1. How to Apply for Thuthuka Funding

Find the Thuthuka call for proposals on the main NRF website – www.nrf.ac.za. The call is posted annually, usually between March and May, and left open for a limited amount of time. Note that no application received outside the time period specified as the window for project submission will be considered for funding.

An accompanying guideline document will assist applicants with completion and submission of applications. Note that application is done electronically and as such will require registering as a user on the NRF Online System. This may be done at any time, even in the absence of a call, by following this NRF Online Submission System website.

All applications must be approved by the submitting institution. Applicants will be invited to apply for funding in one of three tracks:

**PhD Track**: for applicants, wanting to obtain a PhD within the funding period;

**Post-PhD Track**: for applicants wanting to become established researchers, strengthening their research capabilities; and

**NRF Rating Track**: for applicants wanting to obtain a NRF rating within the six-year funding period.

**General Criteria for Applicants to Qualify for funding:**

- Must be South African citizens;
- Are not allowed to participate in more than one track simultaneously;
- Cannot hold multiple (other) NRF grants; and
- Cannot re-apply for funding within a track where they have received funding before

**PhD track**

The applicant must:

- Hold a master’s degree in the natural sciences, social sciences, economic sciences or humanities;
- Be a South African citizen;
- Provide proof of a commitment from the institution in which the institution pledges to allow for time off for research leave - relieve of teaching duties to conduct fieldwork/research; and
- Submit an endorsement from a nominated supervisor supporting the proposed doctoral work to be undertaken.

**Post PhD track**

The applicant must:

- Have obtained the PhD not earlier than five years prior to the date of application;
- Support researchers from designated groups in their pursuit to attain a formal post graduate qualifications or a NRF rating;
- Improve the research capacity of individual researchers from designated groups;
• Foster a culture of research excellence and to 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 with respect to gender, race and persons with disabilities.

2. How to Submit Thuthuka Annual Project Reports (APRs)

Progress reports have to be submitted annually in order to qualify for continued funding the following year. Grant holders will be alerted as to the need for submitting their reports by the NRF at the appropriate time each year.

Annual Progress Reports (APR) are submitted electronically via the NRF Online System. Access the “Create APR” function and follow instructions.

Note that progress reports need to be extensive enough so as to prove that research that was undertaken to be completed within the relevant funding year has indeed been carried out. Excessively terse or unspecific reports will be negatively scored and funding denied for the following year.

3. How to manage Thuthuka Project Changes

A single Annual Progress Report (APR) must be submitted by the grant holder, in a format provided by the NRF, documenting progress made, research outputs, institutional financial contribution and expenditure of project funding.

However, based on unusual or extenuating circumstances the Thuthuka Programme permits exceptions to reporting requirements or meeting deadlines. A deviation from the general reporting requirement will only be considered in cases due to illness, injury, bereavement, or personal circumstances which may affect performance and/or render a grant holder unable to report on the outputs for the reporting period. These are considered extenuating circumstances as they are unforeseen and beyond the control of the grant holder.

Grant holders must notify the Grant Management Systems Administration (GMSA) in writing of the intention not to submit an APR or of a late submission for the period under reporting 30 (thirty) days prior to the closing date for the submission of APRs. Such a notification must be submitted via the research office and must contain detailed reasons and justification for ‘Request for Non-Submission of APR’. Notifications received by the GMSA after the closing date for the submission of APRs will not be accepted.

Managing changes during the project life cycle

Changes may occur during the project life cycle. As the recipient of a Thuthuka grant and the custodian of public funds you will require information and resource to enable you to successfully manage your project during its life cycle. Please note the following on how to manage the award and subsequent changes (planned or unanticipated) as they arise during the project life cycle.
Change Requests

Prior approval requests

All change requests must be preceded by prior NRF-approval made in writing (e-mail is acceptable) to the GMSA at least 30 days before the proposed change. The request must have institutional endorsement and be submitted to the NRF via the Research Office. Failure to obtain required prior approval from your research office may result in processing delays or your paperwork being returned or the request being turned down.

Request for transfer of or additional funding

Requests for additional funding or the transfer of funds on an existing Thuthuka grant has to be submitted in writing via the institution’s Research Office for endorsement and submission to the GMSA. The NRF will only consider such requests based on a detailed budget and relevant information, providing a strong motivation for the request and indicating the impact on the project. It should be noted that funds in any of the four student support categories may not be transferred to Operating Costs.

Grant holders might find it necessary to apply for additional funding over and above the initial amounts awarded, for various reasons. In this case the NRF requires the following:

- Inform the NRF in writing via an additional funding request form. The grant holder will require information on the following aspects to complete the template adequately;
- Report on cost incurred by the project up to the date of the request;
- Ensure that amounts requested are justified and adequately verified by supporting documentation; and
- NRF will not be responsible for expenses incurred without prior authorisation.

