

GEO-Microsoft Planetary Computer Programme

This document is submitted by the Secretariat to the Programme Board for decision.

1 INTRODUCTION

Microsoft’s “Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Earth” has as its vision the creation of a “Planetary Computer” that will harness the power of data, ingenuity, and technology to tackle environmental issues. The GEO community is being invited to take advantage of centralized data and analytical tools of the Planetary Computer for local analyses and decision-making. Contributions of local observations to global data repositories will help create and refine computational tools, to ensure that the tools developed are both locally useful for decisionmakers taking conservation action, while also engineered for global-scale relevance.

2 GEO-MICROSOFT PLANETARY COMPUTER PROGRAMME

The GEO-Microsoft Planetary Computer Programme aims to support the work of eligible projects drawn from the Flagships, Initiatives and Community Activities of the GEO Work Programme. At the conclusion of an open call for proposals during the 2nd quarter of 2021, Microsoft will award successful applicants both credits on its Azure cloud computing platform and cash prizes, for 12-month projects that demonstrate the application of Earth observations within the context of a GEO Flagship, Initiative or Community Activity.

Microsoft will provide successful applicants with (i) up to USD 60,000 Microsoft Azure credits per recipient to be used for the development and implementation of Solutions on Microsoft Azure, and (ii) engineering consulting and support through their existing AI for Earth grants program (a total in-kind value of \$1,000,000). Recipients will have access to their Azure credits for a total of three years after Grants are awarded.

In addition, Microsoft will contribute a total of USD 550,000 to the GEO Trust Fund for distribution among successful applicants. Thus, depending on the project scope and justification presented in the proposal, individual cash prizes will range up to a maximum of US\$60,000 per project.¹

3 INVOLVEMENT OF THE GEO PROGRAMME BOARD

The GEO-Microsoft Planetary Computer Programme will be carried out in cooperation with the GEO Secretariat, the GEO Programme Board, and Microsoft Corporation. As has been the case with previous credit programmes organized between the GEO Secretariat and cloud service providers, the Programme Board is invited to participate in the selection of proposals for the

¹ Azure cloud computing credits and cash prize awards will be independent of each other; they are not coupled.

GEO-Microsoft Planetary Computer Programme. It is particularly important to have PB participation in the evaluation phase, to ensure that proposals:

- Support environmental solutions featuring real-world applications of Earth observations stemming from activities of the GWP (that is, the proposal does not centre on research only);
- Demonstrate impacts through decision-making “on the ground”;
- Provide ample justification for cash award requested; and
- Indicate how they will use key elements of Azure and feed into the Planetary Computer.

Based on previous experience with the review process, the time requirement for review team members would be in the order of one to two hours per proposal for the review itself. The number of proposals which will be received is unknown at this time although, given the total award amount, it is anticipated that the maximum number of proposals that can be accommodated under this programme would be approximately 10. The review workload would be divided among the Programme Board reviewers, such that each reviewer would review an equal portion of the proposals received. It would therefore reduce the potential workload of each reviewer if the Programme Board were to nominate three reviewers instead of only two.

In addition to the review of the proposals, which is done individually, the reviewers would be expected to participate in at least two teleconferences of the review team to discuss the proposals and come to a consensus on which would be accepted. In the previous process, there were two teleconferences of approximately two hours each. The expected period in which the review process will take place is from the close of the application period. Participation in the process will not require any travel on the part of the reviewers.

4 APPROXIMATE TIMETABLE

April 2021	Open call for grant applications accompanied by a digital media campaign.
June 2021	Deadline for grant applications.
July 2021	Evaluation of grant applications by the evaluation committee.
August 2021	Recipients are notified.
September 2021	Recipients have completed due diligence (established account with Microsoft).
September 2022	Project reports and deliverables due.

5 DECISIONS REQUIRED

The Programme Board is requested to decide:

1. Whether it wishes to nominate individuals to the review team; and
2. (If it does) How the individual reviewers will be selected.