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**From:** Januarie, V, Me [venita@sun.ac.za] <venita@sun.ac.za>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 23 February 2021 10:31  
**Subject:** NRF CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: AFRICAN ORIGINS PLATFORM (AOP)  
**Attachments:** AOP Framework Document 2021\_Final.pdf

*Let asb daarop dat hierdie inligting aan 'n verspreidingslys van alle US-navorsers gestuur word. Dit mag dus wees dat hierdie spesifieke oproep nie van toepassing is op u studieveld nie. Ons vertrou dat van die ander NNS oproepe wel relevant sal wees. / Please note that this information is sent to a distribution list of all SU researchers. It may, therefore, be that this specific call is not applicable to your specific research field. We trust that some of the other NRF calls will be relevant.*

Beste Kollegas/ Dear Colleagues

Die NRF het sopas die volgende 2021/2022 Oproep vir Aansoeke uitgestuur/ The NRF has just launched the following 2021/2022 Call for Applications.

### **African Origins Platform (SU application deadline: 23 April 2021)**

- A PhD is not an applicant prerequisite.
- Rated and unrated researchers can apply for three years funding (2022-2024) in this call.
- Applicants must be doing **paleontological research**.
- Full-time employees at recognised research institutions in South Africa are invited to apply.
- Part-time employees on contract at recognized research institutions in South Africa may apply, on condition that their appointment is for (at least) the duration of the project applied for in the submission. The length of the contract should be stated in the application.
- Salaries must be paid by the research institution and the **primary employment of the individual concerned must be at that institution**. A contract researcher appointed at a research institution on behalf of a third party to fulfil a very specific function does not qualify for support.

- Retired academics/researchers, provided that they meet all set criteria as stipulated in 3.2 in attached framework document.
- Students, including PhD Candidates and Postdoctoral Fellows are **NOT eligible to apply as principal investigators** in this call. They may, however, find support for their proposed research by embedding this into applications submitted by eligible principal investigators as detailed above.
- Applications for own degree purposes will **not be considered**.

Applicants wanting to access this ring-fenced funding should note the following:

- The African Engagement allocation **includes grantholder-linked postdoctoral support**. As such, the total application cannot exceed **R1 000 000 per year**;
- The allocation is only for the financial support for researchers based in or associated with South African institutions (and as per conditions of eligibility) and students based at public research institutions that are recognised by directive of the Minister of Science and Innovation. These include mainly, Public Universities, Museums and Science Councils.
- In addition to the funding categories outlined in Section 4.3 of the attached framework, successful applicants accessing this ring-fenced funding will be eligible to apply for:
  - Controlled access to fossil sites, collections and data within South Africa or in the rest of Africa;
  - Conferences, seminars and/or workshops within the African continent; and
  - Per diem costs for African collaborators and students, when these are in South Africa.

### **Application Process**

**All applications must be completed and submitted on the NRF online system: <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za/nrfmkii/Default.aspx> by the **SU application deadline (23 April 2021)**. Applications will then go through an internal review process and feedback will be provided directly to applicants, where necessary.**

Kindly refer to the **attached framework document** for detailed information regarding application instructions, including: Project Information, Details of Research, Potential Impact and Outputs, Methodology and Proposed Research Plan, Alignment to National Imperatives, Data Management and Utilisation, Attachments, Ethical Clearance, and Financials.

**Contact Person**

**Venita Januarie**

[venita@sun.ac.za](mailto:venita@sun.ac.za)

*This notice was sent to you by the Division for Research Development (DRD) of Stellenbosch University.*

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**Ms Venita Januarie | BSc, PGCE, BEdHons, MEd**

Koördineerder: Nasionale Navorsingstoekennings | Coordinator: National Grants

Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling | Division for Research Development

e: [venita@sun.ac.za](mailto:venita@sun.ac.za) | t: +27 21 808 9017 | a: RW Wilcocks Building , Ryneveldstraat | Ryneveld Street



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***AFRICAN ORIGINS PLATFORM (AOP)***

***FUNDING INSTRUMENT***

**KNOWLEDGE ADVANCEMENT AND SUPPORT**

**Framework Document and Funding Guide**

**February 2021**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The National Research Foundation (NRF) recognises that in order for South Africa to be internationally competitive and to meaningfully contribute to the global economy, the country must have the capability to understand the knowledge it produces, and that produced by others. This understanding can best be developed in part through producing new knowledge and translating and developing existing knowledge. Publicly-funded basic and applied research is critical for innovation and potentially, international competitiveness.

The NRF views support for basic disciplinary, multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research as an investment in the country's learning and knowledge production capabilities and capacities. Such research is considered critical for innovation and potentially, international competitiveness. The African Origins Platform (AOP) is a discipline- and transdisciplinary-based and demand-driven funding instrument. It is restricted to the field of palaeosciences, widely defined.

