DSI-NRF Africa University Twinning Programme

Framework Document

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

Research has demonstrated that collaborations and partnerships are invariably successful strategies for institutions that operate at a comparative advantage. One of the advantages of such collaborations is their potential to assist with the distribution of knowledge and skills, therefore stimulating the development of fresh pedagogical methods and educational practices. By facilitating the exchange of students, educational institutions have the opportunity to provide students with exposure to diverse perspectives, teaching methodologies, and cultural encounters, thereby expanding their educational horizons. This can additionally facilitate the cultivation of regional and global citizens who are more adept at navigating an interdependent global society.

As indicated in the 2019 White Paper on Science and Innovation, innovation for societal benefit is fundamental to economic transformation through expanding and transforming the human resource base of the National System of Innovation (NSI). Inter-institutional collaboration can thus provide important research achievements in furtherance of this goal since institutions can pool their knowledge and resources to tackle complicated challenges more effectively. This not only benefits the academic community but also has the potential to drive societal and economic advancements.

The African University Twinning (AUT) is intended to expedite the development of research capacities of South African institutions and those of their counterparts on the African continent in areas important to African governments. The participating academic institutions stand to benefit immensely through the generation of knowledge at a bilateral, continental, and global scale. By twinning with another institution, both institutions can leverage each other's strengths and resources to offer a more comprehensive range of co-curricular activities, thus enriching student life.

The AUT Programme may be implemented in many forms, which include the twinning of the different faculties, co-curriculum development, research collaboration, student exchanges, and twinning of the support structures, such as the administration process, and intellectual Property (IP) policy development, amongst others.

The overall objectives of this programme are to:

- Establish a platform where African universities can play a critical role in the bilateral developmental agenda between South Africa and African partner countries.
- Strengthen the research outputs in South African universities.
- Co-develop a new curriculum that is critical for Africa's socio-economic development.
- Train and build the capacity of personnel, especially in HDIs.
- Establish a sustainable exchange programme where students and personnel will get exposure to different systems and cultures from other African universities as part of internationalising research collaboration.
- Promote the co-development of innovation and ideas that are critical for the transformation of the African continent and strengthening of the innovation eco-system.
- Establish dual qualifications between South African universities and their African counterparts.
- Leverage resources from international partnerships, which could include raising funds for the urgently required research infrastructure.
- Share research infrastructure and co-develop knowledge through joint publications.

WHO MAY APPLY

All researchers who are full-time employees or on a fixed-term contract (*contract to be valid for at least 12 months after the end of the project*) at any of the following institutions are eligible to apply:
- South African universities/universities of technology.
- Recognised research institutions such as national facilities.
- Museums.
- Science councils.
- The applicant **must** be in possession of a **PhD degree.**

Researchers from private/commercial institutions are not eligible to apply.

WHICH ACTIVITIES MAY I APPLY FOR?

Financial support for this call will be made available for conducting networking events and exchanges. Other items that may be applied for include:

- Travel
- Accommodation
- Subsistence
- Joint workshops
- Joint training workshops
- Other related activities

Applicants may apply for a maximum of R400 000-00 over a period of 18 months (starting from January 2026 – June 2027).

HOW ARE APPLICATIONS EVALUATED?

Following the closing date indicated below, applications will be assessed through the National Research Foundation (NRF) review process based on the following criteria:

- Compliance of the project with content-related focus areas.
- Track record of the applicant.
- Quality of the proposal / scientific merit, and originality of the project.
- Potential for promoting equity and redress/capacity building.
- Value-added collaboration.
- Socio-economic impact aligned with the national research priorities. (Note that proposals demonstrating strong elements of capacity building, particularly among historically disadvantaged institutions, will be favourably regarded.)
- The applicant must indicate how the set-out activities will enhance institutional mandate and how they also align with government priorities. *It is strongly recommended that such interactions/activities must be supported by existing inter-institutional MoUs or new ones in the process of being developed.*
- The host institution must provide a support letter containing details on support for the collaboration, signed by the HoD or line manager.
- **The partner institution must show commitment to the twinning initiative and confirm it in writing signed by an equivalent of DVC: Research**.
- Letters of interest in the collaboration by the partner PI is required.
- Applications **that do not have all required supporting documents by the time of submission will be disqualified** and will not be taken up for evaluation by the NRF

- *Applicants have 3 days to query from date of email receipt should your application be rejected in the screening phase.*

COMPULSORY ATTACHMENTS

Each application must be accompanied by the following attachments:
- A letter of support from the applicant's institution, i.e letter from the office of the DVC, HoD, or line manager. The letter should specify the nature and level of support expected from the institution in terms of technical, financial, and administrative contributions towards the collaboration.
- A letter of interest from the partner institution. The partner institution must show commitment to the twinning initiative.
- The applicant must indicate/provide evidence of existing inter-institutional Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) or indicate if in the process of developing a new MoU.
- A detailed schedule and work plan.
- A detailed budget for activities that will be carried out**.**

APPLICATION PROCESS

- 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: **African University Twinning Programme.**
- 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 **17 October 2025. 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.

ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT CONDITIONS (AoC)

The AoC will accompany each formal letter of award. This should be signed and accepted by both the grant holder and the Designated Authority (DA) at the institution. The signed AoC should be endorsed and uploaded to 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). 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.

Grant payments will be made directly to the institution of the applicant.

CONTACTS

For content related queries:	*For technical related queries:*
africatwinning@nrf.ac.za	Email: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za