



Research
Fund



National
Research
Foundation

[African Scientific Progress Award]

Framework Document

African Scientific Progress Award

Please note that this call is currently only open to applicants in the North, West and Central African regions.

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

The [National Research Foundation of South Africa](#) (NRF) and the [AXA Research Fund](#) collaboratively launch the African Scientific Progress Award (ASPA). ASPA intends to support sustainability research activities for early career research on the African continent through the [Future Earth Africa Hub](#) (FEAH). Central to the grant is the generation of timely and regionally relevant research insights, as well as and career growth. The grant aims to help researchers establish themselves in their respective fields, build their research profiles, and work towards developing independent and impactful research programmes in collaboration.

The objective of the NRF – AXA Research Fund partnership is to support excellent science of early career research in Africa building and enhancing on Future Earth Africa’s mission by:

- Enabling early career researchers to spend time focussing on research (increase scientific output, increasing options for promotions/tenure).
- Developing research and knowledge for strengthening existing or developing new science clusters, addressing complex and interrelated global risk challenges in the context of the African continent, such as climate, socioeconomics, and health.
- Strengthening the capacity and skills of the next generation of African sustainability scientists and leaders, by providing opportunities for fellowship, training, mentoring as well as networking and collaboration.
- Strengthening FEAH Regional Nodes / Clusters by building capacity development programmes for early career researchers. Nodes are decentralized leadership centres with partner institutions in different African regions. Nodes work with the FEAH to lead clusters.
- Enhancing the visibility and influence of African researchers on the continent and in the global sustainability science arena.
- Establishing a network of sustainability science researchers in Africa that will include potential mentors and mentees.

RESEARCH AWARD FOCUS

The intersection of climate change and health presents a critical area of research for the African continent. As the global climate continues to change, its impact on human health becomes increasingly significant. This is especially true for Africa due to its vulnerability to climate-related challenges and its rapid population growth, especially in urban areas. The concept of One Health, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, provides a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the complex challenges posed by climate change in the African context. Rapid urbanization, increasing pollution, concerns about water and food security, as well as energy

demands and infrastructure adaptation needs are all factors that intersect with climate change and have direct implications for public health in Africa. Transdisciplinary research approaches that effectively address these interconnected issues are of critical importance for the future. They can contribute to providing valuable insights and solutions for ongoing challenges on a continent particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change.

This grant will consider research projects exploring one or more aspects within the following areas:

- ***Analyses of Health Impacts of Climate Change:***
 - Research the specific health effects of climate change-related factors such as rising temperatures, climate-induced food and water shortages, extreme weather events, and ecosystem changes.
 - Consider the implications for different population groups (youth, elderly, women, Indigenous communities, etc.) and geographies (urban, rural, suburban) as well as the continent's economic development trajectory.
- ***Strategies for Mitigating and Adapting to Health and Climate Change Impacts:***
 - Investigate innovative strategies and solutions for mitigating/adapting to the intersection of health and climate change impacts in Africa.
 - Address the unique challenges and stakeholders in Africa, encompassing both the public and private sectors.
- ***Governance and Financing Considerations:***
 - Examine governance and financing aspects as crucial considerations in addressing the intersection of climate change and health in Africa.
 - Explore effective policies and financial mechanisms necessary for implementing sustainable solutions tailored to the continent's specific needs.

These research approaches should contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationship between climate change and health but also provide actionable insights for practitioners to effectively address the challenges posed by this intersection on the continent.

WHO MAY APPLY

Early career researchers of African nationality from universities across the African continent with PhD plus 3-5 years of research experience. We accept career breaks taken because of family commitments, ill health and work outside of research. Proven career breaks of up to three years (= max. PhD + 8) are considered (please indicate in your CV). It is possible for African nations to re-locate from abroad if they have the support from an African institution.

Applicants must demonstrate they have started to build a track record in their selected field and demonstrate to be a promising future leader. Minimum three years of active research are required, demonstrated by showing evidence of one or more of the below:

- Staff and student supervision or co-supervision
- Demonstrating relevance and impact of research

- Commencing portfolio of publications
- Securing previous grant funding
- Attracting recognition through prizes and awards.

The award will include a component of capacity development allowing fellows to enhance their leadership skills (expanding networks; engage with role models; receive mentorship; and learn the demands of public engagement).

The award partners with academic institutions only; thus, NGOs, governmental bodies, foundations, independent research centres, cultural institutions (such as museums), and hospitals are not eligible.

Applicants must have a good working level of English (this means being capable of liaising with the grant secretariat, participation in capacity building seminars, communicate on research outcomes etc..). However, applicants are allowed to submit their application in either French or English.

WHICH ACTIVITIES MAY I APPLY FOR?

Applicants may apply for a maximum of EUR 42.000,00 (ca. South African Rand 800.000,00) per year for a maximum of two (2) years or 24 months. Please use the South African currency (ZAR) when completing the Requested Financials sections. You will need to make conversions for budget requirements yourself. Funding may be utilised for the following activities (including max. 10% overhead):

- Salaries
- Travel
- Accommodation
- Subsistence
- Publication costs
- Training programmes and workshops
- Purchase of scientific equipment and resources (databases, survey costs, consumables, etc.)

HOW ARE APPLICATIONS EVALUATED?

Following the closing date indicated below, applications will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- Compliance of the project with content-related focus areas.
- Track record of the applicant. The applicant must be a leader in their field of research.
- Quality of the proposal / scientific merit and originality of the project.
- Feasibility of Implementation timeline of project and budget.
- Potential for promoting equity and capacity building.
- Demonstration of impact on societal, economic, policy and/or knowledge
- Value-added of any collaboration existing or foreseen by the researcher. In case of involvement of partners in the research project, the applicant must indicate the governance and contributions of partners to the research project at the level of financial and non-financial contributions including teaching, capacity development etc.

