



science & innovation

Department:  
Science and Innovation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National  
Research  
Foundation



MINISTRY OF SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGY OF  
THE PEOPLES' REPUBLIC  
OF CHINA

## South Africa - China Young Scientist Exchange Programme

(YSEP)

2025 Call

### Information background

The Young Scientists Exchange Programme (YSEP) is a joint initiative between South Africa and China. It is funded by the Governments of South Africa and China with the aim of cultivating future leading scientists between the two countries. It will, through the support of sabbaticals, promote cross border exchanges of excellent young scientists, scholars and researchers between the two countries and enhance cooperation among research institutes, universities and enterprises in an effort to increase the research outputs (i.e. publications in scientific journals and academic papers, new patents and innovative products) by early to mid-career researchers.

### Aims of the Programme

This Programme aims to:

- facilitate the placement of both South African and Chinese early to mid-career researchers at the public research institutions of both countries for a minimum period of three months and a maximum period of twelve months;
- enhance and strengthen collaboration, build research capacity and enhance career opportunities for researchers in South Africa and China;
- foster long-term relations between South African and Chinese early to mid-career researchers through regular interactions, embarking on research activities of mutual interest and accessing each other's centres of excellence and/or laboratories for joint research projects; and
- foster collaboration in order to improve the quality of research outputs by South African and Chinese emerging to early-career researchers

## Areas of Cooperation

The 2025 YSEP Call invites applicants working within the following thematic areas:

- Modernising the mining industry
- Biotechnology (application in modernising agriculture and health innovation, etc.)
- Energy innovation (new energy and renewable energy including the hydrogen economy)
- Space science and technology including astronomy
- Marine science
- High performance computing
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)

## Duration of the projects

Duration has to be agreed between the partnering institutions (the sending and the host institution), preferably 3, 6 or 12 months. The 12 months can be split into six months visits.

## Who may apply?

Candidates applying must meet the eligibility criteria outlined below.

### **For South African researchers interested in hosting their Chinese partners**

- South African researchers interested in hosting their Chinese partners at their home institutions must ensure that their Chinese partners are working researchers residing in the People's Republic of China and based at a Chinese government funded University or research institute, or a national - or provincial- level innovative enterprise. Interested South African researchers will apply to the NRF to host their Chinese partners. Funds will be disbursed to the South African host institution to manage for the visiting Chinese researcher.
- Partnering researchers (both the hosting South African researcher and the visiting Chinese researcher) must not be older than 45 years of age.
- Partnering researchers (both the hosting South African researcher and the visiting Chinese researcher) must have completed a Doctoral degree or over five years of research experience.
- Partnering researchers must have a clearly defined and mutually beneficial research proposal agreed to among themselves.
- Partnering researchers must have an excellent English language proficiency.

### **For South African researchers interested in visiting their Chinese partners**

South African Researchers interested in visiting their Chinese partners must apply through their Chinese partners in accordance with the Call issued on the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) of China website: <http://www.most.gov.cn>.

### **Application Requirements**

#### **For South African researchers interested in hosting their Chinese partners**

South African researchers interested in hosting their Chinese partners must provide an official letter of invitation and support from the South African research host institution. An official letter must clearly demonstrate:

- the alignment of the researcher's proposed research with the host's research expertise; and
- the availability of research space in the host institution (i.e. running costs, laboratory and office space as well as office and laboratory equipment for the Chinese researcher's stay).

As part of the application, South African researchers must include an official letter confirming their Chinese partners' affiliation to a Chinese government funded university or research institution, or a national - or provincial- level innovative enterprise. An official letter must clearly demonstrate:

- that the researcher is employed/ affiliated to the Chinese government funded university or research institution, or the national - or provincial- level innovative enterprise; and
- that the researcher has been granted approval by their home institution to undertake a sabbatical fellowship to South Africa.

#### **For South African researchers interested in visiting their Chinese partners**

South African Researchers interested in visiting their Chinese partners must directly consult their Chinese partners or the executive agency (TBD) of MOST of China regarding the application requirements and visit the MOST of China website at: <http://www.most.gov.cn> for such information.

### **Funding limits**

#### **For South African researchers interested in hosting their Chinese partners**

- The maximum grant value for an all-inclusive 3-months sabbatical is R150 000(i.e. R50 000 per month).

- The maximum grant value for an all-inclusive 6-months sabbatical is R300 000 (i.e. R50 000 per month).
- The maximum grant value for an all-inclusive 12-months sabbatical is R600 000 (i.e. R50 000 per month).
- Please note that the host institution is expected to top-up this grant value should it not be sufficient. The grant is meant to cover the cost of the visiting Chinese researcher including living expenses, domestic ground transport, and round-trip flight tickets for the duration of the research stay in South Africa.
- The funding shall be allocated by the NRF to specific South African host institutions, which then makes arrangements for the incoming Chinese researcher.

