MISSION NEPTUNE

CALL FOR NEPTUNE FELLOWS

Second Cohort — 2026

Postdoctoral Research Fellowships in Ocean Science, Exploration and Governance

Two-year fellowships | All eight Neptune scientific challenges

ABOUT MISSION NEPTUNE

Mission Neptune connects exploration, observation, science, culture, economy and governance to transform ocean knowledge into collective action.

Created by its Founding Partners together with a growing coalition of Mission Partners, Mission Neptune advances humanity's understanding of the ocean and translates scientific knowledge into informed policy and international cooperation. The Mission is structured around three complementary pillars: Exploration, Knowledge and Public Engagement. Its activities include scientific expeditions, the Neptune Fellows programme, academic chairs, the annual Neptune Forum and a global network of Neptune Explorers Galleries currently under development.

Mission Neptune's Scientific Council is co-chaired by Dr. Margaret Leinen (Director Emeritus Scripps Institution of Oceanography) and Dr. Vladimir Ryabinin (Former Executive Secretary of IOC–UNESCO). Its Founding Partners include Dalio Philanthropies, Minderoo Foundation, Voice of the Ocean, Ifremer, the Oceanographic Institute of Monaco, TPC, Focused on Nature and the University of Khorfakkan. Its Patrons include Dr. Sylvia Earle, H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, H.H. Prince Hussain Aga Khan, Dr. Andrew Forrest, Carl Douglas and Chavalit Frederick Tsao.

The Neptune Fellows programme lies at the heart of the Mission. It supports outstanding early-career ocean scientists whose research advances fundamental knowledge of the ocean while contributing to the scientific foundations of future ocean policy, exploration and stewardship. Beyond financial support, Mission Neptune and its Mission Partners provide Fellows with access to an international scientific community, multidisciplinary expeditions, leading research institutions and science-policy dialogue, creating the conditions for scientific excellence and long-term international collaboration.

THE NEPTUNE FELLOWSHIP

WHAT THE FELLOWSHIP OFFERS

A Neptune Fellowship is a fully funded two-year postdoctoral research position designed to support outstanding early-career ocean professionals (ECOP) working on one of Mission Neptune's eight priority scientific challenges.

As a Neptune Fellow, you benefit from a comprehensive package that combines scientific excellence, international collaboration and policy engagement.

The Fellowship includes:

- A fully funded two-year position, including a competitive salary, research budget and institutional overheads, representing an overall investment of approximately €200,000 per Fellow. Funding is provided either by Mission Neptune together with its philanthropic partners or directly by the host institutional scientific partner with support from Mission Neptune.

- Hosting within a world-class research institution, selected in collaboration with the Fellow and Mission Neptune according to the proposed research project. Fellows benefit from leading laboratories, research infrastructure, field facilities and close supervision by internationally recognised scientists.

- Integration into Mission Neptune's international scientific community, with participation in the Scientific Council's activities and working groups, access to senior mentoring, and opportunities to contribute to the Mission's long-term scientific priorities.

- Access to a unique international network bringing together leading institutions and partners, including OceanX, Minderoo Foundation, Ifremer, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, MBARI, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI), CNRS and other leading Mission Partners committed to advancing ocean knowledge.

- Participation in Neptune-endorsed scientific expeditions, whenever relevant to the Fellow's research programme, offering opportunities to collect data, collaborate across disciplines and contribute directly to ocean exploration.

- The annual Neptune Fellows School, bringing together in one of the locations of Mission Partners all Fellows for an intensive programme combining advanced ocean science, science diplomacy, leadership, communication and interdisciplinary collaboration.

- International visibility, through participation in the annual Neptune Forum on World Ocean Day, Mission Neptune's global communication platforms and engagement with the broader scientific and policy communities.

- A dedicated science-to-policy programme during the second year, enabling Fellows to translate their research into policy-relevant knowledge and engage directly with international ocean governance processes, including BBNJ, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UNFCCC and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Fellows receive tailored support from Mission Neptune throughout this process.

