New approaches to engage communities and society across the full cycle of NRF funded research

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NRF Engaged Research Framework

Strengthening the Delivery of Excellent Research for a Better Society

New approaches to engage communities and society across the full cycle of NRF-funded research

Science systems across the world are increasingly recognising the importance of the broader societal impact of research, which includes the interdependent dimensions of social, economic, and environmental impact. Given the significant shifts over time, both nationally and internationally, in considerations of knowledge production; the roles of the university as a public institution; the nature of the relationship between science and society; social responsiveness; and societal impact (among others), the NRF has adopted the "Engaged Research Framework" to underpin the organisation's Vision 2030 of 'Research for a better society'.

Engagement in the research process can be realised across the full cycle of research: Upstream of research during identification and development of research priorities and strategies, and the formulation of research questions and proposals; Midstream of research through the involvement of publics and communities within the research process itself; and downstream of research through ensuring the utilisation of research and innovation outputs and impacts via engagement with communities once >

research projects have been concluded.

What is Engaged Research?

The NRF defines Engaged Research as research that:

- Integrates considered approaches to engage communities and society in, and with, the research across its full cycle, to ensure communities are primary stakeholders, active contributors, as well as beneficiaries of research.
- Encompasses the multitude of ways researchers interact with stakeholders and communities over the various phases of research, from the dentification of research questions and the (co) production of knowledge, to its dissemination, application, and impact; and
- Aims to improve the democratisation of science through the inclusive participation of societal stakeholders in the research process and thus improve public trust in science.

Principles of Engaged Research

The NRF has established five key principles of Engaged Research which can be embedded across the full cycle of research, and these principles are:

Active Citizenship

Engaged Research is driven by the active citizenship of researchers and research institutions for the common good of humanity, through (co)production of socially inclusive and robust knowledge that is anticipatory, inclusive, responsive, and reflexive to the needs, challenges, and aspirations of society. Unlocking this active citizenship of researchers and research institutions requires integrated resourcing and capacity development approaches.

Reciprocity

Engaged Research approaches that are guided by principles of reciprocity for mutual benefit, genuine and equal standing amongst all actors, and pursuing a knowledge (co)production approach that builds capacity and capability in communities along the research value chain, towards a strengthened knowledge democracy. These principles are informed by a shared philosophy of Ubuntu, which incorporates the values of trust, honesty, empathy, and accountability.

Trans- and Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production

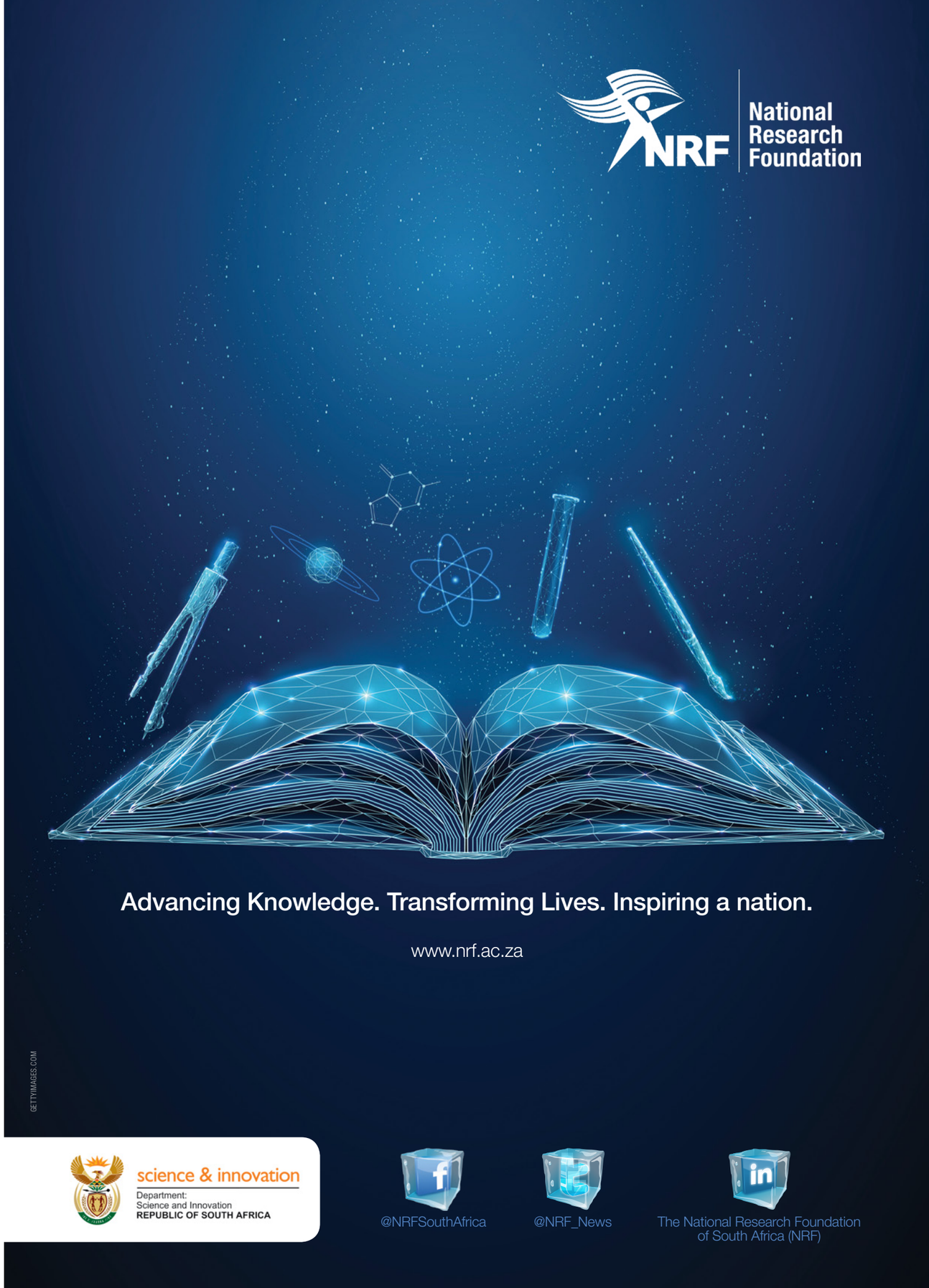
Engaged Research encourages trans- and inter-disciplinary knowledge (co)production driven by researchers from diverse academic disciplines while also being cognisant of the need for active transformation towards inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development. This will foster a systematic, multi-perspective approach that will enhance Engaged Research towards more impactful deliberations between researchers and communities.

Ethics and Sustainability

Engaged Research is governed by ethical standards that are applicable across academic disciplines; relevant to the social engagement processes throughout the research lifecycle; and act towards the intent of beneficence (do good) and non-malfeasance (do no harm) within the interdependent dimensions of a triple bottom line, including people, planet, and profit. Engaged research seeks to ensure the sustained longevity and transferability, across multiple contexts, of the desired beneficial impact of research, while ensuring that all participants, through a process of informed consent, have an unconditional right of withdrawal.

Relationship Building

Engaged Research requires relationship and partnership building (initiated prior to research being conducted and is sustained downstream of knowledge production) over an often-extended period towards a long-term and future-oriented vision. Engaged Research requires capacity building throughout the full research value chain, which is retained as a basis of future engagement.

Given the critical role of the NRF in ensuring that science is trusted, valued and an essential component of society, the adoption of the NRF Engaged Research will better position the organisation to execute its mandate in supporting, promoting, and advancing research for greater societal benefit and knowledge impact.

Read the comprehensive NRF Engaged Research Framework here.