

Research Funding Opportunity with Switzerland

2023 – 2025

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1. Background

The NRF is committed to promote international collaboration in advancing research excellence, reflected through agreements with a number of strategic partners. Informed by the long-standing knowledge engagement between South Africa and Switzerland, the NRF has formalised a Lead Agency Procedure (LAP) agreement with the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The principle of the LAP agreement is to allow research funding organisations from two (or more) countries to engage in a cooperation in which one of the organisations involved (i.e. the Lead Agency), takes a leading role. The Lead Agency organisation would therefore lead the review and evaluation process and forwards the decision to its partner organisation for endorsement and definition of the grant amount. The partner organisation makes its formal funding decision on the basis of the review documentation and the recommendations of the Lead Agency. The respective project parts are then financed by the individual organisations nationally, so that no funds need to be transferred across borders.

In the framework of this LAP agreement the SNSF served as the Lead Agency for the 2021 application round whereby a total of four collaborative projects were approved for funding. The NRF is the Lead Agency for the 2022 application round and will implement the entire evaluation and selection procedure. It is important to note that the LAP agreement is not a new programme with additional funds. It forms part of the existing funds already committed for the respective funding instrument.

2. Objectives of the SA-Switzerland Partnership

The objectives of the South Africa-Switzerland partnership are to:

- build on existing, outstanding, and established research partnerships;
- contribute to scientific advancement in both countries by funding collaborative research projects in specified research fields;
- provide an opportunity for emerging researchers to cooperate in an international setting and to develop their scientific careers;
- support the advancement of basic and applied research; and
- contribute meaningfully to research capacity development.

3. Description of the supported areas of cooperation

The United Nations (UN) has issued a global call for a “Decade of Action” to deliver the SDGs by 2030 and emphasised the need to be innovative in thinking of new ways to accelerate the Agenda 2030. This bilateral programme places particular importance on working with the SDGs (see Figure 1 below for a list of the SDGs 2030 Agenda). The expectation for this bilateral cooperation is to generate innovative approaches, solutions and society-wide results that would otherwise not have been possible. As a result, the cooperation is viewed as a local and global model for addressing the SDGs.



Figure 1: United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda

Submitted research proposals should therefore clearly indicate how they aim to address the 17 SDGs mentioned above. Successful proposals are those likely to empower emerging researchers in both countries to become globally engaged citizens with knowledge, skills, and innovation potential to tackle major societal challenges in the SDGs. Proposals that do not illustrate the link with one or more of the above-mentioned SDGs will not be considered for evaluation.

4. Duration of the projects

Projects will be supported for a maximum duration of 36 months starting in 2023. See Table 1 below for a full schedule of this programme.

Table 1: Planned Call Schedule

Call Process	
Friday, 1 July 2022	Launch of the funding opportunity.
Friday, 23 September 2022	Research proposal submission deadline.
Friday, 30 September 2022	Call deadline for Designated Authorities at South African institutions.
September to November 2022	Screening and reviews of eligible applications.
December 2022 – January 2023	Decision-making, awards and signing of contracts with successful candidates.
February – March 2023	Start of funded collaborative research projects.
December 2025	End of funded collaborative research projects.
End February 2026	Submission of final report by Principal Investigators (lead researchers).

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

5. Eligibility criteria

This funding opportunity is open to working researchers residing in South Africa 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 be in possession of a PhD.

An application must designate two Principal Investigators (PIs), one in South Africa and one in Switzerland, who will bear the main responsibility for the project activities, including its technical and administrative coordination as well as scientific and financial reporting. Therefore, proposals submitted to the NRF without a research partner based in Switzerland will be marked ineligible and will not be submitted for review.

Researchers from commercial institutions and private education institutions (e.g. SMEs, private companies/industries, or NGOs) cannot serve as Principal Investigators (meaning lead researchers), but can form part of the collaborative projects and will be expected to meet their own costs of participation in the projects. Awarded grants cannot be used to support these researchers.

Additional research partners (including postdoctoral researchers) based in South Africa and/or in Switzerland can also participate in the collaborative projects and form part of the research team provided there is a strong motivation for value add.

Each PI is allowed to submit only one proposal meaning that a researcher cannot serve as a PI on more than one proposal.

Former SA-Switzerland beneficiaries are welcome to apply however, a clear motivation should be provided should the submitted proposal be a continuation of a past collaborative project.

Proposals submitted by a PI based at a Historically Advantaged Institution without a research partner from a Historically Disadvantaged Institution (HDI) will be ineligible and will not be submitted for review. The research partner from an HDI in this case can serve as a co-applicant in the proposal. Please note that co-applicants are also required to be in possession of a PhD.

Only the following eight universities will be recognised as HDIs in line with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) November 2021 Ministerial Statement on university funding: University of Limpopo (UL), University of Fort Hare (UFH), University of Venda (Univen), Walter Sisulu University (WSU), University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of Zululand (UniZulu), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), and Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU).

The eligibility of the Swiss research partners must be checked directly with the SNSF on the contact details provided in **section 16** below.

6. Eligible research activities

Projects must demonstrate potential for promoting human capacity development, equity, and redress through the involvement of emerging researchers, historically disadvantaged individuals (female and disabled), and the participation of historically disadvantaged higher education institutions. In this regard, the NRF aims to facilitate sustainable institutional links between partnering countries by building on existing, outstanding and established research partnerships; fostering new linkages and engagements with small cohorts of emerging researchers for new linkages; and supporting actual research, human capacity development, mobility and research exchanges between researchers within a collaborative research project. Funding is made available for the following research activities undertaken as part of the collaborative research project.