More than a postdoctoral position, a Neptune Fellowship provides the scientific environment, international partnerships and global visibility required for emerging leaders in ocean science to develop ambitious research while contributing to the future of ocean knowledge and governance.

FELLOWSHIP STRUCTURE

YEAR 1 — RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY

The first year is dedicated primarily to the Fellow's own research programme, designed in conjunction with their host institution supervisor and Mission Neptune Scientific Council mentor. Fellows are expected to produce original scientific research of the highest quality, engaging actively with the Neptune partner network and contributing to the Scientific Council's working groups on their thematic area.

YEAR 2 — TRANSLATION AND IMPACT

The second year shifts emphasis toward translating research findings into policy-relevant and publicly accessible outputs. Fellows receive dedicated support from Mission Neptune in navigating international governance processes, drafting policy briefs and executive summaries, and presenting their work at high-level events. By the end of Year 2, each Fellow is expected to have produced at least one substantive policy-facing output addressed to a specific international process, as well as at least one peer-reviewed publication.

What the Neptune label brings beyond the fellowship itselfi: Entry into a global network of ocean scientists, explorers and policymakers. Mentorship from co-chairs of an internationally recognised Scientific Council. A platform at the annual Neptune Forum reaching 500+ senior participants across science, diplomacy and culture. Direct engagement with international governance processes including BBNJ COP, UNFCCC COP, CBD COP and the UN Ocean Decade. A community of peers, the Neptune Fellows cohort, working across all eight scientific challenges.

SCIENTIFIC SCOPE: THE EIGHT NEPTUNE CHALLENGES

This call is open to proposals addressing any of Mission Neptune's eight scientific challenges. Applicants must clearly identify which challenge or challenges their proposed research addresses, and articulate how their work contributes to knowledge gaps in that area. Cross-challenge proposals, where the research genuinely spans multiple themes, are encouraged.

Challenge 1 — Mapping of Habitats

Mapping ocean ecosystems, from shallow coastal seas to abyssal plains and seamount summits, to support the 30×30 conservation target and the designation of area-based protection measures under the BBNJ Agreement. Priority focus on understudied
deep-sea and high-seas habitats where mapping data is absent or inadequate for governance purposes.

Relevant expertise: *Multibeam bathymetry; ROV survey design; habitat classification; GIS and spatial analysis; acoustic seafloor mapping; deep-sea benthic ecology*

Challenge 2 — Abundance in Key Areas

Understanding the areas of the ocean that support exceptional concentrations of biodiversity and productivity, biological hotspots, upwelling systems, frontal zones, aggregation areas for migratory species, to anticipate future trajectories of ocean biodiversity, carbon cycling and planetary resilience under climate change.

Relevant expertise: *Pelagic ecology; biological oceanography; remote sensing; species distribution modelling; climate projections; trophic dynamics*

Challenge 3 — Seamount Biodiversity

Deciphering the biodiversity dynamics of seamounts as major hotspots of oceanic life, their species richness, endemism, ecological connectivity, and vulnerability to fishing and mining, to inform their conservation and sustainable management, including the design of Marine Protected Areas in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Relevant expertise: *Deep-sea biology; taxonomy; population genetics; eDNA and metabarcoding; ROV-based survey; connectivity modelling*

Challenge 4 — Polar Oceans

Investigating the rapidly changing Arctic and Antarctic ocean systems, including sea-ice microbiomes, polar circulation dynamics, glacial melt and their global climate feedbacks, to advance understanding of how polar change will alter ocean function and marine biodiversity at planetary scale.

Relevant expertise: *Physical oceanography; sea-ice science; polar biogeochemistry; microbiology; climate modelling; autonomous observation platforms*

Challenge 5 — Hydrothermal Systems and Bio-inspiration

Exploring hydrothermal vents, cold seeps and chemosynthetic ecosystems as frontiers of ocean science, characterising their biodiversity, biogeochemical function and ecological dynamics, and investigating the bio-inspiration potential of vent-associated organisms and processes for materials science, biotechnology and astrobiology.