## 1.1 Description of Funding Instrument

The African Origins Platform (AOP) is a highly competitive, discipline-specific funding instrument which supports research, skills development and infrastructure in the palaeosciences<sup>1</sup>. South Africa's obvious geographic advantage in palaeontological, palaeoanthropological and archaeological research necessitates that the country emerges as a globally leading center for research excellence in these fields of study. The AOP has the potential to bring unparalleled opportunities for cutting edge research, African and other international collaboration, innovative teaching and training programmes. The AOP is also uniquely placed to facilitate the public understanding of the story of life on Earth, and to contribute to nation-building by detailing the story of humankind in a way that appeals to all sectors of society. This, in turn, will stimulate an interest in palaeosciences, which will stimulate *inter alia* palaeo-tourism, thus contributing directly to poverty alleviation through job creation.

As a competitive funding instrument, funding will be prioritized to the top scoring applications. The NRF also takes into consideration the strategic imperatives of the NRF and the Department of Science and Innovation such as transformation, alignment with the research and public engagement goals as detailed in the 2012 South African Strategy for the

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<sup>1</sup> Within this framework document the term palaeosciences includes palaeontology, palaeoanthropology, archaeology and related disciplines, unless stated otherwise.

Palaeosciences (The Palaeo Strategy). The Palaeo Strategy highlights 5 goals, and outlines implementation plans for each. The implementation plans represent the Department of Science and Innovation's (DSI) aims to widen the reach of the field of palaeosciences to ensure a better understanding of the story of life on Earth. This includes the story of humankind, which is an important endeavour for nation-building. The African Origins Platform represents a grouping of interventions that support some of these strategic goals, thus facilitating palaeosciences advancement in South Africa. The strategic goals of the Palaeo Strategy are as follows:

- **To transform the minds of South Africans;**
- **To support the country's universities;**
- **To empower museums to increase research;**
- **To resource South Africa's heritage agencies; and**
- **To make SA the destination of choice for palaeo-tourism**

**Social Sciences, Law and Humanities applications are especially encouraged**, as are applications addressing innovation, defined in the broadest sense. Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider the goals of the Palaeo Strategy and to integrate these innovatively into their research proposals. Proposals that do not integrate one or more of the goals of the Palaeo Strategy will not be prioritized for funding.

## **1.2 African Engagements**

Within the context of the above, the African Origins Platform funding instrument will ring-fence **a total of R1 000 000 per year (R3 000 000 for the funding period 2022-2024)** for research or research-based activities and the associated human capacity development in collaboration with African counterparts. Applications will comply with all the eligibility criteria and rules of participation detailed for the African Origins Platform funding instrument, with the exceptions noted below. This allocation has been set aside by the Department of Science and Innovation to encourage collaboration with African partners in Palaeosciences research and to create an enabling environment for South African researchers to engage with their African counterparts in the field. Successful applications will show evidence of a coordinated and proactive engagement with counterparts on the African continent (outside of South Africa). Applicants conducting research in SADC countries will be prioritized.



**Applicants wanting to access this ring-fenced funding should note the following:**

- The African Engagement allocation includes grantholder-linked postdoctoral support. As such, **the total application** cannot exceed R1 000 000 per year;

The allocation is **only** for the financial support for researchers based in or associated with South African institutions (and as per conditions of eligibility) and students based at public research institutions that are recognised by directive of the Minister of Science and Innovation. These include mainly, Public Universities, Museums and Science Councils.

**In addition to the funding categories outlined in Section 5.2, successful applicants accessing this ring-fenced funding will be eligible to apply for:**

- Controlled access to fossil sites, collections and data within South Africa or in the rest of Africa;
- Conferences, seminars and/or workshops within the African continent; and
- Per diem costs for African collaborators and students, when these **are in South Africa**

**Applicants wanting to access this ring-fenced funding will NOT be eligible to apply for the following:**

- Research-related costs for African collaborators;
- Salaries or stipend costs for African collaborators
- Bursaries or stipend costs for students not registered at a recognized South African university as detailed above.

**Applicants wanting to access this ring-fenced funding MUST indicate this on the online application form as part of the application title**

## 2 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The mandate of the NRF is to support and promote research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the necessary research facilities so as to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of science and technology, including indigenous knowledge and thereby to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of all the people of the Republic (NRF Act, 1998).

In support of its purpose, the NRF's *Strategy 2025, and the NRF Vision 2030*, aspire to contribute to the development of *a vibrant and globally connected national system of innovation*.

### Strategy 2025

NRF Strategy 2025 is an implementation framework for the ten-year vision. This strategy is centred on the NRF's desire to contribute to national development through research with impact. The strategic outcomes include:

- i. A transformed (internationally competitive and sustainable) research workforce;
- ii. Enhanced impact of the research enterprise;
- iii. Enhanced impact of science engagement; and
- iv. A transformed organisation that lives its culture and values.

