



Thuthuka

Framework

**Directorate: Human and Infrastructure Capacity
Development**

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List of Acronyms

PR	Progress Report
DA	Designated Authority
CF	Carry forwards
CoG	Conditions of Grant
DSI	Department of Science and Innovation
GMSA	Grants Management and Systems Administration
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HICD	Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development
NRF	National Research Foundation
RE	Reviews and Evaluation

1. Overview

The purpose of the framework document is to outline the context, organisation and operational procedures with regard to the Thuthuka funding instrument. It links to the strategic objective of the National Research Foundation (NRF), which seeks to promote and support research through human capacity development. The Thuthuka funding instrument is located within the Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development (HICD) Directorate and managed within the Emerging Researchers cluster.

The Thuthuka Framework document is intended to inform potential and existing Thuthuka grantholders of the operational procedures for participation in this Funding Instrument. This document provides a brief overview of the Thuthuka Funding Instrument, eligibility, funding tracks, the application principles, funding guidelines and review procedures. It does not, however, constitute a complete set of the policies, procedures or systems used by the NRF.

2. Context

2.1. Transformation and Equity

The Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) in its White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation (2019) aims to increase the proportion of university staff with Doctoral degrees, through direct support for attaining a research Doctorate, particularly for staff at universities where the proportion of staff holding Doctoral degrees is below the national norm. As part of its Research Capacity Development Strategy (2002) and National Development Plan (2030) government committed to addressing this backlog through targeted interventions to develop the Next Generation of Academics for South African Higher Education. The objectives of these interventions are to:

- Stimulate Research and Development at HDIs;
- Target women and blacks for research support; and
- Pursue this in partnership with institutions.

In alignment with these objectives, the NRF developed a set of strategic objectives and supporting programmes as an embodiment of this imperative.

2.2. NRF Perspective

The Thuthuka funding instrument, initiated in 2001, is central to the NRF's human capital development strategy in so far as it relates to advancing the equity and redress agenda within the research sphere. Operating within the constantly evolving higher education

landscape, the Thuthuka funding instrument aims to develop human capital and to improve the research capacities of researchers from designated groups (black [African, Indian and Coloured], female or disabled) with the ultimate aim of redressing historical imbalances. This is done in partnership with public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), science councils and other public research institutions, as recognised by the NRF as eligible beneficiary institutions for NRF funding.

Whilst the primary aim of the Thuthuka funding instrument is to promote professional development of researchers from designated groups, participation of individuals from non-designated groups is not excluded. The funding instrument does not only contribute to the NRF's strategic goal of creating a maximum number of high-quality Doctoral graduates to drive the knowledge-based economy, but also contributes to the organisation's vision of growing a more representative science and technology workforce.

2.3. Objectives

Thuthuka is founded on the national equity and redress objectives. Specifically, the objectives of the Thuthuka funding instrument are to:

- Promote the attainment of a Doctoral qualification, by early career academics employed at South African public universities, science councils and other research institutions as recognised by the NRF;
- Promote the research development of early career academics employed at South African public universities, science councils and other research institutions as recognised by the NRF;
- Promote the attainment of an NRF rating by early career academics, in particular black and female researchers and persons with disabilities;
- Promote the attainment of an NRF rating by academics that have not been able to realise their potential or sustain their research ability by virtue of the lack of an enabling research environment;
- Promote the attainment of an NRF rating by academics that have not been able to realise their potential or sustain their research outputs due to family responsibilities;
- Foster a culture of research excellence, and aid in the development and expansion of the national knowledge-based economy by boosting research outputs and human capital development; and
- Effect transformation in the demographic composition of the established researcher

community at public funded HEIs, science councils and other research institutions as recognised by the NRF, with respect to gender, race and persons with disabilities.

3. Allocation Principles

The Thuthuka funding instrument supports well-structured research projects with achievable aims and sound methodologies, which support the study's objectives and demonstrate the prudent use of funds. The funding decisions will be guided by the following principles:

Equity and redress: In keeping with the equity and redress objectives, the Thuthuka funding instrument is based on a preferential funding model. In terms of this model, targets for supporting individuals from designated groups are set as in point 6 below;

Developmental: Even though the funding instrument has a developmental focus, only quality proposals that are scientifically sound will be considered for funding;

Achievability: The research proposal must be realistic, i.e. achievable in terms of the research objectives, the resources required and the projected completion times; and

Institutional co-funding: In order to be considered for Thuthuka funding from the NRF, the applicant's institution must commit in writing to provide fifty 50 percent of the total awarded operational costs for all approved projects.

4. Application Process

4.1. Call for Proposals

The NRF issues an annual Call for proposals for the Thuthuka Funding Instrument and applications should be completed and submitted via the NRF Online Submission System at <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za>. An Application and Funding Guide, which provides step-by-step instructions for completing the application template, will be available on the NRF website at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/funding/framework-documents/funding-framework-documents>. It is important to complete all the compulsory sections as well as the non-compulsory sections relevant to you. Any information submitted as attachments that should have been completed in the Thuthuka online application form, will render the application incomplete, resulting in a rejection.

Note:

The Thuthuka Funding Instrument does not accept more than one application per applicant within a three-year funding cycle, however a project proposal that has received an unfavourable review outcome may be revised and resubmitted to the NRF in this period provided that the applicant is still eligible. In such cases, any revision or reworking of the proposal to accommodate the reviewers' feedback on the initial application should be explained and pointed out in the revision.

Applicants will be invited to apply for funding in one of the following three tracks:

- **PhD Track:** for applicants wanting to obtain a Doctoral degree within the funding period;
- **Post-PhD Track:** for applicants wanting to become established researchers, by strengthening their research capabilities; and
- **NRF Rating Track:** for applicants wanting to apply for an NRF rating within the six-year funding period.

