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NRF Call for Proposals: The African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP) Marine Infrastructure-Linked Funding Instrument (2027-2029)

Please note that the African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP) Marine Infrastructure-Linked Funding Instrument is now open on **NRF Connect** under the **Research Grants** category.

UFS internal closing date: 21 September 2026

Background:

The African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP) Marine Infrastructure-Linked Funding Instrument is the next three-year cycle of ACEP's competitive open research funding programme. ACEP is re-advertised every three years and provides funding linked to access to specialised marine research infrastructure. The programme provides researchers with access to specialised marine platforms that are generally unavailable at universities and research institutions, including the following:

- Coastal research vessels
- Marine Remote Imagery Platform (ROVs, BRUVS, deep-water landers)
- Acoustic Tracking Array Platform
- Geophysics Mapping Platform
- Sentinel sites and remote sensing infrastructure

Programme aim and objectives:

The primary aim of the funding instrument is to promote high-quality, multidisciplinary marine research by linking research funding to access to national marine research infrastructure and platforms, thereby maximising the utilisation of strategic marine assets and advancing knowledge on South Africa's marine ecosystems.

Key objectives include the following:

1. **Provide access to national marine research infrastructure** for researchers across South Africa's National System of Innovation.
2. **Support multidisciplinary marine research** aligned with the following:
 - Marine and Antarctic Research Strategy (MARS)
 - National Marine Research Plan
 - Science, Technology and Innovation Decadal Plan
 - National Biodiversity Assessment priorities.
3. **Advance research in priority themes**, including the following:
 - Marine biodiversity and ecology
 - Oceanography
 - Marine spatial planning and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)
 - Climate change impacts
 - Marine biotechnology and innovation
 - Machine learning applications in marine sciences
 - Ecosystem restoration and conservation.
4. **Develop human capacity and transformation**, including postgraduate student training and support.

Financial support:

The African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP) does not provide a direct cash-value grant or monetary funding instrument to researchers. Instead, it operates as a competitive, infrastructure-linked research platform where the 'funding' is provided in the form of fully subsidised access to world-class marine equipment, specialised logistics, and technical support.

Duration of the projects:

The funding instrument operates on a three-year funding cycle (2027-2029).

Note: Rated and unrated researchers, as well as retired academics, can apply for this call.

Postdoctoral Fellows are not eligible to apply as principal investigators in this call. They may, however, find support for their proposed research by including it in applications submitted by eligible principal investigators.

**Please consult the attached framework for further information on eligibility criteria, application procedure, and the scorecard.*

For more information and assistance with proposal writing, please contact:

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- Sibusiso Lukhele (Lukheles1@ufs.ac.za) – Grant writing specialist

Access more documentation here:

- [2027 ACEP Call Framework Document](#)
- [MEMORANDUM: Announcement of 2027 ACEP Call](#)
- [NRF Profile Registration Guide](#)