

FBIP APPLICATION INSTRUCTION GUIDE

Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme (FBIP)

FBIP Small Grants

Call year: 2026

Proposals for small, strategic projects that address critical gaps relevant to foundational biodiversity information and knowledge are invited.

Programme background information:

The primary focus of the Programme is to generate, mobilize, coordinate, and make accessible foundational biodiversity knowledge in line with the needs of society, the Department of Science & Innovation (DSI) Global Change Programme, and the bioeconomy. The priority knowledge needs relate to species occurrence, species identity, population abundance, and DNA information, particularly barcoding. This type of information is often referred to as “fundamental” or “foundational” because it forms the basis of so many other aspects of biodiversity research and decision-making.

Application process:

There are two application windows for FBIP Small Grants (Review Period 1 & 2). Please refer to the **NRF General Application Guide 2026** for the number of applications allowed within an application category within a call year and cut-off dates.

The NRF will publish the One Call for Applications for funding in February 2026 (Review Period 1). The One Call includes applications for FBIP Small Grants (Review Period 1) which must be submitted electronically on the new NRF Connect system at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/>. Instructions for Review Period 2 will be published later.

Applicants applying for FBIP grants must read the **FBIP Framework Document and Funding Guide** to make sure that all the essential information is submitted through the proposals. The FBIP Framework Document and Funding Guide is available on the NRF website.

Applications must reach the NRF by the cut-off dates as indicated in Appendix 1 of the **NRF General Application Guide 2026**.

FBIP Specific Instructions:

It is recommended that applicants follow the standard NRF application instructions along with the FBIP-specific instructions below.

We also recommend that applicants pay special attention to the review criteria and scorecards highlighted in the FBIP Framework Document and Funding Guide.

Note: Small Grant proposals must score a minimum of 3 points for two of the criteria in order to be eligible for funding: (a) Feasibility and (b) Impacts and Outputs.

- Feasibility: Proposals that do not include a very detailed work plan, including a breakdown of activities, details of the timeframes, and the personnel involved, are generally scored below the threshold score of 3.

- Impact and Outputs: The extent to which the outputs are in line with the FBIP targets is assessed, as well as the impact of these outputs in terms of who would use them and how they contribute to global change understanding or the bioeconomy.

A top-scoring proposal: (1) Has a sharply defined strategic gap; (2) clearly demonstrates alignment to FBIP and national strategies; (3) quantifies outputs precisely; (4) shows measurable impact; (5) has a detailed, realistic work plan and clearly justified budget; (6) has a strong data submission and sharing plan; and (7) identifies specific knowledge users.

FBIP instructions for sections and categories on the NRF call application template:

Project Information

The maximum duration for FBIP Small Projects is two years. Project funding will commence in 2026 (Review Period 1). Data generated through projects funded by the FBIP must be made available no later than 26 months after the starting date of the project.

Details of Research:

- Potential Impact and Outputs

“Impact” refers to the influence derived from research outcomes. FBIP Instruction: Indicate the relevance of the proposed activities to Global Change understanding and/or the Bioeconomy. Avoid generic statements; instead, be specific (e.g., “This project will generate 1,200 georeferenced occurrence records...”). You must quantify the number of records, specimens to be digitized, species barcoded, and other measurable outputs. The return on investment must be explicitly assessable by the reviewers.

FBIP instruction:

Please indicate the relevance of the proposed activities in relation to the impact on Global Change understanding and /or the Bio-Economy knowledge field(s). Describe what will change because of the project, who will use the knowledge and information and for what purpose, and in what way users will be able to access the information / knowledge.

Avoid generic statements such as: “This project will contribute to biodiversity knowledge.” Instead, be specific, e.g. “This project will generate 1,200 georeferenced occurrence records for soil arthropods in under-sampled grassland regions of the Free State, enabling improved ecosystem service modelling under projected climate scenarios.” You must quantify the number of records, specimens to be digitized, species barcoded species pages and other measurable outputs. In other words, the return on investment needs to be explicitly assessed and must be assessable by the reviewers.

- Problem Statement

The “research problem” statement refers to an area of concern, a condition to be improved upon, a challenge to be explored, a difficulty to be eliminated, or a scholarly question that requires further interrogation to ground theory and praxis, that points to the need for meaningful understanding and deliberate investigation.

