SOLID MINERALS DEVELOPMENT FUND EARLY-STAGE MINERAL EXPLORATION & RESEARCH GRANT ENDOWMENT
(SMDF–EMERGE)

Grant Manual

Catalysing Nigeria's Mining Development

Rolling Fund, Multi-Window Design

August 2026

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Document Control and Use

This manual is a programme guide for the SMDF Early-Stage Mineral Exploration & Research Grant Endowment (SMDF–EMERGE). The manual is intended to support applicants, reviewers, programme administrators, technical assessors and other stakeholders with a clear description of the Programme's objectives, eligibility rules, application process, appraisal approach, reporting obligations and governance arrangements.

Version number	Date issued	Summary of changes	Approving authority
Version 1.0	3 August 2026	Not Applicable	SMDF

Note: Where any provision of this Manual is inconsistent with the terms of an executed Grant Agreement, a formal Call for Applications, or applicable laws and regulations, the executed Grant Agreement, the formal Call for Applications, and the applicable laws and regulations shall take precedence. In addition, the version published on the SMDF-EMERGE website will always be considered the authoritative current version. Therefore, applicants should ensure they are using the latest version before submission.

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Definitions

Term	Definition
Applicant	An individual, Company, University department, Research Institution, or eligible organisation that submits, or intends to submit, an application under SMDF–EMERGE.
Awardee / Grantee	An applicant that has been approved for grant funding and has satisfied the conditions precedent to receiving support under the Programme.
Co-Funding	The financial contribution provided by an applicant towards the cost of the approved project.
Conflict of Interest	Any situation where personal, financial, professional or organisational interests could improperly influence decision-making.
Critical Minerals	Minerals that are strategically important to Nigeria's industrialisation, energy transition, technology development, export diversification, or domestic value-chain development. For SMDF–EMERGE, priority minerals include lithium, rare earth elements, tin, tantalum, nickel, cobalt and other minerals defined as critical by the Honourable Minister of Solid Minerals Development.
Early-Stage Exploration	Exploration work undertaken to identify, test, or improve the definition of mineral targets before mine development or production. It may include mapping, geophysical and geochemical surveys, sampling, early drilling, geological modelling and associated technical studies.
Eligible Costs	Costs that are reasonable, necessary, directly attributable to an approved project, incurred within the approved project period and expressly permitted under the grant agreement.
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance standards, safeguards and practices applicable to responsible mining, exploration, research, fieldwork, community engagement and project governance.
Grant Agreement	The binding agreement between SMDF or its designated programme entity and a successful applicant, setting out approved activities, budget, milestones, reporting obligations, disbursement conditions, compliance requirements and remedies.
In-kind Contribution	A pre-approved, non-cash contribution provided to support the project. This can include goods, equipment, office space, professional services, volunteer time, or other resources that have value.
Milestone	A defined project deliverable or achievement used to measure project progress and trigger grant disbursements.
Mining Cadastre Office (MCO)	The Nigerian government agency responsible for administration of mining titles and permits.
Programme	The SMDF Early-Stage Mineral Exploration & Research Grant Endowment, also called SMDF–EMERGE.

Programme Administration Partner	The Programme Administration Partner (PAP) is PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), appointed to support due diligence, evaluation oversight, transparency, process management and reporting. The PAP does not approve grants.
Programme Owner	SMDF, as owner and sponsor of the Programme, responsible for implementation alignment, programme oversight and national-priority alignment without involvement in evaluation or grant approval decisions.
Programme Portal	The official online platform used to manage the grant application process. It allows applicants to submit applications, upload documents, track progress, communicate, and manage reporting requirements.
Research & Development / R&D	Applied research in geoscience, mining, mineral processing, metallurgy, geophysics, geochemistry, mineral systems, sustainability and related disciplines that strengthens Nigeria's mining knowledge base or addresses sector-critical gaps.
Service Provider (Vendor)	A shortlisted vendor that provides services, technical expertise, or professional support required for the implementation of EMERGE-funded projects.
Technical Consultant	Specialist experts appointed by SMDF to conduct technical assessments of project feasibility, data quality, methodology, operational viability and related technical considerations.
Vendor Portal	The official online platform established by the SMDF EMERGE Programme through which Service Providers (Vendors) register, submit applications, upload required documentation, and undergo evaluation for inclusion in the programme's approved vendor database.

1. Programme Overview

1.1 Background and Rationale

Nigeria has a large and diverse solid minerals endowment, but the sector remains constrained by limited high-quality geological information, insufficient early-stage exploration funding and a shortage of technically prepared projects capable of attracting private capital. These constraints reduce the flow of bankable opportunities, limit domestic technical learning and delay the transition from resource potential to economic value creation.

SMDF–EMERGE has been designed to respond to these constraints by supporting early-stage exploration and applied research through grant funding, technical review and structured capacity building. The Programme is therefore not only a financial intervention; it is a sector-development platform intended to improve the quality of geological data, strengthen local capability, support responsible exploration and build a pipeline of investment-ready mining opportunities.

The Programme aligns with SMDF's mandate to catalyse private-sector investment across the mining lifecycle and support projects that can generate economic impact, jobs, domestic capacity and sustainable sector returns. By focusing on early-stage project work and applied research, SMDF–EMERGE addresses the phase of the mining lifecycle where risk is high, information is limited and commercial financiers are often least willing to participate.

1.2 Purpose of the Manual

- Provide detailed guidance for applicants preparing submissions under SMDF–EMERGE.
- Document programme objectives, governance arrangements, eligibility rules, eligible costs and ineligible costs.
- Provide a transparent description of the application, screening, appraisal, approval, award, disbursement and reporting process.
- Guide reviewers and technical assessors by setting out high-level appraisal expectations and scoring criteria.
- Clarify post-award obligations, including reporting, monitoring, project controls, ESG requirements and audit rights.

