



South Africa
Sweden
University Forum



National
Research
Foundation

SASUF-NRF Seed Grants for intra-Africa collaborative research projects

Call for joint proposals: 2026 – 2028

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1. Preamble

The South Africa–Sweden University Forum (SASUF) is a long-term partnership between 37 universities in Sweden and South Africa, bringing together researchers, teachers, students, university leaders and external stakeholders to strengthen collaboration in research, education and innovation. Since its launch in 2017, SASUF has established a platform for equitable international collaboration, supporting joint initiatives aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union Agenda 2063, and the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA) 2034.

Now in its third project phase (SASUF+, 2025–2028), funded by STINT (*Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education*) and NRF (*South African National Research Foundation*), SASUF is expanding beyond its bilateral Sweden–South Africa partnership through the SASUF+ Beyond Borders initiative. As part of this expansion, universities from countries participating in the *Science Granting Councils Initiative* (SGCI) are invited to engage in new multilateral collaborations, building on the existing SGCI network to strengthen research partnerships across Africa alongside collaboration with Sweden and South Africa.

Since its inception, SASUF has connected more than 4,000 researchers, teachers, students and university leaders and supported more than 100 collaborative research projects. Building on this experience, the SASUF+ Beyond Borders Seed Funding Call is designed to support the development of new research collaborations between Swedish, South African and SGCI partner universities, creating a foundation for long-term cooperation and future joint research initiatives.

2. Aim and objectives of the SASUF+ Beyond Borders Seed Funding Call

The SASUF+ Beyond Borders Seed Funding Call supports the establishment of new multilateral research collaborations between universities in Sweden, South Africa and countries participating in the *Science Granting Councils Initiative* (SGCI). The grants are intended to help researchers establish new partnerships, develop joint research ideas and lay the groundwork for long-term collaboration.

The call supports interdisciplinary research within the four broad SASUF+ thematic areas:

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

The objectives of the call are to:

- establish new research collaborations between Swedish, South African and SGCI partner universities;
- strengthen long-term institutional partnerships and international research networks;
- support the development of competitive joint research proposals and future collaborative funding opportunities;

- encourage the participation and leadership of early- and mid-career researchers alongside established researchers;
- create opportunities for postgraduate researchers, particularly doctoral candidates, to participate in international research collaboration, mentorship and knowledge exchange, thereby fostering the next generation of researchers; and
- promote interdisciplinary research that addresses shared societal challenges of relevance to Africa and Sweden.

3. Duration of the projects

All projects will be supported for a maximum duration of 16 months starting from March 2027. See Table 1 below for a full schedule of this call.

Table 1: Planned Call Schedule

Call Process	
Thursday, 13 August 2026	Launch of the call
Monday, 26 October 2026	UFS internal deadline for all applicants
December 2026 - January 2027	Screening and reviews of eligible applications
February 2027	Award decisions and contracting
1 March 2027	Start of funded projects/activities
1 July 2028	End of funded projects/activities
31 July 2028	Submission of final 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.

¹ Clarifications regarding “Call deadline for DAs (relevant only for South African applicants)” - DA stands for Designated Authority (typically the university’s Research Office). South African applicants must submit their application in NRF Connect by the applicant deadline (3 November). During the additional week, the Designated Authority reviews the application, verifies institutional compliance, and submits the final application to the NRF through the NRF Connect system. Applicants cannot make further changes once the application has been submitted to the DA. **This is a standard national process in South Africa that applies to all NRF funding calls.**

4. Eligibility criteria

All Swedish and South African main applicants must be based at one of the partner universities of SASUF. See the following link for a full list of the 37 SASUF member universities:

<https://www.sasuf.org/partneruniversities>

A proposal is eligible only if it includes participants from at least

- **one (1) South African SASUF partner university,**
- **one (1) Swedish SASUF partner university, and**
- **one (1) additional African university from one of the additional 19 countries² participating in the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI).**

Therefore, a proposal must be submitted by a minimum of three (3) consortia members. Each proposal must nominate one main applicant based at a South African university, and one main applicant based at a Swedish university; they are the **Principal Investigators (PIs)** 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, and to oversee that all project partners are actively involved in the writing and execution of the project. The Swedish PI will be the recipient of the Swedish part of the grant (100 000 SEK), and the South African PI will be the recipient of the South African part of the grant (160 000 ZAR). Once the grant has been released to the PIs, the grant is free to be transferred to the other project partners institutions if agreed on within the consortia.

In addition to the minimum consortium of three partners, further research partners from South Africa, Sweden, or any of the additional 19 SGCI participating countries will be favourable in the review process of the application, provided that their role and contribution to the project are clearly justified. The involvement of Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) and Universities of Technology (UoTs) in South Africa is highly encouraged. Please note that only the following universities are recognised as HDIs and UoTs by the Department of Higher Education and Training: Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), Central University of Technology (CUT), Durban University of Technology (DUT), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), University of Fort Hare (UFH), University of Limpopo (UL), University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of Venda (UNIVEN), University of Zululand (UNIZULU), Vaal University of Technology (VUT), and Walter Sisulu University (WSU).

