



RIISA

Research, Innovation and Impact
Support and Advancement

Research Grants:
Thuthuka PhD Track;
Thuthuka Post PhD Track; and
Thuthuka Rating Track

Application Guide

Date: February 2025

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

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

1. Introduction

This document serves as a guideline on how to complete the online application for the Thuthuka Funding Instrument. An understanding of the application process is critical in successfully submitting your application. This guide provides an overview of the application process and funding guidelines.

This document should be read together with the accompanying Thuthuka Framework to the current call. The Framework will provide the detailed information about Thuthuka Funding Instrument including eligibility criteria, funding principles as well as the review scorecard.

2. Registering and Accessing the System

The application must be completed on the NRF online system: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>, using the ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) credentials.



If not registered on ORCID, click Register now and follow the steps. Continue with the ORCID registration as prompted. If users are already registered on ORCID, they must sign in using one of the following options:

1. ORCID iD
2. Email address linked with your ORCID profile

3. GMAIL account linked with your ORCID
4. Facebook account linked with ORCID

Sign in

Email or 16-digit ORCID ID
example@email.com or 0000-0001-2345-6789

Password

SIGN IN

[Forgot your password or ORCID ID?](#)
[Don't have an ORCID ID yet? Register now](#)

or

Access through your institution

Sign in with Google

Sign in with Facebook



If you are currently registered on the NRF Online Submission System, the system would automatically log in with the ORCID profile.

When the ORCID registration process is complete, new users will be redirected to NRF Connect login screen to register on the system.

Complete the missing fields and click Register to complete the process and the system will automatically log the user in.

3. Personal Details

After logging in, please click on the Update Profile button to update or complete the profile details.

- South African citizens and permanent residents must attach a copy of their South African Identity Document. Other foreign nationals must attach a certified copy of their valid Passports. These documents must be attached under the Personal Details only, **please do not attach this document under the attachment section**. If these documents are not attached, the application will be rejected.

- Applicants in the **PhD** and **Post-PhD tracks** should be under the age of 45 years at the time of first application. Applicants over the age of 45 must submit a motivation as to why they were not able to achieve their doctoral qualification or research capabilities by the stipulated age.

4. CV Section

Migrating the CV from the NRF Online Submission System

Should the user be an existing user on the NRF Online Submission System, there is functionality to migrate the CV from the previous system. Click **Verify** to link to the relevant account on the NRF Online Submission System.



Link Submission ...

Connect your old nrf submission profile

NO THANKS VERIFY

Provide the ID/Passport number and password used on the NRF Online Submission System.

