
HSRC/NRF Engaged Research Conference – 22 to 24 October 2025

Multiple stakeholders to gather in Gauteng to explore innovative approaches to engaged research that address societal challenges

With just a few days left until the [HSRC/NRF Engaged Research Conference](#), it's all systems go. The multidisciplinary conference will take place at the Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre in Gauteng from 22 to 24 October 2025, bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and community stakeholders to explore innovative approaches to engaged research and its potential as a pathway to address emerging societal challenges.

Organised by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in collaboration with the National Research Foundation (NRF), the conference will be held under the theme: *Engaged Research as a Pathway to Bridging Knowledge and Society*. This international platform will provide a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and impactful discussions on research that makes a difference.

A programme for impact

The programme is guided by a multidisciplinary Scientific Committee of leading scholars and practitioners from across Africa and beyond, with expertise spanning public health, social sciences, education, community development, science communication, and policy engagement.

The conference will delve into a wide range of themes, including:

- Bridging knowledge and society through engaged research.
- Best practices in multi-sectoral research collaborations.
- Research impact on policy and social justice.
- Community-led knowledge production.
- Research and policymaking.
- Digital tools for inclusive research.
- Ethics and inclusivity in practice.

The [conference programme](#) features thought-provoking sessions and panels, including a welcome address reflecting on five years of science engagement at the HSRC and its implications for research uptake and impact. Other highlights include discussions on co-creation and participatory approaches to health and well-being research, the state and democracy, and impactful community partnerships. The programme will also explore themes such as engaged research in the digital age, epistemic justice (fair recognition of diverse forms of knowledge), and social equity in research.

Additionally, the conference will feature sessions on the practicalities of community-engaged research, evaluating the impact of engaged research, and measuring what matters for communities and policymakers alike. These discussions will provide valuable insights and practical takeaways for researchers, policymakers, and community stakeholders.

The three-day conference will also include exhibitions showcasing innovative approaches to engaged research.

The event brings together researchers, practitioners, community members, and policymakers to explore innovative approaches to engaged research that address societal challenges.

The conference objectives are to:

- Identify barriers to engaged research and strategies to overcome them (e.g. ethics approval structures).
- Promote knowledge exchange on methodologies, approaches, and best practices.
- Facilitate networking between academia, community organisations, industry, and government.
- Showcase case studies that demonstrate engaged research's real-world benefits.
- Consolidate learnings on how engaged research can be applied in different contexts.

By fostering partnerships and promoting knowledge co-creation, the conference seeks to align academic inquiry with society-driven priorities.

These discussions aim to inspire actionable strategies for inclusive, impactful, and transformative research. Ultimately, the event aspires to deepen participants' commitment to collaborative and socially responsive scholarship.

Pre-conference workshops

On 21 October 2025, a series of [interactive methodology workshops](#) (14:00–16:00) will provide practical tools for engaged research. Topics include:

- Building effective partnerships between researchers, the government, and NGOs
- Exploring photovoice and digital storytelling for engaged research
- Public squares for engagement: less facilitation, more doing

These workshops aim to build capacity, foster collaboration, and provide practical frameworks for engaged research, co-creation, and community-centred approaches.

The conference is part of the Engaged Research Project, an initiative of the Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation (DSTI) in collaboration with the NRF. Organised and convened by the HSRC, the event aims to advance engaged research within South Africa's National System of Innovation.

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