



science & innovation

Department:
Science and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National
Research
Foundation



MINISTRY
OF HIGHER EDUCATION
AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
General Directorate for Scientific Research

South Africa – Tunisia Joint Research Programme

2027 – 2030

*South African applicants **must** consult their institutions for internal closing dates*

UFS Internal deadline: 03 September 2026

A maximum of 5 joint projects will be funded for this call

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1. Background

Under the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Tunisia and the Government of the Republic of South Africa on Scientific and Technological Cooperation, signed on September 16, 2010, the **General Directorate of Scientific Research (GDSR)** at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Tunisia, and the **National Research Foundation (NRF)**, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of South Africa, invite Tunisian and South African universities, research centres, and institutes to submit joint proposals for scientific and technological research.

2. Aims of the programme

This Programme aims to:

- contribute to scientific advancement in both countries through the funding of joint research activities in specified research fields;
- provide an opportunity for emerging and early career researchers in the two countries to meet and interact;
- support the advancement of applied research; and
- contribute meaningfully to research capacity development.

3. Areas of Cooperation

This call will only support Joint research projects in the following thematic areas:

- Nanotechnology,
- Artificial intelligence,
- Water, Food and Energy NEXUS,
- Health,
- Space and astronomy.

4. Duration of the projects

Projects will be supported for a maximum period of three years (2027 to 2030).

Table 1: Planned Call Schedule

Call Process	
30 June 2026	Launch of the call.
UFS internal closing date: 03 September 2026	Research proposal submission deadline by applicants. (SA applicants, please check your Institution's Internal deadline with your DAs).
	Call deadline for Designated Authorities at South African institutions.
October and November 2026	Screening and reviews of eligible applications.

December 2026	Decision-making, awards and signing of contracts with successful candidates.
April 2027	Start of funded collaborative research projects.
End April 2030	End of funded collaborative research projects.

Please note that the NRF reserves the right to change and amend the abovementioned dates without prior notification to applicants.

5. Eligibility criteria

An application must designate two Principal Investigators (PIs), one in South Africa and one in Tunisia, who will bear the main responsibility for the project, including its technical and administrative coordination as well as scientific and financial reporting to the respective authorities (MHESR in Tunisia and NRF in South Africa).

South Africa:

- This call is open to South African researchers (citizen and permanent resident) and affiliated with a recognised higher education or research institution such as a university, university of technology, or science council. The South African applicant must have a PhD.
- Joint projects involving emerging researchers (through reciprocal research visits and mini sabbaticals), postdoctoral fellows, and paying attention to government equity targets by ensuring a balanced involvement of female and black researchers will be positively considered and receive a higher rating.
- Each PI is allowed to submit only one proposal, under penalty of exclusion.
- Former PIs are welcome to participate in the call however, the project should not be a continuation of the current/past project.
- HDI Clause

Tunisia:

- The PI must hold the rank of **Full Professor** or **Associate Professor (Maître de Conférences)**.
- The PI must be affiliated with a **public research laboratory** that is part of the **partner institution** involved in the project.
- The **Principal Investigator (PI)** is allowed to submit only one Proposal. After the selection of projects, the **PI may not participate in the consortia of other selected projects**
- The critical mass of the research team involved must be composed of a minimum of five (5) statutory researchers (corps A and B), including at least two members with the rank of professor, associate professor, or equivalent rank.
- At least one young researcher (postdoctoral researcher or PhD student) must be involved in the research team.

NB. The involvement of SMEs is strongly recommended. A multi-institutional/ consortia approach will be preferred. Participation of an industry partner on both sides will be encouraged. However industry is expected to meet their participation costs in the project.

