

Geneva Water Hub

March 2025

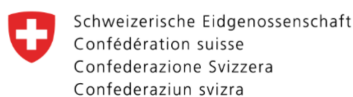
Background

Many of the world's pressing water governance challenges – such as sharing transboundary lakes, rivers and groundwater, protecting freshwater ecosystems, and managing the water-energy-food nexus – require cooperation or diplomacy between actors in order to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts. A root challenge is the often politically-sensitive issue of water allocation, or decision-making about who gets water, when, under what conditions. Allocation decisions are embedded in specific historical, social, institutional, economic, environmental contexts that can bring up political questions of power, access, equity, and what kinds of knowledge counts (Joy et al., 2014; Vij et al., 2020; Turley 2023).

Water diplomacy refers to a *dynamic, politically-oriented process that aims to prevent, mitigate, and resolve water-related tensions in shared waters by making simultaneous use of diplomatic tools, water-related know-how and cooperation mechanisms across multiple diplomacy tracks* (Keskinen et al., 2021). Water diplomacy tends to refer to inter-state relations over the long term, however it is also relevant within countries, can involve non-state actors, and can occur at shorter time scales (Mirumachi, 2020; Barua, 2018).

The scientific literature on water diplomacy and related terms continues to grow: hydropolitics (Bréthaut et al., 2022; Haemmerli et al., 2023), water cooperation (McCracken, 2022), and water/hydro diplomacy (Sehring et al., 2022) span theories, practices and tools for analyzing water conflict and providing tools to understand and potentially resolve conflict. An important literature on the influence of narratives and power asymmetries is developing too (Bréthaut et al., 2022; Vij, 2022; Vij et al., 2020). Water diplomacy research is grounded in different methodologies including case studies as well as “large n” analyses. There are generally many rich contextual analyses on institutions, actors and historical perspectives. Some of the other outputs include pedagogical reflections (e.g. Singh, 2019), ‘toolboxes’ for water diplomacy across different scales and contexts (e.g. Grech-Madin et al., 2018), ‘pathways’ for diplomacy actions (e.g. Keskinen et al., 2021), frameworks (e.g. Islam & Repella 2015), decision tools (e.g. Atef et al., 2019), assessments of the skills

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required for effective diplomacy and trust building (Burbach et al., 2023), and techniques for convening dialogues.

Current water diplomacy approaches used by both ‘Track 1’ actors (e.g. ministers, diplomats, negotiators) as well ‘Track 2’ actors (e.g. civil society leaders) can be complemented by the ideas, evidence and reflexivity that is being generated on these topics. However the question remains: To what extent are the social sciences on water diplomacy having an impact on actual diplomatic and policy processes? Under what conditions is water diplomacy research contributing to water for peace? And in any case, how can we best support the uptake of this knowledge by decision makers? For instance, we often hear about how hydrological data is necessary for developing transboundary water agreements. But what about the growing research on historical contexts, accounting for power asymmetries, integrating diverse knowledge sources, or decision-making about technology – if and how is this research meaningfully used in reaching agreements? How could it be better packaged for users? What is needed to bridge the gaps?

About the Science Policy Incubator Grant on Water Diplomacy

The objective of this grant is to respond to the challenge outlined about: *to give policy-oriented scholars of water diplomacy and hydropolitics an opportunity to bridge their research to policy*. This might involve scholars repackaging their research for different audiences, preparing training materials, communications plans, or more generally connecting with the right policy makers, and intervening in the right arenas. The objective is to *ensure that expertise and experience from scientific research in the social sciences is reaching the audience that would benefit from it*, and ultimately that this science can inform sustainable cooperation over shared resources.

What is included?

