Thuthuka

Framework Document

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
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HDIs	Historically Disadvantaged Institutions
ISF	Institutional Support Form
nGAP	New Generation of Academics Programme
CSUR	Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers
BAAP	Black Academics Advancement Programme

1. Overview

The Thuthuka funding instrument links to the strategic intent of the National Research Foundation (NRF), which seeks to promote and support the establishment of a transformed, internationally competitive and sustainable research workforce. This Framework document is intended to inform potential applicants and existing Thuthuka grantholders of the objectives and requirements for participation in this Funding Instrument. It provides a brief overview of the Thuthuka funding instrument, eligibility criteria, funding tracks, application principles, funding guidelines and review procedures. The Thuthuka Framework does not, however, constitute a complete set of the NRF funding policies and procedures and must therefore be read in conjunction with the Application Guide which provides additional information.

2. Context

2.1. Transformation and Equity

The Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) in its White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation (2019) is committed to continue its support for the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF), which aims to transform the demographic profile of university academic staff. As part of its Research Capacity Development Strategy (2002) and National Development Plan (2030), government committed to addressing the slow transformation of the research and teaching staff through targeted interventions to develop the Next Generation of Academics for the South African Higher Education system. The objectives of these interventions are to:

- Stimulate Research and Development at Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs);
- Target women and Blacks for research support; and
- Pursue this in partnership with institutions.

The Report of the Ministerial Task Team on the Recruitment, Retention and Progression of Black South African Academics (2019), commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, further highlighted the need for targeted support for Black and female academic staff in order to increase the proportion of permanent South African instructional/research staff at universities that hold doctoral degrees.

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 and scholars from designated groups (Black [African, Indian and Coloured], female or persons with disabilities) 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

The objectives of the Thuthuka funding instrument are to:

- Promote the attainment of a doctoral qualification, by early career researchers and scholars employed at South African public universities, science councils and other research institutions as recognised by the NRF;
- Promote the research development of early career researchers and scholars 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 researchers and scholars, in the recent Post-PhD phase, in particular Black and female researchers and persons with disabilities;
- Promote the attainment of an NRF rating by researchers and scholars that have not been able to realise their potential or sustain their research ability by virtue of the lack of an enabling research environment or 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 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 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 8 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. Thuthuka Funding Tracks

Emerging/early career researchers and scholars will be supported under the following three tracks:
- **PhD Track:** for applicants intending to obtain a doctoral degree within the funding period;
- **Post-PhD Track:** for applicants that have recently completed their doctoral degree and are transitioning to become established researchers, by strengthening their research capabilities; and
- **NRF Rating Track:** for applicants, that have not been able to realise their potential or sustain their research ability and are now intending to apply for an NRF rating within the six-year funding period.

5. Eligibility Criteria

5.1 General Eligibility Criteria

Only South African citizens and South African Permanent Residents with a valid South African Identity Document (ID) number may apply. Individuals who are in the process of obtaining permanent residence will not be considered.

The Thuthuka funding instrument is open to applicants employed at NRF recognised public universities and public research institutions in South Africa. Applicants are limited to (i) individuals that hold an academic position at a public university; (ii) individuals that hold a joint academic and administrative position at a public university and whose performance deliverables include research and postgraduate training outputs; (iii) researchers at science councils and other NRF recognised research institutions.

Applicants must be employed 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 i.e. 01 January 2025 to 31 December 2027. Support staff such as technicians and research assistants, part-time lecturers, doctoral students, and postdoctoral fellows are not eligible to apply for a Thuthuka grant.

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 and those living with a disability. In the case of a fixed-term contract, the appointment must extend for the duration of the approved three-year funding cycle.

The employing institution must provide written commitment pledging to allow the applicant time release for research and relief from teaching duties to conduct research, as well as a written commitment for co-funding for running expenses of the approved grant amount at the ratio of 1:1.

5.2   PhD Track

In addition to the general eligibility criteria, the following specific eligibility criteria will apply in respect of the PhD-Track:

- Applicants should have obtained a masters qualification or in their final year of a masters qualification at the time of application and intending to pursue doctoral studies.
- 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. This age eligibility does not apply to individuals that are current Thuthuka grantholders and that are applying for their second cycle of Thuthuka funding.
- Applicants over the age of 45 years, at the time of first application, 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 from research e.g. due to family responsibilities. This information must be included in the application template under Absence from Research.