6. Eligible research activities

The purpose of this call is to support the mobility of researchers, scientists, postdocs, and doctoral students within joint research projects. Funding will be made available for the following activities:

- **Exchange Visits for Project Team Members:**

- For researcher exchanges, the sending party will cover round-trip economy-class airfare to the relevant entry city of the host country and medical insurance.
- The receiving party will provide accommodation and cover living expenses.
- **Support for Consumables:** Up to 30–40% of the total budget may be allocated for consumables and accessories.
- **Human Resources:** The participation of young researchers (postdoctoral researchers and PhD students) is requested.
- **Scientific Events and Meetings:** Support is available for organizing and participating in scientific conferences, seminars, and meetings.
- **Research-Related Expenses:**
 - Coverage includes publication and filing fees for scientific publications and patent applications.
 - Expenses for conducting analyses and processing samples are also supported.

In the case of meetings, research visits and exchange of scientists, personnel and experts, as well as reciprocal visits undertaken as part of joint research projects and the attendance of seminars, symposia and other meetings funded under this agreement, the sending side will be responsible for financing international travel, visas, and medical insurance, while the receiving party will be responsible for financing the accommodation and subsistence of their international partners. Local travel and fees relating to the organisation of events (venue, catering, audio-visual equipment etc.) will be the financial responsibility of the host investigator, which is to be paid from his / her allocation of the joint funding.

The following are **NOT** to be funded from the NRF funds allocation:

- Consultant's fees
- Large equipment
- Project management fees
- Overheads
- Salaries and temporary staff fees
- Educational expenses (scholarships/ bursaries/ student fees/ educational expenses, etc.). Postgraduate students in need of financial support are advised to apply for a scholarship through the NRF call for student support, which opens at the beginning of April each year.

7. Funding regulations

Funding will be available for a **maximum of three years** for activities within collaborative research projects jointly developed and completed by researchers on both sides. In both countries, all the approved projects will obtain funding support from the two parties in terms of the cost of activities mentioned above. Apart from the financial support from the two parties, institutions and universities in both countries are encouraged to solicit other funding resources.

South Africa:

The total amount requested from the NRF, should not exceed R450 000 per project. Funding will be made available for a maximum of three years, to be paid in annual installments (R150 000 per year) and exclusively for research activities commencing in 2026.

Tunisia:

Each project will be funded up to TND 60 000 per year for a maximum period of three years (maximum total budget will be TND 180 000).

Tunisian and South African researchers should, therefore, note that two separate budgets would be required for each project.

Please Note:

Should you be successful, you will be funded only for the activities within the scope of this framework. Scientific and financial reporting on the project is an obligatory condition of funding in subsequent years. Requested amounts do not necessarily imply that this amount will be awarded upon selection for funding. Researchers from the sending country will be responsible for their own international travel and the hosting costs (accommodation and ground travel) will be a responsibility of the hosting party.

8. Application procedure

The onus is on the applicant to find their research partner. The proposal must be written in English and jointly prepared and submitted by the Tunisian and South African applicants to the NRF and the MHESR. Proposals that have only been received in either South Africa or Tunisia, but not both countries, will not be considered for funding. The call process is highly competitive therefore application does not guarantee funding. The evaluation of applications from both countries should have positive ratings before consideration for funding. Neither the NRF nor the Tunisia Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research will be held responsible for the non-submission of the application in the partner country.

South Africa:

- Applications must be submitted through an online application process to the NRF through the link: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>.
- 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 is available on this web page: <https://www.nrf.ac.za/funding/>.
- Pls **must** attach the required **compulsory documents** in PDF format in the following order:
 - CV of partner Principal Investigator.
 - Budget of partner Principal Investigator.

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

Tunisia:

Application forms and guidelines for Tunisian applicants could be found through the following link:

Applicants can apply for the SA/Tunisia Science and Technology Collaboration 2026 by obtaining application forms directly from MHESR.

- The proposal must be written in English and jointly prepared by Tunisian and South African applicants.
- The application must include the following documents:
 - Duly completed application forms.
 - Curriculum vitae (CV) of each research team member.

- A letter of intent exchanged between the project's Principal Investigators (PIs).
- A signed submission request, approved and reviewed by:
 - The Director of the research laboratory,
 - The Head of the institution, and
 - The supervisory authority (e.g., University President, Director General, etc.).
- Details of the participating industrial or socio-economic sector partners, including their field of business and the expected project outcomes, particularly in terms of productivity and competitiveness.