1.3 Programme Objectives

Objective	Description
Support Early-Stage Exploration	Provide targeted grants to advance early-stage mineral exploration and improve the quality and viability of exploration projects through technical evaluation.
Advance Research	Strengthen Nigeria's geological and mineral knowledge base through applied research, innovation and collaboration with academic and research institutions.
Promote Responsible Mining Practices	Promote ESG compliance, safe field practices, community engagement and sustainable approaches to exploration and early project development.
Stimulate Sector Growth	Enhance sector capacity and investment readiness by strengthening technical, operational and commercial capabilities within the mining ecosystem.

1.4 Programme Pillars

- Transparency and integrity in reporting, including clear application requirements, documented review processes and auditable award decisions.
- Technical excellence, including robust geological rationale, credible methodology, qualified project teams and evidence-based deliverables.
- Adherence to due process, including eligibility screening, independent review, award approval and documented correspondence with applicants.
- Compliance with environmental, safety, community, ethical and professional standards applicable to exploration, research and related field activities.

2. Grant Structure and Programme Streams

SMDF–EMERGE operates through three principal funding streams. The streams are differentiated by applicant type, project intent, expected outputs and appraisal requirements. All three streams are expected to contribute to Nigeria's mining development by improving technical knowledge, strengthening project pipelines and supporting responsible sector growth.

2.1. Funding Category / Streams

S/n	Funding Category / Streams	Purpose	Eligible applicants	Funding coverage
1	Exploration Stage	Grants for grassroots and early-stage exploration.	Licenced junior / early-stage exploration companies.	Up to 70% of eligible costs.
2	Critical Minerals	Grants for targeted exploration of Nigeria's critical minerals, plus support for innovative processing technologies that move minerals up the value chain.	Companies targeting critical minerals.	Up to 70% of eligible costs.
3	Research and Development	Grants for applied geoscience and mineral-processing research.	Master's and PhD researchers, university departments and research institutions.	Up to 100% of eligible costs.

2.1.1 Exploration Stage Stream

This stream provides targeted grant support for early-stage mineral exploration projects across Nigeria. It is aimed at improving project definition, strengthening the technical basis for future investment decisions and de-risking mineral opportunities before development or production. Eligible projects may focus on Nigeria's critical minerals such as lithium, rare earth elements, tin, tantalum, nickel and cobalt, whether as primary or secondary exploration targets, as well as other minerals of strategic national importance.

- Examples of supported activities include geological mapping, geophysical and geochemical surveys, sampling, laboratory analysis, assay testing, exploration drilling, data acquisition, geological modelling, technical consulting, ESG assessments, field logistics and temporary exploration infrastructure.
- The stream does not support mine production, commercial extraction, routine operations unrelated to exploration, or activities that are primarily mine-development rather than exploration-stage in nature.
- Corporate awardees under applicable exploration and critical-minerals streams are automatically enrolled in the EMERGE Accelerator, which provides business advisory, technical capability development, network access and investment-readiness support.

2.1.2 Critical Minerals Stream

The Critical Minerals Stream provides targeted grant support to companies undertaking exploration or early-stage value-chain development activities for Nigeria's critical minerals. The stream is designed to accelerate the identification, technical assessment and advancement of mineral opportunities that are strategically important to Nigeria's industrialisation, energy transition, export diversification and domestic value-chain development.

The stream will support targeted exploration of critical minerals and may also support innovative processing technologies that improve mineral beneficiation, increase local value addition and move minerals further up the value chain. Eligible projects may include exploration programmes for lithium, rare earth elements, tin, tantalum, nickel, cobalt and other minerals designated as nationally strategic, whether as primary or associated minerals.

The Critical Minerals Stream also includes an innovative processing technology category designed to support the enhancement of mineral processing, beneficiation, value addition, and recovery within Nigeria's critical minerals sector.

2.1.3 Research and Development Stream

The Research & Development stream supports advancement of geoscience and mining-related research in Nigeria. It is designed to strengthen the national knowledge base, support innovation, increase domestic research capability and generate output that can improve exploration, sustainability, processing, governance, or investment in the mining sector.

- Eligible applicants include Master's and PhD academic researchers, university departments and research institutions in Nigeria.
- Applicable disciplines include Geology, Geosciences, Applied Geology, Geophysics, Geochemistry, Mining or Mineral Engineering, Mineral Processing, Metallurgical and Materials Engineering and other directly relevant disciplines.
- Priority may be given to research topics connected to critical minerals, mineral systems, economic geology, data generation, exploration methods, sustainability, environmental safeguards, mineral processing and sector-critical technical gaps.
- Awardees may choose to participate in the EMERGE Accelerator, which provides researchers with valuable opportunities to connect and collaborate with industry stakeholders.

2.2 Funding Principles

- Funding is discretionary and subject to the availability of Programme funds, formal approval, and execution of a Grant Agreement.
- The Exploration Stage stream and Critical Minerals stream shall operate a milestone-based funding model, with grant disbursements linked to the achievement of approved technical, operational, financial, and reporting milestones.
- Applicants under the Exploration Stage and Critical Minerals Streams shall contribute a minimum of 30% of approved project costs. Such contribution may include cash and approved in-kind contributions supported by evidence and subject to Programme verification.

- The Programme reserves the right to cap the value of in-kind contributions recognised towards co-funding requirements.
- Grant amounts may vary based on the target mineral, project maturity, scope of work, geographical location, technical complexity, funding requirements, and anticipated development impact.
- Progression to subsequent project phases and the release of further grant funding shall be subject to satisfactory completion and verification of approved activities, achievement of milestone deliverables, and compliance with all Programme requirements.
- Verification may include technical reviews, site inspections, laboratory result validation, progress assessments, financial reviews, or any other due diligence measures put in place by the Programme.
- Applicants should not incur costs on the assumption that funding will be awarded unless expressly permitted under the initial application requirements and any further requirement of the Programme.
- The Programme may prescribe grant ceilings, minimum and maximum award amounts, matching-fund requirements, eligible expenditure periods, priority minerals, or other special conditions through the relevant Call for Applications.
- Applicants under the Research Stream may receive funding for up to 100% of approved eligible project costs and are not required to provide any minimum co-funding contribution as a condition for the award of a grant.
- The Programme is structured as an endowment intended to run recurring application windows.