Relevant expertise: *Vent biology; geomicrobiology; biogeochemistry; hydrothermal fluid chemistry; extremophile physiology; biomimetics*

Challenge 6 — Blue Carbon Sinks

Quantifying the ocean's role as a carbon sink, through biological, physical and chemical pump processes, sediment carbon storage, and the carbon functions of specific ecosystems including deep-sea sediments, cold-water corals and seagrass beds, and assessing how warming, acidification and circulation changes may alter these climate-regulating functions.

Relevant expertise: *Marine biogeochemistry; carbon cycle science; sediment ecology; physical oceanography; climate modelling; blue carbon accounting*

Challenge 7 — Paleogenomic Archives

Applying paleogenomics to sub-seafloor sediment cores to reconstruct pre-human ecosystem baselines, understand how marine organisms have responded to past climate events, and establish the ecological reference states needed to assess current biodiversity change and guide future conservation targets.

Relevant expertise: *Paleogenomics; palaeoceanography; ancient DNA extraction and sequencing; bioinformatics*

Challenge 8 — Marine Genetic Resources

Advancing fundamental knowledge of marine genetic resources, including their diversity, distribution, ecological roles and potential value, in support of both scientific understanding and the equitable governance of marine genetic resources under the BBNJ Agreement's Part II framework.

Relevant expertise: *Marine genomics; metagenomics; biodiversity informatics; high-seas ecology; eDNA and metabarcoding; BBNJ governance and policy*

*For more information regarding the Scientific Objectives, please consult this document.

Priority will be given to proposals that address challenge areas not yet covered by the current Neptune Fellows cohort, and to proposals that connect to existing gaps identified by the Neptune Scientific Council in its mapping of international ocean science programmes.

Cross-Cutting Enablers

In addition to addressing one of Mission Neptune's scientific challenges, Neptune Fellows will contribute to a set of cross-cutting enablers that underpin the success of the Mission and strengthen its ability to transform ocean knowledge into collective action. These include advancing public engagement and ocean literacy, supporting innovative approaches to exploration and observation, contributing to the development of new technologies and data-driven approaches, and strengthening the connection between science, society and policy. Fellows will be encouraged to consider how their research can contribute to improved understanding, mapping and monitoring of ocean ecosystems, support science-based decision-making, and enhance international cooperation for ocean governance. Through their work, Neptune Fellows will become part of a global community of early-career ocean professionals helping to bridge scientific discovery, technological innovation and societal action for the sustainable future of the ocean.

ELIGIBILITY

Applications are welcome from early-career ocean professionals and researchers worldwide who have completed their PhD within the past three years, or who are expected to complete their PhD before the start of the Fellowship. There is no restriction on nationality, institution of origin, or current location. Mission Neptune is explicitly committed to geographic equity and strongly encourages applications from researchers based in or working on the ocean systems of the Global South, Small Island Developing States, and regions underrepresented in global ocean science.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Hold a doctoral degree (PhD or equivalent) in a relevant scientific discipline, awarded no more than three years before the application deadline (extensions considered for career breaks, parental leave, or other exceptional circumstances)
- Demonstrate a strong track record of research in a field relevant to one or more of the eight Neptune scientific challenges
- Have the endorsement of a proposed host institution and a named host supervisor at that institution (see Host Institution requirements below)
- Demonstrate the ability to work effectively across disciplinary and institutional boundaries
- Show genuine motivation to engage with the science-policy interface and to contribute to Mission Neptune's public engagement mission

HOW THE HOST INSTITUTION MATCHING PROCESS WORKS

Mission Neptune and the Scientific Council maintain a network of pre-approved host institutions that have agreed to receive Neptune Fellows and to operate under Neptune's open science, mentorship and policy engagement requirements. The matching process works as follows:

- Applicants send a letter from one of the institutions on the pre-approved list, indicating the scientific rationale for their choice and, where relevant, a named potential supervisor (for example, Scripps, MBARI, Sharjah Marine Science Research Center…)
- Mission Neptune and the Scientific Council review applications in parallel with the list of available host positions, matching Fellows to institutions based on scientific fit, thematic priorities, and cohort-level geographic diversity

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mission Neptune believes that the ocean is relevant to all of humanity — and that the science of the ocean must reflect this. The Neptune Fellows programme is explicitly designed to build a cohort that is geographically, institutionally and demographically diverse, and that gives voice to researchers from communities and regions that have historically been underrepresented in global ocean science.