FBIP instruction:

Provide a brief introduction and indicate why the project is needed. Do not write a general introduction to biodiversity; instead, write a focused, strategic gap statement. For example, “Currently, no digitized Darwin Core-compliant occurrence data exist for freshwater macroinvertebrates in X catchment, limiting national freshwater assessment reporting.”

- Rationale and Literature Review

Provide context together with a brief review of the literature. Small grants must explicitly align with one of the three required national strategies: Bioeconomy Strategy (2013), Biodiversity Economy Strategy (2015), or National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2015–2025) .

FBIP instruction:

Provide the context of the proposed project together with a brief review of the literature and other relevant resources. State the strategic importance of the project and how it is relevant to this call.

You must: (1) demonstrate awareness of current knowledge, (2) show that the work has not already been done, (3) position the project within FBIP objectives and lastly indicate alignment with one of the three required national strategies.

Small grants **must explicitly align with:** Bioeconomy Strategy (2013), OR Biodiversity Economy Strategy (2015), OR National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2015–2025).

- Aims and Objectives

- Aims are the broad statements of desired outcomes/ the general intentions of the research, which 'paint a picture' of an envisaged research project.
- The objectives of the research provide an accurate description of the specific actions the researcher intends to take in accomplishing research aims.

FBIP instruction:

No FBIP specific instructions.

- Methodology and Proposed Research Plan

- The research methodology describes the rationale for the application of specific procedures or techniques used to identify, collect, select, and analyse information applied to understanding the research problem, thereby allowing the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability.
- Please ensure that a full proposed research plan outlining activities, who will be involved in each activity, where they will be done (with details of how many individuals / samples / sites etc.) and timelines are included in this section, and this should substantiate the requested budget.

FBIP instruction:

Provide a full research plan outlining activities, personnel involved, locations, and timelines. Proposals often fail due to lack of detail regarding data capture workflow, quality control, or data submission plans. For third-party data, all owners must sign a consent form.

Proposals often fail because details of one or more of the following are not provided: activity plan and purpose, exact number of sites / samples / specimens, responsible individuals, timeline (start and end dates per activity), data capture workflow, quality control process and also data submission plan.

Note: For projects involving the capturing of third party data (i.e. not belonging to the Grantholder), all data owners will need to sign a consent form (examples of Third Party Data Release Agreements are attached to the FBIP Framework Document and Funding Guide, Appendix C and/or D). The consent form will be provided by the NRF upon awarding the grant. The signed consent form must be submitted to the FBIP Manager.

- Transformation

Give a brief description of how your research complies with transformational objectives relevant to the particular call. Some or all of the following transformation contributions may be highlighted:

- Summary of the young researchers who will be involved in the project;
- General or specialist training to be offered to postgraduate students and young researchers;
- Support for postgraduate students and young researchers to attend and present at science meetings;
- Collaborative initiatives with HDIs;
- Involvement of women and black students and researchers in the project;
- Special support offered to disadvantaged students.

FBIP instruction:

Clearly document what will be produced and quantify data outputs (e.g., 1,000 primary records, barcode data for 50 species). When assessed, the return on investment will be considered in terms of how many

records generated / mobilised, species pages compiled, or species / specimens barcoded.

In other words, to ensure that reviewers can assess numerical contributions to the FBIP performance indicators, applicants must quantify the number of Darwin Core occurrence records, species to be barcoded and submitted to BOLD, species pages to be compiled, number of peer-reviewed publications and also the data to be integrated into SANBI portal.

- **Alignment to National Imperatives**

Please outline how this will contribute/is aligned to one or more national priorities/strategies/imperatives. For example, here you can start your sentence by writing: "This project aligns with the Biodiversity Economy Strategy (2015) through..."

FBIP instruction:

Provide a clear and realistic explanation of how the project contributes to these national aspirations. The applicant must clearly explain how the project aligns with the Biodiversity Economy Strategy (2015).

Note: FBIP projects must explicitly align with and contribute to the implementation of one of the following national strategies: The Bioeconomy Strategy of the Department of Science and Technology (2013); Biodiversity Economy Strategy (Bes) for the Department of Environmental Affairs (2015); or South Africa's 2nd National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2015-2025.