Enter your Old Nrf Submission Details

ID Number *

ID/Passport

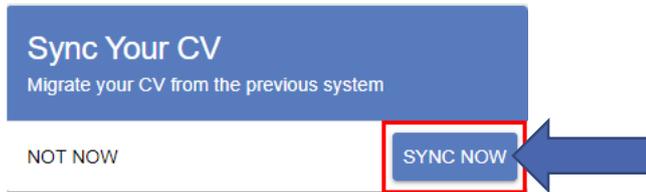
Password *

Your Old Password

CANCEL

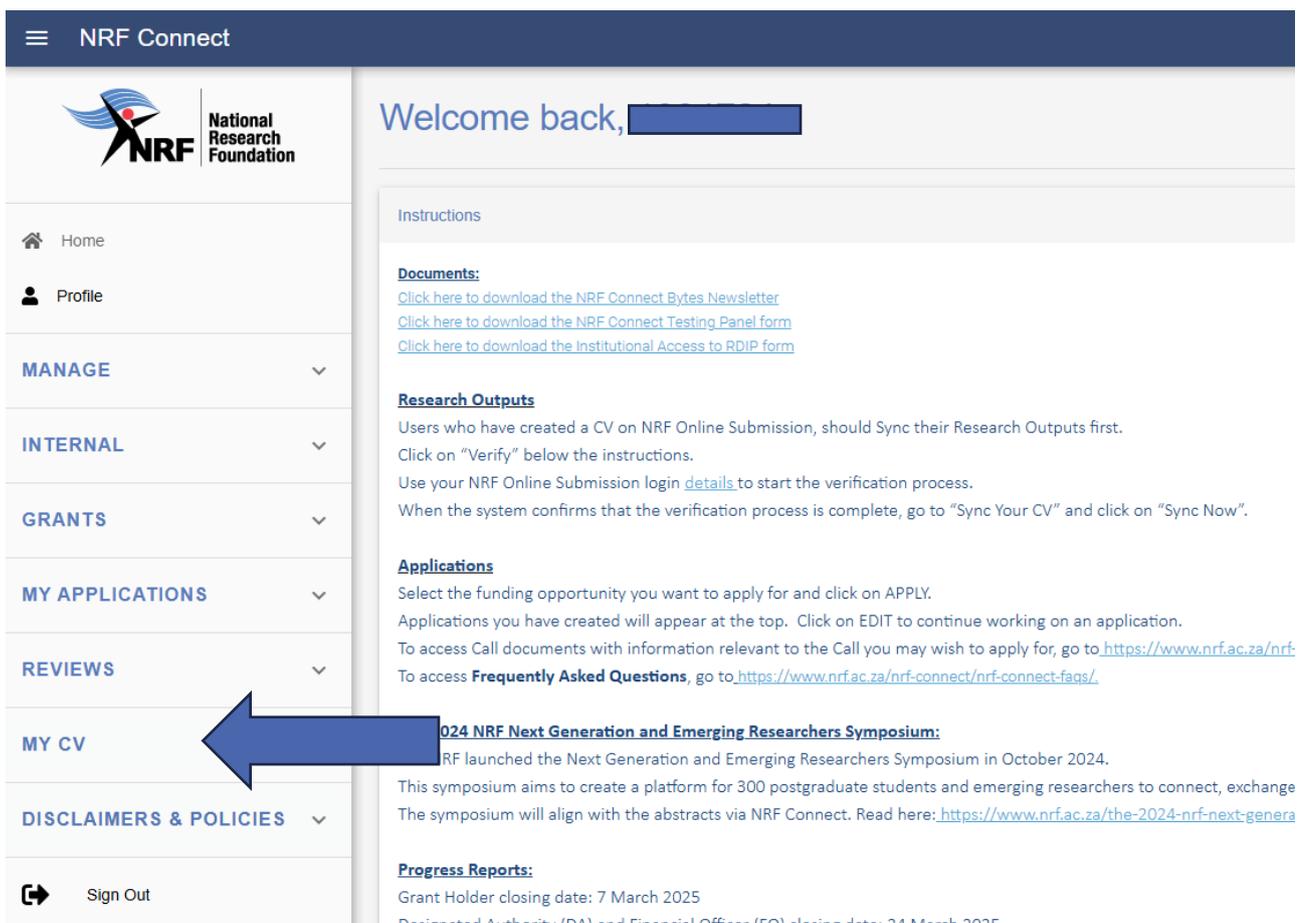
SUBMIT

Once the verification of the two accounts has been completed, confirmation will show at the bottom of the screen.



For new users

The CV can be updated by clicking on the tabs under the CV banner on the left-hand side of the screen.



The CV includes the following sections:

4.1.1. Career History

- 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** in South Africa.

- The term “academic” relates to lecturing duties as part of their job. If any of the following “positions” (current career) are indicated under the Career Profile section of your CV, your application will be deemed ineligible:
 - Doctoral student
 - Postdoctoral fellow
 - Lab technician
 - Coordinator
 - Administrator
 - Research Fellow
 - Tutor

- Applicants must be employed at the 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 who are appointed on a fixed-term half-day appointment to accommodate family responsibilities are eligible to apply. This is limited to women raising children of four (4) years of age and below. A copy of the child’s birth certificate should be included in the online application. In the case of a contract, the appointment must extend for the duration of the approved three (3) year funding cycle.

4.1.2. **Qualifications / Certifications**

PhD track

- Master's degree should be the highest qualification.
- If the Master's degree is "in progress", the degree should be completed by December 2025. *Please include the Masters degree under this section and indicate the anticipated date of completion.*
- Applicants who received previous freestanding and/or grantholder-linked doctoral scholarships are not eligible to apply for further funding under the same level.

Post-PhD track

- Applicants should have obtained a Doctoral degree no more than five (5) years prior to the date of first application.
- If the Doctoral degree is "in progress", the degree should be completed by December 2025. *Please include the Doctoral degree under this section and indicate the anticipated date of completion.*

NRF Rating track

- Applicants should have obtained their Doctoral degree no more than eight (8) years prior to the date of first application.

4.1.3. **Research Expertise**

Select the relevant primary research field and secondary research field from the drop-down list. To search for a field of specialisation, please start typing any part of the word in the appropriate space.

4.1.4. **Research Outputs - Primary and Secondary Outputs and Patents**

Click on **Research Outputs Menu** to select the relevant output type.