3. Governance and Administration

The governance and administration framework for SMDF–EMERGE is intended to ensure transparent, accountable and efficient management of the grant lifecycle. It separates programme ownership from independent evaluation and final approval, while bringing in technical specialists where detailed assessment is required.

3.1 Governance Structure

Party	Core responsibilities
Honourable Minister, Ministry of Solid Minerals Development	Provides sector policy direction for the development of the solid minerals sector, in line with the Seven-Point Agenda for the transformation of the sector. Sets the policy framework under which SMDF interventions, including SMDF–EMERGE, are established, and drives the expansion of funding opportunities for sector development.
SMDF (Programme Owner)	Owns and sponsors the Programme; ensures implementation, coordination, alignment with national priorities and compliance with applicable programme rules. SMDF retains programme oversight responsibility but does not participate in application evaluation or grant approval decisions.
Programme Administration Partner	Conducts independent due diligence, manages or oversees the evaluation process, supports applicant screening, prepares evaluation outputs, ensures process transparency and accountability and supports reporting. The Programme Administration Partner does not approve grants.
Technical Consultants	Provide specialised technical expertise and detailed assessment of exploration design, research methodology, data quality, project feasibility, implementation readiness, ESG considerations and operational viability.
Programme Delivery Partners	Provide approved support services to awardees where required, including procurement support, training delivery, accelerator services, technical assistance, or other capacity-building services.

3.2 Governance Principles

- **Independence:** evaluation and approval roles will be separated to reduce conflict of interest and improve credibility.
- **Objectivity:** applications will be assessed against documented criteria, scoring guides and evidence submitted by applicants.
- **Traceability:** review decisions, requests for clarification, scoring notes, evaluation recommendations, approvals and award communications will be documented.
- **Confidentiality:** commercially sensitive, scientific, technical, personal and institutional information submitted by applicants will be handled securely and used only for programme purposes. (see the SMDF-EMERGE Privacy and Confidentiality Policy).
- **Conflict management:** reviewers, members of any approving person or entity, consultants, or support parties must disclose actual, potential, or perceived conflicts and recuse themselves where necessary.
- **Value for money:** grant funding should support activities that are reasonable, necessary and linked to measurable outputs or sector-development outcomes.

4. Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility is assessed at applicant, project, compliance, documentation and cost levels. Meeting eligibility requirements does not guarantee funding; it only permits an application to proceed to evaluation, subject to completeness and available budget.

4.1 Exploration Stage stream and Critical Minerals stream Eligibility

Eligible companies must:

- Be registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and operate in Nigeria.
- Hold a valid exploration licence, mining title, permit, or other relevant authorisation issued by the Mining Cadastre Office (MCO) or another competent authority (excluding innovative technology applicants). The licence or authorisation must remain valid for at least one year from the application date, unless otherwise specified in the call for applications.
- Be engaged primarily in early-stage mineral exploration rather than mine production, mineral processing, or routine mining operations.
- Demonstrate and provide evidence that the proposed project is supported by credible geological data, including preliminary surveys, geological maps, geochemical data, geophysical data, sampling results, historical exploration records, or other evidence supporting the exploration target.
- Submit a clearly defined exploration programme, work plan, budget, expected outputs.
- Demonstrate sound corporate governance, transparent reporting practices, capable management, and access to appropriate technical advisers.
- Ensure that the proposed project complies with applicable environmental standards, community engagement requirements, responsible mining principles, and relevant Nigerian mining laws and regulations.
- Demonstrate a credible pathway towards feasibility, further development, or commercialisation, recognising the inherently high-risk nature of mineral exploration.
- Include a project team with suitably qualified technical personnel, such as registered geoscientists, mining professionals, and other relevant specialists with demonstrable exploration experience.
- Demonstrate financial commitment to the project through co-investment, prior exploration expenditure, or other verifiable financial contributions.
- Applicants with innovative processing technology are not required to hold a mining licence. Such applicants must demonstrate ownership, control or rights to the proposed technology and provide evidence of technical capability to implement the project.

4.2 Research & Development Stream Eligibility

- Eligible applicants include Master’s and PhD academic researchers, university departments and research institutions in Nigeria.
- Individual academic applicants must provide evidence of Master’s or PhD enrolment and institutional affiliation.
- Institutional applicants must provide evidence of accreditation, registration, or appropriate legal/institutional authority to undertake the proposed research.
- Research proposals must align with SMDF’s mining development mandate and address a sector-relevant knowledge, capability, technical, sustainability, processing, exploration, or governance gap.

- Proposals must be scientifically credible, with a clear problem statement, objectives, methodology, workplan, expected outputs and budget justification.
- Projects must demonstrate sector impact or innovation, including contribution to mineral discovery, geological knowledge, sustainable mining practices, technical capacity, data quality, or regulatory effectiveness.

4.3 General Compliance Requirements

- Applicants must comply with all applicable Nigerian laws, mining regulations, environmental requirements, health and safety standards, registered-business and tax obligations, and sector-specific rules.
- Applicants must provide proof of licence, permit, land access, mineral rights access, institutional authority, or other approvals relevant to the specific project.
- Applicants must not have unresolved compliance issues that materially affect their ability to execute the project responsibly.
- Applicants must submit only one project per application cycle unless the official call permits otherwise.
- Applicants must provide a clear justification for all requested spending and must disclose other grants, co-funding, partnerships, or third-party support associated with the project.

5. Application Documentation Requirements

Applications must be complete and supported by all required documentation. Incomplete applications may be rejected, deferred, or returned for clarification depending on Programme rules and the application stage.

