



Guidelines for Applicants for the BioAgora Sub-Grant Call: Co-design of the SPSI Methodological Infrastructure of the Future Science Service for Biodiversity (SSBD)

1. Background and Context of the Call

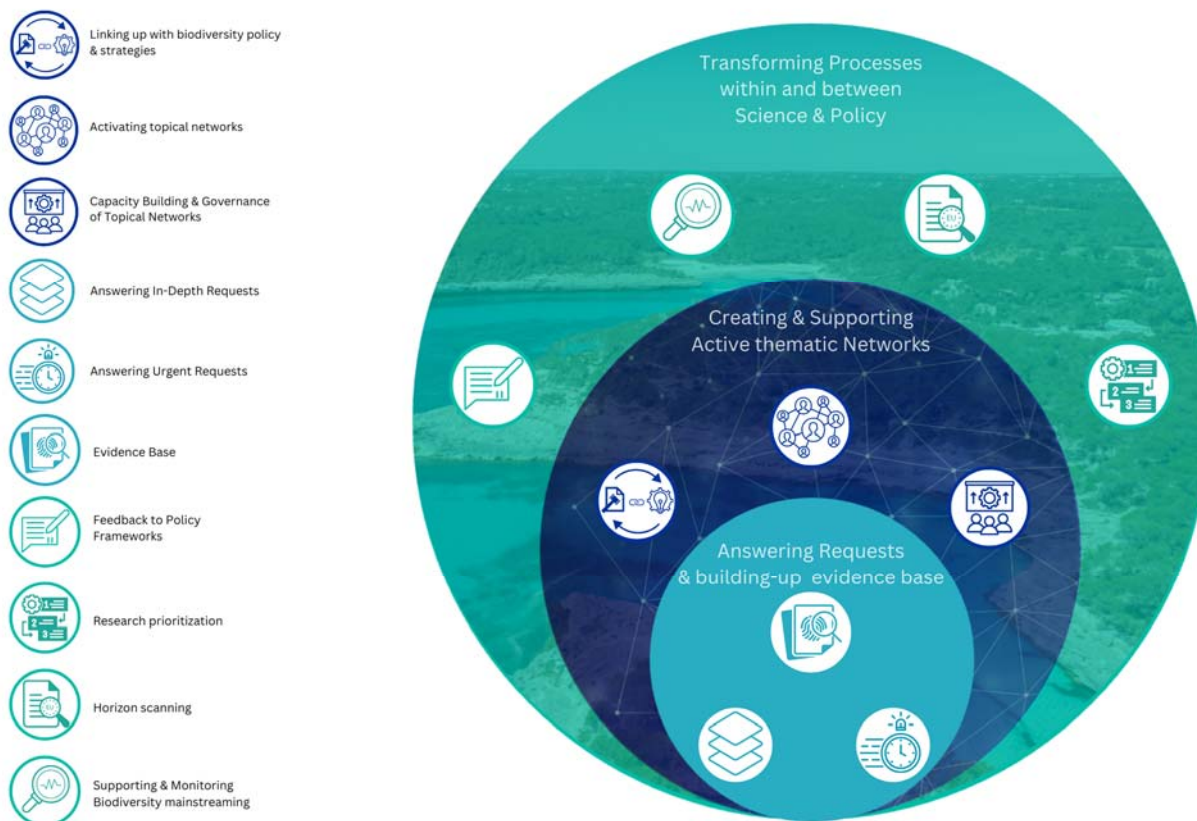
1.1. General

BioAgora is a collaborative European project funded by the Horizon Europe programme that aims to connect research results on biodiversity to the needs of decision-making through a tailored dialogue between scientists, other knowledge holders, and policy actors. Its main outcome will be the establishment of a fair and functional **Science Service for Biodiversity (SSBD)**, which will orchestrate processes and initiatives at the **science-policy-society interface (SPSI)** at the European level by providing the scientific pillar of the EU's [Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity \(KCBD\)](#). The SPSI refers to “the social processes which encompass relations between scientists and other societal actors in the policy process, and which allow for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making” (UNESCO, *World Social Science Report* 2013). The SSBD will better link scientific and non-scientific knowledge with policymaking and implementation, respond more effectively to the current scattered landscape of actors and knowledge holders at the SPSI, and identify future knowledge and policy needs. By creating an inclusive platform where diverse actors can contribute to biodiversity conservation efforts, the SSBD will fully support the ecological transition required by the **European Green Deal** and the **European Union's (EU) Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (BDS2030)**.

