

Premis Pioner 2026

for doctoral thesis
with results aimed
to commercial exploitation

13th Open Call

Scientific research is conducted across a wide range of disciplines and fields of knowledge. Researchers embarking on a scientific career typically begin by undertaking a doctoral research project culminating in the defence of a doctoral thesis. At this stage, it is essential for researchers to recognise the potential value of their findings, not only from a scientific perspective, but also in terms of their potential industrial, commercial, and societal applications.

With this objective in mind, and within the framework of the CERCA System, the CERCA Institution established the **Premis PIONER** awards to recognise researchers whose doctoral thesis demonstrate a clear potential for the transfer and practical application of research results.

The annual **Premis PIONER** awards are governed by the following terms and conditions:

1. OBJECT

The purpose of these awards is to recognise researchers affiliated with a CERCA centre who defended a doctoral thesis proposing the development or enhancement of a technology, product, service, or innovative solution with potential industrial, commercial, or public policy applications. The thesis must be defended between the publication of the 2025 call (14 October 2025) and the publication of the present call (15 July 2026).

2. ELIGIBILITY AND CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Applications may be submitted by researchers affiliated with a CERCA centre who, from October 14th, 2025, to July 15th, 2026, have successfully defended their doctoral thesis, obtained their PhD degree, and developed a specific proposal for the application of their thesis results within the scope of this call.

The call is open to researchers from all academic disciplines. Information about the Premis PIONER awards will be published on the CERCA Institution website and circulated to the directors of all CERCA centres for dissemination among their research communities.

3. AWARDS

Each award recipient will receive a prize of €1,000.

A minimum of six **Premis PIONER** awards will be granted in 2026.

This edition of the awards is supported by several public institutions and organisations.

4. APPLICATION DEADLINE

Applications must be submitted no later than **8 September 2026, 17h00 CET**.

5. APPLICATIONS AND SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

Applications must be submitted by email to pioner@cerca.cat and addressed to the Director of the CERCA Institution.

Each application must include the following documentation:

- a) A completed **application form**, including acceptance of the terms and conditions, identification details, and a direct email address for communications related to the application process. The CERCA Institution will send any communication related with this call to this email address.
- b) An **executive summary** of the doctoral thesis, in Catalan and a maximum of 500 words.
- c) A **proposal outlining the application of the research results**, with particular emphasis on their industrial, commercial or public policy potential (maximum five pages).
- d) A **PDF copy** of the full doctoral thesis **or the link** to the electronic copy ready to be downloaded.
- e) A **certificate** issued by the Director of the CERCA centre confirming the date of the thesis defence and the name of the thesis supervisor, who must be affiliated with the CERCA centre.
- f) Where applicable, letters of interest or support from companies, public administrations, or other organisations that have followed or collaborated in the project.

Documentation and application forms will be available in the Premis PIONER section of the CERCA website: <https://cerca.cat/premis-pioner/>

6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

The evaluation and selection process will be conducted in two stages. The first stage will consist of the selection of the finalists, while the second stage will determine the recipients of the six Premis PIONER awards. Ten finalist projects will be selected and invited to present their proposals at the final event. The jury will assess these presentations in conjunction with the established evaluation criteria. The six projects obtaining the highest overall scores will be awarded the Premis PIONER awards.

Updated timeline: The 2026 edition introduces a new launch date for the call for applications, 15 July 2026, which has resulted in an updated selection schedule and new date for the award ceremony (8 October 2026).

6.1 OPTIONAL TRAINING FOR PARTICIPANTS

Participants will be invited to an optional online training session to be held via Microsoft Teams on 22 September 2026, from 15:00 to 16:00.

The session will provide practical guidance and useful tools to help participants prepare an effective and concise five-minute pitch presenting their technology or innovation project.

The access link and final agenda will be provided exclusively to the participants.

6.2 PRE-SELECTION

A review committee composed of members of the I-CERCA team will carry out an initial assessment of all eligible applications in order to select the finalist projects.

The shortlisted projects will then be evaluated and scored by an external jury, which will assess the contribution of each proposal in relation to the objective of the Premis PIONER awards.

A reserve list will also be established in case any finalists are unable to participate in the final presentation.

Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria.

- a. Originality (3 points)
- b. Viability (3 points)
- c. Expected impact (3 points)
- d. Time to application or implementation (1 point)

Ten finalists will be announced on 18 September 2026, and their names will be published on the CERCA Institution website.

Finalists will be required to deliver a presentation during the final event. Participation in the final pitch session is mandatory. Finalists must therefore confirm their availability as soon as possible. Should a finalist be unable to attend, their place will be offered to a candidate on the reserve list.

