

RFQ: 11/Sept/2026: Three-Year Systems Administration and Technical Support for ASSAf Khulisa Journals (PKP Open Journal Systems)

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) seeks to appoint a skilled and experienced service provider to provide systems administration, infrastructure support and technical maintenance, for ASSAf's multi-journal scholarly publishing platform based on the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) Open Journal Systems (OJS) software. The service is required for a three-year period from 1 November 2026 to 31 October 2029.

The primary requirement is reliable systems administration, monitoring, maintenance, upgrade management and operational support for Khulisa Journals. Custom software development and bespoke development are excluded from the base scope unless separately approved in writing by ASSAf.

The service provider will be responsible for maintaining both the production and test/development environments and for ensuring that OJS and the underlying technology environment remain supported, secure, stable, compatible, and appropriately upgraded throughout the contract period. These responsibilities will apply regardless of the size of the platform or any growth in the number of journal titles hosted on the platform.

All technical queries may be directed to Mrs Ina Smith at ina@assaf.org.za

All queries relating to the bid documentation and quotation submissions may be directed to scm@assaf.org.za

Deadline for submissions: **30 September 2026**

SCOPE OF WORK AND DELIVERABLES

The appointed service provider will provide ongoing systems administration and technical support for the Khulisa Journals OJS platform for the full contract period. The service covers both the production environment and the test/development environment. Technical methods and operating procedures may be agreed with ASSAf during inception and refined as the platform evolves. The responsibilities set out in items (a) - (j) are indicative and not exhaustive, and the appointed service provider will be responsible for all systems administration, maintenance, monitoring, technical support and related services reasonably necessary for the secure, reliable and continuous operation of Khulisa Journals, with the detailed responsibilities, procedures and service levels to be further defined in the Service Level Agreement (SLA); no service reasonably falling within this overall scope may be regarded as out of scope solely because it is not expressly listed below.

a. Platform Administration and Maintenance: Manage, maintain and administer the OJS platform and its production and test/development server environments, including initial and ongoing health checks, configuration, routine maintenance, troubleshooting, corrective action, risk identification, capacity assessment, compatibility management and recommendations required to ensure reliable operation.

b. Monitoring, Security and Reliability: Proactively monitor and maintain the production and test/development environments for availability, performance, capacity, security, backups, automated processes, logs and other operational conditions, while applying appropriate patches, updates and safeguards, responding to incidents, and keeping the underlying server and software environment on supported and compatible versions.

c. OJS and Platform Upgrades: Plan, test, implement and validate all OJS and related platform upgrades required during the contract period, including minor, maintenance, security and major/version upgrades, together with necessary underlying technology changes, plugin and integration compatibility checks, testing on the test/development environment, backups, validation and rollback arrangements, with all normal OJS upgrades included in the base support scope.

d. Test/Development Environment and Deployment Support: Monitor and maintain the test/development environment throughout the contract period and guide and assist the Khulisa Journals Manager with the deployment, configuration, testing, troubleshooting and controlled production release of ASSAf-supplied dashboards, plugins, themes, stylesheets, integrations, scripts, utilities, applications and related components, including required server-side dependencies, permissions and configuration, while excluding bespoke software development unless separately approved in writing.

e. Backups, Recovery and Business Continuity: Maintain and verify appropriate backups of the OJS platform, data, files and essential configuration, document and periodically test practical recovery procedures, and ensure suitable backup and rollback arrangements are in place before significant upgrades or high-risk production changes.

f. Plugins, Integrations and Supporting Services: Install, configure, update, maintain and troubleshoot standard OJS plugins, approved third-party integrations and supporting services used by Khulisa Journals, including domains, certificates, email delivery, analytics, persistent identifiers, authentication, indexing, harvesting and other scholarly publishing services.

g. Technical Support and Incident Resolution: Provide technical support to the Khulisa Journals Manager and, where escalated by ASSAf, other platform users, including diagnosing, resolving and where necessary escalating issues relating to OJS, server environments, permissions,

workflows, files, email, automated jobs, plugins, integrations, usage statistics, performance and other systems-administration matters, while keeping ASSAf informed of progress.

h. Performance, Automated Processes and Statistics: Monitor, maintain and optimise platform performance and the reliable operation of scheduled tasks, background jobs, queues, email processes, usage-statistics processing and other automated services, and investigate recurring errors, performance problems or unexplained failures and implement or recommend appropriate corrective action.

