REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Transition To Scale and Uptake of Research and Innovation:

Supporting projects with scientific breakthroughs for sustainable impact and scale

Summary	
Grant Title	**Transition To Scale and Uptake of Research and Innovation:** *supporting projects with scientific breakthroughs for sustainable impact and scale*
Grant Number	**NRIF 17/2026/27**
Number of grants	A total of Five (5) projects will be funded
Funding Purpose	The purpose of this grant is to provide funding for research and innovation projects in six (6) national priority sectors[1], targeting Innovations that have attained at least Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 4. The TRL4 indicates that the basic components of innovation have been integrated and validated in a laboratory environment, demonstrating that they work together to produce intended results. Testing should have provided the initial evidence that the technology concept is technically feasible. The main goal of the grant is to support the further development of these innovations into Minimum Viable Products (MVPs), with the objective of advancing them to Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 9, where they are fully demonstrated in an operational environment and ready for commercialisation.

[1] National Priority sectors (Sustainable Energy, Food Security and Modern Agriculture, Life and Health Sciences, Local Production and Value Addition, Digital Services, Products and Lifestyles; and Resilient Environment and Climate Change)

Collaborations and partnerships: Academia-Industry Partnership and global collaboration encouraged	This Request for Proposal (RFP) encourages solid and long-term collaborations exemplified by existing joint proof-of-concept projects between academia (*Universities and research institutions)* and private sector (*non-public or private industries, companies and/or multi-national corporations*) focusing on broadening opportunities for collaboration and accelerating transition to scale for technology driven innovation that addresses national challenges in all six (6) national priority areas[1].
Budget information	• 200 million Frw per grant • Funds will be disbursed to the host institutions in Rwanda • Proposed budget should be commensurate with the scope of proposed project work of activities
Source of funds	Government of Rwanda through National Council for Science and Technology (NCST)
Application process	This RFP will undergo 2 phases: • **Expression of Interest (EOI) and** • **Full Proposal**
Duration*:*	36 months from official commencement date
Key Dates:	
Date of Issue:	**10th November 2026**
Epression of Interest (EOI) Closing Date:	**7th December 2026, 5:00 pm, Kigali time**
Full proposal Closing Date:	**29th January 2027, 5:00 pm, Kigali time**

1. Background

The Government of Rwanda's Vision is anchored on the ambition to leverage the potential of science, technology and innovation (STI) as a strategic orientation that knowledge is essential to addressing social-economic challenges. Harnessing research and innovation are key drivers of national economic growth, competitiveness in achieving and improving high quality and standards of life for Rwandans and economic prosperity, as articulated in the national development targets[2]. To address emerging national social, economic, and environmental challenges, it is imperative to fund and promote high-quality research and innovations with scientific breakthroughs that would translate into tangible solutions as

[2] Vision 2050. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN), Republic of Rwanda and National Strategy for Transformation 2 5-year programme 2024-2029 MINECOFIN Republic of Rwanda

products, services or processes that address specific developmental challenges affecting Rwandan citizens.

Over the last 3 decades or so, Rwanda has embarked on considerable investments to improve research, innovation and technology development through enaction of policies such as STI policy, among others, and operationalization of funding instruments to broaden research funding, scientific capacity building and development of research infrastructure. This has enabled research and innovation performing institutions such as universities and private sector industries to collaborate and implement joint research and innovation projects. These policies and legal frameworks for digital talent, broadband, Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy, and guidelines on public-private partnerships developed have supported innovation growth, creation of novel technologies and inventions, as well as technology adoption and transfer leading to gradual increase in intellectual property (IP) and patents.

However, significant challenges still remain; specifically addressing the need to rapidly translate evidence-based research and innovation outputs into into tangible outcomes and long-term investments that are ready for market and industrial applications. This is key to respond to Rwanda's Vision 2050 and NST2 targets; namely generate financial income from novel products and/or services, create descent jobs leading to national economic sustainability, and exports to regional and global market.