- **Research-related costs**: Activities to be supported may include expenses relating to actual research costs such as research field work; conducting interviews, surveys, laboratory experiments; research-related trips of the research teams between the partnering countries, etc. Airfare, accommodation, ground transport, subsistence, visa, and health insurance costs should be calculated using rates as stipulated in institutional travel policies.
- **Postdoctoral fellows**: Researchers can utilise the grant to support up to one postdoctoral position within their collaborative projects. The support should be equivalent to the NRF Freestanding Postdoctoral Fellowships. The responsibilities of this position may go beyond research and include activities such as the management and administration of the collaborative project.
- **Short-term research placement**: The placements should enable emerging researchers within collaborative projects to (1) learn valuable new skills or techniques; (2) access facilities or resources not readily available at home; (3) build relationships with potential new collaborators; and (4) advance complementary collaborative research. The duration of each placement is expected to be not more than three months, with the flexibility to split the placement into several shorter visits. Longer placements may be undertaken where this would add value, and these should be justified within the application. Placements must enhance, not replace, the standard training and support that emerging researchers receive. These placements must be managed to fit within the original funded period of the postgraduate studentship. Additional funding will not be made available to support studentship extensions for those undertaking international placements. Applicants should include information about how these exchanges will be managed within their proposal.
- **Knowledge sharing and capacity building**: Funds can be used in support of activities organised by the partners, such as joint workshops, seminars, conferences, symposia and lecture presentations; capacity building sessions such as participation in winter/summer schools and master classes; setting up of joint experiments; accessing each other's research infrastructure; local/regional dissemination of results aimed at involving stakeholders, and/or end-users from outside the funded project; project meetings; etc.



- **Small equipment, consumables and accessories:** Up to a maximum of 20% of the budget may be budgeted for this item.

The following will **NOT** be funded:

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

7. Funding regulations

Funding will be available for a maximum period of three years. In both countries, apart from the financial support from both the NRF and the SNSF, institutions and universities are encouraged to solicit other funding resources as needs be.

Please note:

- Should you be successful you will only be funded for activities within the scope of these guidelines.
- Scientific and financial reporting is an obligatory condition of funding in subsequent years.

The NRF funding total amount should not exceed **R1,1 million**. These funds should be used exclusively for research activities commencing the beginning of 2023. Funds can be utilised as follows:

- **R500 000 for postdoctoral support.** Postdoctoral fellows should be appointed for a maximum period of two years. Support should not exceed R200 000 (non-taxable stipend) R50 000 (contribution towards research costs), and R15 000 (compulsory institutional contribution) per annum making it a total of R500 000 for the 2-year period.
- **R600 000 for all other activities of the collaborative project.** These research funds will be released per annum for a three year period in line with the researchers' budget requests. Disbursement of funds in subsequent years is dependent on submission of satisfactory progress reports.

Funding regulations for the Swiss research partners must be checked directly with the SNSF on the contact details provided in **section 16** below.

8. Application procedure

The South African PIs must submit their collaborative research proposals through an online application process to the NRF on the NRF Connect system at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>. Rejected applications during the screening phase will be given a maximum of three working days from date of email receipt to query the outcomes thereof. Please make use of the 'General Application Guide 2023' 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.

PIs **must** attach the required **compulsory documents** in PDF format in the following order:

- CVs of all consortia partners including the Swiss Principal Investigator.
- Budgets of the Swiss Principal Investigator.
- Budget division of the South African team, in particular budget sharing between the historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged institutions.

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

9. Review process

Following the closing date, applications will be submitted to recognised experts in the various fields of research represented by the proposals received. These experts will evaluate each proposal based on the following broad criteria:

I. Excellence of the project

- Strong potential to generate new knowledge, insights and/or innovations and sufficient complementarity to other research programmes.
- Adequacy of the research approach including the robustness of the conceptual framework and experimental set-up and the coherence of the hypotheses, research questions and methods.
- Clear alignment of the proposed research project with the identified SDGs.
- Disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary value add as aligned to the identified SDGs.

II. Expected Impact of the project:

- Clear rooting of the proposal in the demands of partners and/or stakeholders, including appropriate integration of gender and youth.
- Quality and feasibility of the research impact pathway with indicators.

- Adequate potential for uptake/application of results including quality of the knowledge sharing approach with appropriate stakeholder engagement, human capacity development and communication strategy.

III. Quality and efficiency of the implementation:

- Complementarity, range and level of integration of the research team appropriate for implementing the proposed research project.
- Adequacy and feasibility of the research methodology/approach and activities, in relation to research questions and objectives as well as the related work plan.
- Adequacy, feasibility and coherence of the various activities to enhance impact, in particular by influencing national and/or regional policies.

Following this review process, the list of projects to be funded will be sent to the SNSF for approval.

10. Projects follow-up and reporting

Principal Investigators are expected to submit progress reports to the NRF. Scientific and financial reporting on the project is an **OBLIGATORY** condition of funding. A final scientific and financial report should be submitted no more than 3-months after the end of the project.

South African PIs will be advised on how to submit progress reports line with the reporting schedule for all NRF grants. The report should mention the outputs of the projects compared with the objectives and aims of the proposal.

Joint publications by the researchers should mention the support from all the funders (i.e. NRF and SNSF). Funders reserve the right to make the final reports available to researchers within and outside this programme in similar disciplines.

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. 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.

12. 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.

13. Ethical Clearance

In conjunction with the institution, it is the responsibility of the grant-holders 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 (CoG). 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/>.

14. 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>.

15. Submission deadline

The deadline for submission is **23 September 2022**.
Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

Please note that the NRF will **NOT** be held responsible for applications not received.

Researchers are advised to ensure that their Swiss research partners engage directly with the SNSF [Lead Agency process \(snf.ch\)](https://www.snf.ch)

16. Contact details

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