



JURY REPORT

SURF Research Support Award 2026

2026: familiar and forward-looking. In 2026 and 2027 the SURF Research Support Award ceremony takes on a renewed format, while its core remains unchanged: recognizing the heroes of research support.

Those who have followed the Award over the years know that it has had different names and has consistently recognized the invaluable contributions of research supporters. This year is no exception. Although, the Award has slightly different name and there will only be one Luminary. Nevertheless, the SURF Research Support Award stands for the recognition of impact, engagement, and exemplary contributions within the research support community. **The Award does not suggest that a single individual has transformed the field alone, but rather highlights contributions that are essential to high-quality research support.**

THE POWER OF RESEARCH SUPPORT

Professionals in research support are often invisible, yet indispensable. They connect researchers with research IT, foster collaboration, and increase engagement within projects. Their influence extends beyond individual teams or institutions, contributing to national and international collaboration and knowledge sharing. These qualities deserve explicit recognition. The SURF Research Support Award is intended for those who make such exceptional contributions to research support.

THE PROCESS

Anyone can be nominated for this award. Nominations are submitted by colleagues, researchers, and managers during an open nomination period of several weeks. A professional jury then carefully reviews all submissions. Based on impact, connecting ability, and distinctiveness, the jury selects one outstanding winner.

This decision is a challenge every year. The submissions demonstrate that all nominees perform valuable work and make important contributions to the research field. The jury, composed of professionals from diverse backgrounds, discusses all candidates in depth before reaching a well-considered decision.

The diversity and quality of the nominations underline the growing importance of research support. Let yourself be inspired by the winner and discover what strong research support can achieve.

Mariia Steeghs-Turchina

Leiden University Medical Centrum – research (software) engineer

Mariia plays a leading role in the rapidly emerging field of research software. The jury regards her as a pioneer who can translate complex challenges, such as version control and turning policy into practical applications, into workable solutions for the research community. In a field that is still evolving, her work clearly demonstrates the value of strong research support.

IMPACT

What sets Mariia apart is the breadth of her impact. She operates not only at a local level, where she remains attentive to the needs of individual researchers, but also successfully translates her work to the national and international community. In doing so, she not only increases the visibility of research software as a field, but also actively contributes to its further development and professionalization. Her efforts ensure that insights and solutions are more widely applied and shared, extending her impact across institutions and national borders.

“Mariia brilliantly combines direct support of individual researchers at the local institution with indirect support of national and international communities, always with a focus on practical and useful solutions based on actual needs.”

CONNECTING ABILITY

Mariia supports individual researchers within her institution, maintaining a strong focus on their specific needs, while simultaneously translating these experiences into a broader national and international context. By actively sharing knowledge and engaging with relevant initiatives and stakeholders, she contributes to a stronger and more cohesive field. In doing so, she embodies the role of a research supporter as a connecting force between people, institutions, and disciplines.

“By promoting and guiding sustainable practices, she addresses a critical gap in research software maintenance and helps research groups increase the long-term sustainability and reusability of their code.”

DISTINCTIVENESS

Mariia holds a leading position in a new and evolving field. The jury notes that her strength lies in her ability to translate complex challenges into solutions that are clear, easy to interpret, and straightforward to implement in research practice. This significantly improves the usability and accessibility of research support. Her contribution goes beyond the individual level and holds broader significance for the field as a whole, making her work both sustainable and distinctive.

“Two examples [ELIXIR & EOSC/EVERSE] illustrate Mariia’s ability to find smart and original but also robust solutions to practical problems, as well as her insight into higher-level aspects of research software quality.”



The jury:

Magchiel Bijsterbosch – jury chair

Innovation Manager Research bij SURF

Anja Smit

Director DANS

Aranka van Wesemael

Board Member Promovendi Netwerk Nederland

Raoul Schram

Research Software Engineer Utrecht University – Research Support Champion 2025

Renate Mattizik

Data Librarian/Data Steward Saxion University of Applied Sciences – Research Support Champion 2025