



National Research
& Innovation Fund

NATIONAL RESEARCH & INNOVATION FUND **GRANTS MANUAL**

Standards and procedures governing the financing of research and innovation, capacity strengthening, governance, research integrity, financial management, evaluation, open science, and accountability



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TITLE

National Research and Innovation Fund — Grants Manual

PROMOTING INSTITUTION

National Research and Innovation Fund (NRIF), Republic of The Gambia

LEGAL BASIS

National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025 (Republic of The Gambia Official Gazette, ISSN 0796-0298). The Act establishes NRIF as an autonomous statutory body, defines its mandate and powers, and sets out the legal framework for all operations described in this manual.

AUTHORSHIP

NRIF Secretariat, informed by the national stakeholder consultation (25 March – 24 April 2026) and by international best practice drawn from NSF (USA), NRF (South Africa), the African Science Granting Councils Initiative, FNR (Luxembourg), the Canadian Tri-Agency Responsible Conduct of Research Framework, the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, DORA, and the Leiden Manifesto

VERSION

1.0 First draft version

DATE

20th May 2026

REVIEW CYCLE

Annual minimum. The Secretariat reviews and, where necessary, revises this manual at the close of each financial year or earlier if a material change in funding architecture, legal framework, or national policy requires it. All revisions require Governing Board approval. Any revision must be consistent with the NRIF Act, 2025.

SCOPE

All NRIF funding windows, governance bodies, financial management procedures, application and evaluation processes, research integrity standards, open science requirements, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems, and communication and grievance mechanisms.

STATUS

Approved by the NRIF Governing Board, chaired by Dr. Ebrima Sall

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025, Republic of The Gambia

Version	Date	Approved by	Summary
1.0	2026	NRIF Board	Initial approved version

LIST OF ACRONYMS

REFERENCE

ACRONYM	DEFINITION
ALLEA	All European Academies, publisher of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity
CoARA	Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment
DORA	San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment
FAIR	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable (data principles)
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
IPSAS	International Public Sector Accounting Standards
LGA	Local Government Authority
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoFEA	Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
MoHERST	Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
NAFTI	National Association of Further and Technical Institutions
NAQAA	National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority
NDP	National Development Plan, Republic of The Gambia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRIF	National Research and Innovation Fund
OA	Open Access
ORCID	Open Researcher and Contributor ID
PFMA	Public Financial Management Act, 2014
SGCI	Science Granting Councils Initiative in sub-Saharan Africa
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TVET	Technical, Vocational, Education and Training

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION, MANDATE, AND GOVERNING STANDARDS

1.1 Purpose and Scope of this Manual

This Operations Manual is the primary governing document for all NRIF activities. It is binding on the Governing Board, the Technical Advisory Committee, the Secretariat, all applicants for NRIF funding, and all grantees. Its provisions have been developed with reference to the leading international standards in research fund management and are grounded in the findings of the national stakeholder consultation conducted across The Gambia between 25 March and 24 April 2026.

The National Research and Innovation Fund was established under the National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025, a statute of the Republic of The Gambia (Gazette ISSN 0796-0298) as The Gambia's dedicated national institution for building a thriving research and innovation ecosystem. Established as a strategic instrument of national development, NRIF finances research, develops talent, and convenes the partnerships that convert knowledge into solutions, and solutions into impact. This manual is the operational expression of the standards that must govern every activity of an institution with that mandate.

The manual exists for a specific reason: across all fourteen consultation sessions, participants, from innovation hubs to the diplomatic corps, from student unions to government ministries, identified transparency and clearly documented processes as the foundational conditions for their trust in NRIF. This manual is the operational expression of that requirement. NRIF will be judged not by the quality of its stated intentions but by the consistency with which it applies the standards set out here.

The manual covers: legal and regulatory framework; international standards adopted; governance; research integrity and ethics; open science; financial management; ten funding windows; application and evaluation procedures; monitoring, evaluation and learning; secretariat capacity building; communication and stakeholder engagement; and the grievance redress mechanism.

1.2 Legal and Regulatory Framework

NRIF's primary enabling legislation is the National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025, a statute of the Republic of The Gambia published in the Official Gazette (ISSN 0796-0298). The Act establishes NRIF as an autonomous statutory body, defines its mandate and powers, sets the legal basis for the Governing Board's composition and authority, governs the Secretariat's accountability, and provides the financial management framework within which all NRIF operations must be conducted. Every provision of this Operations Manual is either required by the Act or is consistent with it. Where this manual is silent on a matter addressed by the Act, the Act prevails without exception.

Governing principle: The National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025 (ISSN 0796-0298) is the supreme governing instrument for all NRIF operations. This manual translates the Act's provisions into operational procedures and augments them with international best practice standards where the Act provides discretion. No provision of this manual may be applied in a manner that contradicts the Act.

NRIF OPERATES WITHIN THE FOLLOWING LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK:

National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025 (Issn 0796-0298)

The primary enabling legislation. Establishes NRIF as an autonomous statutory body; defines its mandate, the composition and powers of the Governing Board, the role and accountability of the Secretariat, financial management obligations, and the framework for all NRIF operations. All provisions of this manual are either required by the Act or are consistent with it. Where this manual is silent on a matter addressed by the Act, the Act prevails.

National Development Plan (NDP)

Primary reference for national priority alignment in all NRIF programme and funding decisions

National Science ,Technology and Innovation Policy (NSTIP)2027-2035

Sets out the programmatic targets to which NRIF grant windows are calibrated

Public Financial Management Act (PFMA), 2014

Governs all financial management, accounting, reporting, and audit obligations

GambiaPublic Procurement Act and Regulations

Governs all procurement conducted by the Secretariat

IPSAS Cash Basis of Accounting

Mandatory accounting standard for all NRIF financial statements

Anti-Corruption Act, 2023

Governs conduct; referenced in conflict-of-interest and fraud prevention provisions

Local Government Act

Governs channeling of funds to urban LGAs through Area Councils

NAQAA Accreditation Framework

Governs eligibility for TVET and university windows

Gambia Labour Act, 2023

Applies to all Secretariat employment arrangements

Data Protection Act (applicable provisions)

Governs all personal data collected and held by NRIF

1.3 Mission, Vision, and Strategic Objectives

Vision. To be a leading national institution driving excellence and impact in research and innovation for sustainable and inclusive development.

Mission. To mobilise and strategically invest resources in high-quality research and innovation, strengthen national capacity, and foster partnerships that generate knowledge, solutions, and measurable impact for The Gambia.

Three Mandated Pillars

NRIF's mandate rests on three interdependent pillars, each of which is addressed by the funding windows and procedures set out in this manual:

Pillar I: Financing Research and Innovation. NRIF provides strategic, targeted funding across the full research and innovation lifecycle, from early-stage concept development to scale-ready solutions with emphasis on national relevance, rigour, and real-world impact.

Pillar II: Strengthening Capacity. The Fund invests in the capabilities of individuals and institutions through training, fellowships, and mentorship, building a national research system that is competitive and globally connected.

Pillar III: Advancing National Development. NRIF aligns all investments with The Gambia's national development priorities, ensuring that knowledge generation produces measurable impact across health, agriculture, education, industry, digital economy, energy and the environment.

Six Strategic Priorities

All NRIF programme and funding decisions are guided by the following six strategic priorities:

1. **Strategic Research Funding:** financing high-quality research aligned with national development priorities and addressing societal challenges with direct policy applications.
2. **Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** supporting startups, innovation laboratories, and scalable solutions with commercial potential.
3. **Capacity Development:** systematically strengthening human capital and institutional infrastructure for a high-performing national research system.
4. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** convening cross-sectoral partnerships between academia, industry, government, and international bodies.
5. **Knowledge Management and Policy Influence:** enhancing research evidence uptake in policymaking and increasing the visibility of Gambian knowledge.
6. **Resource Mobilisation:** operating a diversified, blended financing model that ensures sustainability and expanded programme reach.

1.4 International Standards Adopted by NRIF

NRIF has adopted the following international standards and frameworks. These are not aspirational references: they are operational commitments whose practical implementation is described in the relevant sections of this manual.

NSF Merit Review Principles

The National Science Foundation's (USA) Principles for Scientific Merit Review, as endorsed by the 2012 Global Summit on Merit Review, governs the design of NRIF's proposal evaluation system. These principles require that merit review be characterised by expert assessment; transparent; impartial; confidential; and conducted with integrity. NRIF's evaluation procedures in Part 6 are designed to meet all five principles.

NRIF applies NSF's two-dimensional merit assessment approach, adapted to the national context:

- Scientific and Technical Merit: the quality, originality, and soundness of the proposed research or innovation activity.
- National Development Impact: the potential to benefit Gambian society, contribute to NDP priorities, create employment, build capacity, or advance evidence-based governance.

Source: NSF PAPPG (2024); NSF Merit Review Principles (Global Summit on Merit Review, 2012)

DORA, San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment

NRIF is committed to the principles of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA, 2012), signed by over 27,000 institutions and individuals worldwide. NRIF will not use journal impact factors, h-indices, or other journal-level bibliometric indicators as proxy

measures of research quality in its evaluation of individual applications or in decisions about funding, selection, or assessment.

Research quality will be assessed based on the intrinsic merit of the work, its conceptual contribution, methodological soundness, national relevance, and potential for practical impact, rather than where or in what volume it has been published. Evaluators are expressly prohibited from using journal prestige as a substitute for direct assessment of proposal quality.

Source: San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, 2012; DORA Implementation Guidance.

Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics

NRIF's approach to performance measurement and evaluation is guided by the ten principles of the Leiden Manifesto (Hicks, Wouters et al., Nature, 2015). The Manifesto's core instruction, that quantitative evaluation should support, not replace, qualitative expert assessment, is the foundational principle of NRIF's MEL framework.

In practice, this means that NRIF will: measure performance against the specific research and development missions of each funded activity, not against a single universal metric; protect support for locally relevant research even where that research does not generate international publication outputs; use a portfolio of indicators rather than any single measure; and ensure that those being evaluated can verify the data used to assess them.

Source: Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics, Nature 520:429–431 (2015).

ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity

All research funded by NRIF must be conducted in accordance with the principles of the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (revised edition). These principles apply to all grantees regardless of institutional type or window. The Code's four core principles: reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability, are adopted by NRIF as the foundation of its research integrity framework (Part 3).

Source: ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, 2017, revised 2023.

Canadian Tri-Agency Responsible Conduct of Research Framework

NRIF's policies on research misconduct investigation, conflict of interest in review processes, and responsible grant management draw on the Canadian Tri-Agency Responsible Conduct of Research Framework (2021), which governs CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC; three of the world's leading research funding agencies. In particular, NRIF adopts the Tri-Agency principle that investigation committees must include at least one member external to the institution under investigation, and that funding agencies may conduct independent compliance audits.

Source: Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research, 2021.

SGCI Good Financial Grant Practice

Financial management standards, grant management procedures, and audit requirements in this manual draw on the Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) benchmarking framework developed through the African Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI), which has strengthened research management capacity across 17 sub-Saharan African science funding agencies since 2015. NRIF will seek GFGP certification as a benchmark of its own financial management standards.

Source: SGCI Good Financial Grant Practice Framework; IDRC/SIDA/NRF SGCI Phase II, 2021–2023.

FNR Principles for Scientific Merit Review and Quality Management

NRIF's quality management framework draws on the standards of the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR), which has achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification for its grant management operations. NRIF will work towards equivalent quality management certification within five years of its establishment. The FNR's principle, that the most reliable route to funding excellence is the systematic submission of applications to assessment by independent international experts, underpins NRIF's use of external reviewers in Part 6.

Source: FNR Mission and Strategy; FNR Principles for Scientific Merit Review (2012 Global Summit).

1.5 Alignment with National Development Priorities

NDP Priority Area	NRIF Contribution
Agriculture and food security	Research on mechanization, seed adaptation, value chains, food safety; agricultural innovation support
Youth employment and irregular migration	Innovation in high-potential employment sectors; student and TVET research support
Waste management	Applied research and innovation pilots; circular economy development
Health and social protection	Implementation research; data systems for welfare and social registry
Climate and environmental resilience	Research on adaptation, renewable energy, and environmental enforcement
Skills and human capital	TVET curriculum reform; workforce readiness; postgraduate pipeline
Digital governance and data systems	National data infrastructure; analytical capacity; evidence-based governance
Private sector development	Research-industry linkages; SME data systems; commercialization support

PART 2 GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

NRIF operates under a governance structure comprising three tiers: MoHERST provides policy oversight, ensuring NRIF's alignment with national policies; the Governing Board provides strategic leadership, governance, and oversight; the National Assembly provides financial accountability oversight and receives the annual Audited financial and operational report from the secretariat within three months after the end of each financial year. The NRIF Secretariat handles operational management, programme implementation, and day-to-day delivery. This structure contained in the NRIF Act aligns with findings of the national stakeholder consultation, in which participants across all fourteen sessions identified multi-stakeholder governance, independence from political interference, and transparent decision-making as non-negotiable foundations for NRIF's legitimacy.

2.1 Governing Board

Composition

The Governing Board is the highest decision-making body of NRIF. It convenes quarterly, with extraordinary meetings as required. The Board is constituted of distinguished professionals drawn from government, the private sector, and independent expertise:

#	Role	Affiliation
1	Board Chairperson	Trust Africa; former Executive Secretary, CODESRIA
2	Ex-Officio Member	Permanent Secretary, MoHERST
3	Designated Representative	Deputy Permanent Secretary, MoFEA
4	Ex-Officio Member	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health
5	Designated Representative	Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture
6	Ex-Officio Member	Permanent Secretary, MoECCNR
7	Ex-Officio Member	Permanent Secretary, MoYS
8	Designated Representative	Deputy Permanent Secretary, MoTIE
9	Designated Representative	Senior State Counsel
10	Private Sector Representative	Private Sector
11	Private Sector Representative	Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCl)
12	Secretary / Executive Director	NRIF Secretariat (attends without voting rights)
13	Co-opted Member	Director of Research, MoHERST

The composition, powers, and procedures of the Governing Board as set out in this section are drawn from the NRIF Act, 2025. Where any provision of this manual conflicts with the Act, the Act prevails. Board members are appointed in accordance with the procedures set out in the Act.

Quorum for Board meetings: two-thirds (9) of voting members. Funding allocation decisions require a simple majority. Members with a conflict of interest in any agenda item must declare and recuse themselves from discussion and voting on that item.

Roles and Responsibilities

- Set the strategic direction and priorities of NRIF.
- Approve the annual budget, work plan, and aggregate window allocations.
- Approve all calls for proposals documents before publication.
- Review and adopt quarterly and annual financial and operational reports.
- Appoint members of the Technical Advisory Committee.
- Adopt findings of independent evaluations and audits.
- Ensure operational independence from political interference.
- Approve any revision to this Operations Manual.

2.2 Technical Advisory Committee

Composition and Independence

The TAC provides independent technical assessment and leads the evaluation of all funding proposals. Members are appointed by the Governing Board for each window cycle on the basis of relevant expertise. TAC composition for each window must include at minimum one international reviewer with no affiliation to any Gambian institution, to provide independent,

external perspective on proposal quality, consistent with the NSF principle that expert review panels should include reviewers whose fields of specialty are complementary within a group.

- Deputy Permanent Secretary (Technical), MoHERST (Chair)
- Executive Director, NRIF — Prof. Momodou Sallah (Secretary, with voting rights as the head of NRIF secretariat, overall success of funding falls back to him.)
- Director of Programmes, NRIF (coordination and administrative support, without voting rights)
- NAQAA representative (for windows involving accredited institutions)
- Two to four subject-matter specialists with direct expertise relevant to the window
- At least one international reviewer (Gambian) with no Gambian institutional affiliation
- One youth or student representative (for Windows V and VI)
- NAFTI representative (for Window VI only — governance condition from the consultation)

All TAC members to sign a Conflict of Interest Declaration and a Confidentiality Agreement before their appointment is confirmed. Members under investigation for research misconduct may not serve on the TAC. This requirement follows the Canadian Tri-Agency standard.

Roles and Responsibilities

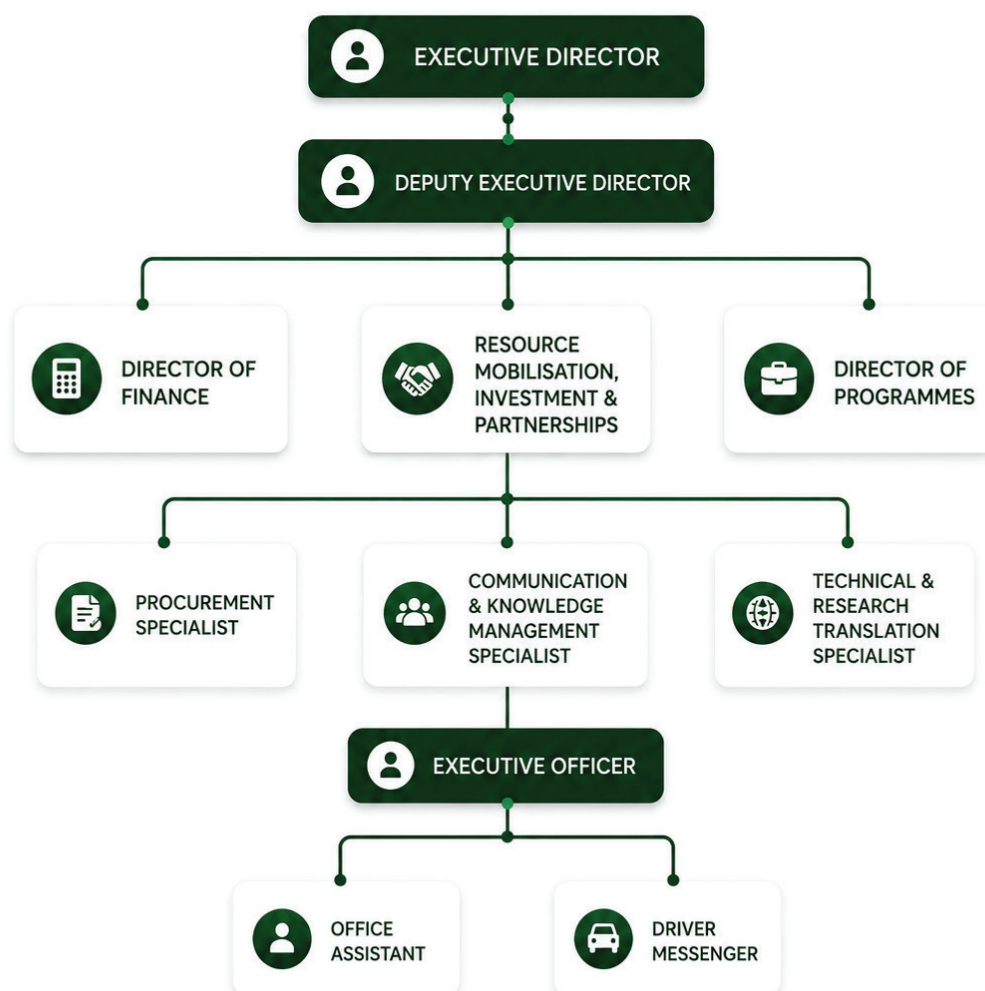
- Provide technical advice on programme design and evaluation methodology.
- Review and provide written feedback on calls for proposals before publication.
- Attend calibration sessions to ensure inter-rater consistency.
- Submit written evaluation reports with score justifications.
- Recommend funding decisions to the Governing Board.