i. Documentation, Knowledge Transfer and Collaboration: Maintain current technical documentation and change records, provide practical guidance and knowledge transfer to the Khulisa Journals Manager and relevant ASSAf staff on testing, deployment, upgrades and routine platform administration, and collaborate with ASSAf staff, infrastructure providers, developers and external service providers as required. Keep track of new developments and engage with the OJS community when and as needed.

j. Contract-End Handover: Provide an orderly end-of-contract handover comprising current documentation, outstanding issues, relevant configuration and operational information, cooperation with ASSAf or an incoming service provider, and assurance that ASSAf retains control of its data, documentation, domains, credentials and administrative access throughout and after the contract.

Scope exclusions and change control

Bespoke software development, new custom applications or plugins, substantial source-code redevelopment, large-scale third-party migrations and major infrastructure replacement projects are excluded from the base support fee unless specifically included or separately approved by ASSAf, while routine systems administration, monitoring and maintenance of both production and test/development environments, deployment assistance and all normal minor and major OJS upgrades are included in the base scope, and no chargeable out-of-scope work may proceed without prior written approval from ASSAf.

Service level expectations

The bidder must indicate whether it can meet or improve the following target service levels. Response times refer to acknowledgement and commencement of diagnosis, not necessarily final resolution where third-party dependencies or complex defects are involved.

Support availability: Normal support is expected during South African business hours. The bidder should state its arrangements for urgent P1 incidents outside normal hours and any additional after-hours charges.

Priority	Typical examples	Target response	Target communication / restoration
P1 - Critical	Platform unavailable; severe security incident; widespread inability to submit/publish; data integrity at risk	Within 1 hour	Frequent updates until stable; workaround/restoration as soon as reasonably possible
P2 - High	Major function unavailable for multiple users/journals; mail/queue failure materially affecting operations	Within 4 business hours	Daily or agreed updates until resolved
P3 - Normal	Single-user or non-critical functional issue; configuration request; plugin issue	Within 1 business day	Progress update within 2 business days if unresolved
P4 - Planned	Routine change, advice, scheduled maintenance, documentation request	Within 2 business days	Schedule by agreement with ASSAf

Deliverables

- Initial platform health check and identification of material risks or priority actions.
- Ongoing monitoring, maintenance and technical support for both production and test/development environments.
- Planning, testing and implementation of required minor and major OJS/platform upgrades throughout the contract period.
- Technical guidance and deployment assistance to the Khulisa Journals Manager for testing and production deployment of ASSAf-supplied applications and components, including dashboards where applicable.
- Regular support and maintenance reporting, with material incidents, changes, upgrades and outstanding risks recorded.
- Current technical documentation and change records maintained throughout the contract.
- Annual technical review and a complete contract-end handover.

Expertise

The bidder must demonstrate practical systems administration experience relevant to OJS and production Linux-based web platforms. The proposed team should have sufficient expertise to manage the full scope of services over the three-year period.

- Administration, maintenance, troubleshooting and upgrade of PKP Open Journal Systems (OJS), including experience with both minor and major upgrades.

- Administration of the web application technology stack required by OJS, including server operating systems, web services, PHP, databases, certificates, permissions and scheduled services.
- Monitoring, security, backup and recovery, performance management and production incident resolution.
- Management of production and test/development environments and support for controlled application/component deployment between them.
- Troubleshooting of plugins, integrations, email delivery, automated jobs, usage statistics and other supporting services relevant to scholarly publishing platforms.
- The exact software versions and technical requirements will change during the contract. The service provider must remain able to support the OJS release and compatible technology environment in use at the time and must advise ASSAf proactively when upgrades or changes are required.

Bidder experience and capacity

- Demonstrable experience supporting OJS or comparable production scholarly publishing platforms.
- Demonstrable experience with multi-site or multi-journal production environments, test/development environments and controlled deployment/change processes.
- Sufficient technical capacity to provide continuity of support during leave, illness or competing assignments.
- Ability to communicate clearly with both technical and non-technical users.
- Ability to work collaboratively with ASSAf and third-party providers and to meet agreed deadlines.

