South Africa-Canada Seed Grant for Collaborative Research

Call for joint proposals: 2026 – 2028

Call Open: 07 April 2026

Closing date: 28 May 2026

DA Closing date: 4 June 2026

A maximum of 8 projects will be funded for this Call

Funding framework draft

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Preamble

In recognition of the growing importance of international research collaboration to address global challenges, the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF) and the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) are pleased to announce a joint funding call, marking the formalisation of a strengthened partnership. This collaborative effort is the direct result of the dynamic and impactful South Africa-Canada Universities Network (SACUN), a strategic network of South African and Canadian universities that has emerged in recent years, bringing together researchers, practitioners and stakeholders from diverse disciplines. The network has not only facilitated the exchange of knowledge and ideas but has also been instrumental in identifying shared goals and fostering synergies between our agencies.

Aim and Objectives of the SSHRC-NRF Seed Grants

The aim of the programme is to enhance universities' research collaboration between Canada and South Africa on areas of mutual interest, with an additional goal of capacity development and inclusivity. The Seed Grants will support researchers affiliated with eligible South African and Canadian postsecondary institutions to build capacity, foster new and existing partnerships, and develop networks and/or consortia among the Canadian and South African research communities.

Call themes

The NRF-SSHRC will support projects in following six prioritised themes:

1. **Just and Resilient Societies** (topics: reconciliation, diversity, gender equality, the rule of law, democratization, security, good governance, addressing poverty, ethical environmental practices, quality education, Indigenous knowledge systems)

2. **Environmental Sustainability** (topics: sustainable and climate resilient agricultural systems, food security, pollution, clean energy, renewable energy, energy transitions, clean water, sustainable sourcing)

3. **Artificial Intelligence** (topics: technological futures, smart transport systems, nanotechnology, urbanization – smart cities, informed policymaking, digital economy, digital innovation, digital infrastructure, big data and data science)

4. **Sustainable Growth** (topics: critical minerals and supply chains, advancing AfCFTA, innovation in the Blue Economy, infrastructure, green economy, labour supply/skills development)

5. **Mathematics Education**

Canadian applicants seeking funding from SSHRC should look at the eligibility section .

Duration of the projects

All projects will be supported for a minimum duration of 24 months and a maximum duration of 36 months, starting from 2026. Refer to the table below for a full schedule of this Call.

Planned Call Schedule	
Milestone	**Planned dates**
Call for applications	07 April 2026
Call deadlines for applications	28 May 2026
Call deadlines for Designated Authorities (institution pre-screening for South African applicants)	4 June2026
Funding decisions, Awards, and Contracts	1 September - 30 September 2026
Start of Funded Projects	1 October 2026
Submission of Annual Progress Report (PR)	End of February 2028 (As per NRF Call for PR)
End of Funded Projects	31 December 2029
Submission of final reports by researchers	End of February 2030 (As per NRF Call for PR)

Although the funders endeavour to abide by the above-mentioned dates, it should be noted that the nature and complexity of the bilateral programme require synchronisation of all processes and alignment of different academic and financial years. Funders, therefore, reserve the right to change and amend the above-mentioned dates without prior notification to applicants.

Budget

The National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa has committed to support a maximum of up to ZAR300,000 per project per year over the next three years. The NRF portion of the grant shall be disbursed to the South African PI upon signature of the Conditions of Grant (CoG) Contract.

The SSHRC grant will support Canadian PIs advancing research and research related activities in the social sciences and humanities at up to CAD $100,000 over 2 years with a one year no-cost extension.

Besides the SSHRC-NRF financial support, universities in both countries are encouraged to solicit other funding resources. Leveraged funds should be clearly indicated in the application.

This Call will support a maximum of 8 projects.

Eligibility criteria

The Principal Investigator for the Canadian and South African teams must be in possession of a PhD to be eligible. Each proposal must nominate one main applicant based in South Africa and one main applicant based in Canada. These will serve as the Principal Investigators (PIs) on the South African and Canadian sides. The PIs will bear the main responsibility for the project, including its technical and administrative coordination, as well as the timely delivery of scientific and financial reports. A researcher cannot serve as a PI on more than one proposal.

