

South Africa/ Wallonia-Brussels Federation Science and Technology Research Collaboration

2026/2027 Call for Joint Research Proposals

UFS Internal Closing Date: 23 October 2026.

A maximum of four joint project will be funded for this Call for Proposals

The National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Fund for Scientific Research - FNRS (F.R.S.-FNRS) of Wallonia-Brussels Federation (WBF) signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 11 March 2014 in order to contribute to the scientific research outputs of both countries by funding researchers' mobility in the frame of joint research projects in all research fields. The call mostly supports early to mid-career researchers and aims to contribute meaningfully to their research capacity development.

Thematic areas of cooperation

Joint research proposals can be submitted in the following areas of cooperation:

- Natural and Life Sciences
- Engineering
- Humanities and the Social Sciences (including Indigenous Knowledge Systems)

Please Note:

- In terms of human capital development, joint projects that involve young scientists (i.e. doctoral students) and pay attention to gender equality (a balanced involvement of female and male researchers) will be positively considered and will receive a higher rating.
- In terms of the South African transformation agenda, South African applications from previously disadvantaged higher education and research institutions and the involvement of previously disadvantaged individuals will be prioritised.

Duration of support

The projects will be supported for a period of **two** years.

Who may apply?

Each proposal must have one main applicant based in South Africa and one main applicant based in Wallonia Brussels Federation. They are the **Principal Investigators (PIs)** and they bear the main responsibility for the project including its technical and administrative coordination as well as timely delivery of scientific and financial reports. Commercial institutions and private higher education institutions are not eligible to apply under this programme.

South Africa:

- Only working researchers/scientists residing in South Africa and affiliated with a recognised South African public higher education or research institution such as a university, university of technology or science council are eligible to apply.
- Private higher education institutions are not eligible to apply under this programme.

Wallonia Brussels Federation:

This call is open to permanent researchers affiliated to the French speaking higher education universities/ colleges, or research institutions of the Wallonia Brussels Federation. All eligibility rules and criteria can be found in the [PINT-BILAT-M](#) regulations.

Which activities may I apply for?

The purpose of this call is to support the mobility of researchers between the two countries. The funds can only be used for international travel, accommodation, subsistence and local travel relating to the researchers' joint research projects. Further to this the call supports research activities as organised by the partnering researchers such as joint workshops, seminars, conferences, symposia, lecture presentations, capacity building sessions, meetings, local/regional dissemination of results aimed at involving stakeholders, and/or end-users from outside the projects.

Funding modalities

Funding will be available for a maximum of two years for **2-year collaborative research projects** jointly developed and completed by researchers on both sides. In both countries, all the approved projects will get funding support from the two funders in terms of the cost of exchange of experts, scientists and other specialists unless specified otherwise by the two funders. Apart from the financial support from the two funders, institutions and universities in both countries are encouraged to solicit other funding resources. Successful researchers will be funded only for the activities within the scope of these guidelines.

South Africa:

The funds requested from the NRF should not exceed R500 000 per project for research activities commencing in 2027/2028 Financial Year. Funding will be made available for a maximum of two years, to be paid in annual instalments (R250 000 per year). Note that a commitment to both scientific and financial reporting on the project is an obligatory condition of funding. Please also note that the requested amounts do not necessarily imply that this amount will be awarded upon selection for funding.

Wallonia Brussels Federation:

The F.R.S.-FNRS funding total amount should not exceed € 15,000 per two-year project, meaning € 7,500 per project, per year. The F.R.S.-FNRS will finance the mobility costs of the researchers affiliated to the French speaking universities from the doctoral level.

How do I apply?

The onus is on the applicant to find their own research partner. Proposals must be received in both South Africa and Wallonia Brussels Federation. Proposals which have only been received in either South Africa or WBF, but not both, will not be considered for funding. The call process is highly competitive; therefore submission of an application does not guarantee funding. The evaluation of the proposals and the availability of funds from both countries should be positive for proposals to be considered for funding. Both the NRF and the F.R.S.-FNRS will not be held responsible for non-submission, administration or evaluation of the application in the partner country.

South Africa:

Applications are also expected to submit their proposals through the NRF Connect system at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za> . Please make use of the 'General Application Guide 2024' 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_calls .

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

- Budgets of the Belgian Principal Investigator.
- CV of Belgian PI.

Wallonia Brussels Federation:

The submission of proposals for bilateral agreements is performed via [e-space](#). Please follow [the modalities of submission](#).

How are applications evaluated?

Following the closing date indicated below, applications will be peer reviewed according to the eligibility criteria. The review panel will include recognised local experts in the various fields of research represented by the proposals received. These experts will evaluate each proposal based on the following criteria:

- Scientific and technical merit
- Feasibility
- Methodology
- International significance
- National priorities
- Participation of students and young researchers

Particular emphasis is to be placed on the training of students and young researchers achieved through research and the transfer of knowledge and know-how aimed at socio-economic community development. The integration of young researchers and students, and the exchange of post-doctoral researchers are encouraged, as is the involvement of students and researchers from historically disadvantaged communities. A final decision on projects to be funded will be made in consultation with the F.R.S.-FNRS authorities. Funding will only become available once both funding agencies have completed their respective evaluation and operational processes. Note further that both scientific and financial reporting on the project is an obligatory condition of funding. **It is highly recommended that students should travel abroad in this programme.**

Projects follow-up and reporting

- Principal Investigators are expected to submit progress reports to the NRF annually. Funds for the subsequent years will not be released by the NRF without a Progress Report (PR).
- A final scientific and financial report should be submitted by both the South African and the French speaking project Principal Investigators no more than 3 months after the end of the project.
- The report should mention the outputs of the projects compared with the objectives and aims of the proposal.
- Any joint publications by the researchers should mention the support from the NRF and the F.R.S. FNRS.