Applicants may also submit any additional supporting documentation they consider relevant to strengthen and substantiate their application.

5.1 Exploration Stage and Critical Minerals Stream Documents

For Exploration Stage and Critical Mineral Stream, the following are required:

1. Completed Grant Application Form.
2. Certificate of Incorporation, CAC registration documents, proof of statutory compliance, Tax Identification Number and evidence of tax compliance.
3. Valid exploration licence, mining lease, permit, or relevant mining title issued by the Mining Cadastre Office or competent authority.
4. Comprehensive exploration workplan, including objectives, methods, target rationale, schedule, key milestones and expected deliverables.
5. Detailed budget and expense breakdown, including assumptions, quotations if available and justification for major cost lines.
6. Environmental, Social and Governance plan, including community engagement approach, health and safety measures, environmental safeguards and grievance-management approach, where applicable.
7. Technical team profile, including CVs, qualifications, relevant experience, professional certifications and roles of geologists, mining engineers, field teams, consultants, or laboratories.
8. Historical exploration data where available, including maps, sampling results, geophysical or geochemical surveys, drilling logs, assay results, reports, or technical interpretations.
9. Evidence of site access, landowner or community consent, mineral title rights, access agreements, or other relevant acknowledgements where applicable.
10. Details of partnerships or third-party support such as MOUs, technical partners, laboratories, contractors, consultants, academic collaborators, or co-funders.
11. Geological datasets and technical reports supporting the exploration target.
12. Drilling results, trenching records, sampling results or other exploration outputs where available.
13. Resource estimates, exploration target statements or mineral inventory reports where applicable.
14. Metallurgical or mineralogical test results where available and relevant to the proposed project.
15. Evidence of professional accreditation or certification of key technical personnel.

For Innovative Processing Technology applicants under a Critical Minerals Stream, the requirements include:

1. Completed grant application form.
2. Product or technology brief, including a description of the product, technology, innovation, value proposition, target market, key features, development stage, and intended application.
3. Technical note describing the innovation, detailing the underlying technology, technical architecture, methodology, novelty, intellectual property considerations, performance specifications, and differentiating capabilities.
4. Prototype, pilot, demonstration, or proof-of-concept evidence, including test results, demonstration reports, pilot outcomes, validation data, or other evidence of functionality and readiness.

5. Process flow diagrams illustrating the operational workflow, system components, technical integrations, and overall solution design.
6. Product roadmap, including development phases, key milestones, implementation timeline, commercial readiness targets, scaling plans, and anticipated future enhancements.
7. Technology validation and performance reports, including technical assessments, laboratory results, field-testing outcomes, certification reports, benchmarking studies, or other evidence demonstrating the effectiveness and reliability of the innovation.
8. Commercialisation strategy, including market-entry plans, customer acquisition approach, revenue model, go-to-market strategy, partnership framework, scaling opportunities, and sustainability considerations.
9. Technical team profile, including CVs, qualifications, relevant experience, professional certifications, areas of expertise, and defined roles and responsibilities of key technical personnel, founders, researchers, engineers, developers, consultants, or advisors.
10. Evidence of co-funding or financial support, including funding agreements, investor commitments, letters of support, contribution schedules, or other documentation demonstrating financial participation from third parties or project sponsors.

5.2 Master's and PhD Academic Researcher Documents

1. Proof of Master's / PhD enrolment, such as admission letter, current student status confirmation, or institutional letter.
1. Valid means of identification such as National ID or International Passport.
2. Research proposal, including problem statement, objectives, methodology, workplan, expected results, dissemination plan and budget.
3. Letter of support from academic supervisor, department, or qualified referee.
4. Evidence of institutional affiliation, including department or faculty confirmation.
5. Estimated research budget and funding plan, including co-funding or in-kind support where applicable.
6. ESG, research ethics, fieldwork safety and data-management considerations relevant to the proposed research.

5.3 University Department and Research Institution Documents

1. Proof of institutional accreditation, registration, or authority to conduct research.
2. Institutional or research capacity profile, including prior relevant studies, facilities, technical resources and experience.
3. Detailed research proposal, including objectives, methodology, expected outcomes, implementation plan, research governance and sector relevance.
4. Principal investigator and research team profiles, including roles, qualifications and time commitment.
5. Institutional approval confirming commitment to undertake the research and to comply with Programme requirements.
6. Research budget and implementation plan, with clear assumptions and justification for cost lines.
7. Monitoring and reporting framework, including milestones, outputs, data-management approach and dissemination plan.
8. Evidence of partnerships or collaboration such as MOUs, letters of support, laboratory arrangements, or industry collaboration where applicable.

5.4 Additional Requirements Where Laboratory Upgrade Is Proposed

- Justification linking the upgrade directly to proposed research objectives and sector impact.
- Detailed specifications for equipment, upgrades, materials, or systems, including technical specifications and intended use.
- Demonstration of existing capacity gaps and explanation of how the upgrade will address them.
- Evidence of institutional commitment to maintain, operate and sustain the facility after the project period.
- Access and utilisation plan showing how the upgraded facility will support ongoing research beyond the funded project.
- Procurement plan aligned with Programme guidelines and value-for-money expectations.

6. Eligible and Ineligible Costs

Costs must be reasonable, necessary, directly linked to approved activities and incurred within the approved project period. The final determination of cost eligibility will be made in the grant agreement and any formal award conditions.