- Should a grantholder not have obtained his/her doctorate within six (6) years of funding in this funding instrument, no further funding will be considered beyond the sixth year.
- Should a grantholder obtain his/her doctorate before a cycle of funding is completed, a new application should be submitted under the Post PhD track.

5.3 Post-PhD Track

The following eligibility criteria will apply in respect of the Post-PhD Track:
- Applicants should have obtained a doctoral degree **no more than five (5) years prior to the date of first application.** Applicants that obtained their doctoral degree prior to February 2019 are therefore not eligible to apply in the Post-PhD Track.
- Applicants must generally be under the age of 45 years at the time of first application. This age eligibility does not apply to individuals that are current Thuthuka grantholders and that are applying for their second or third cycle of Thuthuka funding.
- Applicants over the age of 45 years, at the time of first application, 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. This information must be included in the application template under Absence from Research.
- 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 at the time of commencement of the Thuthuka grant. Applicants are required to indicate that the PhD is in progress under the qualification section of the application template and provide an estimate date for completion of doctoral studies.
- Individuals who have previously received postdoctoral fellowship funding from the NRF or elsewhere, are eligible to apply for this Research Grant, provided that all other criteria are met. Individuals who are still Postdoctoral Fellows are not eligible for a Thuthuka grant.

5.4 NRF Rating Track

The following eligibility criteria will apply with respect to the NRF Rating Track:
- The applicant must have completed a doctoral degree prior to applying for a grant in the Thuthuka NRF Rating Track.
- Applicants who have received one cycle of funding under the Post PhD track are NOT eligible under the NRF Rating track. An application should be submitted for a second cycle under the Post PhD track.
- Applicants should have obtained their doctoral degree **no more than eight (8) years prior to the date of first application.** Applicants that obtained their doctoral degree prior to February2016 are therefore not eligible to apply in the Rating Track.
- Applicants may not be an NRF-rated researcher at the time of the Thuthuka application.

- Applicants at the time of first application 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.
- A research focus must have been identified in an area in which the applicant plans to establish a research track record.

5.5   Exclusions

The following exclusions apply for Thuthuka grant applications:

First-time applicants to Thuthuka **may 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 a Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) grant and New Generation Academics Programme (nGAP). In cases where the BAAP and Thuthuka applications are submitted simultaneously, and both are successful, then the BAAP will be awarded.

This grant may not be held concurrently with any NRF Established Researcher grant. In cases where an NRF Established Researcher grant and Thuthuka applications are submitted simultaneously, and both are successful, then the Thuthuka grant will not be awarded.

Individuals who have already received two cycles (six-years) of research grant funding from any other NRF competitive research grant funding instrument, are considered to have had the opportunity to become established researchers, and are therefore not eligible for Thuthuka funding, which is specifically aimed at supporting emerging/early career researchers.

Applicants who previously received NRF freestanding bursaries or grantholder-linked scholarships, for the maximum period of NRF support for doctoral studies, will not be eligible for further doctoral funding under the Thuthuka PhD Track. Applicants may seek alternative NRF postgraduate funding to enable the completion of doctoral studies. The framework will be available on www.nrf.ac.za when the Call for Applications for Postgraduate Scholarships opens in April 2024. Alternatively, applicants may apply in the Post-PhD Track upon completion of their doctoral studies.

6 Application Process

6.1 Call for Applications

The NRF issues an annual Call for applications for the Thuthuka funding instrument and applications should be completed and submitted *via* the NRF Connect System at https://nrfconnect.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/ .

Please 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 during 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.

6.2 Application Requirements

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 of the application.

An Institutional Support Form (ISF) that commits the institution to support the Thuthuka grant if awarded, must be completed for each application submitted to the NRF.

New applicants for a Thuthuka grant for a project that was previously funded by the NRF such as a doctoral scholarship, or any other funding from the NRF, must include progress to date in the Thuthuka application.

All applicants, whether South African citizens or permanent residents, are required to submit a copy of their South African ID document under Personal Profile for audit purposes.