2. Rationale

National Council for Science and Technology (NCST), through the National Research and Innovation Fund (NRIF), has supported and funded over 131 research and innovation projects to-date, with over 9 billion Rwandan Francs commitment. Currently, the supported projects are at different stages: completed, toward completion stage, midway and new funding grant schemes have just been established. Among funded projects, at least thirty (30) projects have proven to have potential for scaling up their developed innovative products and services. In addition, there are also other local and external support provided to research and development (R&D) projects, specifically at various universities, research institutions and other private and non-for-profit organizations. Most of these funded research and innovation projects have resulted in numerous technologies, products, processes, and services with demonstrated potential to contribute to socio-economic development.

The desired impact for the successfully funded/supported projects shall be to establish high quality and scale of their research and innovation outputs, which shall directly address national socio-economic challenges, both in terms of fostering research performance and productivity, technology development and uptake and boosting the capacity of scientists and researchers, including conformity to with gender inclusion and private sector engagement.

Many promising research and innovation outputs remain at the prototype or pilot stage. This is mainly due to limited funding for product refinement, validation, commercialisation, regulatory compliance, market entry, and adoption.

To address this gap, the National Council for Science and Technology (NCST), through the National Research and Innovation Fund (NRIF), is launching a new funding scheme. The scheme aims to support the transition to scale and uptake of research and development (R&D)-driven innovations. The funding will target technologies that have attained at least Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 4. It will support their further development into Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) and advancement towards TRL 9. The targeted innovations should demonstrate potential for commercialisation, market uptake, and sustainable impact. Ultimately, the funding call seeks to bridge the gap between research outputs and societal needs. It will support the advancement of prototypes towards commercialisation, public adoption, and industrial application.

3. Funding information, duration and priority areas

This RFP seeks to support transition to scale research-based innovations involving technologies that have attained at least Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 4 and demonstrated potential for commercialization and that can be implemented nationally and replicated at global scale. That is, all submitted project proposal should demonstrate clear and sufficient proof of concept evidence.

NCST intends to commit approximately Frw 200 million per project, and to support a total of five (5) selected projects for 36 months period of grant implementation.

The submitted proposal should address one or more of the six priority areas identified under the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Policy and the National Research and Innovation Agenda (NRIA), e.g.:

i. **Sustainable energy**
ii. **Food Security and Modern Agriculture**
iii. **Local production and value addition/manufacturing**
iv. **Life and health sciences**
v. **Resilient environment and natural resources**
vi. **Digital services, products and lifestyles**

Detailed description of the priorities areas to be funded are provided in the Annex I, and STI policy and NRIA documents by visiting **https://www.ncst.gov.rw/publication**

4. Objective of the RFP

The overall objective of this RFP is to fund projects with scientific breakthroughs to accelerate the process of transition to scale and uptake (*from proof-of-concept and early-stage innovation to economically viable and sustainable business*) of their outputs into sustainable innovations with impact and scale that contribute to Rwanda's socio-economic transformation.

The process of transition to scale involves moving a proven pilot, innovation, or early-stage business beyond initial proof-of-concept into sustainable, widespread impact across larger markets or populations.

Specific objectives include:

A. Support evidence-based projects with scientific breakthroughs, and that have developed innovations, which have attained at least Technology readiness Level (TRL) 4 *for sustainable impact and scale*.
B. Facilitate the further scientific and business developments, and advancement of these technologies from TRL4 to TRL 9
C. Facilitate technology transfer, commercialisation, and the adoption of research-based innovations.
D. Strengthen partnerships between academia, research institutions, industry, and government to improve research outputs uptake, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and industrial growth.

5. Opportunities of transition to scale and uptake of research and innovation findings

During execution process of these proposed projects, researchers/innovators will implement the activities as per the technology readiness levels (TRL), specifically, from level four (4) to level nine (9) **(TRL4-TRL9)** as defined in Annex II to enable improved uptake and transition to scale of R&D findings to justify the scientific study and innovation, collect data to support project improvement, feasibility, sustainability, and ensure that the project products and services are being improved, tested towards scaled up.

