



science & innovation  
Department:  
Science and Innovation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National  
Research  
Foundation



MINISTRY OF SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGY OF  
THE PEOPLES' REPUBLIC  
OF CHINA

# South Africa – China Joint Research Programme

2024 – 2025

**Closing Date: Consult the General Application Guide 2024**

<https://www.nrf.ac.za/nrf-call-for-proposals-for-funding-in-2024-and-2025/> and  
<https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>

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

**Submission deadline: Friday, 12 January 2024**

A maximum of 15 joint projects will be funded for this call

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## 1. Background

Formal diplomatic relations between South Africa and the People’s Republic of China were established in January 1998. The relations were given impetus in 2001 through the creation of a Bi-National Commission to champion bilateral relations in seven sectoral committees, including science and technology. In line with this agreement we are pleased to announce the 14<sup>th</sup> call for joint research project proposals between the South African and Chinese researchers. Researchers are invited to submit proposals no later than the date indicated.

## 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 basic research; and
- contribute meaningfully to research capacity development.

## 3. Areas of Cooperation

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

- Modernising the mining industry
- Biotechnology (application in modernising agriculture and health innovation, etc.)
- Energy innovation (focused on new energy and renewable energy including the hydrogen economy)
- Space science and technology including astronomy
- Marine science
- High performance computing

**Please note** that for South Africa, the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) will publish a call to support South Africa-China Flagship Projects in the area of Artificial Intelligence (AI). For more information on this call please contact Mr Duke Nkadimeng at [Duke.Nkadimeng@dst.gov.za](mailto:Duke.Nkadimeng@dst.gov.za). The NRF is not involved in the adjudication of this Flagship call. All queries on this must be forwarded directly to the DSI.

## 4. Duration of the projects

Projects will be supported for a maximum period of two years (2024 to 2025).

Table 1: Planned Call Schedule

Call Process	
November 2023	Launch of the call.
Friday, 19 January 2024	Call deadline for Designated Authorities at South African institutions.
January - March 2024	Screening and reviews of eligible applications.
March - April 2024	Decision-making, awards and signing of contracts with successful candidates.

*Please note: NRF reserves the right to change/ 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 China, who will bear the main responsibility for the project, including its technical and administrative coordination as well as scientific and financial reporting. Commercial institutions and private education institutions are not eligible to apply under this programme.

### **South Africa:**

- This call 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 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.

### **China:**

This call is open to working researchers residing in Mainland China and affiliated with a recognised Chinese higher education university/college, research institution, or enterprise.

## 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:

- Research mobility: the exchange visits of researchers, postdocs, and doctoral students including support for research fieldwork.
- Small equipment and consumables.
- Workshops, seminars or networking events: holding meetings alternately in South Africa and/or China.

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 two 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 **R300 000** per project. Funds will be paid in annual installments (R150 000 per year) and exclusively for research activities commencing in 2024.

### **China:**

The total amount requested from MOST, should not exceed **RMB 2 mil.** Further information on the funding modalities for the Chinese researchers should be addressed to MOST.

### **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.

## 8. Application procedure

The onus is on the applicant to find their research partner. Proposals must be received in both China and South Africa. Proposals that have only been received in either South Africa or China, 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 MOST 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://nrconnect.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 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.

### **China:**

Application forms and guidelines for Chinese applicants could be found through the following link: [https://service.most.gov.cn/kjih\\_tztg\\_all/20231031/5425.html](https://service.most.gov.cn/kjih_tztg_all/20231031/5425.html)

## **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:

- Scientific quality of the joint research project including the competence and expertise of the scientists/research teams involved especially in supervising postgraduate students.
- Alignment with national priorities in each country.
- Feasibility of continuing the partnership beyond the 2-year funding period of this programme.
- Human Capacity Development.

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 encouraged.

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 MOST 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.

## **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 MOST.

## **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

- The deadline for submission to NRF is **12 January 2024**
- The deadline for DA submission to the NRF is **19 January 2024** (23:59 SAST)

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 details

### South Africa, National Research Foundation (NRF)

#### For programme-content related queries

**Teuns Phahlamohlaka**

Overseas Collaborative Grants Initiative  
Knowledge Advancement and Support (KAS)  
Tel: +27 (0) 12 481 4385  
Email: [T.Phahlamohlaka@risa.nrf.ac.za](mailto:T.Phahlamohlaka@risa.nrf.ac.za)

**For NRF-Connect system or technical queries:**

Sibulele Sibulali  
Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA)  
Tel: +27 12 481 4155  
Email: [supportdesk@nrf.ac.za](mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za) Or [S.Sibulali@risa.nrf.ac.za](mailto:S.Sibulali@risa.nrf.ac.za)

#### For grant related queries

**Ms Mpai Motsei**

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### South Africa, Department of Science and Innovation (DSI)

**All queries relating to support for Flagship Projects in Artificial Intelligence should be addressed to:**

**Mr Duke Nkadameng**

Deputy Director: Bilateral Relations  
Department of Science and Innovation  
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### Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) of China

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## Annexure 1 Review Criteria

Weight	Assessment criteria	Descriptions
20%	Scientific quality of the joint research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there an indication of joint research project for competence and expertise of the research teams involved?</li> <li>- Is the proposal strong, well conceptualized, and strongly motivated and can contribute to the research field?</li> <li>- Is there a research rationale with clear aims/objectives and research methodology?</li> </ul>
20%	Alignment with national priorities in each country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How will the proposed project benefit broader South African/ Chinese research communities?</li> <li>- Does the project take into consideration on the establishment of a community and science engagement in the fields of study?</li> </ul>
30%	Feasibility of continuing the partnership beyond the 2-year funding period of this programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is the project feasible with a research plan, distribution of tasks and activities, coordination, management, and timelines?</li> <li>- Is there a thoroughly formulated project work-plan provided?</li> <li>- Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities beyond the funded period well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale?</li> </ul>
30%	Human Capacity Development (expertise of the scientists/research teams in supervising postgraduate students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there an indication of the training of students and young researchers?</li> <li>- Is there transfer of knowledge and know-how aimed at socio-economic development?</li> <li>- Clear indication of integration of young researchers and exchanges of students.</li> </ul>