6.1 Eligible Costs – Exploration Stage and Critical Minerals

- Geological, geophysical and geochemical surveys, including mapping, survey design, data acquisition and interpretation.
- Drilling programmes and associated field activities, including mobilisation, demobilisation, core logging, sampling and site preparation directly tied to exploration.
- Sampling, laboratory analysis, assay testing, metallurgical or mineralogical testing where directly tied to exploration objectives.
- Technical consulting services, including exploration design, geological modelling, data interpretation, resource-target evaluation and technical reporting.
- Environmental and social assessments, community engagement, field safety planning and safeguards directly required for exploration execution.
- Data management systems, geological databases, modelling tools and project-specific digital systems directly required for approved project work.
- Licensing permits and regulatory compliance costs directly attributable to the approved project.
- Field operations, logistics, field equipment rentals, consumables and exploration equipment required for field execution.
- Temporary exploration infrastructure such as field camps, access tracks and site preparation for exploration activities, where appropriate and approved.
- Personnel costs for geologists, technical specialists, field teams and approved project staff, limited to time spent directly on approved activities.
- Other reasonable costs directly attributable to approved exploration activities, as approved in the grant agreement.
- For the innovative processing technology projects, eligible costs may include prototype development, pilot testing, technology validation, engineering design, metallurgical testing, laboratory assessments, demonstration activities, specialist consultancy services, software development directly related to the technology, and commercial readiness activities approved by the Programme.

6.2 Eligible Costs – Research & Development Stream

- Travel to and from approved field research locations (reimbursable)
- Fieldwork expenses, including accommodation and subsistence for project personnel engaged in approved research activities.
- Consumable and expendable research materials required for sample collection, preparation, testing, or analysis.
- Analytical and laboratory testing costs.
- Journal publication and related dissemination costs

- Limited travel to present research findings, where linked to dissemination of approved project outputs and expressly approved.
- Research-specific equipment, upgrades, or software only where directly required for approved research objectives and expressly approved.
- Professional or technical services directly required to complete approved research outputs.

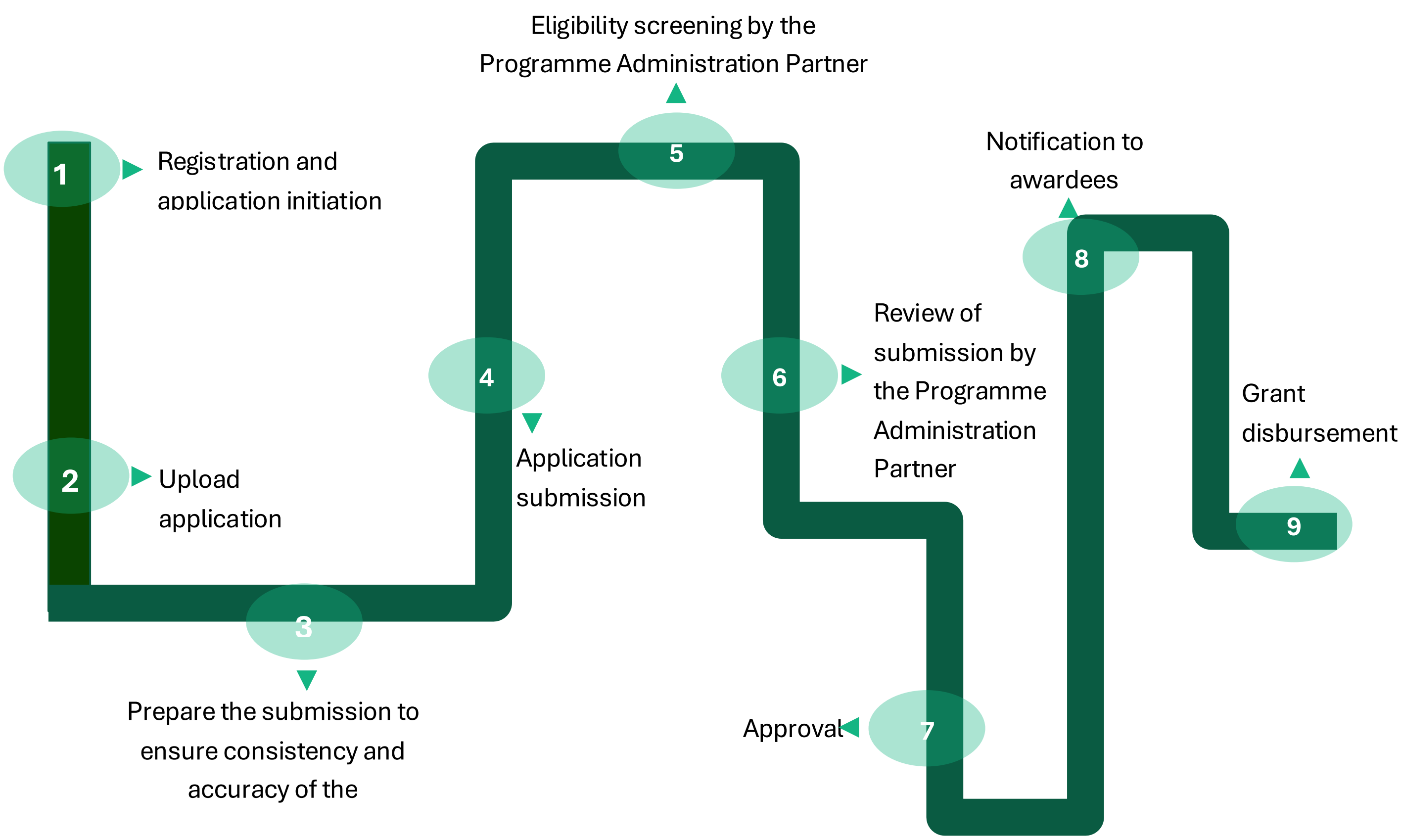
6.3 Ineligible Costs

- Loan refinancing, interest, debt repayments, bond costs, finance charges, or repayment of existing obligations.
- Losses on investments, bad debts, or costs associated with unrelated projects and contracts.
- Depreciation, amortisation, or notional accounting charges.
- Recoverable taxes, general income taxes, or tax filing costs, unless specifically approved as non-recoverable and project related.
- Employee bonuses, discretionary payments, entertainment, gifts, donations, dues, membership fees and non-essential expenses.
- Routine operational costs unrelated to approved exploration or research activities.
- Projects already fully funded by other grants, unless the applicant clearly demonstrates distinct project scope and no double funding.
- Costs incurred before the grant award date or outside the approved project period, unless explicitly allowed in writing.
- Activities outside the scope of mining research, exploration, responsible mining, or approved sector-development objectives.
- Costs related to litigation, fines, penalties, sanctions, lobbying, government relations, or non-compliance.
- University administrative overheads, tuition fees, living expenses for non-project personnel and travel unrelated to approved research activities.
- Purchase of non-essential or general-purpose equipment and computer hardware/software not directly required for project activities.

