstanding researchers committed to improving peoples' lives through innovative research in the areas of Climate & Environment, Health, and Socio-Economics. For nearly 15 years, AXA has financed over 230 projects related to environmental issues.

The AXA Research Fund is partnering with UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO) in its role of the coordinator of the Ocean Decade to launch this joint 'Call for Proposals | Call for Decade Actions'.

Together, the AXA Research Fund and the Ocean Decade are launching this joint 'Call for Proposals | Call for Decade Actions' around the theme of "Resilient Coastal Livelihoods". This joint Call will simultaneously respond to the priorities of the AXA Research Fund and contribute to the fulfillment of several Ocean Decade Challenges. The Call will predominantly contribute to Challenge 7: Increase Community Resilience to Ocean Hazards, but research proposals could also contribute to a range of other Challenges including Challenge 4: Sustainably Feed the Global Population; Challenge 5: Develop a Sustainable and Equitable Ocean Economy; and Challenge 6: Unlock Ocean-Based Solutions to Climate Change.

This 'Call for Proposals | Call for Decade Actions' aims at selecting and supporting 8 Postdoctoral researchers working on coastal livelihoods and the associated environmental, economic, social, geopolitical issues. **We will look for innovative, transdisciplinary research topics**, adopting either a global perspective or focusing on regional challenges with potential for replication such as (but not limited to):

- **Coastal communities' protection and increased resilience through nature-based solutions, particularly related to extreme weather events**
- **Cost and investment strategies to better protect coastal environments and prevent them from damages**
- **Economic and social cohesion impacts on local communities**
- **Implications for governments at national and sub-national levels, including guidance for public policies / decision-making**
- **The role of civil society in building coastal resilience**
- **Valuing nature to encourage investment but also impact of policies**
- **Innovative technology and approaches for coastal resilience including multi-hazard early warning systems**
- **Inciting and measuring individual or institutional behavior change needed to increase resilience in coastal communities**
- **Increased resilience of coastal and marine food systems including community and small-scale aquaculture**
- **Sustainable ocean planning approaches that integrate resilience concerns with economic development policies and plans**
- **Effectiveness of governance and decision-making processes for coastal resilience policies and strategies**
- **Economic analysis of coastal resilience approaches and policies including applications and services for decision making and trade-offs**
- **The place of indigenous and local knowledge systems in enhancing coastal resilience**
- **Local community engagement and co-design of coastal resilience strategies including participatory risk and vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning**

Applicants are encouraged to consider the endorsement criteria for Decade Actions in the preparation of their submissions. These can be found in the [Ocean Decade Implementation Plan](#) in Section 2.4 (see also Appendix of this Call for proposals). Selected proposals that fulfil the Ocean Decade endorsement criteria will be formally endorsed as Decade Actions and thus become part of the global Ocean Decade movement to generate and use the science we need for the ocean we want.

AXA Fellowships Guidelines

AXA Fellowships aim at supporting promising early-career researchers, **defined as no more than five years past the completion of their PhD**,⁸ on a topic aligned with AXA's priorities and societal challenges. The support of AXA Research Fund should be transformative for the researcher and the advancement of their field. To apply for a grant, **researchers must not have a fixed position**.

Duration

An AXA Postdoctoral Fellowship is awarded for a period of **2 years**.

Institution eligibility

The project calls are global. However, the AXA Research Fund partners with academic institutions only; thus, NGOs, governmental bodies, foundations, independent research centers, cultural institutions (such as museums), hospitals are not eligible.

Each institution can present at most ONE CANDIDATE for the whole institution (and not one per department, faculty, or laboratory). **In case of several Expressions of Interest submitted from a single institution, all applications would be disqualified.**

Institutions hosting an AXA Chair cannot request an extra Post-Doctoral fellowship for a researcher working on the AXA Chairholder's team.

Researcher

Candidates should be of the highest caliber and have demonstrated outstanding research achievements, as evidenced by the usual indicators for assessing academic excellence such as research outputs (e.g., publications), research activities (e.g., organizing networks, being involved in communities) and research impact (e.g., policy report, specific recognition through awards, etc.).

AXA Fellowships aim at supporting promising early-career researchers who have been holding a PhD no longer than five years.⁹ **Candidates must be awarded their PhD before they submit their Expression of Interest. Candidates must have already defended their PhD certification before applying.**

Research program

The research program should demonstrate its scientific originality and innovative nature and have the potential to contribute to a step change in the considered field. It is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate the relevance of the proposed research topic to the AXA Research Fund.