Should the outputs have been synched with NRF Submission, a list of outputs will be available for editing or deletion.

4.1.5. Student Supervision

This section is for capturing the student supervision track record.

5. Navigation and Controls

5.1. Drop-down List Control

Click on the arrow on the drop-down to see a list of options. Then click on the relevant option(s) to select.



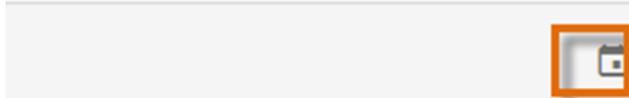
5.2 Upload Control

Click on the **Attachment** icon to upload required document(s).

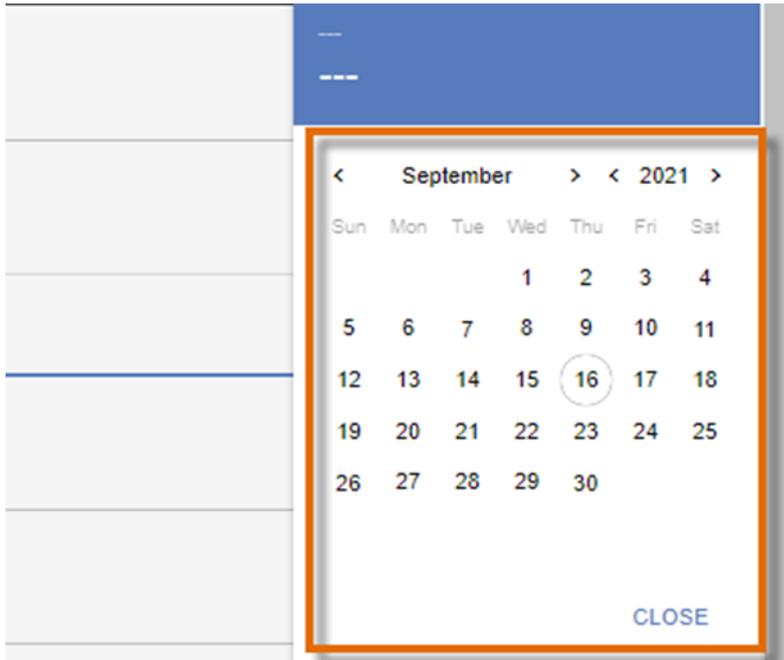


5.3 Calendar Control

Click on the **Calendar** icon to select the date, where a date is required.



A full **Calendar** will be displayed to allow for selection of the relevant date (follow the sequence as follows: year, month, day).

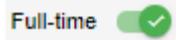


5.4 Toggle Control

Toggle to indicate **No**.



Toggle to indicate **Yes**.



Are you disabled in any way?

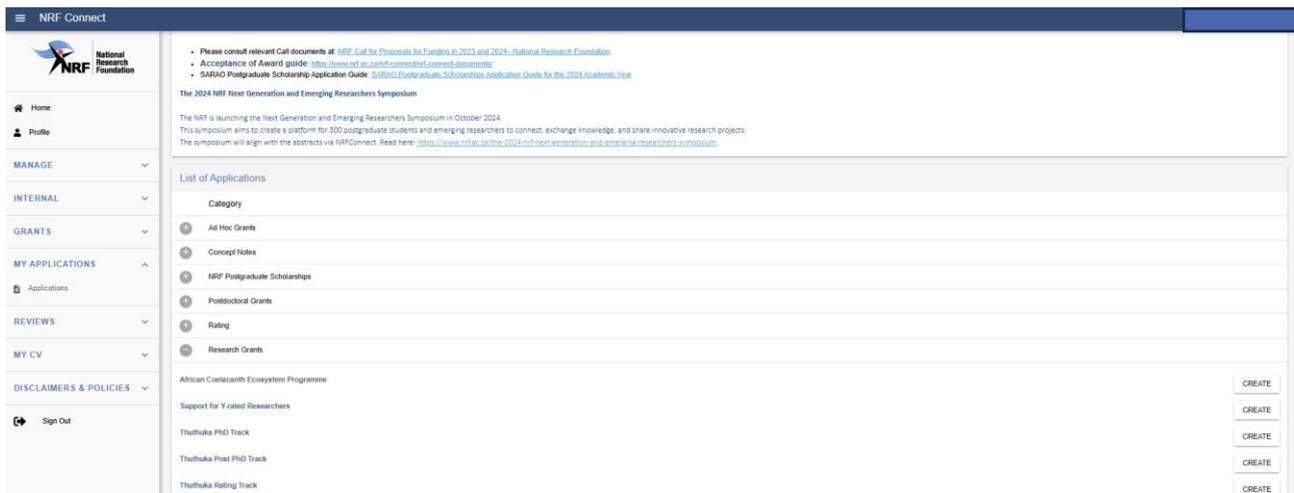
Please make sure that the toggle has fully marked no or yes based on your selection. Toggle not fully selected will not allow the section to complete.