Researchers from subject matter experts, private companies/industries, and NGOs cannot serve as PIs but can form part of the joint projects and will be expected to meet their own costs of participation in the joint projects. Neither NRF nor SSHRC grants can be used to support these researchers.

In Canada

In order to be eligible for SSHRC funding, the Canadian PI must be affiliated with a Canadian postsecondary institution that holds institutional eligibility at the time of application and before funding can be released. Individuals are eligible to be co-applicants if formally affiliated with any of the following:

- **Canadian**: eligible postsecondary institution; not-for-profit organisation; philanthropic foundation; think tank; or municipal, territorial or provincial government.
- **International**: postsecondary institution.

In addition, the Canadian PI and any Canadian co-applicants should consult 8. Eligible subject matter below.

In South Africa

Researchers who are full-time employees or on a fixed-term contract at any of the following institutions are eligible to apply:

- South African universities/universities of technology.

The applicants must be in possession of at least a PhD degree.

Students and researchers from private/commercial universities are not eligible to apply.

Eligible research activities

Projects must demonstrate potential for advancing research and capacity development on the proposed themes Therefore, the funding within this programme will support research and research capacity development activities such as:

- Joint publications, synthesis reports, creative works, and/or other research outputs
- General research-related mobility
- Joint workshops, seminars, conferences, symposia
- Lecture presentations
- Capacity-building sessions such as participation in winter/summer schools, master classes, etc. - Meetings and local/regional dissemination of research results aimed at involving stakeholders and/or end-users from outside the participants

The following will not be funded from the fund allocation:

- Consultant's fees
- Project management fees
- Educational expenses (scholarships and/or bursaries, etc.)
- Large equipment
- Salaries and temporary staff fees.

Eligible subject matter

Recognising the different research funding mandates of the NRF and SSHRC, the programme intends to support collaboration within the social sciences and humanities disciplines, or interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary collaboration between Canadian researchers in the social sciences and humanities and South African researchers across all disciplines. Canadian PIs must propose to undertake research and research related activities **only** in disciplines, thematic areas, approaches or subject areas that are eligible for SSHRC funding. Please note that the outcomes of the proposed research and research activities must be eligible for SSHRC funding. The use of social sciences or humanities theories, methodologies and hypotheses is, in and of itself, not sufficient to make a proposal eligible for SSHRC funding. Canadian researchers who are unsure whether their proposed project falls within SSHRC's subject matter mandate should contact SSHRC for further clarification regarding subject matter eligibility.

Application procedure

Through a lead agency model, the South African PI will submit a single collaborative proposal on behalf of the research team, which will undergo a review process by NRF, the lead agency. The Canadian PI will include all material, including a budget breakdown, within the single application.

Canadian PIs must ensure that the included budget justification meets the Tri-Agency Guide on Financial Administration's eligibility regulations, and that it aligns with the eligibility requirements for the funding opportunity. Additionally, Canadian PIs must be eligible to apply to SSHRC as outlined in 6. Eligibility criteria.

The South African PI must submit their consortia proposals through an online application process to the NRF on the NRF Connect system at https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za. Please use the 'General Application Guide 2026' 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:

I. CVs of PIs partners.
II. Project description
III. Detailed budget breakdown of all partners (PI Lead, Co-Leads & Research Partners).
IV. Budget division of the South African team, particularly budget sharing between the historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged institutions.
V. Signed Letters of Intent by all Research Partners (Lead, Co-Leads & Research Partners).

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

Submission deadline

The Call deadline for applications is **28 May 2026**. The deadline for Designated Authorities (DA) submission to the NRF is **4 June 2026** (only applicable to South African researchers).

Applications received after the closing date will not be considered for funding. Please note that neither SSHRC nor the NRF will be held responsible for applications not received. Researchers are also advised to ensure that their research partners' applications are submitted and received in the partner country.

Review process (One Step Peer Review Process)

Following the closing date, all submitted proposals will undergo a formal eligibility check before moving to the one-step evaluation process. Following this process, all applications meeting the eligibility criteria will be subject to the one-step evaluation process as follows:

A joint selection panel comprising experts designated by the NRF and SSHRC will evaluate all eligible proposals and allocate the funding. The composition of the joint scientific committee is only determined after the submission deadline to align the panel members' expertise with the topics of the submitted applications. The composition of the joint scientific committee will be openly available after the finalisation of the evaluation process.

