

# Call for Applications

## South African-German Collaborative Research Programme on Artificial Intelligence for Societal Transformation

**UCT Internal Deadline: Friday 3 October 2025**

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The National Research Foundation (NRF, South Africa) and the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) invite joint research proposals under the ZADE-AI programme. This bilateral initiative supports high-quality, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research that has the potential for meaningful scientific as well as societal impact.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

Through this bilateral call, South Africa and Germany aim to bring together partners to co-develop user-centred solutions for pressing ecologic, economic and social challenges using AI-related technology and methodology. The call seeks:

- to build and connect knowledge to increase sustainable use of AI tools including blockchain, machine learning and quantum technologies,
- to explore new development pathways for AI tools in the focus areas, and
- to find new ways to accelerate transitions towards their sustainable and equitable application.

### THEMATIC FOCUS

Projects should develop and test AI solutions in:

- **Health:** precision medicine; One Health; health services for remote areas (e.g. telemedicine); pandemic preparedness
- **Climate Change:** climate resilience in rural communities (community/citizen science)
- **Agriculture:** adaptation to climate change; robotics
- **Energy:** efficient ownership of energy models; sustainable (energy efficient) AI
- **Finance:** in the area of blockchain
- **Quantum Technologies**
- **Machine Learning**

Additionally, cross-cutting aspects such as education, ethics of AI, and AI governance (what is hindering AI and how can AI contribute to the betterment of communities?) should be taken into consideration and demonstrated in the proposal submission.

### ELIGIBILITY

- A proposal should have two Principal Investigators (PIs): one based in South Africa, and one based in Germany.
- **The South African PI must submit the proposal on behalf of their consortium.** Upon being selected for funding, the German PI will need to submit a full application to DLR-Projektträger.
- It is mandatory for UCT PIs to include, as part of the consortium, a research partner from any of the historically disadvantaged institutions and/or one of South Africa's two new universities.
- All consortium members have to be involved in the formulation of the research questions, in the development of the proposal and in the execution of the research project.
- Each partner of a consortium can apply for one project or participate in one consortium only.

## FUNDING

The total budget for this call amounts to approximately €1.8 mil (R37.3 mil) (South Africa and Germany combined).

- Up to **R2 million** per project from NRF. (Only R1.4 mil will be released for research and mobility grants)
- Up to €220,000 per project from BMFTR (plus a 20% lumpsum awarded to German higher education institutions)
- Maximum project duration: **48 months** (four years).
- Up to five joint projects will be funded.

The funders will also organise joint kick-off and closing workshops (maximum of two days per workshop) for the ZADE-AI call, and **researchers should include costs of attending these workshops (i.e. travel and accommodation) in their budget plans.** The kick-off workshop will be held in Pretoria (South Africa) in September 2026, and the closing workshop in Bonn (Germany) in September 2030.

## APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION PROCESS

The South African PI should submit the full proposal on behalf of the entire consortium. Upon being selected for funding, the German PI will need to submit a full application to DLR-Projektträger.

The application must be completed on the **NRF Connect System**: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>

1. Register / Login using your ORCID and password.
2. Update your CV (These Curriculum Vitae are used in the assessment processes, and incomplete or outdated inputs will jeopardise the success of the application).
3. On the Menu, click on Applications under My Applications tab.
4. Click on the + sign next to **Research Grants**.
5. Click on the *Create* button next to **SA/Germany (SAG-CORE)**
6. Complete all compulsory sections and the relevant non-compulsory sections.
7. Attach all the required documents in PDF format as listed below.
8. Submit the application on completion.

### Compulsory attachments:

- The German PI must provide the South African PI with a **Letter of Intent (LoI)** for the proposal submission. The LoI, which is obligatory, should confirm that if the application is successful, a consortium agreement will be signed within two months of the project start.
- A completed **Impact Pathway** template must be attached as an Annexure. See [Annexure I](#) for the format/template to be used.

## IMPORTANT NOTE

It is of utmost importance that applicants consult the [Funding Framework Document](#) for more detailed information about the funding regulations, guidelines, specific project requirements and annexures

The NRF recommends the use of the DCC Checklist for Data Management Plan as a guide when drafting the Data Management Plan for the application proposal. For UCT Research Data Management information and resources, please go to <http://www.digitalservices.lib.uct.ac.za/dls/services/rdm>

For technical enquiries, please contact the NRF Support Desk: [Supportdesk@risa.nrf.ac.za](mailto:Supportdesk@risa.nrf.ac.za)