



**National  
Research  
Foundation**

PO Box 2600  
Pretoria 0001  
South Africa  
Tel: (012) 481 4000  
Int. Code: +27 12  
info@nrf.ac.za  
www.nrf.ac.za

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**To: Interested Applicants, Research Directors, Postgraduate Directors and Designated Authorities at the NRF Recognized Research Institutions**

### **The 2026 NRF Next Generation and Emerging Researchers Symposium**

The National Research Foundation (NRF) is the biggest funding agency that supports next generation and emerging researchers. Over the years, until 2017, it hosted a number of national symposiums and forums for postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows. These initiatives and forums played a key role in providing a platform for engagements, academic and grant writing, publication, ethical research, research collaboration, networking and professional development opportunities. Furthermore, these allowed for valuable feedback from the NRF stakeholders and beneficiaries on improving the service culture of the organization. In October 2026, NRF will be hosting the third of the newly reconceptualized *Next Generation and Emerging Researcher Symposium*, which will occur on an annual basis.

The aim of the symposium will be to provide the next generation and emerging researchers funded by the NRF with a platform that offers varied opportunities for networking, creating local and global workforce connections, knowledge exchange, sharing the latest groundbreaking insights on topics of their interest and thought-provoking research projects in relation to the NRF's 2030 vision "**research for a better society**" and aligned to the thematic areas in the DSI decal plan. The objectives of the symposium are to develop and support the next generation and emerging researchers through the following: One-stop-shop clearing house; Encouraging Innovation and Impact; Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange; Mentorship; Providing a Platform for Science Communication; and Leadership and Strategic Direction in Research.

The 2026 symposium is expected to bring together a diverse group of up to 300 delegates, featuring the next generation and emerging researchers funded by NRF, stakeholders from South African universities and across NSI, along with senior NRF executives, A and B-rated NRF researchers, industry leaders who will provide invaluable support. The target audience will be the emerging researchers (i.e., postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and other researchers in the early stages of their careers) and undergraduate students interested in postgraduate studies and/or seeking to explore research/networking opportunities.

The NRF is thus inviting all **Doctoral Students, Postdoctoral Fellows and Early Career Researchers currently funded by the NRF**, to submit applications (incl. abstracts) for the symposium to be hosted by the NRF on 06 – 09 October 2026 in Boksburg. The application template is designed to provide the applicant with an opportunity to present the information that is required and will be assessed (Table 1). The sections of the application will require information on the following:

- Abstract that describes the topic to be presented at the symposium,
- Impact of the applicant's research study; and

- Motivation to participate in the symposium and respective expectations.

All eligible applications will be reviewed by the Organising Committee, and approved applicants will be formally approved and accepted as Participants/Speakers to present an oral and/or poster at the symposium. The applications received will be reviewed against the set evaluation criteria described in Table 1.

**Table 1. Review scorecard and evaluation dimensions for the NRF Next Generation and Emerging Researchers Symposium Application**

EVALUATION DIMENSION	DESCRIPTOR	WEIGHTING
<b>Track record of the applicant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work and publication record of the applicant in their research area.</li> <li>• Strength of the motivation submitted by applicant for participation in the symposium.</li> </ul>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Quality of the abstract</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well conceptualised abstract to be presented at the symposium, highlighting the significance of the research study and outcomes.</li> </ul>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Alignment of the proposed study with the theme of the symposium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment of the proposed study to with the theme of the symposium, i.e., <b>“research for better society”</b>.</li> </ul>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Impact of the project</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impact of the project in line with national priority areas and specifically with regard to:</li> <li>• The NRF’s Vision 2030 “research for better society”; and</li> <li>• Thematic Areas listed in the DSI Decadal Plan 2022-2032.</li> </ul>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Strength of the motivation by Supervisor or Head of Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of the motivation by Supervisor or Head of Research.</li> </ul>	<b>15%</b>

**The Opening Date for applications: 20 April 2026**

**The UFS Internal Closing Date for Grant Holders and Post Docs: 18 May 2026**

**Applicants will be informed of the outcome by 03 August 2026**

The symposium will be hosted on 06 – 09 October 2026 at Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre, Bartlett, Boksburg, South Africa. Successful applicants will have all their basic expenditures including travel and accommodation covered.

**Please note that individuals who have attended the NRF NGER Symposium previously are not eligible to apply.**

**\*Doctoral students need to contact the Centre for Post Graduate Support for their internal closing date.**

**NRF Contact Persons for enquiries:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Telephone</b>	<b>Email</b>
Dr Sello Moloi	Research Management Specialist (RIISA)	+27 12 481 4249	<a href="mailto:SP.Moloi@risa.nrf.ac.za">SP.Moloi@risa.nrf.ac.za</a>