Tunisian applicants: Applicants can apply by following the steps below:

- Applicants can apply by accessing the link: Application
- The Tunisian PI should submit the proposal electronically to partenariat.scientifique@gmail.com in a **single PDF file**.
- Incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be considered.
- Sending hard copies of proposals is not needed.

South African applicants: Applicants can apply by following the steps below:

- Applications must be submitted through an online application process to the National Research Foundation (NRF).
- Applicants can apply for the SA/Tunisia Science and Technology Collaboration 2026 by accessing the link: <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za/>.
- Register/Login using your ID/passport number and password.
- Go to “My Applications” – “Create Application”
- Select the call for which you are applying for: SA/Tunisia Science and Technology Collaboration 2026.
- Remember to complete all sections of the application.

Please attach the necessary documents in PDF file in the following order:

The application must consist of:

- a signed statement from the South African AND the partner principal researcher/project manager and their respective responsible research offices confirming that the proposal is submitted jointly with the approval of the institution;
- the curriculum vitae of the collaborator (CV's should be limited to a maximum of 4 pages and focus on the most important research projects and publications (maximum 4 pages);
- a list of team members on the partner country side;
- budget of the partner in their currency; and
- Endorsement letter from the applicant's HOD or Line manager.
- **Should you not follow the guidelines for attaching the necessary documents, your application will be disqualified upon screening.**
- Remember to **submit** your application on completion.
- Complete applications will go to the host institution for verification before being forwarded to the NRF for further processing.
- Incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be considered (Please refer to the above eligibility criteria).
- Please contact the institutional research office or equivalent, if you have any queries.

Please note that applications submitted outside the NRF Online Submission System will not be accepted.

NOTE:

- No Tunisian application will be accepted in South Africa, and no South African application will be accepted in Tunisia.
- Researchers must ensure that applications have been submitted in both Tunisia and South Africa.
- Applicants who do not adhere to this criterion will be disqualified.
- The MHESR and NRF will not be held responsible for non-submission of applications in the relevant country. This Joint Call is highly competitive, and therefore an application does not guarantee funding.
- The availability of funds and evaluation from both countries should be positive for the applications to be considered for funding.

9. Review process

Following the closing date indicated below, 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 criteria:

- Strategic alignment and Project Relevance
- Scientific Quality and Methodological Robustness
- Expertise and Complementarity of Research Teams
- Impact, Dissemination, and Exploitation of Results

Particular emphasis is to be placed on the training of postgraduate students through research, transfer of knowledge and know-how. The integration and the exchange of postgraduate students is requested.

Following the closing date indicated, applications will be screened for eligibility before being subjected to a scientific peer review. Should the application be rejected during the screening phase, researchers have a maximum of three working days, from the date of email receipt, to query the outcomes of the screening phase.

Following local evaluation, a shortlist of projects to be funded will be constituted through consultations between the NRF and Tunisian MHESR based on the results of the evaluations done in both countries.

Although the two Parties undertake to execute the evaluation and selection process as quickly as possible so as to notify applicants of the results, the nature of the bilateral process requires the alignment of the commencement of each phase of the process with the partnering country, whose schedules may differ significantly. All research proposals submitted to the NRF for funding are evaluated according to the pre-determined criteria rated from 1- 5. Each area is given a weighting to indicate its relative importance as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1: Scorecard for the Assessment of Proposals for South Africa -Tunisia Joint Research Mobility Call