2.3 NRIF Secretariat Current Organogram

The NRIF Secretariat is responsible for operational management, programme implementation, and day-to-day delivery. The current Secretariat is constituted as follows:



National Research & Innovation Fund



Functional Responsibilities

Function	Key Responsibilities
Executive Director	Strategic and operational leadership; accountability to the Governing Board; external representation of NRIF; overall programme oversight.
Director of Finance	Financial accounting and reporting; IFMIS operation; bank account management; procurement oversight; internal controls; external audit coordination.
Director of Resource Mobilisation, Investment and Partnerships	Development partner relations; co-financing arrangements; diaspora engagement window; strategic partnership development; blended financing model management.
Director of Programmes	Application process management; grant agreement administration; milestone-based disbursement; grantee compliance monitoring; calls for proposals coordination.
Technical and Research Translation Specialist	Research quality assurance; evidence-to-policy translation; research integrity oversight; TAC support; reviewer database management; open science compliance.
Procurement Specialist	All procurement activities in accordance with the Gambia Public Procurement Act; contracts management; procurement plan implementation.

The Secretariat's current staffing reflects NRIF's establishment phase. As NRIF's portfolio grows, additional staff including a dedicated MEL Officer and Research Integrity Officer will be recruited through open, merit-based competitive processes to meet the operational requirements of this manual.

Phase	Description	Governance Actions
Phase 1: Foundation	Governance structures established; this manual approved; digital portal launched; Secretariat recruited; IFMIS deployed; first generation of calls for proposals developed.	Board constituted and quorate; TAC appointed; Executive Director and core Secretariat in post; portal live.
Phase 2: First Funding Cycle	Calls for proposals published; proposals received, evaluated, and funded; grant agreements executed.	Board approves calls; TAC conducts evaluation; Board approves recommendations; grant agreements signed.

Phase 3: Implementation	Grantees implement; Secretariat monitors; milestone-linked disbursements processed; quarterly portfolio reviews.	MEL Officer and Grants Team conduct monitoring; quarterly reports to Board; disbursements processed.
Phase 4: Learning and Adaptation	First cycle findings evaluated; window designs refined; procedures updated.	Independent evaluation commissioned; TAC reviews findings; Board approves revisions; Manual updated.
Phase 5: Consolidation	Portfolio matures; impact assessed; second cycle designed; sustainability strategy advanced.	Independent impact evaluation; GFPG certification pursued; Annual Report published; second cycle approved.

2.5 Transparency, Accountability, and Public Reporting

Transparency is the single most important trust factor identified by stakeholders across every session of the national consultation. NRIF treats the following obligations as non-negotiable:

- All calls for proposals, eligibility criteria, evaluation rubrics, TAC panel compositions (names and institutional affiliations), funding decisions, award amounts, quarterly and annual financial reports, independent evaluation reports, and audit reports are published on the NRIF digital portal within 30 days of their production.
- Structured, criterion-referenced feedback is provided to all applicants within 30 days of a funding decision.
- Annual financial statements are audited independently and published within 90 days of the financial year end.
- An Annual Report covering portfolio performance, disbursements, key results, and lessons learned is published within 90 days of the financial year end.
- One public stakeholder forum per year at which NRIF reports on progress and receives ecosystem feedback.

2.6 Conflict of Interest Policy

NRIF's conflict of interest policy is modelled on the standards of NSF, NIH, and the Canadian Tri-Agency, each of which treat undisclosed conflicts as a disqualifying breach of integrity standards.

A conflict of interest exists where an individual has a personal, financial, or professional interest, real, potential, or perceived, in the outcome of a decision they are involved in making. All Board members, TAC members, Secretariat staff, and external reviewers sign a Conflict-of-Interest Declaration on appointment and at the start of each evaluation cycle.

Where a conflict exists, the individual must: disclose it in writing to the Executive Director (or Board Chairperson (Dr. Ebrima Sall) if the Executive Director has the conflict); recuse themselves from all discussion, evaluation, scoring, and voting on the affected matter; and have no access to confidential information relating to that matter. Conflicts are recorded in the Secretariat's Conflicts Register, updated at each funding cycle.

An undisclosed conflict identified after the fact is treated as a breach of NRIF's Code of Conduct. Consequences include: disciplinary action; reversal of the affected decision where feasible; suspension from further participation in NRIF processes; and, where the Anti-Corruption Act, 2023 applies, referral to the relevant authority.

PART 3

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND ETHICAL STANDARDS

Research integrity is the foundation of NRIF's credibility as a public institution and the precondition for the value of every activity it funds. An institution that funds research it cannot trust, that cannot verify the conduct of its grantees, or that cannot investigate and respond to misconduct is not a serious research fund. NRIF's research integrity framework draws on the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, the Canadian Tri-Agency Responsible Conduct of Research Framework, the FNR's integrity guidelines, and the Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers (2020).

3.1 NRIF's Commitment to Research Integrity

The four core principles of the ALLEA Code of Conduct for Research Integrity apply to all NRIF-funded activities:

Reliability. Research must be conducted with care, using appropriate methods, recording and reporting results accurately. Grantees are accountable for the reliability of all data, analyses, and findings produced under NRIF funding.

Honesty. Research must be conducted, evaluated, reported, and communicated honestly. Fabrication, falsification, and selective reporting are misconduct. Grantees must not misrepresent their own contributions or those of others.

Respect. Research must respect collaborators, research subjects, communities, data, the environment, and the public interest. All human subjects research must have appropriate ethics committee approval before it commences.

Accountability. Grantees are accountable to NRIF, to their institutions, and to the public for the responsible use of public funds, the conduct of their research, and the accuracy of their reporting.

Source: ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, 2017, revised 2023. The NRIF Research Integrity Officer is responsible for maintaining and updating these standards and for advising grantees on their application.

3.2 Standards Governing Applicants and Grantees

The following standards apply to all applicants and grantees from the point of application through the end of the grant period:

- Applications must contain true, complete, and accurate information. Misrepresentation of qualifications, track record, or outputs, including in CVs, publication lists, or preliminary results, is grounds for immediate disqualification or grant termination.
- Applicants may not apply to NRIF if they are currently subject to a finding of research misconduct, financial mismanagement, or ineligibility for funding from any other research funding organisation. This follows the Canadian Tri-Agency standard.
- Applicants and grantees are encouraged to create and maintain an ORCID identifier for all named researchers. NRIF will accept ORCID identifiers as evidence of research track record in relevant windows.
- Grantees must not engage in duplicate submission: the same project may not be submitted simultaneously to NRIF and to another funding body without prior disclosure and written approval from both funders.
- Authorship of research outputs produced under NRIF funding must be based on substantive intellectual contribution. Gift authorship and ghost authorship are prohibited. Attribution must be accurate.
- Research involving human participants must have received written approval from an appropriately constituted research ethics committee before the research commences. NRIF will not fund any human subjects research that lacks prior ethics approval.
- Grantees must acknowledge NRIF funding in all publications, reports, and public communications arising from NRIF-funded work.

3.3 Research Ethics Requirements

NRIF requires a proportionate research ethics review for all funded activities involving human participants, sensitive data, or activities with significant environmental or community implications. The following framework applies:

Research Type	NRIF Requirement
Research involving human participants (interviews, surveys, focus groups, clinical data, identifiable personal data)	Mandatory written approval from a constituted research ethics committee before research commences. Must be submitted with grant agreement documentation.
Research involving vulnerable populations (children, prisoners, patients, communities with limited institutional access)	Mandatory ethics approval. NRIF reserves the right to require additional safeguards or to appoint an independent ethics monitor.

Research involving environmental impacts, community resources, or traditional knowledge	Evidence of free, prior, and informed consent from affected communities or bodies. Community co-design processes documented.
Research with no human or environmental dimensions	Standard responsible conduct of research obligations (Sections 3.1 and 3.2) apply. No separate ethics approval required unless the research involves animals (see note below).

Research involving animals requires documented compliance with applicable national animal care regulations. NRIF follows the FNR's approach: grantees must hold all required approvals before research commences and present documentation on request.

3.4 Responsible Use of Metrics in Evaluation

NRIF endorses the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics, and applies their principles in all evaluation and assessment activities.

The following practices are expressly prohibited in all NRIF evaluation processes:

- Using journal impact factors as a proxy for the quality of individual research proposals or outputs.
- Using h-indices or total citation counts as primary or sole measures of researcher quality.
- Ranking applicants primarily on the basis of the prestige of their institutional affiliation.
- Treating international publication as inherently superior to locally relevant applied research outputs that address Gambian development challenges.