The National Research Foundation and SSHRC will thereafter approve the rankings made by the joint evaluation panel. The South African and Canadian researchers involved will be notified about the evaluation results after the ratification by both funding agencies.

Review Criteria

The proposals are assessed based on their content with respect to the following six criteria: i) Scientific quality of the proposal and/or technology development, ii) Relevance, iii) Project Management and Implementation, iv) Broader Societal Impact, v) Quality & Adequacy of Resources and Competencies, and vi) Human Capacity Development.

The experts will evaluate each proposal based on the following:

1. **Scientific quality of the proposal and/or technology development**

Scientific originality/innovation/conceptualisation & relevance - positioning of the research vis-à-vis current research/technology development in the field

- Is the proposal strong, well-conceptualised, and strongly motivated? Are the research question and problem statement well-advocated?
- Is the idea novel/shows potential to contribute to the generation of both new methodology and new knowledge in the field?
- Is the research rationale - (reasons offered by a researcher for conducting more research into a particular subject) clearly articulated?
- Does the account of existing literature affirm diverse theoretical underpinnings published by scholars on the topic?
- Is the literature well cited and referenced, and does it address the existing gap in the extant literature?

The clarity of the Aim, Objectives, and the tasks

- Does the aim indicate the project's overarching goal, and does it align with the problem statement and the knowledge gap?
- Are the objectives clearly stated, providing an accurate description of intended activities for accomplishing research aims
- Do the objectives concisely indicate critical issues of the research focus, and are they well aligned with the problem statement and research aim?

Applicability and Replicability of the Research Methodology

- Are the methods realistic and innovative for achieving beneficial results?
- Does the research methodology describe the reason behind the use of specific/unique procedures/techniques in the field?
- Does the application describe data collection and analysis methods and the use and dissemination of results? Are validity and reliability methods defined?

2. **Relevance**

The Degree to which the Proposal Aligns with the Thematic Focus of the Call/ Programme Priority Areas and **Equity/Diversity and Inclusion**

3. **Project Management and Implementation**

Suitability and feasibility of the outlined research plan, distribution of tasks and activities, coordination, management, synthesis, timelines

- A thoroughly formulated project work plan is provided, with tasks, activities, and where each activity will be explained.
- Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organised, and based on a sound rationale?

4. **Broader Societal Impact**

Technological, economic, and/or societal benefits from research outcomes and impacts within a national and global context

- What is the potential of the project in benefiting society and advancing the desired societal outcomes?
- To what extent do the proposed activities suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?

- Do research outputs have a high potential for scientific innovations/commercial applications/lead to social or economic benefits?
- Based on the research plan and the track record, is the envisaged impact feasible and relevant nationally and globally?
- Is there a practical plan in place to disseminate and communicate research findings for public consumption or benefit?
- Does the proposal incorporate a mechanism to assess success?

5. **Quality and Adequacy of Resources and Competencies**

Synergy, appropriateness, and added value of the joint research plan refer to the individual consortium members' expertise/knowledge and experience and whether the diversity of expertise adds value to the international research collaboration/initiative.

- Does the distribution of resources between partners reflect balanced cooperation with respect to complementarity of expertise/competencies/inclusion.
    - For Canadian researchers: Does the distribution of resources between partners reflect balanced cooperation with respect to the complementarity of expertise/competencies and with respect to EDI considerations?
- Are the roles of the PI and of others in the project, range, and level of integration fully defined?
- Do participants in the consortium have the knowledge and experience that adds value to tackle the different research project aspects?
- Are scientific disciplines needed to address the problem and knowledge from outside the scientific community included?
- Does the project employ pluri-disciplinary (multi, inter, intra, cross, trans disciplinary) approaches and appropriate methods?
- Are these approaches clearly articulated and complementary to national priorities and international research agendas?

6. **Human Capacity Development**

Transformation, equity and redress refers to capacity building opportunities for emerging researchers and how the proposed research complies with transformational objectives relevant to the funder.