Pricing requirements

Quotations must provide a clear and transparent cost breakdown. Prices must be inclusive of VAT where applicable. Non-VAT vendors must indicate this explicitly.

- Monthly support fee and annual total for Year 1 (1 November 2026 - 31 October 2027).
- Monthly support fee and annual total for Year 2 (1 November 2027 - 31 October 2028).
- Monthly support fee and annual total for Year 3 (1 November 2028 - 31 October 2029).
- Any annual escalation must be stated upfront and reflected in the three-year total.
- Hourly or daily rate for separately approved out-of-scope work, if applicable.
- After-hours/emergency rates, if different from the base support arrangement.
- Any once-off inception or transition costs must be separately identified.
- Total contract price for the full 36-month period.

Pricing item	Monthly / unit rate	Annual / subtotal	VAT-inclusive total
Year 1 support			
Year 2 support			
Year 3 support			
Once-off inception (if any)			
Out-of-scope rate			
After-hours rate (if any)			
TOTAL 36-MONTH CONTRACT PRICE			

VALUATION CRITERIA FOR BIDS

Proposals will first be evaluated for functionality. Bidders that meet the minimum functionality threshold will then be evaluated in accordance with the price.

Minimum functionality threshold: 70 out of 100 points. Bidders scoring below the threshold will not proceed to further evaluation. ASSAf may request evidence, demonstrations, clarification or references in support of claims made in the proposal.

Rating scale: The 0-5 rating is converted to the weighted score for each criterion.

0 – Non-compliant	1 – Poor	2 – Fair	3 – Good	4 – Very good	5 – Excellent
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Criterion	Guideline for application	Weight
Technical expertise	Depth and relevance of OJS/Linux/PHP/database/security expertise; ability to provide the full scope and deliverables.	30%
Relevant experience	Track record supporting OJS or comparable production scholarly publishing platforms and successful upgrades/maintenance.	30%
Capacity and support approach	Capacity, continuity, incident handling, escalation, availability and ability to meet service levels.	15%
Client feedback / references	Quality of feedback from previous or existing clients on similar assignments.	10%
Examples of work	Three relevant examples/case descriptions demonstrating quality, problem-solving and successful delivery.	15%

MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

- A company/organisation profile that demonstrates relevant expertise, experience and capacity.
- Proof of registration on the Central Supplier Database (CSD), including a current CSD report.
- Fully completed and signed Standard Bidding Documents (SBD forms) supplied with the RFQ.
- Valid Tax Compliance Status PIN / proof of tax compliance.
- At least three references from past or present clients for similar systems administration/OJS or comparable platform support assignments.
- A proposed support approach, escalation process and named key technical personnel.
- A complete quotation meeting the pricing requirements.
- A response to the scope and service-level requirements, including identification of any exceptions or assumptions.

Bidders that fail to comply with mandatory requirements may be disqualified and not considered for further evaluation.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

- Quotations must be emailed to SCM at scm@assaf.org.za by the stated deadline. Late submissions will not be considered.
- Quotations should remain valid for at least 30 days from the closing date, unless the final RFQ specifies a longer period.
- ASSAf reserves the right to request clarification, negotiate aspects of the service within procurement rules, or not to make an award.
- ASSAf may verify information supplied by bidders and contact references.
- The successful service provider will be required to protect confidential information, credentials and platform data and to comply with ASSAf policies and reasonable security instructions.
- All OJS data, journal content, configuration information, documentation, ASSAf-owned domains and administrative credentials remain the property/control of ASSAf or the relevant rights holder. No vendor lock-in is permitted.
- The service provider may not make material production changes without appropriate approval, except for urgent actions necessary to contain an active security or availability incident, in which case ASSAf must be notified immediately.
- The final contract/service-level agreement will incorporate the accepted quotation, this scope, agreed service levels and any approved clarifications.

SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

✓	Required item	Bidder reference / page
☐	Quotation with Year 1, Year 2, Year 3 and 36-month total	
☐	Company/organisation profile	
☐	Technical response to scope and service levels	
☐	Named key personnel / support capacity	
☐	Three client references	
☐	Three relevant examples/case descriptions	
☐	Current CSD report	
☐	Tax Compliance Status PIN / tax-compliance evidence	
☐	Completed and signed SBD forms	
☐	Any assumptions, exclusions or proposed deviations clearly stated	

END OF SPECIFICATION