4.2. Eligibility

4.2.1. General Eligibility Criteria

The Thuthuka funding instrument awards are limited to **academics** with academic or joint academic and administrative professional appointments, at NRF recognised public universities, and **researchers** at Science Councils and other public research institutions as recognised by the NRF. Applicants must be employed at these institutions on a full-time permanent or full-time contractual basis. If the applicant is appointed on a full-time contractual basis, the appointment date must extend to cover the duration of the grant. Applications from Doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, lab technicians or similar appointed by institutions for the duration of the project will not be accepted.

Applicants that are generally under the age of 45 years at the time of first application may apply. Applicants in the PhD and Post-PhD Tracks over the age of 45 **should** submit a motivation as to why they were not able to achieve their Doctoral qualification or research capabilities by the stipulated age.

Female applicants that are appointed on a fixed-term half-day appointment in order to accommodate family responsibilities are eligible to apply. This is limited to women raising children of four (4) years of age and below. A copy of the child's birth certificate should be

included in the online application. In the case of a contract, the appointment must extend for the duration of the approved three-year funding cycle.

First-time applicants to Thuthuka **should not** be rated researchers, but may become rated during the tenure of the Thuthuka grant. Once rated, a grantholder must complete the current cycle and exit the Funding Instrument. However, should an NRF Evaluation and Rating application and a Thuthuka application be submitted simultaneously and both are successful, then the Thuthuka grant will not be awarded.

This grant may not be held concurrently with the Black Academics Advancement Programme grant. In cases where the Black Academics Advancement Programme and Thuthuka applications are submitted simultaneously and both are successful, then the Black Academics Advancement Programme will be awarded. The same applies to any Established Researcher awards and those who have already held two cycles of Freestanding Postdoctoral Fellowships.

Failure to submit a fully signed and completed Institutional contribution form will render the application ineligible for Review and will be rejected. **The Funding Track has to be completed by the applicant on the institutional support form. Failure to include the funding track on the institutional support form will result in an automatic rejection of the application.**

Note: The application will be screened/reviewed under the track indicated in the institutional support form. If the applicant is either not eligible under the specified track or has indicated that incorrect track, the application will be rejected.

All applicants who are South African Citizens and Permanent Residents are required to submit a copy of their South African ID document under Registration Details on the online application for audit purposes.

Attachments:

- Applicants in the PhD and Post-PhD Tracks over the age of 45 must attach a motivation as to why they were not able to achieve their Doctoral qualification or research capabilities by the stipulated age.
- Female applicants that are appointed on a fixed-term half-day appointment must attach a copy of their child's birth certificate.

- Institutional support form duly completed, with funding track information and duly signed.

In addition to the above criteria the following also applies. The Thuthuka Funding Instrument consists of three distinct tracks. Applicants may apply for funding in one of the following three tracks:

4.2.2. PhD Track

The following eligibility criteria will apply in respect of the PhD-Track:

- Only South African citizens may apply in this Track.
- Applicants should have obtained a minimum of a Masters degree.
- Applicants must be registered for a Doctoral degree at the time of commencement of the Thuthuka grant.
- Applicants must generally be under the age of 45 years at the time of first application.
- Applicants over the age of 45 years may be considered on submission of a motivation demonstrating that they are late entrants to research or that they are returning to research after a period of absence due to family responsibilities. Applications without the motivation will be automatically rejected.
- Applications must include institutional commitment from the employing institution, pledging to allow the applicant time release for research and relief of teaching duties to conduct research, by submitting a completed institutional support as part of the application.. Applications submitted to the NRF without the completed institutional form, including the funding track of the applicant will be automatically rejected without reconsideration or reinstatement of the application.
- Applications must include an endorsement by the nominated supervisor, supporting the proposed Doctoral research to be undertaken, by submitting the supervisor's report *via* the link to the NRF Online Submission System.

Note:

- The applicant must complete the supervisor's details on the References section of the application. An e-mail will be generated requesting the supervisor to complete the form electronically. The supervisor's report is an integral part of the application and without this, the application will not be considered for funding.
- Successful applicants must provide renewed proof of registration annually for the consecutive years of NRF funding. Failure to comply will lead to the cancellation of the grant.

- Should a grantholder not have obtained his/her Doctorate within six years of funding in this Funding Instrument, no further funding will be considered beyond the sixth year.
- If an applicant in the PhD Track, has received funding for the Doctoral degree from any other NRF Funded Programme, the duration of NRF funding received will be taken into consideration when making a funding decision.
- Applicants who received previous freestanding or grantholder-linked scholarships for full-time doctoral studies will not be eligible for further doctoral funding under the Thuthuka PhD Track as they have to provide an output for the previous funding i.e. a doctoral qualification. If the applicant cannot produce an output then the “defaulting student” process will apply i.e. they will become debtors to the NRF.
- New applicants for a Thuthuka grant for a project that was previously funded by the NRF as a grantholder-linked bursary or any other funding from the NRF, must include progress to date in the Thuthuka application.

4.2.3. Post-PhD Track

The following eligibility criteria will apply in respect of the Post-PhD Track:

- Only South African citizens may apply in this Track.
- Applicants should have obtained a Doctoral degree **no more than five (5) years prior to the date of first application.**
- Applicants must generally be under the age of 45 years at the time of first application.
- Applicants over the age of 45 may be considered on submission of a motivation demonstrating that they are late entrants to research or that they are returning to research after a period of absence due to family responsibilities. Applications without the motivation will be automatically rejected.
- Applications must include institutional commitment from the employing institution, pledging to allow the applicant time release for research and relief of teaching duties to conduct research, by submitting a completed institutional support form *via* the electronic online application process. Applications submitted to the NRF without the completed institutional form, including the funding track of the applicant will be automatically rejected without reconsideration or reinstatement of the application.
- Applicants, who have not finalised their Doctoral degree at the time of application, are eligible to apply under this track, however, the NRF must receive proof of having passed the Doctoral degree before the funding may be granted.