A. Intervention:

The proposed projects and implementation process for transition to scale shall include the following steps:

Step 1: Solution validation and prototype optimization

At this stage, the project should focus on confirming that the developed solution has been scientifically validated and needs improvement of technical performance. The prototype is optimized, engineering challenges are addressed, and the technology is validated under conditions that closely resemble its intended operating environment. Intellectual Property (IP) is also protected to safeguard the innovation before disclosure.

Step 2: Solution testing and user validation

Once the solution has been developed and technically validated, the emphasis shifts to transforming it into a product or service that meets user and market needs. The solution is refined based on user feedback, tested by potential users, and demonstrated in real-world settings. Market validation ensures that there is sufficient demand and that the solution addresses a genuine problem.

Step 3: Manufacturing and Regulatory Readiness

This stage prepares the innovation for reliable production and market entry. Pilot production is used to test manufacturing processes and identify production challenges. The product undergoes regulatory testing and certification to ensure compliance with applicable standards, while product standardization and manufacturing readiness help ensure consistent quality and scalability.

Stage 4: Uptake and Scale-up

After the product is technically, commercially, and legally ready, attention turns to bringing it to the final TRL9 phase. A sustainable business model, commercialization strategies, and plans for scaling up are developed, and licensing opportunities are explored where appropriate.

6. Application process

The application process will undergo two phases.

a. **Phase 1 Application: Expression of Interests (EOIs)**

NCST invites eligible applicants to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI) through Research and Innovation Grant Management System (RIGMS) https://rigms.ncst.gov.rw/ before the deadline.

- Expressions of Interest (EOI) must be received by no later than **7th December 2026 at 5:00 PM, Kigali time**

- Applicants should follow and fill the application form and related supporting documents in RIGMS: https://rigms.ncst.gov.rw/

i) Who can apply? Eligibility criteria for Expressions of Interest (EOI) include:

1. Primary Applicant/ Principal Investigator (PI) shall be formally affiliated with an organization/institution registered in Rwanda, and shall submit:
    a. **Work Appointment letter and/or letter of support by Head of institution or any other competent authority such as Dean of**

Faculty etc., and where applicable a **certificate of training/certificate of justification of expertise in relevant field**;

2. The Principal Investigator (PI) shall submit **a relevant degree certificate** (Bachelor, Masters/PhD)
3. The Applicant shall submit **letters of support from at least 2 collaborating institutions** (Collaborating private sector/ Industry and/or academia or public institution)
4. A Project Lead can only submit **one (1) application.**
5. The project shall possess **reports, designs, IP registration regarding** validated and tested proof of concept and a technology readiness at Level 4; evidence of technical feasibility such as **market survey analysis report, businesses plan, proven field report, prototype etc; and a report** of well-defined proof of potential for scaling-up, commercialization, or widespread adoption.
6. Primary applicant/PI shall s**ubmit a proof of registration/independent legal status** (or "legal personality") of the institution
7. Primary applicant's applications shall be aligned with at least one of the **priority areas** of the call.
8. Business Enterprises and Private Non-Profit (PNP)/NGO institutions shall submit:
    a. **External audit Reports of two previous consecutive years.**
    b. **Tax clearance certificate**
    c. **Bank statements for previous three months**
    d. **Monthly payrolls for at least 10 full-time employees for the last three months**
9. Business Enterprises and PNP/NGO institutions must **provide proof of registration certificate**
10. Applicants shall submit curriculum vitae (CVs) of at least four (4) members the project team, namely *The PI who is scientist/Innovator, Co-PI from Industry, Financial Manager/Administrative expert & Business Manager/expert*, with **no more than three (3) pages** per team member
11. An applicant without the above eligibility criteria shall seek opportunities to be subcontractor(s) with eligible institutions (Academia/private sector/PNP)