6. Creating the Application

An application can be created from the **My Applications** menu.

Create Application from My Applications Menu

Click the expand icon next to the relevant Category to see the Calls associated with the Category (*Thuthuka applications are under the Research Grants Category*). Then Click **Create** next to the relevant Funding Opportunity to create a new application.



If the application is submitted under an incorrect funding track, it will be rejected without review.

Sections of the application

- Please note that some sections (e.g. Personal Details, CV Details) will be pre-populated, if they were completed on Update Profile and MY CV sections.
- Most application screens have application specific instructions to help you work through the section. Please read the instructions carefully before completing the section.
- Completed sections will be indicated by a green tick on the main menu, while incomplete sections will have a red cross. Please ensure that you press the “save” button after completing information in a section, before returning to the application.
- All sections marked with a red asterisk (*) are compulsory sections in the application. These sections must be completed for the final submit button to be active.

TTK250204297738 PREVIEW 			
Section	Complete	Updated	Edit
Personal Profile *	✓	16/02/2023	
Qualifications/Certifications *	✗		
Research Expertise *	✗		
Student Supervision	✗		
Career History *	✗		
Research Outputs	✗		
Patents	✗		
Top Research Outputs	✗		
Student Support	✗		
Basic Information *	✗		

6.1 Additional Information: Research Grants (Thuthuka)

If you are employed on a contractual basis, please indicate the end date of employment. If this information is not captured under the section, the application will be deemed incomplete and it will be rejected.

Additional Information: Research Grants (Thuthuka Phd)

Track *

End Date of Employment



End Date of Employment is Required

CANCEL

SAVE

6.2 Details of Research

The details of research section is one of the most important parts of the application and is looked at during the review process (please refer to the detailed review scorecard in the Framework document). This section is made up of multiple sub-sections that must be completed with as much detail as possible. Character limitations are indicated in each sub-section.

Section	Complete	Updated	Edit
Potential Impact and Outputs *	x		
Problem Statement *	x		
Rationale and Literature Review *	x		
Aims and Objectives *	x		
Proposed Activities/Methodology/Work Plan *	x		
Transformation *	x		
Anticipated Outputs *	x		
Alignment to National Imperatives *	x		
Data Management and Utilisation *	x		

6.3 Attachments

The following attachments are required for Thuthuka:

- The Institutional Support Form, which is attached to the Call documents, must be downloaded by the applicant for the Dean of the Employing/Affiliated Faculty and Research Office/DA signatures and then uploaded in the attachment section. This document is submitted to confirm and verify the Institution's support to the applicant for the proposed research. The Funding Track must be completed by the applicant on the Institutional Support Form.
- Applicants with joint academic and administrative professional appointments **must** attach proof thereof. This can be in the form of a letter from the institution confirming the joint appointment.
- Female applicants who are appointed on a fixed-term half-day appointment to accommodate family responsibilities are eligible to apply. This is limited to women raising children of four (4) years of age and below. A copy of the child's birth certificate **must** be attached.
- Applicants in the PhD and Post-PhD tracks over the age of 45 **must** submit a motivation as to why they were not able to achieve their doctoral qualification or research capabilities by the stipulated age.

6.4 Ethical Clearance

Indicate if ethical clearance is required for your research and if it has been obtained already.

6.5 Reviewers – Possible Reviewer and Excluded reviewer

Please indicate potential subject experts who would be suitable to review your application. A minimum of six (6) reviewers are required. Applicants are given the opportunity to identify reviewers (not exceeding three) who the NRF should not approach. Please use the appropriate 'tab' to enter relevant information.

You can search for the reviewer on the system by typing part of their email address.

Possible reviewer Excluded reviewer

Search for the email address or part of the name of the reviewer

5 or more characters

Should a reviewer not be found, please select the not found tab to add the reviewer details.

6.6 Preferred Panel

Indicate the most suitable panel that your project should be evaluated under.

6.7 Requested Financials

Please refer to the Framework for more information about the Thuthuka granting rules, financial control and categories supported. Please note that some of the running expenses sub-categories listed under the template are **not supported under Thuthuka**.