4.2.4. NRF Rating Track

The following eligibility criteria will apply with respect to the NRF Rating Track:

- Only South African citizens and South African permanent residents with a valid South African ID number may apply. Applicants applying for permanent residence will not be considered. The applicant must have completed a Doctoral degree prior to applying for a grant in the Thuthuka NRF Rating Track.
- Applicants should have obtained their Doctoral degree no more than 8 years prior to the date of first application.
- Applicants may not be an NRF-rated researcher at the time of the Thuthuka application.
- Applicants must demonstrate that they have been unable to establish themselves as researchers due to limited research opportunities (e.g. working at an institution with limited research infrastructure and research activity, or due to family responsibilities). If such limitations are not clearly confirmed in the applicant's career profile, the application will be rejected and not considered for funding.
- Applications must include institutional commitment from the employing institution, pledging to allow the applicant time release for research and relief of teaching duties to conduct research, by submitting a completed institutional support form *via* the electronic online application process. Applications submitted to the NRF without the completed institutional form, including the funding track of the applicant will be automatically rejected without reconsideration or reinstatement of the application.
- A research focus must have been identified in an area in which the applicant plans to establish a research track record.

5. Ethical Clearance

It is the responsibility of the grantholder, in conjunction with the institution, to ensure that all research activities carried out in or outside South Africa comply with the laws and regulations of South Africa and/or the foreign country in which the research activities are conducted. These include all human and animal subjects, copyright and intellectual property protection, and other regulations or laws, as appropriate. A research ethics committee must review and approve the ethical and academic rigor of all research prior to the commencement of the research and acceptance of the grant.

The awarded amount will not be released for payment if a copy of the required ethical clearance certificate, as indicated in the application, is not attached to the Conditions of Grant.

Please also refer to the “Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices” on the NRF website at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/media-room/news/statement-ethical-research-and-scholarly-publishing-practices>.

6. Granting Rules

6.1. Funding Model

Thuthuka supports the advancement of individuals from Masters’ to Doctoral level in all scientific fields. Grants are awarded for well-structured research projects that demonstrate the prudent use of funds. Projects should have a clear aim and objectives and sound methodologies that support the study objectives. The NRF **does not** fund any projects for undertaking clinical trials.

The budgeting model for Thuthuka takes into account two dimensions, namely the human capital dimension (in terms of race, gender and disability) and the funding Track. Funds are allocated in terms of a horizontal budget split across the three funding Tracks (namely, PhD Post-PhD and NRF Rating) with weights assigned to each Track on the basis of its relative importance. For example, the PhD Track is allocated 40% of the overall budget in line with the NRF’s initiative of the ‘PhD as Driver’ for the knowledge-based economy strategy.

As the Thuthuka grant is aimed at development and the advancement of designated groups per race and/or gender, the NRF has set the following targets for allocation of grants to designated groups to bring about this transformation:

- **PhD Track:** 80% of all funded grantholders to be Black; up to 60% of all funded grantholders to be female.
- **Post-PhD Track:** 80% of all funded grantholders to be Black; 55% of all funded grantholders to be female.
- **NRF Rating Track:** 80% of all funded grantholders to be Black; 55% of all funded grantholders to be female.

The grant covers Research Operating Costs and it excludes costs incurred by the researcher or institution for research prior to the approval of the Thuthuka award.

6.2. Funding support

Thuthuka research projects will be funded within a set maximum amount for each budget category as outlined under point 7; subject to budget availability. Applicants may request funding for the following items, by indicating projected costs on the NRF online Application Form:

1. Research Equipment;
2. International Conferences (travel and subsistence) including airfare and accommodation;
3. Local Conference (travel and subsistence) including airfare and accommodation;
4. Local Travel (travel and subsistence) including airfare and accommodation;
5. Materials and supplies;
6. Research/Technical Assistants;
7. Visiting scientists;

6.3. Institutional contribution or co-funding

The NRF policy on co-funding for this Funding Instrument is a 1:1 funding ratio commitment by the NRF and the applicant's employing institution. By validating the application, the applicant's institution declares its funding commitment for operating costs of the approved projects at the ratio of 1:1. The onus is on the institution to ascertain that all budget rules have been adhered to.

The **Institutional Support Form**, which is attached to the Call documents, must be downloaded by the applicant for the Dean of Employing/Affiliated Faculty and Research Office/DA signatures and then **uploaded in the attachment** section. This document is submitted to confirm and verify the Institution's support to the applicant for the proposed research. **Important Note: Indicate funding track on the form.**

Note: The application will be screened/reviewed under the track indicated in the institutional support form. If the applicant is either not eligible under the specified track or has indicated that incorrect track, the application will be rejected.

Failure to submit an Institutional Support Form and/or uploading an incomplete form that is not supported by the Dean of Employing/Affiliated Faculty and Research Office/DA will result in the application being rejected.

