Blue Sky Young Researcher and Professional Innovation Awards for the Global Forest Products Sector

2026-2027

The Idea

The Blue Sky Young Researcher and Professional Innovation Awards is a global competition for students, young researchers and professionals who are passionate about a range of activities relevant to forest-based science and products using forest-based raw materials, process improvements, or other innovations throughout the forest sector value chain.

The Blue Sky Awards are not just about research and development – they are also about showcasing the work of students and early-career researching professionals who are passionate about climate positive forestry and forest products, clean manufacturing, and the forest bioeconomy.

Taking place every two years and sponsored by the International Council of Forest and Paper Associations (ICFPA), the Blue Sky Awards are presented to six worthy recipients from around the world.

Eligibility

2027 celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Blue Sky Awards and two categories will be remained, both focused on research, development and innovation:

Category 1: Young Researchers (under 30)
Category 2: Young Professionals – PRO (under 35)

Applicants of Category 1 (Young Researchers) must be students or researchers who are 30 years old or younger in November 2026.

Applicants of Category 2 (Young Professionals) must be early-career researching professionals who are 35 years old or younger in November 2026.

Applicants must be carrying out research and innovation projects relevant for forestry, forest products, and/or forest products processing technologies – with links to academia, public or private research centers, and/or corporate research and innovation departments.

To carry out research work that promotes innovation in the forest products sector either in the forest, at production facilities, along the supply chain, or via product innovation, some of the topics related can be (but not limited to):

- Artificial intelligence
- Social and inclusive innovations (better life for people and natural resources)
- Efficiency improves in using resources
- Faster restoration techniques
- Forest tree breeding and biotechnology
- Precision forestry, measurements and inventory
- Bioproducts and wood chemistry
- Material substitution with wood
- Facilities, instrument and process control
- Recycling, de-inking and environment (circular economy)
- Analysis and properties of pulp and paper, panels and energy-products
- Timber for construction (mass timber, CLT, etc)

Opportunities and Recognition

The top three winners of each category will be recognized with a **trophy** and be featured in an **official press release**.

Monetary prizes will be granted only to the Category 1 - Young Researchers & Innovation Award.

The first-place winners of Category 1 (Young Researcher) and Category 2 (Young Professional) will have the opportunity to share their projects at the **ICFPA Annual Meeting in October 2027 in São Paulo, Brazil** (specific location and date to be confirmed by late 2026) **with all travel expenses covered by ICFPA**.

Additional finalists (top three of each category) will be included in the 2027 meeting through virtual or pre-recorded presentations.

Regional Competitions and the International Awards

- Each ICFPA member organization[1] will be asked to run their own regional/national competition and will advance up to 4 candidates (2 from each category) to compete internationally.
- Applicants advancing to the international competition will be requested to submit a short video describing their project.
- Six submissions (three from each category) will be shortlisted by an international judging panel to receive the international awards.
- Travel and accommodation expenses for the first-place winners of Category 1 (Young Researcher) and Category 2 (Young Professional) will be covered to present at the ICFPA Annual Meeting in October 2027 in São Paulo, Brazil.

[1] https://icfpa.org/who-we-are/

Schedule

PERIOD	ACTION
November 2026	Announcement and Call for Applications in Country/Regional level
By April 30th 2027	Regional evaluation of applications (short list) and Regional Award
By May 3rd 2027	Global Pre Selection (2 candidates per Country/Region) advance to the International Judging Round
May 3rd – Jun 30th 2027	International Judging and Global Final Selection
July - September 2027	Notification and preparation of country/region finalists to the international award
October 2027	Presentation and International Awards in São Paulo, Brazil

Application and additional information

Applicants are invited to submit their application containing the following documents:

- Short CV (maximum one page)
- Summary of the project, including:
  - 550 words; double spacing; font Calibri 12
  - Objectives
  - Description of the project
  - Summary of Methodology
  - Expected results
  - Why is it relevant for the forest products industries
  - What makes it innovative
  - How is it fitting with the selected theme
  - Direct and indirect links to each of the UN SDGs
  - Please disclose if and how artificial intelligence was used in the project or application
- One letter of support

The same requirement applies for Category 1 and Category 2. The only difference is the age. Applications and deadlines for national award selection will be defined by local/regional associations.

Please contact your association should you require any additional information.
For general information, please contact matheus.kussuki@iba.org.

Evaluation

A jury composed by industry representatives and well-respected researchers will evaluate the finalists both in regional and international level, based on evaluation form with pre-defined premises.