### Vision 2030

The overall objectives for 2030 are to shape, influence and impact the national research system; to establish the NRF as a thought leader and source of knowledge within the science sector; to create a clear causal relationship between research and national development; to have a transformative effect on the national research enterprise and the relationship between science and society; and to enable, initiate, facilitate and perform excellent research with direct and indirect impact, whether immediate or long-term, that extends the frontiers of knowledge and addresses national challenges.

## 2.1 Environmental scan

The AOP funding instrument resonates with the NRF mandate by being cognisant of the role that research plays in the innovation and the commercialisation value chain, and hence the socio-economic development of the country.

While it is recognised that the innovation value chain requires basic, strategic and applied research, the emphasis in *this* funding instrument will primarily be on the support of both basic research and applied research<sup>2</sup>. In order to participate in an international system of innovation, a nation needs to produce knowledge and understand the knowledge produced by others. Support for basic disciplinary research is thus seen as an investment in a society's learning capabilities (Salter and Martin, 2001).

At the same time, this funding instrument acknowledges that basic and applied research are a continuum and inter-dependent (ICSU, 2004) and that increasingly, the notion of "frontier research" is gaining purchase internationally, as it transcends the distinction of basic and applied research and refers to leading edge research which is risky and often across different disciplines.

Social Sciences, Law and Humanities applications are especially encouraged, to enable support traditionally skewed towards the natural sciences, engineering and health science. The NRF continues to support self-initiated bottom-up research ideas and research that address national strategic initiatives as reflected in national strategies like the National Development Plan, the 10-year Innovation Plan and those that are embedded in our geographic advantage areas. The NRF also supports the African Union Agenda 2063 priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals as contained in the United Nations 2030 of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In respect to the social sciences and humanities however, the NRF would like to highlight the fact that it is supportive and committed to working closely with the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) on the advancement of social sciences and the humanities scholarship in South Africa.

## 2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the funding instrument are:

- To contribute to knowledge production about South Africa's palaeosciences in the Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and the Humanities;
- To achieve world-class research in the palaeosciences, including a renewed prioritization of previously identified vulnerable or critical skill areas (as per the

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<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> The [Frascati Manual](#) (OECD, 2002) defines **Basic research** as experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundation of phenomena and observable facts, without any particular application or use in view. It further defines **Applied research** as also original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge. It is, however directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective.

2012 Palaeosciences Strategy);

- To advance or develop paradigms, theories and methodological innovation relating to the palaeosciences;
- To develop a comprehensive pipeline of human capacity in the palaeosciences, from past graduate training to emerging researchers, to established researchers;
- To ensure meaningful public awareness activities so as to raise the national and international visibility of South African palaeosciences research; and
- To develop sustainable and inclusive community engagement activities.

### **2.3 NRF Perspective**

The AOP Funding Instrument is a demand-driven funding instrument and will serve to develop and expand palaeosciences research excellence. This is in line with the NRF's view that support for research is an investment in South Africa's learning capabilities. The funding instrument directly, and in part, addresses the following strategic objectives of the *NRF Strategy 2025*:

- A transformed (internationally competitive and sustainable) research workforce;
- Enhanced impact of the research enterprise; and
- Enhanced impact of science engagement (SE).

### **2.4 Institutional structure**

The strategic direction and outcomes of the funding instrument are managed by the Knowledge Advancement and Support (KAS) Directorate. The Reviews and Evaluation (RE) Directorate is responsible for the review processes up to the recommendations of grant awards. RE is also responsible for writing feedback to unsuccessful applicants. The Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) Directorate's responsibilities include posting of the research call, disbursement of grant funds and ensuring adherence to the conditions of the grant.

### **2.5 Financing support**

Funding for the AOP Funding Instrument is made possible through contract funding from the DSI. The DSI will fund a three-year cycle of research funding from 2022-2024. As a demand-driven funding instrument, there is no limit to the amount an applicant can request. Having said this, the financial requests need to be in line with requirements and accurately reflect

the financial needs of the proposed work. **Excessive budget requests are not well received by the review panels.** Applications will be scored according to a scorecard (see **Annexure 1**). The final number of successful applicants that will be supported will be determined by the available budget, which is approximately R10 000 000.00 (ten million Rand) per year for 2022-2024. This amount includes research-related costs **and** postdoctoral fellowships.

## 2.6 Key stakeholders

The key stakeholders in this funding instrument are persons doing research in the fields of palaeosciences, based at public research institutions that are recognised by directive of the Minister of Science and Technology. These include mainly, Public Universities, Museums and Science Councils.