6.4. Awards and period of funding

- Funding is available for a maximum period of six years (in two three-year cycles) within all Tracks. Successful research proposals will be approved for funding for a period of three years. A new application should be submitted for **each** three-year funding cycle in the same Track;
- Applicants who are progressing from the PhD Track to the Post-PhD Track need to submit a new application for consideration;
- The following apply if a grantholder in the PhD Track completes his/her Doctoral degree within the first or second three-year cycle:
 - If the Doctoral qualification is completed within the first three year cycle of the PhD Track, the grantholder may apply for funds for a **new** project in the Post-PhD Track for a second cycle, after which he/she will be eligible for a third three-year cycle in the Post-PhD Track.
 - If the qualification is completed in the second, three year cycle of the PhD Track, the grantholder may apply for funds for a **new** project in the Post-PhD Track for one additional funding cycle.
 - Grantholders commencing their Thuthuka grant in the PhD Track, are therefore eligible for up to three, three-year cycles (9 years) in total within the Funding Instrument.
 - Grantholders in the PhD Track that have received 6 years of funding but have not completed their Doctoral Degree are not eligible for a third three cycle of funding.
- Grantholders who are successful in their NRF Evaluation and Rating application during a three-year Thuthuka funding period will be permitted to complete the three-year funding cycle but not apply for a continuation grant.

Applying for a 2nd or 3rd cycle?

Funding is available for a maximum period of 6 years (2 cycles) within a track.

Applicants who completed a cycle (3 years) under Thuthuka are eligible for a 2nd cycle (3 years) under the same track. Example: if a grantholder had one cycle under Post-PhD track, they can apply for a 2nd cycle under the Post-PhD track. Progression from Post-PhD to NRF Rating track is not allowed due to the different eligibility criteria.

The only “progression” that is allowed are for those who started under the PhD track and received their doctoral qualification within the 1st or 2nd cycle. The incentive for

these grantholders is being eligible for further funding under the Post-PhD track (2nd or 3rd cycle).

Continued funding beyond the first year is dependent on the submission of a Progress Report (PR) to the NRF for each grant year, for all three-year grants from 2021. Continued funding will be released based on satisfactory progress.

6.5. Reporting

Continued funding beyond the first year of funding will be released based on satisfactory progress achieved by the grantholder. The grantholder will be required to submit a detailed Progress Report (PR) to the NRF by 15 February of each subsequent year. The PR will be used to assess project performance against timeframes and deliverables as indicated in the project work plans, institutional financial contribution and expenditure of project funding. The HoD motivation is intended to assess whether or not the grantholder has made adequate progress and will inform the NRF decision for continued funding. Approved funding for continuing grantholders will only be released upon submission of the DA approved PR to the NRF.

At the end of the three-year funding period, a PR must be submitted listing the outputs and expenditure of the previous years, as well as containing a final assessment of progress made in relation to project objectives.

7. Financial control

Thuthuka grant awards will be managed in terms of standard NRF financial policies and procedures. The payment of the grant by the NRF to successful applicants will be administered by the Grants Management and Systems Administration Directorate (GMSA). The institution will in turn administer the funds on behalf of the successful grantholder to the value of the full sum awarded by the NRF.

7.1. Funding Exclusions

The Thuthuka Funding Instrument does not consider applications for:

- Research infrastructure for which the Infrastructure Funding Instruments make provision;
- Budgets requesting funding only for equipment or conference attendance;

- Grant applications for less than three years, unless the applicant is in the process of completing a Doctoral study (applying in the PhD Track);
- Lecturer replacement, external supervisory support, study/training visit local/abroad and sabbatical support;
- Researchers that have received 6 years of funding in the Post-PhD or NRF Rating Track do not qualify for further Thuthuka funding as this is the maximum number of years a researcher may be funded by the Thuthuka Funding Instrument; and
- Researchers that have received 3 years Doctoral full-time funding from any NRF Freestanding Scholarship Programmes or Grantholder-linked bursaries do not qualify for further funding at the same level.

7.2. Multiple Grants

Applicants **may not** hold two Thuthuka grants simultaneously.

A grantholder may not hold a Thuthuka grant concurrently with -

- a grant as a Director of an NRF Centre of Excellence or Industrial Centre of Excellence;
- a South African Research Chairs Initiative grant;
- any NRF Knowledge Fields Development grants;
- NRF postgraduate student bursary;
- New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) Research Development Grant;
- Black Academics Advancement Programme;
- Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers (CSUR).

For further details refer to the NRF *Overview of Funding Opportunities* document or the *Multiple Grant Eligibility* rubric (available on the NRF Website).

7.3. Carry Forward of Grant Funding

The Carry Forward (CF) of unspent/unclaimed funds to the next grant year is not automatic and will only be considered according to the regulations provided in the '*Guidelines for the Carry Forward of Unspent/claimed Grant Allocations*'

A Carry Forward (CF) motivation must be submitted with the PR by grantholders. Grantholders must consult the NRF's Carry Forward Guidelines sent to the Institutions in September each year, where exceptions and detailed rules are included, and should be adhered to. The NRF reserves the right to refuse such a request. At the end of the stipulated grant period, all unspent

funds will revert to the NRF unless a well-motivated request has been approved by the NRF for funds not claimed. Approved carried forward amounts, which are not claimed by June, will revert to the NRF without notification to the grantholder or the Institution's Research Office.

8. Financial Categories of Support

When completing the project budget, applicants need to consider all costs that could impact on undertaking the research, such as the direct, indirect and human capacity development costs. **Budget approvals by the NRF are subject to the availability of funds in any given financial year.**

The amounts allowed per item, by the NRF as indicated below, need to be considered in the budget request.

8.1. Human Capacity Development Support

Postgraduate students to be supervised by Thuthuka grantholders must apply for NRF postgraduate funding independently in the open competitive Call for Applications for Postgraduate Scholarships. Only students intending to pursue full-time postgraduate studies will be eligible for NRF postgraduate student funding.