BioAgora is launching a new funding call for the development within the SSBD of a dedicated **Methods Expert Group on Advancing Science Policy Interface**, which will provide strategic and operational guidance on identifying, selecting, and applying appropriate knowledge synthesis and overview methodologies in response to policy-relevant questions at the SPSI. The selected proposal is expected to assess and propose a robust methodological framework that can underpin all SSBD processes, including a mobilisation strategy to engage a broad expert community around methodological development and implementation. This includes establishing a network of experts to foster knowledge exchange on methods applied in science-policy interfaces and biodiversity governance. The project should produce a clear overview of available methods and propose practical guidelines for their use in different contexts - from in-depth, long-term assessments to time-sensitive, short-term requests. A central task will be to directly support all ongoing urgent request processes during the funding period, offering hands-on methodological advice and enabling real-time testing and refinement of the proposed approach.

Through this call, BioAgora aims to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and adaptability across SSBD activities, ultimately strengthening the service's capacity to deliver robust and relevant knowledge for EU biodiversity policy.

1.2. Description of Functions of the Science Service



The Science Service for Biodiversity is expected to be fully operational by 2027. To address current gaps at the science-policy-society interface, three main overarching functions have been identified. Each function will require dedicated supporting bodies and activities to ensure effective implementation.

The **first and central function** is to drive **transformative change** at the interface. This means moving beyond the status quo by testing and implementing innovative approaches that reshape how science and policy interact.

A key element of this transformation - captured in the **second function** - is the development and support of **active thematic networks**. These networks will serve as testing grounds for improving the effectiveness and transformative potential of existing science-policy processes.

The **third function**, which the European Commission is particularly focused on, is to **respond to policy-relevant questions** and help build a strong, evidence-based policy-making ecosystem. This function aims to support the implementation of biodiversity-related commitments.

However, this third function cannot stand on its own. It relies on the successful development of the first two functions - transformative approaches and strong thematic networks - to be effective. Equally - the function of answering requests can serve as an approach to establish and strengthen the other two functions.

As illustrated in the figure above, the function to respond to policy-relevant questions will be central in the future SSBD; for this purpose, it needs to have the capacity to handle a multi- or even transdisciplinary

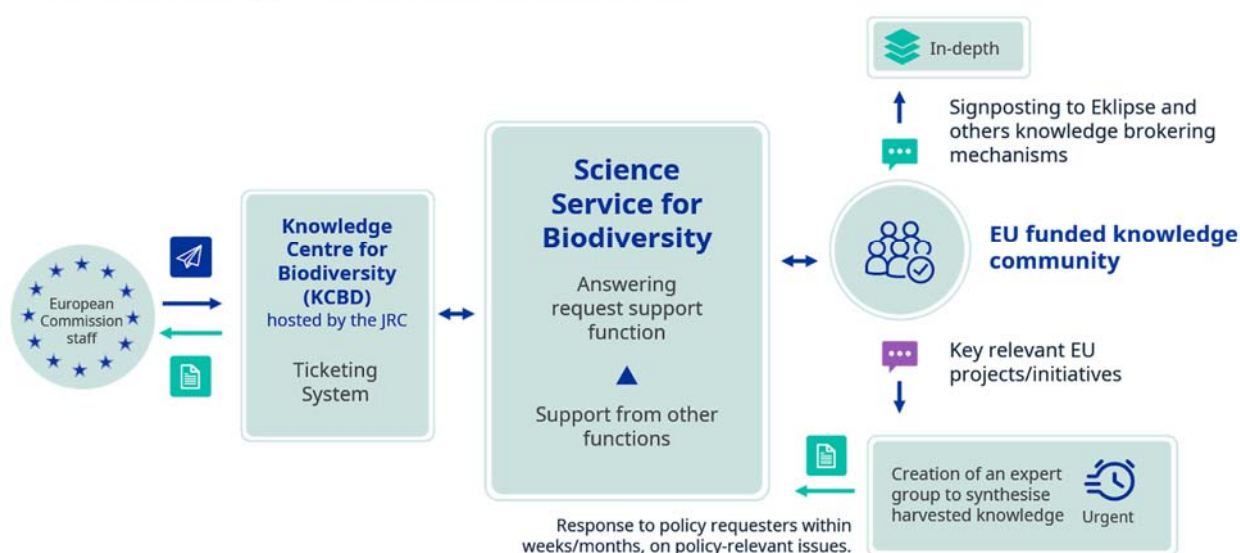
process of knowledge synthesis and overview, with the involvement of different knowledge owners, not only with different disciplinary backgrounds, but also coming from different knowledge systems - from academic experts through institutional stakeholders to affected public. This implies that traditional methods of knowledge “compilation”, typically used in research for a single or a restricted number of disciplinary areas and types of knowledge, may not be suitable in the process. Instead, new combinations of methods and approaches - compatible with the different kinds and knowledge types - need to be identified.

