SA-Japan (JSPS) Joint Research Mobility Call

2027 – 2028

Closing Date: Consult the General Application Guide 2026

available at https://www.nrf.ac.za/nrf-call-for-proposals-for-funding-in-2026-and-2027/ *South African applicants **must** consult their institutions for internal closing dates.* **A maximum of four joint projects will be funded for this call**

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

CLOSING DATE: 11 September 2026

Designated Authority Submission deadline: Friday, 18 September 2026

Contents

1. Background 2
2. Aims of the programme 2
3. Areas of Cooperation 2
4. Duration of the projects 2
5. Eligibility criteria 3
6. Eligible research activities 4
7. Funding regulations 4
8. Application procedure 5
9. Review process 6
10. Projects follow-up and reporting 7
11. Science engagement 7
12. Intellectual property 8
13. Ethical considerations 8
14. Protection of personal information 8
15. Submission deadline 8
16. Contact details 9

1. Background

On 28 August 2003, South Africa signed an agreement on cooperation in science and technology with Japan, followed two years later by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). The implementation of the NRF/JSPS MoU led to annual cycles of joint research funding between the two countries. Following eighteen successful joint calls for proposals, between 2005 and 2026 the NRF is pleased to announce the 23rd call in 2026, and herewith invite all interested parties to submit their applications, by a date no later than that 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 young 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 proposals within the Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and the Humanities. **Please note that for South Africa**, joint projects by historically disadvantaged institutions and individuals (HDIs) that involve young scientists and pay attention to a balanced involvement of female and male researchers (gender equality), will be positively considered and will receive a higher rating.

4. Duration of the projects

Projects will be supported for a period of two years (2027 to 2028).

Table 1: Planned Call Schedule

Call Process	
Monday, 01 June 2026	Launch of the call.
Friday, 11 September 2026	Closing Date
Friday, 18 September 2026	Call deadline for Designated Authorities only at South African institutions.
September – November 2026	Screening and reviews of eligible applications.
December – February 2026	Decision-making, awards and signing of contracts with successful candidates.

April 2027	Start of funded collaborative research projects.
December 2028	End of funded collaborative research projects.
End February 2029	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

An application must designate two principal investigators, one in South Africa and one in Japan, 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.

- Please note that for South Africa, joint projects by historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) and individuals that involve young scientists (masters students) and pay attention to a balanced involvement of female and male researchers (gender equality), will be positively considered and will receive a higher rating. *Applicants based at an HDI, science council (including any of the NRF research facilities), are allowed to partner among each other. Please note that only the following universities will be recognized as historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) in line with the Department of Higher Education and Training Ministerial Statement on university funding and New Universities: University of Limpopo, 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), Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Sol Plaatje University (SPU), University of Mpumalanga (UMP)*

- Joint projects involving young 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.

Japan:

Japanese PIs must hold a full-time or equivalent position as a researcher at a university or research institute in Japan that is eligible to receive Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research - KAKENHI. However, there are cases when a researcher not employed in a full-time position may be eligible. Such persons must be eligible to apply for a KAKENHI grant-in-aid and his/her affiliated institution must judge them as able to implement the project and to provide an appropriate research

environment (e.g., laboratory, equipment, personnel) for it.

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:

- 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 Japan.

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 of funding requested from the NRF should not exceed **R900 000 (R450 000 per annum)**. Funding will be made available for a maximum of two years, to be paid in annual installments and exclusively for research activities commencing in 2027.

Japan:

The total amount requested from JSPS should not exceed **JPY 2,500,000** per fiscal year (up to JPY 5,000,000

in total) per project.

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 Japan and South Africa. Proposals that have only been received in either South Africa or Japan, but not both countries, will not be considered for funding. The call process is highly competitive therefore the application does not guarantee funding. The evaluation of applications from both countries should have positive ratings before consideration for funding. Neither the NRF nor JSPS 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://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za. Please make use of the 'General Application Guide 2026' 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/nrf-call-for-proposals-for-funding-in-2025-and-2026/.

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

- CVs of partner Principal Investigators.
- Budgets of partner Principal Investigators.
- Budget division of the South African team, in particular budget sharing between the historically advantaged and HDIs.

Failure to submit compulsory documents will result in the disqualification of the application and will make the entire project ineligible. You have three (3) days to query from the date of email receipt should your application be rejected in the screening phase.

Japan:

Application forms for Japanese applicants may be downloaded from the JSPS website making use of the links:

- http://www.jsps.go.jp/j-bilat/semina/shinsei_bosyu.html
- https://www.jsps.go.jp/english/e-bilat/call.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 students and young researchers through research, transfer of knowledge and know-how aimed at socio-economic development. Integration of young researchers and students, and the exchange of postgraduate students, are 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 (3) 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 JSPS 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. All research proposals submitted to the NRF for funding are evaluated according to the pre-determined criteria rated from 1- 5. Each area is given a weighting to indicate its relative importance as indicated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Scorecard for the Assessment of Proposals for SA Japan (JSPS) Joint Research Mobility Call

Assessment criteria	Descriptions	Weighting (Total = 100%)
Scientific quality of the proposed project	- Is there an indication of joint research project for competence and expertise of the research teams involved? - Is the proposal strong, well conceptualized, and strongly motivated and can contribute to the research field? - Is there a research rationale with clear aims/objectives and research methodology?	20%
Alignment with national priorities in each country	- How the proposed project will benefit broader South African/ Japanese research communities? - Does the project take into consideration on the establishment of a community and science engagement in the fields of study?	20%

Feasibility of continuing the partnership beyond the 2-year funding period of this programme	- Is the project feasible with a research plan, distribution of tasks and activities, coordination, management, and timelines? - Is there a thoroughly formulated project work-plan provided? - Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities beyond the funded period well-reasoned, well-organised, and based on a sound rationale?	30%
Human Capacity Development	- Is there an indication of the training of students and young researchers? - Is there transfer of knowledge and know-how aimed at socio-economic development? - Clear indication of integration of young researchers and exchanges of students.	30%

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 JSPS.

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. 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-andscholarly-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 (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

- **South African applicants must consult their institutions for internal closing dates.**
- The deadline for South African researchers to the NRF is Friday, **11 September 2026** (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.

16. Contact details

National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa

For NRF-Connect system or technical queries: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za

For programme content & grant related queries

Ms Lutanani Rambau
International Grants and Partnerships
Tel: +27 12 481- 4208
LA.Rambau@risa.nrf.ac.za

Ms Kgotso Jabosigo
International Grants and Partnerships
Tel: +27 12 481- 4319
KP.Jabosigo@risa.nrf.ac.za

Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), Japan

Ms YAMAHARA Shoko
International Research Cooperation Division II
International Program Department
Japan Society for the Promotion of Science
Tel: +81 3 3263 2362 Email:
kenkyouka13@jsps.go.jp