Changes in grant holder

This change may be triggered by a number of things, from a change of status of a grant holder to a grant holder’s untimely death in which case the grant and/or project needs to be transferred or handed over to someone else. For this type of change to be approved, the institution, must provide evidence that the grant holder(s), nominated to take over the project, is suitably qualified and able to achieve the research aims of the project before the NRF will agree to continue the grant funding.

Requests’ for changes in grant holder or grant transfer has to be approved by the grant holder’s immediate Supervisor and/or Principle Investigator (whichever is applicable), declaration and acceptance by nominee taking over the grant and endorsement by the Head of Department approving these proposed changes. The NRF will only consider request for changes submitted via the Research Office. Grant holders should notify, the GMSA in writing of the proposed changes as soon as possible. Note the following:
Complete a project handover report

- Wrap up any outstanding financial issues related to the termination in accordance with the NRF conditions of grant; and
- Find a suitable replacement to continue with the work and recommend the appointment of the replacement to the NRF for ratification.

Changes in project scope

Changes may occur where a project scope needs to be modified from the original research proposal/project design. Project changes must be approved by the immediate supervisor and requires endorsement by the Head of Department wherein it reassures the NRF these changes has minimal and/or no adverse impact on the project’s ability to meet its original objectives and students.

The request must have institutional Designated Authority (DA) endorsement and be submitted to the NRF via the Research Office. Grant holders should notify, the GMSA in writing of the proposed changes as soon as possible. For designated GMSA persons refer to the Grant Administration contact from the Thuthuka pocket guide.

Premature project closure

The NRF should be notified timely of the intention to close the project mid-term through the submission of all required reports and adjustments to amounts due by the grant holder or the NRF. This entails winding down a project’s activities as efficiently and effectively as possible in order to minimize any adverse impact on the students, collaborators and team members involved. This process usually also allows for the capturing of benefits and lessons learnt. The purpose is to ensure that all deliverables as set out in the project proposal have been met and to plan for any post-project activities, if any, in cases of succession.

Project termination could become a possibility where a project becomes defunct or when the grant holder approaches the NRF with a request for termination. The NRF can declare a project defunct when through monitoring and evaluation, it establishes that project objectives are not being met or stands a reasonable chance of not being realised. In this case the NRF requires the following:

- A project closure report; and
- The grant holder must wrap up any outstanding financial issues related to the termination in accordance with the NRF conditions of grant.

Premature termination of grant

If a grant holder is unable to complete a research project for which the NRF has awarded a grant, it is the responsibility of the grant holder, through the institution’s DA, to notify the NRF’s GMSA staff of the intention to prematurely terminate the project. Premature termination of a research project may occur for a number of reasons. Taking into account the circumstances and reasons for termination, the grant holder, in consultation with the NRF, will decide on the best course of action and possible outcomes, including, but not limited to, the final termination of the project and the recall of funds expensed. Irrespective of the decision taken, the grant holder is required to submit a
Project Closure Report to the NRF. The grant holder must ensure that each student involved in or directly linked to the project completes a progress report on their research project, which is endorsed by the grant holder and the institution’s DA. These progress reports will be used in considering any further applications for NRF funding to complete the work, according to the criteria applicable to the programme to which any such application is submitted.

Exclusions:

Applicants in the PhD Track working on their doctoral dissertation may not transfer the Thuthuka grant to another grant holder.

Note that some change requests may be referred for additional review before a final decision is taken.

4. How to Nominate Students for Thuthuka

During the initial application stage student identification is not required, only the number and level of students for which funding is sought. This is part of the compulsory budget request section of the electronic application.

Before funding is released applicants need to provide the personal details of the students for whom bursaries have been procured. This is done by accessing the student nomination function on the NRF Online System, to be found on the “My Applications” page. Access the active application and follow the instructions for student nomination.

Note that student funding will only be provided for the duration of project funding, not until degree completion by the student. Students who are nominated towards the end of a project’s funding cycle need to be aware that they will not be able to rely on Thuthuka funding once the project has come to an end, and as such will have to make alternate financial arrangements in order to assure the successful termination of their studies.
Thuthuka Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who should apply for Thuthuka funding?

Masters Degree holders working towards a PhD, young researchers seeking to build experience and a viable publication record, researchers who have been absent from research for a while and would like to re-establish themselves within their field. The funding may be taken up by the designated (black males, female and persons with disabilities) groupings.

2. Will an employee who is appointed on a fixed-term / contractual basis be eligible for consideration under the Thuthuka Programme?

Yes. Applicants must be employed in public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Science Councils and other research institutions on a full-time or contractual basis. In the case of a contract, the appointment must extend for the duration of the approved three-year funding cycle.

3. What is the maximum amount that I can apply for Thuthuka funding?

The range (minimum and maximum) varies from year to year and specific amounts are announced with each call.

4. For how long can I obtain Thuthuka funding?

The maximum amount a time a grant holder can remain in the Thuthuka programme is six years, generally divided into two consecutive three-year cycles.