Assessment criteria	Descriptions	Weighting (Total = 100%)
Scientific quality and Methodological Robustness	- Clarity and precision of objectives: The project goals must be well-defined, measurable, and achievable within the proposed timeframe and budget. - Adequacy of the methodology: The proposal must present a robust methodological approach, well-suited to the research objectives and aligned with international standards. - Interdisciplinarity and integrated approach: The project's ability to mobilize multiple disciplines to address complex challenges will be valued. - Risk management: Potential risks must be clearly identified, along with mitigation strategies.	30%
Alignment with national priorities in each country	- Consistency with priority research areas: The project must align with the themes defined in the call for proposals, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, water, food and energy Nexus, health, space and astronomy). - Innovation and originality: The project should introduce a novel approach, either through new methodologies or by applying existing knowledge to an unprecedented context. - Added value of bilateral collaboration: The complementarity of the institutions and researchers involved must be demonstrated, with a clear distribution of responsibilities and scientific contributions from each partner. - Scientific and technological impact: The project should demonstrate its potential to advance the state of the art in its field and produce exploitable results.	20%
Expertise and Complementarity of Research Teams	- Experience and scientific excellence of researchers: The scientific leadership of the coordinators and the experience of the teams in the relevant field must be demonstrated. - Complementarity of skills: The interaction between partner teams should create strong synergy, leading to a deeper understanding of the research topic. - Supervision of young researchers and training: The involvement of young researchers, postdoctoral fellows, and PhD students will be valued, with an emphasis on skill transfer and capacity building. - Collaboration dynamics and integration of diversity and gender equality perspectives: The project's commitment to promoting inclusive and balanced partnerships will be assessed.	30%

Impact, Dissemination, and Exploitation of Results	- Contribution to societal and economic challenges: The project should demonstrate how its results will benefit society, industries, or public policies. - Dissemination and communication plan: Strategies for sharing results with the scientific community, policymakers, and the general public must be clearly defined (publications, conferences, digital platforms, etc.). - Transferability and applicability of results: Identifying exploitation perspectives, particularly through industrial collaborations or technological innovations, will be an asset. - Follow-up and sustainability perspectives: The project should outline a clear vision for continuing research and maintaining collaborations beyond the funding period.	20%
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(Note that proposals demonstrating strong elements of capacity building, particularly among historically disadvantaged institutions, will be favourably regarded by the South African side). Following these assessments, projects will be shortlisted for funding through mutual consultations between Tunisian MHESR and NRF based on the results of the evaluations accomplished by both countries.

Note that funding will become available only after both funding agencies have completed their respective national procedures.

10. Projects follow-up and reporting

Principal Investigators are expected to submit progress reports to the NRF annually. Scientific and financial reporting on the project is an obligatory condition of funding in subsequent years.

- A final scientific and financial report will be submitted in English by the South African PI and the other project leaders no more than three 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.
- The joint publications by the researchers will mention the support from the NRF and Tunisian MHESR.

11. 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. 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, and 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.

12. Intellectual property

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

13. Impact

Applicants are encouraged to ensure that their research have relevance and potential for impact beyond the academic world, such as in societal, technical, economical, or cultural realms. In line with this, applicants may include societal or industry partners within their projects or consider how relevant stakeholders can be involved in, or benefit from, the design and realisation of the proposed research project. These stakeholders, however, must cover their own costs of participation in the joint projects. In this regard, the NRF aims to facilitate sustainable institutional links between partnering countries by building on existing, outstanding and established research partnerships, and fostering new linkages and engagements with small cohorts of young and emerging researchers for new linkages.

14. Ethical considerations

In conjunction with the institution, it is the responsibility of the grant-holder 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 <https://www.nrf.ac.za/statement-on-ethical-research-and-scholarly-publishing-practices/>.

15. 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 (<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>.

16. Submission deadline

17. The deadline for submission to NRF and MHESR by applicants is **03 September 2026**. South African researchers are reminded to check their Internal Closing date with their institutions Research Office. (UFS deadline is - 03 September 2026 midnight)

Applications received after the closing dates will not be considered for funding. Researchers are also advised to ensure that their research partners' applications are submitted and received in the partner country.

17. Contact the UFS Research office: Thabi Mosoetsa (Mosoetsat@ufs.ac.za/ xx7708)

South Africa, National Research Foundation (NRF)

For programme-content related queries

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