The NRF has developed a new **Postgraduate Student Funding Policy** that will use postgraduate student funding as a lever to address the challenges of inequity of access, success and throughput in higher education. From the 2021 academic year onwards, the NRF will be phasing out the block grant nomination process as well as the grant-holder linked modalities of funding postgraduate students. **All postgraduate students will be expected to apply on the NRF Online Submission System by accessing the link: <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/>.** The call for application for the 2021 academic year will open on 01 April 2020. This single entry point will enable the NRF to coordinate the assessment of applicants who may be financially needy but have not yet undergone a financial means test. The Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP) has agreed to conduct the financial means test. Postgraduate students will be funded either at Full Cost of Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS) under the new policy. To ensure equity of access to postgraduate studies, South African citizens who are financially needy students (i.e. those whose combined household income is R350 000 per annum or less) and students with a disability will be funded at FCS. Academic high fliers achieving a distinction or first-class pass

will also be eligible for funding at FCS. International students as well as South African students who are not eligible to be funded at FCS will be funded at PCS.

The students that are to be considered for NRF funding are expected to meet the NRF minimum entry requirement in order to be eligible for FCS or PCS as illustrated in Table 1 below. Additionally, the bursaries are intended to support Honours, Masters and Doctoral candidates intending to register at South African public universities.

Table 1: Eligibility criteria for NRF postgraduate funding for FCS and PCS for the 2021 academic year.

Study Level	Full Cost of Study <i>(South African Citizens and Permanent Residents only)</i>		Partial Cost of Study <i>(South African Citizens; South African Permanent Residents and 5% Non-South African Citizens)</i>
	Exceptional Achievers	Financially Needy & Students with Disability	Other
Honours	≥ 75% Mark in Final Year of study	≥ 65% Mark in Final Year of study	≥ 65% Mark in Final Year of study
	Honours students must be 28 years of age or younger in the year of application. Non South African Citizens are not eligible for Honours Scholarships.		
Masters	≥ 75% Mark for Honours	≥ 65% Mark for Honours	≥ 65% Mark for Honours
	Masters students must be 30 years of age or younger in the year of application.		
Doctoral	≥ 75% Mark for Masters	≥ 65% Mark for Masters	≥ 65% Mark for Masters
	Doctoral students must be 32 years of age or younger in the year of application.		

In cases where a **grade is not indicated, the application will not be considered** for funding by the NRF.

The NRF will allocate all postgraduate bursaries under its management control as follows:

- 95% South African citizens and permanent residents;
- 5% students from SADC countries and from the rest of the world; and

- 55% women.

The NRF disaggregates these targets for South African citizens and permanent residents as follows:

- 90% Black (African, Coloured, and Indian);
- 10% White; and
- 1% students living with a disability.

For further details on the NRF Postgraduate Funding policy, kindly refer to the framework document which will be available on www.nrf.ac.za when the Call for Applications for Postgraduate Scholarships opens on 1 April 2020.

Postgraduate students who have been recruited by a supervisor to be part of a research project that is **currently funded by the NRF** should provide the NRF six-digit grant UID (unique identification number). Alternatively, postgraduate students who have been recruited by a supervisor to be part of a research project application that has been **submitted to the NRF for review** should provide the supervisor's NRF application reference number.

For each funding track, applicants may request support for up to two postgraduate students. Due to budget constraints, **Thuthuka does not fund Doctoral scholarships**. The approved number and level of postgraduate student bursaries will be subject to budget availability.

Postdoctoral Fellowships are not supported within this Funding Instrument. Postdoctoral Fellows to be mentored by Thuthuka grantholders may apply for NRF Postdoctoral Fellowships independently in the open competitive Call for Applications for Postdoctoral Fellowships.

8.2. Support for Operating costs

The 7 financial sub-categories supported by the NRF and the maximum amount that will be awarded per sub-category is indicated in Table 3. Running expenses are capped at a maximum amount of R100 000.00 (one hundred thousand rand) per annum. The applicant's institution must match the NRF awarded amount in a 1:1 ratio.

Table 2: Financial Sub-categories supported and maximum amounts funded.

No.	Category of Support	Maximum amount (NRF contribution)
Equipment		
1.	Research equipment	R50 000 maximum per annum
Running Expenses		
2.	International conference	R17 000 per annum
3.	Local conference	R5 000 per annum
4.	Local Travel	R10 000 per annum
5.	Materials and Supplies	R70 000 per annum
6.	Research / technical / ad hoc Assistants	R20 000 per annum
7.	Visiting Scientists	R60 000 for a maximum of 12 months

Note:

In order to realistically gauge the full extent of the proposed research, details of other sources of financial support for the research must be submitted in the application budget. This in no way compromises or disadvantages the proposal; instead, knowledge of the commitment and contribution of other contributors (where applicable) serves to better understand the feasibility of the proposed research project.

All grants allocated are subject to compliance with the NRF Conditions of Grant (CoG) as specified in attachments to the Award Letter to successful applicants.

The following 7 financial Sub-categories are NOT supported by the NRF.

Table 3: Financial categories NOT supported under the Thuthuka Grant

Category of support	NPT supported under Thuthuka Grant
A. Running Expenses	
Accommodation	Not Funded (to be included where applicable under International conference, Local conference or Local Travel)
Airfare	Not Funded (to be included where applicable under International conference, Local conference or Local travel)
Costs for joint conferences and workshops	Not Funded
International travel	Not Funded
Subsistence	Not Funded (to be included where applicable under International conference, Local conference or Local travel)
B. Sabbatical	
Lecturer Replacement	Not Funded

C. Science Engagement	Not Funded
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Note:

Applicants must include a detailed and well-motivated budget for each of the three years in the three-year grant application. The budget for each of the three years will be approved at the time of the award.

Budget requests and motivations that **are not consistent** with the permissible funding categories **will not be considered** in the Funding Decision process. Budget requests must be well motivated according to the requirements of the Thuthuka Funding Instrument. Budget requests that are not well motivated according to the requirements of the Thuthuka Funding Instrument will not be approved for funding.

The following seven 7 financial Sub-categories are supported by the NRF.

