



South African Radio Astronomy Observatory

Application Guide for SARAO Freestanding Doctoral Scholarships for 2026

READ THE ENTIRE GUIDE BEFORE APPLYING FOR A SARAO FREESTANDING DOCTORAL SCHOLARSHIP

1. Eligibility for SARAO Freestanding Doctoral Scholarships for the 2026 Academic Year

1.1. Eligibility: Nationality

SARAO will consider applications from South African citizens and permanent residents, as well as from citizens of Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia.

1.2. Eligibility: Master's Degree

SARAO will only consider applications from:

- Students who completed a Master's degree during, or after 2024, where the research work is relevant to the pre-approved research project selected by the student for their Doctoral degree (see Section 2); or
- Students who are in the final year of a Master's degree, where the research work is relevant to the pre-approved research project selected by the student for their Doctoral degree (see Section 2).

1.3. Eligibility: Doctoral Degree to be Funded

SARAO will only consider applications from students who:

- Wish to study towards a relevant Doctoral degree starting in 2026; AND
- Have selected a research project that has been approved by SARAO for Doctoral research in 2026; AND
- Have submitted a letter of support from the relevant supervisor of the research project.

2. Projects for Doctoral Research for the 2026 Academic Year – For Freestanding Doctoral Scholarships

- 2.1. SARAO will ONLY consider applications from students who have selected a research project that has been approved by SARAO for Doctoral research in 2026, and who upload a signed letter from the relevant supervisor stating that he/she will supervise the student.
- 2.2. All projects approved by SARAO for postgraduate research for 2026, as well as the contact details of the relevant supervisors, are available at: <https://www.sarao.ac.za/researchandstudy/doctoral-scholarships/>
- 2.3. Prior to submitting an application for a SARAO freestanding Doctoral scholarship, you must review the list of approved Doctoral research projects for 2026, and identify a project you wish to pursue for your Doctoral degree.
- 2.4. Once you have identified a project, you must then contact the supervisor of the project to discuss the project, and determine if you have the required qualifications, skills and abilities to undertake the project.
- 2.5. If the supervisor of the approved project agrees to supervise you for your Doctoral degree, the supervisor must provide you with a signed letter, on a university letterhead, stating that he/she has agreed to

supervise you for the relevant project. You **MUST** upload a copy of this letter with your application, as an attachment. SARAO will NOT consider an application if there is no supervision-agreement letter – See Section 4.

- 2.6. You must use the details of the research project, as provided on the SARAO website, to complete the “Research Project Information Section” of the application form.
- 2.7. If you are awarded a SARAO freestanding Doctoral scholarship, you will have to register at the university where the supervisor of the research project is based, and undertake your degree at that university.

Note: Supervisors are under no obligation to agree to supervise a student

3. How to apply for a SARAO Freestanding Doctoral Scholarship for the 2026 Academic Year

- 3.1. Application forms are accessible online at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>
- 3.2. **Select the “SARAO Doctoral” option.**
- 3.3. Students may only submit ONE application.
- 3.4. Students **MUST** upload all five required documents (see Section 4), in the Attachments Section of the application form. **IF ANY OF THESE FIVE DOCUMENTS ARE NOT ATTACHED TO YOUR APPLICATION, SARAO WILL NOT CONSIDER YOUR APPLICATION.**
- 3.5. Your application must be supported by at least two letters of reference (see Section 5). **IF YOUR APPLICATION IS NOT SUPPORTED BY TWO LETTERS OF REFERENCE SARAO WILL NOT CONSIDER YOUR APPLICATION**
- 3.6. Once you submit your application, it will automatically be routed to the institution where you are applying to study.
- 3.7. In order for your application to be considered for 2026 funding, you must submit your application on or before the cut-off date. It is YOUR responsibility to check the application closing date with the university’s Research or Postgraduate office.

4. Supporting Documents to be Attached to your Application Form

You **MUST** upload **ALL FIVE** documents listed below, in the **Attachments Section** of the application form.

