Application and Funding Guide for NRF Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026

Directorate: Next Generation and Emerging Researchers

Date: February 2025

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Contact Details

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For technical online enquiries, please contact the NRF Support Desk during office hours from 08:00 to 16:30 Monday to Friday.

E-mail: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za

1. Introduction

This document provides an overview of the application process and funding guidelines for the Freestanding, Innovation, and Scarce Skills (FISS) Postdoctoral Fellowships funding instrument for funding in the 2026 academic year. An understanding of the application process is critical to successfully submitting your application.

This document should be read in conjunction with the **NRF Postdoctoral Fellowships Framework for Funding in the 2026** Academic Year attached to the current call. The Framework document provides detailed information with respect to objectives of the funding instrument, eligibility criteria and other relevant information for applicants. This document does not, however, constitute a complete set of the policies, procedures or systems used by the NRF.

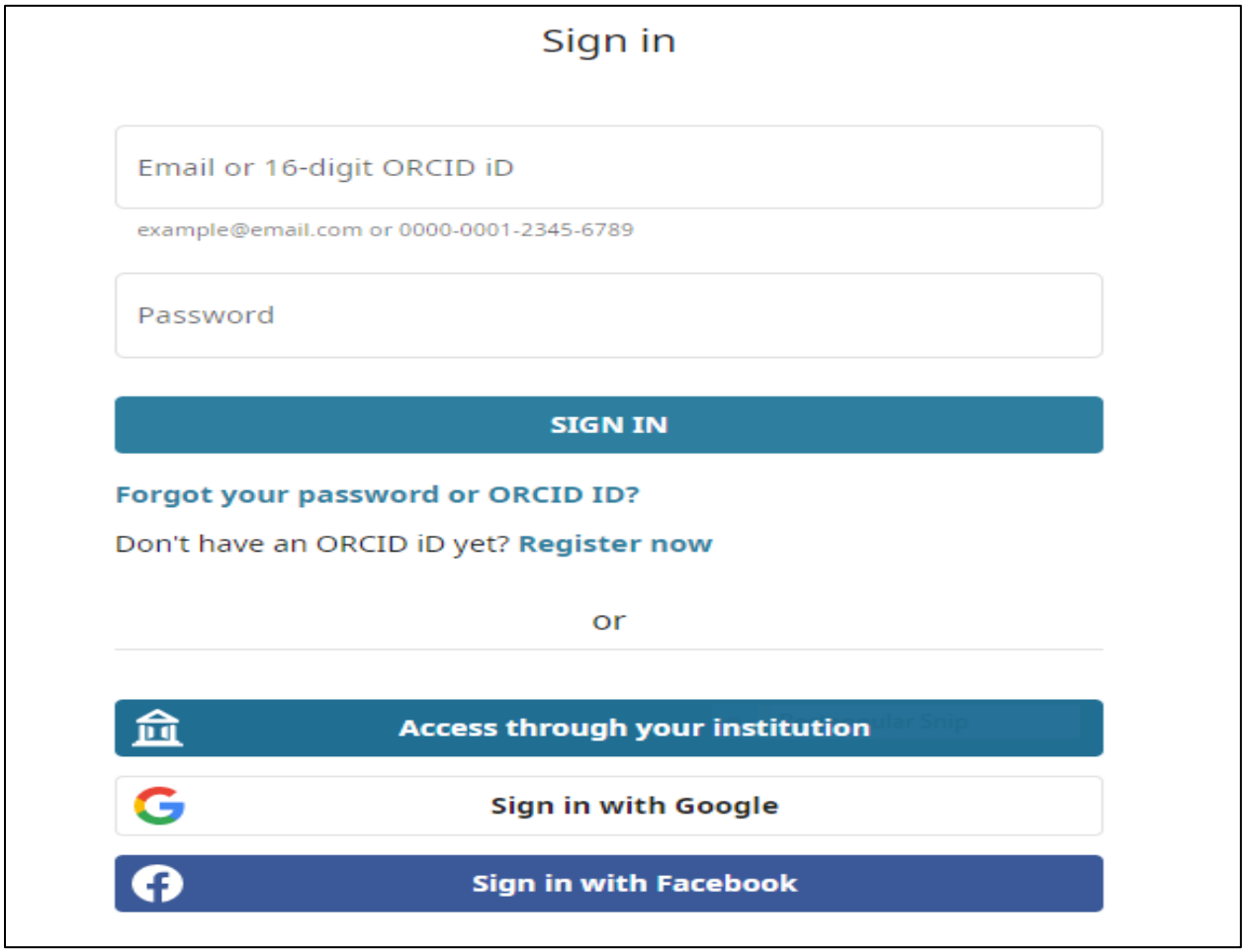
2. Registering and accessing the system

Application forms must be completed on the NRF Connect System at https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za. Applicants must click the **ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) icon to login or register** as shown in the image below.

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:

