



SASUF-NRF Seed Grants for academia, Industry, Society Collaboration

Call for joint proposals: 2026 – 2028

Consult the General Application Guide 2026 for
opening and closing dates

A maximum of 20 projects will be funded for this call

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1. Preamble

The South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF) is a transformative project uniting 37 universities from across Sweden and South Africa, bringing together leading researchers, teachers, students, university leaders, and other stakeholders. The project aims to develop joint solutions to challenges aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2030, the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 and the Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA) 2034. SASUF, which was launched in October 2017, is now in its third phase of implementation, which goes under the name SASUF+, and will be running from August 2025 to August 2028. The SASUF+ phase focuses on deepening collaborative partnerships, promoting joint innovation, and addressing societal challenges through a glocal approach that considers both global and local conditions.

Collaboration between South Africa and Sweden has grown significantly in recent years. Since its inception, SASUF has connected more than 4,000 South African and Swedish researchers, teachers, students and university leaders in workshops and seminars. Activities in SASUF have led to the initiation of more than 100 collaborative projects with researchers from both countries addressing challenges linked to the SDGs. The initial funding from the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT), the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa, the South African Departments of Science and Innovation (DSI) and Higher Education and Training (DHET) was crucial for the success of the project. With this initial funding, SASUF has made a substantial impact in advancing science between the two countries. The methodology and approaches in SASUF have been internationally recognised as a highly successful model for building an equitable platform for international collaboration.

2. Aim and objectives of the SASUF-NRF Seed Grants

With the momentum built in phase I, the second phase of SASUF, known as SASUF 2030, presented new and innovative ways of working with strategic internationalisation. In addition to the broad spectrum of activities already successfully proven in the initial phase, SASUF 2030 introduced a range of renewed partnership mechanisms and tools including the [Seed Grants for Collaborative Research](#). This programme was implemented in partnership with the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa.

The third phase, SASUF+, now launches the [SASUF-NRF Seed Grant Grants](#) which focus on academia – industry collaboration. The grants will advance interdisciplinary research in four key thematic areas:

- Sustainable Health
- Green Transition

- Migration and Urbanisation
- Democracy, Social Justice, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The objectives of the SASUF-NRF Seed Grants are to:

- contribute to scientific advancement in both countries by funding researchers' mobility in the frame of joint research projects in specified research fields;
- provide an opportunity for next generation and emerging researchers to cooperate in an international setting and to develop their scientific careers - support the advancement of basic and applied research; and - contribute meaningfully to research capacity development.

3. Duration of the projects

All projects will be supported for a maximum duration of 2 years starting from 1 August 2026. See Table 1 below for a full schedule of this call.

Table 1: Planned Call Schedule

Call Process	
Monday, 17 March 2026	Launch of the call
UFS deadline: 29 May 2026	Call deadline for all applicants
Friday, 18 June 2026	Call deadline for DAs (relevant only for South African applicants)
Friday, 17 July 2026	Screening and reviews of eligible applications
Friday, 28 July, 2026	Decision making, awards and signing of contracts with successful candidates
1 August 2026	Start of funded projects/activities
1 July December 2028	End of funded projects/activities
July 2028	Submission of progress report by researchers

Although the funders endeavour to abide by the above-mentioned dates, it should be noted that the nature and complexity of the bilateral programme require synchronisation of all processes and alignment of different academic and financial years. Funders, therefore, reserve the right to change and/or amend the above-mentioned dates without prior notification to applicants.

4. Eligibility criteria

All applicants must be based at one of the partner universities of SASUF. See the following link for a full list of SASUF members: <https://www.sasuf.org/partneruniversities>

A proposal must include participants from at least **two (2) South African universities + two (2) Swedish universities and one (1) South African Organisation/ Industry Partner/NGO, OR one (1) Swedish Organisation or Industry partner** to be eligible. Therefore, a proposal must be submitted by a minimum of six (5) consortia members. Each proposal must nominate one main applicant based in South Africa and one main applicant based in Sweden; they are the **Principal Investigators (PI)** on the South African and Swedish sides, respectively. The PIs will bear the main responsibility for the project, including its technical and administrative coordination as well as the timely delivery of scientific and financial reports.

Additional research partners based in South Africa and/or Sweden can also participate in the joint projects and form part of the consortia, provided there is a strong motivation for value add.