Engagement and Obligations

It is a requirement that researchers would be proactive in engaging science with society when supported by the AXA Research Fund and use an open-data framework when applicable. Our researchers commit to sharing their project and communicating their research to a broad audience, supported by the AXA Research Fund. In addition, funded researchers agree to provide both an annual and a final project report, as well as committing to sharing their research through speaking engagements in collaboration with the AXA Research Fund. Annual and final financial reports will be requested as well. For this joint 'Call for Proposals | Call for Decade Actions', researchers will be expected to engage in Ocean Decade Communities of Practice to allow collaboration and exchange with leaders of complementary Ocean Decade Actions. Opportunities for researchers to engage in Ocean Decade events and capacity development initiatives will be identified.

AXA Support for Dissemination and Career Development

⁸ There is a flexibility of 6 months regarding PhD date (i.e. PhD max 5 full years + 6 months), at the Expression of Interest date (i.e., October 8, 2021) i.e., PhD defended after **April 8, 2015**

⁹ There is a **flexibility for maternity/paternity leave: 6 months per child**. (For example, a candidate who has three children can consider 18 months).

The AXA Research Fund will provide support through proposed training sessions related to science communication, media, finance, and management. Furthermore, attention will be given to the opportunity for the grant to deliver a significant step-change in the career of the grantee.

Diversity

Diversity will be an important criterion in the selection process, as applied to the research topic, gender and geography.

Budget and grant allocation

An AXA Fellowship is awarded for a maximum amount of **125,000€ in total, to be spent over the two years**. It is the applicant's responsibility to submit a carefully calibrated budget, appropriate for the ambition of the research program and justified in a detailed and coherent manner. The budget will help cover:

- Annual salary of the researcher (based on institution internal policy)
- Equipment/resources (databases, survey costs, consumables, etc.), academic activities (conferences, workshops, fieldwork, etc.)
- Outreach activities (beyond academic audiences).

Any other type of costs not listed above should be justified in the application template. **No overhead costs can be eligible**. No additional budget will be granted. Budget reallocation during an ongoing project must be strongly justified.

Host institutions will be expected to participate in the AXA Fellowship's general funding with studentships, PhD support and material resources related to the research program. There is no minimum threshold, however, the institution should demonstrate this participation in the section dedicated to the budget in the application form. Grants should not substitute for the host institution's responsibilities vis-à-vis its researchers. As a result, the grant cannot be used to procure basic laboratory equipment.

The AXA Research Fund will formalize its support through a **sponsorship agreement to be signed with the host institution**.

Ethics

The AXA Research Fund places extremely high importance on the ethics of the work it supports. Programs are required to comply fully with all relevant ethical review processes and for this compliance to be evidenced. Cases of scientific misconduct (such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or of inappropriate behavior towards staff or other parties) will be considered as breaches of the AXA ethical principles¹⁰ and will be excluded from funding.

Intellectual property

The researcher and the host institution remain fully independent to conduct the research project. AXA will not claim any right to the ownership or use of the results.

Timeline & Application process

The AXA Research Fund's evaluation process has been designed to assess scientific excellence. The evaluations are monitored to ensure transparency, fairness, and impartiality in the treatment of proposals.

¹⁰ AXA Group Compliance and Ethics Guide, 2011: <https://www.axa.com/en/newsroom/publications/compliance-ethics-guide>

The AXA Research Fund partners with independent external providers to carry out the peer review process in accordance with criteria defined by the AXA Research Fund, the results of which are submitted to the Scientific Board for final selection. Please note that:

- The complete application must be submitted in English, on time, and online. It must respect the template structure and the page limit.
- The research topic must fall within the scope of the eligible topic focus.
- The candidate must submit a free-standing independent research project involving full-time work for the duration of the fellowship (with an exceptional acceptance of up to 20% time dedicated to teaching).

Timeline

Host institution's phase	Step 1 - Registration <i>Only if your institution is not already registered on the AXA Research Fund's online platform.</i> <i>Registrations must be submitted at least 4 days before the Expression of Interest's deadline (see below)</i>	October 15th, 2021 – November 4th, 2021 4 PM Paris time
	Step 2 - Expression of interest <i>On the AXA RF platform</i>	October 15th, 2021 – November 8th, 2021 4 PM Paris time
Researcher's phase	Step 3 - Research proposal submission <i>On the ESF platform, our partner organization (online link to be provided on due time)</i>	November 17th, 2021 – December 14th, 2021 4 PM Paris time
	Step 4 – Rebuttal <i>On the ESF platform</i>	March 1st, 2022 – March 6th, 2022 Noon Paris time
AXA Research Fund	Results announcement by email to the candidates and published on our website: https://www.axa-research.org/fr	End of May 2022

Projects selected for funding are expected to start between May 2022 and December 2022.

