



Biodiversity Futures Synthesis Working Group Programme

Call for Proposals

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First deadline: 30 June 2026

Host: Biodiversity Futures Lab, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (MNCN) - Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), Madrid, Spain & Biodiversity Research Chair, University of Évora, Portugal

1. About the programme

The hardest questions in biodiversity science are rarely single-investigator questions. They sit between fields, between scales, between data and theory, between knowing and deciding. They rarely advance through incremental work alone. Instead, they benefit from intensive, face-to-face exchange, where a small group of people commits to several uninterrupted days of direct engagement, focused on a question or a shared problem that matters.

The Biodiversity Futures Lab Synthesis Working Group Programme funds small, focused groups of scientists who come to the Lab to do what individual research projects cannot easily do: *synthesise*. The synthesis we aim for is not a literature review or a meta-analysis. It is the deliberate effort to bring previously disconnected data, concepts, methods or communities into productive contact — to formalise what is implicit, to test claims that have only been asserted, and to produce ideas that none of the participants would have arrived at alone.

We fund each synthesis group at a maximum total budget of €10,000, covering up to two in-person meetings each. What we offer is time, place and intellectual gravity: a quiet room, a whiteboard and a group of people who have agreed that the question matters.

Beyond funding and venue, the Lab itself is part of what is on offer. Every working group will include two to three Biodiversity Futures Lab members, contributing expertise across biogeography, macroecology, community and theoretical ecology, global change biology, conservation and sustainability science — in terrestrial, freshwater and marine systems. Through them, synthesis groups also gain access to the Lab's broader collaborative and international networks.

The programme is funded from the Lab's own research budget. We are a small group investing internal resources in frontier synthesis. Synthesis as an institutional practice is not new — NCEAS, NESCent, CESAB, and the iDiv Synthesis Centre have shown what dedicated centres, funded at scale, can do. What is novel here is the *level*. This format — public call, funded working groups, multiple structured



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meetings and explicit synthesis remit — has not been operated at the level of a single research lab before.

We are trying this initiative because we believe the synthesis-centre logic is too valuable to leave only to large institutional contexts, and because it fits with the Lab's broader commitment to international collaboration: a way of opening the lab outwards while keeping the questions our own.

2. Scope: what we mean by synthesis

We welcome three modes of synthesis:

- **Theory and conceptual synthesis** — the integration of ideas across previously disconnected literatures, the formalisation of implicit assumptions and the construction of new frameworks.
- **Data synthesis** — the integrative analysis of existing datasets to address questions no single dataset can answer alone.
- **Actionable synthesis** — work that translates between scientific knowledge and decision-making contexts (policy, conservation practice, governance, finance, design).

Original data generation — field, lab, primary sampling — is outside the scope of this programme. So is incremental work that could be done equally well by an existing team in its own corridor.

We are particularly interested in proposals that take intellectual risks and that articulate clearly why a working group — rather than a paper or a grant — is the right vehicle for the question, and sits at intersections: ecology and economics, biodiversity and climate, planetary boundaries and conservation practice, mechanism and forecast, ideas and instruments.

3. Research themes that frame the call

The following themes frame the questions we expect to prioritise. Proposals can sit between or across themes, and we welcome work that pushes their edges.

1. Drivers and dynamics of biodiversity change across scales

What governs biodiversity change when climate, land use and biotic interactions act simultaneously and non-linearly? Synthesis here is the work of formalising what is implicit and reconciling claims that operate at different scales.

2. Projecting biodiversity futures under uncertainty

The architectures we use to project biodiversity were not designed for the present moment. What would a credible, honestly bounded biodiversity projection look like at 2030, 2050, and beyond — and what does it entail to build one?

3. Trophic biogeography and macroecological energetics



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How are trophic structures organised across biogeographic gradients, and how do metabolic and energetic budgets constrain the biodiversity a place can sustain? Synthesis here reconciles food-web ecology, metabolic theory and macroecology.

4. Biodiversity conservation under non-stationarity

What does principled, adaptive, pluralistic conservation look like when historical baselines no longer hold and futures are genuinely open?

5. Methodological frontiers in biodiversity research

Statistical, mechanistic and AI-enabled methods now permit syntheses that were unfeasible a decade ago. Which are mature enough to deliver — and on what?

6. Biodiversity at the intersections

Working groups that bring biodiversity into rigorous dialogue with neighbouring fields — planetary boundaries, climate science, economics, ethics, the humanities, design — are also welcome.

4. Working group format

- **Meetings.** Up to two in-person meetings, each of three to five working days. Hybrid participation is permitted where it strengthens the work; fully virtual working groups are discouraged under this call.
- **Location.** In-person meetings are held at the Biodiversity Futures Lab, which operates across two sites: Madrid (Spain) and Évora (Portugal). The site for each meeting is agreed with the awarded working group on the basis of the topic and researchers involved. Travel and accommodation are organised by the Lab.
- **Group size.** Six to ten participants, including PIs. Smaller, more focused groups (two to five) are possible if clearly justified.
- **Budget.** Maximum €10,000 per working group. See section §10 of the Call for Proposals for what is and is not funded.
- **Project duration.** Up to 18 months from kick-off, including post-meeting analysis and manuscript writing and submission.
- **Lab integration.** Two to three Biodiversity Futures Lab members will be selected by the Lab leadership to join each working group, based on the research themes of the successful applications.

