

Experiences and Reflections of South Africa's Approach to the GBIF Graduate Researchers Award

Fatima Parker-Allie

24 February 2026



forestry, fisheries
& the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



- The annual GBIF GRA fosters **innovative research and discovery** in BDI by graduate students, whose studies rely on GBIF mediated data.
- Focus – increasing the **use and mobilization of biodiversity data** shared through the GBIF network

2026

Graduate Researchers Award



 Share how you're using open biodiversity data from the GBIF network in your graduate research—you could earn global recognition and €5,000!

 Deadline for receiving nominations:
** 1 May 2026_SA** 29 May 2026_GBIF

 More information:
www.gbif.org, <https://www.sanbi-gbif.org/post/2026/graduate-research26/>

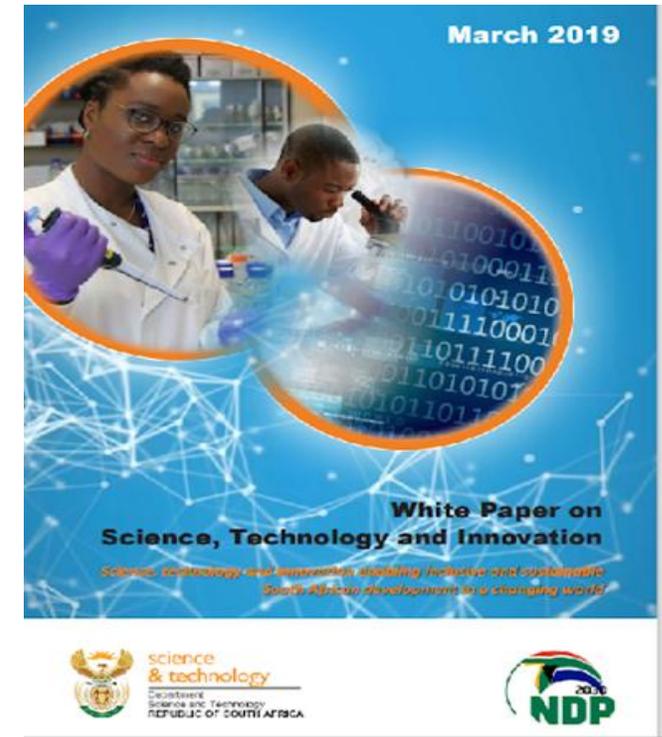
 **SANBI**
Biodiversity for Life
South African National Biodiversity Institute

 science, technology & innovation
Department
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

 **GBIF**

Global opportunities supporting our biodiversity informatics work in South Africa

- Efforts, such as the GBIF GRA & the GBIF Ebbe Nielson Prize, are mechanisms that have the potential to raise the visibility of biodiversity informatics and the value of data mobilization and use.
- SA decided to use the **GBIF GRA as a tool** for awareness-raising of this new area of science.
- This aligns with our Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy, to support and grow a scarce skills area & WP on Science, Technology and Innovation to increase the knowledge base of the country through MSc's & PhDs.



SANBI-GBIF Graduate Researchers Advisory Panel

- Establishment of the SANBI-GBIF Graduate Researchers Advisory Panel in 2021 – to provide support and foster **additional champions for this scarce skills area of science**
- **The main purpose:** Conduct a review and evaluation of eligible proposals received, based on scientific and technical merit, and alignment with the criteria of the GBIF GRA Call for Applications.
- Committee will review and assess all applications received and recommend 2 candidates for the award.
- The South African HoD will endorse the recommended applicants for submission to GBIF

SANBI-GBIF Young Researchers Award Advisory Panel



National Process developed to support biodiversity informatics skills and capacity development

The Establishment of the SANBI-GBIF Young Researchers Award Advisory Panel



One of the key focus areas for the SANBI-GBIF Node is to grow capacity and skills in biodiversity informatics, to support the mobilisation, management, use and application of biodiversity data for science, policy and decision making. In line with this the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) has issued a call for the 2021 **GBIF Young Researchers Award**.

