



**Thuthuka**

**Framework**

**Directorate : Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development**

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## **1. Introduction**

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 together with the Thuthuka Application and Funding Guide are intended to give the research community a clear representation of the workings of the funding instrument, which will enable them to access funding opportunities to engage in research and to contribute towards the knowledge economy.

## **2. Context**

### **2.1. Transformation and Equity**

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) in its White Paper on Science and Technology (1996) identified that historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) have very limited research capacity due to their focus on teaching as opposed to research and development. As part of its Research Capacity Development Strategy government committed itself to address this backlog through targeted interventions. 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 institutions.

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 a 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 a 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 a 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 a Call for Proposals for the Thuthuka funding instrument annually. These Calls will be accompanied by a Thuthuka Application and Funding Guide for ease of reference to potential applicants. 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 a 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 and researchers, with academic and/or joint academic and administrative professional appointments, at NRF recognised public universities, 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.

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

Applicants may not be an NRF-rated researcher at the time of the Thuthuka application. 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 NRF-FRF Sabbatical Grant. In cases where the NRF- FRF Sabbatical grant and a Thuthuka applications are submitted simultaneously and both are successful, then the Thuthuka grant will not be awarded.

### **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.
- 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 form *via* the electronic Online application process. Applicants 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 endorsement by the nominated supervisor, supporting the proposed Doctoral research to be undertaken, by submitting the supervisor's report *via* the electronic online application process. Applicants without the supervisor report included during NRF processing will be automatically rejected without reconsideration or reinstatement of the 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.
- 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.
- Applicants that have not finalized their doctoral degrees at time of application are eligible under this track, however institutions need to ensure that NRF receives proof of doctoral degree before the funding can be granted.
- 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. Applicants 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.

#### 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 Identity Number may apply.
- A first-time applicant **may not be an NRF-rated researcher** but may apply for NRF Evaluation and Rating during the tenure of the Thuthuka grant.
- The applicant must have completed at a Doctoral degree prior to applying for a grant in the Thuthuka NRF Rating Track.
- Applicants may not be an NRF-rated researcher at the time of the Thuthuka application. 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.
- Applicants should have obtained their Doctoral degree no more than 8 years prior to the date of first 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 not be automatically rejected from further consideration.
- 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. Applicants 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.

## 5. Proposal review

Proposals that meet the eligibility criteria and application requirements, following institutional and NRF screening, will be subjected to review by peers to assess substantive issues such as scientific merit and any other pre-determined content criteria, as outlined in the Application and Funding Guide. Based on the outcomes of the review process, projects will either be eligible for funding or not.

## 6. Funding

### 6.1. Funding Model

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; 50% of all funded grantholders to be female.
- **NRF Rating Track:** 80% of all funded grantholders to be Black; 50% of all funded grantholders to be female.

### 6.2. Funding ranges

Thuthuka research projects will be funded within a set maximum amount range for each budget category, subject to budget availability, as outlined in the accompanying **Application and Funding Guide**.

### 6.3. Funding support

Applicants may request funding for a number of items but not all tracks will be provided with the same type of funding support. Each application will indicate projected costs for the following line items **ONLY** from the NRF online application form:

#### A. Running Expenses

1. Materials and supplies
2. Research Equipment
3. Research/ Technical/ Ad Hoc Assistants
4. Local Travel
5. Local Conference
6. International Conferences

### 6.4. Institutional contribution or co-funding

The applicant's institution must commit in writing to contributing fifty (50) percent of the total awarded operational costs for all approved projects.

## 6.5. Awards and period of funding

Successful research projects will be approved for funding for a period of three years. The funding period will be linked to the applicant's funding Track.

- **PhD Track:** projects may be funded for a maximum of two three-year cycles;
- **Post-PhD Track:** projects may be funded for a maximum of three-year cycles; and
- **NRF Rating Track:** projects may be funded for a maximum of two three-year cycles.
- Applicants that are changing from the PhD Track to the Post PhD Track need to submit a new application for consideration
- Applicants supported in the PhD track that successfully complete their PhD during the Thuthuka funding period may be considered for a third three-year cycle of funding, to enable them to develop into established researchers.
- Grantholders that 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

A research proposal must be submitted, and subjected to peer-review, for each three-year funding period. Continued funding beyond the first year will be considered based on satisfactory progress achieved by the grantholder, as evaluated by the grantholder's head of department (HoD) during the annual submission of the Budget Motivation on the NRF Online Submission System. The purpose of the Budget Motivation is to ensure that budget allocations are aligned with the grantholder's capacity to expense the awarded funds in the academic year in which it is awarded. 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

In addition, the grantholder will be required to submit a detailed progress report (PR) to the NRF at the end of each academic year. Approved funding for continuing grantholders will only be released upon submission of the DA approved PR to the NRF.

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

With the view to continuously monitor and report on project performance, all grantholders are required to submit an PR that 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 information contained in the PR will be incorporated

into the NRF Annual Report submitted to Parliament and must therefore be verified by the grantholder's institution and auditable.

At the end of the three-year funding period, a final report 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.

## **8. Financial control**

These 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) to the relevant institutions' cost centres. The institution will in turn administer the funds on behalf of the successful grant holder to the value of the full sum awarded by the NRF.