The Science Policy Incubator Grant on Water Diplomacy aims to provide scientists with an opportunity to strengthen the potential policy impact of their research. Projects considered will make an explicit case for the policy relevance or need for this research. Through the grant program, the Geneva Water Hub hopes to build a community of practice on science-diplomacy and science-policy processes. The successful candidates will be awarded with:

- Funding of individuals up to a maximum of 12,500 CHF to be used in the 6 months following award. The total funding envelope is 25,000 CHF to be divided into 2-3 projects.
- The funds can be used towards a wide range of activities including:
 - **Applied research:** *strategies to inform specific policy processes, strategies for translating the results of science into effective policy, stakeholder mapping, adapting a conceptual paper to a new case study*
 - **Knowledge transfer activities:** *transforming academic article(s) into policy briefs, training materials, communications packages or digital tools*
 - **Engagement activities:** *Outreach activities, organizing dialogues or roundtables with water authorities or diplomats, connecting with policy-makers, intervening in policy arenas*
- A visit to Geneva in December 2025 for the final wrap up meeting and event.
- Support from Geneva Water Hub staff on science-policy interface conceptualization and techniques, stakeholder mapping and identification, networking opportunities, and Geneva-based policy processes.
- At least two one-on-one mentoring sessions with high-level water diplomats.
- The opportunity to have your research inform Geneva Water Hub’s work on water diplomacy, through integration into our educational activities and courses and/or through the strategic support we provide to our clients on navigating water-related tension and conflict.

Who is Eligible to apply?

- Grants will be awarded to individual researchers who have obtained a PhD in the last 3 years;
- The research used for the grant must already be published or currently undergoing peer review;
- The research used for the grant is not limited to research conducted during the candidate's PhD;
- It is welcome, but not necessary, for individuals to be affiliated with an academic institution at the time of application;
- There is no geographical limitation;
- Applications from developing countries are particularly welcome/ encouraged; &
- Applications from female researchers are particularly welcome/ encouraged.

How to apply?

Please send a 1 000-word project proposal, a budget for proposed expenses, a timeline for proposed activities, and a CV (listing your most relevant publications) to research@genevawaterhub.org by **April 17th 2025** (23:00 CET). For more information on the SPI grants please visit our [SPI Grant page](#).

Important Dates

March 8, 2025 – Opening of call for proposals

March 24, 2025 (14:30 CET) – Webinar Q&A

April 17, 2025 (23:00 CET) – Deadline for submissions

1st week June 2025 – Announcement of selected projects

July 2025 – Inception meeting (online)

January 2026 – Wrap up meeting in Geneva and public-facing event

February 2026 – Completion of projects and closing meeting (online)

Evaluation

The grant is intended for recently-graduated social science scholars who wish to advance cooperation over shared water resources, and who can demonstrate through their application that they can use funding and organize activities to create impact. It is important to note that the grant cannot be used to finance additional research activities (e.g. field work to collect more data) but must be used to scale or apply findings from existing research. The specific activities and actions to be financed are up to the candidate, but again must be based on generating impact from existing research.

Project proposals will be evaluated by a scientific evaluation committee composed of three Geneva Water Hub staff, one external science-policy specialist, and one external water diplomacy expert with policy experience. Project proposals will be evaluated against 4 key criteria:

1. **Policy need:** does the proposal make a convincing case for the need for policy applications of the research?
2. **Originality and quality of research:** does the proposal rely on the author's own, original research findings, and is this research methodologically sound and academically rigorous?
3. **Clarity of vision for impact:** does the proposal propose a clear vision and plan on how to influence policy, and propose a convincing theory of change (explicitly stating the assumptions made in linking the activities to achieving impact)?
4. **Feasibility of the plan:** do the budget and proposed activities seem feasible and are they directly in line with the objectives of the grant programme?

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The Geneva Water Hub is a centre of excellence specialised in hydropolitics and hydrodiplomacy. Its objective is to better understand and contribute to the prevention of tensions related to water by taking into account conflicts of uses between public sectors and private sectors, between political entities, and between states. The Geneva Water Hub is the Secretariat of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace and engages in the promotion and the implementation of the Panel's recommendations published in September 2017.

The Geneva Water Hub aims at developing the hydropolitics agenda to help prevent water-related conflicts at an early stage at intersectoral and transboundary levels, and to promote water as an instrument of peace and cooperation with the support of the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the University of Geneva.

For more information, kindly contact the Geneva Water Hub – Secretariat of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace at the following e-mail address: contact@genevawaterhub.org and visit our website at www.genevawaterhub.org