The following practices are required:

- Proposals are assessed on the intrinsic quality of the work proposed, using the published evaluation criteria.
- Track record is assessed through a narrative contribution statement, a description of the applicant's most significant contributions to their field and to development practice, rather than a bare publication list. This approach follows the FNR, NRF (South Africa), and Canadian Tri-Agency narrative CV models.
- Locally relevant research on Gambian development challenges receives equal standing with internationally published academic research. The Leiden Manifesto's instruction to 'protect excellence in locally relevant research' is applied explicitly.
- Performance data used in assessments is made available to applicants for verification on request.

3.5 Open Science Policy

NRIF is committed to open science as both a principle and an operational requirement. Publicly funded research is a public good, and NRIF expects its grantees to make their findings as openly available as practicable. This policy is informed by the FNR's open access framework, the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (2021), and Plan S principles.

The following requirements apply to all research outputs produced under NRIF funding:

- Open Access to publications: all peer-reviewed journal articles arising from NRIF-funded research must be made freely available to read, at the latest twelve months after publication, through open access routes.

NRIF strongly recommends immediate open access through Gold or Green OA channels. Article processing charges (APCs) are an eligible grant expenditure where institutional OA agreements are not available.

- Open Access to policy outputs and reports: all policy briefs, technical reports, and research summaries produced under NRIF funding must be published without charge on the NRIF portal and, where relevant, on the websites of grantee institutions.
- Preprint encouragement: NRIF encourages grantees to deposit preprints of journal articles in recognised open repositories. Preprints do not replace peer-reviewed publications.
- Attribution: all open access outputs must carry a clear acknowledgement of NRIF funding.

3.6 Data Management Requirements

All NRIF grantees must produce and submit a Data Management Plan (DMP) with their inception report. The DMP requirement is standard practice among leading research funders including NSF, UKRI, NRF South Africa, and the European Research Council, and reflects the growing international consensus that research data is a scientific and public asset that must be responsibly managed.

NRIF applies FAIR data principles:

- Findable: research data should be discoverable by both humans and computers, with persistent identifiers and descriptive metadata.
- Accessible: data should be stored in accessible repositories with clear protocols for who can access it and under what conditions.
- Interoperable: data should use standard formats and vocabularies to enable reuse across systems.
- Reusable: data should be documented with sufficient detail to allow others to reproduce results and build on findings.

Grantees must: specify in their DMP which data will be made openly available, which will be held under controlled access (with justification), and the repository in which data will be deposited; retain original research data for a minimum of five years after the end of the grant period; and make data available to NRIF for audit or verification on request.

NRIF will develop a Gambia-specific open data repository in partnership with MoHERST and the national university system. Until this is operational, grantees may deposit data in appropriate international open repositories.

3.7 Research Misconduct Investigation Procedure

NRIF defines research misconduct as: fabrication of data or results; falsification of data, methods, or findings; plagiarism; and serious or repeated breaches of the responsible conduct of research standards in this manual. Honest differences of interpretation and genuine research errors are not misconduct, and must be distinguished from it.

Stage	Action	Timeline
Allegation received	Allegation submitted in writing to the Research Integrity Officer (or Executive Director if the Officer is implicated).	Within 5 working days: written acknowledgement to complainant.
Initial assessment	Research Integrity Officer determines whether the allegation falls within NRIF's scope and whether a prima facie case exists.	Within 15 working days of receipt.
Investigation	If a prima facie case exists: investigation committee constituted.	Within 60 working days of committee constitution.
	At least one member external to the institution under investigation (following the Canadian Tri-Agency standard). Committee reviews evidence; interviews relevant parties; produces written findings.	Extension possible with Board Chairperson approval.
Findings and response	Written findings presented to the Executive Director and Board Chairperson. Respondent given opportunity to respond before findings are finalised.	Respondent response period: 14 working days.
Consequences	Depending on findings: grant suspension or termination; recovery of funds; ineligibility period for future NRIF funding; referral to the respondent's institution; referral to the Anti-Corruption Commission (2023 Act) where appropriate.	Within 21 working days of final findings.
Appeal	Respondent may appeal to the Board Chairperson within 14 days of receiving the outcome.	Board Chairperson responds within 21 working days.

The identity of complainants is treated as confidential throughout the investigation and is not disclosed to the respondent without explicit consent. Anonymous allegations will be assessed on the basis of the evidence provided. The Secretariat maintains a Research Integrity Register recording all allegations received and their outcomes.

PART 4

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

4.1 Financial Management Framework

NRIF's financial management is governed by: the Public Financial Management Act (PFMA), 2014; IPSAS Accrual Basis Accounting Standards; the Financial Reporting Act, 2013; the Public Finance Act, 2014 and Government Financial Regulations, 2016; the Anti-Corruption Act, 2023; and the SGCI Good Financial Grant Practice framework. NRIF will seek GFGP certification as a benchmark of its financial management maturity.

An Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) will be deployed with minimum capabilities including: budget recording and actuals comparison at any time period; real-time expenditure recording against the Chart of Accounts; fund receipts capture by source; IPSAS-compliant financial reporting; export in Excel, PDF, and standard formats; and disbursement tracking linked to approved grants and milestones.

4.2 Accounting Standards and Policies

NRIF applies the IPSAS Accrual Basis of Accounting. Income is recorded when received; expenditure when they are incurred (not when cash is paid out) disbursed. Accounting policies are applied consistently; any departure is disclosed in the relevant financial statement. The Director of Finance maintains memorandum records of all commitments to prevent over-commitment of funds.

Monthly bank reconciliations are completed by the 15th of the following month, signed by the preparer and reviewer, and filed with supporting bank statements. Quarterly financial reports, summarising all disbursements against approved allocations, are submitted to the Board within 30 days of each quarter end.

4.3 Bank Account Management

All NRIF funds are held in a Special Account (NRIF-SA) denominated in GMD, opened and maintained at the Central Bank of The Gambia. Operational costs are managed through the Special Account. All grant disbursements are channeled through the NRIF-SA.

Four designated signatories (any two required to sign):

- Executive Director, NRIF (Prof. Momodou Sallah) — Category A
- Director of Finance, NRIF (Mr. Samba Bah) — Category B
- Permanent Secretary, MoHERST (Ms Isatou Auber) — Category A alternate
- TBC — Category B alternate

Disbursements are made directly to the bank account of the grantee institution following Board approval and endorsement by the authorised signatories. Disbursements are milestone-linked as set out in Section 4.4 and the grant agreement.

4.4 Funds Flow and Milestone-Based Disbursement

All grant disbursements follow a milestone-based payment structure. Specific percentages and milestone definitions are set in each call for proposals document. The standard structure is:

Tranche	Trigger	Documentation Required
First tranche (30–40%)	Execution of signed grant agreement	Signed grant agreement; bank details of grantee; approved inception report including activity plan, budget breakdown, and Data Management Plan
Intermediate tranche(s) (30–40%)	Verified achievement of milestones specified in the grant agreement	Mid-term progress report accepted by Secretariat; evidence of milestone achievement; satisfactory site visit report where required
Final tranche (20–30%)	Successful completion of grant activities	Final report accepted by Secretariat; evidence of all agreed outputs; audited financial statement for grants above the threshold specified in the call for proposals

Where a grantee fails to achieve agreed milestones, the Secretariat through the services of a Legal retainer issues a written remediation notice specifying the gap and a remediation period. If unresolved, NRIF may suspend or terminate the grant and recover disbursed funds under the grant agreement terms. Recovery procedures follow PFMA provisions.

4.5 Procurement

All Secretariat procurement follows the Gambia Public Procurement Act and Regulations, using standard procurement documents, against an annually approved Procurement Plan. Objectives: value for money; timely delivery; fair competition; compliance with national frameworks; accurate records. The Procurement Specialist and all staff involved in procurement sign conflict-of-interest declarations specific to each exercise. Contracts above the Board-approved threshold require Board approval before award.

Grant disbursements to grantees are not procurement activities. Service contracts entered into by grantees using NRIF funds must comply with the procurement standards in the relevant call for proposals document and grant agreement.

4.6 External Audit

An annual external audit is conducted by the National Audit Office or an independent qualified auditor appointed by the National Audit Office. The auditor provides an opinion on NRIF's Annual Financial Statements, conducts the audit in compliance with International Standards on Auditing, and produces a Management Letter with observations and recommendations on internal controls.

The audit scope extends to all NRIF-managed funds including grant disbursements. Grantees must retain original documentation of eligible expenditures and provide it to auditors on request. Audit reports and Management Letters are published on the NRIF portal within 60 days of receipt.

PART 5

5.1 Portfolio Overview

NRIF operates a portfolio of ten funding windows. Each window responds to one or more priority themes identified in the national consultation and addresses a specific structural gap within The Gambia's research and innovation ecosystem. The portfolio design reflects the NRF South Africa model of portfolio-based national funding, adapted to the Gambian context, recognising that heterogeneous ecosystem actors require different instruments matched to their mandates, capacities, and development stages.

The Board will set window priorities and allocations in the annual work plan. Not all windows are necessarily active in every cycle; sequencing is determined by available resources, national priorities, and ecosystem readiness.

#	Window	Primary Beneficiaries	Consultation Basis
I	Government Systems and Evidence	Ministries, sub-vented agencies, regulatory bodies	Data-to-decision gap identified as top constraint by all 18 sub-vented agencies (81% participation); data systems ranked first (14 votes).
II	Cross-Cutting Capacity Strengthening	Universities, government agencies, LGAs, CSOs, innovation intermediaries	Universal finding: capacity building is a precondition for all other investments, cited by all 14 consultation groups.
III	Research Infrastructure and Systems	Universities, research institutions, TVET centres	Research infrastructure unanimous top priority in Vice Chancellors' Mentimeter polling; ranked second in university funding priorities (13 selections).

