GRANT CALL

Tropical Forest Ecology Research (TFER)
Grants and Fellowships Scheme: 2026 Call

1. **Background**

1.1   In March 2021, NParks established a Tropical Forest Ecology Research (TFER) programme to coordinate and advance forest ecological research in Singapore with the overall aim of informing forest management strategies and policies in Singapore and the region. The TFER Grants and Fellowships Scheme (GFS) is one part of this programme.

1.2   The TFER GFS provides funding support for early career researchers in tropical forest ecology. The scheme aims to build capacity in forest ecological research in Singapore and the region; and to encourage the use of data collected in permanent research plots under the TFER programme.

1.3   The TFER programme maintains permanent forest plots to encourage co-location of research studies within the same sites. These include the Long-Term Forest Ecological Monitoring (LTFEM) project plots around the Central Catchment Nature Reserves and four buffer parks, the Bukit Timah Forest Dynamics Plots in Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (maintained under the Forest Global Earth Observatory (ForestGEO) network), and the Singapore Botanic Gardens Rainforest Decennial Census.

2.   **Invitation**

2.1   The National Parks Board (NParks) is inviting proposals for the inaugural call of the Tropical Forest Ecology Research (TFER) Grants and Fellowships Scheme.

3.   **Call Topics**

3.1   Please refer to **Annex A** for the details of suggested topics in tropical forest ecological research that NParks is interested in. These topics are not exhaustive; high-quality proposals that fall outside of the specified call topics will still be considered.

4.   **Eligibility**

4.1   Applications are open to Lead Applicants who are Singapore citizens, Singapore Permanent Residents, or citizens of ASEAN member countries. Lead Applicants must also be early career researchers, defined as either currently undertaking a research-based postgraduate degree, or within 5 years of being conferred a research-based postgraduate degree at the deadline of the call for proposals. Master's degrees completed through coursework will not be considered.

4.2 For the small grants component, Lead Applicants with an affiliation with a Singapore-based Institute of Higher Learning (IHL) are eligible to apply. This includes postgraduate students and research staff (including visiting fellows or adjunct faculty) of these institutions; however, the supervising (or host) faculty member (who may be listed as a collaborator) must provide support for the application[1].

4.3 For the short-term fellowship component, the Lead Applicant must spend the full fellowship duration in Singapore. The award is also subject to visa approval, HR formalities and Lead Applicant's employer's policy for receiving the stipend.

4.4 Lead Applicants must declare any active funding, excluding salary and allowances.

5. **Funding Support**

5.1 The total amount requested for funding support should not exceed the limit stated in **Annex A**. Proposals exceeding this limit will be regarded as ineligible. If the Lead Applicant is applying for both the small grants component and short-term fellowship component, the total fellowship stipend is included in the total amount requested (but should be excluded from the Budget section of the application form which is for the small grants component only).

5.2 The proposed budget for the small grants component should be based on realistic costings with appropriate justifications. The reasonableness of the budget will be considered in the assessment of the proposal and may be subjected to amendments and revisions.

5.3 When budgeting for funding, the total cost of the small grants component should include all approved direct costs[2] and indirect costs[3]. All expenditures should be budgeted inclusive of any applicable Goods and Services Taxes (GST) at the prevailing rates, where applicable. No additional claims for GST will be reimbursed.

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[1] Such Lead Applicants for proposals with the small grants component must have an affiliation with a Singapore IHL at the time of application and that is expected to last until the projected end of the project. In the event that the Lead Applicant's affiliation ceases before the end of the project, the supervising or host faculty member will take over any matters to see the project to its end, including any claims and reporting.

[2] More information on the non-fundable direct costs of research can be found in **Annex B**.

[3] Indirect costs are costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular sponsored research project but contribute to the ability of the Institutions to support such research projects (e.g. providing research space, research administration and utilities), and not through the actual performance of activities under the sponsored projects.

5.4 Direct costs are incremental costs required to execute the programme. Supportable direct costs can be classified into the following cost categories:
(a) Expenditure on manpower (EOM), such as research assistants (but NOT including the stipend for the short-term fellowship component);
(b) Equipment;
(c) Local Transport;
(d) Consumables;
(e) Other Operating Expenses (OOE); and
(f) Overseas Travel for presenting at conferences or attending training.

5.5 For all direct cost items proposed for the project, please note that:
(a) Funded Institutions must strictly comply with their own procurement practices;
(b) Funded Institutions must ensure that all cost items are reasonable and are incurred under formally established, consistently applied policies and prevailing practices of the Funded Institution; and
(c) All items/ services/ manpower purchased/ engaged must be necessary for the R&D work.

5.6 The Lead Applicant should exercise due diligence and ensure that the proposed budget is correct and free from error.

5.7 Please ensure that proposed equipment to be purchased are currently unavailable in the Funded Institution (or the institutions of collaborators, if any). In the event where a similar equipment is available in a Funded Institution, necessary justifications for purchase have to be provided, and NParks' explicit approval has to be obtained. Equipment purchased using NParks' funding support needs to be available for NParks' use during the project as needed.

5.8 At the end of the project, NParks shall have the option to own any equipment purchased using NParks' funding support at no transfer cost.

5.9 NParks will support 100% of the approved qualifying direct costs of a project for Singapore-based IHLs.

5.10 Support for indirect costs, in the form of overheads, will be provided for Singapore-based IHLs. Funding support of 30% of the total qualifying approved direct costs will be allowed. Funded Institutions will be responsible for administering and managing the funding support provided by NParks for the indirect costs of research. Indirect costs must be specifically provided for in the grant application and approved by NParks based on the nature of the research. Stipend for the short-term-fellowship component should NOT be included for calculation of indirect costs.

5.11 The short-term fellowship is directly awarded to the Lead Applicant and consists of a monthly stipend of SGD 5,250 only. The stipend is inclusive of any airfare, research expenses and other costs related to the proposal. For applicants based overseas, there will also be a monthly accommodation allowance of SGD 1,000 or pro rata based on the fellowship duration. The withholding tax associated with the fellowship will be covered by NParks.

5.12 Subject to availability, space and equipment may be borrowed from NParks. If there is an intention to borrow space and/or equipment, this should be stated in the proposal, along with how the research will continue if the requested items are not available. Any space and/or equipment that is essential to the proposal should be clearly specified in the research proposal.

6. **Data Management**

6.1 To safeguard against data leaks/breaches, depending on the nature of the research, the Institutions and/or collaborators may be required by NParks to:
   (a) Attain one of the data and/or cybersecurity standards certification listed below (hyperlinked) as a pre-requisite to start the project, receive data requested or execute the data collection (e.g. survey) for the Research.
   (b) Conduct an independent exit external audit assessment[4] upon completion or termination of the Research.

Exact requirements will be determined after evaluation[5] and NParks will officially inform the applicants selected for award in writing[6]. Failure to obtain the required certifications may affect project progress leading to delays in payment milestones, and potentially termination of the award.

Cyber Security Agency (CSA) Cybersecurity Standards[7, 8]	Inforcomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) Data Security Standards
Cyber Essentials Mark (CEM)	Data Protection Essentials (DPE)
Cyber Trust Mark (CTM) *Note – there are a few tiers under CTM, Institutions will only have to attain certification for one tier for the project, if required.*	Data Protection Trust Mark (DPTM)

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[4] The independent assessment is to be conducted by an external auditor unless directed otherwise by NParks, and the report shall confirm that all classified information provided by the Government or generated during the project has been securely disposed of in accordance with Singapore's data protection laws, contractual obligations, and industry best practices.

[5] To ensure accurate evaluation of Institutions' cybersecurity posture, Institutions are required to submit internet-facing sites relevant to the delivery of the project in the Proposal template.