PIs **must have a PhD** to be eligible; this does not apply to Co-PIs.

Researchers from SMEs, municipalities, and NGOs/NPOs, private companies/industries cannot serve as PIs but are welcome to form part of the joint projects (**with clear indications of their roles**). However, they will be expected to meet their own costs of participation in the joint projects. The NRF grants cannot be used to support these researchers, **however, the Swedish side of the grant is allowed to be used for that.**

Each consortium is allowed to submit **only one proposal**. Further to this, a researcher cannot serve as a PI on more than one proposal.

Former SASUF beneficiaries are welcome to participate in the call; **however, the project should not be a continuation of the past project.**

5. Eligible research activities

Projects must demonstrate potential for promoting human capacity development, equity, and redress through the involvement of the next generation, mid-career researchers, historically disadvantaged individuals (including female and disabled), and the participation of HDIs. As indicated above, the aim of the SASUF+ initiative is focused on deepening collaborative partnerships, promoting joint innovation, and addressing societal challenges through a glocal approach that considers both global and local conditions.

These are the four key thematic areas:

- Sustainable Health,

- Green Transition,
- Migration and Urbanisation,
- Democracy, Social Justice, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Therefore, the funding within this programme will support research capacity development activities such as:

- Postgraduate student exchange programmes
- General research-related mobility
- Joint workshops, seminars, conferences, symposia
- Lecture presentations
- Meetings, local/regional dissemination of research results aimed at involving stakeholders, and/or end-users from outside the consortium.

The following will **not** be funded from the fund allocation:

- Consultant's fees
- Project management fees
- Educational expenses (scholarships and/or bursaries, etc.)
- Large equipment
- Salaries and temporary staff fees.

6. Funding regulations

Researchers should ensure that all expenses are calculated and covered in line with the rules and regulations in force in each country. Funds requested should not exceed **100 000 SEK (SASUF portion) plus 160 000 ZAR (NRF portion)** per consortium project.

Funding will be made available for a maximum of 2 years and exclusively for activities commencing in September 2026. A maximum of 20 consortia projects will be supported with this call.

The NRF portion of the grant shall be disbursed to the South African PI on signature of the Conditions of Grant (CoG) Contract and the SASUF portion shall be allocated to the Swedish PI. Apart from the SASUF-NRF financial support, universities in both countries are encouraged to solicit other funding resources. Leveraged funds should be clearly indicated in the application. Industry partners are welcome to offer financial or in-kind support.

7. Application procedure

The South African PI must submit their consortia proposals through an online application process to the NRF on the NRF Connect system at <https://nrconnect.nrf.ac.za>. Rejected applications during the screening phase will be given a maximum of 3 working days from the date of email receipt to query the outcomes

thereof.

Please make use of the *'General Application Guide 2026'* for assistance on the steps to follow when applying for international research grants. The link to the guide will be published on this web page: <https://www.nrf.ac.za/funding/nrf-call-for-proposals-for-funding-in-2025-and-2026/>.

The South African PIs **must** attach the required **compulsory documents** in PDF format in the following order:

- CVs of all consortia partners.
- Institutional support letter (Dean/HOD/Director).
- Institutional Support letter of Swedish Principal Investigator.
- Industry partner letter of participation and support with clear indications of roles and responsibilities.
- NGO, NPGO, civil society partners' letter of participation with clear indications of roles and responsibilities.
- Detailed Project Plan/ Schedule of project activities.
- Detailed budget of the South African Principal Investigator.
- Detailed Budgets of the Swedish Principal Investigator.

Failure to submit compulsory documents will result in the disqualification of the application and will make the entire project consortium ineligible.

The Swedish PI must submit their consortia proposal via mail to sasuf@uu.se. Please make sure to follow the instructions in the call guidelines, also available on <https://www.sasuf.org/funding-opportunities>.

8. Review process

Following the closing date, applications will be submitted to recognised national experts in the various fields of research represented by the proposals received. These experts will evaluate each proposal based on the following broad criteria:

- Scientific quality of the intended joint research project
- Feasibility and/or plans for future cooperation: the potential of the project to initiate or further develop collaboration between Sweden and South Africa in research and/or education
- Human Capacity Development: the potential of the project to strengthen the international prospects of emerging researchers and students.