IV	Innovation Lifecycle and Market Readiness	Innovation hubs, startups, SMEs	Prototype funding: 67% (top priority); market access support: 89% (top non-financial priority). Testing infrastructure identified as systemic failure point.
V	Student Research and Innovation	Students (undergraduate and postgraduate)	100% participation rate — highest of any session. Research opportunities for students: 71%; mentorship: 61% (top non-financial). Grant framework proposed by participants.
VI	TVET and Skills Innovation	TVET institutions (through NAFTI)	100% participation. Trainer capacity: 40%; equipment: 30%; curriculum: 25%. NAFTI on evaluation panel: governance condition from the consultation.
VII	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	All grantees and implementing partners	Accountability and results measurement cited as essential trust conditions across all sessions.
VII I	Local Government And Provincial Development	Urban and provincial LGAs, Area Councils	Funds flow through Area Councils (Local Government Act): unanimous LGA position. Decentralised funding: 64% (top priority).
IX	Partnerships and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration	Cross-sector consortia	Fragmentation: universal finding. Partnership creation: 50% of non-financial support votes from urban LGAs.
X	Diaspora and International Collaboration	Gambian diaspora, international partners	Mentorship and innovation partnerships: 5 selections each (top diaspora engagement areas). Principle: local partner required.

5.2 Window I: Government Systems and Evidence

Details	
Focus	Strengthening national and sectoral data systems; closing the gap between evidence generation and government decision-making.
Primary Beneficiaries	Government ministries, sub-vented agencies, regulatory and oversight bodies.
Consultation Finding	18 sub-vented agencies across entirely different mandates converged on identical priorities: data systems (14 votes, 1st); capacity building (12 votes, 2nd); M&E (10 votes, 3rd). 33% of ministry votes for capacity building.
NRIF Role	Investments in evidence readiness, analytical capacity, and the translation of evidence into policy and regulatory action — sequenced in that order, as participants articulated.

Objectives

- Establish or strengthen integrated data systems and digital evidence platforms within government and regulatory institutions.
- Build the human capacity to analyse, interpret, and act on data within mandated functions.
- Develop applied analytics and decision-support tools that translate evidence into operational practice.
- Fund policy-relevant applied research directly commissioned by ministries and agencies to address identified evidence gaps.

Eligible Activities

- Development and deployment of integrated data platforms and digital management systems
- National data repositories, registries, and hubs
- Evidence systems for regulation, disaster response, social protection, and oversight
- Staff training in data collection, analysis, and policy application
- Applied research to generate evidence for policy or regulatory action
- Knowledge management and data governance framework development
- ICT and connectivity infrastructure in support of research and regulatory functions

Ineligible Activities

- General office equipment without a demonstrable link to evidence generation
- Salary top-ups to civil servants
- Activities already fully funded in the institution's approved government budget
- Activities outside the institution's statutory mandate

Evaluation Criteria — Window I

Criterion	What is Assessed	Weight
A. Strategic and mandate alignment	Degree to which the proposed investment addresses a documented evidence gap directly linked to the institution's statutory mandate and the NDP.	25%
B. Quality of needs assessment	Rigour of the documented gap between current evidence capacity and what the institution requires to fulfil its mandate.	25%
C. Project design and feasibility	Logic of activities; realism of budget and timeline; quality of implementation plan.	20%
D. Institutional implementation capacity	Demonstrated ability to implement, manage, and sustain the proposed system.	15%
E. Sustainability and uptake pathway	Credible plan for maintenance, institutional embedding, and operational use of findings after the grant period.	15%

Minimum Merit of Proposal for funding eligibility: 7.0 out of 10. Proposals scoring zero on any criterion are not eligible, regardless of overall MP. Tiebreaking: criterion B, then A, C, D, E.

5.3 Window II: Cross-Cutting Capacity Strengthening

Focus	Building the human and institutional capacity required to generate, manage, and apply research and innovation sustainably.
Primary Beneficiaries	Universities, government agencies, LGAs, CSOs, and innovation intermediaries.
Consultation Finding	Capacity building was the most consistently cited cross-cutting investment need across all 14 stakeholder groups — identified as the precondition that must accompany all other investments.

Eligible Activities

- Staff technical training and professional development programmes
- Grant writing, research design, and research management training

- Postgraduate fellowships (Masters and PhD) and early-career researcher support
- Research ethics training and institutional ethics committee capacity
- Data literacy, M&E, and evaluation training
- Open science and data management capacity building

Evaluation Criteria — Window II

Criterion	What is Assessed	Weight
A. Identified capacity gap	Rigour of needs assessment; documented link between gap and institutional mandate or research outputs.	30%
B. Programme quality and design	Evidence-based methodology; alignment with national skills priorities; quality of training design.	25%
C. Institutional commitment	Protected time; institutional support structures; commitment to enabling participants to apply acquired skills.	20%
D. Target group and inclusion	Reach to underserved researchers: women, early-career, provincial institutions, smaller institutions.	15%
E. Value for money	Cost per beneficiary relative to expected skill gain.	10%

5.4 Window III: Research Infrastructure and Systems

Focus	Investment in physical research infrastructure, shared equipment, and research management systems.
Primary Beneficiaries	Universities, research institutions, and TVET centres with research mandates.
Consultation Finding	Research infrastructure: unanimous top priority in Vice Chancellors' session; second in university priorities (13 selections); identified as a critical enabler across the SGCI Africa experience and NRF South Africa's research facilities strategy.

Eligible Activities

- Laboratory construction, renovation, and equipment acquisition
- Shared research equipment and shared-use facilities with a published access protocol
- Innovation hubs, incubators, and maker spaces within accredited institutions
- Prototype testing and product certification infrastructure
- Research management information systems
- Library resources and journal access

Shared-Use Requirement. Infrastructure funded under this window must be made available for shared use by other institutions through a published access protocol. Proposals must include a Shared-Use and Maintenance Plan demonstrating governance arrangements, maintenance budget, and access provisions for smaller and provincial institutions.

Evaluation Criteria: Window III

Criterion	What is Assessed	Weight
A. Research need and projected utilisation	Documented need; evidence of current under-capacity; projected utilisation and diversity of user base.	25%
B. Shared-use and equity of access	Quality of shared-use governance; access provisions for provincial and smaller institutions.	20%
C. Institutional implementation capacity	Qualified personnel; management track record; operational plan.	20%
D. National research priority alignment	Degree to which the infrastructure supports research in NDP priority areas.	20%
E. Sustainability and maintenance	Credibility of maintenance plan; evidence of recurrent funding or partnership to sustain infrastructure beyond the grant period.	15%

5.5 Window IV: Innovation Lifecycle and Market Readiness

Focus	Supporting the full innovation pipeline from concept development to market entry.
Primary Beneficiaries	Registered innovation hubs, startups, and SMEs.

Consultation Finding	Prototype funding: 67% (top priority, innovation session). Market access support: 89% (top non-financial need). The testing stage was described as 'where innovations go to die' due to the absence of certified testing infrastructure.
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Innovation Lifecycle Framework

Stage	Key Gap	NRIF Instrument	Indicative Range
Ideation	No structured concept support; absent mentorship	Concept grants + mentorship matching	GMD 50,000–150,000
Prototype Development	No shared facilities; high material costs	Prototype grants + shared infrastructure access	GMD 150,000–500,000
Testing and Certification	No certified testing facilities, systemic gap	Testing access subsidies; co-investment in shared testing infrastructure	GMD 50,000–200,000
Market Entry	Limited market research; distribution gaps	Market access grants; commercialisation support	GMD 200,000–750,000

Evaluation Criteria: Window IV

Criterion	What is Assessed	Weight
A. Innovation quality and novelty	Technical and commercial merit; originality; response to a documented Gambian market or social need.	25%
B. Market and commercialisation plan	Quality of market analysis; realism of market entry strategy; evidence of demand.	25%
C. Team capacity	Technical, operational, and entrepreneurial capacity to execute.	20%
D. National development impact	Employment creation; import substitution; export potential; NDP priority sector contribution.	15%

E. Financial viability	Budget realism; evidence of sustainable revenue model; path to financial self-sufficiency.	15%
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5.6 Window V: Student Research and Innovation

Focus	Enabling student-led research and innovation from concept to market pilot.
Primary Beneficiaries	Undergraduate and postgraduate students.
Consultation Finding	100% participation rate — highest of any session. Research opportunities: 71% (top priority). Small grants: 61%. Mentorship: 61% (top non-financial need). The milestone grant framework was proposed by participants and is adopted here.

Milestone-Based Grant Framework

Grant Level	Amount	Stage	Milestone Trigger
Ideation Grant	GMD 50,000	Concept development and feasibility	Approved inception report and concept note
Prototype Grant	GMD 150,000	Prototype development and testing	Prototype development report and evidence of working prototype
Market Pilot Grant	GMD 200,000	Small-scale implementation and market pilot	Market pilot report with initial uptake data
Scale-Up Grant	GMD 300,000	Scale-up and institutional research support	Scale-up plan with evidence of sustained adoption

Evaluation Criteria: Window V

Criterion	What is Assessed	Weight
A. Quality and originality	Clarity of problem addressed; originality; response to a Gambian development challenge.	30%
B. Feasibility	Realism of activities and timeline relative to available resources and student stage.	25%
C. National development relevance	Alignment with NDP priorities; potential community, sector, or national impact.	20%
D. Implementation plan	Step-by-step plan; risk awareness; mitigation strategies.	15%
E. Inclusion	Application from underrepresented groups: women, students from provincial institutions, first-generation students.	10%

5.7 Window VI: TVET and Skills Innovation

Focus	Trainer capacity building, equipment modernisation, and evidence-based curriculum reform.
Delivery Channel	NAFTI association (mandatory intermediary); NAQAA for quality assurance.
Consultation Finding	100% participation. Trainer capacity: 40%; equipment: 30%; curriculum: 25%. NAFTI on evaluation panel: non-negotiable governance condition. TVET-stigma as education for school dropouts identified as a repositioning challenge requiring deliberate investment.