[6] Should there be new data request or new data collection works identified later over the course of the project, NParks reserves the right to require additional certifications to be attained during the project's progress (i.e. after project is awarded).

[7] Applicants with ISO/IEC 27001:2022 certification may use that to meet CEM and all tiers of CTM.

[8] A list of CSA-certified service providers for CSA's CEM and CTM can be found here - https://www.csa.gov.sg/our-programmes/support-for-enterprises/sg-cyber-safe-programme/cybersecurity-certification-for-organisations/how-to-get-certified/

6.2   Any datasets shared by agencies may be aggregated, anonymised and desensitised, where feasible, to lower the data classification/sensitivity. In the same vein, where feasible, any proposed data collection from human subjects (e.g. survey) by the researchers should be anonymised as well. These efforts would help to reduce the inherent data/cybersecurity risks of the research and minimise the need for data/cybersecurity standards certifications.

7.   **Evaluation of Proposals**

7.1   Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

(a)   Strength & Quality of Proposal
- *Research Approach* – The methodology is technically sound and appropriate for addressing the proposed research. The proposed research builds upon outcomes of published research and/or other ongoing/past research.
- *Execution Plan* – The proposed plans to execute the research should be clear and practical for the Lead Applicant to implement with the support of collaborators. The proposed timeline should be reasonable and achievable, with the project outcomes produced in a timely manner. The proposed budget should be reasonable and based on realistic costings to carry out the proposal.

(b)   Benefit and Relevance to Singapore
- *Use of TFER permanent forest plots* – Proposals that utilize or build on data collected in permanent research plots under NParks' TFER programme (i.e. the Long-Term Forest Ecological Monitoring (LTFEM) plots, Bukit Timah Forest Dynamics Plots, and the Singapore Botanic Gardens Rain Forest Decennial Censuses) will be favourably considered.
- *Potential for application in Singapore* – Proposals with research outcomes that inform and support management of forests in Singapore's nature reserves and parks, or generate any other outcomes that NParks deems valuable, and/or with relevance to the call topics stated in Annex A, will be favourably considered.

(c)   Strength & Future Potential of Lead Applicant
- The Lead Applicant should demonstrate the relevance of a past track record or current research pursuits to the proposed project tasks.

7.2   Proposal submissions will be subject to evaluation by a Project Evaluation Panel appointed by NParks. NParks may also decide to send the research proposal to internal or third-party reviewer(s) for comments.

7.3   NParks reserves the right, at its sole discretion, not to select any of the proposals submitted for this Grant Call for funding. NParks may require proposals to be revised as it sees fit to enhance research outcomes, facilitate integration of research concepts and technologies, and optimise funding resources. Specific data/cybersecurity standards

certifications required (if applicable) will also be communicated to the Lead Applicant in writing for the selected proposal for award. **NParks' decision on project and funding support will be final** and shall be abided by the applicants.

8. Project and Funding Agreement

8.1 For the small grants component, before the start of any project, a research collaboration agreement ("RCA"), or a similar agreement, setting out the full responsibilities and obligations of collaborators, will be signed between the institution of the Lead PI and NParks. For the short-term fellowship component, before the start of any project, a fellowship appointment letter, or a similar agreement, will be signed between the Lead Applicant and NParks.

9. Submission Instructions

9.1 All project proposals for this Grant Call must be submitted using the prescribed Project Proposal Template, and in Microsoft Word format, to momoka_ang@nparks.gov.sg by **13 March 2026, 2:00pm, Singapore time (UTC +08:00). Late submissions will not be entertained, and submissions received through other means will not be considered.**

9.2 Files must be named in the following convention: *FP_RCO-TFER-2026_<Name of Lead Applicant>*

9.3 Full proposals and supporting documents shall only be deemed to be submitted if all relevant forms with relevant attachments are submitted. Incomplete or non-compliant submissions may be considered disqualified. Please refer to the Project Proposal Template in **Appendix 1**.