Applicants are required to list all their qualifications in the *Curriculum Vitae* (CV) section.

6.3 Attachments:

- Female applicants that are appointed on a fixed-term half-day appointment must attach a copy of their child's birth certificate or a medical certificate indicating their disability.

- 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.

6.4 PhD Track

- 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. This must be done by selecting the "Absence from Research" type on the Career Profile. Applications must include an endorsement by the nominated supervisor, supporting the proposed doctoral research to be undertaken. Applicants under the PhD track must add their supervisor's details under the *Application Support Input* section on the application. Once the application has been submitted, an e-mail will be generated requesting the supervisor to complete the reference report electronically by login to NRF Connect and providing the support for the applications. Please ensure that the contact details provided in the application are correct.
Thuthuka grantholders may progress from the PhD Track to the Post-PhD Track only. The Rating track is ONLY for those applicants who were unable to establish themselves as researchers.
- A proof of registration for PhD should be provided for access to the funding under the PhD Track.

6.4.1 Post-PhD Track

- 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. This can be done *via* the "Absence from Research" Section on the application This must be done by selecting the "Absence from Research" type on the Career Profile. Applications without the motivation will be automatically rejected.
- Applicants in this track may not progress to the NRF Rating Track as the Rating Track is ONLY for those applicants that were unable to establish themselves as researchers.

6.4.2 NRF Rating Track

- 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.

7   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 in accordance with institutional ethical policies and procedures. The ethical clearance approval should be held by the institution and the grantholder and accessible on request, if necessary.

Please also refer to the "Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices" on the NRF website at https://www.nrf.ac.za/statement-on-ethical-research-and-scholarly-publishing-practices/.

8   Granting Rules

8.1   Funding Model

Thuthuka supports the advancement of individuals from masters to doctoral level in all fields of research. 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.

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 across all three funding tracks, for allocation of grants to designated groups, to bring about this transformation:

- at least 80% of all funded grantholders to be Black; and
- at least 55% of all funded grantholders to be female.

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

8.2   Funding support

Thuthuka research projects will be funded within a set maximum amount for each budget category as outlined under point 10; 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. Hardware and supplies (Materials and supplies);
6. Research/Technical Assistants;
7. Visiting scientists;
8. Science Engagement.

8.3   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 running expenses 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.

8.4   Awards and period of funding

The following are applicable to Thuthuka grants.

- 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;
- Grants are approved for a three-year funding cycle.
  - o Only applicants that are in the process of completing a doctoral degree may apply for two years of funding for completion of the doctoral degree.
  - o Applicants who complete their PhD during a three-year funding cycle, and are commencing post-PhD research on a different research project from that of the doctoral study, must submit a new application for consideration in the Post-PhD Track on completion of the doctoral studies;
  - o Applicants who complete their PhD during a three-year funding cycle, and are continuing with post-PhD research on the same research project, must submit a new application for consideration in the Post-PhD Track on completion of the three-year funding period;
- The following apply if a grantholder in the PhD Track completes his/her doctoral degree within the first or second three-year cycle:
  - o 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-year cycle of funding.

- Progression from the Post-PhD to NRF Rating track is not allowed due to the different eligibility criteria.
- 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 may not apply for a further funding cycle.

8.5 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. 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 detailing the outputs and expenditure of the previous years, as well as containing a final assessment of progress made in relation to the project objectives.

9 Financial control

Thuthuka grants 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 (GMSA) directorate. 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.

9.1 Funding Exclusions

The Thuthuka Funding instrument does not consider the following for funding:
- Grant applications for one year of funding only;

- Grant applications for less than three years, unless the applicant applying in the PhD Track has commenced the doctoral study and is requesting two years of funding for completion of the doctoral study;
- Research infrastructure for which the Infrastructure Funding instruments make provision;
- Budgets requesting funding only for equipment or conference attendance;
- Lecturer replacement, external supervisory support, study/training visit local/abroad and sabbatical support;
- Applications from researchers that have already received 6 years of funding in the Post-PhD or NRF Rating Track as they do not qualify on the grounds of having received the maximum number of years of funding from the Thuthuka Funding instrument; and
- Applications from researchers that have received prior NRF funding for doctoral studies to the maximum eligible funding period.