Remote participation may be authorised in duly justified circumstances. The final presentations will take place during the Premis PIONER awards ceremony.

6.3 FINAL EVENT

The final presentation and award ceremony will take place on Thursday, 8 October 2026, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the DREU Auditorium, Sala -1, Via Laietana 2, 08003 Barcelona,

Finalists wishing to use presentation slides must submit their PDF presentation no later than 48 hours before the event.

Each finalist will have five minutes to present their project, followed by two to three minutes of questions and answer with the jury.

The evaluation criteria for the final stage will be as follows:

- a. Originality (3 points)
- b. Viability (3 points)
- c. Expected impact (3 points)
- d. Time to application or implementation (1 points)

e. Pitch and presentation (2 points)

The names of the jury members will be announced a few days before the awards ceremony, when the programme is distributed.

Following the presentations, the jury will deliberate in private and, by consensus, submit its final ranking and recommendation to the Director of the CERCA Institution.

The Director of the CERCA Institution will issue the final resolution and formally designate the recipients of the 2026 Premis PIONER awards. The resolution will be published on the CERCA Institution website.

7. AWARDS CEREMONY

The official resolution signed by the Director of the CERCA Institution, announcing the recipients of the Premis PIONER awards, will be presented publicly during the award ceremony.

Representatives of the sponsoring organisations and institutional authorities will participate in the presentation of the awards.

8. CONFIDENTIALITY

The CERCA Institution guarantees the confidentiality of all information submitted by participants within the framework of this call.

Only the information expressly identified as publishable, together with the public summary included in the application form, may be disseminated through any media or communication channel for the purpose of promoting the awards and the selected projects.

9. PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION

The personal data that is provided within the framework of this call for applications, as well as the updates of said data, will be processed by the CERCA Institution under the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679, of 27 April 2016 (GDPR), and Organic Law 3/2018, of 5 December (LOPDGDD).

The CERCA Institution will process the personal data provided by participants for the purposes of managing their application to take part in the Premis PIONER awards and to provide information and send communications, including electronically and/or telematically, concerning updates regarding this or future calls for applications promoted by the CERCA Institution in the research field.

The legal grounds for processing the data are compliance with a legal obligation and the exercise of public powers conferred on CERCA Institution regarding management of the call and the consent of the interested parties in reference to the sending of electronic communications. The interested party may withdraw such consent at any time.

This data will be kept for the time strictly necessary to achieve the purpose, respecting in any event that established in the terms and conditions of the call for applications and the applicable archiving regulations. The CERCA Institution hereby certifies that it has taken the technical and organisational measures contemplated in Regulation (EU) 2016/679 to ensure the security and

integrity of the personal data on file and to prevent unauthorised alteration, loss, processing or access.

The CERCA Institution may communicate the personal data of applicants to the Ministry of Research and Universities so that it may exercise its power of control over the management of the Institution, as an organisation attached to said ministry; The CERCA Institution may disseminate the projects presented and the winners on the basis of the public interest and the exercise of the public powers conferred on it.

The CERCA Institution advises participants that they may exercise their rights of access to and rectification and erasure of data at all times, in the terms established by current legislation, request restriction or oppose the processing of their data, as well as request data portability, by writing to Via Laietana, 2, 08003 Barcelona, or by emailing institucio.cerca@gencat.cat, stating clearly the right they wish to exercise. In the case of non-conformity with the data processing, they also have the right to submit a complaint before the Catalan Data Protection Authority website (apdcat.gencat.cat).

10. IMAGE AND AUDIO RIGHTS

By accepting these terms and conditions, participants irrevocably and freely authorise the CERCA Institution to reproduce, use and display their name and image for the purposes of publicising them in the public domain without the right to any corresponding remuneration.

Participants grant the CERCA Institution the use rights for images, sound bites, audio and video material, as well as the names and general descriptions of the projects presented, across any medium or format, exclusively for purposes of promotional, publicity and development activities related to the Premis PIONER awards.

This rights transfer is not subject to any kind of geographical or temporal restriction or financial obligation.

Applicable Regulations:

Article 55.2 of the Parliament of Catalonia Act 19/2014, of 29 December, on Transparency, Access to Information and Good Governance, stipulates that the administrations and bodies falling within the scope of this law must include, in contractual clause documents and in the bases of calls for grants or aid, the ethical principles and rules of conduct to which contractors and beneficiaries must adhere, and must determine the consequences of any potential breach of these principles.

You can find the applicable regulations on the [CERCA Institution transparency portal](#).