7. Application Process

The SMDF–EMERGE application process is designed to be transparent, structured and evidence-based. Applicants are expected to read the call-for-applications notice, complete the application form carefully, upload all required documents and submit through the SMDF–EMERGE Portal within the stated application window.

7.1 Indicative Application Stages



7.2 Application Window and Timeline

The application window opens on 3 August 2026. The full application timeline, review period and award announcement dates will be communicated in the official call-for-applications notice and on the SMDF–EMERGE website. The current indicative plan anticipates review and committee decision, with announcement of beneficiaries in Q4 2026.

Note: Where an application window, deadline, or review timeline is formally announced, applicants should rely on that announcement. Late submissions may not be considered unless the Programme formally extends the application window.

7.3 Completing the Application Form

- Applicant Information: provide legal name, contact details, registration information, institution or company profile and authorised representative details.
- Programme Stream: select the applicable stream and confirm that the applicant and project meet the stream-specific eligibility rules.
- Project Summary: provide a concise but technically meaningful description of the project, location, target mineral or research focus, methodology and expected outputs.
- Project Rationale: explain why the project area or research topic is important, how the proposed approach addresses an identified gap and how the project contributes to Nigeria's mining development.
- Workplan: describe activities, milestones, deliverables, timing, responsible persons, dependencies and expected evidence of completion.
- Budget: provide itemised costs, assumptions, quotations where available, funding requested, co-funding if any and explanations for major cost categories.
- ESG and safeguards: explain environmental, community, health and safety, research ethics, data handling and governance controls.
- Declaration: confirm accuracy, consent to programme checks, conflict disclosures and agreement to be bound by Programme rules if approved.

7.4 Data Protection and Privacy

All personal and corporate information collected under the Programme is handled in accordance with the SMDF-EMERGE Privacy and Confidentiality Policy, issued in compliance with the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 and available on the SMDF-EMERGE Programme website. The Policy explains what information is collected at each stage of the grant lifecycle, the legal bases on which it is processed, the categories of information that will be published in the interest of transparency and public accountability (including the names of shortlisted and successful applicants, project titles and grant amounts), the categories treated as confidential (including detailed technical exploration data, proprietary methodologies and evaluation records), how information may be shared with programme partners, government bodies and service providers, the applicable retention periods, and the rights of data subjects under the Act, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Nigeria Data Protection Commission.

By submitting an application, an applicant confirms that it has read and accepted the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy and that it has obtained the necessary authorisations from any individuals or entities whose information is included in the application. Questions or requests concerning personal data should be directed to the SMDF-EMERGE Data Protection Officer at the contact details set out in the Policy.

8. Appraisal and Selection Framework

Applications that pass eligibility screening will be appraised against documented criteria. The appraisal process is intended to identify projects with the strongest technical basis, sector-development value, implementation readiness, responsible safeguards and alignment with SMDF–EMERGE objectives.

8.1 Exploration Stage and Critical Minerals Appraisal Requirements

- **Technical:** exploration methodology, geological data quality, exploration maturity, drilling results (where available), resource definition progress, metallurgical understanding, technical competence of the project team and overall project readiness.
- **Commercial Potential:** likelihood of advancing the project towards resource definition, feasibility studies, investment readiness or future commercial development.
- **Financial:** project budget, cost estimates, historical exploration expenditure, funding requirements, utilisation plan, reasonableness of cost assumptions and financial controls.
- **Corporate Governance:** certificate of incorporation, organisational and shareholding structure, profiles and CVs of promoters and management, internal policies, controls and evidence of community engagement.
- **Logistics:** site access, field execution plan, security considerations, equipment mobilisation, procurement strategy and schedule realism.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** mining licence, permits, land access rights, compliance history, environmental considerations and readiness to meet applicable Nigerian mining regulations.
- The innovative processing technology projects shall be assessed based on technology maturity, innovation, technical performance, commercial potential, scalability, implementation readiness, market relevance, and potential contribution to critical minerals value addition in Nigeria (refer to 8.2.1).

8.2 Exploration Stage and Critical Minerals Scoring

Scoring criteria	Weight
Technical Merit & Geological Potential	40%
Management / Team Experience & Strength	20%
Development Impact & Strategic Fit	15%
Financial & Commercial Viability	15%
Risk & Execution Readiness	10%
Total	**100%**

8.2.1 Innovative Processing Technology Scoring

Scoring criteria	Weight
Financial and Commercial Viability	30%
Development Impact, Strategic Fit and Local Value Chain Addition	25%
Technology Maturity & Innovation	20%
Management / Team Experience & Strength	15%
Risk & Execution Readiness	10%
Total	**100%**

8.3 Research & Development Appraisal Requirements

- **For Master's and PhD Students:** Verified admission status, valid identification, clarity and technical merit of research topic, academic capability, supervisor/referee support, budget clarity and feasibility of execution.
- **For Universities:** Accreditation or departmental approval, institutional capacity, proposal relevance, qualifications of principal investigators and team, alignment with priority areas, implementation readiness, budget justification and governance structure.
- **For Research Institutes:** Valid registration or accreditation, institutional experience, proposal quality, methodology robustness, expected contribution to knowledge and exploration, budget accuracy, co-funding or sustainability plan and dissemination approach.