****Please include all financial details (i.e., budget breakdown) in the space provided in the application. Do not add attachments with the required detail to the application. This will not be looked at during the funding decisions process.**

****Only indicate the NRF contribution under this section.**

The eight (8) financial sub-categories supported by the NRF and the maximum amount that will be awarded per sub-category are indicated in Table 1. The NRF will award a maximum total amount of R100 000 (one hundred thousand rand) per annum for running expenses. The applicant's institution must match the NRF awarded amount on a 1:1 basis.

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	R50 000 per annum
3.	Local conference	R20 000 per annum
4.	Local Travel	R20 000 per annum
5.	Hardware and Supplies (Materials and Supplies)	R100 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

The Equipment sub-category supported under Thuthuka is the Research Equipment.

Note: Applicants must include a detailed and well-motivated budget for each of the three (3) years in the three (3) year grant application. The budget for each of the three (3) years will be approved at the time of the grant award. Applications with two (2) or one (1) year budget requests will not be considered.

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

For more information on the **Financial Categories** supported under Thuthuka, please refer to the Thuthuka Framework document.

Capturing the requested amount

Please DO NOT leave a space when capturing the requested *amount* as the system will not allow you to save.

TTK250204297738
Requested Financials

BACK TO REQUESTED FINANCIALS

Operating Costs

Year	Line Item	Sub-line Item	Amount
2026	Running expenses	International conferences	R 20000

Motivation

CANCEL SAVE

6.8 Other Sources of Funding

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.

If there are no other sources of funding, please select “add” under the section, then select “N/A” from the dropdown list under “source”. You can then enter 0 values for the different years.

6.9 National Infrastructure Platforms

Indicate the infrastructure platform (i.e., planned equipment or data) that will be accessed outside your own institution during the grant.

6.10 Science Engagement

List any science communication or public engagement activities that will take place during the grant.

6.11 Application Support Input

6.11.1 Doctoral supervisor

Applicants under the PhD track must add their supervisor's details in this section (**please use the Doctoral Supervisor or Doctoral Co-supervisor role under the application template**). Once the application has been submitted, an e-mail will be generated requesting the supervisor to complete the reference report electronically. The supervisor must login to NRF Connect to access and complete the report. Please ensure that the email address that is used in the application support input section is the same as the email addressed used by the supervisor to login to NRF Connect.

*The supervisor's report is compulsory and without this the application will not be considered for funding. It is the applicants responsibility to ensure that the supervisor has responded.

Application Support Input

Instructions

- Please **do not** list yourself, or any students, or postdoctoral fellows.
- Select the role of your referee. Search for them in the NRF Connect database by using their email address or part of their name by clicking the **search** button.
- Should you find the relevant person, click on the box next to their name, complete the rest of the fields and **save**.
- If you could not locate the person you are looking for, **click user not found**, and complete the rest of the fields, and **save**.
- Upon clicking the Save button, the system will send an automated email with a link to the referee email address inserted/captured. Once this is done, the section will be marked as "Complete".
- Please consult with the Framework Documents to determine the type of compulsory referee(s) that need to be added.

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Role *

- Doctoral Co-supervisor
- Co-investigator
- Chief Financial Officer

6.12 Participating Members

Add the details of additional people e.g. collaborators, who will be involved in the research project.

6.13 Appendix A

Aligning the budget to the programme requirements

Some applicants invest a significant amount of time and effort in ensuring that their project is clearly articulated within their application. While having a compelling narrative is crucial, it is equally important not to overlook the budget component, as it plays a vital role in the overall evaluation and the allocation of funding by the NRF.

The review panel may find the application to be exceptionally well-written and may score it highly based on its content and project significance. However, if the proposed budget does not accurately align with the program's requirements or guidelines, it can ultimately lead to the application being rejected for funding. Therefore, it is essential for applicants to create a comprehensive budget that not only reflects the project's needs but also adheres to the specified criteria. Balancing both the narrative and the budget ensures a stronger chance of securing funding.

Here are some common mistakes that applicants often make, outlined below.

1. Requesting financial subcategories not supported under the Thuthuka programme. The subcategory listed below are on the dropdown list under the application template, but they are NOT supported under the Thuthuka programme.