5. Are white applicants encouraged to apply for Thuthuka funding?

There seems to be a perception that the Thuthuka grant does not cater for white researchers who feel they might be "wasting their time" if they apply. The Thuthuka budget split is 80/20 - 80% targeting designated groupings (black males, females and persons with disabilities) 20% of the budget available for others. So our white colleagues are encouraged to apply. Please note these are only Equity Targets (medium term target the NRF would like to achieve to affirm the race groups that have been disadvantaged). 80% of the budget might not necessarily be taken up by the designated groupings. Whatever is not taken up will be available to everyone else.

6. I am on a one year contract with my employer (renewed annually) but the Thuthuka Grant requires that I am contracted for the duration of the Grant

The NRF commits funding to projects for a minimum period of three years and would like to have a medium term commitment from the institution and grant holders to complete projects and to ensure non-delivery risks are managed properly from an auditing point of view.

7. Should one apply in Post PhD Track if your PhD is in its final stages?

No. Applicants must hold a Doctoral Degree awarded not more than five years prior to the date of first application.
8. If the employing institution does not give any funding, can an applicant get the commitment funding from an outside source?

No, an outside source might not have any obligations towards the research project for the duration of the funding cycle. The employing institution has various commitments such as ensuring that the grant holder is enabled to devote and allocate the required time attached to the project to the extent needed to undertake the research in a manner that complies with the work plan of the research proposal submitted to the NRF in order to achieve the research aims of the project. The institution further undertakes to commit its required portion of the co-funding related to the cost of the project, as per the operation of the relevant NRF funding programme, for every year of funding allocated to the project by the NRF. The institution also commits itself to ensuring that nominated student(s) and others involved in the project have access to adequate resources (infrastructure, equipment etc.) and supervisory support to undertake the stated research and to accomplish all the objectives of the funded project.

9. What is the difference between Lecturer Replacement and a Sabbatical Travel grant?

Sabbatical leave is accrued to academics based on years of service. Thuthuka grant holders may use their sabbatical grants as a travel grant e.g. to spend periods of time at another research institution. The intention of a lecturer replacement grant for Thuthuka grant holders is to allow the grant holder to buy leave where the applicant has not served in the employ of the university long enough to qualify for sabbatical leave. In this instance the academic can apply for paid leave and the institution can use the lecturer replacement funds to employ a replacement lecturer during the Thuthuka grant holder’s absence. The objective of a lecturer replacement grant is to fast track the research outputs of the TTK grant holder.

10. Can applicants be awarded Lecturer Replacement and Sabbatical concurrently?

No. Grant holders may not concurrently hold grants in the sabbatical travel and lecturer replacement categories.

11. Can one apply for conference proceedings/travelling only?

No. The Thuthuka Grant is not a travel grant. The grant is awarded to fund direct costs of the research for which the funds were awarded and the benefits should be directly attributable to the grant.

12. Will the grant holder be allowed to send a student to another country to attend a workshop / conference that is relevant to his / her research?

Yes. Grant holders may apply for support for all nominated postgraduate students to attend reputable conferences. The grant holder should motivate how their participation and attendance will benefit the research project.

13. Can funds be transferred or vired between funding categories?

Yes, but not without the prior approval from the NRF. Grant holders are required to inform the NRF of any anticipated funding transfers and request permission in writing for approval.
14. Should budgeting be based on the total projected cost of the research activities or only the NRF maximum contributions?

Applicants should give the total research project costs as it gives a realistic reflection of the direct, indirect and staff replacement costs.

15. There was a costing error on the application when it was submitted and the full cost of undertaking the research was not considered. Will the NRF increase our funding?

No. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the costs are correct in the application submitted. As a policy, the NRF will not increase the budget once funding has been agreed. Any additional amounts have to be borne by the applicant.

16. What do I need to do before I can submit an application through the NRF Online Submission System?

Applicants must meet the eligibility criteria of the Thuthuka Programme which is briefly outlined in the Thuthuka Pocket Guide or the Thuthuka Grants Manual; identify their project information, such as the Title of the Project, Project Abstract, project start and end year; and the details of the research; draw up a project budget that considers all the costs that could impact on undertaking the research, such as the direct, indirect and staff replacement costs. The NRF has provided researchers with a Budget Assist Costing Tool to prepare the budget offline, the purpose of which is to assist researchers to develop more realistic budgets. Applicants must register on the NRF Online Submission System. If they are already registered users, they must ensure that their Curriculum Vitae (CV) is updated or completed before creating an application.

17. What is the NRF Online Submission System?

The NRF Online Submission System is a system which allows potential applicants to apply for funding through an internet web interface.

18. What software do I need to have loaded before I can begin using the NRF Online System?

Applicants may use Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox or Google Chrome for best results.

19. What is involved in the NRF Online Submission System registration process?

Prospective applicants need to complete all the compulsory fields (indicated with *) on the NRF Online Submission System and create a password that is at least 6 characters long, contains small letters, capital letters and numerals. After applicants have successfully registered, they can login to the system by using the ID/passport number and password you provided.