8.4 Research & Development Scoring

Scoring criteria	Weight
Academic & Research Excellence	30%
Innovation & Knowledge Contribution	20%
Industry Relevance and Application Potential	20%
Relevance to Nigeria's Solid Minerals Development Plan	15%
Feasibility, Institutional Capacity and clear execution pathway	15%
Total	**100%**

8.5 Selection Principles

- Funding is not automatic and remains subject to approval and successful completion of award conditions.
- Applications may be prioritised based on technical quality, strategic relevance, critical-mineral focus, community benefits, job creation potential, host-community participation and readiness for execution.
- Where applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis, only complete applications that meet the minimum eligibility threshold shall be placed in the queue for substantive review.
- The Programme may request clarification, additional documents, or revisions; failure to respond within stated timelines may result in disqualification or deferral.

9. Award, Grant Agreement and Disbursement

9.1 Award Notification

Successful applicants will be notified through their registered email address, official SMDF–EMERGE channels and may be announced in national newspapers. Unsuccessful applicants may be notified in accordance with Programme communication protocols.

9.2 Grant Agreement

No applicant shall be deemed to have received a grant award until a Grant Agreement has been duly executed and all conditions precedent have been satisfied.

The Grant Agreement shall set out, among other matters:

- The approved project scope and activities;
- Eligible expenditure categories;
- The approved budget;
- Disbursement conditions and schedule;
- Reporting and record-keeping obligations;
- Procurement requirements;
- Milestone and performance requirements;
- Monitoring and audit provisions;
- Remedies for non-compliance; and
- Any other terms and conditions required by the Programme.

9.3 Disbursement Principles

- Grant disbursements shall be made in instalments and shall be linked to approved project milestones, reporting periods, evidence of eligible expenditure, procurement documentation, technical deliverables, and satisfactory compliance reviews.
- Subsequent disbursements shall be subject to verification and approval of milestone deliverables by the Programme's PAP or other authorised reviewers.
- The Programme reserves the right to conduct or commission technical audits, laboratory verification, site inspections, and independent assessments before approving any subsequent disbursement.
- Payments relating to specialised technical services, drilling activities, laboratory analyses, consultancy services, or other approved project activities shall be made directly to approved service providers.
- The Programme may withhold, reduce, suspend, terminate, or recover grant funding where an awardee fails to comply with the Grant Agreement, provides false or misleading information, or breaches applicable laws, regulations, or Programme requirements.
- All awardees shall maintain complete and accurate accounting records, invoices, receipts, payroll records, consultant agreements, laboratory reports, procurement documentation, and other supporting evidence demonstrating the proper use of grant funds.

9.3.1 Payment to Approved Service Providers

- Grant funds shall not be disbursed directly to awardees.
- Approved grant funding shall be paid directly to Programme-approved service providers engaged in delivering eligible project activities, including laboratories, consultants, contractors, technical partners, training providers, equipment suppliers, logistics providers, and other specialist implementation partners.
- All service providers shall be selected, assessed, and approved in accordance with the Programme's procurement procedures, due diligence requirements, and technical standards.
- Payments shall be made only against approved workplans, budgets, contracts, invoices, milestones, deliverables, and satisfactory evidence of service delivery.
- Direct payment to service providers shall not relieve an awardee of responsibility for project implementation, reporting, record-keeping, conflict-of-interest disclosures, ESG compliance, or confirmation that services have been delivered in accordance with the approved project scope and objectives.
- Notwithstanding the above, limited categories of Research and Development stream costs that cannot practicably be settled through a service provider, such as fieldwork travel, and subsistence for approved research personnel, may be disbursed directly to an awardee or to the awardee's institution. Such direct disbursement is available only where the cost is expressly approved in the grant budget, is supported by prior written approval from the Programme, is capped at the amount stated in the grant agreement, and is subsequently acquitted with receipts and supporting evidence within the period specified. Direct disbursement is not available under the Exploration Stage or Critical Minerals Streams.

10. Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation (MRE) are critical Programme control mechanisms designed to ensure that grant-funded activities are implemented as approved, funds are utilised for intended purposes, project risks are appropriately managed, and intended outcomes are achieved. SMDF shall appoint a Programme Administration Partner to oversee the monitoring, reporting and evaluation process and provide project implementation structure.

10.1 Monitoring and Reporting Responsibilities

The Independent Grant Consultant shall be responsible for:

- Conducting programme monitoring and performance reviews.
- Reviewing and validating technical, financial and operational reports submitted by awardees.
- Verifying achievement of project milestones prior to the release of subsequent grant disbursements.
- Conducting site visits and project inspections where necessary.
- Reviewing compliance with grant agreements, ESG requirements and Programme guidelines.
- Providing periodic performance reports and recommendations to SMDF.
- Maintaining a central repository of project reports, supporting documentation and performance records.
- Escalating significant implementation issues, project delays, compliance breaches or misuse of funds to SMDF for further action.

10.2 Awardee Reporting Requirements

Component	Expected contents
Activities completed	Narrative and evidence of project activities completed against the approved workplan.
Technical outputs	Maps, datasets, logs, field notes, laboratory results, modelling, research outputs, technical interpretations, or other deliverables.
Budget and expenditure	Approved budget, expenditure to date, variance analysis, supporting documents and forecast to completion.
ESG and safeguards	Environmental incidents, safety performance, fieldwork controls, community engagement, grievances, ethical approvals and data safeguards.
Risks and issues	Implementation risks, delays, cost overruns, technical constraints, mitigation actions and decisions required.
Next steps	Full development programme and workplan, upcoming milestones, procurement needs, support requested and expected completion date.

10.3 Programme Performance Evaluation

The Programme Administration Partner shall prepare:

Quarterly Programme Performance Reports Covering:

- Number of applications received
- Number of grants awarded
- Disbursement status
- Milestone achievement rates

Annual Programme Evaluation Report Covering:

- Programme outcomes and impact
- Exploration projects advanced
- Research projects advanced
- Follow-on investments mobilised (if applicable)
- Research outputs produced.
- Lessons learned and recommendations for programme improvement.

