

Circular Economy Science, Technology and Innovation

CALL FOR PROPOSALS 2025

The Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) is pleased to announce an **Open Call for Proposals** for circular economy related **research projects** commencing in January 2026.

Applicants are requested to familiarise themselves with the information provided in this Call before preparing an application. All proposals should be aligned with the intentions of the South African Government's Circular Economy Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy (DSTI, 2024), which is available online at <https://www.circulareconomy.co.za/about/ce-sti-strategy/>

1 Background

The Circular Economy STI Strategy (2024-2034) is a strategic initiative of the DSTI, implemented by Circular Innovation South Africa (CISA) and managed by the CSIR. The Circular Economy STI Strategy aims to strengthen –

- Human capital development (HCD)
- Research and development (R&D), and
- Innovation in the circular economy

Through the strategic investment in science, technology and innovation (STI), the DSTI aims to support South Africa's **transition to a more circular economy by eliminating waste and pollution; (ii) keeping products and materials in use at their highest value; and (iii) regenerating natural systems, in a manner that will provide maximum environmental, social and economic benefit for the country**. The Circular Economy STI Strategy also prioritises the decoupling of economic development from resource consumption, through science, technology and innovation.

The objective of the Circular Economy STI Strategy Call for Proposals (2025) is to directly support –

- Strengthened STI capability and capacity
- More effective decision-making, and
- Faster insertion of context-appropriate technology

2 Research themes

This Circular Economy STI grant call has prioritised the three resource-intensive sectors identified in South Africa's STI White Paper (2019) and STI Decadal Plan (2022-2032), that of modernising **mining, agriculture and manufacturing**. Research proposals must be aligned with one of these resource-intensive, priority economic sectors and STI sub-areas. Further details are provided in the Circular Economy STI Strategy, available online.

- Agriculture sector
 - Resource efficiency
 - Regenerative agriculture
 - Agro-processing
 - Biorefinery
- Manufacturing sector
 - Resource efficiency and cleaner production
 - Circular product design
 - Advanced manufacturing
 - Remanufacturing
- Mining sector (minerals & metals)
 - Resource security, e.g., critical minerals
 - Resource efficiency
 - Diversifying sources of minerals and metals, e.g., urban mining

Proposals should be clear in how the research will achieve one or more of the circular economy principles, driving more sustainable use of primary and/or secondary resources (waste), thereby unlocking economic, social or environmental benefits for the country.

3 Grant award amount and duration

Grant proposals should be ≤ R2,000,000 (excl. VAT) and ≤ 3 years in duration. The total grant funding available for 2025 is limited and since the call is open to all circular economy related research topics, the process is expected to be highly competitive.

4 Eligibility criteria

4.1 Eligible institutions

Only researchers from South African public universities, science councils and other public research institutions, working in relevant disciplines, are invited to submit proposals for a Circular Economy research grant.

4.2 Experience

Principal investigators (PI) must be qualified to do the proposed research and should be experts in the subject matter referenced in the proposal. Typically, this would include full-time faculty at academic and research institutions.

4.3 Capacity development

The following requirements in terms of human capital development apply –

- Proposals that include capacity development through the training of post-graduate students will be favourably considered.
- Students may be supported on the grant project through either Full Cost of Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS) depending on the needs and academic performance of the student (*See DSI/NRF Post-graduate Funding Policy*). The grant holder will need to reflect whether the student(s) is supported on FCS or PCS in the quarterly reporting to the DSTI.
- Students supported on grant projects must be South African citizens or permanent residents.
- Students should be placed on the grant project on the basis of academic merit, and may not hold salaried employment that exceeds 12 hours of work per week, while pursuing the degree.

5 Evaluation criteria

All applications will undergo evaluation by an independent review panel, to assess the suitability of the proposal in terms of the Circular Economy STI Strategy objectives. All proposals will be evaluated against the following criteria:

- i. **Alignment:** the research proposal must address one or more of the priorities and research themes of the South African Government's Circular Economy STI Strategy (Section 2 above)
- ii. **Relevance:** the research must have the potential to **directly, and positively, influence South Africa's transition to a more circular economy**, by (i) eliminating waste and pollution; (ii) keeping products and materials in use at their highest value; or (iii) regenerating natural systems, in a manner that will provide maximum environmental, social and economic benefit for the country. Preference will be given to proposals which are impact driven and solution orientated.
- iii. **Scientific/technical soundness and credibility:** the research proposal has a sound scientific and/or technical base, reflects a sound grasp of the issues requiring investigation, the proposed methodologies are appropriate for achieving the objectives; and the deliverables and associated time frames for delivery are realistic.
- iv. **Innovation:** the project is original and contributes to the body of knowledge or develops practical solutions to transition South Africa to a more circular economy
- v. **Research Outputs/Deliverables:** the project must result in a significant research output, such as research reports, post-graduate dissertations, technologies, journal papers, etc.
- vi. **Capacity development:** preference will be given to proposals that include capacity development through the development of post-graduate students.
- vii. **Institutional capacity:** the applicant must demonstrate sufficient institutional capacity to implement the project
- viii. **Value for money:** the benefits of the proposed research are measurable and the value of the benefits exceed the value of the investment

6 Equity and redress

In line with the national imperative of equity and redress, the research call prioritises support for designated groups viz. black, female and persons with disabilities.

7 Submission of proposals

Only proposals submitted on the Circular Economy STI grant **proposal template**, issued together with this Call, will be considered. Proposals should be submitted in MSWord or PDF format. Research proposals (PART III: DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT) **must not exceed 10 pages** (at font Arial 10, line spacing 1.15). **Proposals may be rejected prior to evaluation if they exceed the set length and if they do not make use of the template provided.** A concise 1-2 page (max) curriculum vitae (CV) of the Lead Researcher must be submitted together with the proposal.

8 Reservations

The DSTI expressly reserves the following rights to:

- Reject all or any proposals
- Waive any or all irregularities in the proposals submitted
- Retain the right not to select any application/s even if meeting all the requirements

9 Contract negotiations

The successful applicant/s will be required to enter into a written Agreement with the CSIR, who manages the Circular Economy STI Strategy on behalf of the DSTI.

10 Closing date

Proposals must be submitted electronically via email to LGodfrey@csir.co.za on the Circular Economy STI Strategy grant proposal template (issued with this call).

The deadline for the submission of proposals is **Friday, 25 July 2025 at 18:00**.

Successful applicants will be notified about the outcome of their applications by early September 2025 (or sooner) to allow sufficient time for students to be recruited for the 2026 academic year.

11 Confirmation of receipt

All applicants will receive a confirmation of 'receipt of proposal' email. If you do not receive such a confirmation within one week of application, please follow up with the CISA office to ensure that your proposal has been received. Proof of submission before the closing date will be required.

12 Validity

All applications will be regarded as valid for 120 days from the 25 July 2025 whereafter the CSIR may request an updated application, should this become necessary.

For any queries relating to the call for proposals, contact:

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