

POLICY FRAMEWORK



Thuthuka Programme

Directorate	Human Institutional Capacity Development
Programme	Institutional Capacity Development
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1. Overview

The purpose of the framework document is to outline the context, organisation and operational procedures with regard to the revised Thuthuka Programme. The programme links to the strategic objective of the National Research Foundation (NRF) which seeks to promote and support research through human resource development.

The Thuthuka Programme is housed within the Human and Institutional Capacity Development directorate, and managed in the Institutional Capacity Programme (ICP).

The Thuthuka Framework Document together with the Guide for Applicants, is intended to give the research community a clear representation of the workings of the programme 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 agenda of the national government

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

2.2 NRF Perspective

The Thuthuka Programme, 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. The programme is located within the ICP sub-directorate, which falls within the Human and Institutional Capacity Development directorate at the NRF. Operating within the constantly evolving higher education landscape the programme aims to develop human capital and to improve the research capacities of designated (i.e., black, female and disabled) researchers, ultimately redressing historical imbalances. This is done in partnership with South African public institutions of higher learning and research institutions. The programme seeks to achieve this through its specific research grant which funds grant holders participating in research from a wide range of scientific disciplines.

Whilst the primary aim of the revised Thuthuka programme remains to promote professional development of researchers from designated groups, participation of non-designated individuals are not excluded. The programme not only contributes to the NRF's strategic goal of creating a maximum number of high-quality PhDs to drive

the knowledge economy, but also to the organisation's vision of growing a more representative science and technology workforce.

2.3 Rationale for the revised Thuthuka programme

The programme is founded squarely on the national equity and redress objectives. Specifically, the objectives of the Thuthuka research grant are to:

- Promote the attaining of a PhD qualification, by early career academics employed at South African universities;
- Promote the research development of early career academics employed at South African universities;
- Promote the attaining of a NRF rating by early career academics, in particular black and women researchers and persons with disabilities;
- Promote the attaining of a NRF rating by academics that could not realise their potential or sustain their research ability by virtue of a lack of an enabling research environment;
- Promote the attaining of a NRF rating by academics that could not realise their potential or sustain their research outputs due to family responsibilities;
- 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 at public funded universities with respect to gender, race and persons with disabilities.

This revised programme replaces the current programme with one that focuses on research excellence, while at the same time providing a clear trajectory leading grant holders towards attaining a PhD and/or a NRF rating.

3. Allocation principles

The grant 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 Thuthuka grant's funding decisions will be guided by the following principles:

Equity and redress: In keeping with the equity and redress objectives the Thuthuka grant is based on a preferential funding model. In terms of this model targets for supporting individuals from designated groups will be set;

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

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

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 awarded running costs for all approved projects.

4. Application process

4.1 Call for proposals

The NRF will issue a call for proposals annually. These calls will be accompanied by a Thuthuka Application 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 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 apply for a NRF rating within the six-year funding period.

4.2 Eligibility

4.2.1 General eligibility criteria

The following general criteria will be applicable:

- Applicants must meet eligibility criteria per track as detailed in the Thuthuka Application Guide;
- Where one of the applicants applying for funding is considered to be a person with disabilities he or she will be deemed eligible for preferential funding;
- Researchers cannot apply for funding within a track where they have received funding for the maximum permissible period.

4.2.2 PhD Track

The applicant must:

- Be a South African citizen;
- Hold a master's degree; and
- Generally be under the age of 45 years at the time of first application.

4.2.3 Post-PhD track

The applicant must:

- Be a South African citizen;
- Have obtained the PhD not earlier than five years prior to the date of application; and
- Generally be under the age of 45 years at the time of first application;

4.2.4 NRF Rating track

The applicant must:

- Be a South African citizen or permanent resident;
- Have a PhD or equivalent research training;
- Have identified a research focus in an area in which she/he plans to establish a research track record; and
- Demonstrate that they were unable to establish themselves as researchers due to limited research opportunities.

4.3 Proposal review

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

5. Funding

5.1 Funding model

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

- **PhD Track:** 80% of all funded grant holders to be Black; up to 60% of all funded grant holders to be female.
- **Post-PhD Track:** 80% of all funded grant holders to be Black; 50% of all funded grant holders to be female.
- **NRF Rating Track:** 80% of all funded grant holders to be Black; 50% of all funded grant holders to be female.

5.2 Funding ranges

Thuthuka research projects will be funded within a set minimum and maximum amount range subject to budget availability.

5.3 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:

- Running costs, including necessary materials and supplies;
- Small to medium-sized equipment;
- Student and staff support;
- Conference and course/workshop attendance;
- Study visits and sabbaticals;
- Mentoring;
- Visiting scientists;
- Lecturer replacement; and
- Technical assistance.

5.4 Institutional contribution

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

5.5 Awards and period of funding

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

- **PhD Track:** projects will be funded for two three-year cycles;
- **Post-PhD Track:** projects will be funded for two three-year cycles; and
- **NRF Rating Track:** projects will be funded for two three-year cycles.

A research proposal must be submitted, and subjected to peer review, for each three-year funding period. 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.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

With the view to continuously monitor project performance the grant holders are required to submit Annual Progress Reports 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.

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.

At a programme level Thuthuka will be subject to an external review every five years. Monitoring and evaluation will comprise assessing the constituent components of the programme to determine the strengths and weaknesses and identify factors of success or failures and to ascertain programme sustainability of results in relation to the objectives of the programme. The objectives of the overall programme review are to evaluate:

- Programme context and landscape;
- Programme performance – viewed from the following three perspectives: Grant holder; Institutional Support; Internal Business Processes;
- Access to and participation in linked NRF research funding opportunities; and
- Leveraging NRF funding opportunities.

7. Financial control

These 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.