



DSI-NRF Conference Fund

Call for Applications 2027

Consult the General Application Guide 2026 Notice:

Applicants should only apply for the hosting of a physical meeting if they are confident and can show strong evidence that such meetings can and/or will take place. It must be noted upfront that no carry forwards will be allowed for postponed or cancelled events.

The NRF is however cognisant that some virtual gatherings may require financial support for hosting and/or registration fees and attendance/participation. Therefore, applications for such support accompanied by strong motivation and evidence will be considered on a case by case basis.

CONTEXT

A vibrant and internationally competitive science, technology and innovation (STI) system is critical to growing a knowledge-driven economy and improving social well-being. The importance of a globally competitive STI system is well captured in policy documents of both the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) and the National Research Foundation (NRF).

To attain this goal, it is important to strategically position South Africa as a global competitor in Research and Innovation (R&I). This can inter-alia be achieved by promoting international collaboration through hosting of strategic global events, and support of researcher mobility and participation in scientific events, enriched by national learning opportunities and engagements.

OBJECTIVES

The Conference Fund is intended to support the hosting of prominent international conferences focused on excellent scientific research that has potential for socio-economic impact. The funding platform makes provision for **strategic, large events of an international nature**, hosted in South Africa, or on behalf of South Africa abroad. The fund will typically support 'global conferences' of more than 500 participants. Smaller events can be applied for under the KIC funding instrument of the NRF, published biannually.

The overall objectives of this fund are to:

- Promote South Africa as a science destination;
- Increase the competitiveness of the South African NSI;
- Showcase South Africa's scientific endeavours and infrastructure, and to build capacity within the NSI;
- Enhance networking within the science system;
- Foster international collaboration in order to improve the quality of research outputs by researchers.

WHO MAY APPLY

All researchers who are full-time employees or on a fixed-term contract (minimum 12 months) at any of the following institutions are eligible to apply:

- South African universities /universities of technology;
- Recognised national research institutions such as the National Facilities;
- Museums;
- Science Councils;
- Members of the International Science Council (ISC) National Committees (with recognition of the above institutional affiliation to adhere to the list of qualifying institutions that may receive grants);
- The applicant must be a member of the conference organising committee and must be in possession of a PhD degree;
- Researchers from private/commercial institutions are not eligible to apply.

REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for funding, applications have to fulfil the following conditions:

- The proposal must have clearly defined objectives and a programme of activities;
- The theme of the conference must be aligned to and address the DSTI-NRF priorities;
- The conference must be co-organised with a renowned international body/society and must be open to international participation;
- The conference programme should be designed in such a way that it fosters international collaboration;
- The organisers must ensure that the event is openly accessible, and that participants represent the diversity of people working in the field;

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- Postgraduate students must be included as participants at the conference (e.g. through poster or paper presentation)
- Involvement of other South African scientists and collaboration with other institutions working in similar disciplines;
- Applicants requesting support may be required to present before an evaluation panel;
- The conference should target hosting **at least 500** participants. Should this not be the case, a strong motivation justifying deviation from hosting of 500 or more delegates should accompany the application;
- At least **25%** of conference speakers should be based in other African countries other than South Africa (**excluding those residing at South African institutions**).

WHICH ACTIVITIES MAY I APPLY FOR?

Funding may only be utilised for the following activities:

- Venue and/or equipment hire;
- Catering – meals, lunches, tea and coffee breaks;
- Conference marketing material;
- Evaluation reports and/or publication of conference proceedings;
- □ Translation;
- Accommodation and/or travel for non-paying delegates (*keynote speakers, or participants from Africa only*);
- Bursaries/support for participants with appropriate backgrounds and/or experience that would be useful to include in order to achieve the conference objectives (*limited to participants from developing countries, and specifically from Africa*);
- Given the competitive nature of the programme and budgetary limitations, funding is not guaranteed, and the NRF will only make a contribution to the event.

Costs for non-scientific activities e.g. cultural activities and social programmes will not qualify for consideration.

HOW ARE APPLICATIONS EVALUATED?