Concretely, this means:

- Applications from researchers based in, or working on, ocean systems of the Global South, Pacific island states, the Indian Ocean region, Africa, the Caribbean and other underrepresented regions are especially encouraged
- The evaluation panel will actively seek to achieve geographic balance across the cohort as a whole
- Fellowship budgets include provision for travel and participation costs to ensure that Fellows from lower-income countries are not disadvantaged by cost-of-living differentials in host institutions

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

Neptune Fellows are not required to produce outputs on a rigid schedule — good science takes the time it takes. However, by the end of the two-year fellowship, each Fellow is expected to have produced, at minimum:

SCIENTIFIC OUTPUTS

- At least one peer-reviewed publication submitted or in advanced preparation, directly resulting from Fellowship research
- Contribution to at least one Neptune Scientific Council working group or synthesis product
- Datasets deposited in globally publicly accessible data repositories in compliance with FAIR principles

POLICY AND GOVERNANCE OUTPUTS

- At least one policy-financing document (policy brief, executive summary, strategic note, or contribution to an international assessment) addressed to a specific governance process (BBNJ, CBD, UNFCCC, UN Ocean Decade, regional seas convention, or equivalent)
- Participation in at least one high-level policy event or international forum relevant to the Fellow's thematic area, with Mission Neptune support

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OUTPUTS

- At least one accessible public communication product, a short documentary, article, public lecture, school visit, social media series, or equivalent, bringing the Fellow's research to a non-specialist audience
- Participation in the annual Neptune Forum and, where relevant, the Neptune Explorers Galleries or film programme

On the policy output requirement: Mission Neptune recognises that producing policy-relevant outputs is a skill, not an innate capacity. Year 2 of the Fellowship is specifically designed to develop this capacity, with training, mentorship and drafting support provided. Fellows are not expected to arrive as experts in ocean governance — they are expected to leave the Fellowship with the tools to engage effectively with it.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications must be submitted as a single PDF document containing the following elements, in the order listed:

1. Cover page: Full name, nationality, current institution, proposed host institution and supervisor, Neptune challenge(s) addressed
2. Research proposal (maximum 5 pages): Scientific objectives, knowledge gaps addressed, methods and approach, connection to Neptune's scientific challenges, anticipated contribution to the field
3. Policy and engagement plan (maximum 2 pages): How the proposed research connects to international governance processes; proposed policy output(s); proposed public engagement activity
4. Data management plan (maximum 1 page): Where data will be deposited; standards to be followed; timeline for data release
5. Host institution letter of support: Signed by the proposed supervisor, confirming institutional support, infrastructure availability, and agreement to Mission Neptune's open science requirements
6. Curriculum vitae (maximum 4 pages): Including full publication list and any career break information where relevant
7. Two letters of reference: From senior scientists familiar with the applicant's research, submitted directly to Mission Neptune by the referees (not attached to the application)
8. Statement of motivation (maximum 1 page): Why Mission Neptune, why now, and what the applicant hopes to contribute to and take from the Fellowship

Applications and reference letters must be submitted by email to:

Submission: team@mission-neptune.com and teodora.stojilkovic@mission-neptune.com | Subject line: Application — Neptune Fellows 2026 | Submission on an ongoing basis

EVALUATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed by the Mission Neptune Scientific Council, co-chaired by Dr. Margaret Leinen and Dr. Vladimir Ryabinin, with input from external reviewers where needed. The evaluation will be conducted on an ongoing basis

- Round 1 (Early November – early December 2026): Desk review of applications against eligibility criteria and evaluation criteria. Shortlist of approximately 10–15 candidates selected for interview.
- Round 2 (November - December): Interviews with shortlisted candidates, conducted by a panel of Scientific Council members. Final cohort selected.