## 2.7 Information sources

International Council for Science (ICSU) 2004. The value of basic scientific research, <http://www.icsu.org/publications/icsu-position-statements/value-scientific-research/the-value-of-basic-scientific-research>

National Government 2012. *National Development Plan 2030: Our future, make it work.* [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf)

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2002 *Frascati Manual: Proposed standard practice for surveys on Research and Experimental Development* [http://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/resource/DMP/DMP\\_Checklist\\_2013.pdf](http://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/resource/DMP/DMP_Checklist_2013.pdf)

Salter, AJ., and Martin, B (2001) The economic benefits of publicly funded basic research: a critical review. *Research Policy* 30(3):509-532

The African Union, 2015. *Agenda 2063*, <https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf>

The Department of Science and Technology, 2012. *The South African Strategy for the Palaeosciences.* [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf)

The Department of Science and Technology, 2013. *The ministerial guidelines for improving equity in the distribution of DST/NRF bursaries and fellowships.*

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[https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/paleostrategydstfinal.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/paleostrategydstfinal.pdf)

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The National Research Foundation, 2015, *Open Access Statement*, accessed at <http://ir.nrf.ac.za/page/policies>.

The National Research Foundation, 2020. *2025 Strategic Plan of the National Research Foundation: NRF Vision 2030*. Pretoria. National Research Foundation. South Africa.

United Nations, 2016. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

### 3 **MODUS OPERANDI**

#### 3.1 **Call for proposals**

All application materials **must** be submitted electronically via the NRF Online Submission System at <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za>.

All applications **must** be endorsed by the research office of the principal applicant before submission to the NRF. It is the responsibility of each applicant to familiarise himself / herself with the **internal closing dates**, set by institutions in order to meet the NRF closing date included in the “General Application Guide 2022”. **Incomplete OR late submissions will not be accepted for review.**

#### 3.2 **Eligibility**

- A PhD is not an applicant prerequisite;

- Rated and unrated researchers can apply for three years funding (2022-2024) in this call;
- Applicants must be doing paleontological research and must be employed by public research institutions as recognised by directive of the Minister of the Department of Science and Innovation;
- Full-time **employees** at recognised research institutions in South Africa are invited to apply;
- Part-time **employees** on contract at recognized research institutions in South Africa may apply, on condition that their appointment is for (at least) the duration of the project applied for in the submission. The length of the contract should be stated in the application form;
- Salaries must be paid by the research institution and the primary employment of the individual concerned must be at that institution. A contract researcher appointed at a research institution on behalf of a third party to fulfill a very specific function for the latter does not qualify for support.
- Retired academics/researchers if they meet all set criteria as stipulated below:
  - are resident in SA;
  - are formally affiliated to a South African Higher Education Institution (e.g., appointed as an emeritus professor, honorary research associate/professor, supernumerary/contract employee);
  - are active researchers with a distinguished track record in research and postgraduate student supervision;
  - are actively mentoring/training postgraduate students/young research staff and
  - the institution ensures that a minimum of reasonable time (6 months minimum) is spent at the facility for the purpose of research and research capacity development.
- **Students, including PhD Candidates and Postdoctoral Fellows are NOT eligible to apply** as principal investigators in this call. They may, however, find support for their proposed research by embedding this into applications submitted by eligible principal investigators as detailed above. ***Applications for own degree purposes will not be considered.***

### 3.3 Ethical clearance

It is the responsibility of the grantholder, in conjunction with the institution, 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 at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/media-room/news/statement-ethical-research-and-scholarly-publishing-practices>

### 3.4 Application assessment

The assessment of applications will be guided by a Panel Assessment Scorecard (**see Annexure 1**) and scored according to the Proposal Grading (**see Annexure 2**). **Annexure 3 details the pre-selected equity scores for each applicant, as applied to South African citizens and Permanent Residents. Non-South Africans or Permanent Residents will not be counted towards transformation, and will score as White Males or Females, as appropriate.**

Application assessment will occur by way of a two-tiered process:

- **Remote peer review**

The remote peer reviewers will be specialists in the ambit of the respective proposals. Requests for written reviews will be solicited electronically from national and international peers. Applicants will be requested to provide between 6 to 10 possible reviewers. It is in the applicant’s best interest to ensure that the selected reviewers are aware of the submission and are thus likely to respond. It is also in the applicant’s best interest to ensure that selected reviewers **have no possible conflict of interest** (project partners, academics in the same department, close personal or professional relationships, etc.). in submitting a review; as such review reports are dismissed without consideration. On average, a 30% response rate is achieved by the NRF in requesting any postal peer reviews.

- **Panel-peer review**

The adjudication panel will be broadly constituted to include senior academics, selected based both on their respective knowledge fields and their research standing. The panel



meeting will be held at a central location or by way of tele- or video-conferencing. Panel members will deliberate on submitted written reviews and will be expected to offer their own expert opinions.

