

OPEN SCIENCE FOR INNOVATION

Concept note

12 November 2026

Room XI, UNESCO Headquarters | Paris, France



In the context of the 25th anniversary of World Science Day for Peace and Development (10 November)

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Background

Scientific knowledge serves society only when it circulates from those who hold it to those who need it. Open science is increasingly recognised as a powerful means of bridging the science, technology and innovation divides between and within countries, of accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and of advancing the human right to share and participate in scientific advancement and its benefits. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science, adopted in 2021, gave this ambition its first global expression, setting out shared principles and values across all Member States and calling on governments, research institutions and the private sector to make scientific knowledge, in all its forms, more accessible, more equitable and more responsive to the world's most pressing challenges. Five years on, commitment is broad but implementation remains uneven, and the gap between the two is widening in precisely the areas where open science matters most.

If open science defines the objective, open science partnerships are one of the means of implementing it. They are collaborative arrangements that place open science principles at the centre of how knowledge is jointly produced, shared and applied, and they are recognised as a promising tool for translating the Recommendation from principle into practice. When well designed, they can help accelerate the diffusion of knowledge, build research capacity where it is scarce, and extend the benefits of science to communities that have long been excluded from them. Yet the evidence base for what works remains thin, governance frameworks are applied inconsistently, and the relationship between intellectual property regimes and the openness on which these partnerships depend is still being worked out in practice.

This Conference deliberately positions open science partnerships as an innovative tool for supporting science, technology and innovation (STI) policies. Understood in this way, the central question is no longer whether knowledge should be open, but how openness can be designed, financed and governed so that it carries research across the gap between laboratory and market, and converts scientific results into products and services that grow economies while serving the public good. The Conference concentrates on the UNESCO science priority areas in which this challenge is most pressing, such as water, biodiversity and climate change.

Research and innovation are increasingly operating in a period of heightened concern for research security, a question UNESCO placed at the heart of its 2025 Global Ministerial Dialogue on Science Diplomacy, where open science and research security were taken up as a single, linked theme. Yet openness and security are too often cast as opposites. The premise of this Conference is the reverse: open science is not a threat to research security but a prerequisite for it. Transparency, shared data and reproducible results are what allow research to be scrutinised, verified and trusted across borders. They are also key for science diplomacy, through which collaborative research becomes a bridge between nations and, in UNESCO's terms, a way of building peace in the minds of men and women.

Context

The Conference is convened in the context of World Science Day for Peace and Development, observed each year on 10 November. In 2026 the Day reaches its twenty-fifth edition, an appropriate moment to assess how far commitment to science for society has advanced. The Day serves to reaffirm the role of science in building peaceful and sustainable societies, to strengthen the links between science and society, and to renew national and international commitment to the use of science for the public good. Open science for innovation gives that commitment practical form, providing a concrete means by which scientific knowledge is shared across borders, institutions and sectors and translated into benefits that reach people. Held on 12 November, in the same week as the commemoration, the Conference carries that purpose forward.

It proceeds through four deliberate phases: taking stock of what open science partnerships have delivered across diverse STI ecosystems; examining the relationship between open science and intellectual property; research security and data; and the role of governments in open science.

Objectives

The Conference aims to:

- establish a shared understanding of open science partnerships and intellectual property;
- take stock of how open science partnerships operate in UNESCO priority areas, including how they manage intellectual property, governance, funding and accountability measures;
- examine how openness and research security can be reconciled without narrowing participation in science, particularly for researchers in the global South;
- clarify the policy levers that governments hold to encourage open science and open science partnerships;
- equip participants with practical guidance on how to design, finance, govern and sustain an open science partnership.

Draft programme

The Conference is structured as a single-day open conference, built around an opening keynote and four plenary sessions.

● Opening and keynote

An opening address situates the Conference in the context of World Science Day for Peace and Development and the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science. A keynote sets out the stakes: why the diffusion of knowledge has become a central question for innovation policy, and what is at risk if the gap between commitment and practice continues to widen.

● Session 1: Open science, partnerships and intellectual property

This opening session establishes the shared understanding on which the rest of the Conference depends.

- Discuss and differentiate between open science (the open sharing of data, publications, tools and materials), open science partnerships (mission-oriented, often public-private collaborations that use open sharing as a route to the development of products and services), and intellectual property (time-limited, government-created rights designed to mobilise private investment).
- Discuss how these three are not mutually exclusive but complementary, when they are combined with intention and skill and sequenced appropriately across the research-to-application pathway.
- Position open science partnerships within the wider innovation ecosystem rather than as an inward-facing ideal, including their social and economic justification. Illustrate the argument with concrete examples.

● Session 2: Open science partnerships in UNESCO priority areas

This session moves from definitions to evidence, examining how open science partnerships operate in practice across selected UNESCO priority areas.

- Present a set of representative case examples spanning water, biodiversity and climate change.
- For each example, examine how intellectual property and openness are managed, at which stages of the research-to-application pathway, and subject to which limitations.
- Examine the governance structures and funding sources behind each partnership, and the lines of accountability to which it is subject.
- Draw out how each partnership contributes to measurable progress in its priority area.

● **Session 3: Open science, data and research security**

Protecting the security and integrity of research and of data is a legitimate and shared concern. As such measures spread, however, they should not unintentionally narrow who is able to take part in science, particularly in the global South. The concerns are real and include the misuse of research, the exclusion of trusted partners, and a wider loss of access to data, infrastructure and collaboration. This session explores how open science, when well governed, can support rather than undermine research security, and asks how security concerns can be addressed while keeping science open, inclusive and a source of trust.

- Explore how research security measures, even when well intentioned, can limit scientific participation through partner-vetting, restricted access to data and infrastructure, and constraints on researcher mobility.
- Explore how openness can itself strengthen security and trust: open data drove the rapid COVID-19 response, and transparent methods build the cross-border confidence that the 2025 Global Ministerial Dialogue on Science Diplomacy called science's contribution to peace.
- Examine how the concept of “as open as possible, as closed as necessary” can be applied fairly when access decisions affect partners in other countries, and what this implies for the governance of open science partnerships in priority areas.

● **Session 4: The role of government in encouraging open science partnerships**

This session turns to the public sector, and to the instruments through which governments can encourage open science and open science partnerships.

- Examine the leverage that governments hold, and how it can be exercised deliberately as part of a coherent STI policy.
- Discuss the specific policy instruments available, including research funding and the conditions attached to it, public procurement, and the opening of government-held scientific outputs and data.
- Consider how to combine bottom-up project proposals with top-down identification of strategic missions, so that public direction and researcher initiative reinforce one another.

● **Closing**