Evaluation Criteria and Weighting

Criterion	Weight	Notes
Scientific excellence and originality of proposed research	30%	Assessed by Scientific Council reviewers in the relevant thematic area
Relevance and ambition of contribution to Neptune scientific challenges	20%	Priority to challenges underrepresented in current cohort
Track record and potential of the applicant	20%	Relative to career stage
Quality and concreteness of policy and engagement plan	15%	Specificity of governance process targeted; realism of plan
Fit with available host institution positions	10%	Assessed during matching process; not penalised if first-choice unavailable
Contribution to geographic and demographic diversity of cohort	5%	Assessed at cohort level, not individual level

Contact and Further Information

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Mission Neptune before submitting to discuss the suitability of their proposed research and host arrangement. We are happy to advise on the relevance

of a proposed topic to Neptune's scientific challenges, the appropriateness of a proposed host institution, or any other aspect of the application.

Contact: team@mission-neptune.com | www.mission-neptune.com | Maison de l'Océan, 195 rue Saint-Jacques, 75005 Paris

"We are all here together in a way that wasn't possible 50 years ago.
50 years from now it won't be possible to do what is now within our grasp.
What a wonderful time to come together."

— Dr. Sylvia Earle, Patron of Mission Neptune

— Mission Neptune, at Neptune Forum in Paris, 2026

ANNEX I — HOST INSTITUTIONS

The following institutions have confirmed their readiness to host a Neptune Fellow for this cohort. They have each signaled scientific capacity, supervisory commitment and alignment with one or more of Mission Neptune's eight priority challenges.

Prospective applicants should contact these institutions directly to explore scientific fit before submitting an application. This list is not exhaustive. Applicants may equally approach other institutions within Mission Neptune's Partners and Scientific Council members.

This list is not exhaustive.

Applicants may equally approach other institutions within Mission Neptune's broader network of Mission Partners and Scientific Council members.

Station Biologique de Roscoff — CNRS · France

Challenge 8 — Marine Genetic Resources

Supervisor(s): Dr Fabrice Not

Contact: fabrice.not@sb-roscoff.fr ; joachim.claudet@cnrs.fr

Research applying environmental genomics, metabarcoding and molecular ecology to planktonic biodiversity and the biological carbon pump. The SBR offers world-class marine genomics, microscopy and bioinformatics infrastructure, with direct access to the English Channel and Atlantic sampling sites.

CNRS / Ifremer / IRD / Sorbonne Université · France · Costa Rica · Mexico

Challenges 1, 2, 3 — Mapping, Abundance, Seamounts

Supervisor(s): Prof. Joachim Claudet (CNRS) & Dr Jean-Marc Daniel (Ifremer)

Contact: joachim.claudet@cnrs.fr · Jean.Marc.Daniel@ifremer.fr

Area-based management tools under the BBNJ Agreement, with a case study on the Thermal Dome — a transboundary, moving oceanographic feature connecting the high seas to the EEZs of Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico and France. Research spans cumulative impacts, ecosystem services and 3D water-column management approaches.

National Oceanography Centre (NOC) · United Kingdom

Challenges 1, 2, 3, 5 — Mapping, Abundance, Seamounts, Hydrothermal Systems

Supervisor(s): Dr Alex Rogers (biodiversity lead), Dr Daniel Jones, Dr James Strong
Contact: Alex.rogers@noc.ac.uk

Distribution and condition of deep-sea species and communities across biodiversity hotspot ecosystems, including seamounts and chemosynthetic systems. Access to two ocean-class research vessels, the National Deep Submergence Facility, the Discovery Collection (one of the world's largest deep-sea specimen archives, dating to the 1920s) and AI-assisted video image analysis.