All applicants' applications are encouraged to:

a. demonstrate the technical and managerial capacity (*with managerial structures and leadership such as CEO, Managing Director, Board of Directors, Financial and administrative managers*) to implement the proposed project,
b. Demonstrate well-established partnerships such as agreements and funded programs/projects with partner institutions (from Academia/private sector or industry/PNP)
c. Have project team composition of at least 30% of women researchers, scientists or innovators;

d. Demonstrate the strategic and policy mechanisms to develop novel innovations, create jobs and aim at having competitive products, services and processes that shall be ready for national, regional and global market

i) Administrative Assessment and selection process of Expression of Interests (EOIs)

Each EOI will undergo an administrative screening and review for completeness and EOI eligibility criteria. The EOI review process will be led by NCST team. If an EOI does not meet eligibility criteria for Expressions of Interest, it will be immediately disqualified for next phase.

b. Stage 2 Application: Full proposals submission

Only applicants shortlisted at Stage 1 (Expression of Interest) will be invited to submit full proposals.

- Applications for full proposal must be received by no later than **29th January 2027 at 5:00 PM, Kigali time**
- Applicants should follow application form and related supporting documents in RIGMS: **https://rigms.ncst.gov.rw/**

i) Who can apply and eligibility criteria for Full proposals submission:

- Project description demonstrating the problem being addressed and the proposed solution at the level of transition to scale.
- Description of the project methodology, activity plan, timeline and key deliverables, project monitoring, evaluation, and key performance indicators.
- Clear strategy for scale-up, commercialization, technology transfer, and knowledge sharing.
- Community outreach and dissemination strategy for communicating the project's objectives and outcomes.
- Stakeholder engagement plan, risk analysis, sustainability plan, and intellectual property management plan.
- Gender equality and social inclusion considerations.
- Project management and governance structure.
- Description of private sector contributions being financial or in-kind resources such as office space, technical support, staff time, office facilities, vehicles, equipment, or other logistics required for the project implementation.
- Completed budget template in excel
- Completed Activity plan template in excel
- Completed Team composition template in excel
- Business plan

Note: Although not a requirement under this RFP, applicants are encouraged to establish partnerships that can co-fund or otherwise support the proposed project activities.

ii) Review process for full proposals

An independent peer review committee composed of three (3) members with a broad expertise will be assigned to evaluate the submitted proposals. The final selection will be based on the recommendations of the review committee criteria underneath and if applicable in due diligence conversations.

Reviewers will assess each of the criteria outlined in (Table 2) and assign scores to determine the scientific merit of the proposed project and its readiness and potential for transition to scale.

Table 2: Review criteria for the Full Proposal

Evaluation Criterion	Description	Marks
1. Relevance and significance	The proposal should demonstrate a clear pathway through which the study will contribute to sustainable innovation, including product and/or service testing, uptake, scale-up, and long-term sustainability. The statement of the problem and justification of the study should be clearly articulated to demonstrate the need of proposed solution/innovation and potential for uptake and transition to scale of the research outputs. The stated goals and objectives should be clear and measurable, with a well-defined pathway from research outputs to expected outcomes and impacts.	10
2. Innovation, Originality, and Scientific/Technical Merit	Level of innovation, uniqueness, scientific quality, technical soundness, and improvement over existing solutions.	20
3. Technology Readiness and Feasibility/Approach	Current Technology Readiness Level (TRL), technical feasibility, innovation maturity, and likelihood of successful completion.	20
4. Transition-to-Scale Plan	Clear roadmap for scaling, manufacturing, deployment, partnerships, and operational expansion.	10
5. Team Capacity and Partnerships	Qualifications and expertise of the project team members, industry participation, institutional support, and strategic partnerships.	15
6. Intellectual Property and Regulatory Readiness	IP registration, protection strategy, freedom to operate, standards compliance, certifications, and regulatory considerations.	10

7. Expected Impact	Economic, social, environmental, and national development impact, including job creation and productivity improvements.	15
Total		**100**

Note: Applications received at Stage 2 (Full proposal) will not undergo administrative compliance screening against the predetermined eligibility criteria, as they will have already completed this screening during Stage One. Instead, proposals submitted at Stage Two will proceed directly to the next stage of evaluation. However, there should not be any substantial change from the submitted expression of interest.