NB: Applicants **must** ensure that their Curriculum Vitae are updated on the NRF Online Submission System at <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>

**These Curriculum Vitae are used in the assessment processes, and incomplete or outdated inputs will jeopardise the success of the application.**

### 3.5 Rules of participation

#### a) Principal Investigator

The principal investigator (PI) (i.e. the applicant) must be an active researcher who takes intellectual responsibility for the project, its conception, any strategic decisions required in its pursuit, and the communication of results. The PI must have the capacity to make a serious commitment to the project and cannot assume the role of a supplier of resources for work that will largely be placed in the hands of others. The PI will take responsibility for the management and administration of resources allocated to the grant award, and for the meeting of reporting requirements.

**The research team may also include:**

#### b) Co-investigators

A co-investigator (CI) is an active researcher who provides significant commitment, intellectual input and relevant expertise into the design and implementation of the research application. The CI will be involved in all or at least some well-defined research activities within the scope of the application. Only South Africa-based co-investigators will be eligible for funding in successful grant applications.

**It is important to note that postdoctoral fellows, students, technical and support staff**

**DO NOT qualify as co-investigators**

#### c) Research Associates / Collaborators

These individuals or groups make a relatively small, but meaningful contribution to the research endeavours outlined in the application, but do not participate in the research design. They are not considered as part of the core research team and are **not eligible** to receive NRF funds from the grant if the team's application is successful.

### 3.6 Data management and use

A data management Plan (DMP) is a **formal document** that describes the data you expect to acquire or generate during the course of a research project, how you will manage, describe, analyze, and store those data, and what mechanisms (including digital data storage) you will use at the end of your project **to share and preserve** your data. This may be included as an attachment to the application, or the information can be placed into the application template text, as preferred.

Research data sharing that underlies the findings reported in a journal article/conference paper/thesis as set out in the NRF Open Access Statement.

The findings reported in a journal article or conference paper should be deposited in accordance with the NRF Open Access Statement. It is acknowledged that some data generated are more sensitive than others. Before initiating the research, it is the grantholder's responsibility to consider the following: confidentiality, ethics, security and copyright. Possible data sharing challenges should be considered in the DMP with solutions to optimise data sharing.

Researchers should note that publicly funded research data should be in the public domain, with free and open access, by default. Collaborators and co-investigators in the research project should be informed by the applicant that due to public funding and funder mandate, one is expected to share research data as openly as possible. The Data Management Plan should indicate which data will be shared. If (some) research data is to be restricted, an appropriate statement in the DMP and subsequent publication should explain why access to data is restricted.

The National Research Foundation has adopted and is given permission to use the [DCC Checklist for Data Management Plan](#), and this can be used as a guide for developing the DMP.

([http://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/resource/DMP/DMP\\_Checklist\\_2013.pdf](http://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/resource/DMP/DMP_Checklist_2013.pdf))

### 3.7 Science Engagement

The NRF supports science engagement through its coordination and implementation of the Department of Science and Innovation's Science 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, technology, all aspects of the innovation chain and indigenous knowledge. Within this context, science engagement refers to activities, events, 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. Science engagement is an overarching term for all aspects of public engagement with science, science awareness, science education, science communication and science outreach, which aim to develop and benefit individuals and society. Researchers funded through the NRF programmes are required to contribute to science engagement and report the related outputs in their project's Annual Performance Report.

### **3.8 Management of funding instrument**

The **KAS Directorate** of the NRF – Research and Innovation Support and Advancement (RISA) manages the AOP funding instrument, and is responsible for:

- Strategic oversight and management of the funding instrument;
- Conceptualizing and developing the funding instrument;
- Coordinating and facilitating activities of the funding instrument;
- Compiling funding instrument research and evaluation reports;
- Stakeholder engagement; and
- Ensuring that the funding instruments delivers on its intended goal(s).

The **RE Directorate** of the NRF – RISA is responsible for managing the adjudication process including:

- sourcing of reviewers both for remote reviews and panels;
- managing the peer review process;
- organizing and managing the review panels as and where appropriate; and
- providing feedback as appropriate.

The **GMSA Directorate** of the NRF – RISA is responsible for

- Managing the call process, that is,
  - Posting the call;
  - Receiving and assessing application eligibility;
- Coordinating and facilitating the granting processes;
- Managing the granting including the administration of awards;
- Administering grant payments; and

- Ensuring adherence to conditions of grants.

### **3.9 Lines of authority**

The AOP Director in the KAS Directorate manages the funding instrument. The Director responsible for this instrument reports to the Executive Director of the KAS Directorate. Directors from RE and GMSA manage the review and granting processes. The Directors in both RE and GMSA report to their respective Executive Directors.

## **4 FINANCIALS**

### **4.1 Funding model**

The grants of this funding instrument are to be primarily used for **research purposes** and for the development of associated human resources under the auspices of the NRF standard grant and finance policies. The money is released upon acceptance of the conditions of grant, both by the applicant and his/her employing institution. These grants will fall under the NRF audit requirements of beneficiary institutions.