- For South African researchers: Does the project include appropriate transformational, ethical, gender considerations and other diversity perspectives where relevant (i.e., collaborative initiatives with historically disadvantaged institutions [for South Africa]; involvement of women and black students and emerging researchers in the project; Special support offered to disadvantaged students)
    - For Canadian researchers: Does the project include appropriate transformational, ethical, gender considerations and other diversity perspectives where relevant, in both the Canadian and South African contexts?
- Are postgraduate students and emerging researchers to be involved in the project indicated/identified and is their training described?
- For South African researchers: Is there a plan to send South African Historically Disadvantaged students (doctoral and postdocs) to partner countries for training strengthening the international prospects of postgraduate students/young emerging researchers?
    - For Canadian researchers: How are considerations related to EDI integrated in the training and mentoring plan?
- Is there a plan to receive students from partner country for training and skills transfer?
- Is the support to be provided for the postgraduate students and young researchers to attend and present at science meetings explained? - for the South Africa assessment only: experience in supervising postgraduate students.

Each evaluation criterion will be scored on a scale of 0-4, where 0 is the lowest and 4 is the highest score. All criteria are weighted equally. The 0-4 scoring system for each criterion indicates the following assessment:

Score	Rating	Description
0	Poor	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information. The criterion is inadequately addressed.
1	Fair	The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
2	Good	The proposal addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present.
3	Very Good	The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
4	Excellent	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

At the end of the review process, the panel will make recommendations on which applications should be funded and prepare a ranked list of applications based on their relative merit.

Communication of results

The NRF and SSHRC will make funding outcomes available to applicants using their respective procedures. All Canadian applicants will be provided, in addition to SSHRC's notice of decision, any external assessments received and a summary of the merit review committee's evaluation of their proposal, where applicable.

Project follow-up and reporting

Principal Investigators are expected to submit progress reports to SSHRC and the NRF. Scientific and financial reporting on the project is an OBLIGATORY condition of funding.

- A final scientific and financial report should be submitted by Principal Investigators no more than four months after the end of the project.
- All reports should be submitted via NRF Connect system in line with the reporting schedule for all NRF grants.
- The report should compare the project's outputs with the proposal's objectives and aims.
- The joint publications by the researchers should mention the support from all the funders (i.e., SSHRC and the NRF).
- The funders reserve the right to make the final reports available to researchers within and outside this programme in similar disciplines.
- Canadian PIs receiving funding from SSHRC must comply with SSHRC's reporting requirements, which will be communicated to successful applicants when they receive their notice of award.

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.

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 Online Submission System (https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/). The National Research Foundation will protect the personal information provided by applicants or third parties against misuse, loss, unauthorised access, modification, or disclosure. The privacy policy of the NRF outlines the practices relating to the protection of personal information, which can be accessed on the NRF website at https://www.nrf.ac.za/privacy-policy.

Regulations, policies and related information

South African applicants:

All South African grant-holders should abide by the NRF grant conditions stated in award letters

Canadian applicants:

Canadian applicants and grant holders must comply with the regulations governing grant applications and with the regulations set out in the Tri-Agency Guide on Financial Administration. Grant holders must also comply with the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications (see the Open Access overview for more information) and the Tri-Agency Research Data Management Policy), which, as of April 1, 2021, has replaced SSHRC's Research Data Archiving policy for all active grants.

On January 16, 2024, the Government of Canada published its Policy on Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern (STRAC), which applies to this funding opportunity. Grant applications that involve conducting research and related activities that aim to advance a sensitive technology research area will not be funded if any of the researchers involved in activities supported by the grant are affiliated with, or in receipt of funding or in-kind support from, a university, research institute or laboratory connected to military, national defence or state security entities that could pose a risk to Canada's national security. Read the tri-agency guidance on the STRAC policy to understand how this may impact your application. Successful Canadian applicants will be required to submit STRAC attestations as a condition of receiving SSHRC funds.

Contact details

SSHRC	
Technical queries related to the NRF online submission system should be directed to the NRF contact information listed below. **Any queries related to the Canadian application process can be directed to the following:**	
Research Partnerships Portfolio	
1-855-275-2861	
partnerships@sshrc-crsh.gc.ca	
National Research Foundation	
Queries on the NRF online submission system (NRF-Connect) can be forwarded to the NRF Support Desk on email: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za. **The following NRF official(s) can also be contacted for further details:**	
For content-related and technical queries	
Valencia Mashiloane	
Tel: +27 481 4341	
VL.Mashiloane**@risa.nrf.ac.za**	