In terms of the governance structure of the future SSBD, a team of method experts (Methods Expert Group on advancing the Science Policy Interface) will be established to provide their expertise and assess how to respond to policy-relevant questions, through methodological advice and guidelines. Their goal will be to identify tailored, robust, and feasible approaches for the MSG to rely on.

Answering request function

Through the newly launched [ticketing system](#) of the Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity (EC-KCBD), any Commission Service can submit a request for knowledge to BioAgora. Upon receiving a request, BioAgora initiates a scoping process to clarify, refine, and reformulate the policy-relevant knowledge requirements through an iterative dialogue with the requesters. Depending on the timeline indicated by the requesters and the nature of the underlying needs, BioAgora has identified two types of requests, as outlined below. Until now, BioAgora has received 10 tickets from the EC-KCBD, covering a broad range of topics linked to biodiversity (see Annex 8).

Answering request function





Urgent request model

The urgent request process, tested in BioAgora for the future SSBD, was developed in response to knowledge needs in policy that sometimes arises at short notice. In these cases, quick and sound scientific/knowledge input is needed since in-depth, state of the art reviews may well provide answers that come too late. Those processes last anything between 3 and 7 months and rely heavily on the EU research funded community to drive the process and broaden the needed expertise to answer the request. Topics of urgent requests that have been received by BioAgora since the beginning of the project include: Deadwood and Fire Risk; Overview of unmapped habitats listed in Annex II of the NRL; Degraded Wetlands; Urban Greening Planning Tools; Identifying Key Pollinator Areas and Buzz lines (habitat connectivity); and Green Roofs & Walls (see Annex 8). **Through this call, BioAgora seeks proposals that reflect on the existing urgent request model and propose methodological approaches to support rapid knowledge synthesis or overview processes in response to short-term knowledge needs.**

In-depth request process

This model aims to deliver more comprehensive outputs from science, while also incorporating diverse types of knowledge and practices. For this type of request, BioAgora forwards them to the [Eclipse mechanism](#). Eclipse is a recognised knowledge brokering mechanism set up in 2016 to answer policy relevant questions from governments, businesses and NGOs to allow them make better informed decisions when it comes to biodiversity. Eclipse produces contextualised and timely evidence reports by steering inter- and trans-disciplinary perspectives and knowledge, including diverging views, and synthesizing it and ensuring the uptake of the results. Eclipse's first [Methods Expert Group](#) (MEG) has identified over 20 knowledge synthesis methods, and developed an online app to support the assessment and selection of adequate knowledge synthesis method(s) to answer the requests. Currently, Eclipse is processing two requests submitted through BioAgora: [“Cumulative impacts of offshore wind farms on marine ecosystems”](#) and [“Blueprint for Site-Specific Conservation Objectives for Marine Natura 2000 sites in European Sea Basins”](#) (also see Annex 8). BioAgora is also mapping the broader landscape of existing knowledge brokering mechanisms to explore how they could contribute to the future SSBD.