### **For South African researchers interested in visiting their Chinese partners**

South African Researchers interested in visiting their Chinese partners must directly consult their Chinese partners or the executive agency of MOST of China regarding the funding limits and visit the MOST of China website at: <http://www.most.gov.cn> for such information.

### **Application Process,**

Chinese researchers interested in visiting their South African partners must submit the applications through their South African partners to the NRF in South Africa (through the following link:<https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/>). South African researchers interested in visiting their Chinese partners must submit the applications through their Chinese partners to the executive agency of MOST of China in accordance with the Call issued on the MOST of China website: <http://www.most.gov.cn>. The two executive agencies will review the applications and make final award decisions respectively. The two executive agencies will notify their final award decisions to each other.

**South African researchers interested in hosting their Chinese partners should follow the application procedure outlines below:**

- Applications must be submitted through an online application process to the NRF by accessing the link: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/>.
- Register/Login using your ID/Passport number and password.
- Go to “My Applications” and select “Create Application”.
- Go to “Research Grants: International”.
- Select the call for which you are applying for: **South Africa-China YSEP 2025**.

- Remember to complete all sections of the application as indicated on the online application form.
- Please attach the necessary documents in PDF file in the following order:
  - Official letter of invitation and support from the South African research host institution.
  - Official letter from the incoming Chinese researcher confirming affiliation to a Chinese government funded University or research institution, or a national - or provincial- level innovative enterprise
  - Curriculum Vitae (CV) of the South African host researcher.
  - Curriculum Vitae (CV) of the incoming Chinese researcher.
- Remember to submit your application on completion.
- Incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria as outlined in this document will not be considered.
- Applications submitted outside the NRF Online Submission System will not be accepted.
- No hard copies will be accepted and will automatically be disqualified by the NRF.
- Please contact the individuals indicated at the end of this document, if you have any queries.

**South African researchers wishing to visit their Chinese partners** must consult their Chinese partners or the executive agency of MOST of China regarding the application procedure and visit the MOST website at: <http://www.most.gov.cn> for such information.

### **Selection Criteria**

Applications that meet the eligibility criteria, and that are completed appropriately, will be subjected to a competitive merit review process. An independent and external review committee will consider all applications and recommend applications for awards to the NRF. The reviewers are selected by the NRF from existing reviewer databases and other sources.

Selection criteria will be based on the assessment criteria in the form of a scorecard indicated in Annex I. The NRF will make a final decision on funding based on the recommendation by the expert reviewers.

**Only a maximum of 10 grants** (3-months, 6-months and 12-months combined) will be awarded.

## **Conditions of Award**

Successful applicants will be required to complete and sign the NRF Conditions of Grant contract that will be forwarded at the time of award. The Conditions of Grant contract will require the signatures of three parties; the incoming Chinese researcher, the South African host researcher and the Designated Authority of the host institution. This contract will stipulate terms and conditions for the awards (e.g. how funds should be utilised, unspent funds at the end of the sabbatical, transfer of the grant, cancellation of the grant, etc.).

## **Reporting**

Applicants will be required to submit an exit report to the NRF at the end of the exchange programme. This report should be submitted by the South African host researchers on behalf of their Chinese partners. The report should detail the incoming Chinese researcher's overall experience, achievements and outputs as well as any future plans for collaboration. The format of the exit report will be provided by the NRF.

## **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.

## **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.

## 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-and-scholarly-publishing-practices/>.

## 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>.

## Closing date for applications

The cut-off date for submission of applications to the NRF is **Friday, 31 March 2025**. Applications that are submitted after the specified date will not be considered or accepted by the NRF.

## Contact details for queries

### National Research Foundation (NRF)

Email: [supportdesk@nrf.ac.za](mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za)

For content related queries:

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### MOST of China

For content related queries:

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## Annex I

### Scorecard for the Assessment of Proposals for South Africa-China 2024 YSEP Call

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Sub-Criteria</b>	<b>Weight (Total = 100%)</b>
<b>Track Record of Applicant</b>	Applicant expertise/training that will enable the applicant to successfully undertake the proposed research.	10%
	The applicant's research track record: peer-reviewed publications, conference proceedings, research prizes, and awards.	10%
<b>Scientific and Technical quality of proposed research</b>	Literature review with citations, the significance of the research in terms of the problem statement, aims, and objectives. Scientific contribution; originality and new knowledge to be generated.	20%
	Research design and methodology developed to address the aims of the research. Provision of work plan and feasible timelines and milestones for the research.	20%
	Alignment with national (at applicant's home country) and institutional research priorities (at host institution).	5%
<b>Institutional Support</b>	Institutional support for the fellow through infrastructure and facilities for an enabling environment.	10%
<b>Potential Research Outputs and Impact of the collaboration</b>	Details of envisaged realistic outputs of the research such as publications, conference proceedings, toolkits, policy documents, etc.	5%
	Contribution to the development of the fellow's research skills in a priority research area (human capacity development of the applicant).	10%
	Potential for socio-economic impact of the research in South Africa and in China.	10%