- **Data Management and Utilisation**

Provide a summary of what processes and systems will be used to compile and manage data for the project. This could include a list of data fields that will be included in the data set, the software that will be used, how data will be captured, who will be responsible for the data capture and management, and whether any data quality checking and upgrading will be carried out. If there are other plans for long-term data management and dissemination, briefly discuss these.

FBIP instruction:

Applicants must describe the data format (Darwin Core), software used, data capture method, who is responsible, quality control, data storage, and more importantly timeline for submission of the data produced (within 26 months). It should also explain if and when barcoding will be deposited in BOLD. Additionally, if sequencing is done overseas, applications require strong motivation (note that expenditure of >30% of the budget outside the country is not allowed).

Note: Data generated through projects funded by the FBIP must be made available no later than 26 months after the starting date of the project. More information about data standards and data release requirements can be found in the FBIP Framework Document and Funding Guide in Appendix A (Format and Standards for Data Submission) and Appendix B (Data Release Requirements).

Attachments

Please consult the Call documents to determine the compulsory attachments.

FBIP instruction:

Any supporting documentation should this be deemed necessary.

Ethical Clearance

- Select whether this project requires ethical clearance from an international or national research ethics committee.
- If this project requires ethical clearance, select whether it has been obtained and add any relevant comments.
- Upload proof of granting of ethical clearance, if available.

FBIP instruction:

Under “Ethical clearance”, please also indicate that due consideration has been given to all permitting requirements, including section 20 permits, export permits, and third-party data consent. Upload proof, if available, in the Attachments section, otherwise clearly state how these will be dealt with in the application. Making ethical and permitting issues more explicit and transparent in the protocol will assist the review process.

Note: Any material sent outside the country for analysis must have the required Material Transfer Agreements and export permits.

Reviewers

This is a compulsory field on the standard NRF online template. FBIP Small Grant proposals submitted will be peer-reviewed by a panel. Panels will be selected based on their broad experience in terms of the respective knowledge field and their research standing.

Financials: Operating Costs

Please ensure that you read all the Call Information Documents and abide by the eligibility rules.

FBIP instruction:

The total amount requested should not exceed R350,000 per project. Funding will be made available for a maximum of two years for research activities commencing in 2026. Research related costs should be justified and correspond with the scope of the planned project activities and outputs. Guidelines are provided in the FBIP Framework Document and Funding Guide, Page 25 - 29.

Proposals often fail due to problems with the budget. Ensure that all budget items are sufficiently detailed and motivated (including sequencing costs and overseas analyses/services). Travel and subsistence expenses should be detailed, well-motivated, realistic and economic (i.e., it should be budgeted for with the same care as if the applicant were using personal funds). Where relevant, technical support allocation must be clear and well-motivated. This funding instrument does not cover the following: postgraduate bursaries, postdoctoral fellowships, purchasing of large equipment, overheads and publication page charges.

- Exclusions: This instrument does not cover postgraduate bursaries, postdoctoral fellowships, purchasing of large equipment, overheads, or publication page charges.

Financials: Student support

Note: FBIP Small Grants exclude postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellowships support. All postgraduate students will be expected to apply on the NRF Online Submission System by accessing the link: at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/>

National Infrastructure Platforms

Follow NRF instructions.

Science Engagement

Follow NRF instructions.

Note: FBIP Small Grant proposals will **not** be scored in this category although applicants are encouraged to contribute to this initiative.

Participating Members

Follow NRF instructions.

FBIP instruction:

All roles must be explicitly described.

Checklist before submission

1. Are project’s proposed outputs realistic, clearly explained and suitably quantified?

2. Is the work plan sufficiently detailed to allow evaluation of the project's feasibility?
3. Is the timeline and work plan realistically aligned with one another and with the project's aims/objectives?
4. Is the project's wider significance and impact clearly described?
5. Is the project's alignment Global Change and/or Bioeconomy explicitly described?
6. Are data sharing and standards clearly described, and do they conform to FBIP standards?
7. Does the proposal mention and explain the intended users of the knowledge that will be generated?
8. Is the budget detailed, with all line items motivated and aligned with the aims and overall workplan?
9. Are permits and ethical issues considered?
10. Is the project's return on investment clear and quantified?

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