SMDF, the Programme Administration Partner, or authorised representatives may conduct document reviews, technical verification, site visits, financial checks, or audits in accordance with the grant agreement. Awardees must retain records for the period stated in the grant agreement and cooperate with reasonable verification requests.

11. ESG, Community Engagement and Safeguards

SMDF–EMERGE is intended to promote responsible mining and research practices. Applicants should therefore demonstrate that proposed activities can be completed safely, ethically and with appropriate environmental and community safeguards.

- Environmental safeguards: identify potential impacts, avoid unnecessary disturbance, manage waste, rehabilitate exploration disturbances where required and comply with applicable regulations.
- Health and safety: prepare a field safety plan, identify hazards, assign accountability, train field personnel, provide emergency response arrangements and document incidents.
- Community engagement: engage affected communities early where field activities may affect access, livelihoods, land use, security, or local expectations; document engagement and address grievances responsibly.
- Research ethics and data responsibility: ensure human-participant research where applicable has relevant approvals, protect personal and sensitive data and manage research integrity risks.
- Governance: maintain transparent decision-making, procurement controls, segregation of duties, conflict disclosures and accurate reporting.

12. EMERGE Accelerator and Capacity Building

Beyond grant funding, the Programme includes capacity-building support designed to strengthen the ability of awardees to execute projects, present credible technical outputs, manage funds, engage communities and progress toward future investment readiness. Awardees under relevant exploration and critical-minerals pathways are automatically enrolled in the EMERGE Accelerator, while awardees under the research and development may be considered based on programme needs.

- Business advisory: support for business planning, financial management, governance, project documentation and investor readiness.
- Technical capability development: training and hands-on support in exploration planning, data management, reporting, ESG, procurement and technical communication.
- Network access: opportunities to connect with sector stakeholders, technical partners, laboratories, prospective investors, service providers and relevant public-sector institutions.
- Procurement support: registered suppliers may be made available through the SMDF–EMERGE Portal where procurement support is required for successful applicants.

13. About the MSMD and SMDF

13.1 Ministry of Solid Minerals Development

The Ministry of Solid Minerals Development is the arm of the Federal Government charged with unlocking the economic potential of Nigeria's solid minerals sector. It formulates and drives the policies that govern prospecting, quarrying and mining; regulates and coordinates the sector's institutions; and oversees the administration of mineral titles, permits, leases, rents, fees and royalties through the relevant agencies. Under its Seven-Point Agenda for the transformation of the sector, the Ministry is repositioning solid minerals as a pillar of Nigeria's economic diversification: generating reliable geoscience data on priority minerals, attracting domestic and international investment, formalising artisanal mining, securing the mining environment and anchoring value addition at home. The Solid Minerals Development Fund, through which the Ministry expands funding opportunities for the sector, is one of the principal instruments of that agenda.

13.2 Solid Minerals Development Fund

The Solid Minerals Development Fund is Nigeria's government-owned fund for the mining sector, established to catalyse private-sector investment across the mining lifecycle, from exploration to production. Its mandate is to unlock financing, de-risk projects, crowd in private capital, create jobs, grow the sector's contribution to GDP and generate sustainable returns to the Fund. It delivers this mandate through its Growth, Opportunities and Responsible Mining Funds, the AFC-SMDF Project Development Facility and the EMERGE grant endowment, supported by flexible financing solutions, technical evaluation, strategic partnerships and access to industry networks.

Appendix A: Applicant Readiness Checklist

Area	Checklist item	Applicant confirmation
Eligibility	Applicant fits the selected stream; project is in Nigeria; applicant has required licence, institutional affiliation, or registration.	☐ Confirmed
Technical rationale	Project has a clear target, research question, geological rationale, or sector-development gap.	☐ Confirmed
Workplan	Activities, schedule, deliverables, responsible persons and milestones are clearly defined.	☐ Confirmed
Budget	All costs are itemised, justified, eligible, reasonable and linked to activities.	☐ Confirmed
ESG	Environmental, safety, community, ethical and governance controls are described.	☐ Confirmed
Documents	All mandatory documents have been uploaded and are current, legible, consistent and signed where required.	☐ Confirmed
Declarations	Conflicts, co-funding, other grants, land access, partnerships and compliance matters have been disclosed.	☐ Confirmed

Appendix B: Sample Workplan Template

Activity	Description	Units / outputs	Start date	End date
Geophysical survey				
Geochemical sampling				
Drilling / field testing				
Laboratory analysis				
Community engagement / ESG activities				
Data interpretation and reporting				
Research dissemination				

Appendix C: Sample Budget Template

Budget category	Description / assumptions	Eligible amount requested	Co-funding details
Personnel directly engaged on project			
Contractors / consultants			
Field logistics and mobilisation			
Laboratory and assay testing			
Rental equipment / approved supplies			
Permits and regulatory compliance			
ESG / community engagement			
Data management / modelling tools			
Dissemination / reporting			
Contingency if expressly permitted			

Appendix D: Common Application Errors

- Submitting an application under the wrong stream.
- Providing expired licences, incomplete CAC documents, or unclear institutional evidence.
- Uploading a budget that does not reconcile to the workplan or includes ineligible costs.
- Providing a general project description without a clear geological, research, or sector-development rationale.
- Failing to include ESG, community engagement, health and safety, or ethical safeguards.
- Providing technical team CVs that do not demonstrate capability to execute the proposed work.
- Using inconsistent project names, locations, cost figures, or timelines across uploaded documents.
- Failing to disclose other grants, partnerships, conflicts of interest, or access constraints.

Appendix E: Contact

smdf-emerge.com.ng

info@smdf-emerge.com.ng

smdfemerge

smdfemerge