Delivery and Governance

Funding flows through NAFTI, which conducts institutional due diligence and provides board-level oversight. This is a governance requirement from the consultation, not a preference. NRIF enters a formal partnership agreement with NAFTI before the first call for proposals, covering due diligence procedures, reporting obligations, conflict-of-interest protocols, and accountability to NRIF. NRIF retains the right to conduct independent verification of any NAFTI-channelled disbursement.

Priority Areas

Priority Area	Rationale	Indicative Share
Trainer capacity building	The precondition for all other TVET investment: without skilled instructors, equipment and curriculum reform will have limited impact.	40%
Equipment modernisation	Industry-standard equipment is essential for practical, market-relevant training and graduate employability.	30%
Curriculum development and reform	Integrating entrepreneurship; aligning with labour market needs; supporting evidence-based NAQAA curriculum review.	25%
Other (infrastructure, accreditation facilitation)	Infrastructure gaps, student enterprise seed capital, NAQAA accreditation support.	5%

Priority Areas

Criterion	What is Assessed	Weight
A. Strategic and TVET policy alignment	Alignment with national TVET policy, GNQF standards, and NDP priority skills sectors.	25%
B. Institutional capacity and track record	Current NAQAA accreditation; governance structure; financial management capacity; training delivery track record.	20%
C. Quality of training design	Alignment with current industry standards; evidence of employer engagement; evidence-based pedagogical approaches.	25%
D. Labour market relevance and employability	Employer demand evidence; internship or placement arrangements; documented graduate outcomes.	20%

E. Inclusion	Targeting of marginalised groups: women, people with disabilities, youth from financially constrained backgrounds, students from provincial regions.	10%
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5.8 Window VII: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

This window supports the development of MEL systems within grantee institutions and across the NRIF portfolio. Drawing on the SGCI's embedded MEL approach and the Leiden Manifesto's emphasis on transparent, verifiable performance data, this window treats MEL capacity as a public good, not an administrative overhead.

Eligible activities: MEL framework design and implementation; results management systems; data collection and analytical capacity; learning and knowledge translation platforms; and independent evaluation of specific thematic programmes. All grantees participate in MEL capacity building as a grant condition.

Criterion	Key Focus	Weight
MEL framework design quality	Logic model; SMART indicators; data collection methodology	30%
Institutional embedding	Evidence M&E will be owned and maintained institutionally after the grant period	30%
Data use and learning plan	Clear mechanism for translating M&E findings into operational decisions	25%
Value for money	Cost efficiency; use of existing systems where applicable	15%

5.9 Window VIII: Local Government and Provincial Development

This window finances decentralised research, data, and innovation at LGA and provincial level. In accordance with the unanimous position of all urban LGA participants and the Local Government Act, all funds to urban LGAs flow through Area Councils. Regional Governors are updated quarterly on NRIF activities and results in their regions.

Eligible activities: local data systems; waste management research and innovation pilots; youth employment creation in high-potential sectors; community co-design programmes; and local governance and accountability capacity building. Proposals must align with both the NDP and the applicant council's strategic plan.

For provincial LGAs, the Governor's Office is the identified coordinating body and must provide a letter of support. An indicative starting allocation of GMD 10 million per region was proposed by provincial LGA participants. The Board determines actual allocations in each cycle.

Criterion	Key Focus	Weight
Community need and evidence base	Documented need; participatory needs assessment	25%
Governance and delivery capacity	Area Council governance; financial management; procurement track record	25%
NDP and council plan alignment	Alignment with both NDP and applicant's own strategic plan	20%
Community ownership and participation	Co-design; community contribution; sustainability plan	20%
Youth and inclusion	Meaningful youth and marginalised group involvement in design and implementation	10%

5.10 Window IX: Partnerships and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

This window directly addresses the fragmentation finding that emerged across all 14 sessions. It finances cross-sector partnerships, consortium research, and collaborative innovation. Proposals must involve a minimum of three institutions from at least two different sectors, with one designated lead applicant. A signed partnership agreement must be submitted with the application. Priority goes to partnerships that bring previously unconnected institutions together and that include at least one provincial or under-resourced institution.

5.11 Window X: Diaspora and International Collaboration

A demand-driven approach applies: NRIF defines national priority areas, then identifies diaspora expertise to match, with all engagements anchored in Gambian institutions. Eligible activities: structured mentorship programmes; joint research projects; visiting expert placements; co-financing arrangements.

A Diaspora Engagement Focal Point within the Secretariat manages this window and maintains the Diaspora Registry. The principle established in the consultation, ‘whatever the diaspora is doing must have a local partner’, is a condition of every grant, not a preference.

PART 6 APPLICATION AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

NRIF’s evaluation system is designed to meet the NSF Principles for Scientific Merit Review, expert, transparent, impartial, confidential, and conducted with integrity, and to apply DORA and Leiden Manifesto standards in every aspect of proposal assessment. The process is structured to maximise both the quality of funding decisions and the integrity of the institution.

6.1 Call for Proposals Process

Stage	Action	Responsibility
1. Board approval	Board approves the call for proposals document, including window, eligibility criteria, evaluation rubrics, budget ceiling, and timeline.	Board. Minimum notice to sector: 45 days before application deadline.
2. Publication and outreach	Call published on NRIF portal in full; outreach through community radio, social media, and direct institutional notification; information sessions for potential applicants held within 10 days of publication.	Secretariat.
3. Application submission	Only online submission through NRIF portal would be accepted for proposal submission. Secretariat provides technical assistance to eligible applicants on request.	Applicant.
4. Eligibility screening	All submissions assessed against published eligibility criteria. Ineligible applications notified with specific reasons within 14 days of the deadline.	Secretariat (Grants Management Team).
5. Peer review and scoring	Eligible proposals evaluated by the TAC using published evaluation criteria, calibrated rubrics, and the Merit of Proposal system. Independent international reviewer on all panels.	TAC.

6. Due diligence	Site visits and/or Presentations from shortlisted applicants. Financial management assessment. Verification of information in proposals.	Secretariat (MEL Officer and Grants Team).
7. Board approval	TAC submits ranked list and funding recommendation to the Board. Board approves final funding decisions.	Board.
8. Notification	All applicants notified within 7 days of Board approval. Successful applicants receive grant agreement within 14 days.	Secretariat.
9. Grant agreement	Grant agreement executed. Specifies: grant amount; activities and budget; milestone schedule; Disbursement triggers; reporting requirements; open science obligations; integrity standards; and compliance obligations.	Secretariat and grantee.

6.2 Eligibility Assessment

Eligibility screening is a binary pass/fail assessment conducted before technical evaluation. Proposals not meeting eligibility requirements are not forwarded to the TAC. General eligibility requirements (window-specific requirements are in each call for proposals):

- The institution is legally registered and operational in The Gambia.
- The institution has no unresolved NRIF compliance issue from a previous cycle.
- The proposed activities fall within the scope of eligible activities for the window.
- The application is complete: all required sections, declarations, and attachments are submitted.
- The application is submitted within the published deadline.
- Where required: evidence of current NAQAA accreditation is submitted.
- The lead researcher/applicant has no active finding of research misconduct from any funding body.
- Score each proposal independently, without prior consultation with other reviewers.
- Write a substantive justification for every score awarded, referenced to the published rubric.

6.3 Peer Review and Proposal Evaluation

Reviewer Selection

Reviewer selection follows the NSF PAPPG standard: reviewers must have expertise relevant to the proposals they assess; their fields should be complementary within a panel; at least one reviewer should be international with no Gambian institutional affiliation; and reviewers must not have conflicts of interest with any proposal they review. The Secretariat maintains a Reviewer Database, a searchable registry of qualified reviewers by discipline and sector, which is updated at each cycle and will be expanded through partnerships with NRF South Africa, the SGCI, and diaspora networks.

NRIF's use of an international reviewer on every TAC panel is a deliberate standard calibration mechanism: it ensures that Gambian research quality is assessed against international benchmarks, not solely against local comparators. This is consistent with the FNR and NRF South Africa approach.

Reviewer Obligations

- Sign a Conflict of Interest Declaration before any access to proposals.
- Sign a Confidentiality Agreement: proposal contents must not be shared with any party outside the evaluation process.
- Confirm they are not currently under investigation for research misconduct.
- Attend a calibration session before independent scoring begins.
- Score each proposal independently, without prior consultation with other reviewers.
- Write a substantive justification for every score awarded, referenced to the published rubric.

Calibration and Inter-Rater Reliability

Before independent scoring begins, the TAC Chair convenes a calibration session at which reviewers discuss two or three sample proposals (not from the live cohort) to align their interpretation of the scoring rubric. Where the standard deviation of reviewer scores for any criterion in the live cohort exceeds 1.5, the TAC Chair convenes a moderation session. Reviewers discuss the divergence; each may revise their score with written justification. The final criterion score is the arithmetic mean of all reviewers' scores after moderation.