A. Equipment

8.2.1. Research Equipment

Goal

The goal is to provide support to applicants for the **purchase** of small research equipment, contributing to the purchase of large equipment, covering the **maintenance, service or upgrade** costs for equipment or **hiring** of equipment.

Eligibility

Applies to applicants in all funding Tracks.

Applicants are required to submit the following:

- Details of laboratory equipment to be purchased, e.g. water bath, autoclave, water purification system or gel dryer.
- Details of the contribution to the purchase of large equipment, e.g. shipping and customs.
- If the funds are not used to purchase equipment, but to cover equipment maintenance / service / upgrade costs, to enable research to be carried out on the Thuthuka project, provide the following:
 - Detailed description of the equipment, e.g. (camera or tape recorder for data capturing purposes);
 - Description of how the equipment will be used in the Thuthuka project; and
 - Details of the specific maintenance or service or upgrade.

- A motivation for specialised hardware, e.g. audio-visual equipment, and specialised software.
- If more than one item of a particular piece of equipment is purchased, a motivation per application should be provided.
- Maintenance costs, for new equipment that is purchased with NRF funding, must be budgeted for (if not requested in this application).
- Equipment must be purchased in accordance with the institutional procurement policies.

Exclusions

- Personal laptops, note pads, hand-held notebooks, and personal digital assistant (PDA) devices.
- Licence fees or renewals of licences of non-specialised software (e.g. Ms Office).

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R50 000 per year per applicant.

Requests for funding for equipment valued between R1 000 000 and R10 000 000 should be directed to the Infrastructure Funding Instruments for support.

Note:

Information is available at http://www.nrf.ac.za/funding_overview.php.

B. Running Expenses

8.2.2. International Conferences

Goal

The goal is to provide support to an applicant who intends to participate (not just attend) at internationally-held conferences, as a mechanism to further the goals of their projects.

NB: Workshop attendance will only qualify for support if this is attached to the conference.

Eligibility

- Applies to applicants in all funding Tracks who are **presenting a paper or poster** at a conference in the field of the research project funded by the NRF.
- Applies only if a conference has been identified.
- In addition, preference will be for conferences where applicants can demonstrate:
 - networking opportunities;
 - launch of collaboration; and/or
 - Professional society/association meetings.

- Attendance of international conferences in subsequent years will be considered only if the grantholder's paper at the previous international conference, for which funding was awarded, has been published in a peer-reviewed journal or proceedings, or if evidence of acceptance for publication is supplied. Such evidence must be included in the Progress Report submitted to the NRF in February each year.

Applicants are required to submit the following:

- The **name** and **place** of the conference.
- Indicate whether a paper or poster will be **presented**.

Exclusions

- Visa and permit fees;
- Events not attached to the conference;
- Presentation of the same work at multiple conferences; or
- Attendance of more than one conference abroad per year.
- Travel costs to maintain any equipment (this needs to be requested under the correct category).

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R17 000 per year for conferences held abroad.

8.2.3. Local Conferences

Goal

The goal is to provide support to an applicant and/or postgraduate student/s (directly working on Thuthuka project) who intends to participate (not just attend) at locally-held conferences, as a mechanism to further the goals of their projects. This includes national and/or international conferences held **in** South Africa.

NB: Workshop attendance will only qualify for support if this is attached to the conference.

Eligibility

- Applies to applicants in all funding Tracks who are **presenting a paper or poster** at a conference in the field of the research project funded by the NRF.
- Applies only where a conference has been identified.

- In addition, preference will be for conferences where applicants can demonstrate:
 - networking opportunities;
 - launch of collaboration; and/or
 - Professional society/association meetings.
- Grantholders should motivate how the presenting of a paper or poster by their postgraduate students working on the Thuthuka project at **reputable local events** (conferences, seminars and workshops) will benefit the research project.

Applicants are required to submit the following:

- The **name** and **place** of the conference.
- Indicate that a paper or poster will be **presented**.

Exclusions

Visa and permit fees;

- Events not attached to the conference; or
- Presentation of the same work at multiple conferences.

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R5 000 per year for local conferences held in South Africa.

8.2.4. Local Travel

Goal

The goal is to provide support to applicants, or students of the grantholder (only those directly working on this project), to cover travel for **research** and **fieldwork** that is related to the research project. When determining the cost pertaining to local travel, researchers must ensure that the most economical and safe transport is utilised in compliance with university policy and/or South African Revenue Services (SARS) rates for travel and subsistence.

Eligibility

Applies to applicants and their students directly working on this project for application in all the funding Tracks.

Applicants are required to submit the following:

- A motivation and purpose (why) and place (where to) of the travel that is related to the project objectives and methodology.
- Detailed budget breakdown including:
 - Cost for economy air travel.

- For travel by road, the number of kilometres to be travelled and costs based on the applicant's institutional rates.
- Type and cost of accommodation and duration of stay.
- Subsistence allowance based on the applicant's institutional rates.

Exclusions

Meetings, workshops, networking and collaboration event.

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R10 000 per year per applicant.

8.2.5. Materials and Supplies

Goal

The goal is to provide support for materials and supplies that are required for the approved Thuthuka research project. Materials and Supplies refer to the daily running expenses/costs of the research project. This is a compulsory category of funding to be completed in the application form. However, should your research not require materials and supplies, please substantiate this in the application.

Materials and Supplies are any items with a life expectancy of generally less than a year, and which are consumed in the normal course of operations in all fields of research. Equipment with a value of less than R3 000 should be captured under Materials and Supplies even if not consumed in the normal course of operations e.g. automatic pipettes.