### **4.2 Funding ranges**

The allocation of funds is demand-driven, and as such there is no maximum or minimum proposal request. The number of applications that will be supported overall will depend on the availability of resources and the financial requirements of those successful applications. If successful applications have high financial requirements, fewer applications will be supported. The application assessment process will consider proposed budget items in terms of cost, risk and reward ratios. The NRF Online Submission System uses a single template for all research grants. Not all sections will apply to AOP. All awards will be made in line with the detailed AOP funding rules and guidelines as outlined below. Although specific funding categories are outlined in the application form, awards will be collapsed into 5 categories: running, research equipment, technical support personnel (non-students) and postdoctoral fellowships on the Letters of Award.

The application assessment process will consider proposed budget items in terms of cost, risk and reward ratios. Decisions relating to budget items will also be governed by the overall funding instrument funds available for the period. Awards will be made in line with the NRF funding rules and guidelines as outlined in **Section 4.3**.

### 4.3 Funding support

#### (a) Postgraduate student support

The National Research Foundation (NRF) has developed a new Postgraduate Student Funding Policy that will use postgraduate student funding as a lever to address the challenges of inequity of access, success and throughput. The policy is underpinned by the pursuit of research excellence in all of its dimensions and has transformation of the postgraduate cohort as the core objective. Its purpose is to retain high academic achievers in the system to pursue postgraduate studies up to doctoral level, as part of a national drive to grow the next generation of academics to sustain South Africa's knowledge enterprise. The NRF is prioritising postgraduate students with research inclination, with the aim to grow the pool of early career researchers. Another motivation for this policy is to fast-track the development of postgraduate students in high-impact, priority and vulnerable disciplines critical for national socio-economic development.

From the 2021 academic year onwards, the NRF began phasing out the block grant nomination process as well as the grantholder-linked modalities of funding postgraduate students. All the postgraduate students are required to apply on the NRF Online Submission System by accessing the link: <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/> . This single-entry point will allow the NRF to coordinate the applications that have not yet had the financial means test conducted' This financial means test will be conducted by Ikusasa Students Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP). Postgraduate students will be funded either at Full Cost of Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS) under the new policy. To ensure equity of access to postgraduate studies, financially needy students (i.e., those whose combined household income is R350 000 per annum or less) and students with a disability will be funded at FCS. Academic "*high-fliers*" achieving a distinction or first-class pass will also be eligible for funding at FCS. International students as well as any other South African students who are not eligible for FCS may be funded at PCS. The academic minimum requirements for NRF postgraduate funding is 65% in order to be eligible for FCS and PCS support. Detailed eligibility criteria for NRF postgraduate funding for FCS and PCS are outlined in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Eligibility criteria for NRF postgraduate funding for FCS and PCS.**

Study Level	Full Cost of Study <i>(South African Citizens and Permanent Residents only)</i>		Partial Cost of Study <i>(South African Citizens; South African Permanent Residents and 5% Non-South African Citizens)</i>
	Exceptional Achievers	Financially Needy & Students with Disability	Other
Honours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 75% Mark in Final Year of study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 65% Mark in Final Year of study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 65% Mark in Final Year of study</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Honours students</b> must be <b>28</b> years of age or younger in the year of application. Non South African Citizens are not eligible for Honours Scholarships.</p>		
Masters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 75% Mark for Honours</li> <li>• Completed Honours in one year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 65% Mark for Honours</li> <li>• Completed Honours in one year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 65% Mark for Honours</li> <li>• Completed Honours in one year</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Masters students</b> must be <b>30</b> years of age or younger in the year of application.</p>		
Doctoral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 75% Mark for Masters</li> <li>• Completed Masters in two years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 65% Mark for Masters</li> <li>• Completed Masters in two years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≥ 65% Mark for Masters</li> <li>• Completed Masters in two years</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Doctoral students</b> must be <b>32</b> years of age or younger in the year of application.</p>		

**In cases where a grade is not indicated, the application will not be considered for funding by the NRF.**

The NRF will allocate all postgraduate bursaries under its management control as follows:

- 95% South African citizens and permanent residents;
- 5% students from SADC countries and from the rest of the world; and
- 55% women.

The NRF disaggregates these targets for South African citizens and permanent residents as follows:

- 90% Black (African, Coloured, and Indian);
- 10% White; and
- 1% students living with a disability.

For further details on the DSI-NRF Postgraduate Funding policy, kindly refer to the Postgraduate Funding Framework document which is available on [www.nrf.ac.za](http://www.nrf.ac.za).