Please note that other national criteria may be applicable in line with the national policies and regulations of the partnering countries. Following national evaluation, a shortlist of projects to be funded will be constituted through consultations between SASUF and NRF based on the results of the expert evaluations done in both countries.

The final decision on funding will be taken by a joint award committee with members of the SASUF Steering Committee and the NRF. The minutes of this meeting (indicating approved joint projects for funding) shall

be signed by the Chairperson indicating a joint consensus on projects to fund. The results of this meeting will preferably be announced in **July 2026**.

Although all Parties undertake to execute the evaluation and selection process to notify applicants of the results as soon as possible, the nature of the bilateral process requires the alignment of the commencement of each phase of the process with the partnering countries, whose schedules may differ significantly.

9. Projects follow-up and reporting

- Principal Investigators are expected to submit progress reports to SASUF and the NRF. Scientific and financial reporting on the project is an **OBLIGATORY** condition of funding.
- A final scientific and financial report should be submitted by both the South African and the Swedish project Principal Investigators no more than 3-months after the end of the project.
- South African PIs should submit their reports through the NRF Connect system in line with the reporting schedule for all NRF grants. Swedish PIs should submit their reports, using the official template available on <https://www.sasuf.org/funding-opportunities>, to sasuf@uu.se.
- The report should mention the outputs of the project compared with the objectives and aims of the proposal.
- The joint publications by the researchers should mention the support from all the funders (i.e. SASUF and the NRF).
- The funders reserve the right to make the final reports available to researchers within and outside this programme in similar disciplines.

10. Science engagement

Science engagement refers to scientific and initiative activities, events, interventions, or interactions characterised by mutual learning and dialogue among people of varied backgrounds, scientific expertise, and life experiences, who articulate and discuss their perspectives, ideas, knowledge, and values. It is an overarching term for all aspects of public engagement through suitable communication channels with science, science awareness, science education, science communication, and science outreach, aiming to develop and benefit individuals and society. Science engagement is critical for all SASUF-related activities.

The NRF supports science engagement by coordinating and implementing the Department of Science and Innovation's Engagement Strategy. The strategy embraces a broad understanding of science, encompassing systematic knowledge spanning (natural and physical sciences, engineering sciences, medical sciences, agricultural sciences, mathematics, social sciences and humanities, technology) all aspects of the innovation chain and indigenous knowledge. Therefore, researchers funded through the NRF programmes must contribute to science engagement and report the related outputs in their project's progress report.

11. Intellectual property

The researchers of each country, particularly the PIs, must take adequate steps to ensure the protection and sharing of the intellectual property that could result from the joint projects.

12. Ethical considerations

It is the responsibility of the grant holder, in conjunction with the institution, to ensure that all research activities carried out in or outside South Africa comply with the laws and regulations of South Africa and/or the foreign country in which the research activities are conducted. These include all human and animal subjects, copyright and intellectual property protection, and other regulations or laws, as appropriate. A research ethics committee must review and approve the ethical and academic rigor of all research in accordance with institutional ethical policies and procedures. The ethical clearance approval should be held by the institution and the grant holder and accessible on request.

Please also refer to the “Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices” on the NRF website <https://www.nrf.ac.za/statement-on-ethical-research-and-scholarly-publishing-practices/>.

13. Protection of personal information

The National Research Foundation ensures compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), Act 4 of 2013, committing to ensure the privacy of those submitting applications and proposals to the NRF on the NRF Online Submission System (<https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/>). The National Research Foundation will protect the personal information provided by applicants or the third party against misuse, loss, unauthorised access, modification, or disclosure. The Privacy Policy of the NRF outlines the practices relating to the protection of personal information and can be accessed on the NRF website at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/privacy-policy>.

14. Submission deadline

The deadline for UFS submission **29 May 2026**. The deadline for DA submission to the NRF is **18 June 2026** (*only applicable to South African researchers*).

Applications received after the closing date will not be considered for funding. Please note that neither SASUF nor the NRF will be held responsible for applications not received. Researchers are also advised to ensure that their research partners' applications are submitted and received in the partner country.

Please contact your institution's Research Office first for more information.

15. Contact details

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NRF

Queries on the NRF online submission system (NRF-Connect) can be forwarded to the NRF Support Desk on email: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za. For content-related queries, please contact

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