2. Scope of the Call and Expectations for Funded Projects

2.1. Robust Overview and Guidelines on Existing Methods and Approaches for Knowledge Synthesis at the SPSI

To support the development of the methodological infrastructure for the future SSBD, we expect proposals to identify a diverse range of methods and approaches, and to assess their robustness, feasibility, and transformative potential when applied at the SPSI, particularly in the context of policy-relevant requests requiring knowledge synthesis or overview. Since time limitation is often critical (especially in urgent requests), proposals are encouraged to look for innovative ways of applying the given methods (e.g. by combining traditional research approaches with artificial intelligence-based solutions).

Methods and approaches selected for review can include, but are not restricted, to the following:

1. **Evidence overview & Review Methods**, used to gather, assess, and synthesize existing knowledge or data.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement Methods**, focusing on obtaining structured input from experts.
3. **Decision Support Frameworks**, providing structured approaches to evaluate options or make decisions based on multiple criteria.
4. **Causal Inference & Analysis Tools**, to better understand relationships between variables, especially cause-effect.
5. **Qualitative & Interpretive Methods**, exploring the underlying beliefs, narratives, and frames.
6. **Foresight & Strategic Planning Methods**, helping to anticipate future developments, explore uncertainty, and support long-term strategy.
7. **Deliberative methods**, engaging diverse stakeholders on a wide range of issues and scopes, to gain access to a broader set of knowledge and values.

We are expecting proposals to build on past and actual projects and initiatives, such as Eclipse and its report on [“Knowledge synthesis for environmental decisions: an evaluation of existing methods, and guidance for their selection, use and development”](#). Biodiversa+ has produced several key resources to support decision-making, including the [“Stakeholder engagement handbook”](#), [“Guide on policy relevance and effective science-policy interfacing in research proposals”](#), [“Citizen science toolkit”](#), and [“Handbook on the use of Biodiversity scenarios in support of decision-making”](#). IPBES also offers [Policy tools and methodologies](#), [Scenario](#) and [model](#) methodologies. Additionally, the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy provides a great range of [resources to support the identification of deliberative approaches and methodologies](#).

Proposals are expected to identify and assess a shortlist of the most promising methods for knowledge synthesis or overview in response to urgent requests across different fields. Building on this, they should provide guidance on the application of these methods in various contexts. To this end, proposals may:

- Provide comprehensive and detailed methodological assessment of the best practices for conducting knowledge synthesis or overview processes (methods and/or approaches) used at the SPSI (in a form of a handbook, guide, or catalogue)



- Define clear criteria for selecting the most appropriate method from the shortlist for a given request (e.g. thematic focus, geographical or temporal scope, stakeholder relevance, technical complexity), especially in the context of the SSBD
- Evaluate the potential use of AI or other technical tools to support the selected methods.

2.2. Developing a network of methods experts: Knowledge Exchange Networks on Methods at SPSI

As a legacy, proposals are expected to create a Knowledge Exchange Network on Methods - a community of practice which enables method experts to connect to each other, to experiment and innovate new approaches to be used in science-policy interfaces, and to actively support knowledge overview processes in the future SSBD. This Knowledge Exchange Network should be open to diverse disciplinary backgrounds and knowledge domains. The legacy of the project's outcomes will be ensured through internal support provided by the BioAgora business plan and governance group, and the future SSBD web platform.

2.3. Testing and implementation of the methodological infrastructure: direct assessment on the methods and approaches to be used for all new and ongoing urgent request processes

The winning consortia are expected to test the tools and guidance developed for point 2.1 in real life requests taken up by the SSBD. This testing phase is expected to take place from Spring 2026 (if not earlier) and will iteratively contribute to the design of the methodological infrastructure, as well as the development and operation of ongoing and incoming requests. This will be achieved by supporting the focal points (responsible individuals facilitating the answering request process of policy relevant questions). This guidance will take place at different stages of the process:

- The pre-submission or screening phase with the requesters (from Commission Services)
- Co-designing and/or guiding expert groups
- Assessing the methodological expertise needed for the call for experts