#### **b) Full-time technical skills personnel**

Support for full-time technical skills personnel will continue into 2022-2024 so as to enable South African researchers have access to the required technical skills and support personnel in the palaeosciences, thus ensuring their competitiveness in the global arena. Freestanding technical skills personnel **will not** be awarded under the AOP funding instrument. Consultants **do not** qualify as technical skills personnel under this funding instrument and such requests will not be considered.

Technical skills support in this context will be exclusively for:

- Casting technicians @ R100 000 pa **cost to company** (*pro rata* per month)
- Excavators @ R120 000 pa **cost to company** (*pro rata* per month)
- Preparators @ R120 000 pa **cost to company** (*pro rata* per month)
- Rock art tracing/digitization @ R120 000 pa **cost to company** (*pro rata* per month)

The amounts for technical skills personnel is cost to company. This is thus inclusive of any deductions. This applies to all recognized research institutions, including museums.

Applicants will quantify their technical skill personnel requirements under the research/tech skills/ad hoc assistants funding category on the NRF Online Submission System's application template, but must clearly state that these are technicians in this specific context. The Curriculum Vitae (CV) of each person must accompany the application. **No technical skills personnel funding will be released without the accompanying CV.** The applicant must submit a detailed justification for each position, including how each will be embedded into the current research proposal. The justification must include the impact each individual will make on both research and human capacity development within the proposed research proposal. Applicants may request new or recurring technical skills awards for the award period.

### **c) Research-related operating costs**

These costs include materials and supplies, travel (including conferences) and subsistence, equipment and research/technical/*ad hoc* assistance. These costs should be justified and commensurate with the planned outputs, as they will be assessed on this basis. The amount awarded within this framework can be used at the discretion of the applicant.

#### **General guidelines**

##### Sabbaticals

The AOP funding instrument **does not** provide support for sabbaticals

##### Lecture replacement

The AOP funding instrument **does not** provide support for lecturer replacements

##### Materials and Supplies \*

Support for running expenses of the proposed application. These items would be used in the normal course of operations in all fields of palaeo-related research. The AOP funding instrument does not provide financial support for:

- Basic office equipment including computers and consumables unless the computer is required for high-end computing for the research itself.
- Basic office stationery, photocopying costs, printing costs unless these items form part of the research tools.
- **Journal publication costs, journal subscription costs and book costs.**
- Telephone, fax and internet costs.

##### **\* PLEASE NOTE:**

**These restrictions do not apply to a PI and/or CI's based at a museum**



### Travel and subsistence

- International conference attendance: Generally, the NRF restricts this amount to R25,000 per person to a **maximum of R50,000 per application per year** for a team application i.e. for principal investigators and co-investigators (local only) and local postgraduate students.
- International visits: These will be considered on a case by case basis. Such visits must be integral to the research plan and strong motivations should accompany these requests. Realistic funding allocations will be based on the requested activities. Only outgoing visits will be considered depending on the availability of funding.
- Local conference attendance: Generally, the NRF restricts expenditure against this item to **R5,000 per person (all costs)**. Support for local conference attendance could be requested for all listed co-investigators and postgraduate students. The applicant should clearly motivate for the benefit to attend more than one local conference per annum, and for the number of people attending each local conference.
- Local travel: The NRF does not stipulate any rate for mileage as this will depend on the rate which varies per institution/organisation. Applicants are requested to provide details of this rate as well as the estimated distance to be travelled within the given year. This travel should be well-motivated and exclude travel to conferences mentioned above.
- Local accommodation costs should not exceed a 3\* establishment. This relates to local travel for research purposes and estimation of accommodation cost for each trip should be clearly presented in the motivation.

### Research / Technical / Ad hoc Assistants

- The AOP funding instrument **does not provide funding for salaries within this category**. Requests for research/technical/*ad hoc* assistance should be treated with caution. Generally, the NRF would encourage applicants to engage students to undertake the research rather than employing research consultants. **The NRF will not pay for students to undertake research**. This guideline however, does not apply when specific and/or highly specialised research/technical expertise is required. This should be **CLEARLY** motivated for in the application. **Administrative assistance does not qualify as technical assistance**.

### Research Equipment

**Funding for equipment will be limited to R200 000 per application.** Requisitions for large equipment items should be submitted through the NRF's National Equipment Programme

### Science Engagement

Pre-planned science engagement events can be awarded additional funds, **limited to a maximum of R30,000 per annum**, and only events that are motivated upfront will be funded.

#### **d) Funding to cater for disabilities**

Additional funding support to cater for disability will be allocated to people with disabilities as specified in the Code of Good Practice on Employment of People with Disabilities as in the Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998.

#### **4.4 Financial control and reporting**

Upon receipt of the signed Conditions of Grant, the NRF will release the awarded amount for the year. Grantholders will then be required to comply with the standard NRF financial management procedures, including the submission of an annual Progress Report. These are to be submitted by 15 February of the following year and are a prerequisite for the release of the subsequent year's funding for **ALL current NRF awards**. Failure to submit a Progress Report will result in the cancellation of ALL current grants held by the defaulting principal investigator.