This inter-rater reliability procedure follows the standard established by the SGCI grants management framework and mirrors the calibration processes used by NSF and the European Research Council.

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This inter-rater reliability procedure follows the standard established by the SGCI grants management framework and mirrors the calibration processes used by NSF and the European Research Council.

Narrative Contribution Statement

In line with DORA and the Leiden Manifesto, NRIF does not use bare publication lists as the primary evidence of research track record. All windows requiring demonstration of research track record will use a Narrative Contribution Statement in which the applicant describes their most significant contributions to knowledge and to practice, in their own words, with reference to specific outputs or outcomes. This approach follows the model of the NRF South Africa, the Canadian Tri-Agency narrative CV, and the FNR's researcher profile requirements.

6.4 Scoring and Merit of Proposal Calculation

The Merit of Proposal (MP) is the weighted average of criterion scores:

$$MP = (Wc1 \times Sc1) + (Wc2 \times Sc2) + \dots + (Wcn \times Scn)$$

Where: MP = final weighted score (scale 0–10); W = criterion weight (fractions summing to 1.0, published in the call for proposals); S = criterion score (0–10, awarded by each reviewer using the published rubric); c1...cn = evaluation criteria.

Each criterion score is the arithmetic mean of all reviewers' scores for that criterion after moderation:

$$Sc = (Se1 + Se2 + \dots + Sen) / n \text{ [where } e1 \dots en \text{ are individual reviewer scores and } n \text{ is the number of reviewers]}$$

Funding eligibility thresholds:

- Minimum MP for eligibility: 7.0 out of 10.
- Zero score on any single criterion: the proposal is not eligible regardless of overall MP.
- Tied MP: Criterion ranking for tiebreaking is specified in each call for proposals document.

These thresholds and the MP calculation methodology follow the standard used in the SIEF/NRIF precursor programme and are consistent with scoring systems used by the NRF South Africa and the SGCI member councils.

6.5 Due Diligence, Award, and Grant Agreement

Proposals meeting the minimum MP threshold are ranked in descending order. Shortlisted institutions participate in due diligence, which may include: presentation to the evaluation committee; site visits to verify proposal information; and financial management capacity assessment. The funded list begins with the highest-ranked proposal and continues to the limit of available funds.

Proposals not funded due to insufficient funds may, at the Board's discretion and where criteria are substantially unchanged, be carried forward to the next cycle without resubmission. All grant agreements include as mandatory clauses: the open science obligations in Part 3.5; the data management requirements in Part 3.6; and the research integrity standards in Part 3.2.

6.6 Applicant Feedback

All applicants, successful and unsuccessful, receive structured, criterion-referenced written feedback within 30 days of the funding decision. The feedback specifies the score received on each criterion, the key reasons for the outcome, and for unsuccessful applicants, specific guidance on how the proposal might be strengthened. This standard follows the FNR and NRF South Africa practice of treating the feedback process as a contribution to ecosystem-wide research capacity.

Applicants who believe the evaluation was conducted in breach of this manual may submit a formal complaint within 21 days of the funding decision. Complaints must be in writing, specify the alleged procedural breach, and be supported by evidence. The Secretariat acknowledges within 5 working days and provides a substantive response within 21 working days. Complaints alleging fraud or corruption are escalated under the Anti-Corruption Act, 2023.

PART 7 MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

NRIF's MEL system is informed by the SGCI's embedded MEL approach, which since 2015 has developed MEL as a tool that African science funding agencies can use not only for accountability but to make the case for increased national research investment. MEL serves three functions simultaneously: accountability for the use of public funds; performance management for funded activities; and learning for NRIF and the ecosystem.

7.1 MEL Architecture

The framework operates at three levels:

- Grantee level: monitoring of individual project implementation against agreed milestones and indicators.
- Window level: aggregate assessment of results across all funded projects within each window.
- Portfolio level: strategic assessment of NRIF's contribution to national development priorities.

7.2 Performance Indicators

Indicator	Level	Data Source	Frequency
Grants awarded per window	Portfolio	Grants management system	Quarterly
Total value of grants disbursed	Portfolio	Financial management system	Quarterly
Participation rate by gender and institutional type	Portfolio	Grant applications	Annual
Percentage of grants achieving all agreed milestones	Window	Progress reports; monitoring visits	Annual
Number of researchers receiving capacity development support	Window II	Training completion reports	Annual
Research outputs produced (disaggregated: publications, datasets, policy briefs, community reports)	Windows I, III, IX	Grantee final reports	Annual
Policy decisions or regulatory actions informed by NRIF-funded research	Windows I, III	Policy uptake tracking; grantee reports	Annual
Innovations reaching market or early adoption (disaggregated by stage)	Window IV	Grantee reports; market assessment	Annual
Student grants awarded (disaggregated: gender, institution type, grant level)	Window V	Grants management system	Annual
TVET trainees completing funded programmes (disaggregated: gender, region)	Window VI	NAFTI reports; NAQAA data	Annual

TVET graduate employment rate at 6 months post-completion	Window VI	Graduate tracer studies	Annual — cohort - based
LGA and provincial Development projects implemented	Window VIII	Monitoring visit reports	Annual
Diaspora professionals engaged (mentors and research collaborators)	Window X	Diaspora Registry	Annual
Stakeholder satisfaction with NRIF processes (applicants and grantees)	Portfolio	Annual satisfaction survey	Annual

7.3 Grantee Reporting Requirements

Report	Due Date	Required Content
Inception Report	Within 30 days of grant agreement execution	Confirmed activity plan; baseline data; milestone schedule; risk register; budget breakdown; Data Management Plan
Mid-Term Progress Report	At mid-point of grant period (specified in grant agreement)	Progress against milestones; expenditure against budget; emerging challenges and agreed remediation; updated risk register
Final Report	Within 30 days of grant completion	Full account of outputs against milestones; financial statement; open science compliance evidence; lessons learned; uptake evidence; sustainability plan update

The Secretariat reviews submitted reports within 21 days and provides written feedback. Disbursement of subsequent tranches is contingent on written acceptance of the preceding report. Grantees may be invited to present progress to the TAC at periodic review sessions. Standardised reporting templates, calibrated to grant size and institutional capacity, are published on the NRIF portal.

7.4 Independent Evaluation

At minimum one independent impact evaluation per completed funding cycle is commissioned by NRIF. Evaluators are selected through open competitive procurement and must have no prior involvement in the design or implementation of the programmes being assessed. The evaluation scope includes cost-benefit analysis to assess the return on public investment. Results are published on the NRIF portal.

Additional MEL activities:

- Site visits: for grants above a Board-set threshold, at least one monitoring visit per grant period. Formal site visit report shared with the grantee.
- Quarterly portfolio reviews by the Secretariat, with reporting to the Board.
- Annual stakeholder satisfaction survey: all applicants (successful and unsuccessful) and grantees invited to rate NRIF's processes and provide qualitative feedback.
- TVET graduate tracer studies: annual cohort-based tracer studies for Window VI.
- Annual Report: published within 90 days of financial year end, covering portfolio performance, disbursements, key results, and lessons. Published on the NRIF portal in full.

PART 8 SECRETARIAT CAPACITY BUILDING PLAN

The Research Integrity Officer is a distinctive element of NRIF's staffing model. Its inclusion reflects the SGCI's conclusion that research ethics and integrity capacity is a core requirement for credible grant management, not an optional supplement. The following capacity building plan governs the Secretariat as a whole.

At the start of each year, the Executive Director commissions a training needs assessment through: staff self-assessment surveys; review of job descriptions and competency frameworks; performance evaluation findings; and analysis of feedback from grantees and stakeholders on Secretariat performance. Results inform the annual training plan and budget.

Training Area	Content
Grant Management	Application process; evaluation methodology; grant agreement administration; milestone-based disbursement; compliance monitoring; fraud detection and prevention
Financial Management	IPSAS Cash Basis accounting; IFMIS operation; bank reconciliation; internal controls; procurement; external audit preparation
Research Integrity and Ethics	ALLEA Code of Conduct; DORA and Leiden Manifesto principles; misconduct investigation procedures; open science requirements; FAIR data principles

Monitoring and Evaluation	MEL framework design; indicator setting; data collection; statistical analysis; evaluation design; the Leiden Manifesto in practice
Open Science and Data Management	Open access publication requirements; Data Management Plan preparation; FAIR data principles; repository management
Communications and Outreach	Portal management; calls dissemination; stakeholder engagement; success story documentation; media relations
Research and Innovation Systems	Gambian research and innovation landscape; TVET, university, and government mandates; NDP priorities; SGCI regional research funding frameworks

8.3 Continuous Learning

- Staff supported to attend national and international conferences and workshops relevant to their roles. Participation in SGCI capacity strengthening activities actively pursued.
- Quarterly internal knowledge-sharing sessions: staff present on topics from external training or portfolio lessons.
- Mentorship programme pairing junior Secretariat staff with senior officers.
- Exchange visits to NRF South Africa, FNR Luxembourg, or other SGCI member councils to build institutional peer learning, consistent with the SGCI Staff Exchange and Learning Visits programme.
- A dedicated, Board-approved budget line for staff training and professional development.

8.4 Performance Monitoring

Capacity building effectiveness is assessed through: pre- and post-training knowledge assessments; annual performance evaluations; grantee feedback on Secretariat performance; and audit and evaluation findings. Results feed into the following year's training needs assessment.