3. Procedures and eligibility criteria

3.1. Eligibility criteria for projects and partners

- Applications can be submitted by one legal entity or a consortium of legal entities.
- Applicants must meet the following criteria to be eligible for the grant:
 - The main applicant is a legal entity (legal person). The application may be submitted by a consortium (grouping of legal persons represented by a coordinator), and the criterion of being a legal entity applies to all consortium participants.
 - The applicant is eligible for funding under the EU Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme. If the application is submitted by a consortium, this criterion applies to all the consortium participants.
- Applications not fulfilling the above-stated eligibility criteria will be rejected.
- Furthermore, the following legal entities will not be eligible for funding:
 - Entities subject to EU restrictive measures, e.g. entities listed within the EU Sanction map (<https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main>)
 - Restrictive measures imposed by the EU may target governments of third countries, or non-state entities (e.g. companies) and individuals (such as terrorist groups and terrorists). For overview see more at European Union sanctions | EEAS ([europa.eu](https://eeas.europa.eu))
- Organizations which are consortium members of BioAgora cannot submit grant applications nor can they be a partner in the grant applications.

3.2. Available funding and requirements

- The funding is granted in the form of a non-repayable lump sum grant with a maximum funding amount of EUR 165.000.
- Funding will be paid in two (2) instalments in accordance with the following payment schedule and conditions:
 - A prefinancing payment of 50% of the maximum funding shall be made once the Subgrant Agreement has been signed by all Parties.
 - The final payment of the remaining 50% of the maximum funding shall be made after receipt and acceptance of the final report by the UFZ.
- Activities may also be co-financed with own or other sources (co-funding means financial supplement targeted to this activity, e.g. through new projects. It **cannot** be part of already ongoing projects, or financing already ongoing activities.)
- Only costs attributable to the Project that are incurred directly, actually and in addition (to the conventional operating expenses) during the funding period according to the Subgrant Agreement are eligible. Details on the eligible costs can be found under The EU Horizon Europe Rules available [here](#).

3.3. Proposal preparation and submission

The call announcement is published on the EU's Funding & Tender Portal: Calls for proposals | EU Funding & Tenders Portal ([link](#)). Instructions on how to find the Call for grant: Find a call - IT How To - Funding Tenders Opportunities. Applications shall only be submitted by the main applicant (coordinator, as applicable) by filling out this [online application](#) form and uploading the respective documents.

The grant application must be received by the following deadline: 31st August 2025 at 20:00 CEST (Brussels time).

- Applications shall only be submitted by the main applicant (coordinator, as applicable) by filling out this [online application](#) form and uploading the respective documents listed below.
- Only proposals from eligible applicants will be evaluated.
- Each applicant must confirm and accept the eligibility conditions and rules of the Horizon Europe Programme - especially Articles 12 (conflict of interest), 13 (confidentiality and security), 14 (ethics and values), 17.2 (visibility), 18 (specific rules for carrying out the action), 19 (general information obligations) and 20 (record-keeping) of the Grant Agreement no. 101059438 (Project BioAgora).
- Applicants are recommended to become familiar with Annex 7 - Sub-grant agreement. This document must only be provided if the applicant is selected and is mandatory to finalise the contract and enter the funding programme.

Note: Third parties receiving financial support from BioAgora through the Open Call will not become parties to the BioAgora Grant Agreement. Consequently, the Grant Agreement will not require any amendment to include the selected beneficiaries.

The following Annexes are available for download on the BioAgora website ([link](#)):

- Annex 1 - Guidelines for applicants
- Annex 2 - Application Form (template)
- Annex 3 - Declaration of Honour (template) to be signed by authorised representatives of each party participating in an application
- Annex 4 - Legal Entity Form (template) to be completed by all consortium partners (signed by authorised representatives)
- Annex 5 - Letter(s) of Commitment (template) from consortium partners (signed by authorised representatives)
- Annex 6 - Beneficiary's Bank account information form (template) for the lead applicant (only needs to be completed by successful applicants)
- Annex 7 - Sub-grant agreement (template) that the successful applicants will be requested to sign
- Annex 8 - List of examples of requests received so far by BioAgora

Annexes 2, 3, 4 and 5 must be uploaded at the end of the [online application](#) form in PDF format.