IF ANY OF THESE DOCUMENTS ARE NOT ATTACHED, SARAO WILL NOT CONSIDER YOUR APPLICATION!!!!

Document	Details
1. Identity Document or Passport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For South African citizens and permanent residents: A copy of your South African ID - For non-South Africans: A copy of your passport
2. University Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All your university academic results, from the start of your degree until now, and where relevant for all other degrees completed to date. - Please attached all your results as ONE single PDF Document
3. An up-to-date Curriculum Vitae	
4. Supervisor-agreement letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The supervisor of the project you have selected must provide you with a signed letter, on a university letterhead, stating that he/she has agreed to supervise you for the relevant project. - The letter of agreement from the relevant supervisor is essential. - If no letter is attached to your application, your application will be REJECTED.
5. Letter of Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The motivation is CRITICAL to the review of your application. Take the time to draft an excellent motivation! - You must provide a letter of about 1000 words motivating why you should be awarded a SARAO Doctoral

	<p>Scholarship. In this letter you should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your academic progress from undergraduate to postgraduate level. - Your understanding of radio astronomy generally, and more specifically of the MeerKAT and SKA radio telescopes. - A brief overview of your Doctoral research work. - How your Doctoral research work links to the research proposed for your Doctoral degree, and how your Doctoral research will contribute to the science or engineering of the MeerKAT radio telescope and/or the SKA radio telescope. - Details of your academic, and other achievements. - Your personal strengths, passions and career aspirations.
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5. Letters of Reference

Your application must be supported by **AT LEAST TWO** letters of reference. Please ask at least two academic/faculty staff to submit letters of reference to study.research@sarao.ac.za, before 15 July 2025. Please ask the referees to include the following information in their letter of reference:

- The capacity in which the referee knows the applicant, and for how long they have known the applicant.
- The applicant's academic performance, and attitude to their studies.
- The applicant's research capabilities in terms of attitude, initiative, understanding of the subject, progress against deliverables, publications etc.
- The applicant's written and verbal communications skills.
- Any other relevant comments regarding applicant.

6. Structure and Funding Levels for SARAO Freestanding Doctoral Scholarships for the 2026 Academic Year

	Value
I. Scholarship	R205,725
II. International Student Fee	Paid in full
III. Travel Grant	R57,000
IV. Equipment Grant	R35,000
V. Home Travel Grant	Cost of one return ticket, with one change permitted, per year
VI. Repatriation Fee	Paid in full, if required
VII. Emergency Medical Insurance	Paid in full
VIII. Assistive Technology Device	R20,000

- Maximum duration of a SARAO Freestanding Doctoral Scholarship is three years
- SARAO will pay the international student fee due to the university, for students from Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia.

- III. Travel grants are awarded annually, for the duration of the scholarship. The student must use the travel grant for travel related to his/her research.
- IV. The equipment grant is a total amount available for the full duration of the scholarship (i.e. this is not an annual amount). The equipment grant is available to the student to support the purchase of equipment required for his/her research.
- V. SARAO will organise and pay for one return ticket, per year, for students from Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia, to travel to South Africa.
- VI. SARAO will pay the repatriation fee, if required, for students from Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia.
- VII. SARAO will pay the cost of emergency medical insurance for students from Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia.
- VIII. Students living with a disability may apply for a grant of up to R20 000. This is the maximum amount allowed during the tenure of the scholarship. An assistive device is defined as any device, product, equipment or tool that is designed or adapted to enable persons with disabilities to participate in activities, tasks or actions including: (i) mobility aids such as wheelchairs, prostheses and crutches as well as service animals (ii) communication aids such as hearing aids, Frequency Modulation (FM) systems; (iii) sensory aids such as white canes; noise reducing headphones and coloured lenses (iv) technology aids such as computers for alternate and augmentative communication, screen readers, magnifiers, texts in audio format (Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the PSET, 2022).

7. Enquiries regarding SARAO Freestanding Doctoral Scholarships

Contact: study.research@sarao.ac.za