Eligibility

- Applies to applicants in all funding Tracks.
- Only project-related direct costs are covered.
- Every type of purchase must be clearly identified individually and be well-motivated in the budget submission.
- Funding may be considered for the applicant's/team members with disabilities and other special needs as specified in the *Code of Good Practice on Employment of People with Disabilities*, as stated in the *Employment Equity Act* (No. 55 of 1998).
A clear motivation should be provided.

Applicants are required to submit the following:

- A detailed description of items, e.g. description of the consumable, quantity, reagent grade and cost per unit;
- Survey-related costs, e.g. number of questionnaires, stationery, photocopies, etc.; and
- Details of singular items above R3 000.

Exclusions

- Indirect costs (overheads);
- Registration fees for enrolment, tuition fees, membership fees of any sort;
- Basic office equipment;
- General stationery, photocopying and printing costs;
- Journal publications, journal subscription costs and textbooks;
- Telephone, fax and internet costs;
- Personal laptops, computer hardware, and purchase or renewal of software licenses unless for specialised equipment and software licences.
- Any funding line that is listed as: “miscellaneous” or “other”

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R70 000 per year.

8.2.6. Research/Technical Assistants

Goal

The goal is to provide support for **specialised technical skills** essential to the completion of the project, if a skills gap exists in the research team.

Eligibility

Applies to applicants in all funding Tracks. Appointees as Temporary Support Staff must have a minimum qualification of a BTech or Honours degree. Technical Assistance Support (e.g. services of a statistician) includes using statistical software packages (e.g. Statistical Package for the Social Science-SPSS, Statistical Analysis System-SAS, etc.) to analyse data.

Applicants are required to submit the following:

- Details on research assistance required, e.g. consulting and legal services, editing and proofreading, data capturing, survey fees, forums facilitator fees or assistant, e.g. Statistician, Technician, Transcriber, Translator, Field worker.
- Identified skills gap in the research team;
- Expected skills transfer, if applicable; and

- Detailed cost breakdown, e.g. technical assistant work for three hours per day for a total period of three months, at a rate of R80 rand per hour.

Exclusion

Administrative and/or secretarial support.

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R20 000 per year.

8.2.7. Visiting Scientist

Goal

The goal is to provide support to applicants to invite (a) visitor/s to the applicant's employing institution, whose specialised skills add value to the project on a technical, scientific, strategic and/or human capacity building level. Visiting scientists must be individuals of good standing in their research fields and may be drawn from institutions in South Africa or abroad. Capacity development activities associated with such visits are a requirement for funding under this funding category.

Eligibility

Applies to applicants in all funding Tracks.

The visiting scientist should make a contribution to the research project in the following categories:

- Technical skills or knowledge transfer.
- Human capacity building: Student interaction (faculty interaction, seminars and lectures).

Applicants are required to submit:

- The **name** of the person visiting.
- The **purpose** of the visit (at the minimum a preliminary plan that must have been discussed with the visiting scientist).
- The **period** of the visit.
- A detailed cost breakdown with regards to the:
 - Accommodation,
 - Airfare,
 - Ground travel,

- Incidentals, e.g. toll gate, parking costs and subsistence.
- Information on other sources of funding available.
- An outline of the outcomes that will be achieved including:
 - Skills or knowledge transfer; and
 - Contribution to the research at a strategic level.

There are no limits on the number of visitors, e.g. the visiting scientist. Repeat visits by the same scientists will only be considered if active research collaboration exists.

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R60 000 per year per Thuthuka grant applicant.

9. Overview of the Screening Process

All applications validated by institutions and submitted to the NRF are screened by the NRF for compliance with the requirements of the Framework, the stipulations set out in the Application and Funding Guide, and the content requirements indicated in the online application screens. Applications that fail to meet the requirements and stipulations will be rejected.

10. Overview of the Review Process

Following institutional and NRF screening, proposals that meet the eligibility criteria and application requirements will be subjected to a merit review by peers to assess substantive issues such as scientific merit and any other pre-determined content criteria. The NRF's peer-review policy requires that all Thuthuka applications be subjected to a two-tiered review process, firstly for remote review and secondly for panel review.

10.1. Remote Peer Review

After the closing date for the submission of applications, all eligible applications are subjected to remote peer review. The reviewers are selected from the list of suggested reviewers provided by the applicant, as well as additional reviewers selected by the Reviews and Evaluations (RE) staff of the NRF, from existing databases and other sources. Applicants are encouraged to suggest reviewers from abroad. A minimum of 6 written reviews per application

are solicited, with the ultimate aim of eliciting at least 3 well-substantiated remote review reports per application for submission to the panel review process.

Applications are sent for review to researchers with research knowledge and insight in relevant disciplines, after which written online review reports are submitted to the NRF. The remote review reports, together with the proposals and supporting documentation are then deliberated upon in the Panel Review Process.

10.2. Panel Review

Following the remote review process, applications are subjected to panel review. The remote reviewers' reports serve as the basis for discussion and review by the panel members.

Panel members are selected from the NRF database, which is updated on a continuous basis, as well as other sources. In making the selection, the expertise and experience of individuals in funding proposal adjudication are taken into account. In assessing the proposals, the remote reviewers' reports are referred to, and agreed assessment criteria are applied in the form of a scorecard.

The panel provides recommendations to the NRF. The final funding decision is made by the NRF. When awarding Thuthuka grants, the NRF takes into account the recommendations of the review panels, budget motivations by the applicant, the objectives and equity targets of the Instrument, as well as the available budget.

11. Ranking of Proposals

11.1. Scoring proposals

The purpose of the scoring system is to evaluate proposals, based on the Thuthuka research grant criteria, in order to identify applicants that are most deserving of the limited funds available. All research proposals submitted to the NRF for funding, irrespective of the Funding Track, are evaluated according to a number of predetermined criteria. Proposals are assessed and ranked on the basis of qualifiers as listed in Table 5. Each area is given a weight to indicate its relative importance. Kindly consult Table 5 for details on the criteria used per Funding Track as well as the relative weighting.