Running Expenses

- Subsistence
- Airfare
- Costs for joint conferences and workshops
- International travel
- Registration fees
- Research Proposal Development
- Research Running Expenses
- Small Research Equipment
- Visa costs
- Accommodation
- Running Expenses (Wilson AM)
- Project management costs
- External project audit fees

Research Equipment

- Minor item of research

2. When submitting a budget request, please ensure that the duration is for three years. This is because the Thuthuka cycle operates on a three-year model. Any applications that propose a budget for a period shorter than this may be rejected. It is essential to plan accordingly to align with the requirements of the Thuthuka program.
 3. Requesting Equipment and/ or Conference funds only.
 4. Requesting funds under a wrong category.
 5. The motivation section of the application lacks essential details. It's crucial that the budget is organized in accordance with the guidelines specified in the Thuthuka framework document. Any omission of the required information could lead to the application being denied funding. Below, you will find examples of budget justifications that have historically led to applications being unsuccessful.
-

Table 1. Example of categories of the financial section that have been poorly motivated

Research Equipment	Need to buy equipment
International Conference	The funds will cover costs for accommodation, flights and conference registration
Visiting Scientist	A data analysis expert will be invited
Materials and supplies	The requested amount is R50 000, which will assist me in paying for materials and supplies
Science engagement	The funds will cover Science engagement related activities
Research / technical / ad hoc Assistants	Research Assistants required to assist in the project
Local conference	Travel and Subsistence required to attend conferences
Local Travel	Funds to be used for data collection

Table 2. Example of categories of the financial section that has been well-motivated

<p>Research Equipment</p>	<p>Direct-Pure® Genie water purification system is important for the proposed research since it produces Type I ultrapure and Type II pure water, ensuring accurate and reliable experimental results. The system delivers ultrapure water with 18 2MΩ·cm resistivity and <30 ppb TOC, which is vital for sensitive techniques such as Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry and radioactive decay of Uranium (U) isotopes to Thorium (Th). The utilisation of ultrapure water minimizes contamination and interference, guaranteeing high data quality. With a flow rate of up to 2 L/min and options for 30 or 60 L tanks, the system meets diverse lab requirements, from sample preparation to equipment cleaning. The tank has a vent filter with a CO2 scavenger to protect pure water from air contamination, while an optional sanitization module inhibits microbial growth inside the tank. The total cost of the Direct-Pure® Genie water purification system is R80 000.</p>
<p>Materials and supplies</p>	<p>The amount budgeted for is required to procure necessary reagents and consumables for the project Media for Isolation of microalgae and wastewater-born bacteria 2 of each media: BG-11 (R 2377), Luria broth (R 2557), Luria broth with agar (R8479), bold modified basal freshwater medium (R 3289) Spectroqaunt kits</p>

	<p>for nutrient analysis from agro-industrialwastewater 4 of each: Total nitrogen cell test (R 13138), phosphate cell test (R 11372), COD cell test (R 6138) Kits for isolation of DNA from bacteria and microalgae for identification: Power Water DNA Isolation Kit (R 25362) and plant DNA extraction kit (R 28331), TAKARA – Emerald Amp Max PCR Master Mix-160 reactions (R 2490), Gel Red Nucleic Acid Stain(R 3428), 500 gram of agarose (R 20156) The remaining funds will be used to procure Petri dishes (R 755 per box),gloves (R 125 per box), Erlenmeyer flask, pipette</p>
<p>Research/technical/ad hoc assistants</p>	<p>The funds will be utilized to hire a research assistant, preferably a PhD candidate, to collect and process wastewatersamples from poultry slaughterhouses and dairy processing facilities, establish and validate methods, and set uplaboratory instruments This will be a 3-month appointment, and the research assistant will be paid R 13340 monthly for a fixed contract The University rate for PhD candidates is R 85 per hour</p>
<p>Local Travel</p>	<p>The first and second phases of the study will involve collecting wastewater samples from the poultry and dairy industries around KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, which will be done twice for each phase The principal investigator will hire bakkiefrom the School of Life Science, UKZN which charges R7,00 per kilometer to travel to poultry slaughterhouse in Hammersdale,</p>

	<p>Kwazulu Natal (80 km return) and dairy processing industry in Dundee, Kwazulu Natal (550 km return) Therequested funds will be used to pay for the rented bakkie and tolls (Mariann hill: R15,50) for transportation to the sampling sites</p>
	<p>In the third year of the project, an international conference organized by Elsevier on Algal Biomass, Biofuels, and Bioproducts (AlgalBBB) will be attended The principal investigator will present a conference paper based on the findings that will be generated in the second phase of the study in 2026 The conference will be held in the USA in June 2026. The requested funds will be used for air ticket R30 000, accommodation around R14000 and conference registration around R10 000</p>

Do you have gum?

End