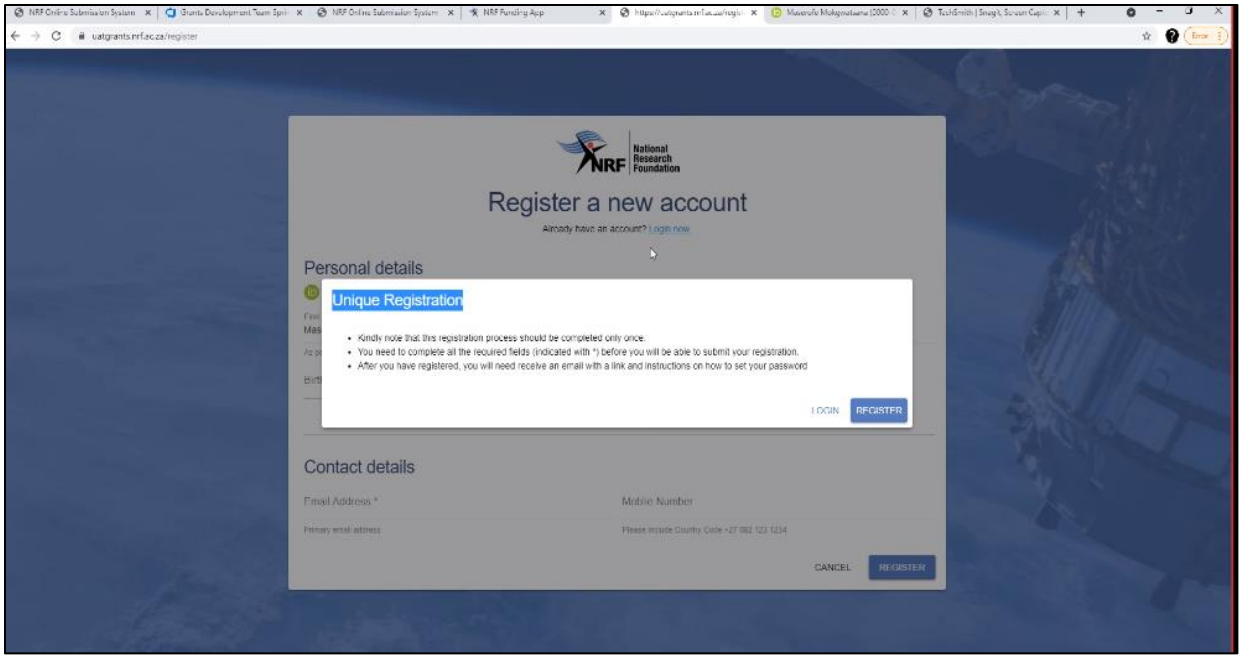
- ORCID iD
- Email address linked with your ORCID profile

- GMAIL account linked with your ORCID
- Facebook account linked with ORCID

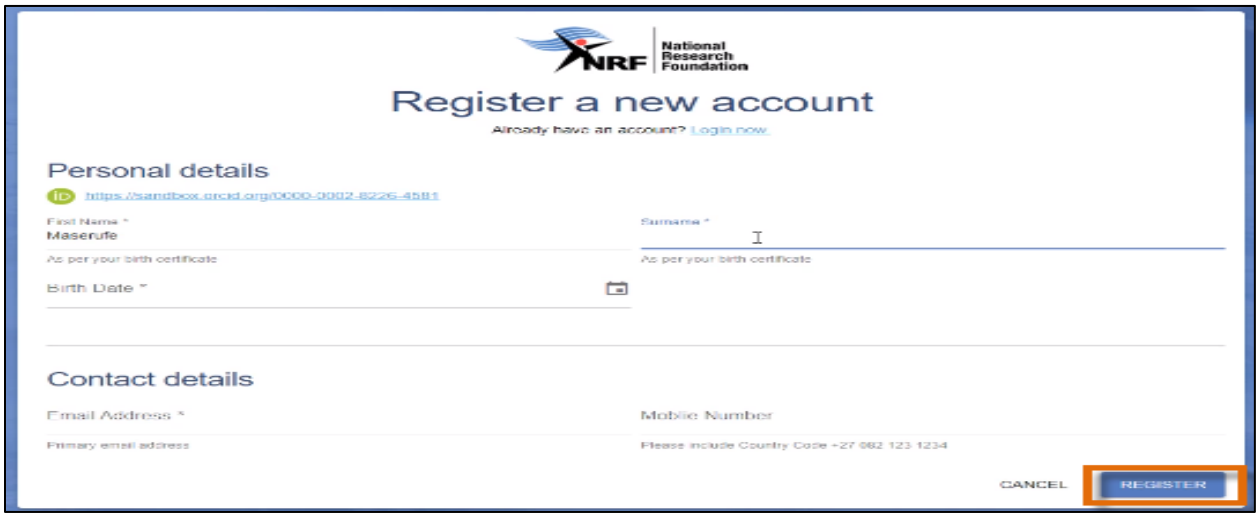


If you are currently registered on the NRF Online Submission System, you will be automatically logged in with the ORCID profile.

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



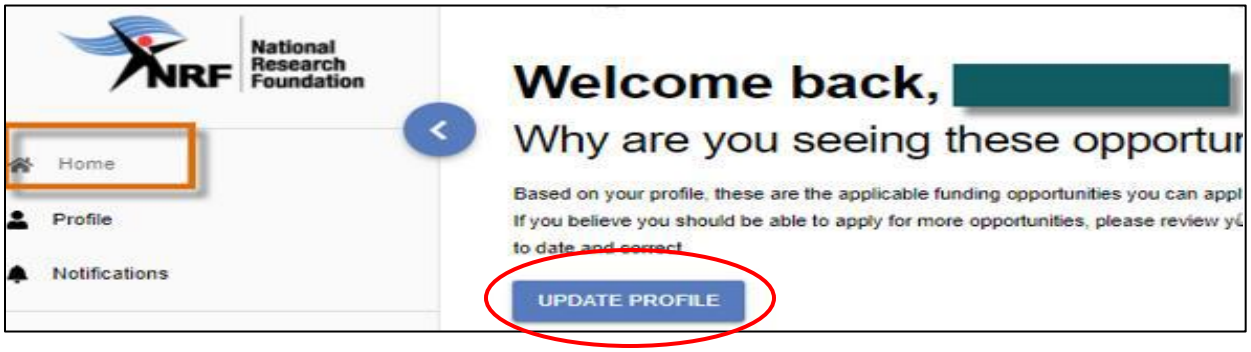
Complete the missing fields and click **Register** to complete the process and the system will automatically log the user in.



3. Personal Details

Applicants must first complete or update the section **'My Profile'**. South African citizens and permanent residents must attach a certified copy of their South African Identity Document while 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 these documents under the**

attachment section. Should the above-mentioned documents not be attached, the application will be rejected without undergoing the review process.