Minderoo OceanOmics Centre at University of Western Australia · Australia

Challenges 3, 4, 8 — Seamounts, Polar Oceans, Marine Genetic Resources

Supervisor(s): Dr Georgia Nester
Contact: georgia.nester@uwa.edu.au mbunce@minderoo.org

Environmental DNA, metabarcoding and genomic approaches to resolve biodiversity patterns and biogeographic structure across deep-sea and polar ecosystems. Access to ~4,000 deep-sea eDNA samples spanning 11 geographic regions, end-to-end genomics infrastructure (Illumina, PacBio HiFi, Oxford Nanopore), and ongoing expedition opportunities aboard Minderoo Foundation's Pangaea Ocean Explorer, OceanX and other platforms.

GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel & NIOZ Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research · Germany & The Netherlands

Challenge 5 — Hydrothermal Systems and Bio-inspiration

Supervisor(s): Prof. Sylvia Sander (GEOMAR) & Dr Sabine Gollner (NIOZ)
Contact: ssander@geomar.de · Sabine.Gollner@nioz.nl

Full ecosystem-level study of hydrothermal vents — from fluid geochemistry and trace metals to vent fauna biodiversity, connectivity and resilience. Research cruise opportunities to the Pacific (Kermadec Arc, RV Sonne) and potentially the Atlantic. Both supervisors are members of the Mission Neptune Scientific Advisory Board.

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) · USA

All eight Neptune challenges, including the Marine Policy Center

Supervisor(s): Faculty identified jointly with the Fellow — contact the Academic Programs Office

Contact: diane.foster@whoi.edu · postdoc@whoi.edu

WHOI's ~135 faculty cover all eight Neptune challenge areas, spanning five scientific departments and the Marine Policy Center. Infrastructure includes the HOV Alvin, ROV Jason/Medea, AUV Sentry and the research vessels Atlantis and Neil Armstrong. At any given time WHOI hosts 80+ postdocs and 130 graduate students.

Note: *Applicants must identify a potential WHOI supervisor and develop their application jointly before submission. WHOI will conduct an internal vetting process prior to confirming the hosting arrangement. Prospective applicants are encouraged to explore the faculty pages at whoi.edu and make contact early.*

Ifremer · France

Challenges 1, 2, 3 — Mapping, Abundance, Seamounts (priority: French Polynesia Chair)

Supervisor(s): Dr Jean-Marc Daniel & Dr Pierre-Marie Sarradin

Contact: Jean.Marc.Daniel@ifremer.fr · pierre-marie.sarradin@ifremer.fr

Ifremer is ready to host Neptune Fellows across its research programme. Current priority is the development of a Mission Neptune Academic Chair in French Polynesia, focusing on deep-sea habitat mapping, biodiversity and abundance in key areas of the Pacific.

Sharjah Marine Science Research Centre — University of Khorfakkan · United Arab Emirates

Challenges 1, 3 — Habitat Mapping & Seamount Biodiversity

Supervisor(s): Dr Amelia Bridges

Contact: amelia.bridges@ukf.ac.ae

Two fellowship themes are proposed: (1) seamount biodiversity and ecological connectivity — integrating electronic tagging, stable isotope analysis and oceanographic modelling to assess movement pathways and the role of seamounts as foraging habitats in the northern Indian Ocean/Gulf of Oman; (2) global uncertainty-aware habitat mapping to support ecologically representative MPA networks in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Fellows will also have opportunities to spend time at the University of Exeter and Plymouth Marine Laboratory.

CNR-ISMAR (National Research Council) · Italy

Challenges 1, 3, 5 — Habitat Mapping, Seamount Biodiversity & Hydrothermal Systems & Bioinspiration

Contact(s): Dr Marzia Rovere

Contact: marzia.rovere@cnr.it

Their new ROV infrastructure aboard the research vessel Gaia Blu is expected to be operational from September 2027, enabling ROV-based surveys of deep-sea coral habitats, seamounts and coralligenous beds across the Mediterranean and Arctic. Contact: marzia.rovere@cnr.it