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

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.**

² The additional 19 SGCI countries are: Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

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.

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 are responsible for ensuring that all budgeted costs comply with the financial rules and regulations applicable in their respective countries. The requested budget may not exceed **SEK 100,000** (SASUF contribution) and **ZAR 160,000** (NRF contribution) per project.

Eligible African partners include both public and private universities in the SGCI participating countries. Funds may be transferred to eligible African partner universities, or to formally constituted consortia specified in the application, in accordance with the relevant institutional financial procedures.

As a public funder, the NRF requires that all grant funding is used exclusively for non-profit purposes and in accordance with applicable regulations. Where private universities participate, the consortium must clearly demonstrate how grant funds will be managed to ensure that no portion of the funding contributes to commercial profit. Private institutions are therefore welcome to participate but must provide additional information on their financial governance and the proposed use of funds.

The grant period is **16 months**, ending on **1 July 2028**. All awarded funds must be spent by this date. A final financial and scientific report must be submitted no later than **31 July 2028**.

A maximum of **20 consortium projects** will be funded through this call.

The NRF contribution will be disbursed to the South African Principal Investigator (PI) upon signature of the Conditions of Grant (CoG). The SASUF contribution will be allocated to the Swedish PI. Thereafter, the consortium is responsible for distributing funds to other consortium partners, where applicable, in accordance with the approved budget and the participating institutions' financial procedures.

In addition to the funding provided through this call, participating institutions are encouraged to secure complementary funding from other sources. Any co-funding or leveraged funding should be clearly indicated in the application.

SASUF is in ongoing dialogue with funding agencies and relevant ministries across the SGCI participating countries to explore opportunities for additional travel support for consortium participants. As such support is subject to national priorities, funding decisions and institutional processes, it cannot be guaranteed. Any opportunities that become available will be communicated directly to the relevant funded participants.

7. Application procedure

General information

Each consortium must submit two coordinated applications: one by the South African Principal Investigator (PI) and one by the Swedish Principal Investigator (PI). Although the applications relate to the same project, they must be submitted through separate systems to enable the respective funding organisations to administer and transfer funding to the Principal Investigators in each country.

- The South African PI submits the application through the NRF Connect system.
- The Swedish PI submits the application to SASUF by email.

Both applications must describe the same consortium, project, work plan and budget, while including separate national budgets where applicable.

South African Principal Investigator

The South African PI must submit the application through the NRF Connect system:

<https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>

The application template available on the SASUF website supports the preparation of the joint proposal but does not replace the NRF Connect application. As several sections must be completed directly in NRF Connect, South African applicants are strongly encouraged to begin the application process well in advance of the submission deadline to allow sufficient time for completing all required information and obtaining the necessary institutional approvals.

Rejected applications during the NRF screening phase may be queried within three (3) working days from the date of the notification email. Applicants are encouraged to consult the General Application Guide 2026

for guidance on applying for international research grants. The guide will be available on the NRF website:
<https://www.nrf.ac.za/funding/nrf-call-for-proposals-for-funding-in-2025-and-2026/>

Swedish Principal Investigator

The Swedish PI must submit the completed consortium application form, together with all required supporting documents listed below, in one single email to sasuf@uu.se.

The application form must be fully completed and correspond to the application submitted by the South African PI through the NRF Connect system. All required attachments must be included at the time of submission. Incomplete applications, or applications submitted without the required supporting documents, will not be considered.

Required attachments for both Swedish and South African applications

The following documents must accompany the application:

- CVs (maximum 2 pages each) for all consortium partners.
- Institutional support letter for the South African PI (signed by the Dean, Head of Department or Director).
- Institutional support letter for the Swedish PI (signed by the Dean, Head of Department or Director).
- Letter of support/commitment from the SGCI partner institution, confirming the institution's commitment to the project and indicating whether any additional institutional support will be provided.
- Detailed project plan, including a clear description of how the additional African partner will contribute as a co-creator throughout the project.
- Detailed budget for the consortia (how the NRF funds and the SASUF funds will be used)
- If applicable: Letter(s) of participation from industry, NGO, NPO, or civil society partners, clearly outlining their roles and responsibilities.

Failure to submit all required documents will result in the application being declared ineligible.

8. Review process

Following the closing date, applications will be submitted to 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 February 2027.

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 (through the NRF Connect system) and the Swedish (through the reporting template provided by SASUF) project Principal Investigators by 31 July 2028.
- 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 submission is **Monday 26 October 2026**. *(only applicable to South African PIs submitting their part of the application).*

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.

15. Contact details

UFS Research Office: Thabi Mosoetsa - Mosoetsat@ufs.ac.za/ 7708

SASUF

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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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