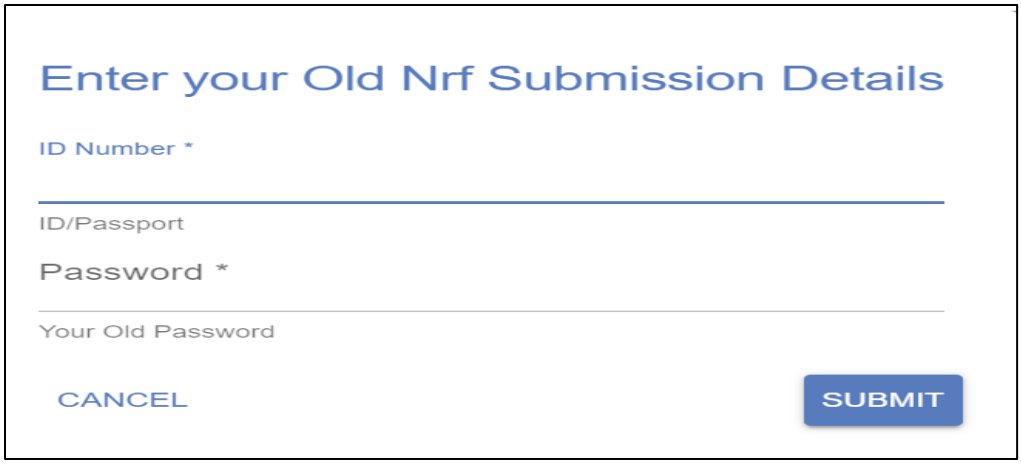
***If the ID copy or passport is not certified, the application will be rejected as this is an audit requirement.**

4. CV section

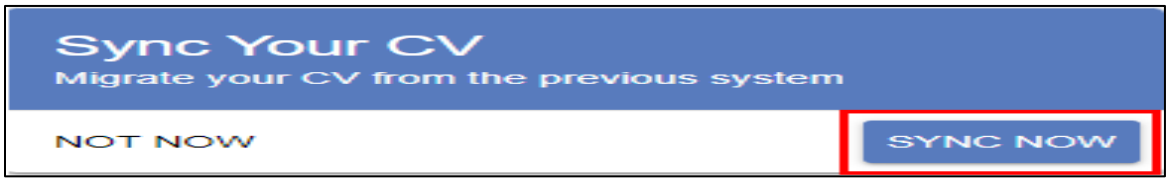
Migrating the CV from the NRF Online Submission System

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

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

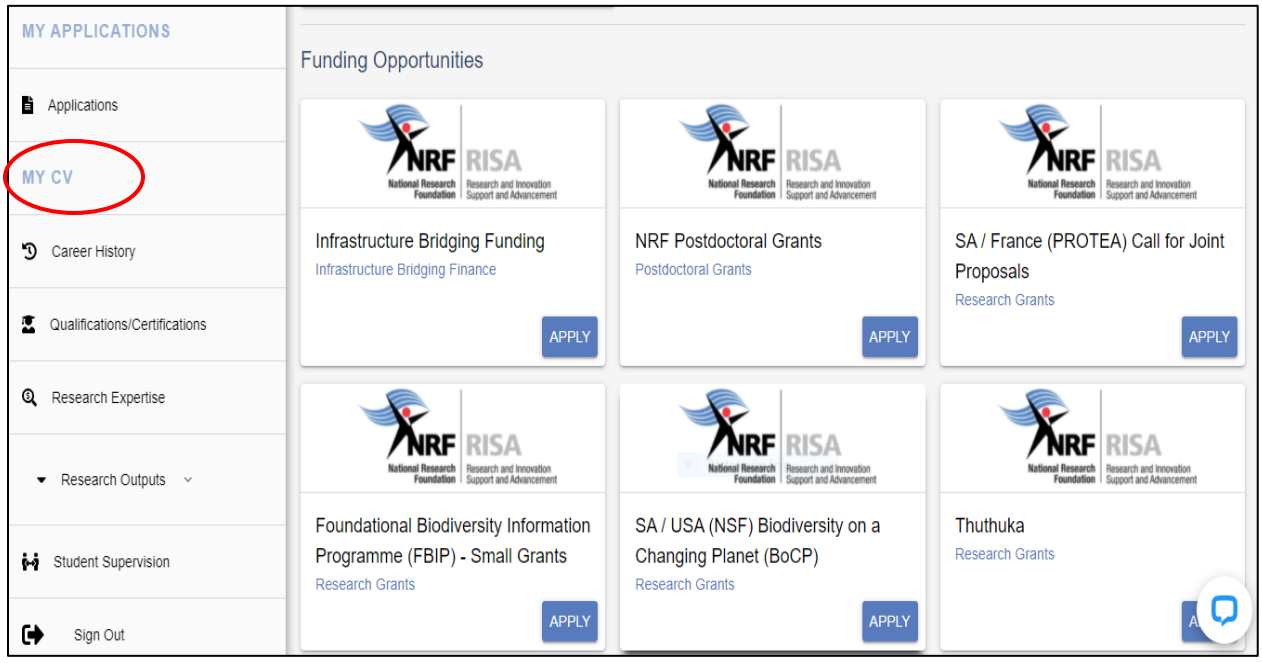


Once the verification of the two accounts has been completed, confirmation will appear at the bottom of the screen.



For new users

The 'MY CV' sections on the left side of the NRF Connect screen must also be completed before applicants can complete the application.



4.1. Sections of the CV

The sections under “MY CV” needs to be completed and should always be up to date since the information under this section forms part of the review process. The CV includes the following sections:

4.1.1. Career History

The applicants must provide information about employment history, accomplishments, awards, prizes, as well as any period that the applicant was absent from research.

4.1.2. Qualifications / Certifications

Applicants must have graduated with their Doctoral degree within five (5) years of submitting an application to the NRF. If the Doctoral degree is “in progress”, then the degree should be completed by the 31 December 2025. The highest qualification certificate should be attached to the application.

4.1.3. Research Expertise

Select the relevant primary research field and secondary research 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 or Secondary Outputs and Patents

Click on Research Outputs menu to select the relevant output type. Should the outputs have been synched from NRF online 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.

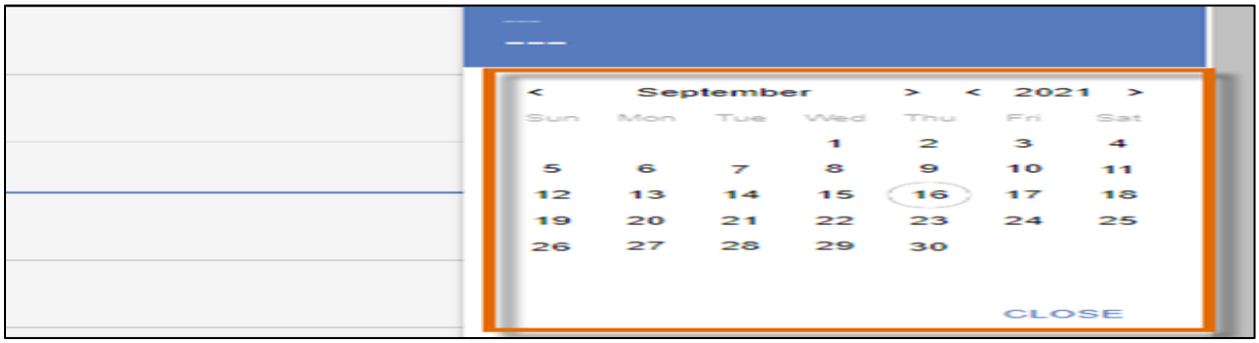
5.2. Upload Control

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.

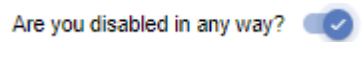
A full **Calendar** will be displayed to allow for selection of the relevant date (follow the sequence as follows: year, month, day).



5.4 Toggle Control

Toggle to indicate **No**.

Toggle to indicate **Yes**.



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.

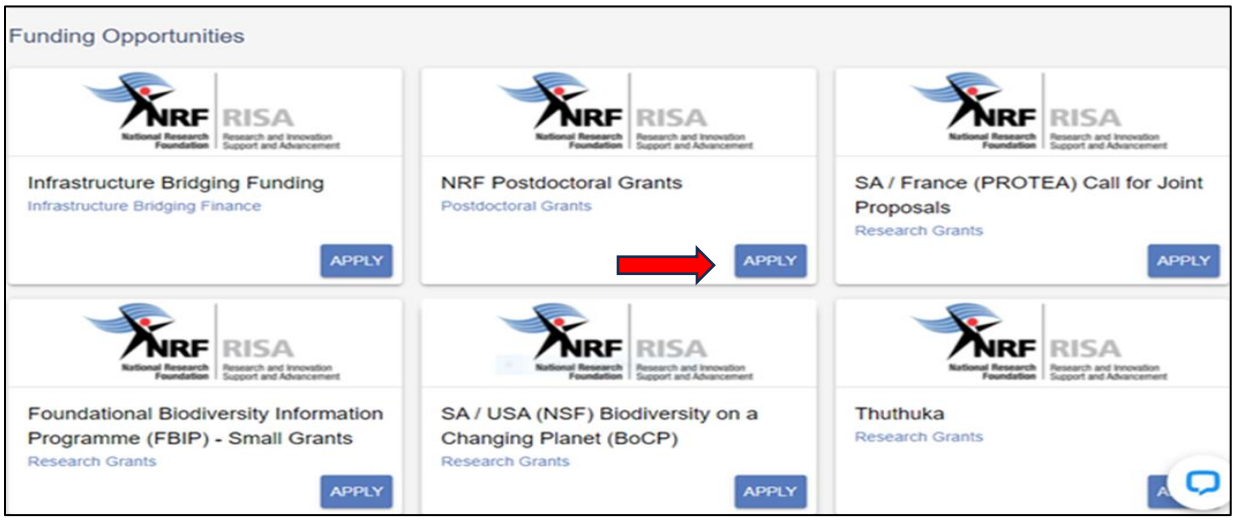
6. Creating the application

An application can be created from the **Home/Landing page** or from the **My Applications** menu.

Create Application from Home/Landing Page

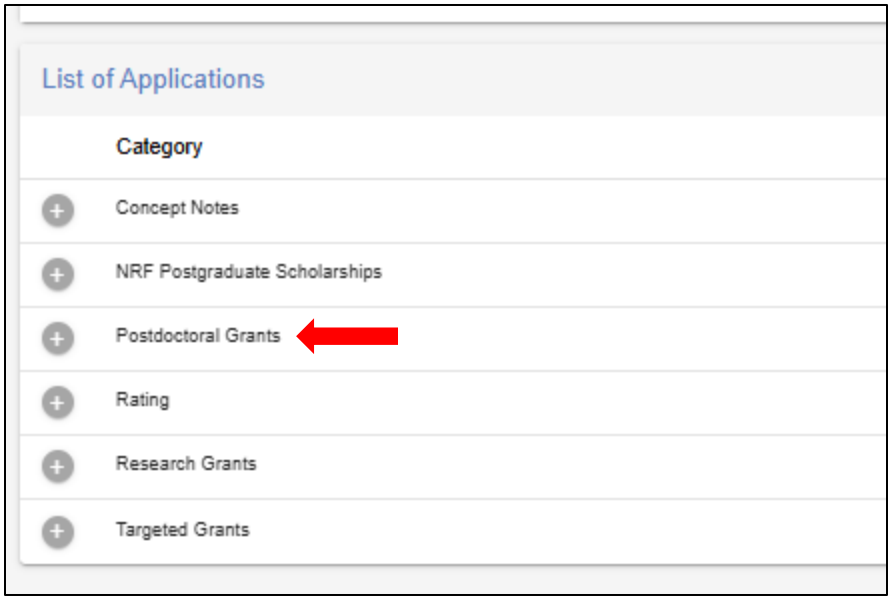
The Funding Opportunities listed under your profile will be those that the applicant might be potentially eligible to apply for based on the information captured under the CV section.

You can click on the “apply” icon to start an application.

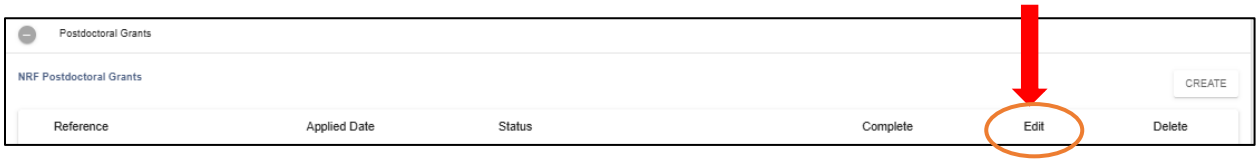


Create Application from My Applications Menu

Click the expand icon next to the relevant Category to see the Calls associated with the Category. Then Click Create next to the relevant Funding Opportunity to create a new application.



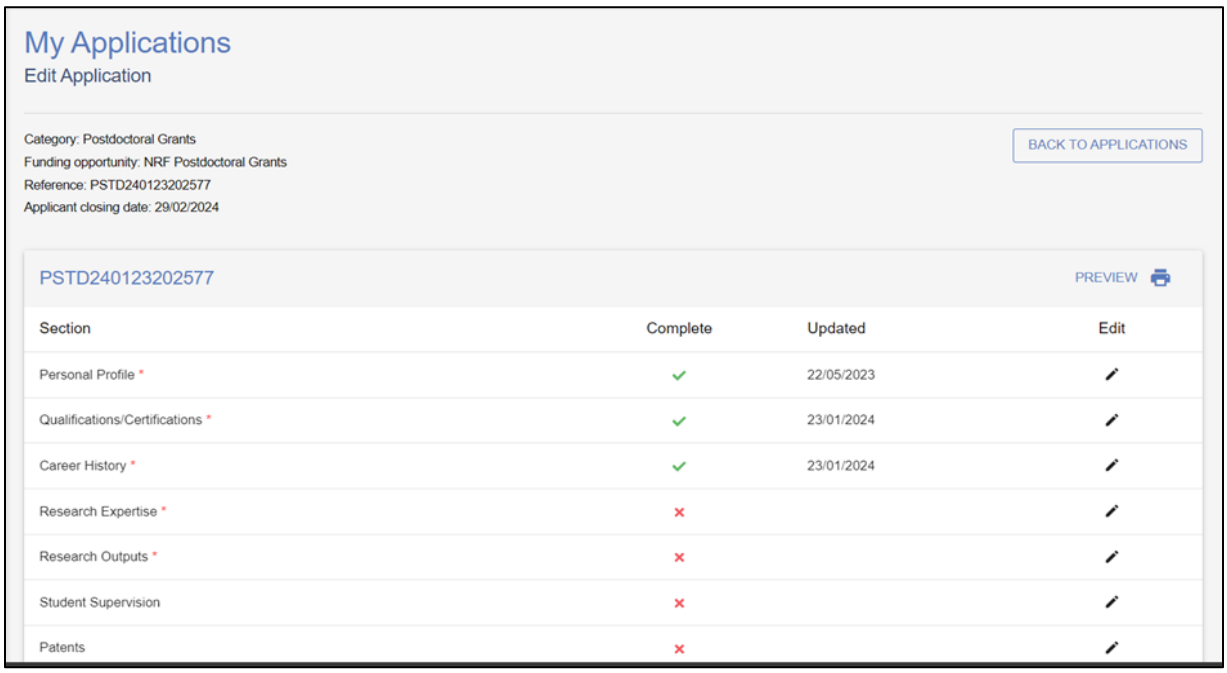
To continue working on an application, click **Edit** on the funding call you want to edit.

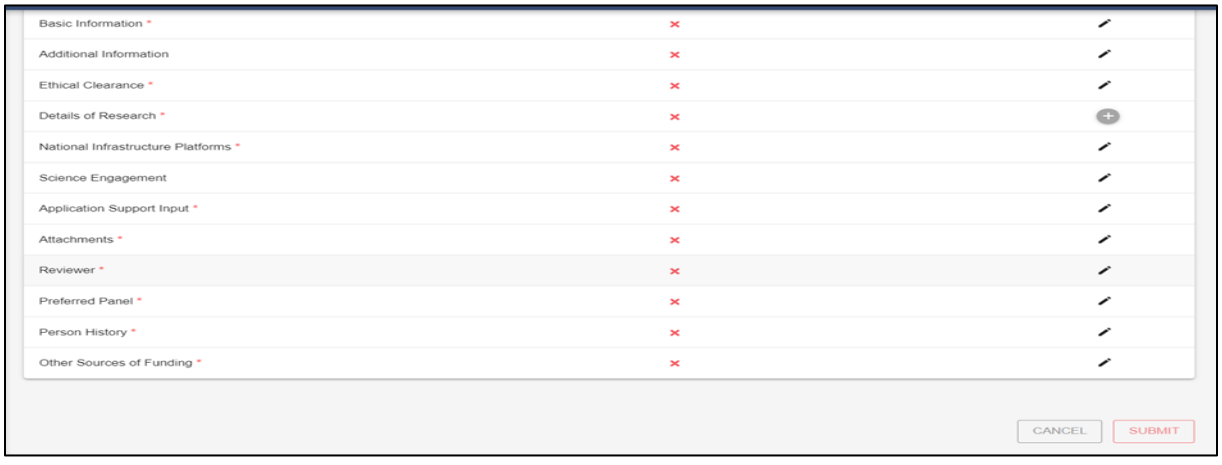


Sections of the application

- 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 (**x**). 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.