5. Eligibility

Provenance. Applications are open to scientists worldwide. Lead PIs may be based at any institution, anywhere.

Leadership. A maximum of three PIs per working group.



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Theme. Proposed projects should align with the call's research themes and demonstrate clear relevance to the research undertaken by the Biodiversity Futures Lab.

Submissions. One proposal per Lead PI per call.

Standards. See section 6.

6. Standards we hold ourselves to

Diversity and equity

Each working group must include at least 30% of the underrepresented gender and at least one early-career researcher (PhD candidate or postdoc within five years of award). Proposals that do not meet these standards will be returned without review.

Carbon footprint

No more than 30% of participants should travel from outside Europe (using the Council of Europe definition) for any single meeting. Where remote participation can substitute for travel without harming the work, we encourage it.

Open Science

Data and code produced under this programme must be made publicly available under the least restrictive license consistent with applicable constraints, within three years of the final meeting. Funded PIs will be asked to sign the Lab's Data and Code Sharing Agreement.

7. What working groups should produce

A successful working group should leave the room with the seeds of one or more high-impact papers, a competitive grant proposal, a shared dataset or codebase, a conceptual framework others can use, a policy-facing output — or, often the most durable outcome: a long-term research network that keeps producing after the funded meetings end.

We do not require all of these. We do require that applicants make **two cases**: a case for why a working group is the right vehicle for the question, and a case for how the proposed work fits — and feeds — the Biodiversity Futures Lab's own research. The programme is funded from internal resources; we commit them because we expect every working group to move our science forward, alongside the field's.

8. Selection criteria

Proposals are assessed on five dimensions, weighted approximately equally:



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1. **Scientific merit and novelty.** The synthesis question must be sharp, defensible, and not reducible to work already in progress elsewhere. Novelty can lie in question, framing, method or integration — but must be articulable.
2. **Fit to Lab research themes.** Proposals should plausibly connect to one or more of the themes in §3. We do not require a tight match, but it needs to be a productive one — see section §7 of the Call for Proposals on the two cases applicants must make.
3. **Synthesis nature of the work.** The proposed work must be synthesis as defined in section §2 of the Call for Proposals; the working group format must be the right vehicle for the question.
4. **Group composition.** We look for genuine complementarity — disciplinary, methodological, institutional — and for proposals that take diversity (gender, career stage, geography) as a productive constraint rather than a checkbox.
5. **Feasibility and impact.** Are the data, methods, and people in place? Is there a credible plan for the outputs identified in section §7 of the Call for Proposals, and for what happens after the working group ends?

It is essential that your application clearly addresses all five criteria, as rankings will be based exclusively on them. Consider each one carefully.

9. Application process and timeline

The programme is funded from the Lab's own research budget. We are a small group investing internal resources in frontier synthesis; for that reason, calls are issued occasionally rather than on a fixed annual cycle, when budget and bandwidth allow.

When a call is open, a single-stage application form (provided with this document) must be submitted by the deadline below. Applications are intentionally concise and designed to minimise administrative burden — for applicants and for us. Applicants are encouraged to register interest informally before submitting, particularly to confirm Lab member participation.

- **Call opens:** 11 May 2026
- **Submission deadline:** 30 June 2026, 23h00 CET
- **Decision communicated:** approximately six weeks after the deadline
- **Earliest project start:** approximately three months after decision

Selection is made by the Lab PI in consultation with a small internal advisory panel. We aim to fund 1-2 working groups per call, subject to budget and quality.

10. What we fund and what we do not

Funded

Travel and accommodation for participants attending in-person meetings; meeting room and catering costs; small open-access publication costs; in-meeting analytical, computational and visualisation support; childcare or accessibility costs that enable participation.



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Not funded

Researcher salaries; field, lab or primary sampling work; equipment; software licences beyond meeting needs; consultancy fees; conference attendance; honoraria.

A budget table is included in the application form. Deviations from the approved budget require prior written approval from the Programme Coordinator.

11. Reporting and outputs

Funded groups submit a short report after each meeting summarising progress, outputs and next steps. A final report is due within three months of the final meeting. Reports are published on the Lab website.

Lab support must be formally acknowledged in all publications and outputs arising from the working group. Suggested wording is provided to PIs at award.

12. Submission and contact

Applications and queries: Salvador Herrando-Pérez — shp@mncn.csic.es

Submit completed application forms (single PDF, named "BFL-WG-[LeadPISurname]-[YEAR].pdf") to the address above by the deadline.

Programme home: maraujolab.eu

Address: Biodiversity Futures Lab, MNCN-CSIC @ Madrid, Spain & University of Évora @ Évora, Portugal