3.4. Important deadlines and timeline

	Action
27 th May 2025	Announcement and official launch of the call
31 st August 2025 at 20:00 CEST (Brussels time)	Deadline for submitting the proposal
September 2025	Eligibility check by the call secretariat
September/October 2025	Evaluation of proposals
October 2025	Recommendation for funding projects published & applicants informed
1 st December 2025	Earliest possible start date of funded projects
Halfway point of the project	Interim report submitted
31 st December 2026	Latest end date
3 months after project end	Final report submitted

4. Assessment process and criteria

4.1. Proposal evaluation and scoring

All proposals will be evaluated by members of an evaluation committee. Evaluators are required to be independent, impartial, and objective. Evaluators must sign a declaration of confidentiality concerning the contents of the proposals they review, and all evaluators must confirm the absence of any conflict of interest with any individual application. Any known conflict of interest will be immediately communicated to the BioAgora call secretariat who are managing this process. Evaluators will also be bound by strict confidentiality regarding the evaluation during and after the evaluation process. The assessment will be made on the criteria and scores precisely described below.

The proposals will be scored based on the following criteria (Table 4.1):

Table 4.1 Evaluation criteria for awarding the grants

No.	Criterion	Sub-criterion
A1	Excellence	Scientific and methodological robustness of the proposed approach to identifying, assessing, and applying methods at the science-policy-society interface (SPSI)
		Innovation - The extent to which the proposal demonstrates innovative ideas and approaches to address current challenges at the SPSI, such as time mismatches and/or resource constraints. This includes the originality and suitability of the proposed methodological infrastructure or mechanisms to improve responsiveness, relevance, and coherence of SPSI processes.
		Relevance and Adaptability to SSBD Needs - The extent to which the proposed approach aligns with the objectives and operational needs of the Science Service for Biodiversity (SSBD). This includes its pertinence for supporting different types of policy-relevant processes at the SPSI and its adaptability to varying timeframes, thematic scopes, and stakeholder constellations.
		Inter- and Transdisciplinarity of the proposed methodology - The extent to which the methodological approach meaningfully integrates diverse scientific disciplines and knowledge systems (e.g. stakeholder, practitioner, Indigenous/local), including a clear acknowledgment of any incommensurability or challenges in integration where relevant.
A2	Implementation	Coherence and clarity of the work plan , including work packages, deliverables, milestones, timelines and risk management measures
		Feasibility of the proposed activities in relation to the budget and person-months
		Human resources and competences of the consortium to carry out the innovative approach that is proposed

		Approaches and strategy to facilitate networking and collaboration involving a broader expert community across disciplines and sectors
A3	Impact	Expected contribution to the functioning of the SSBD, including its request-answering processes
		Potential to support transformative change at the SPSI, including the use of innovative approaches and tools (e.g. AI)
		Scalability and sustainability of the proposed methodological framework and the Knowledge Exchange Network on Methods
		Potential for uptake and use of the produced guidance (e.g. handbooks, catalogues, decision-support tools) by relevant actors

Each sub-criterion will be scored between 0 and 3. Half point scores are not given. For each sub-criterion under examination, score values will indicate the rationale presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Scoring rationale

Score	Description
0 / No information	The proposal does not address this criterion.
1 / Poor	The proposal addresses the criterion in an inadequate manner or there are significant weaknesses.
2 / Good	The proposal addresses the criterion well, but improvements are necessary.
3 / Excellent	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

4.2. Ranking of proposals and selection

Only one proposal will be funded. In the event of a tie, a consensus meeting will be held to determine which proposal will be selected for funding. All proposals will receive either an acceptance or rejection letter, accompanied by an anonymised version of the evaluation report. The outcome of the call will be published without delay and will include a brief description of the selected proposal, project duration, and the legal name and country of the sub-grantees.



5. Questions

The BioAgora consortium will provide information to applicants primarily through the following webpage: <https://bioagora.eu/financial-support-third-parties>. All questions and answers will be made publicly available there to ensure equal access for all potential applicants. The Q&A section will be updated regularly. No binding information will be provided through other channels (e.g. telephone or email).

Further details about the BioAgora Open Call can be found at: <https://bioagora.eu/financial-support-third-parties>

To apply, please use the online application form.

For support, contact the BioAgora team at: calls@bioagora.eu

6. Acknowledgements & Disclaimer

BioAgora is funded by the European Union through a Horizon Europe Innovation Action under Grant Agreement Number 101059438. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them