Please ensure that you complete and submit your application by the closing date of the call. The system will not allow applicants to submit nor make any edits after the call has closed. **Should you have any queries related to the application process, please ensure that your query is sent to the NRF's Supportdesk at least one week prior to the application closing date. The NRF will not be held responsible for not responding to queries that were not submitted**

timeously in order to afford the NRF the opportunity to resolve the query or issues related to the application.

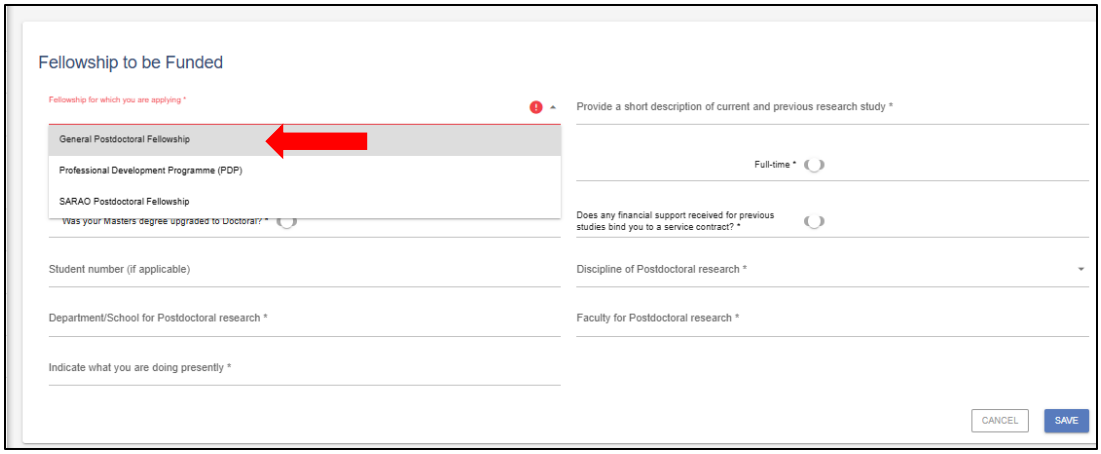
6.1 Fellowship to be Funded

The ***Fellowship to be Funded*** section is a compulsory section. Please complete the section accurately and keep the following in mind: (1) Applicants must undertake Full-time Postdoctoral research; and (2) The Fellowship cannot be held concurrently with any Full-time salaried employment.

This call is **ONLY** for candidates who will be conducting research at a South African institution.

Applicants intending to apply for the Freestanding, Innovation, Scarce Skills Postdoctoral Fellowship must select "**General Postdoctoral Fellowship". This can be selected from the dropdown under the "Fellowship for which you are applying for" field.**

***Please note that once the application has been submitted to the NRF, no changes under this field can be accommodated.**



6.2 Basic Information

The ***Basic Information*** section requires you to select the proposed institution. Please select the proposed institution for Postdoctoral research in South Africa from the dropdown list. Please note that it is the applicant's responsibility to find an institution and supervisor/mentor in South Africa that is willing to host them for the duration of the fellowship.

Please note that the maximum funding period is <u>two</u> (2) years for the General Postdoctoral Fellowship. Do select the funding period accordingly.

6.3 Ethical Clearance

The ***Ethical Clearance*** section is a compulsory section. It is the responsibility of the applicant, 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 rigour of all research prior to the commencement of the research.

***Note:** If your application is successful and ethical clearance is required for your research, then the ethical clearance certificate must be sent to the institution. The institution will have to provide the clearance certificate to the NRF, if required.

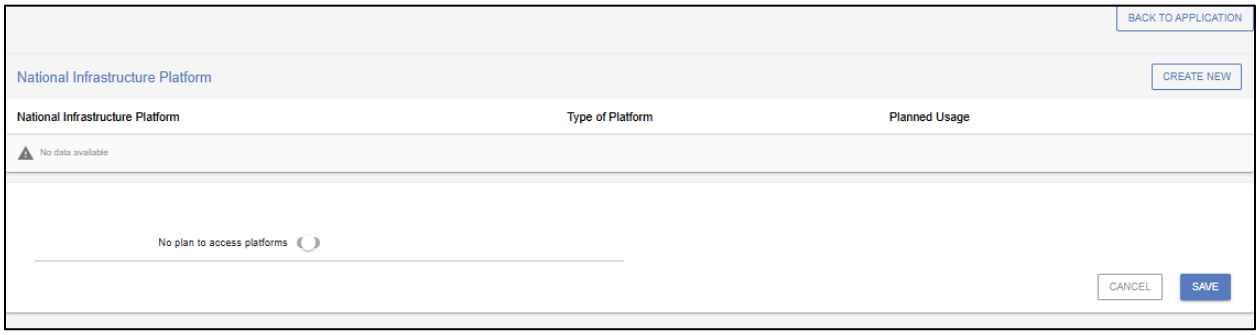
6.4 Details of Research

The ***Details of Research*** Section is one of the most important sections of the application and is evaluated 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.

***Please note that the Details of Research section will only mark as complete (√) when all the sub-sections are completed.**

6.5 National Infrastructure Platforms

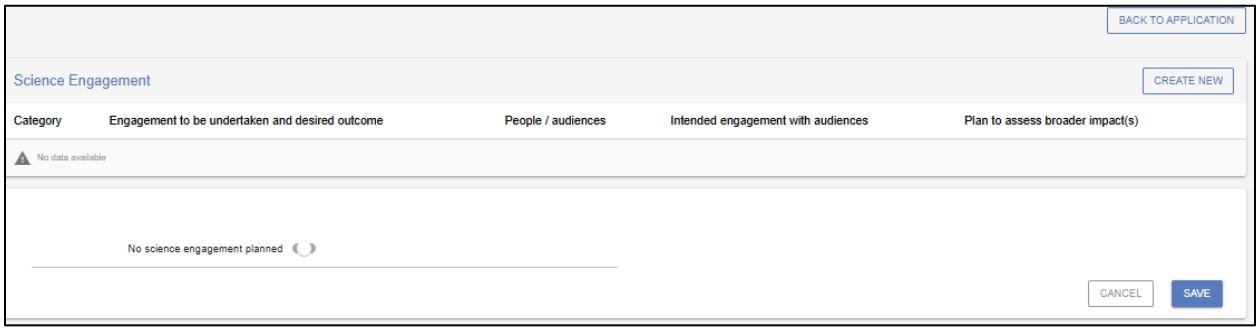
The ***National Infrastructure Platforms*** section is a compulsory section for reporting purposes. If you will not be accessing any infrastructure platforms, please select: "*No plan to access platforms*" and save.