7. Expected Outputs

Successful projects should demonstrate that the technologies have attained Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 9 and are ready for commercialisation. They should have a clearly defined business plan, a complete and competent project team, certified products (where applicable), appropriate packaging and appealing industrial design, registered intellectual property (IP), and a clearly defined IP strategy.

8. Intellectual Property

Ownership and management of intellectual property arising from funded projects shall be governed by applicable national laws, institutional intellectual property policies, and funding agreements. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate a clear strategy for protecting and managing intellectual property to facilitate commercialization and societal impact.

9. Indicative Timeline

Activity	**Activity timeline**
Publication of Call	10 November 2026
Information session	17th November 2026
Expression of Interest Submission Deadline	7th December 2026
Administrative screening for EOI Evaluation	8th December 2026 to 14th December 2026
Notification of Shortlisted Applicants and invitation for full proposal submission (*before or at least on*)	15th December 2026
Deadline for submission of Full Proposals	29th January 2027
Evaluation of full Proposals	8th February to 12th February 2027
Notification and Funding Decision (*before or at least on*)	15th February 2027
Grant Agreement Signing (*before or at least on*)	26th February 2027
Project Commencement (*before or at least on*)	15th March 2027

10. How to apply

Proposals shall only be in English language and can ONLY be submitted online through the Research and Innovation Grants Management System (RIGMS) available on https://rigms.ncst.gov.rw. The Principal Investigator of the selected project must create an account on RIGMS where application forms and templates are available. However, the applicant has questions or require further information, he/she can submit his/her queries via email to: **research@ncst.gov.rw** | Tel: +250781030798

Applicants are strongly advised to submit well before the deadline. Applications sent by e-mail, delivered in hard copy, submitted through another platform, or resubmitted after the deadline WILL NOT be accepted. NCST is not responsible for delays caused by an applicant's internet connection, incomplete uploads or other last-minute technical problems.

Clarification questions should be submitted to the e-mail address **research@ncst.gov.rw** Any clarification that materially affects the call will be communicated to all applicants through RIGMS or the NCST website. Applicants are responsible for monitoring the platform for updates.

11. Annexes

Annex I: National Priority Areas as per STI policy

A-F priority areas:

A: Sustainable energy

- **Alternative Energy**: Innovations and research interests with a goal to provide cleaner energy. This includes solar energy solutions, biomass, hydro power, methane gas, geothermal and wind energy
- **Rural Energy**: Innovation and research interest with a goal to provide efficient lighting, cooking, heating and other energy solutions to rural communities.
- **Advanced Energy**: Innovation and research on high density forms of energy, improved storage, transport, metering and efficient use of energy.

B: Local production and value addition/Manufacturing

- Construction materials
- Packaging products
- Textiles and leather products
- Chemicals and fertilizers
- Food Processing C: Food security and modern agriculture
- Crop Research and Protection
- Biotechnology
- Post-harvest handling and management
- Livestock production
- Precision agriculture Land husbandry

C: Life and health sciences

- Disease prevention and control: research in preventing and managing both communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- Pharmaceutical drugs: knowledge-based solutions to producing drugs and other medicinal products preferably from local raw materials.
- Maternal and child health: solutions aiming at protecting and improving the health and overall quality of life for mothers and children.
- Health promotion: activities and research questions related to health communication and promotion.
- Health system support: health support systems, services, products and procedures pertaining to health financing, governance, skills, technologies and management.
- Clinical research: studies related to the delivery of solutions to health issues such as testing on new drugs, vaccines, feasibility studies and others.
- E-Health: application of modern technologies to the health sector issues.