Proposals will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- A motivational statement concerning the nature of the conference, and its importance in the scholarly or professional field(s) within which it is located;
- Clear anticipated benefit to South Africa in hosting the conference, the host institution and broader scientific community;
- Alignment of the conference theme with the national priorities;
- Geographic distribution of delegates who are expected to be in attendance, including effective participation of delegates from Africa;

- Proof of other sources of funding or efforts being made to secure additional funding (registration fees are not considered as additional funding). **At least two thirds of the total cost of the event must be sourced elsewhere;**
- Applications will further be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they are able to promote and establish South Africa as a science destination of choice
- Demonstration of how the conference has the potential to leverage potential medium- to long-term partnerships and collaboration;
- The applicant must be in possession of a PhD degree. Students and researchers from private/commercial institutions are not eligible to apply;
- The world body or equivalent of the association or professional body hosting the conference should provide proof of its support or allocation of the bid for hosting the event in South Africa, or abroad on behalf of South Africa;
- The conference should take place between **1 January 2027 and 31 December 2027;**
- Grants are limited to a maximum of R2 million per conference (and a minimum of R350 000), to be read in conjunction with a maximum one third contribution;
- In the context of a successful bid to host for a conference taking place beyond 2027, the NRF should be consulted for consideration of funding modalities, or potential seed support, for the period leading up to the conference. This is still dependant on the outcome of the competitive evaluation process in considering support. Normally, funding support will be provided in the year prior to the conference. When a decision has been taken to bid for a conference in the future, the NRF should be notified of the intent prior to the bidding process.
- ***Applicants have 3 days to query from date of email receipt should your application be rejected in the screening phase.***

APPLICATION PROCESS

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- 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 www.nrf.ac.za, with all the call documents.
 - Select the call for which you are applying for: **DSTI-NRF Conference Fund 2027.**
 - Complete all compulsory sections and the relevant non-compulsory sections (i.e. CV sections).
 - Please attach the required documents in PDF format as listed in the section below.
 - Remember to **submit** your application upon completion.
Completed applications will go to the host institution for verification before being forwarded to the NRF for further processing.
 - Incomplete applications will not be considered.
 - All applications should be submitted by **02 April 2026**. **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.

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The application must be accompanied by:

1. A list of the conference organising committee (a diversified committee comprising of researchers from different institutions is highly encouraged);
2. A list of local and international invited keynote speakers;
3. CVs of the organising committee members and invited keynote speakers;
4. A detailed draft or final version of the conference programme;
5. A letter of support/sponsorship/co-funding/part-funding from the international body;
6. Letters of support from hosting institutions;
7. Information on conference publicity (especially international) and outreach activities;
8. A separate detailed budget for the conference (please put only the amount you are requesting in the section titled 'Financials: Operating Costs');
9. Proof of other sources of funding and fundraising strategy.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Applicants will be assessed on various aspects as indicated in each section of the form.

REVIEW CRITERIA		ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTION
1. Track record of applicant (30%)	Letters of support from the hosting institutions	
	Proof of the world body or equivalent of the association/ professional body hosting the conference (10%)	
	Conference co-organised with renowned international body	
2. National & Global Relevance (30%)	The theme of the conference must be aligned to and address the DSI-NRF priorities (Grand Challenges)	
	Nature of the conference, and its importance in the scholarly or professional field(s) within which it is located	
	Impact and collaboration of the conference	
	Benefits to the host/the broader South African (SA) research community (promote SA as a science destination)	

Geographic distribution of keynote speakers. At least 25% of conference 3. Keynote Speakers & Participants: speakers should be from other African countries other than South Africa (excluding those working in South African institutions)	
REVIEW CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTION
Involvement of African countries & capacity building (20%)	Involvement of Postgraduate students
4. Transformation and Equity Redress (10%)	Involvement of HDIs
5. Financials (10%)	Proposed budget (min of R350 000 and max of R2 million per conference) Co-investment and other source of funding. At least two thirds of the total cost of the event must be sourced elsewhere

ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT CONDITIONS (AoC)

The AoC will accompany each formal letter of award. This should be signed by both the grant holder and the Designated Authority at the institution. The signed AoC should be endorsed and uploaded on the NRF system by the research office within 30 days of receipt. Funding will only be released for payment to the host institution upon receipt of the AoC by the NRF. Failure to comply may result in the NRF cancelling the award.

REPORTING AND PAYMENTS

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

A student attendance register is required to be made available during the event, including detailed information providing name, department, institution, study level and demographics.

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Each event should be reported upon no later than 30 days after the event. Grant payments will be made directly to the institution of the applicant.

CONTACTS

For programme/content related queries:

Please send an email to:

E-mail: conferencefund@nrf.ac.za

For technical related queries:

Please send an email to: E-mail: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za

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