6.6 Science Engagement

The ***Science Engagement*** section is a compulsory section for reporting purposes. Science engagement relates to activities where the applicant will communicate their science to the public.

Should applicants not be hosting any science engagement activities, they must move the 'Toggle' to the left.



6.7 Application Support Input

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the referee email is correct and that the referees have responded by the deadline date indicated in the notification, as this category is assessed in the application. The applicant **must** review their application PDF prior to submitting it to the NRF, to check if their referee has responded to the request for support. Required references are from the proposed Supervisor/Host and/or Doctoral supervisor.

Applicants who have not finalised their PhD are required to provide details of their PhD supervisor as a referee and all applicants should provide details of their potential host of the postdoctoral study under this section. It is important that the supervisor and the host provide support for the application within the deadline date indicated.

Note: The applicant must confirm with the proposed Supervisor/Host and Doctoral supervisor that the email address used in the application is the one utilised by the latter on their NRF Connect profile.

Herewith find steps the proposed Supervisor/Host and Doctoral supervisor to access the report:

- Login on NRF Connect and on the left-hand side on the Menu, the Supervisor should have REPORTS.
- If so, click on Feedback on Submission
- Click on +sign before the category to expand
- Click on View Report, complete and Submit.

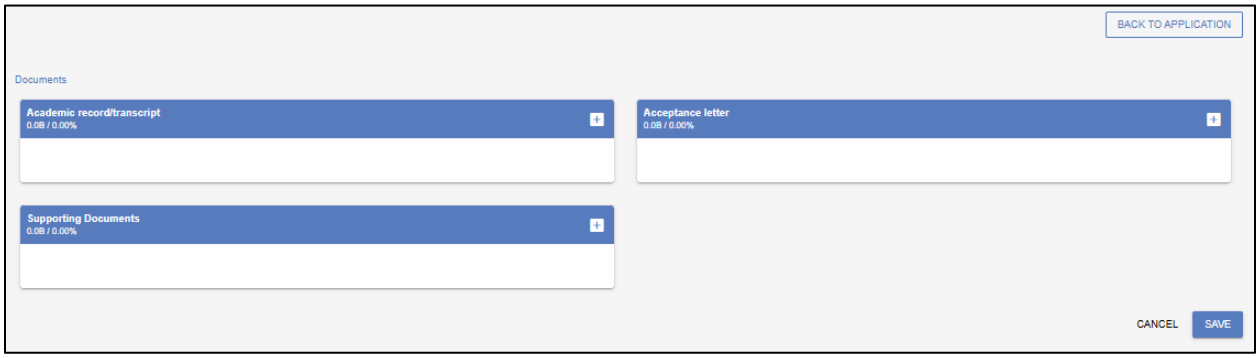
6.8 Attachments

The following documents are compulsory for the NRF Postdoctoral Fellowships application:

- Proof of Masters and Doctoral qualifications (if Masters was upgraded to Doctoral this needs to be clearly stated in your application).
- If your Doctoral degree is still “in progress”, a formal letter of confirmation from your institution, stating that your Doctoral qualification will be completed by December 2025, **must** be attached.

- If the institution, department and/or supervisor remains the same as your Doctoral study or first postdoctoral placement, a motivation letter **must** be attached.
- Official postdoctoral acceptance letter from the host institution (signed, stamped and on an official letterhead), **must** be attached. The letter should include details of the availability of specialised equipment, infrastructure and resources to enable the fellow to conduct their research.
- If you are a fellow with a disability, you **must** also upload a medical certificate in support of your disability. This can be done under the Personal Details section of the application.
- Proof of South African National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) or University financial aid scheme funding (if applicable).

***Please note that should any of the required documents not be uploaded to the application, the application will be rejected during the screening process and will not be reviewed.**