11.2. Review Outcome

Based on the outcomes of the review process, projects will either be eligible for funding or not.

Table 5: NRF Scorecard for the Assessment of Proposals for Thuthuka Funding

Criteria	Description	% Weighting		
		<i>PhD Track</i>	<i>Post-PhD Track</i>	<i>NRF-rating Track</i>
Track Record of Applicant	<p>This refers to past research outputs recognised by the NRF. This refers to outputs such as the professional development of the applicant; journal articles; conference presentations and proceedings; books and chapters in books; and patents.</p> <p>Reviewers will be required to comment on whether the standing and research record of the researcher suggest that the applicant has the appropriate research experience to undertake the proposed research.</p>	5	5	5
Research Proposal	<p>This refers to scientific contribution; originality and new knowledge; interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary aspects; match between the research question and the proposed research methodology and alignment with the applicant's institutional strategy and/or any national research strategy.</p> <p>Scientific and Technical Quality – Reviewers will evaluate whether the project will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * make a contribution to new knowledge and new methodologies in the field; * apply existing knowledge and methodologies in the field; * involve unique application of existing knowledge and methodologies in the field; * or utilise the application of existing knowledge and methodologies in the field. <p>Interdisciplinary or Multidisciplinary aspects – Reviewers will assess whether Interdisciplinary or Multidisciplinary aspects have been fully-, partially or not explored in the research proposal.</p>	35	25	25

Criteria	Description	% Weighting		
		PhD Track	Post-PhD Track	NRF-rating Track
Human Capital Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student involvement • Representation from designated / under-represented groups 	<p>Greater emphasis is placed on the number of students trained and the participation of researchers and/or students from under-represented groups (i.e. black, female and disabled) in research projects must be indicated in the proposal.</p>	10	20	20
Project Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project organisation • Project scheduling • Budget 	<p>Project organisation refers to how project teams and human resources are composed; the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of team members; the proposed research activities; and the supervision.</p> <p>Project scheduling refers to the work breakdown of the project to ensure that specific outcomes are achieved; as well as the objectives and associated timelines in place to divide the scope of work into manageable activities.</p> <p>Project budgeting refers to effective planning and budgeting of resources.</p>	20	20	20
Collaboration on Research Project	<p>In order to address historical imbalances, research collaboration between researchers at various institutions is encouraged, especially between institutions with limited research infrastructure and research activity, and research-intensive institutions with varied capabilities.</p> <p>Reviewers will be required to comment on whether research collaborations are required to meet the study objectives and have been considered, and to also comment on whether the research collaborations are appropriate to meet objectives of the study and have been fully addressed; are appropriate but only partially meet the study objectives; or are not appropriate to meet the study objectives.</p>	5	10	10

Criteria	Description	% Weighting		
		<i>PhD Track</i>	<i>Post-PhD Track</i>	<i>NRF-rating Track</i>
Supervision / Mentorship	The applicant has supervised postgraduate students in the past, is currently supervising students and/or plans to supervise students in the future.	10	5	5
Expected Outputs	This refers to NRF recognised research outputs such as the professional development of the applicant; journal articles; conference presentations and proceedings; books and book chapters; and patents. Successful applicants will be expected to deliver on all anticipated outputs or risk suspension of their funding. Reviewers will be required to assess whether the proposed outputs are fully-, partially- or not achievable within the given timeframe.	10	10	10
Potential Impact	Particular attention is paid to proposals with the potential to contribute to the strategic goals of the knowledge economy.	5	5	5

12. Supervision

In the PhD Track, the **grantholder and the appointed supervisor** have a commitment to the grantholder's students working on the NRF-funded project. All Thuthuka grantholders must ensure that students receive adequate supervisory support to undertake project-related research that contributes towards the degree for which the students are registered. Grantholders are required to submit a PR on the NRF Online Submission System detailing both project- and student-related progress during the given funding year. Failure to comply with this requirement, or submission of a report that the NRF considers inadequate, may lead to the suspension or termination of the research grant.

13. Change Requests during the Project Life Cycle

Changes may occur during the project life cycle due to unforeseen or extenuating circumstances. Please adhere to the following on how to manage the award and subsequent changes (planned or not anticipated) should they arise during the project life cycle.

13.1. Prior Approval Requests

All change requests must be preceded by prior NRF-approval submitted in writing to the GMSA at least five days before the proposed change. The request must have institutional DA endorsement and be submitted to the NRF *via* the Research Office.

13.2. Grantholder change

The Thuthuka Funding Instrument does not allow a grantholder change. Should there be such a request the new nominated researcher must submit this project as a new application for assessment.

Exclusions

Thuthuka grantholders in the PhD Track working on their Doctoral dissertation may not transfer their grant to another grantholder.

13.3. Changes in project scope

Changes may occur where a project scope needs to be modified from the original research proposal/project design. The request must have institutional DA endorsement and be submitted to the NRF *via* the Research Office. Grantholders should notify the GMSA in writing of the proposed changes at least 5 working days before the proposed change.

14. Contact Details

For NRF Online Submission and Grants Management related queries contact:

Professional Officer: GMSA

Ms Melissa Govender

Tel: (012) 481-4311

E-mail: melissa.govender@nrf.ac.za

For Thuthuka Funding Instrument related queries contact:

Professional Officer: HICD

Ms Maphuti Madiga

Tel: (012) 481-4150

E-mail: maphuti.madiga@nrf.ac.za

For technical online enquiries, please contact the NRF Support Desk during office hours (08:00- 16:30) on:

Tel: (012) 481-4202

E-mail: Supportdesk@nrf.ac.za