### **5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE FUNDING INSTRUMENT**

The NRF-RISA is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the AOP.

#### **5.1 Reporting**

The KAS Director is responsible for reporting quarterly on the contribution of the AOP funding instrument to the KAS Directorate's Key Performance Indicators. In addition, the Director is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the progress of the funding instrument.

## 5.2. Timeframes for funding instrument review

The AOP funding instrument will be evaluated by an appropriate external reviewer as appointed by the RE Directorate. In consultation with this directorate, KAS will agree to and set timeframes for the review in line with existing guidelines.

## 5.3 Broad terms of reference for the funding instrument review

The broad terms of reference for the programme review of the AOP funding instrument will be determined by the KAS Directorate prior to the evaluation taking place, and in accordance with tenets set in the RE Directorate's Guidelines.

## 5.4 Utilisation of funding instrument review findings and recommendations

The results of the evaluation will be used in line with the purpose set in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, as well as for instrument improvement and development.

## 6 CONTACT DETAILS

Please direct all queries to the individuals detailed below. Applicants may also direct their queries to the Support desk via email: <a href="mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za">supportdesk@nrf.ac.za</a>	
Funding instrument related queries	NRF Technical queries
KAS	GMSA
Mr Katleho Ralehoko Professional Officer: KAS E-mail: <a href="mailto:Katleho.ralehoko@nrf.ac.za">Katleho.ralehoko@nrf.ac.za</a> Tel: 012 481 4188	C Ms Motsakwe Rakgoale Professional Officer: GMSA E-mail: <a href="mailto:Motsakwe@nrf.ac.za">Motsakwe@nrf.ac.za</a> Tel: 012 481 4297

## **7 LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AOP	African Origins Platform
CI	Co-investigator
DMP	Data Management Plan
DSI	Department of Science and Innovation
FCS	Full Cost of Study
GMSA	Grants Management and Systems Administration
ISFAP	Ikusasa Students Financial Aid Programme
KAS	Knowledge Advancement and Support
NIHSS	National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences
NRF	National Research Foundation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCS	Partial Cost of Study
PI	Principal Investigator
RE	Reviews and Evaluation
RISA	Research and Innovation Support and Advancement
SADA	South African Data Archive
SADC	Southern African Development Community

## ANNEXURE 1: Panel Assessment Scorecard - AOP

Criteria	Sub-Criteria	Details	Score / 4	Weight
Proposal	Scientific merit and feasibility	<p>Reflect on the proposed rationale, approach and methodology</p> <p>Is the proposal feasible as proposed?</p> <p>Has knowledge of relevant literature been adequately articulated?</p>		45%
Equity	Of applicant	Race / Gender / Years post PhD <sup>3</sup>		10%
Transformation	Early career researchers/ postgraduates	Reflect on the historical compliance with transformational objectives		10%
Science Engagement	Plans for science engagement	<p>Is there evidence of a science engagement strategy?</p> <p>Are the appropriate target groups adequately articulated?</p>		10%
Impact	Wider Impact	<p>Has economic/ societal/ environmental impact been embedded in the proposal?</p> <p>Is it clear how such impact will be measured?</p>		15%
Data management and use	Plans for digital data storage, usage and/or dissemination	Has appropriate consideration been given to digital data storage, usage and/or dissemination beyond the immediate project team?		10%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>3</sup> This score is predetermined in accordance with an NRF-approved scale – see Annexure 3

**ANNEXURE 2: Proposal Grading - AOP**

Score	Meaning of score	Notes
4	Excellent	Application demonstrates evidence of outstanding performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration
3	Above average	Above average performance across all criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration
2	Average	Application demonstrates average performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration
1	Below average	Below average performance across all the criteria, as determined by panel and relative to knowledge field
00	Poor	There are major shortcomings or flaws within and across the stated criteria, with <b>particular emphasis</b> on the scientific/scholarly merit

**Context:**

Proposal grading is done with sensitivity to the context within which each application is submitted. The score of each criterion for each application will be contextualised to accommodate variability in such things as knowledge fields, institutional capacity, etc. Should a criterion not be applicable to a specific application (e.g. plans for digital data storage; collaborations; etc.), the weighting of that specific criteria will be made to equal zero, and the overall score normalised.

<b>ANNEXURE 3: Pre-set equity scores</b>	
<b>Equity Status</b>	<b>Pre-set Equity Score</b>
Disabled	4
Black female; Black male, young <sup>4</sup>	4
Black male, not young	3
White female, young	3
White female, not young	2
White male, young	2
White male, not young	1

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<sup>4</sup> “Young” refers to 5 years post-PhD as per the applicant’s CV. Applicants will be classified as “young” if their graduation date is less than 5 years prior to the date of assessment.