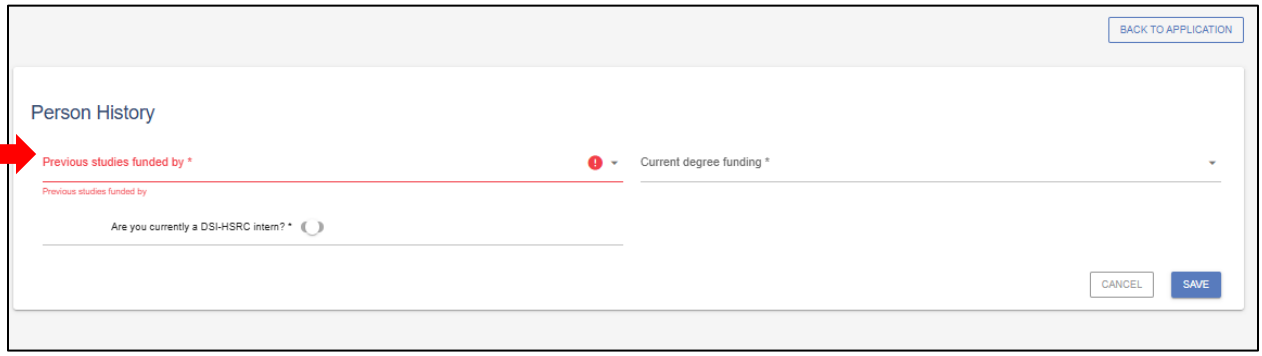


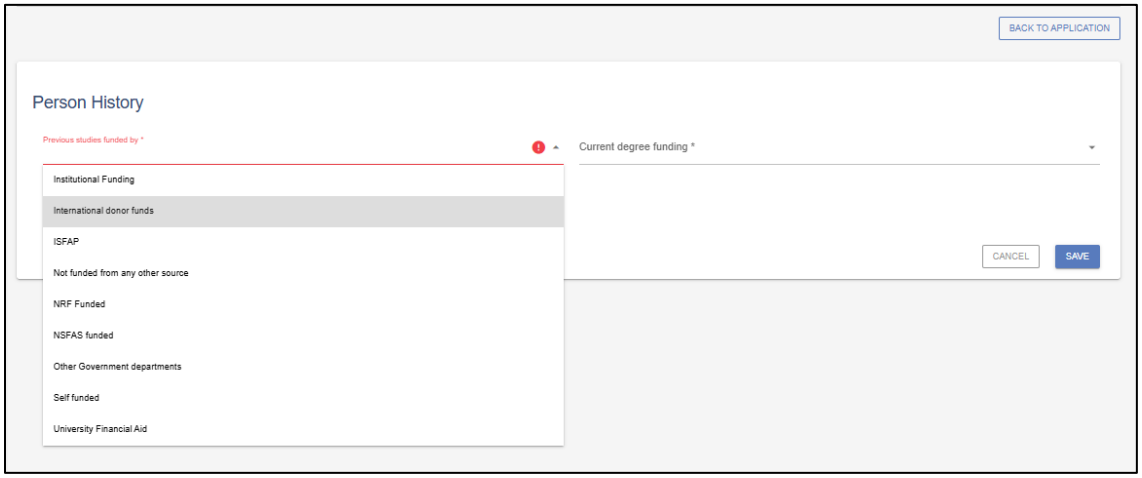
6.9 Preferred Panel

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

6.10 Person History

The ***Person History*** section is required for statistical purposes by the NRF. It allows the NRF to ascertain who previously received NSFAS funding. Please also indicate if you were funded by the NRF for your Doctoral studies, an international donor etc.

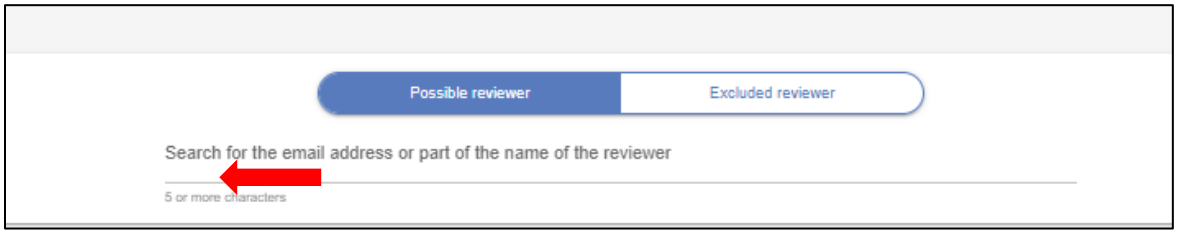




6.11 Possible Reviewers

The ***Possible Reviewers*** *section* is compulsory in this call. The section requires that you add the names of possible reviewers in your field of research that will be able to provide a neutral review of your proposed research project. These may be reviewers that you have interacted with through conferences or other academic fora. A minimum of six (6) and a maximum of ten (10) possible reviewers are required. 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.



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

6.12. Participating Members

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

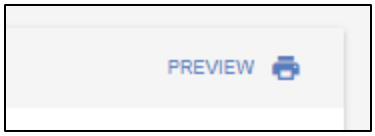
Designated Authorities (DAs) at institutions must ensure that all proposals are screened and approved through internal institutional processes **before** submitting applications to the NRF. The NRF assumes that the DAs are satisfied with the standard of all proposals validated and submitted, and that the institution approves and supports the proposed research.

The final submit button will appear only if all compulsory sections are complete. Press 'OK' to submit your application. If all the compulsory sections are complete and the final submit button does not appear, select any section and re-save to refresh the application; you will then see the final submit button**. A submitted application is automatically routed to the DA in the Research Office of the institution that you selected, for internal review and validation. Late applications, additional supporting documentation or information received after the cut-off date will not be accepted or considered.**

The NRF will not process applications that are incomplete, contain insufficient or incorrect details, or fail to follow instructions.

Such applications will be rejected. The application must be completed with sufficient details to allow for a comprehensive review and evaluation by external reviewers. In addition to the electronic application and required attachments, the NRF may request additional information or documentation to support an application if required. Failure to supply such information or documentation upon request may result in the rejection of the application.

An applicant can preview their application before they submit it. Click on the 'Preview' button at the top right side of the page to access a Pdf copy.



7. Tracking the application

This section explains different application statuses to assist the applicant track their application. The status of your application will determine the stage of the application.

Applicants should direct queries to the Institution Research/Postgraduate Office if the application is still with the institution i.e., not yet submitted to the NRF.

Application in progress	• Applicant has created an application.
Application complete	• Application is complete but has not been submitted to the institution yet.
Submit application to institution	• Application has been submitted to the selected institution.
Designated authority submission review	• Application received by institutional designated authority (DA) and currently under review.
Designated authority submission eligibility review	• DA has completed review but still needs to complete eligibility criteria check.
Internal screening submission	• Application has been submitted to the NRF by the DA.
Internal screening approval	• NRF screening process to check eligibility and application requirements. • If rejected, the applicant will receive a notification with the reason for rejection.
Funding decision allocation	• Eligible application now under awarding stage. • Unsuccessful applications will remain at this stage.
Award accepted	• Successful application i.e., an award has been made against the application. Awardee can log into NRF Connect to accept/reject the award.