D: Resilient environment and natural resources

- Land and water resources: solutions for managing land resources, providing abundant and safe water for drinking and other uses
- Green production: processes and products aiming at increasing productivity while promoting and maintaining environment friendly practices
- Mining products: as one of the Rwanda's main exports, there is a need for adequate solutions to add value to mineral products to avoid value loss due to exporting raw materials

E: Digital services, products and lifestyles

- Digital media: This includes video games, video content, e-books and other content delivery mechanisms
- Financial Technologies (Fintech)
- ICT for an identified area (education, business, etc.) that is to greatly benefit from added value brought by advanced information and communication technologies
- Digital sservices: technology solutions to ease and mainstream service delivery in all sectors.
- Cybersecurity and data security

F: Food security and modern Agriculture

- **Crop research and protection:** aiming at improving crop productivity, crop varieties and reduce crop losses 2. Biotechnology: cutting-edge research and solutions in plant genotyping using molecular biology techniques and modern diseases diagnostics
- **Post-harvest handling and management:** solutions to broaden the utilization base of primary agricultural products through food processing and other value addition techniques and reduce post-harvest losses through improving food handling and storage
- **Livestock production:** solutions to develop high yielding livestock genotypes for meat and milk production 5. Irrigation and mechanization: using technology solutions to modernize agriculture to reduce dependence on rain and sole manual labor
- **Land Husbandry:** increasing the productivity and commercialization of hillside agriculture
- **Precision agriculture:** monitoring and control of real time information in agriculture to improve productivity and profitability.

Annex II: Technology Readiness levels as per KTH innovation readiness model

Level	Description
TRL 9	- Complete technology is scalable and proven to work in actual operations by several users over time - Continuous development, improvement, optimization of technology and production is ongoing
TRL 8	- Complete technology has been proven to work in actual operations by first users - Complete technology = Complete - contains everything the user needs to use it; Functional - everything works the way it should for the user to solve their problem/need; Compatible - compatible with people, processes, goals, infrastructure, systems, etc. at the user; Producible - possible to produce at a reasonable cost - Proven to work = meet all performance requirements/specifications - Actual operations = implemented by end-users on their own in their day-to-day operations
TRL 7	- Prototype near or at the complete technology has been shown to actually work in an operational environment - Operational environment = environment that addresses all the operational requirements and specifications where the technology will be used by the end-users - Complete end-user requirements/specifications and/or use cases in place

TRL 6	- Representative model or prototype of the technology has been shown to actually work in a relevant environment - Representative model = a functional form of the technology, generally reduced in scale, near or at operational specification - Prototype = the technology in a form that can be used to evaluate the technical and/or manufacturing feasibility or utility of the final product - Shown to actually work (i.e. demonstration) = meet most of the important performance requirements
TRL 5	- Basic components are integrated and tested in a more realistic form in a relevant environment - Test results give evidence indicating that the technology will work (i.e. validation) - Relevant environment = lab or other controlled environment that simulates the most important and most stressing aspects of the operational environment - More defined end-user requirements/specifications and/or use cases based on feedback from users
TRL 4	- Basic components are integrated and shown to work together and produce desired results in the laboratory environment - Test results give initial evidence indicating that the technology concept will work (i.e. initial validation)
TRL 3	- Tests in the laboratory environment (analytical and/or experimental) of important parameters/features/functions show that the technology concept could work and be feasible - Laboratory environment = the environment where technology is typically developed, often not the same environment as where it will be used - Active R&D is initiated to develop the technology further - There is a first idea of end-user requirements/specifications and/or use cases
TRL2	- A potential technology concept is defined and described. - Practical applications can be defined/researched but are speculative, and no proof or detailed analysis that the technology will work.
TRL1	- Research results with potential benefits or useful applications identified - Vague idea of a technology to be developed