9.2   Multiple Grants

Applicants **may not** hold more than one Thuthuka grant simultaneously.

A grantholder may not hold a Thuthuka grant concurrently with any of the following:
- a grant as a Director of an NRF Centre of Excellence (CoE), Institute or Centre;
- a South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) grant;
- any NRF Knowledge Advancement and Support (KAS) grants;
- NRF postgraduate student bursary;
- New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) Research Development Grant;
- Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) grant;
- Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers (CSUR);
- Any Established Researcher grant.

9.3   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 CF motivation must be submitted with the PR by grantholders who must consult the NRF's Carry Forward Guidelines, sent to the Institutions in September each year, wherein exceptions and detailed rules be adhered to, are included. 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 that are not claimed by June of each funding year, will revert to the NRF without notification to the grantholder or the Institution's Research Office.

10   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.

10.1   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 NRF Postgraduate Scholarships. Only students intending to pursue full-time postgraduate studies will be eligible for NRF postgraduate student funding.
All postgraduate students will be expected to apply on the NRF Connect by accessing the link: https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za.

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 NRF Postgraduate Scholarships opens in April 2024.

In order for the NRF to identify students applying for postgraduate funding that will be supervised by Thuthuka grantholders please ensure the following:
- 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 with the supervisor's five- or six-digit grant UID (unique identification number) or the supervisor's application reference 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.

10.2 Support for Running Expenses

The eight (8) financial sub-categories supported by the NRF and the maximum amount that will be awarded per sub-category is indicated in **Table 1**. 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 1: 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	R20 000 per annum
3.	Local conference	R10 000 per annum
4.	Local Travel	R10 000 per annum
5.	Hardware and Supplies (Materials and Supplies)	R70 000 per annum
6.	Research / technical / ad hoc Assistants	R20 000 per annum
7.	Visiting Scientists	R50 000 per annum
8.	Science Engagement	R10 000 per annum

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), attached to the Letter of Award to successful applicants.

The following six (6) financial sub-categories are NOT supported as stand-alone categories by the NRF and must be included under International conference, Local conference of Local Travel where applicable.

Table 2: Financial categories NOT supported under the Thuthuka Grant

Category of support	NOT supported under Thuthuka Grant
A. Running Expenses	
Accommodation	Not Funded (to be included where applicable under International conference, Local conference of 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

Note:

Applicants must include a detailed and well-motivated budget for each of the three (3) years in the three-year grant application. The budget for each of the three (3) 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 motivated in detail according to the requirements of the Thuthuka funding instrument will not be approved for funding.

The following eight (8) financial sub-categories are supported by the NRF.

A.   Equipment

10.2.1 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, centrifuge, 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, notepads, 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 grant.

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

10.2.2 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:
  - o networking opportunities;
  - o launch of collaboration; and/or
  - o 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;
- Attendance of more than one conference abroad per year; and
- Travel costs to maintain any equipment (this must be requested under Running Equipment).

Maximum Funding

The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R20 000 per year for conferences held abroad.

10.2.3 Local Conferences

Goal

The goal is to provide support to an applicant and/or postgraduate student/s (directly working on the 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 whether a paper or poster will be **presented**.

Exclusions
- Visa and permit fees;
- Events not attached to the conference; and
- Presentation of the same work at multiple conferences.

Maximum Funding
The NRF contribution will be limited to a maximum of R10 000 per year for local conferences held in South Africa.

10.2.4 Local Travel

Goal
The goal is to provide support to applicants, or students of the grantholder (only those directly working on the 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 the 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.

o   For travel by road, the number of kilometres to be travelled and costs based on the applicant's institutional rates.

o   Type and cost of accommodation and duration of stay.

o   Subsistence allowance based on the applicant's institutional rates.

Exclusions

Meetings, workshops, networking, writing retreats and collaboration events.

Maximum Funding

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

10.2.5 Hardware and Supplies (Materials and Supplies)

Goal

The goal is to provide support for hardware and supplies that are required for the approved Thuthuka research project. Hardware 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 hardware and supplies, please substantiate this in the application.

Hardware 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 hardware 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/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; 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; and
- 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.