- The applicant's institution must provide a support letter containing detail on co-support for the collaboration, signed by the Head of Department or line manager of the applicant.
- In case of collaboration of multiple institutions, letters of interest in the collaboration by the partner institution(s) must be included.
- **Applications that do not have all required supporting documents by the time of submission will be disqualified and will not be taken up for evaluation by the NRF**
- ***Applicants have 3 days to query from date of email receipt should your application be rejected in the screening phase.***

APPLICATION PROCESS

- Applications must be submitted electronically to the NRF via the NRF Connect system at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>.
- Please follow the steps in the Manual on how to Register/Login, published on the NRF website at [General-Application-Guide-2025-Ver-1.0-11-March-24.pdf \(nrf.ac.za\)](#).
- Select the call for which you are applying for: **NRF - AXA Research Fund African Scientific Progress Award**
- Complete all compulsory sections (i.e. CV sections, project descriptions, timelines) and the relevant non-compulsory sections.
- Please attach the support letter from your institution as a **PDF format**. The applicant's institution must provide a support letter containing detail on co-support for the project, signed by the Head of Department or line manager of the applicant.
- Remember to **submit** your application upon completion.
- Incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Applications can be submitted in English, French, and Portuguese yet researcher applying must have sufficient command of English to engage in correspondence with NRF and partake in capacity trainings.
- Only one application per applicant can be submitted.
- All applications should be submitted by **Date 19 March 2025, not later than 23:59 SAST. No application will be accepted beyond this date.**
- The NRF will not be held liable for server/IT problems experienced by any applicant or institution for non-submission of applications. Please ensure to allow yourself ample time to complete your application ahead of the closing date.
- Please send an email to the NRF Support Desk requesting to add your institution should you not find it on the system.
- Support will only be provided from **Monday to Friday 8h00 – 16h30 SAST**, excluding South African Public holidays.

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SELECTION PROCESS

Funding decisions will be made in consideration of the following:

- Peer review and evaluation outcome
- Geographical and linguistic balance
- Gender and diversity considerations

NRF Conditions of Grant will have to be signed by successful applicants, and will govern the grant administration process, including reporting requirements.

The Evaluation Panel's decision is final and cannot be appealed. It can neither be disputed nor subject to explanations or justifications.

REPORTING AND PAYMENTS

Reporting standards for the programme will be outlined in the project agreement between the NRF and the applicant's institution.

In principle awarded proposals are required to be proactive in engaging their projects and use an open-data framework when applicable.

The NRF and AXA support should be acknowledged in all publications (including World Wide Web pages). Use of the NRF and AXA logos should be in accordance with the branding policies of the organisations and can be obtained from the contact persons below.

Grant payments will be made directly to the institution of the applicant.

Projects must deal with research that conforms to the AXA Group Compliance and Ethics Guide. The Following is a non-exhaustive list of disqualifying factors:

- Research violating national regulations
- Research supporting any political activity
- Research having direct military use
- Research having potentially dangerous environmental impacts
- Research relying on the artificial production of highly infectious pathogens with potential for large scale harmful/lethal effects for humans and research involving gain of function
- Biomedical research conducted without the fully informed consent of the participant
- Research processing private personal data without the informed consent of the concerned parties (incl. genetic information)

Cases of scientific misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misrepresentation of data will be considered as breaches of fundamental ethical principles and the proposals concerned will be excluded.

Participation in the call for applications implies acceptance of the above-mentioned rules.

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NORTH, CENTRAL AND WEST AFRICA COUNTRIES TO BE CONSIDERED

North

Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Western Sahara

Central

Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Republic - Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, São Tomé & Príncipe

West

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo

If you are applying from an African country not listed your application will automatically be disqualified.

CONTACTS

For content-related queries:

Email: aspa@nrf.ac.za

for technical-related queries:

Email: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za

PARTNERS

The **AXA Research Fund**¹ is AXA Group's global scientific philanthropy initiative, launched in 2008 to address the most important issues facing the earth today. It supports human progress by funding research in Health, Environment and Social Risk and helping inform public and private decision-making based on science. The AXA Research Fund functions on a five-year mandate with a main mission at heart: supporting transformative and excellent science. AXA's mandate is focused on strengthening the transdisciplinary exploration of emerging risks, consolidating links between academic experts, industry, and the public sector around major societal issues for informed decision-making, and implementing innovative formats for the dissemination of scientific knowledge for the benefit of decision-makers and the public.

¹ <https://axa-research.org>

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The **National Research Foundation**² is a juristic person established in terms of Section 2 of the National Research Foundation Act, Act 23 of 1998, and a Schedule 3A Public Entity in terms of the Public Finance Management Act. The NRF is the government's national agency responsible for promoting and supporting research and human capital development through funding, the provision of National Research Facilities, and science outreach platforms and programs to the broader community in all fields of science and technology, including natural science, engineering, social science, and humanities. The NRF hosts the Future Earth Africa Hub through which it primarily supports sustainability research activities on the continent.

Future Earth³ is an international network of researchers and change-makers collaborating to accelerate transformations to global sustainability. Building on more than three decades of work by global environmental change research programmes - DIVERSITAS, IGBP, and IHDP - Future Earth is working to expand the understanding of global sustainability challenges by broadening the tent of actors engaged in defining the challenges and connecting top-down and bottom-up approaches to identifying the solutions. This is pursued by facilitating research and seeding solutions-oriented collaborations in research, business, policy, and civil society. Future Earth is governed by a Governing Council and works with its entities such as GRNs, regional and national structures and partner with The Belmont Forum, ISC, START, WCRP, ESA, STS, UNU, IPCC to drive worldwide sustainability agenda.

² www.nrf.ac.za

³ www.futureearth.org