Application process

Step 1 – Registering

To apply for the AXA Fellowship grants, academic institutions must be registered on our platform: <https://institution.axa-research.org/>. You can check if your Institution is already registered in the database via the above link. **If your institution is already on our database, you can skip the registration and your Institution's operational contact can log in directly using the login details they defined.**

Institutions should appoint a single point of contact (“Operational Contact”) who will handle relations with the AXA Research Fund and who will be responsible for candidate’s application.

Step 2 – Expression of Interest **ON OUR ONLINE APPLICATION PLATFORM**

Only host institutions can apply, applications cannot be directly submitted by individual researchers.

To submit an online Expression of Interest, host institutions need to follow the steps below:

- 1/ Log onto our online application platform: <https://institution.axa-research.org/>
- 2/ Go to the “Application” tab and click the “Post-doc” link to go to the “Expression of Interest” page
- 3/ Click “New” and fill in the online Expression of Interest form. Attach a short CV (3 pages maximum)
- 4/ Click “Submit”

At the stage of Expression of Interest, you will be requested to provide the following information:

- About the candidate
 - Name, last name
 - Birth date
 - PhD defense date
 - Current university he/she is affiliated with
 - Short CV (3 pages maximum)
- About the research program
 - Project’s description: 3000 characters including spaces

You will receive an email confirming that your Expression of Interest has been submitted. If you don’t receive the email, please check your spam folder or contact fellowships@axa.com

You will be able to edit your Expression of Interest as long as you have not clicked on “Submit”. Once submitted, your Expression of Interest can no longer be edited. The Expression of Interest will be reviewed by the AXA Research Fund and Decade for Ocean’s teams. You will be informed of the decision pertaining to your Expression of Interest by email.

Expressions of Interest received after the deadline, by email or incomplete will not be considered.

Step 3 – Full Application

Academic institutions will be given access to the dedicated ESF platform to nominate their candidate by entering his/her name & email address online. Nominated candidates will be invited to submit their research proposals and will be provided with the necessary information to access the application form. Eligibility criteria of the application call will be screened by our partner organization.

Candidates will have maximum 4 weeks to submit their proposals through the ESF platform. Please note that if the host institution doesn’t nominate the candidate on the ESF platform, the candidate won’t have access to the platform.

Applications received after the deadline, by email or incomplete will not be considered.

Step 4 – Scientific Assessment

The evaluation of the scientific quality of research proposals is carried out in a fully independent manner by our partner peer-review organization.

Each application is reviewed by two relevant experts who will assess the candidate's excellence and the research program's scientific quality.

Step 5 – Rebuttal

Candidates will have the opportunity to respond online to peer review experts' comments before their applications are reviewed by the AXA Research Fund. The main purpose of the rebuttal is to provide applicants with the possibility to comment on any potential misinterpretations or misunderstandings that may have been made by the experts while initially assessing their proposals.

Step 6 – Selection & Results Publication

The Scientific Board of the AXA Research Fund selects to fund applications based on strength of the scientific case, peer review assessments, the potential of the project, candidate profile and of the institution and overall impact. AXA Research Fund informs the candidates of the decisions by email. Results will also be made available on the AXA Research Fund's website (<https://www.axa-research.org/fr>).

The Scientific Board's decision is final and cannot be appealed. It can neither be disputed nor subject to explanations or justifications. Participation in the call for applications implies acceptance of the above-mentioned rules.

Appendix:
endorsement criteria for Ocean Decade Actions

Applicants are encouraged to consider the below endorsement criteria for Decade Actions in the preparation of their submissions:

- Contribute to fulfilling the Ocean Decade Challenges and to achieving the Decade Objectives and the associated sub-objectives.
- Accelerate the generation or use of knowledge and understanding of the ocean, with a specific focus on knowledge that will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and complementary policy frameworks and initiatives.
- Are co-designed or co-delivered by knowledge generators and users, and thus facilitate the uptake of science and ocean knowledge for policy, decision-making, management and/or innovation.
- Ensure that all data and resulting knowledge are provided in an open access, shared, discoverable manner in accordance with the provisions of UNCLOS and are appropriately deposited in recognized data repositories consistent with the IOC Oceanographic Data Exchange Policy¹¹ or the relevant UN subordinate body data policy.
- Strengthen existing or create new partnerships across nations and/or between diverse ocean actors, including users of ocean science.
- Contribute toward capacity development, including, but not limited to, beneficiaries in SIDS, least developed countries and land-locked developing countries.
- Overcome barriers to diversity and equity, including gender, generational and geographic diversity.
- Collaborate with and engage local and indigenous knowledge holders.