10.2.6 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 B Tech 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)] 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.

10.2.7 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 following:

- 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:
  o Accommodation;
  o Airfare; and
  o Ground travel.
- Incidentals, e.g. tollgate, parking costs and subsistence.
- Information on other sources of funding available.
- An outline of the outcomes that will be achieved including:
  o Skills or knowledge transfer; and
  o 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 an active research collaboration exists.

Maximum Funding

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

10.2.8 Science Engagement

Goal

The goal of Science engagement activities are:

- To popularise science, engineering, technology and innovation as attractive, relevant and accessible in order to enhance scientific literacy and awaken interest in relevant careers;
- To develop a critical public that actively engages and participates in the national discourse of science and technology to the benefit of society;
- To promote science communication that will enhance science engagement in South Africa; and
- Engagement between researchers and scholars with broader society, funders, industry and policy-makers, in undertaking research, to improve the social, economic impact of the research.

Eligibility

Applies to applicants in all funding tracks.

Applicants are required to submit the following information:
- Explain why the engagement is being undertaken, and what is the desired outcome of the engagement activity/project;
- Indicate who are the people/audiences with whom you intend to engage;
- Indicate how you intend to engage the various audiences that you have identified; and
- Indicate how you plan to assess the broader impact(s) of science engagement initiatives.

Exclusions
- Publication costs for journal articles; and
- Local and international conference attendance.

Maximum Funding

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

11   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.

12   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.

12.1   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) directorate of the NRF, from existing databases and other sources. Applicants are encouraged to suggest reviewers from abroad. A minimum of six (6) written reviews per application are solicited, with the ultimate aim of eliciting at least three (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.

12.2   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 funding instrument, as well as the available budget.

13   Ranking of Proposals

13.1   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 3. Each area is given a weight to indicate its relative importance. Kindly consult Table 3 for details on the criteria used per Funding Track as well as the relative weighting.

13.2   Review Outcome

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

Table 3: NRF Scorecard for the Assessment of Proposals for Thuthuka Funding

Criterion	Review Dimensions	% Weighting for PhD Track	% Weighting for Post-PhD and NRF Rating Track
Track record of the applicant	Past research outputs that outline the candidate's research experience and contributions to knowledge production. Outputs could be from the past 5 years (or from a longer period in the past). This could include journal articles/peer reviewed publications, conference presentations and proceedings, book chapters, patents and awards, designs, performances, student supervision and/or expertise in a specified knowledge area that will enable the applicant to successfully undertake the proposed research.	5%	10%
Human Capital Development	Diversity, including sex and gender. This could include: (i) the involvement of postgraduate students (i.e., at Masters' and Doctoral 'level) from designated/under- represented groups in the proposed project, and/or (ii) the number of students that have completed their degrees/graduated in the past 5 years with considerations of race, gender and representation from designated/under-represented groups.	5%	10%
Scientific Merit	• The proposal is comprehensive and well-constructed. • Research novelty refers to whether project idea is novel and will contribute to the generation of both new methodologies and new knowledge in the field. • The study is well conceptualized: i.e., the problem statement; research question aligns with methodology; the rationale of the study, research approach and methodology are clearly articulated,	35%	30%

Criterion	Review Dimensions	% Weighting for PhD Track	% Weighting for Post-PhD and NRF Rating Track
	the aim is clear and objectives that align with a problem statement. • Alignment of the overall research proposal with the (i) objectives of the funding programme - proposal fit within the scope of the Call, (ii) the applicant's institutional research strategy & (iii) specified national research strategies. • Literature is thoroughly reviewed, relevant, cited in text and well referenced, and addresses the existing gaps in extant literature. • Pluri-disciplinarity: The multi-, inter, and trans - disciplinary aspects of the proposed study; The project addresses one or more aspects of pluri-disciplinarity attributes.		
Project management and Feasibility	• Project organisation detailing the composition of project teams, roles & responsibilities and contributions of all identified roles; research activities and supervision. • Project scheduling/work plan detailing the project work breakdown structure comprising the project tasks, activities, timelines (in line with the funding period) and outputs • Project budget plan defined by effective planning of the budget, listing the line items and related costs in consideration of project objectives, activities, outputs and additional services required to produce outputs (such as DNA sequencing services possibly rendered abroad).	30%	20%
Collaboration	• This includes: a description of collaborations between institutions with limited infrastructure & research activity, and research-intensive institutions with varied capabilities.	5%	10%