Science engagement

The NRF supports science engagement through its coordination and implementation of the Department of Science and Innovation's Science 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. Within this context, science engagement refers to activities, events, 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. Science engagement is an overarching term for all aspects of public engagement with science, science awareness, science education, science communication and science outreach, which aim to develop and benefit individuals and society. Researchers funded through the NRF programmes are required to contribute to science engagement and report the related outputs in their project's annual Progress Report.

Capacity building

Projects must demonstrate potential for promoting human capital development, equity and redress through the involvement of young, early-stage, and/or mid-career researchers, historically disadvantaged individuals (female and disabled), and the involvement of historically disadvantaged higher education institutions.

Intellectual property

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

Ethical clearance

It is the responsibility of the grantholder, 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 prior to the commencement of the research and acceptance of the grant. The awarded amount will not be released for payment if a copy of the required ethical clearance certificate, as indicated in the application, is not attached to the Conditions of Grant. Please also refer to the "Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices" on the NRF website at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/media-room/news/statement-ethicalresearch-and-scholarly-publishing-practices>.

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 Connect 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>.

Closing date for applications

The deadline for proposal submission to the NRF Connect is **23 October 2026.(UFS Internal Closing Date)** South African researchers **must** consult their institutions for internal closing dates. Applications received after this date will not be considered for reviews. Please note that neither the NRF nor the F.R.S.-FNRS will be held responsible for applications that were not received. Researchers are also advised to ensure that their research partners' applications are submitted and have also been received in the partner country.

University of the Free State Research Office: Ms. Thabi Mosoetsa (MosoetsaT@ufs.ac.za/ 051 401 7708

Contact details for queries and further information

National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa	
For programme-content related queries	For grant related queries
Teuns Phahlamohlaka Knowledge Advancement and Support Tel: +27 12 481 4385 Email: t.phahlamohlaka@risa.nrf.ac.za	For technical related queries Tel: +27 12 481 4155 o Supportdesk@nrf.ac.za
The Fund for Scientific Research (F.R.S.-FNRS), Wallonia-Brussels Federation	
For programme-content related queries	For technical and grant related queries
Joël Groeneveld European and International Affairs Tel: + 32 (0)2 504 92 70 Email: joel.groeneveld@frs-fnrs.be	Déborah Matteredne European and International Affairs Tel: + 32 (0)2 504 93 05 Email: international@frs-fnrs.be

Annex I: NRF Review Criteria Description

1	Scientific quality & technical merit of the proposal (20%)	Scientific originality/innovation/conceptualisation & relevance - positioning of the research vis-à-vis current research/technology development in the field Is the proposal strong, well conceptualized and strongly motivated. Are the research question and problem statement well advocated. Is the idea novel/show potential to contribute to the generation of both new methodology and new knowledge in the field? Is the research rationale - (reasons offered by a researcher for conducting more research into a particular subject) clearly articulated? The clarity of the Aim, Objectives and the tasks Does the aim indicate the overarching goal of the project, and does it align with the problem statement and the knowledge gap? Are the objectives clearly stated, providing an accurate description of intended activities for accomplishing research aims? Do the objectives concisely indicate key issues of the research focus and are they well aligned with the problem statement and research aim. Applicability and replicability of the Research Methodology - Comment on the research design and framework, - Are the methods realistic and innovative for achieving beneficial results? - Does the research methodology describe the reason behind the use of specific/unique procedures/techniques in the field - Does the application describe data collection and analysis methods, the use and dissemination of results - Are validity and reliability methods defined?
2	Science Engagement (10%)???	- Public engagement with science, communication, literacy, accumulation of knowledge, enjoyment, opinion formulation, outreach and awareness of science by targeted groups of society in a programme aimed at generating mutual understanding and responses to science. - Has the project plan included communication and engagement activities with relevant stakeholders/users throughout the project period? - Are engagement types (e.g., publications, debate, social media etc), the objective & desired outcome of the engagement with target audiences indicated? - Are proposed tools for knowledge sharing & research uptake relevant and sufficient for comprehensive stakeholder engagement. -
3	Project Management and Implementation: (Methodology, Suitability & Feasibility). (30%)	- Suitability and feasibility of the outlined research plan, distribution of tasks and activities, coordination, management, synthesis & timelines - Is there a thoroughly formulated project workplan, have tasks & activities and where each activity will be done been explained?
4	Plans for future cooperation & International significance (20%)	- Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organised, and based on a sound rationale? - Are details of how many individuals/samples/sites etc will be involved in each activity described, - Does the project have a realistic, clearly defined and relevant time frame,

5	Human Capacity Development (10%)	- Transformation, equity and redress refers to capacity building opportunities for emerging researchers and how the proposed research complies with transformational objectives relevant to the NRF. - Is there indication of participation of students and young researchers ? - Does the project include appropriate transformational, ethical, gender considerations and other diversity perspectives where relevant. Does the proposal make provision for the Historically Disadvantaged Groups (HDGs) in terms of students and young researchers to attend and present at science meetings explained?
6	Intellectual Merit & National priorities (Knowledge Advancement) (10%)	- What is the potential for the proposed activity to advance knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields? - Is the significance and/or contribution of the research articulated and are target outputs and outcomes defined and are they aligned to the call focus and national priorities? - Will the outputs and outcomes contribute to the knowledge industry addressing a crucial knowledge gap? - Will the project advance knowledge on how to innovatively mitigate the negative societal effects and support recovery and renewal in the post pandemic world? - Will the knowledge generated serve as unique resource that will put SA on the map internationally in the discipline. - Will technological innovation and the transformation agenda through human capacity development be advanced?