ToR of the SANBI-GBIF GRA Advisory Panel

Composition

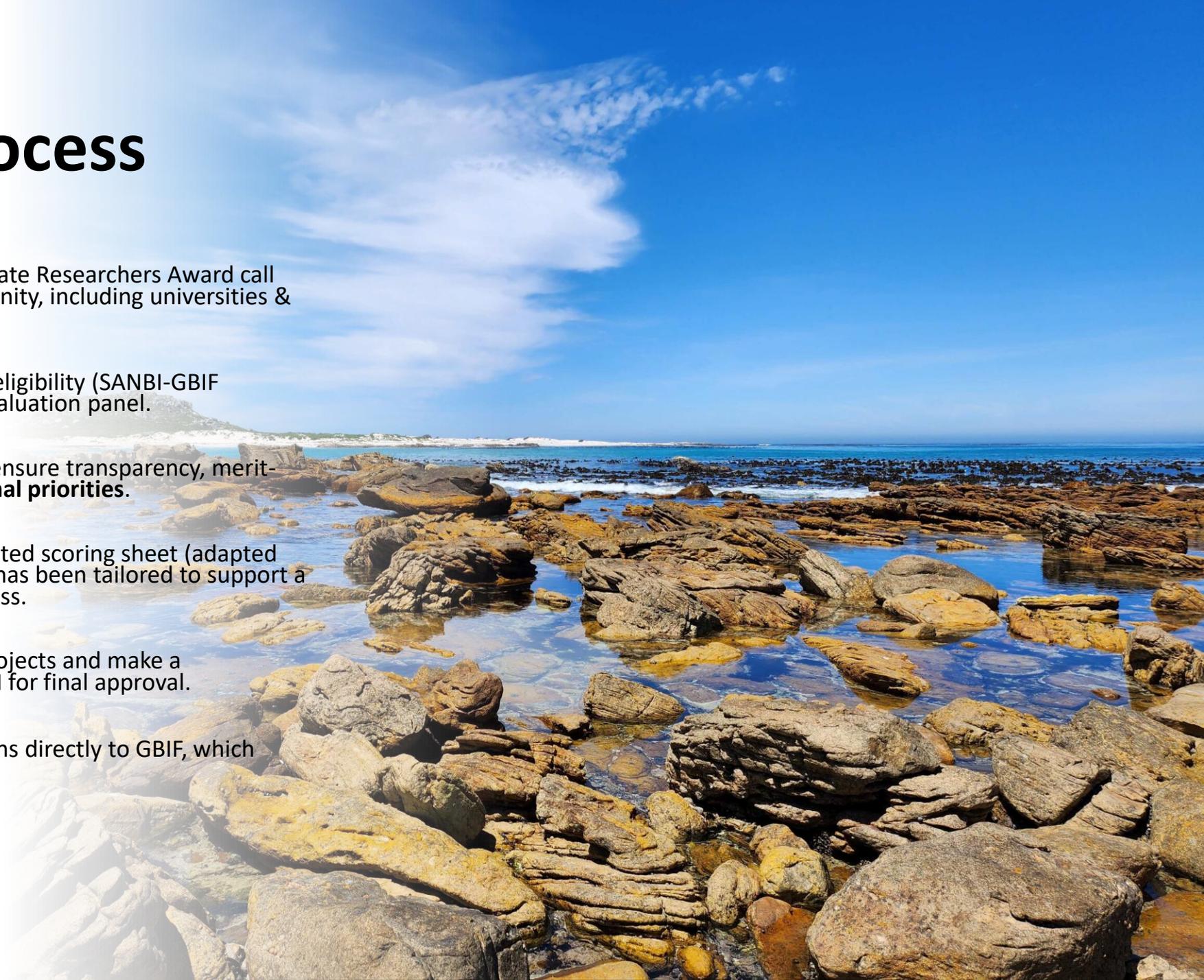
- The Advisory Committee should consist of no fewer than four members.
- Members will include the SANBI-GBIF Node Manager, a DSTI Official, & three relevant experts.
- The SANBI-GBIF Node Manager will co-ordinate & chair the Advisory Committee meetings.

The criteria for the awards include:

- Originality and innovation in the proposed research
- Use of and strategic significance of data accessed through GBIF, and published at the national level
- Measurable effectiveness and impact in advancing BDI and/or the conservation of biological diversity.
- South Africa incorporates **transformation measures**, reflecting national policy priorities and equity considerations.

Our National Process

- The SANBI-GBIF Node distributes the Graduate Researchers Award call nationally via email & website to the community, including universities & research institutions.
- Applications are received and screened for eligibility (SANBI-GBIF Secretariat) before being forwarded to an evaluation panel.
- A national review process is conducted to ensure transparency, merit-based selection, and alignment with **national priorities**.
- The evaluation process is guided by an adapted scoring sheet (adapted from GBIF GRA Jury Panel). This score sheet has been tailored to support a fair and structured national evaluation process.
- We meet online as a panel to discuss the projects and make a recommendation, which is submitted to DSTI for final approval.
- Node Managers can now submit applications directly to GBIF, which simplifies the process.



Strengthening GRA Participation and National Impact

- We receive fewer than 10 applications annually, and they are generally ecology-based. We hope to increase the number of applications we receive.
- 2 winners in SA – 2015 and 2024
- The GRA is a useful mechanism to raise awareness of BDI, and to have more students which are at early stages of their careers, to mobilise and use GBIF-mediated data.
- The GRA is an important opportunity to reinforce the Node's coordinating role, strengthen national visibility of GBIF, and connect biodiversity informatics to government priorities.
- For both science and environment ministries, opportunities for the youth are a very strong driving factor for transformation. It is key for innovation and speaks strongly to the Ministerial outcomes.



Thank you

SANBI-GBIF wishes to thank the SANBI-GBIF GRA Advisory Panel for their efforts in the evaluation of proposals and commitment to GBIF efforts



science & innovation

Department:
Science and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



GBIF

Global Biodiversity
Information Facility



forestry, fisheries
& the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA