

Building the EFI Science-Media Initiative

For the Board and Annual
Conference

BUILDING THE EFI SCIENCE - MEDIA INITIATIVE

1. Background

"We need more scientists speaking like journalists and more journalists thinking like scientists."
(Marc Palahi)

In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, decision-making, especially policy making, requires contextualised knowledge based on connecting disciplines, sectoral challenges and opportunities and different geographical and temporal scales. A good example is climate change.

In such emerging complex environment, the role of science becomes more important than ever. In this respect, we are facing a paradox. Never before in human history have there been so many scientists and so much scientific knowledge available. We have the means to understand many of the challenges we are facing, yet we need to admit that post truth politics as well as contradictory media and science messages are also abound.

Therefore, science needs to partner with media to have impact - and together put emphasis on the synthesis and contextualisation of information, bringing together scientists and media experts from different disciplines. In addition, the right fora, timing, and formats are of crucial importance when communicating scientific information.

In this context, EFI has developed a new and ambitious approach to build long-term science-media partnerships as basis for implementing the strategic goals of [The EFI Strategy 2025](#) :

- An ambitious European forest research and innovation area;
- Science-informed policies to address societal challenges and opportunities;
- Awareness in society of the importance of forests.

EFI Science-media work is key to successfully raise awareness of the role of forests and forest science in building a sustainable society. Facilitating the development of a science-informed narrative together with media is crucial for engaging policy makers, young people and urban populations.

2. Building science-media partnerships – the Lookout Station initiative

EFI created the Lookout Station initiative at the end of 2017 to meet the Institute's strategic goals, as described above. Building bridges between science and media communities brings concrete societal impact, as shown in the Lookout Station pilot projects.

The Lookout Station offers programmes to both science and media communities. It supports storytellers to produce engaging science-based stories about forests related topics such as climate change, with innovative new tools. It also helps scientists simplify their communication so that the storytellers can accurately report about the topic with scientific facts, data and evidence.

The initiative focuses on closing the gap between science and media, so that the wider public gets evidence-based information in the digital environment, about topics important to the work of EFI and its member organizations.

- 1) As a pilot project, the European Forest Institute and the Global Editors Network joined forces to launch [Lookout360°](#) that focused on 360 video storytelling on climate change. The project started with a bootcamp for journalists, trainers and scientists in Lapland early 2018. The final video projects were showcased at the [GEN Summit in Lisbon](#) on 30 May – 1 June 2018, both on the conference main stage and in the GEN Dome, an immersive storytelling-focused exhibition. The GEN Summit was attended by 750+ editors and featured speakers included Jimmy Wales (Wikipedia), Borge Brende (World Economic Forum) and [many more](#).
- 2) Media partnerships have so far produced stories on forest fires in Portugal (Euronews), agroforestry systems in Spain (El País), on climate change effects in Morocco (AlJazeera), and deforestation and climate change affects in Argentina (The Guardian). The stories have reached tens of millions of people, and brought great visibility for EFI.
- 3) Partnerships have also been formed, among others, with MIT's Joint Programme for Global Change, the Finnish Forest Foundation, UN University, and World Science Journalism Federation. MIT refer to the Lookout Station initiative as “a pioneer way to build trust between science and media in the 21st century”.
- 4) EFI's collaboration with science-media trainer Elisabetta Tola M.Sc. Ph.D. (agricultural sciences and microbiology) has produced a “**Handbook for Scientists: Driving Scientific Research into Journalistic Reporting on Forests, Environment and Climate Change**”. You can download the booklet [here](#).

3. Next steps- Involving the Network: CALL FOR STORIES

Due to the success of the pilot stages of the Lookout Station initiative and the whole science-media concept, EFI now wants to consolidate the initiative and involve its Network in building this science-journalism platform.

Some emerging ideas include:

- Involving especially young scientists and journalists.
- Utilizing the EFI Network Fund.
- Making short scientific visits available for journalists.
- Creating an EFI science-media online community.
- Involving young journalists in the EFI Young Leadership Programme

In May, we invited our member organizations to submit story pitches: a [CALL FOR STORY IDEAS](#) was launched. By the deadline, we received a total of three qualified suggestions for story topics from our Network.

Two proposals were chosen to be implemented as field trips/science-media bootcamps for journalists and researchers between November 2018 - spring of 2019.

- *Forests and water in a Mediterranean context. The case of Cork Oak Forests in Catalonia*, from the Forest Science and Technology Center of Catalonia
- *The climate archive: a story of how a changing climate affects trees and how trees affect the climate*, from University of Copenhagen, Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management

In the Call, EFI specified that the topic should be visual, concrete, and interesting to policy makers and/or the society at large. Thus, the two topics were chosen based on their relevance to EFI Strategy, suitability for field trips/bootcamps, and the interest they are likely to create in the general public and media. Both meet the ultimate goal of shining light on the work of our Network.

The travel/trainer costs of the participants are sponsored by the Lookout Station project.

CONGRATULATIONS to the winners! We will soon be in touch about the practical arrangements.