Criterion	Review Dimensions	% Weighting for PhD Track	% Weighting for Post-PhD and NRF Rating Track
	• The proposal should clearly indicate that team members possess complementary skills sets that can be leveraged for the success of the project. • The proposal should clearly state research collaborations to meet the study objectives and clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of each collaborator.		
Outputs	• Proposed outputs should be aligned to instrument objectives and the Professional development of the applicant. • Outputs should include Journal articles, conference presentations and proceedings, books, patents, and other relevant outputs. • The achievability of the proposed outputs within the given timeframe.	5%	5%
Knowledge Production Impact	This could include detailing the potential/contribution of the study outcomes to the strategic goals of the knowledge economy and advancement of discovery and understanding of the field; and/or demonstrated high return on investment and embedding of specified realistic societal benefits (e.g., social, economic, environmental) ex-ante (potential) ex-nunc (during) and ex-post (after) the implementation of study in the proposal; e.g., the project could have the potential to resolve taxonomic problems to unlock knowledge critical to other projects related to the bioeconomy or global change; Identifying the end-users of both the knowledge/information produced; dissemination format of generated knowledge/information, the extent to which the project will contribute to the funding opportunity deliverables.	5%	5%

Criterion	Review Dimensions	% Weighting for PhD Track	% Weighting for Post-PhD and NRF Rating Track
	The return on investment (quantifying records of generated/mobilised, species pages compiled, or species/specimens barcoded). Align assessment to clear articulation of scientific merit.		
Broader Societal Impact	Demonstrated high return on investment and embedding of specified realistic societal benefits (e.g., social, economic, environmental): - the defined impact could be ex-ante (potential); ex-nunc (during); and/or ex-post (after) the implementation of the proposed study - e.g., explain the project potential to resolve taxonomic problems to unlock knowledge critical to other projects related to the bioeconomy or global change. - Identify the end-users of both the knowledge/information produced. - Describe the dissemination format of generated knowledge/information, - Describe the extent to which the project will contribute to the funding opportunity deliverables. - The return on investment (quantifying records of generated/mobilised, species pages compiled, or species/specimens barcoded). - Align assessment of impact to articulation the Scientific Merit content in the proposal. High scores for impact cannot be given to a poorly articulated scientific merit.	5%	5%
Ethical considerations, Data Management and Use	**Ethical considerations:** Ethical issues including data sharing and collecting/import/export permits, specimen repository has been considered. The proposal should clearly indicate how expected findings and outputs will be disseminated including the use of science communication strategies, and open access.	5%	5%

Criterion	Review Dimensions	% Weighting for PhD Track	% Weighting for Post-PhD and NRF Rating Track
	Data management and use: The proposal should clearly indicate how expected findings and outputs will be disseminated including the use of science communication strategies, and open access.		
Total		**100%**	**100%**

14   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 Connect 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.

15   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.

15.1   Prior Approval Requests

All change requests must be preceded by prior NRF approval submitted in writing to the GMSA at least 14 days before the proposed change. The request must have institutional DA endorsement and be submitted to the NRF *via* the Research Office.

15.2   Grantholder Change

The Thuthuka funding instrument does not allow for a change of grantholder. Should the institution desire to continue the research project with a new primary investigator, he/she must submit a new Thuthuka application subject to meeting all the Thuthuka eligibility criteria.

15.3   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 14 working days before the proposed change.

16   Contact Details

For NRF Connect and Grants Management-related queries contact:

Professional Officer: GMSA

Ms Thandeka Mthethwa
Tel: (012) 481-4163
E-mail: T.Mthethwa@risa.nrf.ac.za

For Thuthuka funding instrument-related queries contact:

Professional Officer: HICD

Ms Nthabeleng Makhetha
Tel: (012) 481-4150
E-mail: N.Makheta@risa.nrf.ac.za

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

E-mail: Supportdesk@risa.nrf.ac.za