PART 9 COMMUNICATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

NRIF's communication plan serves two purposes: ensuring that all eligible institutions know about and can access NRIF's funding windows; and maintaining the ongoing dialogue with the ecosystem that the national consultation established and that stakeholders across all sessions expected NRIF to sustain.

9.1 Audience-Specific Messaging

Audience	Key Message
Universities and research institutions	NRIF funds are available for research infrastructure, capacity building, and collaborative research. Merit-based. Transparent. Open science required.

9.1 Audience-Specific Messaging

Government ministries and agencies	NRIF can fund the evidence and data systems needed to close the gap between data collection and decision-making.
Innovation hubs and startups	NRIF offers prototype funding, scale-up grants, and market access support for the most critical stages of the innovation pipeline.
TVET institutions	NRIF funds trainer capacity, equipment modernisation, and curriculum reform, through NAFTI, with NAFTI on the evaluation panel.
Students	NRIF offers direct-access grants from GMD 50,000. Apply directly. A mentor is assigned on award.
Local government authorities	Funding flows through Area Councils under the Local Government Act. Based on community evidence.
Civil society organisations	NRIF funds CSO-led projects, community research, and research for policy and advocacy.
Private sector	NRIF supports research-industry linkages, SME data systems, and market access for Gambian innovations.
Gambian diaspora	NRIF has a structured window with clear processes. A local partner is required for all engagements.
Development partners and diplomatic corps	NRIF will demonstrate impact, relevance, sustainability, and accountability. Co-financing and technical partnerships are available.

9.2 Communication Channels

- NRIF Digital Portal: primary hub for all NRIF communication. Hosts all calls for proposals, criteria, evaluation guidelines, funding decisions, financial reports, annual reports, research outputs repository, and grievance mechanism.
- Community radio: calls and announcements broadcast in all regions, in local languages where possible, to ensure rural and provincial reach.
- Social media: regular updates and success stories targeting younger audiences and the innovation community.
- Information sessions: at the launch of each call for proposals, held in the Greater Banjul Area and at least one regional venue, and available virtually.
- Media engagement: formal press releases for major announcements; feature coverage of grantees and results.
- Annual Stakeholder Forum: public reporting on portfolio results; structured ecosystem feedback.

9.3 Stakeholder Engagement Calendar

Activity	Purpose	Frequency
Annual Stakeholder Forum	Public reporting; ecosystem feedback on NRIF performance	Annual (within 3 months of financial year end)
Quarterly stakeholder consultations	Feedback from grantees, applicants, and ecosystem partners	Quarterly
Information sessions, new calls	Eligibility, application requirements, and evaluation process	At launch of each call for proposals
Bilateral engagement with diaspora networks	Update on priorities and engagement pathways	Bi-annually
Meetings with development partners	Results reporting; co-financing discussions	Bi-annually
Annual Report circulation	Share Annual Report with all institutions consulted in the national consultation	Annual

PART 10 GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISM

NRIF operates a formal Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) covering: concerns about the fairness, transparency, or procedural correctness of any application, evaluation, or funding decision; concerns about the conduct of NRIF staff; concerns about misuse of NRIF funds by grantees; and any other matter affecting an individual's or institution's rights or legitimate interests in relation to NRIF.

10.1 How to Submit a Grievance

- Online: through the dedicated grievance form on the NRIF digital portal.
- In writing: addressed to the Executive Director, NRIF Secretariat.
- By telephone: through the NRIF toll-free grievance line.
- In person: at the NRIF Secretariat during published office hours.

Grievances may be submitted anonymously. The identity of all complainants is treated as confidential and is not disclosed to the subject of the grievance without explicit consent.

10.2 Process and Timelines

Step	Action	Timeline
Acknowledgement	Written acknowledgement to complainant.	Within 5 working days of receipt
Initial Assessment	Nature of grievance assessed; assigned to appropriate officer or escalation level.	Within 10 working days
Investigation	Relevant officer investigates, reviews evidence, and consults as necessary. Grievances alleging fraud or corruption escalated to the Executive Director or Board Chair, and, where applicable, Anti-Corruption Commission.	Within 21 working days of initial assessment
Response	Substantive written response provided to complainant: findings and action taken.	Within 30 working days of acknowledgement
Appeal	Where dissatisfied, complainant may escalate to the Board Chairperson within 14 days of response. Board Chairperson's decision is final within NRIF's internal processes.	Board Chairperson (Dr. Ebrima Sall) responds within 21 working days

The Secretariat maintains a Grievance Register. An anonymised summary of grievances received and resolved in the year is included in the NRIF Annual Report.

PART 11 ANNEXES

Annex A: Allowances in NRIF-Funded Activities

These rules apply to all funds managed by NRIF and by grantee institutions using NRIF funds:

Type of Payment	Status	Notes
Salary top-up to civil servants	Not permitted	Civil and public servants may not receive supplements to their government salaries from NRIF funds NRIF funds could be used to support honorarium, capacity building and other related staff development costs

Sitting allowances or honoraria to civil servants for meetings or workshops	Not permitted	Civil servants attending NRIF processes are performing government duties.
Internal consulting fees to civil servants on government payroll	Not permitted	Government employees wishing to work under an NRIF contract must take authorised leave without pay before contracting.
Per diem and travel costs to non-government participants	Permitted at governing rates	Receipts required for actual costs. Rates must not exceed the Government of The Gambia rate or UNDP rate, whichever is lower.
Sitting allowances or honoraria to consultants contracted under NRIF	Not permitted	Consultants are contracted and paid fees; additional sitting allowances are not payable.
Student grants and bursaries, Windows V and VI	Permitted as specified in grant agreement	Disbursed as specified in the grant agreement.
Grant disbursements to grantee institutions for eligible activities	Permitted as approved	Supported by documentation of eligible expenditure and approved milestones.
Article processing charges for open access publication	Permitted where institutional	Must be for peer-reviewed research outputs from NRIF-funded work.

Annex B: Grant Agreement — Mandatory Clauses

All NRIF grant agreements include as a minimum:

- Grant amount, window, and funding cycle
- Description of funded activities and outputs
- Milestone schedule and disbursement trigger table
- Reporting obligations (inception, mid-term, final)
- Financial management obligations (IPSAS standards, records retention, audit access)
- Open access obligations for publications and policy outputs (Section 3.5)
- Data Management Plan submission requirement and FAIR data obligations (Section 3.6)
- Research integrity obligations and ALLEA Code of Conduct acceptance (Section 3.2)
- Research ethics approval requirement (Section 3.3)
- NRIF acknowledgement in all outputs and communications

- Conflict of interest obligations
- ORCID registration requirement for named researchers (encouraged)
- NRIF's right to conduct monitoring visits and independent evaluation
- Conditions for suspension, termination, and fund recovery
- Grievance mechanism reference
- Governing law: laws of the Republic of The Gambia

Annex C: Eligible and Ineligible Expenditures

Generally Eligible	Generally Ineligible
Directly project-attributable personnel costs (staff not on government payroll)	General operating costs of the institution not attributable to grant activities
Equipment, materials, and consumables required for approved activities	Purchase of land or buildings
Training and capacity building directly linked to grant activities	Salary top-ups, sitting allowances, or honoraria for civil servants
Travel and accommodation at governing rates for approved project activities	Personal expenses, entertainment, or hospitality
Article processing charges for open access publication of NRIF-funded outputs	Activities not specified in the approved application
Sub-contracting of specific technical services where the grantee lacks the expertise (subject to procurement compliance)	Sub-contracting of the core grant activities to another entity
Data repository fees and data management platform costs	Lobbying or political activities
Communication and dissemination of approved research outputs	Purchase of assets for personal use

Annex D: Key International Standards Referenced in this Manual

Standard / Framework	Source	Sections Applied
National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025	Republic of The Gambia Official Gazette (ISSN 0796-0298)	Throughout — supreme governing instrument
NSF Principles for Scientific Merit Review	United States National Science Foundation / Global Summit on Merit Review, 2012	Part 1.4, Part 6.3
San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)	Annual Meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology, 2012	Part 1.4, Part 3.4, Part 6.3
Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics	Hicks, Wouters et al., Nature 520:429–431, 2015	Part 1.4, Part 3.4, Part 7.1
ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity	All European Academies, revised 2023	Part 1.4, Part 3.1, Part 3.2
Tri-Agency Responsible Conduct of Research Framework	CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC (Canada), 2021	Part 1.4, Part 2.6, Part 3.7
SGCI Good Financial Grant Practice Framework	SGCI / IDRC / SIDA / NRF South Africa, Phase II 2021–2023	Part 1.4, Part 4.1, Part 6.3
FNR Principles for Scientific Merit Review / ISO 9001:2015	Luxembourg National Research Fund	Part 1.4, Part 2.3, Part 6.3
UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science	UNESCO, 2021	Part 3.5
FAIR Data Principles	Wilkinson et al., Scientific Data, 2016	Part 3.6
Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers	World Conference on Research Integrity, 2020	Part 3.1

Prepared by the NRIF Secretariat and approved by the Governing Board of the National Research and Innovation Fund

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Statutory basis: National Research and Innovation Fund Act, 2025 — Republic of The Gambia Official Gazette, ISSN 0796-0298. The Act prevails over this manual in all matters. This manual will be revised upon formal adoption to incorporate any specific statutory provisions not yet reflected herein.

For technical assistance, further information, or to submit a grievance, please contact the NRIF Secretariat (info@nrif.gm).

NRIF Digital Portal: www.nrif.gm | Toll-free grievance line: to be published at launch