10. Enquiries

10.1 For transparency, all enquiries and associated clarifications will be published on the NParks website for the Grant Call. We regret that phone enquiries will not be accepted.

10.2 For any enquiries or clarifications, please contact momoka_ang@nparks.gov.sg.

Research Collaboration Opportunity Ref No.: RCO-TFER-2026

1. Call Topics

1.1 Please find the research topics for this year's grant call listed below. Research proposals outside of these topics will still be considered.

(a) Development and assessment of forest restoration strategies
(b) Forest disturbance ecology (including edge effects, blowdowns, fire, etc.)
(c) Climate change impacts on and sensitivity and resilience of forests and forest-associated biodiversity
(d) Impacts of invasive species and improving the cost-effectiveness of control methods
(e) Life history or genetics studies and occupancy/demographic/movement modelling for flagship/indicator species in Singapore's forests
(f) Forest dynamics modelling in Singapore's forests
(g) Integrated botanical studies, e.g., coupling field observations of trees in plots with specimen-based work
(h) Plant pathogens in Singapore's forests and implications for forest regeneration and climate resilience

2. Funding Support and Duration

2.1 The Call for Proposals offers funding support up to S$100,000, including all direct and indirect costs for the small grants component as well as the total stipend amount for the short-term fellowship component. Proposals that exceed this limit will not be considered.

2.2 The small grants component offers funding support for a period up to 2 years, but the proposed project duration can be shorter depending on the proposed workplan.

2.3 The short-term fellowship component offers funding support for a recommended duration of 3 months. The monthly stipend is fixed at SGD5,250. For applicants based overseas, there will also be a monthly accommodation allowance of SGD 1,000 or pro rata based on the fellowship duration.

2.4 NParks' decision on the funding support to be awarded for this project is final.

ANNEX B

Non-Fundable Direct Costs of Research

This list may be subject to revision.

Type of Expenses	Description
Salaries of Lead Applicant or their collaborators	Not allowable, to ensure no double-funding of salaries and related costs, as the salaries are already supported from other sources (e.g. faculty salaries are supported separately by the IHL as it is in support of the IHLs' core mission). The short-term fellowship component, if applicable, will be directly awarded to the Lead Applicant and not through the IHL, so it should not be included as a direct cost. However, receipt of the stipend must be allowable by their employer's policy.
Salaries of teaching staff / teaching substitutes	Not allowable, as this is already being supported from capitation grants.
Undergraduate tuition support	Not allowable, as this should be supported under the respective scholarship grants and bursary schemes.
Salaries of general administrative support staff	Not allowable, as this is an indirect cost*.
Costs related to general administration and management	Not allowable, as this is an indirect cost*. This includes common office equipment, such as furniture and fittings, office software, photocopiers, scanners and office supplies.
Costs of office or laboratory space	Not allowable, as this is an indirect cost*. This includes renovation/outfitting costs, rent, depreciation of buildings and equipment, and related expenditures such as water, electricity, general waste disposal and building/facilities maintenance charges.
Personal productivity tools & communication expenses	Not allowable, unless the use of mobile phones and other form of smart devices were indicated in the methodology for the Research/I&E Project. All other costs under this expense type is an indirect cost*.
Entertainment	Not allowable, as this is an indirect cost*.
Refreshment	Not allowable, unless this is related to a hosted conference or workshop for the Research/I&E Project. All other costs under this expense type is an indirect cost*.
Audit fees (Internal and external audit) and Legal fees	Not allowable, as this is an indirect cost*.
Fines and Penalties	
Professional Membership Fees	
Staff retreat and team-building activities	

| Patent Application | Not allowable, as this should be supported from overheads given to I&E Office (IEO)*. This includes patent application filing, maintenance and other related costs. |

* Note: Indirect cost items should be supported from overheads or other funding sources.

(Aligned with National Research Fund Guide, version w.e.f. Dec 2020)